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Introduction

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Introduction

Historically, language for specific purposes (LSP) has been a field made up of a coalition of the willing. Most educators working in LSP have trained in literary studies or in linguistics and it remains difficult for graduate students in language programs to pursue, let alone be offered, any formal training in LSP. Practitioners, including the editors of this volume, tend to be driven by a passion for the work in our “specific purpose” areas, which cover a wide range of topics and specializations, and have long exhibited an eagerness to share experiences, materials, and ideas with our colleagues from around the world. Because of this, over the years LSP as a field has found its place in academia and taken root within higher ed departments and programs. With these strong roots, the field has been able to truly blossom. As we observe the LSP landscape today, we see colleagues conducting traditional rigorous research in the field to better inform classroom practices and deploying innovative research techniques to improve our testing and teaching methods as well as to interrogate the history of the field and our place in it. With curiosity, optimism, and enthusiasm this volume looks to the future of LSP.

While not in any way a conference proceeding, *Global Business Languages*'s 2023 volume, “The Future of LSP: Rooted in Research,” serves as a bridge from the 2022 International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes (ISLSP) & Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) Business Language Conference, hosted at the University of Chicago, to the 2024 conference that will be hosted by the journal's home campus, the George Washington University. The theme of the 2022 conference was “The Future of LSP: Research, Assessment, Curricula” and as part of the process of weaving the research thread from the conference into the subsequent special volume of GBL, one of the organizers of that conference, Darcy Lear, joined Margaret Gonglewski and Mohssen Esseesy as co-editor of the volume. Over the past year, the editors have worked to assemble a research-based volume that we hope you will enjoy reading while also taking away concrete practices that can be applied to your own research and teaching practice in LSP.

As the issue took shape, three clear themes emerged, based on the focus areas of the six articles. The first two articles generally address topics within the area of traditional research; the second centers on research-informed pedagogical proposals, with practical curricular suggestions that come out of long histories of rigorous research. The third and final theme features articles that call for using specific research frameworks in LSP that are not traditionally associated with the field.

Theme 1: Traditional Research

The volume opens with Ahmet Dursun's essay “Domain Analysis as a Multidimensional Research Framework: Evidence-Based Alignment for LSP Research, Assessment, and

Curricula,” which serves as a blueprint for conducting research in LSP using the framework known as domain analysis. Dursun’s argument is that, unlike general language courses, the outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities students will need in LSP contexts are often not known a priori. Domain analysis provides a systematic, evidence-centered approach for collecting data within specific target language use domains so that it can be empirically coded and analyzed as part of a reverse-design process that culminates in curricular, course, or program development. With detailed references to point researchers and practitioners in the right direction, the piece concludes with an assertion that the field of LSP writ large will benefit from widespread implementation of domain analysis research projects precisely because it yields assessments and curricula aligned with research regardless of discipline.

The second article, by Pilar Ortega et al., details research around medical Spanish rater training: “Development and Effectiveness of a Rater Training Curriculum for Evaluating Student Medical Spanish Oral Proficiency Using the Physician Oral Language Observation Matrix.” The virtual absence of a health care-specific standardized assessment curriculum that measures the language abilities of students and practitioners in medical Spanish has given rise to two challenges in the field of medical Spanish: a heterogeneity of assessment strategies and underpreparedness of educators to reliably measure students’ medical Spanish language abilities. Against this backdrop, Ortega and colleagues in this volume discuss the development of an effective, empirically validated tool rooted in communication and learning theory, the Physician Oral Language Observation Matrix (POLOM™) for training raters to assess Spanish proficiency of medical students and practitioners.

The heavily interactive instructional approach Ortega and colleagues followed enabled a relatively small number of trainees—eight out of nine—to successfully complete the training, five of whom proceeded to a calibration stage requiring a high level of interrater reliability. In their study, Ortega and colleagues offer suggestions for successful recruitment of future rater trainees and foresee the potential for the POLOM to assume a vital role in credentialization testing. Such advancement in assessment has a clear positive implication for patient safety and improved access to health care.

