

# Approaches to Teaching LSP: An Introduction

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## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This volume is one of the end products of the project “Languages for special purposes: Research, teaching and translation” financed by the University of Milan in 2014, and conceived within the activities of the CLAVIER Research Centre, of which the English Linguistics researchers of the Department of Studies in Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication are members<sup>1</sup>. The project focused on Languages for Specific Purposes and set out to explore three different aspects: research, translation and teaching. The essays collected in this volume – all focusing on English – regard specifically the latter aspect, exploring various issues and trends in ESP pedagogy, while ESP research and translation will be tackled in another edited volume (Garzone, Heaney, and Riboni forthcoming).

This does not mean there is no room in this book for reports on research, given that – as Swales (1988) underlines – ESP research and pedagogy are closely interwoven. In actual fact, the need for practically-oriented language teaching to be supported by research was already advocated in the 1960's by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens:

Every one of these specialized needs requires, before it can be met by appropriate teaching materials, detailed studies of restricted languages and special registers

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carried out on the basis of large samples of the language used by the particular persons concerned. (Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens 1964, 189-190)

In time, the difference between the teaching of language for specific purposes and mainstream language teaching became taken-for-granted, and specific research and theorisations about specialised discourse pedagogy started to be produced extensively: in 1977 Strevens (1977, 146) emphasised the importance of “Special-purposed Language Learning” as a “major, world-wide educational tide of change”.

As Starfield (2013, 466-467) highlights, the rising interest in LSPs contributed to increasing the relative attention for context and content beyond traditional grammar-focused teaching under the influence of communicative approaches, at a time of rapid technologisation and increasing internationalisation of the economy.

In the last few decades, progress in LSP pedagogy has been stimulated by a number of developments in research in various related fields, especially in linguistics, language acquisition and language pedagogy.

If in the early days of ESP research, terminology was at the centre of the stage, as its deployment was considered to be the only really distinctive trait of specialised communication, in the following phase attention widened to include recurrent syntactic features (e.g. the passive, nominalisation), while in more recent times a discursive approach that looks at text and language in use has prevailed. In this respect an important role has been played by genre analysis (Swales 1990, 2004; Bhatia 1993, 2004; Paltridge 2001; Hyland 2004) in its various periodically updated versions and applications, with increasing importance being attributed to the socially-situated character of genres, i.e. their social and pragmatic dimension<sup>2</sup>, and this has eventually led to a more flexible approach, which Tardy (2011) has defined “multi-method”. Also the rise of corpus linguistics and other technological advances in language analysis have been a very important factor in the evolution of ESP teaching methods, being useful – as Bloch points out (Bloch 2013, 385) – in two distinct ways, “first, as a tool for helping with traditional types of language learning and, second, as a space for creating new forms of communicating”. In particular, recourse to corpus linguistics in ESP teaching has offered important opportunities for course and syllabus design, development of teaching materials, as well as for pedagogically-oriented ESP research, as all these activities can now be

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<sup>2</sup> On ESP genre-based teaching cf. also – among others – Flowerdew 2002; Johns 2002; Hyland 2011.

grounded in massive collections of data and supported by software for text analysis (Belcher, Johns, and Paltridge 2011, 3-4). In this way, as Paltridge (2013, 351) points out, teachers “are able to show how language is used in the context of particular academic genres”, as for instance Hyland (2002) and Harwood (2005) have done for specific features of academic writing (the use of personal pronouns respectively in students’ academic writing and in academic research articles) with a view to relying on research results as a basis for teaching.

As regards the choice of the language variety to be taught in the ESP classroom, which had always been oriented towards one of the national standards, with a preference for the English standard, a radical change of perspective has recently occurred as part of a more realistic approach taking account of the fact that in most cases the kind of language actually used in real-world exchanges by non-native speakers is English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF: cf. e.g. Nickerson 2005, 2013; Mauranen 2011). This has initiated an interesting line of research on the use of ELF in LSP contexts, whose results are of great interest both from the pedagogical and the linguistic research perspectives.

