Conference Report on the 3rd European Symposium on LSP

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Teaching a native or a foreign language for specific purposes is a growing field of interest. At least 2 journals have recently been started which are exclusively devoted to research in this field, be it linguistic, psycholinguistic or didactic: Fachsprache, International Journal of Languages for Special Purposes (LSP) (managing Editor: Dr. Josef Wieser, Rudolf-Zeller-gasse 67/5, A-1230 Vienna, Austria) and The ESP Journal (Editor: Dr. Grace S. Mancill, ELT, The American University, Washington DC 20016 USA). This interest is also demonstrated by international conferences on LSP.

The 3rd biennual European Symposium on LSP was held at the Copenhagen School of Economics and organized by the LSP-Centre, the UNESCO ALSED LSP Network and the AILA Commission on LSP, on August 17-19, 1981 (after Vienna in 1977 and Bielefeld in 1979 and just after the 6th AILA-congress in Lund, Sweden, which included a two-day LSP-section). There were two plenary addresses: one was to have been delivered by Prof. Dr. Lubomir Drozd (Charles University, Prague). Dr. Drozd was replaced by Dr. Jan Ulijn (Eindhoven University of Technology, Netherlands) who spoke on: Universals and Variants in Scientific and Technical English, French, German and Dutch. The other address was delivered by Dr. Kurt Opitz (Pachhochschule Hamburg, FRG) on: LSP versus Common Language: the muddle of definitions and definiendum. Forty papers were presented in 4 sections: 1. Text typology (11), 2. Speech Acts & Communication (6), 3. Terminology-Lexicography (4)/Translation-Interpretation (1), 4. Didactics (18). There were more than 100 participants, from 11 European and 10 non-European countries.

In his address, Jan Ulijn tried to answer two questions:

1. Does a scientific and technical register represent a lexical, syntactic and textual particularity of the common language and if so, is it a reduction or an enrichment in relation to common language? And, what is to be taught to students who already have some knowledge of the common language to prepare them for the type of language they will need in their future professions?

2. Does a scientific and technical register vary or does it remain constant for languages such as English, French, German and Dutch? What actually prevails: universals linked to specific aspects of the profession or variants arising from the different grammatical systems in question? Universals and variants of a native and a foreign language - how can they be taken into account in professional language courses?

On the basis of comparative linguistic research he stated that scientific language is a particularity of the common language in terms of an expansion; on the syntactic level a reduction is to be observed. In most cases supralinguistic universals will be more important than variants. These analyses were subjected to experimental psycholinguistic verification and led to the conclusion that in a course designed to teach the scientific and technical register it will be useful to take into account previous knowledge of the common language and as one would, with certain precautions, the knowledge of the native language. In general, for languages such as English, German and Dutch it seems more reasonable to stress universals than interlinguistic variants.

Kurt Opitz examined the distinction between common or standard language or register and an LSP register. Through an analysis of the main features of both registers, with examples chiefly drawn from English, he
tried to show that:

1. The particular role of pragmatics, usually ascribed to LSP in order to differentiate it from other languages, is in fact not limited to LSP.

2. The standard register is not a closed entity with enough stability and identity of its own so as to serve as a capable definitions.

The conclusion suggested was that there is a constant exchange of items and features between LSP and standard language, and that no mutual demarcation of the two seems possible.

Another contribution which attracted a plenary audience was Drs. Louis and Mary Trimble’s paper: Rhetorical-grammatical Features of Scientific and Written English Texts as a Major Factor in Written ESP Communication. They have examined for several years now passive constructions, non-temporal use of tense and other features in technical articles (for EAP) and technical manuals (for EOP). In Copenhagen some differences between the two types of documents were discussed.

These three contributions came under the heading of Typology. The Didactics section, with 18 papers, was the largest. The section papers dealt with several domains of language activity such as mathematics, technology, biomedical journals, radiology, plant pathology, agriculture, banking, economics (4x) or science and technology in a general way EAP, (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) to family therapy, coffee-reading and social deviance (alcoholism, violence, crime). Several languages were involved: English (18x), French (6x), German (6x), Spanish and Hebrew (3x), Finnish (2x), Italian, Russian, Dutch Swedish and Xhosa (all 1x)(mostly in their written mode). Five papers dealt with an analysis of native language use: Finnish (2x), Hebrew (2x) and Xhosa (1x). Most of the papers were read in English, some in French or German. Since it would be hard to review all 40 papers read, I will refer to 20 which may give an indication of current trends in the field. If the target language is not otherwise identified, it is English.

