

A comparison of three major approaches to genre in Language for Specific Purposes

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特定の目的のための言語における3つの主要なアプローチの比較

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Introduction

In this essay I discuss developments in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and by implication English for Specific purposes (ESP) since the 1980s. I highlight the defining features of LSP, and also detail how these features relate to teaching Language for Business Purposes (LBP). With regard to LBP, I describe and make a comparison of the three major approaches to genre, ESP, New Rhetoric and Australian. I give outlines of each approach and make a comparison of the usefulness of each approach to teaching LBP.

Developments in LSP

According to Strevens (1977) LSP has an academic history dating back to at least the early 20th century with some aspects such as language courses for travellers appearing as early as the 16th century. Howatt (cited in Dudley-Evans & St John 1998) notes that text books focusing on commercial or business English were being produced from the 19th century. It was not however until the 1950s through 1970s that LSP rose to prominence.

Some factors that led to this rise included the post Second World War economic and technological boom in the United States, an increased use of English as an international language, and an increasing number of international students studying in countries such as the U.K., and Australia (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, (cited in Gatehouse 2001)). These factors led to great academic interest in the development of ESP/LSP from the mid to late 1960s through the 1970s. Hutchinson and Waters (cited

in Gatehouse 2001) note that the emergence of ESP during this time was boosted by a revolution in linguistics that saw language being described in terms of communication rather than isolated linguistic features. The work of pioneers in English for Science and Technology (EST) such as Ewer and Latorre, Swales, Selinker and Trimble was also significant. Building on these foundations in the period from the 1980s until the present, LSP has developed as an academic discipline with distinct defining features.

Developments in the definition of LSP

Although even today LSP does not have a clear definition in the literature, during the 1980s it had become a wide spread discipline typified by a concern with adult students and their varying roles in society as users of English outside the classroom (Swales, cited in Belcher, Johns, & Paltridge 2011). Swales (cited in Belcher, Johns, & Paltridge 2011) also emphasised pedagogical development suited to the specific needs of learners of LSP; noting that classroom application of empirical findings in discourse and needs analyses has always been a defining characteristic of LSP. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) point out that in its earlier development ESP was focused mainly on the branch English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and was situated to assist foreign students studying in inner circle countries (Kachru, 1985). Flowerdew and Peacock (cited in Belcher 2006) point out that due to their situation in higher education EAP professionals are often better positioned than English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) professionals to do research. Swales (cited in Hutchinson & Waters 1987) was of the opinion that English for Science and Technology (EST) was at the forefront of language analysis and development of teaching materials. However since then LSP has developed in other areas such as LBP.

The 1980s saw several attempts to define ESP, Robinson (1980) stated that "An ESP course is purposeful and is aimed at the successful performance of occupational or educational roles. It is based on a rigorous analysis of students' needs and should be 'tailor-made'" (p. 13). Hutchison and Waters (cited in Dudley-Evans & St John 1998) saw ESP as being needs based rather than based on materials or methodology. In 1988 Strevens (cited in Gatehouse 2001) gave a definition of ESP stating that it had absolute characteristics and variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics he noted were that, it is designed to meet the specified needs of the learner; was related in content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities; was centred on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse; and importantly was in contrast with General English. The variable characteristics noted were that ESP may be, but is not necessarily: restricted as to the language skills to be learned and is not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology. At the centre of each of these definitions is a flexible approach based on the context of particular students needs.

As late as 1997 there was still no clear consensus about a definition for LSP. Dudley-Evans (1997) "What we do not yet have is an extensive theory of LSP/ESP" (p. 59). He criticised Strevens' definition stating that it was too narrow and incorrectly defined ESP as being absolutely related to content. Arguing for a broader definition Dudley-Evans (1997) referring to Blue (cited in Dudley-Evans 1997) stated that LSP can be seen as relating to general as well as specific purposes thus LSP methodologies could be general and similar to general English methodologies, but that more specific content requires a rather different methodology. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) then gave a more refined definition of ESP; elaborating further on the work of Strevens. They stressed two main points that they considered should be common to all aspects of ESP; firstly that ESP teaching methods and classroom language should reflect the methodologies and language of the professions and disciplines of students' extra classroom contexts; and secondly that ESP methodologies may be very different from those used in general English classes, however unlike Strevens they do not see this as an absolute. They are of the opinion that common or core ESP teaching contained a degree of overlap with general English classes. They expressed this overlap by stating that the whole of English teaching could be seen as a continuum running from general English classes through to very specific ESP classes. Courses based on common core language such as English for General Academic Purposes and General Business Purposes and, Courses related to broad disciplinary or professional areas such as report writing for scientists and engineers, or negotiation and meeting skills for business people contained significant overlap. Courses related to more specific skills however do not share this overlap and this is where their definition of ESP directly reflects the more particular methodologies and language of the students' discipline or profession.

