

# Do we need to standardize written scientific discourse?

Almost ten years ago we wrote that academicians had been debating about the exact place of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) –and similarly, Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Languages for Academic Purposes (LAP)–, and whether or not ESP was valued on a par in higher education vis-à-vis EAP and vice versa. Some linguists tended to reject this parity on the grounds that one devalues the other. Our proposal, at that time, was that we "concentrate on what can be developed in common to contribute positively to the debate" (Piqué et al., 1996: 6). LSP is sufficiently diversified, as Kachru (1988: 9) wrote, to cover three basic assumptions:

[...] appropriateness of language corpus; format organization of the corpus at various linguistic levels; phonetic, phonological, lexical, syntactic, and discursal; and the relationship between the formal features and the functions of the texts in terms of the profession, participants, and so on.

And Alcaraz (2003: 5), in his prologue to Rosario Bueno's bibliographical study, wrote:

En lo que a las lenguas modernas se refiere, la interdisciplinariedad ha significado su fecunda unión con otras ramas del saber, como el derecho, la medicina, los negocios, la ciencia y la tecnología, la industria, etc., y el resultado de esta fructífera alianza son las lenguas de especialidad, también llamadas lenguajes profesionales y académicos.

Since the first issue of *Ibérica*, we have tried to open up the scope of contributions to our journal and accept papers not only from a diversity of cultures and nationalities but also languages and ideological points of view. We have intended to leave room indeed to different languages other than English (particularly Spanish and French) in an effort to foster, under the pressures exerted by English as today's scientific *lingua franca*, the use of other scholarly languages. It is actually an effort to somehow heed Swales' (1998) call for preserving academic languages. I believe we have succeeded in doing so, while at the same time respecting and maintaining whenever possible their cultural and rhetorical traditions. We believe we have accomplished our role in doing so, whether writing as natives or nonnatives, although sometimes forgetting that culture is what makes international communication complex, as has been evidenced by authors who have attributed differences in textual rhetoric to cultural differences (Mauranen, 1993: 252).

Although we recognize the universality of the English language and that our papers written in English will achieve a much larger audience, our task as editor has tended not to establish a specific writing code or a handbook for publication in our journal, but rather allow our contributors' specific writing languages and identities. As

Leppänen (2003: 55) said about publishing, writing handbooks are “very much ideological, historical, and moral in nature.” In addition –she concludes (1993: 81)–, “their universality, technicality, and transparency are often only apparent, especially for non-native writers of academic English,” and by extension, for academic writers in any language. While we would agree with Ana Moreno (1997: 173), in her comparison between English and Spanish models, that there are “more areas of similarity than differences between [these] two writing cultures of the western world,” we also want to guarantee this multicultural transparency.

There has been a tendency to standardize writing, but, as pointed out by Nancy Hoft (1999: 146), “it is not a solution to the problems introduced by multilingual and multicultural readerships that is growing in its popularity among worldwide corporate leaders in localization.” In addition, she believes that this localization, as an alternative to globalization, is not the answer since it is expensive and time consuming and proposes a third option: collaboration.

Salager-Meyer et al. (2003), faced with the “uniformization and standardization” trend in the non-English speaking academia, posed the following challenging final sentence:

Isn't it already too late to prevent scientific discourse from becoming a monoculture which encourages conformity to approved disciplinary discursive practices, and may thus be considered as a system of increasingly restrictive social control? (Salager-Meyer et al., 2003: 242)

Writers in the medical professions, facing that old aphorism of “publish or perish”, are indeed under such pressure for uniformity that everything not adhering to the Vancouver dictates will be systematically refused for publication. Eells and Hugel's (1997) booklet, *Publishing Without Perishing*, does not seem to be the answer, since it simply gears possible users of this manual towards uniformity in publishing. This uniformity is further promoted when nursing is included in the same package with the medical sciences (Erlen, 1997).

The ‘collaboration’ Hoft (1999) was talking about when referring to technical communication does not seem such a content-empty idea in an effort to reach compromise between the advocates of both currents. We firmly agree with her proposal when she postulated a “spirit of genuine collaboration” among all professionals involved, a collaboration that represents “the struggle to identify and address cultural differences as they present themselves in the technical communication context” (Hoft, 1999: 147).