Another important development in ESP teaching is the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), thus defined by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010, 1):

[...] a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, in the teaching and learning process, there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language. Each is interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater on one or the other at a given time.<sup>3</sup>

This teaching practice has been gaining ground in Europe, after the success of ‘Immersion’ in Canada, being strongly promoted by European institutions in furtherance of multilingualism. It is now practiced as part of mainstream education and in the form of pilot projects (Euridyce 2006, 33) for the teaching of several different subjects (cf. e.g. Dalton-Puffer et al. 2010). The development of CLIL-like curricula is much more demanding than traditional language teaching, above all in terms of appropriately qualified teachers and suitable teaching materials, and this remains a topic of animated discussion.

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<sup>3</sup> For other definitions of CLIL cf., among others, Dalton-Puffer 2007, 1-5; Marsh 2012, ii. For a definition distinguishing CLIL from other forms of EMI (English Medium Instruction) cf. Dearden 2014, 3.

All the developments described so far would have been devoid of sense were it not for a tendency that cuts across all of them: the trend to lay ever greater emphasis on learner-centredness (cf. e.g. Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Johns and Price-Machado 2001), which is the magnification of a principle that – as Belcher (2004, 166) points out – has always been part of the ESP perspectives, as by definition ESP teaching has been aimed at catering to learners’ needs in their own academic or occupational contexts.

This initial overview is necessarily general in nature, providing a theoretical vantage point from which to view the action of the current debate on LSP teaching unfold. Naturally, it does not do full justice to the kind of detailed stock-taking of the status of ESP and the methodologies for teaching analysed in the contributions that make up the volume. The following section, which offers a more detailed description of the contents, allows us to zoom in on the matter and reveals how much has changed, is changing and, in the view of some contributors, still needs to change in pursuit of more effective LSP instruction across a spectrum of didactic scenarios.

## 2. CONTENTS OF THE VOLUME

The first section of the volume contains various papers dealing with Teaching English for Specific Purposes (TESP) at higher education level across different academic disciplines. These studies delineate a variety of possible approaches. Some chapters are genre-based and aim at making students aware of the functional and discursive features of the materials proposed to them. Further perspectives on this teaching scenario are provided by a chapter that adopts a corpus-based approach and relies on the use of substantial data sets in order to demonstrate how monolingual and parallel corpora can be employed to train students in the development of advanced and LSP-specific linguistic and analytical skills, which may also be extended to translation issues.

In the first chapter in this section, Anna Franca Plastina argues the case for a genre-activity based approach to English for Medical Purposes (EMP) to prompt learners’ transfer of genre knowledge for meaningful participation and production. To this end, the author explores the as yet unresolved tension in tertiary didactic scenarios between the focus on genre as “a purposeful social activity” (Martin 1984, 25) and the growing need to foster greater “socio-cognitive genre knowledge”, as advocated

by Johns (2008) and as increasingly called for by the contemporary shift within EMP from doctor-centred to patient-centred encounters and their resulting generic requirements (Funnell and Anderson 2004). Taking her cue from Devitt's (2009, 338) contention that raising genre awareness in the classroom alone ultimately constrains students' socio-cognitive generic competence, and from Russell and Fishers's (2009, 165) observation that this tendency entails the risk of abstracting the genre from its real context, the author describes a pedagogical experiment in which EMP learners populated the activity space of the medical interview, producing computer-mediated simulations. With reference to Bhatia's (1997) framework of genre analysis, the resulting digital products are analysed both for learners' convergence towards generic conventions and for their creative divergence. The findings of this study highlight the appropriateness of learners' lexical choices, suggesting adequate transfer of their knowledge of the code, with anatomical and diagnostic terms used mainly to reconstruct doctor-led rather than patient-centred dialogues, thus reflecting the prevailing influence of the traditional disease-oriented model on learners. However, this bias is viewed as constraining learners' effective exploitation of rhetorical phases/moves in medical interviews and reducing sensitivity to cognitive structures, areas in which major weaknesses are identified. Nevertheless, such weaknesses are observed to be partially offset by individual creative choices, mainly made to personalise the simulated medical space, to introduce a range of medical props, and to create interrelations with other genres pertaining to bio-social contexts. In the view of the author, a pragmatic synergy between learners' own actions and the socially defined context of the medical interview is to a certain extent achieved, while the project as a whole maps out an area of research and teaching practices that have the potential to take genre-based approaches to EMP beyond the confines of the activity system of education in the direction of workplace genres (cf. Artemeva 2008).

