

Information Technology in Languages for Specific Purposes. Issues and Prospects.

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The application of Information Technology (IT) to language learning and research is a relatively new field of scholarly work whose possibilities have not ceased to increase hand-in-hand with technological advances. In the case of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), traditionally concerned with issues such as needs analysis, learner's autonomy and use of authentic materials among others, IT can be extremely useful in producing highly interactive learning environments adapted to students' needs, and, at the same time, innovative studies on language acquisition. The present volume is a good example of it, and is particularly welcome because few studies have been published on the relationship between IT and LSP. This selection of papers and keynote lectures given during CILFE6, an International Conference held in Vilanova i la Geltrú (Barcelona, Spain) in 2003, offers an ample and varied overview of recent trends in technology-based language teaching and research from different parts of the world. Its international dimension is not only derived from the fact that contributors come from a variety of countries and continents, but also because several of the projects described involve cross-cultural issues. In spite of its internationalism, or maybe because of it, English is the target language in the majority of cases brought together, all of which are set within the higher education academic context.

The book begins with an introduction, where the editors carefully frame and analyze the essays that make up the volume. It ends with a concluding chapter in which they summarize the main issues discussed throughout and advocate the natural integration of IT into LSP teaching and research. The thirteen chapters in-between have been organized into five thematically related sections: *Corpus-based studies*, *Computer-mediated communication*, *Specific technology-based projects in different educational settings*, *Technology and learner autonomy in higher education*, and *Terminology and lexis: teaching and translation*. In the last pages (263-266) a useful index of topics in alphabetical order has also been included.

The first section, on corpus-based studies, opens up with a chapter by John Swales, where he discusses the advantages of using small specialized corpora for LSP, based on his experience with the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) project. He summarizes the differences between academic speech and academic prose, updates his reflections on corpus linguistics (lessening somewhat his previous concerns and criticisms), reflects on what a MICASE-based grammar might look like and, finally, offers a discursal-analytic example of teaching materials for EAP students. In the following chapter, Inmaculada Fortanet analyses the frequency, referents and discourse functions of ‘I’ and ‘you’ in American lectures, also basing her work on the MICASE corpus. Her research shows interesting differences in the way monologic and dialogic academic language uses these pronouns to mark closeness or distance between speaker and hearer, or to confirm the speaker’s ideas, points of view and attitudes. Part one concludes with the paper by Vassiliki Rizomilioti, where three small, purpose-built corpora of academic discourse from three different disciplines (Biology, Literary Criticism and Archaeology) are researched in an attempt to find out how the certainty-uncertainty continuum is expressed, and the reasons for differences, if any. Rizomilioti adopts an extended view of modality, examining “downtoners” (lexical devices which signal the speaker’s lack of confidence), and their opposites, “boosters”, as well as other less emphatic “indicators of certainty”.

The second part of the book explores the possibilities of computer-mediated communication for LSP. The three chapters in this section show case studies of computer-assisted language learning environments, solidly grounded in research. In the first paper, Christine Appel & Roger Gilabert describe part of a three-year project between two European universities in Dublin and Barcelona. The main aim of the project was to measure the effect of task-based e-mail tandem exchanges on students’ written production. Although the number of participants was small, the results point at the positive effect of integrating this kind of activity into the syllabus, setting up conditions to guarantee similar levels of interaction on both ends of the e-mail exchange. The second essay, by Virginia Hussin, presents the design and implementation of two interactive online workshops developed at the University of South Australia to help ESL students of Nursing and Business. With a very practical approach based on particular students’ needs, the workshops described provide flexible forms of support and contribute, by its interactive nature, to raise students’ critical language awareness. Finally, M. del Rosario Caballero & M. Noelia Ruiz, in chapter seven, report on

SMAIL, a multimedia application originally designed to cater for problems common to LSP courses in the Spanish tertiary level context, namely the large number of students per course, and the diversity of learning styles and concerns. If in the previous chapter interactivity mainly aimed at raising students' critical language awareness, many activities in SMAIL are geared towards promoting learners' autonomy by giving them tools to identify and use their own learning attitudes and styles in the process.

The third section presents two specific technology-based projects in two different educational settings. The chapter by Claudia Devaux, Renate Otterbach & Ying Ying Cheng describes a collaborative experience developed by three institutions from China, Taiwan and the United States, and focuses on work carried out with graduate students learning academic writing in Southwest China. Teachers' websites, e-mail, bulletin boards, chat rooms and web-based research were the tools used to develop trust, collaboration and autonomous learning, the three aims of the project. The second experience, as presented by Deborah Healey in chapter nine, took the form of a faculty exchange between educators from two US and six Tunisian institutions with the common goals of creating and expanding connections, and using the internet for ESP teaching. In spite of political and economic barriers, electronic and human networking and gaining an understanding of the uses and limitations of technology were achieved.

Part four is devoted to emphasizing how technology can be used to promote learner autonomy in higher education. In the first chapter of this section, David Lasagabaster & Juan Manuel Sierra present the results of a software evaluation questionnaire answered by fifty-nine undergraduates at the University of the Basque Country (Spain) after having self-accessed the multimedia lab for one academic year, and made use of four different programs. The aim of the research was to check students' impressions so as to improve the design of CALL applications and compensate for the programs' weaknesses. The next chapter, co-authored by María José Luzón Marco & María Isabel González Pueyo, is a clear, introductory guide to the theoretical and practical aspects of using the Internet in the ESP class. After reviewing the relevant literature on the potential of technology for learner-centred pedagogy, the authors summarize the features that Internet-based activities should have, and present a model activity designed for students of English for Chemical Engineering which shows the possibilities of the WebQuest format. This section closes with Ruth Trinder's paper, in which the design of a new e-learning environment is presented. The project was

developed at the Vienna University of Economics, with funding from the Austrian Ministry of Education, and was created to complement ESP classes in Business English. The chapter also reports on the students' perceptions of its effectiveness. The theoretical aspects of the meta-cognitive strategies introduced into the structure and the navigation options of the program are clearly integrated for learner control and learner choice.

The last section, part five, includes two papers on terminology and lexis applied to the teaching and translation of specialised languages. In the first of these, Jordi Piqué-Angordans, Santiago Posteguillo & Lourdes Melcion describe the development of a new bilingual (English-Spanish/Spanish-English), corpus-based dictionary of Computing, designed not as a passive but as an active tool; i.e., including information on word categories, gender, word compounds/clusters, collocates and context, together with exemplified syntax and encyclopaedic data, where necessary. This interesting initiative of two Spanish universities, a British one and a publishing house, begins to fill the existing vacuum in the field of specialised bilingual dictionaries, which in most cases conform to the passive mode. The second chapter stresses the importance of key words for LSP. Mike Scott, developer of the well-known suite of programmes *WordSmith Tools* for text analysis, discusses the notion of “keyness” and its relationship to context. He then goes on to show how making students focus on key words, whether identified by using software or manually, helps them raise their language awareness. Scott ends up with a series of suggestions for using keywords in the LSP class.

In short, this remarkably well-edited volume is an outstanding collection of higher education teaching projects and research studies from multiple perspectives, of interest to applied linguists in general and LSP practitioners in particular who wish to confront the challenges posed by technological advances in the twenty-first century.

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