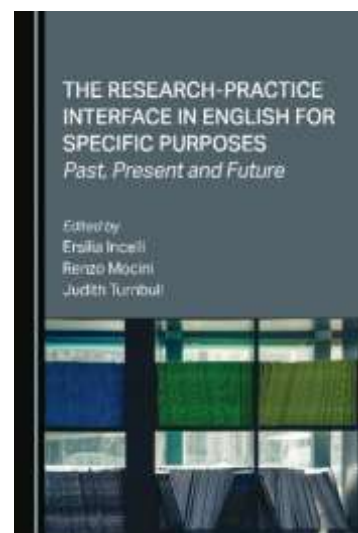


Ersilia Incelli, Renzo Mocini and Judith Turnbull (eds.)

# The Research-Practice Interface in English for Specific Purposes

Past, Present and Future



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Review by Martin Solly

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This volume, *The Research-Practice Interface in English for Specific Purposes: Past, Present and Future*, edited by Ersilia Incelli, Renzo Mocini and Judith Turnbull, discusses and explores some of the latest evolutions in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In particular, it deals with the interface between research and practice in the provision of English courses in Italian university curricula, especially in non-humanities degree programmes, thus including English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

Proficiency in domain-specific discourse is an increasingly essential requisite for those in higher education who envisage a successful career in the field of their study, be it economics, education, engineering, law, international studies, medicine, science or other disciplines. Achieving this proficiency is no simple task, given the specificities of such discourse—every disciplinary field has its own lexical requirements and stylistic preferences. Moreover, attaining competence in the language skills of a particular field is an integral component in the construction of that ethos of credibility (Riley 2006) which can determine successful membership of a specific academic or professional Community of Practice (Wenger 1998). It should also be remembered that native speakers of a language too can be at a disadvantage when faced with specialised texts and discourse (Solly 2016). Hence the need for higher education to provide students with the tools—

effective research-based courses and guidance—that will enable them to become aware of the discursive practicalities and requirements necessary to operate successfully in the chosen field. The title of this volume reveals the concerns of its editors and authors, all of whom carry out research on language use and discourse strategies and all of whom have considerable experience in the delivery of ESP/EAP courses in higher education. They operate in a single European country, Italy, and their knowledge of the context has enabled them to write what can be considered almost a kind of handbook (or even a manifesto) on the research-practice interface of ESP in the country. This indeed helps fill a gap, for, while extensive research has been carried out and published in Italy on the discourse of various domain-specific areas, not enough studies focus also on the didactic issues and challenges facing practitioners. This volume, a Festschrift to celebrate and honour the career of Professor Rita Salvi of the Sapienza University of Rome, is therefore a most welcome exception. As Giuliana Elena Garzone observes in her Foreword, Rita Salvi's career has combined research scholarship of the highest level in English linguistics with a tireless commitment to the teaching of ESP in higher education. This dual focus on the honorand's distinguished career and work is duly and admirably reflected in the contributions to the volume.

The book starts with an *Introduction* by Renzo Mocini which draws attention to some of the lacunae in the existing literature which the contributors aim to fill, as well as briefly describing the contents of the volume, which is divided into four sections. Part I, *Lexicography and Semantic Analysis in ESP*, consists of three chapters. In the first, Stefania Nuccorini looks at “The Lexicographic Treatment of Representative Samples of English and Italian Collocations,” with a comparative focus on the felicity and pitfalls of word combinations in the two languages. The second chapter, by Ersilia Incelli, presents “A Corpus-based Study of Semantic Prosody: A Methodological Proposal and a Case Study in ESP,” where she also looks at collocations, this time through the lens of semantic prosody. She suggests that the integration of corpus-based research can enable learners to become actively aware of the language they are using. In the third chapter, “Communication Strategies in City Design: Vision and Verbal Art in ESP,” Giuseppina Cortese illustrates how recourse to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has become an integral part of both the advertising genre and of today's street literacy in Italy. She introduces an innovative independent urban project in the city of Turin, showing how a sprinkling of English, with its creative experimental hybridity, successfully permeates the discourse and language choice of the street posters, underpinning their visual art.