In the following chapter Glenn Alessi presents the findings of a survey into the current practices of genre and or discourse-based approaches used in *Lingua Inglese* courses in the curriculum at Italian universities in various departments and degree programmes. The information on current practices has been garnered from questionnaires distributed to 25 academics that research, teach or supervise teaching of ESP in 14 Italian universities. Participants were approached on the basis of their long-term engagement with teaching and researching ESP in Italian higher education. Among the questions the author poses are: *What gets taught? How are course content and objectives related to degree programmes? Why is this approach used? And,*

*how are genre and discourse-based approaches to ESP seen as being relevant and justified in terms of institutional practices, student needs and career pathways?* A second, but not secondary, motive for Alessi's study is to discuss the very rationale for including genre or discourse-informed ESP language awareness components in course content. The ensuing discussion takes the form of comments on survey findings based on the course descriptions and reviews the existing tension between theory versus practice, institutional offerings versus student needs, as well as the role of genre or discourse-based studies (under the category of 'Applied Linguistics') in the curriculum, and of higher education's role in identifying and teaching employable skills as a product of reflective learning. Taking into account possible student responses to the prevailing approaches to genre within LSP teaching at tertiary level, largely weighted in favour of the theoretical top-down approach as opposed to more practical bottom-up approaches (see Wilkins 1999), the author considers feasible adjustments to and refinements of the balance that could be achieved by shifting from more traditional transmission models aimed at increasing genre awareness to transformational approaches, whose relevance might be more immediately appreciable to students of LSPs.

This study is followed by Stefania Gandin's contribution which examines the potential of corpus-assisted approaches to LSP acquisition, placing particular emphasis on the role of translation in this process. With reference to Gotti (1991, 2003) and Dann (1996), the language of tourism is presented as a distinctive type of LSP, comprising a notable array of stylistic, pragmatic and lexical features, combining with and influenced by varying registers and different specialised languages. Therefore, as the author states, learning the language of tourism and acquiring the skills to translate it as an LSP require the development of specific linguistic and analytical competences, of which both learners and teachers need to be fully aware if they are to master it. To this end, Gandin sets out to present some corpus-based didactic proposals for the teaching and learning of English tourism discourse as LSP. Her primary aim is to demonstrate how monolingual and parallel corpora of tourist promotional texts – created for academic research reasons – can also be employed to train students in the development of advanced and LSP-specific language skills. Stressing the overall usefulness of corpora, her contribution describes three main corpus-based didactic approaches proposed to L2 learners of English at university level: the exploration of different aspects of the language of tourism in terms of its main linguistic, stylistic and pragmatic properties; the investigation of the main translational features employed in tourist

texts, including the identification of translation universals and most/least successful translational strategies; and familiarisation with corpus linguistics methodologies, notions, design criteria, technical tools, resources and procedures for the interpretation of linguistic data.

The author argues that corpus linguistics can successfully integrate, innovate and strengthen language teaching methods, particularly in L2 and LSP learning contexts, through the use of authentic linguistic materials and up-to-date and stimulating tools of analysis. In so doing, she also makes a strong case for the place of corpus-assisted translation as a valuable resource for consolidating teaching and learning procedures of LSP in general.