An exact definition of LSP is still elusive; however there are certain features that can be said to be shared by all LSP courses. Belcher (2006) states that "ESP assumes that the problems are unique to specific learners in specific contexts and thus must be carefully delineated and addressed with tailored-to-fit instruct" (p.135) and "Needs assessment, content-based teaching methods, and content-area informed instructors have long been considered essential to the practice of specific-purpose teaching" (p. 135). However she also points out that there is debate about the validity of these features coming from the field of applied critical linguistics. Another criticism is that due to resource distribution and the time sensitive nature of many LSP courses there has been little research outside of written academic and professional genres.

Developments in LSP approaches

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) claim that “ESP is essentially a materials- and teacher-lead movement” (p. 19) and that while it has been influenced by changes in Applied Linguistics and general English teaching that it has also had a considerable influence on those fields. They give the example of how ESP influenced the transformation of communicative curriculums into functional-notational and task based syllabuses.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) discuss four trends in ESP leading up to the beginning of the 1980s including, Register Analysis, Rhetorical and Discourse Analysis, Analysis of Study Skills, and Analysis of Learning Needs. Given that ESP was seen as centred on needs assessment it is natural that from the early 1980s functional-notational concepts were adopted, “the ESP/LSP movement initially focused on the end product of instructional programs” (Nunan 2004, p. 8). Register analysis developed because of a need to base ESP in research and consisted mainly of a frequency analysis of language used in actual scientific texts. Register analysis was criticised for lacking the ability to show how sentences are used in actual communication acts and how they are combined in continuous passages. This led to the discourse analysis approach which centred on the way language is used in communication acts and developed materials based on functions. This approach was also criticised for an inability to clearly show how functions combine to form longer texts. “We are given little idea of how these functions combine to make longer texts.” (Robinson, 1981) Dudley-Evans (1987) explains the next development ‘Genre Analysis’ as giving ESP practitioners the important ability to differentiate genres of text such as business or technical reports. Through the mid 1980s, and in many places until present, communicative approaches have been favoured in many institutions. Breen (cited in Nunan 2004) suggests that placing communication at the centre of the curriculum leads to a merger between classroom goals and processes, the process becomes the goal. The late 1980s also saw the advent of Task Based Learning approaches where emphasis is on the task rather than the elements of language.

A more recent approach is the integration of genre and context of teaching, Lassen (cited in Hammouda 2003) sees this as moving away from simply describing language patterns, and variation, but also including context to explain texts and the linguistic choices available. Bhatia’s model of language, which involves text, genre, professional and social practices, and the importance of context in genre theory has also been extremely influential in recent understandings of LSP, see Bhatia (1993, 1997, 2004).

Since the 1980s the field of LSP has been a leading branch of TESOL driving research and application in materials design and pedagogy. LSP holds interesting opportunities for future research and application of critical linguistics exploring actual rather than perceived notions of learner needs and outcomes. Another interesting area of study is

how LSP accommodates and is accommodated by entrenched power structures in institutions such as business and academia. These relationships have been relatively unquestioned until recently.

LSP and genre theory

Genre theory, genre analysis and corpus-enhanced genre studies have become one of the major influences on current practices in teaching languages to learners in specialized areas including engineering, science, law, and business (Belcher, 2006; Bhatia, 1997). Whilst traditionally a literary construct genre is now used for analysing diverse texts and for informing pedagogy in a wide range of fields including LSP (Hyon, 1996). Genre analysis represents the study of linguistic behaviour in institutionalized academic and professional settings. Rather than describing language use it attempts to determine why members of specific professional communities use the language the way they do. To accomplish this genre analysis utilises research in various disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics and ethnographic studies, psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology, communication research, studies of disciplinary cultures and, input from the specialist communities in question (Bhatia, 1997).