Part II, *Research in ESP as Potential Teaching Resources*, is also formed of three chapters. It starts with a contribution on “*Risk and Threat* during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Micro-

Diachronic Perspective” by Marina Bondi and Jessica Jane Nocella. Their mixed method quantitative and qualitative analysis of *risk* and *threat* shows how the discourse evolved during the pandemic and the vaccination campaign. The Covid-19 outbreak is also the focus of Franca Poppi’s chapter “‘We have to Weather the Storm and Ensure that we Emerge Stronger after the Crisis:’ The Impact of the COVID Pandemic on CEOs’ Letters to Shareholders.” She reveals how both the corpora of letters written by CEOs of selected airlines to shareholders tend to take advantage of more credible appeals rather than rational and affective ones, thus affirming the key role of persuasive language choice in the metadiscourse. In his chapter, Girolamo Tessuto turns an interesting lens on “Appraising the Brexit Discourse in Opinion-Bearing Blogs: An Analysis of Attitudinal Stance Meanings.” He points out the value of analysing the deployment of evaluative stance in such blogs and suggests that they provide students with the opportunity to explore a subject/topic by developing their ability to write constructively and express themselves efficiently and effectively.

Part III on *ESP Spoken Discourse: Methodology and Practice* is made up of four chapters. Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli looks at “The Multimodal Expression of Humour in a Law Lecture: An Exploratory Case Study.” Her analysis of the humour deployed by a law professor in a single lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology demonstrates the usefulness of humour in co-constructing an empathic relationship with the students. In her chapter, Giuliana Elena Garzone explores the role of “TED Talks in the Learning/Teaching of ESP and EAP.” She examines the discursive features and strategies (including humour) used in these talks and shows how this popularizing genre enables the speakers to present scientific and/or technological topics successfully to a lay public. They thus have an enormous potential for use in ESP/EAP language teaching / learning. Giuliana Diani’s chapter focuses on “Citation Practices in Spoken Academic English: The Case of Students’ Oral Presentations.” The discussion and analysis of linguistic features and patterns in such presentations throws useful light on the teaching of referencing skills in EAP speaking courses, including the important issues of avoiding potential accusations of plagiarism and making their own voice heard in their oral presentations. In their chapter which concludes the section, Silvia Cavalieri, Sara Corrizzato and Roberta Facchinetti examine “The Research-Practice Interface in ESP and the Challenges for Linguists in the Digital Era: The Case of the InterDiplo Corpus.” They describe the creation and analysis of the InterDiplo spoken English corpus of TV interviews and debates where diplomats and international operators are interviewed by journalists from different cultural backgrounds. They note that although the growth in digitalization favours research work and analysis, the role of the linguist still remains fundamental.

Part IV, *Research Applied to ESP Teaching Contexts*, opens with a contribution by Janet Bowker on “ESP Education in Italian Universities: A Case Study of the Faculty of Economics, Sapienza University of Rome.” She traces the evolution and impact of ESP theory and research on teaching and learning in Italian higher education, exemplifying the diachronic perspective through the lens of two courses held in the Economics Faculty of the Sapienza University. In her chapter Paola Catenaccio then presents “Teaching CSR Discourse: A Critical Approach to Business English.” Her research reveals that analysis of a sample of business discourse drawn from the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) reports of a well-known international company can provide rich insights and awareness, which can then enable students to enhance their linguistic and discursive competence. Renzo Mocini’s chapter, “Knowing That – Knowing How: A Love-Driven, Enquiry-based Teaching Pathway,” is the first of two that present innovative teaching/learning methodologies from the Sapienza University in Rome. He shows how personal choice can strongly and serendipitously motivate the performance by medical students of real-world tasks involving the targeted reading of healthcare literature in order to write scientific papers themselves. The section (and the volume) concludes with Laura Ferrarotti’s study of “The Linguistic Landscape: Theory and Practical Applications in EFL and ESP.” She describes how the multiple signages and multilingualism of the urban linguistic landscape of Rome have provided the didactic framework for her ESP course in communication and marketing.

The scope of ESP today is potentially vast as is testified by the wide range of topics presented in this volume. These range from the deployment of humour in law lectures to citation in student speech, from the lexicographic treatment of collocations to the challenges facing linguists in the digital era, from TED talks to opinion-bearing blogs, from the impact of the COVID pandemic to linguistic landscapes. Looking towards the future, the scope of ESP can certainly be expected to increase. Indeed, some developments may be extremely rapid, as the current concern and debate on the new issue of academic writing being carried out through artificial intelligence and machine learning demonstrates.

Taken as a whole, the volume displays the high level of the research and practice carried out by the community of those working with ESP in higher education in Italy, as well as the wide range of the contributors’ research interests. It will thus be a valuable additional resource and tool for all those scholars, researchers and practitioners interested in the past, present and future of the research-practice interface in ESP, especially in higher education.

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