This issue contains seven articles, an interview with Charles Meyer, and three book reviews. Two of them come from the USA and Denmark, and the rest from Spanish universities. The variety of topics analyzed further enhances our opinion that the field of languages for specific purposes has a much wider scope than assigned twenty years ago.

Charles Meyer, from the University of Massachusetts Boston, explores how materials drawn either from the Web or from the database MICASE can be used to teach modality in English to prospective teachers of ESL, EFL and ESP. We are also very pleased to have a closer look at Professor Meyer's professional activity in the interview carried out by our colleague, Dr. Carmen Pérez-Llantada, through which Dr. Meyer's dedication to corpus linguistics studies is made evident.

Alicia Martínez-Flor and Esther Usó-Juan focus on a practical problem encountered in many ESP disciplines: the use of request modifiers. In their pragmatic approach, they come to the conclusion that request modifiers were more commonly used among English Philology students than among Informatics students, and also that both groups used more internal modifiers, particularly "hesitators", than external ones.

The professionals working at the Aarhus School of Business have been known for their activity in dictionary production and more specifically on specialized lexicography. We already had proof of their expertise in the 2005 fall issue of *Ibérica* (10: 7-21), with Sven Tarp's paper, and in this issue we are pleased to include another paper by Sandro Nielsen on monolingual accounting dictionary production and how its texts can be used for EFL teaching purposes. Marisol Velasco touches upon the world of advertising by way of examining the variety of English being used and its degree of specialization: she concludes that this variety of English shows a low degree of specialization and it is, in fact, on the borderline between general and specific English.

From a rather theoretical perspective, Rosa Giménez tackles the problem of defining the concept of register. It is not the first time she approaches this difficult task (Giménez, 1997), and she does it now through the review of existing theories and models of analysis and proposes a new and practical systematic approach to register analysis. María José Esteve analyzes medical English from a diachronic perspective and, through a corpus of ophthalmologic texts, studies the evolution of several sets of words from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. She found that there was a decrease of words denoting procedure and, at the same time, an increase in the number of complex words from one period to the next.

Finally, Rosario Artiga explores academic lectures and authorial presence in their phraseology. She identifies and describes various elaboration strategies used by lecturers, finding a (perhaps surprisingly) high frequency of elaborations not marked by any comprehension clues such as formal definition structure, discourse markers, or syntactic patterning. They make suggestions for disambiguating unfamiliar lexis in science lecture contexts.

This issue comes to a close with three book reviews on three important publications: the first one is on a recently published bilingual dictionary of economics and law

(French-Spanish/Spanish-French), which is actually a second revised edition of a previous publication. The second and third book reviews are related to two collections of essays: the former, on language use in the academic context, gathers a series of papers delivered at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid by several scientific discourse specialists; and the latter, on corpus linguistics and its application to the study of English, in what we may call a state-of-the-art publication, offers a wide selection of papers presented at the Hübner Seminar, organized by the Universidad de Zaragoza.

I have been connected to *Ibérica*, first as member of the Editorial Board since its inception in 1991 and as editor for the last four years, but now it is time to let new air and new ideas come in and continue our work. When I embarked in this job, I had in mind a challenging list of priorities for the journal, namely redesigning its layout to make it more professional, increasing the number of issues per year and also making it more known internationally by including it in several international listings. Hopefully, these improvements have been noted by, and beneficial to our entire readership.

I greatly appreciate the support provided by the whole Editorial Board and AELFE's executive committee. Without their help and the help of our many contributors, what we have accomplished would have not been possible. I am sure that the new editor will continue towards enhancing this rapidly developing area of Languages for Specific Purposes, particularly when you think of it in terms of the new European curricula.

At this point, I would like to make mine John Swales' (1994: 200) words written in his farewell as co-editor of *ESP*: "I will henceforth find myself in the unaccustomed position of receiving a copy of [*Ibérica*] in the mail and not already knowing what it contains." It is time, therefore, to make way for younger, and certainly fresher, replacements.

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