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ESP DEVELOPMENTS: STAGES AND CORE CONCEPTS

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Abstract: Research in the field of English for specific purposes (ESP) has been dominated by a discourse analytic perspective with a focus on genre-based studies, the use of computers in approaching specific purpose language use and corpus-based studies. As the prevalent post-war forces, commerce and technology triggered the emergence of ESP due to the need to communicate across languages. The paper aims to examine the evolution of ESP research and to outline the stages in the history of ESP, to introduce core ESP concepts and to establish a balance between theoretical landmarks and practical issues. Researchers have identified three main stages in the history of ESP research, but we will focus on the period after 1990, in particular genre analysis, needs analysis and corpus linguistics.

Keywords: ESP, developments, stages, core concepts, discourse analytic perspective

1. Preliminary issues

In recent years, ESP research has been dominated by a text/discourse analytic perspective. Genre-based studies, the use of computers in approaching specific purpose language use, corpus-based studies have become core areas of ESP research. New techniques and notions have been used and explored (Paltridge & Starfield, 2011).

Considering the factors that fostered the emergence of ESP, one can rightly note that commerce and technology were the areas where the need to communicate across languages was first manifest. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 6) argue that these two forces were dominating the new post-war world. The unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale generated a demand for an international language. The economic power of the U.S. was the main reason behind the role that English was granted as the language of international communication. A new generation of learners was eager to learn English – the key to international currencies of technology and commerce. A new need was identified, that for costeffective courses with accurately specific goals.

2. ESP Developments: Stages

Reviewing the history of ESP research, Ann M. Johns (2013) identifies three main problems: the first problem is raised by hesitations concerning the moment when the review should begin; the second problem is created by the existence of a considerable number of localized, on-site ESP/LSP research which is unpublished, or if so, it is published in other languages or in local journals; the third problem regards the distinction between research and practice.

While trying to solve these problems, the author distinguishes several stages in the history of ESP research:

- The Early Years 1962-1981 (From Text-based Counts to “Rhetorical Devices”)
- The More Recent Past 1981-1990 (Broadening the Scope/ Introducing Central Concepts)

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- The Modern Age: 1990-2011 (New International Journals, Genre, and Corpus Studies, Take Center Stage)
- The Future

Lesiak-Bielawska (2015) makes a summary of the main ESP developments, similarly to Johns (2013), going back to the 1960s. They will be dealt with below.

2.1. The register analysis phase

The register analysis phase characterizes the decade 1962-1972 and marks the modern origin of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 2010), while focusing on English for Science and Technology (EST) in academic settings and attempting to delimitate the manifestations of the language system in different registers.

Early research included counting grammatical features across genres, aiming at discovering and defining, both quantitatively and descriptively, the general characteristics of EST at the level of the sentence, best illustrated by the first example provided in Swales' *Episodes*, by Barber (1962).

2.2.Towards the use of rhetorical devices

During the next decade (1972-1981), the development of ESP was decisively influenced by Lackstrom J.E., Selinker L., Trimble L.P. (1972), with their *Grammar and technical English*. It opened the door to rhetorical or discourse analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 2010), capturing the relationship between grammar and lexicon and meeting the authors' rhetorical aims.

The objectives of this rhetorical theory were stated in the late 1970s by R. Bley-Vroman (1978: 280), noting that it should attempt "to establish a correspondence of purpose with device," where 'device' is a linguistic means that the author uses to accomplish the desired purpose.

2.3. Core *ESP* concepts (1981-1990)

In *Aspects of Article Introductions*, published by J.M. Swales' (1981), the author presented an approach which later appeared in the expanded form in his *Genre Analysis* (1990). Enjoying wide recognition, it initiated "a research boom that has yet to end" (Johns, 2013: 9). We owe John Swales and Ann Johns, the editors of *The ESPJ*, the expansion of ESP research which finally crossed the barriers established by EST. The original ESP definition proposed by P. Strevens (1977) was reconsidered and rediscovered, determining an explosion of articles, mainly dealing with needs analysis (NA), genre and rhetorical moves, and still dominating the theoretical and practical endeavours of ESP.

The theory of **needs analysis** led to the gradual development of ESP as a multilayered language approach. Lung (2014) shows that such a theory emerged in the 1960s and developed in the 1970s as a consequence of the increasing demand for specialised language programmes, especially in the field of business and industry. At present, it is a prerequisite before designing an ESP course, for it is important "to design a foreign language course which is relevant and as efficient as possible for the target group" (Koster, 2004: 5). An ESP teaching programme depends on the assessment of students' purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required. Lesiak-Bielawska (2015: 6) mentions that over time, the concept of needs analysis came to include, besides target situation analysis, a series of extra elements, such as subjective needs analysis, present situation analysis, learning needs analysis, discourse/genre analysis and means analysis. In the following decade, the focus shifted from register to rhetoric. The 1990s brought a new perspective, a more genre-analytic one, NA becoming ethnographically oriented and triggering more empirical and triangulated research into student needs

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As for the **genre** and **rhetorical moves**, the publication of Swales' *Genre Analysis* (1990) increased their popularity. Swales' Creating a Research Space model (the CARS model) has had a tremendous impact on genre analysis in ESP, as well as on the teaching of academic writing. The move-based approach tries to describe the laboratory of academic writers, the way they prepare and organize their contribution to the ongoing research in the field.