Theme 2: Research-informed Pedagogical Proposals

Two of the articles in this volume took the innovative approach of presenting pedagogical proposals for business language courses rooted in research. One delves into word collocations in a business Spanish context and another the integration of translation and interpretation into business language courses. Anna Naudi’s “A Task-Based Road Map to Teaching Business Spanish with Word Combinations” makes a compelling argument for word collocations being much more than the sum of their parts. The article first presents research on improved L2 learner outcomes when a collocation approach is used over a vocabulary approach, especially where incongruent collocations between L1 and L2 exist. With a focus on salience and habituation, the author presents a five-task sequence for designing a course-long business plan project built

around didactic sequencing. With specific examples and clear “how-to’s,” the article provides a research-informed primer for anyone interested in integrating didactic sequencing and lexical collocations into their LSP pedagogy.

Christopher D. Mellinger’s “Incorporating Translation and Interpreting into the Business Language Classroom” lays out a case for integrating translation and interpretation (TI) into LSP courses to improve student learning outcomes. Building from a broad research base, Mellinger advocates for promoting TI literacy among students, dubbed as a “fifth skill,” as distinct from professional translation and interpretation. The pedagogical proposal details two approaches: text-based and interaction-based, with neither being the exclusive realm of either translation or interpretation. Again, drawing from a well-established research base, pedagogical content related to interlingual, intralingual, and sight translation are detailed in the former case while examples of sight translation, consecutive interpreting, and simultaneous interpreting are developed in the latter case. It must go without saying that simply making students aware of these many different distinctions and tasks within the broad area of “translation and interpretation” is novel pedagogy, but Mellinger takes the extra step of suggesting specific activities to integrate experiences with TI into LSP courses to enhance what he terms “interprofessional education.” The article concludes with a reminder that these components that reflect “real life” professional contexts and tasks are intended to be integrated into already-existing courses and curricula.

Theme 3: Specific Research Frameworks for LSP

The last section of this special volume consists of two articles that present a compelling case for applying research frameworks that have, as yet, not been widely used in the LSP scholarship. While the authors of these two articles each focus on a different framework, their arguments similarly spotlight the potential value of the research framework to the LSP context. In the first article, “Toward the Systematic Integration of Naturalistic Inquiry in LSP Research,” author Steve Sacco examines naturalistic inquiry (NI) and advocates for its use for LSP research. In the LSP context, NI is an empirical approach that aims to understand human behavior in natural settings, such as classrooms, workplaces, healthcare facilities, and more, in order to design effective courses and instructional materials for LSP students. Sacco reviews the impact of NI studies on LSP curriculum development and proposes a five-step program for educating, training, funding, and mentoring future NI researchers. He also discusses challenges in conducting NI research and describes a key funding source to support NI training and research in LSP. From this article, readers will obtain an understanding of NI research through a clear definition of NI, the various NI approaches (e.g., single-researcher or team ethnography), and data gathering tools typical for NI, such as interviews and participant observations. The article places particular focus on the author’s own NI research for LSP, including a project conducted within a major US agribusiness. The results of such NI research that takes place within a particular “specific purpose” area can have direct implications for the workers involved (as in the

development of an online English for safety purposes instructional program) or for future classroom learners, because the research results could lead to the creation of appropriate materials, assessments, or even full LSP courses.

Ann Abbott’s article, titled “Autoethnography: An Examination of the Self, Languages for Specific Purposes, and Departmental Culture,” provides a fitting close to the volume by pushing readers—and LSP scholars—out of their comfort zone and into an area of research not typically utilized in LSP scholarship. Abbott’s particular approach to autoethnography is modeled on one used by other scholars, which grounds the work in traditional academic research while employing techniques from creative writing. Her autoethnography provides an honest and, at times, jarring examination of her experience as an LSP scholar in a challenging academic context that can be skeptical at best and unwelcoming at worst to those working in LSP. Through the process of baring her professional soul, Abbott is able to step back from subjective experience and draw conclusions about the challenge of fighting self-doubt and isolation when developing a new LSP course in medical Spanish. This brave and provocative work will serve as an inspiration for all of us in LSP to embrace autoethnography as a research approach to reach greater understanding of our place in the field now and into the future.

We hope this volume will take the reader on a journey—following a broad roadmap for conducting evidence-centered research in LSP to the pinpoint that is the genuine struggles and triumphs of individual practitioners. Stops along the way provide clear insights into the importance of systematic research and training in medical interpretation as well as ways in which existing research can inform specific pedagogical approaches, with hands-on guidance for adopting didactic sequencing to integrate word collocations and clear, detailed rationales and tips for making translation and interpretation part of existing LSP courses. The volume closes with compelling calls for bringing new research approaches—naturalistic inquiry and autoethnography—into the field’s research canon.

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