The next chapter, authored by Roxanne Doerr, outlines new applications of IT and digital resources intended to transform the individual, asynchronous experience typical of blended or online university courses into a more collective and rewarding endeavor. Owing to the mobilisation, de-localisation and flexibility of today's job market, some universities have been tailoring the programmes, content and the conveyed skills of their ESP courses to a new sort of target student who cannot attend regular classes and seeks practical skills that may be immediately used in the current or desired work environment. The University of Padua's School of Psychology offers an online bachelor's degree course, *Scienze e Tecniche Psicologiche* ('Psychological Sciences and Techniques'), which promotes and provides a flexible program for this new category of learners. In particular, the 'Psychology in English' course activity appears to be specifically customised to cater to the needs of working students, as it mainly consists in task-based collaborative wiki texts, regarding specific branches or issues in Psychology, uploaded by groups of users/learners throughout the course. 'Psychology in English' therefore represents an interesting empirical case study which Doerr examines in order to investigate the potential of online (Psychology) ESP teaching as well as its limitations. In her chapter, she considers theories on and necessary changes in psychology ESP teaching and evaluation methods required by an online Moodle context, and she reflects on possible tools and solutions to emerging problems. The analysis of the activities proposed within the course and of the final results obtained by the students enables her to conclude that, provided some technical and organisational issues are tackled, online courses such as 'Psychology in English' can indeed offer users/learners the problem solving skills and use of psychology ESP that is required by the current job market.

The section closes with a chapter by Cynthia Kellet Bidoli who shifts the attention to interpreter training, and proposes an approach that tries to

strike the right balance between consolidated traditional teaching practices and the opportunities afforded by technological tools. The chapter begins with a review of some of the principal challenges entailed in teaching consecutive interpretation from the perspective of Language for Special Purposes (LSP), the type of discourse interpreters have to work with in the main. This overview spans both traditional terminological approaches, like manual research and memorisation techniques, and more recent cognitive ones that account not only for individuals' perception of specialised terms, but also their note-taking of LSP. This is because, in the author's view, while "specialised vocabulary is the access key to specialised discourse" (Garzone 2006, 13), the skill of note taking is no less central to consecutive interpreting, as trainees must learn how to understand and memorise different generic usages of LSP in Italian and English, and have to be taught how to transform the Italian source language into notes and select correct or acceptable equivalents in the English target language in order to deliver consecutively an interpreted discourse at the required level of competence. In line with Costa et al.'s (2014, 32) call for a new phase in interpreting research to better understand 'technology awareness' among interpreters, with a view to assessing needs and developing appropriate tools, the author focuses on the potential of digital pen technology for note taking training. Description of the product's relevant features and the results achieved in the classroom are provided to back up the author's case for the incorporation of such technology into Consecutive Interpreting note taking instruction.

The second section of the book focuses on "English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF)" and can be viewed against the underlying tension between the aims and requirements of traditional English language curricula in universities and the recognition that the language teaching orthodoxies that have a predominantly English or US orientation (Mauranen 2012) are increasingly confronted with the need to adjust to a global trend in which, as Seidlhofer (2008) points out, near-native proficiency has ceased to be a priority for many learners and speakers who, nonetheless, require a working knowledge of the language in highly professional contexts. In their different ways, the two chapters in this section reflect the growing synergy between English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) and ESP teaching.

Franca Poppi opens this section with a contribution where she offers a series of reflections on how a university-level language course can accommodate awareness of ELF, discussing the kinds of learning outcomes that can be achieved when such an approach is adopted. The traditional approach to English Language Teaching in Europe is described as predominantly EFL-based, in accordance with the generally held conviction



that “the acquisition of an idealised rendition of a prestigious L1 variety is the given goal of institutionalised foreign-language education” (Modiano 2009, 208). However, this attitude is reviewed and assessed from the perspective of widely observable changes in the global uses of language, in which neither students’ interlocutors nor the readers of the texts they produce are any longer necessarily confined to a single nationality or locality, a development which, Poppi argues, inevitably calls into question the installed reliance on the traditions of the British or US dialects for language instruction. Poppi proceeds to argue that the role and function of English needs to be integrated with insights from ELF, to better prepare the students for their future professional lives. Starting from an evaluation of student’s attitudes to the acquisition or approximation of native-speaker levels of competence, the author describes the structure, method and outcomes of an ELF-oriented component introduced into a university language syllabus. In the author’s view, the inclusion of ELF content is particularly conducive to fostering the levels of linguistic awareness and skills needed to use the language as an effective instrument of global communication rather than as a passport into the narrower ethnic and cultural identities tied up with native-like competence.