1. Text typology

Josh Ard (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor USA: The pragmatics of Mathematical Discourse) considered two major aspects in detail: the properties of mathematical expressions themselves and the interplay between these, the prose portion and the graphic display portion of the texts. Texts for mathematical majors, business and engineering students show the same information with the interplay of different types of expression that writers and readers of mathematical articles should take into careful consideration.

Rosemarie Gläser (University of Leipzig, GDR: The Problem of Style Classification in ESP) distinguished 5 styles: academic scientific and technical, popular scientific; didactic; directive; and practical or everyday. In scientific and technical style Jeanne Heslot (Institut National d'Agronomie, Paris: Tense and other Indexical Markers in the Typology of Scientific Texts in English) pointed out on the basis of a quantitative comparison of primary articles and review articles on plant pathology by herself and an analysis of text books by other researchers that there is a difference in rhetorical structure (primary articles have a stricter structure, as for example: Introduction, Materials, Results and Discussion) which corresponds to differences of distribution over the text of markers like active voice, past tense and finite verbs.

Betty Dubois (New Mexico State University, Las Cruces USA: The Construction of Noun Phrases of Biomedical Journal Articles) following Halliday & Hassan's (1976) analysis method, demonstrated that NP's are a dynamic phenomenon in scientific writing and indicate also a special
style of the writer. Joseph Chetritt (University of Haifa, Israel: La composition nominale dans les langues spécialisées - étude de pragmatique référentielle) drew similar conclusions for nominal compounding which is very important for creating neologisms in scientific French. Hilka Oksanen (Vasa University, Finland: Adjectives in Finnish Advertising - A study on Syntactic-Semantic Bases) concluded that adjectives (12% of the total word material) are favoured in advertising to make the object of the advertisement more desirable (cognitive and affective aspects fuse here). In 30% of cases the adjective qualifies the subject of the sentence, in 21% its object.

2. Speech Acts & Communication
Jo Ann Crandall & Allene Guss Grognet (Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington: Speech Acts and Vocational ESL) analyzed the value of the speech act theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1965) in vocational ESL and provided examples of models of curriculum design and materials using this theory, being developed for the 700,000 Indochinese, Cuban, Haitian and other immigrants with limited education who have come to the USA in the last five years.
Jannie Botha (University of Stellenbosch, South Africa: The Need for Communicative LSP in a Multilingual Society) highlighted the multilingual communicative needs of the population of South Africa: English, Afrikaans (related to Dutch) as official languages and one of the 7 major Bantu languages. The need for a third language led to a special course: Xhosa for special purposes.
Most of this section's papers stressed oral language as envisaged by the speech act theory.

3. Terminology-Lexicography/Translation-Interpretation
Only one paper was devoted to Translation-Interpretation: Willy Agtby (Århus School of Business Administration, Economics and Modern Languages, Denmark: Teaching Consecutive Interpreting) which included LSP-topics. The other papers were all concerned with terminology: Antonin Kučera (Brandstetter Verlag, Wiesbaden, FRG: Pragmatische Überlegungen bei der Anlage von Fachwörterbüchern). As the author of a dictionary of scientific and technical German (COMPACT Wörterbuch der exakten Naturwissenschaften und der Technik, Brandstetter: Wiesbaden 1980) he made a plea for such dictionaries to include lexical information on polysemantic + homonymic terms, definitions and references (of the utmost importance for the learner to find out about the structure of the specialised lexicon and to include translators.).
Monique Legros (El Colegio de México, México: La Banque Plurilingue de Terminologie en Espagnol de El Colegio de México) described the setting up of a terminological bank with the help of the Bureau de Terminologie of the CCES in Luxemburg (Eurodictautom) for English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. She discussed also the education of translators and terminologists at her Institute.
Marie-Pierrette de Montgomery (University of Nice, France: Computer Assisted Instruction of Banking Terminology, presented a computer assisted course of Banking terminology with special attention to repetition and revision procedure and patterns of discourse in banking. .

4. Didactics (all foreign language teaching)
To what extent should LSP teaching focus on lexis; a traditional topic in this field. Michel Perrin (University of Bordeaux II, France: Suiting the Word to the Action: A Pragmatic Approach to the Teaching of LSP) stated that specialised lexis is only relevant to young undergraduates without knowledge of their professional field. It is then up to the teacher of the scientific subject to transmit that vocabulary. The language teacher should develop courses based on the particular discourse and on the tasks to be performed by the learner-specialist who is in the best position to provide authentic materials.
Christer Pålsson (Swedish School of Economics, Helsingfors, Finland: On the Pragmatics of Semantic Selection under Restricted Resource Conditions among LSP-learners) examined the problems on the basis of 50 lexical items central to and highly frequent in business and economics, with first-year students from Swedish, Finnish or bilingual backgrounds. He concluded that the adding of a specific meaning to the common language words creates special problems in the learning process. This has a negative effect on the understanding of the content of a particular text as a whole.