Hyon (1996) points out that an understanding of genre research is complicated by the existence of distinct scholarly traditions. The first of these traditions that I consider is the Australian approach which has developed theories of genre and genre based pedagogical approaches within the larger theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics developed by Michael Halliday (Hyon, 1996; Johns, 2002). Next I examine ESP where genres are framed as oral and written text types defined by their formal properties and their communicative purposes within social contexts (Hyon, 1996). Flowerdew (2002) points out that the ESP and Australian approaches tend to emphasise the linguistic features of texts and places less emphasis on context. Finally I describe New Rhetoric research which has been more concerned with the sociocontextual aspects of genres rather than linguistic features (Flowerdew, 2002; Hyon, 1996). New Rhetoric research emphasises “the purposes and functions of genres and the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours of the members of the discourse communities within which genres are situated” (Flowerdew, 2002, p. 91).

The Australian approach

Paltridge (1997) explains that the Australian approach to genre centres around systemic functional linguistics (SFL) which was originally developed by linguists from the University of Sydney in Australia, especially Michael Halliday. This approach to genre was further

developed by Ruqaiya Hasan, James Martin and others. The Australian approach was developed in response to what Cope et al. (cited in Paltridge 1997) characterised as the unsatisfactory results produced by the 'process' approaches to teaching writing and an over-emphasis of focus on narrative texts in Australian primary and secondary schools and migrant education. Owing to the previous over emphasis on narrative texts researchers using the Australian approach to genre using SFL have tended to focus more on the analysis of texts such as recounts, procedures, reports, descriptions, explanations, and expositions and other factual texts Paltridge (1997). An appreciation of genre in this approach requires the understanding that functional linguists view texts as occurring in two contexts, one within the other. The outer context known as the context of culture can be thought of as the sum of all meanings possible in a particular culture. The inner context which functional linguists call context of situation involves language used in more specific contexts, each of which is a context of situation. Contexts of culture and situation combine to instantiate the differences and similarities between different pieces of language (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000).

The relationship between a variety of language and a context of situation is known as register (Halliday, 1978). Texts with meanings in common or which share the same 'context of situation' will share similar experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings and thus belong to the same register. Context of situation can be accounted for by three extra linguistic features that shape a text; Field, Tenor and Mode. In general terms Field can be defined as the subject of the text, or what is being written or talked about, Tenor describes the relationship between the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader, and Mode is the kind of text being made.

Texts that have similar purposes in a culture will tend to share the same obligatory and optional structural elements and thus belong to the same genre (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000). Halliday in developing SFL believed that register was sufficient to encapsulate the relationships between text and context and that genre is simply a characteristic that along with textual structure and cohesion can distinguish text from non-text. However other theorists working in the Hallidayan tradition do not see register as sufficient (Butler 2002). According to Leckie-Tarry (cited in Butler 2002) this is because register studies prioritise the linguistic characteristics of texts and give too little emphasis to texts as social processes, and in genre studies the broader notion of context of culture is prioritised rather than the narrower context of situation involved in register studies.

According to Kathpalia (cited in Butler 2002) the two most important approaches to genre theory within this view have been developed by Ruqaiya Hasan and James Martin. Paltridge (1997) states that Hassan's Generic Structure Potential (GSP) was the first genre analysis approach to be based on systemic functional theory. GSP analysis involves speci-

fying the obligatory and optional elements of a text within a particular genre as well as specifying the order that each element may be placed in relation to each other. Hassan (cited in Butler 2002) states that this gives a generalised array of generic conventions which permits an array of actual structures that may be realised in specific texts. Butler (2002) describes Martin's model, Schematic Structure (SS), as activity types that are realised through language and are recognised in a given culture. Genre and register are seen as 'connotative' semiotics. "Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (Martin cited in Butler 2002, p. 383). Martin derives much of his theory from Hasan, however he criticises her model as deriving texts in fundamentally different ways depending on mode, whereas he treats mode differences as less fundamental and attempts to derive all text types from genre networks that he equates to systematic formulations of Hasan's array of existing conventions (Martin 1992).