In the other chapter included in this section, Elisa Turra reports the findings of the most recent stage of ongoing research into role plays and simulations derived from company courses on business negotiation. The analysis focuses on the repertoire of discursive, rhetorical and interactional strategies employed by Italian speaking participants to manage conflict and find an agreement using English as a *Lingua Franca*. Grounded on the one hand in interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis (Sacks, Schlegoff, and Jefferson 1974), and on the other in pragma-linguistic perspectives like face (Goffman 1959), politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987; Watts 2003), gossip (Eggins and Slade 1997) and humour theory (Holmes 2000; Harris 2003; Norrick 2009), the analysis reveals that the interactants are highly cooperative, making effective use of communication-enhancing pragmatic strategies, so that cases of failed comprehension are very limited. As such, these findings support and extend the results of the author’s previous studies of ELF data, confirming the effectiveness and flexibility of these strategies in business negotiations. Indeed, in this particular study, the author stresses how the participants’ cooperative attitude is reflected in the interaction by the use of question-answer sequences aimed at sharing and exchanging information, as well as positive politeness strategies aimed at creating common ground. Interactants’ social psychological needs, notably affiliation and appreciation, are also linguistically realised

through the use of inclusive resources, such as a shared lexical repertoire, inclusive pronouns, shared irony, laughter and banter. Although it may be objected that the instances of disagreement and contradiction registered in the encounter may be the result of lower pragmatic competence by ELF speakers, it is suggested that, in line with Watt's (2003) concept of politic behaviour, such responses may be actually deemed eminently politic. Nevertheless, as the author makes clear, further study of fresh data is needed to appreciate more fully ELF's potential in such business negotiations, in the light of participants' expectations, cultural and social norms and experience in management and leadership. It would also be interesting if the new data were to draw on a sample of NNS participants from a more varied L1 mix.

The remaining chapters, organised in a final section titled "Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)", discuss the CLIL pedagogical approach not only in tertiary education, but also looking beyond the horizons of the university to the world of the primary and secondary school, where it is used for subjects such as Science, History and Geography which are taught through a foreign language.

The first of the four studies in this final section, authored by Manuel Silva and Alexandra Albuquerque, approaches CLIL from the point of view of a university teaching scenario, with an accent on the acquisition of terminology. A terminological approach to CLIL – or TerminoCLIL – represents the link between concepts and expertise (terminology), on the one hand, and discourse on knowledge (language) on the other. Taken together, these dimensions form the basis of non-ambiguous and more efficient communication about specialised knowledge. Drawing on the assumption that terminology is key as regards the development of communication processes as well as information and knowledge sharing, Silva and Albuquerque's contribution emphasises the need to create a methodology that specifically addresses its use in CLIL environments. The authors proceed to describe a Learning Activity Plan, based on a terminological approach to CLIL, which covers learning objectives, terminology acquisition tasks and related tools, developed to support teaching activities and help accomplish the objective of acquiring specialised knowledge. This Learning Activity Plan consists of three consecutive stages: (1) Knowledge retrieval/organisation, (2) Knowledge application and (3) Knowledge visualisation, and follows Bloom's (1956) taxonomy throughout a scaffolded learning process. Implemented in the wider context of Portuguese Higher Education, where CLIL is still in its infancy and little or no research has been carried out on it, this project and its outcomes are still being tested in training courses offered to domain-specific teachers.

