

Pre-publication draft

New Directions in English for Specific Purposes Research

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University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor (2011). 282pp., \$30.95 paperback,

ISBN: 978 0 472 03460 4

New Directions in English for Specific Purposes Research is an edited volume comprising eleven chapters by some of the best-known names in ESP research today and provides a broad panorama of the main issues and methodologies currently in use today. As the editors Belcher, Johns and Paltridge underline in their introduction, ESP research has always been grounded in practice: “studying language, discourses, and contexts of use [...] and *then* applying them to the pedagogical practice” (p. 1). In recent years ESP research has been enriched by advances in related academic domains, such as corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, genre analysis, rhetoric, critical discourse analysis and critical ethnography. One of the main arguments put forward in this volume is that researchers need to be aware of these developments and exploit all the tools at their disposal in order to form sound assessments of language and discourse contexts and provide relevant instruction for learners. After a brief introduction by the three editors, the book is then divided into two main sections: Issues in ESP Research (chapters 1-5) and Methodologies and ESP Research (chapters 6-11). It is completed by an afterword by John Swales and a useful index.

In chapter 1, Ken Hyland examines the case for disciplinary specificity. Drawing on his past research on reporting verbs, first person pronouns and four-word lexical bundles, he shows how these language features are shaped by the disciplinary contexts that produce them. Although recognising the institutional pressure that can be put on teachers to teach broad-based generic versions of academic English, Hyland reminds us that students do not learn in a cultural vacuum and pleads for an approach that enables language and disciplinary knowledge to be included. The chapter by Brian Paltridge and Wei Wang on media discourses also underlines the importance of context, in this case the national context. For students enrolled in media and communications courses, knowledge of local culture is often an essential prerequisite for the writing of effective texts. The authors describe a study they undertook of the Australian and Chinese newspaper coverage of the events of September 11. They show that when text analysis is combined with documentary analysis relating to the precise socio-cultural context, this enables a much fuller understanding of why the texts were written as they were.

In chapter 3, An Cheng takes as his starting point actual classroom practice. He emphasises how considerations of context and language specificity underlie all aspects of ESP course design and pedagogy. In the next chapter Diane Belcher and Lauren Lukkarila tackle the question of student identity. Their sample study of six ESP students from very different first language backgrounds reveals the extent to which students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds impact on their learning strategies and their investment in their courses. The authors conclude by suggesting ways in which research on learner identity can – and should – be included in ESP needs analysis. In the final chapter of section one, Anna Mauranen describes some of the latest developments in academic English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research. For Mauranen, “the most notable development in academic English in the last decades has been its explosion as a lingua franca” (p. 94). Empirical research into academic ELF has however only recently begun and the author places great hopes in the newly constituted ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic settings) corpus of academic speech, to help fill this gap.

The second section of the book, Methodologies and ESP Research, begins with a chapter by John Flowerdew on the place of genre analysis in ESP research. Flowerdew first provides a summary of three approaches to genre analysis: the ESP approach (e.g., Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993), the systemic linguistic approach (e.g., Halliday 1994) and the New Rhetoric approach (e.g., Freedman & Medway 1994). The first two approaches can be considered as linguistic-oriented approaches, whilst the New Rhetoric approach presents a much more social way of looking at genre. As the author underlines, one constant concern for the ESP researcher is to avoid overgeneralisation and prescriptivism in applying genre analysis to ESP pedagogy. With too narrow a focus on linguistics features there can be a danger of reifying genres. With reference to a recent study carried out with Wan (Flowerdew & Wan 2006) on the analysis of tax letters, the author illustrates how linguistic and New Rhetoric approaches can successfully complement each other. The next chapter by Christine Tardy also considers the input of genre analysis to ESP research. Taking abstracts of grant applications as an example, Tardy demonstrates the flexibility of genre analysis and shows how a wide range of types of genre analysis tools (including the analysis of identity markers, intertextual links and rhetorical move structure) shed light on different aspects of a genre exemplar.

Research using critical ethnography focuses prominently in the next two chapters of the second section. In chapter 8, Sue Starfield describes an ethnographic project looking at the grading of essays written by black students in a South African university. She shows how students' prior discourse practices and life histories impact strongly on even something as seemingly innocuous as the title page of a sociobiology essay. In chapter 9, Ann Johns and Leketi Makalela describe some of the tensions and conflicts that occurred during a needs assessment project carried out by the first author in the second author's home university, due to the specificities of the local situation and some mismatches between both parties' expectations. They show how objectivity is difficult to attain and how therefore including critical ethnography can be extremely relevant in needs assessment projects. The focus of the following chapter by Lynne Flowerdew is corpus analysis of ESP texts. After discussing a number of tricky issues in corpus compilation, such as those of corpus size and representativeness, she describes what the main entry points for the analysis of corpus data usually are (keywords, frequency, lexical bundles) and some of the software tools available to researchers for carrying out these analyses. This is followed by an interesting reflection on the implications of adopting "top down" and "bottom up" methods in corpus analysis (cf. Biber *et al.* 2007) and on the role that context plays in the interpretation of corpus data. In the final chapter of the book, Magdi Kandil and Diane Belcher make use of corpus linguistic techniques and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study an increasingly popular genre, web-based news reports. Comparing corpora from three news network websites (Al-Jazeera, BBC, CNN) on the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the authors show how the varying ideological commitments of the genre producers are visible in the language choices adopted. They conclude by making a convincing case for the usefulness of combined CDA and corpus approaches and extending it to the analysis of other genres.

In his brief afterword and discussion of chapters in the volume, John Swales reflects on how much the ESP field has developed over the last 50 years and also highlights two particular issues, not developed in the present book, which might figure in a similar work in ten years' time. The first is a greater concentration on oral discourse genres and the second a clarification of what he terms the current "insecure relationship" between ESP and corpus practice.

Overall this volume provides an excellent overview of the research under way in a variety of areas of ESP. The chapters can also of course be considered separately, but taken together they provide a good picture of where ESP stands in 2011 and of some of the likely directions future research will take. As John Swales also points out in his afterword, not all these directions are necessarily new, but even

those that revisit old issues provide new insights and regroupings. In a book of this type one can obviously always regret the lack of detail granted to a particular topic. One of my personal regrets is that, with the notable exception of Lynne Flowerdew's chapter and the final chapter by Kandil and Belcher, there is not more in this volume on the input of corpus linguistics. I would in particular have welcomed more discussion on the ways in which the analysis of hard data can be combined with softer approaches incorporating context-sensitive features. Several chapters in the volume stress the need for more contextually situated or ethnographic approaches. How can this be combined with large-scale corpus studies involving masses of data? Another issue that perhaps arguably deserved more coverage is that of data-driven learning (Johns 1991). Apart from a brief mention in John Flowerdew's chapter on genre (p. 125), the issue of learners doing their own corpus-based analysis is not broached.

There is some repetition and redundancy between chapters that could possibly have been avoided (Chapters 6 and 7 for example provide very similar accounts of Bhatia's (1993) genre analysis steps.) Some cross-referencing between chapters would also perhaps have been useful. However these small defects do not detract from the overall quality of the volume. The book is on the whole not only very thorough but also very readable and can be recommended to doctoral students and researchers alike, not only for the breadth of topics covered but also for its scholarship.

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