New Rhetoric

According to Hyon (1996) New Rhetoric research is a multi-discipline body of North American scholarship concerned with L1 teaching. Disciplines include rhetoric, composition studies, and professional writing. Research into genre has mainly been concerned with the situational contexts in which genres occur focusing on the social purposes, or actions, that these genres fulfil within these situations and has de-emphasised textual forms. Coe and Freedman (cited in Coe 2002) state that New Genre theories consider that "A genre is a socially standard strategy, embodied in a typical form of discourse, that has evolved for responding to a recurring type of rhetorical situation" (p. 197). Coe (2002) further explains that genre is neither a text type nor a situation but that "genre is a motivated, functional relationship between text type and rhetorical situation" (p.195). Miller (1994) claims that a classification of discourse will be rhetorically sound if it accurately reflects the experience of the people who create and interpret the discourse. A semiotic framework of discourse based on the action 'pragmatics' used to accomplish a discourse provides a sound basis for a definition of genre as it most clearly reflects rhetorical practice. She also states that a framework based on rhetorical action can encompass the semantics and syntactics of genre. Miller (1994) claims that genres are not conducive to classification because they change evolve and decay. She proposes a set of five particular features for understanding genre that while not "precise enough to permit quantification of formal features or elucidation of a complete hierarchy of rules, it can provide guidance in the evaluation of genre claims" (p. 31). The five features are;

- 1 Genre refers to a conventional category of discourse based in large scale typification of rhetorical action; as action, it acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose.

- 2 As meaningful action, genre is interpretable by means of rules; genre rules occur at a relatively high level on a hierarchy of rules for symbolic interaction.
- 3 Genre is distinct from form: form is the more general term used at all levels of the hierarchy. Genre is a form at one particular level that is a fusion of lower level forms and characteristic substance.
- 4 Genre serves as the substance of forms at higher levels; as recurrent patterns of language use, genres help constitute the substance of our cultural life.
- 5 A genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent
(taken from Miller, 1994, p.31).

Focus on functional and contextual aspects of genres has also led to the development of ethnographic rather than linguistic approaches to genre research producing detailed descriptions of academic and professional texts (Hyon, 1996). Johns (2002) claims that those in New Rhetoric place much more emphasis on rhetorical situation than more specific lexico-grammatical elements of texts and that genres are dynamic and evolving and are situated in complex contexts that relate to who and what texts are in power and what are the socially constructed relationships between hegemonic texts/text creators and the students learning about them (Johns 2002).

ESP

ESP is an inherently pragmatic approach to genre and as such does not easily identify with any one particular linguistic or pedagogical tradition. Pedagogies are generally based on local needs assessments and situational and discourse analyses (Johns & Dudley-Evens, cited in Johns 2002; Dudley-Evens & St John, cited in Johns 2002). ESP uses pedagogical approaches based on SFL, the New Rhetoric and other older literacy approaches (Johns, 2002). Swales (cited in Johns 2002) suggests that this is because ESP practitioners do not trust theories which do not quite work when tested in their own classrooms.

Despite the eclectic nature of ESP, analysis of genre has often focused on rhetorical organisation and genre-specific language features. In the ESP approach the move-step framework suggested by Swales (cited in Henry & Roseberry 2001) has been influential in most approaches to genre. In any discourse community authentic texts are produced by utilising appropriate moves which comprise generic structures applicable to that discourse community (Henry & Roseberry, 2001). There are similarities in the way ESP and the Australian approach deal with genre analysis, as noted by Johns (2002) 'moves' are conceptually related to the 'stages' of the Systemic Functional view which sees genre as a staged, goal-oriented social process (Martin, Christie, & Rothery, 1987), and for example

Henry and Roseberry (2001) adopt Hasan's framework of obligatory and optional elements of genre.

The framework of 'recurring situations', 'moves' and 'stages' developed by Swales are cultural constructs (Mauranen, 1997; Zhu, 2005) as such the L2 structures used within a particular genre may be different from those of the learners L1. From a language teaching perspective it is useful to think of a genre as consisting of a series of moves (Swales, cited in Henry & Roseberry 2001). A move can be thought of as part of a text, written or spoken, which achieves a particular purpose within the text. The move contributes in some way to fulfilling the overall purpose of the genre (Henry & Roseberry, 2001). Bhatia (cited in Henry & Roseberry 2001) states that genre analysis aims to identify the moves and strategies of a genre, the allowable order of the moves, and the key linguistic features. This identification is followed by an attempt to explain the reasons why the identified features were chosen by expert users of the genre to achieve their communicative purpose.