The following contribution, authored by Paola Catenaccio and Cinzia Giglioni, also looks at university teaching, but the focus is on English language courses offered within the framework of MA primary language teaching training in Italian universities. Starting from the assumption that the teachers' language competences are a pivotal factor whatever the intensity, length of exposure and specific syllabus organisation chosen for a CLIL-based project, their chapter reports on a case study conducted at the University of Aosta, where the administration of an entry test to students enrolled in the Primary Education Degree revealed an uneven starting level of English among prospective teachers. The authors maintain that such a heterogeneous scenario makes it difficult to envision an exit level suited to the demands of CLIL-based teaching. In order to verify whether the results obtained in Aosta may possibly be representative of the rest of the country and to evaluate the adequacy of university programmes to meet the needs of CLIL instruction, the authors call for research into a wider range of Italian universities and for an extended language level assessment of primary education degree course students. It is Catenaccio and Giglioni's contention that a major rearrangement in primary education degree courses is necessary and they put forth a series of tentative proposals that illustrate what changes may be made not just to improve language level entry tests, but also to attach more importance to language certifications and attribute more university credits to language training as a whole. Finally, the authors provide a detailed description of the specific characteristics that materials and university syllabi should possess if they are to fully meet the needs of prospective CLIL teachers.

At this point, the attention shifts to CLIL in primary and secondary education, as in the following chapter Silvia Cavalieri and Anna Stermieri present a project carried out at elementary school level on the teaching of three subjects (i.e. Science, Geography, Art) to be delivered in English, also the language for class interaction, to provide a fully immersive educational environment. The project, called BEI-IBI (Bilingual Education Italy - Insegnamento Bilingue Italia), was developed by the Italian Ministry of Education, the British Council Italy and the USR Lombardia (the Regional Education Office of Lombardy) on the basis of a project implemented in Spain in 1996. Cavalieri and Stermieri's study provides the data collected during a monitoring activity on the project and reflects on the best practices for promoting bilingual education in the early stages of learning. The different actors of the teaching/learning process (primary school headmasters, teachers, parents and pupils) were all involved and underwent focus group interviews so that their level of motivation and

satisfaction with the project could be assessed. Focus group questioning also proved strategic in order to generate debate among the participants. As regards the teaching end of the process, much attention is devoted in the chapter to the examination of teachers' instructional design and mode of implementation. Teachers' training in BEI-IBI teaching methodologies also plays a significant role in the presentation of the pilot project. At the learning end of the process, pupils' results are reported on and appear to indicate that the activities proposed within the project can enable students to achieve a satisfactory knowledge both of the taught subjects and of L2.

The CLIL section and the entire volume is brought to an end by Annarita Tavani's contribution which describes a corpus-assisted study which examines materials used in Italian secondary schools for CLIL projects in Physics, with a view to identifying specificities in the didactic strategies developed in an EFL country for the teaching of a non-linguistic subject in a vehicular language other than the majority one. The author contends that of the non-linguistic school subjects the physical sciences are typically considered as suitable disciplines for CLIL projects in Italy: this is probably due to the fact that scientific discourse is usually regarded as an LSP with fixed lexical, morpho-syntactic and textual conventions. Relying on the methodological tools provided by discourse analysis, Tavani adopts a qualitative close reading procedure and carries out a multi-level analysis focusing on lexis, syntax and textual organisation of six Physics coursebooks. Four of these are specifically designed to be used for the teaching of CLIL Physics in Italian secondary schools and represent the main corpus under investigation. The analysis of these CLIL materials reveals an effort to conform to the grammatical and textual standards of specialised discourse as well as a lack of consistency in the application of strategies that integrate acquisition of language and subject content. A comparison between the CLIL corpus and a control corpus made up of two Physics coursebooks published in English-speaking countries highlights that the latter display a more accurate use of specialised lexis, as well as an attempt to make the discourse of scientific instruction – in terms of both syntactic features and overall cognitive-textual organisation – more accessible to students.

The picture of LSP teaching that emerges from this volume as a whole is, then, a complex, evolving, and fluid one. It is composed of descriptions of experiences, illustrations of problems, and outlines of possible solutions – the latter, in the view of the proponents themselves, requiring still further research in order to be fully and convincingly fleshed out. It is a picture marked by the tension between consolidated practices, fresh

perspectives, and the need to strike the right balance between them to further enhance LSP instruction. It is the hope of the editors that these chapters will convey the state of play in LSP instruction and help focus attention on the key issues and challenges within this dynamic sphere, be it to meet the more immediate needs of teaching or to channel the longer term efforts of research.

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