The term genre was first employed in relation to and in contrast with sundry types of texts as to the linguistic means used in these texts.

Swales' approach was also popular, as models of the CARS type were considered to be applicable to a wide range if not all academic disciplines. Later, move-based models were seen as prototypes and the article examples that academic writing provides "will vary in the degree to which they conform with this prototype" (Dudley-Evans, 2000: 9).

2.4. Recent developments (after 1990)

Under this heading, Lesiak-Bielawska (2015) points out the role of international journals, genre studies and corpus linguistics.

2.4.1. International journals

As for international journals, the one which is first mentioned is *The ESP Journal*, established by Grace Burkhart from the American University of Washington, D.C., in 1981.

1992 is the year witnessing the beginning of *The Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW)*, focusing on second/foreign language writing and writing instruction, without neglecting ESP-related issues and genre-based studies.

Established in 2001, *The Journal of English for Academic Purposes (JEAP)* deals with aspects of needs analysis, teacher education, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, acquisition studies in EAP contexts, etc.

The first issue of *English for Specific Purposes World* came out in May 2002. It covers topics related to a wide range of ESP issues.

There are also *Ibérica*, the official journal of AELFE, the European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes, and *The Asian ESP Journal* that are worth mentioning.

We would also like to signal the establishment of a journal which started in 2013 (volume 1, issue 1, December 2013), namely *ESP Today – Journal of English for Specific Purposes at Tertiary Level*, an online-only open access peer-reviewed journal welcoming research that covers all areas of English for specific purposes in the context of tertiary education.

2.4.2. Genre studies

Developments in the field of genre studies were marked by Swales' *Genre Analysis* (1990), followed by a variety of studies, many of them of an interdisciplinary nature, and making use of a wide range of methods. Under the influence of North American scholars of rhetoric and composition studies, the perspective on ESP and of ESP researchers changed "to go beyond traditional text analysis and to relate from patterns to discourse communities, their goals, values and practices" (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015: 9).

Textual and social context analyses are integrated into genre analysis according to the practical methodological procedures identified and described by Bhatia (1993). In the *General Editor's Preface* to Bhatia's book (p. 1), *Analyzing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings*, the metaphorical meaning and currency of the term 'genre' are briefly and accurately explained:

> "As Dr. Bhatia carefully displays, text and genres is a metaphor which invites attention by those whose role is linguistic analysis, those who seek evidence for the

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rhetorical preferences of contemporary media, those who seek to infer the processing strategies whereby texts are individually constructed and construed, those who wish through the analysis of individuals' textual preferences to connect language with social practices, and those literary and lexicographic scholars whose interests lie in stylistic choice and historical antecedent".

Bhatia (1993) embarks upon the study of some of the important language-teaching contexts, especially ESP, where genre analysis can reveal certain issues in language teaching and enhance solutions.

Other researchers continued the study of genres, e.g. Hyland (2000), who achieved a corpus-based approach to the investigation of academic genres, selecting eight academic disciplines and making a comparison between their lexico-grammatical features and move structures, or Swales (1998), who highlighted the interaction between text and context, using interviews, observations, in-depth analysis of textual histories with a focus on key texts.

A framework for critical genre analysis was devised by Bhatia (2008) in an inspired combination of text, genre, culture and professional practice.

In 2014, Evangelisti Allori, Bateman and Bhatia were the editors of the volume *Evolution in genre. Emergence, variation, multimodality,* one of the latest contributions complementing initial views on the notion of genre. The emergence of new genres is determined by recent social and technological changes, whereas traditional genres continue to evolve and become more and more varied. The notion of families or groups of genres co-existing within broader constellations is also presented and genres enjoy an in-depth analysis of their linguistic and non-linguistic realisations and forms of expression within the same genre and across related genres from the perspective of social or medial constraints or possibilities. This compilation of research articles shows that the notion of genre still functions in research, getting adapted to new communicative situations through updated, complex, embedded and hybrid genres.

2.4.3. Corpus linguistics

Corpus studies are a mark of modern research, especially in connection with written academic genres. Hyland (e.g. 2000) focused on the relationship between writers and readers of academic texts and his publications are among the most influential in this area (Johns, 2013: 15-16).

As corpora have turned out to be a valuable resource in ESP research, Diane Belcher (2006: 142, in Paltridge & Starfield, 2011: 106) highlights the potential of corpus-based studies to provide a better "empirically based understanding of language used for specific purposes".

According to Cheng (2010: 319), corpus-based linguistics pursues several aims in teaching: teaching about, i.e. the principles and theory making use of corpora, teaching to exploit, i.e. the practical, methodology-oriented aspects of corpus-based analyses, and exploiting to teach, i.e. using the potential of corpora to enhance teaching (Fligelstone, 1993), teaching to establish resources (Renouf, 1997).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, we want to map out future directions, which will most probably be characterized by an increasing number of topics expanding research in areas that have already been tackled and explored, such as needs analysis or genre (e.g. poster discussions, conference presentations or research group meetings, according to Swales, 2014). Lesiak-Bielawska (2015: 15) argues that corpus linguistics techniques might be used "to collect and analyze mega-databanks of authentic spoken and written discourse. Future developments in

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software will not only move corpus analysis forward, but will also provide researchers with access to larger corpora, allowing them to support their statistical claims about language use in specific settings", at the same time stressing that research will undoubtedly focus on "ESP teacher needs which constitute a basis for determining the content of ESP teacher education programmes".

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