Other papers which placed heavy emphasis on lexis were: Cynthia Coad (Multicultural Education Center, Anaheim USA: A Job Preparation Program for the Limited English Speaking Person) described research and planning stages of a special vocational programme. It included needs assessment, goal description and the administration of an English placement test. The language component with extensive occupational terminology was part of the vocational training itself. 

Anne-Marie Cornu & Jean Binon (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium: L'enseignement du vocabulaire: clef de voûte de l'enseignement du français fonctionnel) stressed the same need for systematic vocabulary teaching (French labour terminology) for first year economists. Their programme takes into account all kinds of criteria: textual, semantic (such as hyponyms, synonyms, paronyms, antonyms, homonyms), morpho-syntactic (derivation procedures, transitive or intransitive), phonetic and orthographic, distributed over 3 bipolar distinctions: frequency/specialisation degree, interference/transparence receptive/productive.

Other aspects of LSP teaching were stressed as well: Rosemarie Buhlmann (Goethe Institute Munich, FRG: Competence in Special Fields as the Goal of Foreign Language Teaching for Special Purposes) made a distinction between two groups: those who have competence in the professional subject matter of the language and those who haven't. Both would need an awareness of the role of scientific discourse in the reception and production of language and a transfer of strategies from native to foreign language use. In the second group general learning strategies would have to be developed also. The paper mentioned examples of such strategies. Malcolm Cooper (British Council, London UK: Aspects of the Structure of Written Academic Discourse and Implications for the Design of Reading Programmes) argued on the basis of a published textbook that university students should be trained not only in retrospection but also in prediction beyond the sentence level in reading along the hypothesis-formation reading theory of Smith and Goodman and the discourse analysis of Sinclair and Coulthard.

Siv Higelin (National Board of Education, Stockholm: LSP for Immigrants Participating in Labour Market Training in Sweden) is also interested in reading textbooks (in Swedish for mechanical engineering and restaurant personnel courses). A first study concerned a linguistic analysis and the preparation of a teacher's guide and exercise book for LSP teaching. Other studies may include rewriting existing textbooks to make them more readable.

Christopher Martin (English Language Teaching Development Unit, Bicester UK: Adult Language Training: Defining Objectives and Measuring Performance) reported on a Stages of Attainment Scale and Test Battery in English developed at the request of the SKF Group of companies, a Swedish multinational, to be used by administrators and language teachers in SKF's language training programme.

If this conference were considered representative of current trends in LSP, one might sum up as follows:

1. The conception of LSP continues to be very broad: "special purposes" could mean science and technology, but also family therapy. It comprises also native language mastery.
2. The descriptions of language varieties are merely qualitative. Some 3 or 4 papers presented quantitative data to support qualitative distinctions, not to speak of significance calculations between common language and the specialised varieties. (cfr.: a recent doctoral dissertation: The Language of The Hague. A quantitative stylistic study on the basis of published criticisms of Dutch government language, by J. Renkema, The Hague: Staats-uitgeverij.).

3. Only 2 papers mentioned psycholinguistic experiments, limited to reading. More experimental work would be needed on:
- first and second/foreign language speaking, listening, reading and writing for professional and academic purposes and the transfer processes between them: how do people use a native or foreign language for special purposes.
This would considerably increase the validity of tests in LSP acquisition, the development of which was inadequately represented in the papers at this conference.

4. No contribution to the Didactics series mentioned any truly controlled experiment assessing LSP teaching strategies. Efficient improvement of LSP programs would require such experimental studies.

More detailed information on the conference may be obtained from: Jørgen Høedt, LSP Centre, UNESCO ALSED LSP Network and Newsletter, Copenhagen School of Economics, 7 Fabrikvej.
Pragmatics and LSP will be published by Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck A/S, Købmagergade 49, D-1150 Copenhagen K, Denmark.
The next international symposium on LSP will be especially devoted to reading and will be held at Eindhoven University of Technology, 2, 3 & 4 August 1982 (write to: Jan Ulijn, Department of Applied Linguistics, Eindhoven University of Technology, P.O.Box 513, 5600 MB Eindhoven, The Netherlands). The 4th European Symposium on LSP will probably take place at the University of Bordeaux in August 1983 (write to: Michel Perrin, University of Bordeaux II, France).