According to Bhatia (2001) genres are embedded in the disciplinary cultures and discourse communities that they serve. In opposition to the New Rhetoric which sees genre as inherently unstable, the ESP approach views the disciplinary embeddedness and conventional features of genres as producing relative stability, and generic integrity of structural forms. This structural integrity can constrain the use of lexico-grammatical and discoursal linguistic resources, however experienced users manage to manipulate generic conventions to produce novel forms of discourse.

Comparison

I believe that all three main approaches to genre studies have similarities that can illuminate the pedagogically useful notion that genre is culturally constructed. LSP pedagogy is an inherently pragmatic field and as such much useful material can be gained from all three approaches, however with respect to LBP and especially in the approach to genre analysis and pedagogy I consider the ESP approach to be most useful. Firstly I will discuss the weaknesses of the other two approaches in this area.

With respect to genre the New Rhetoric approach has more doubtful pedagogic application than the other approaches and many New Rhetoric researchers have relatively little faith in explicit instruction for genuine acquisition of genres. They have reservations with regard to the pedagogical application of genre research; arguing that genres are too complex and varied to be taught in the classroom out of their original contexts (Freedman, cited in Johns 2002). Many who hold to this theory also believe that genres live in the social unconscious of the discourse community and that many experts use their genres without explicit understanding. Another impediment held by followers of this

view is that genres are difficult to capture because they are dynamic and evolving thus the classroom is an inauthentic place to acquire professional genres (Johns, 2002). ESP and Australian genre analysis points to the need to explicitly teach generic structures. They also show that business genres especially tend to be relatively stable and 'capturable'. As such the New Rhetoric approach seems less useful than ESP or the Australian approach for teaching LBP.

As outlined by Belcher (2006) the Australian approach uses Vygotskian scaffolding, or staged SFL-informed instruction which is certainly useful in an LBP context and could well be an area of further development and one which as stated above has been adopted by some researchers in the ESP tradition. The problem however is the association of the Australian approach with critical discourse analysis. This association has led to a reticence amongst linguists involved in business language analysis to be involved with a position that espouses a political agenda for social change (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2007). As such research into LBP has been retarded. This negative association with critical discourse analysis is also seen in the New Rhetoric approach.

As discussed above, the Australian approach developed out of dissatisfaction with outcomes in schools and migrant education. Martin (cited in Johns 2002) states that the existing approaches led to outcomes where only the brightest, middle-class monolingual students benefited. In the context of LBP, and especially in Japanese business contexts, students are often amongst the brightest and are also often middle class or aspire to be. They also tend to have a firm grasp of L1 business genres and the ability to quickly grasp L2 genres.

Beginning with the realisation of the insufficiency of teacher intuition of language and through its development of text analysis, needs analysis, and research into ongoing subjective learner needs ESP has become more learning centred. The focus now is not just on what people use language for but also on language acquisition (Belcher, 2006). The pragmatic and eclectic nature of the ESP approach and the fact that it tends to assimilate what is seen as the useful elements of the other approaches lends it more readily to pedagogical use in LBP. ESP also jibes more closely with the definitions of LSP given by Belcher, Strevens, and Dudley-Evans and St John. The pragmatism of ESP also allows for flexibility, as Robinson (1991) points out the most important quality the ESP teacher needs is flexibility.

Conclusion

I have cited a number of positive points of the ESP approach, including its eclectic and pragmatic nature, its identification of stable business genres, and its emphasis on learner and needs analysis. Also the comparative weaknesses of the New Rhetoric and Austra-

lian approaches have been listed. These facts lead me to conclude that, the New Rhetoric approach does not hold much promise for LBP pedagogy. The Australian approach does have much to offer LSP and is a growing and fertile approach, however much of its positive work has already been subsumed by the ESP approach, without the perceived negative baggage of critical discourse analysis. As such currently ESP offers a more useful toolkit to the LBP teacher than either the New Rhetoric or the Australian approaches.

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