

————— Envoi

by John M. Swales

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an *envoi* consists of “the usually explanatory or commendatory concluding remarks to a poem, essay or book.” So, as I reflect on all the descriptions and discussions of new developments in ESP research contained in this volume, I am first struck by how much the field has grown over the last 50 years—in the nearly 50 years since the publication of the 1962 Charles Barber paper referred to in the Introduction. The authors in this collection are all innovators or at least “early adopters,” all offering new perspectives, and this is as it should be. But it is no longer the case that ESP can be depicted as having a few expert specialists at the top, followed by a large number of relatively unadventurous and underprepared practitioners (a depiction that would have been largely accurate toward the end of the last century). In contrast, my most recent experiences overseas, such as participating in ESP/EAP conferences in Argentina and Greece, show that, even in these two countries where few attempt to publish in international journals, the levels of knowledge, professionalism, and research are commendably high. Indeed, at those two national conferences, insubstantial papers, with little to offer and with little knowledge of the literature, were very rare. The field is thus much deeper and much broader—in a geographical sense—than it used to be. So, if the contributors to this volume (or at least one of them in the case of co-authored papers) are major league players, then there are many operating in the minor leagues with both talent and expertise.

Some of the topics addressed in the eleven chapters are ones that have been around for some time and are here revisited with new insights and perspectives. In the opening chapter, for example, Ken Hyland returns to the question of whether disciplinary specificity is a necessary and obtainable pedagogical goal. Like a number of issues in ESP, this remains a some-

what intractable question, at least in terms of providing a generally viable answer. While linguistic differences among disciplines can be established easily enough, the curricular consequences for both L2 and L1 instruction are rendered less certain by such factors as the different educational backgrounds of the instructors and the putative value of being able to compare and contrast disciplinary discourses.

In the next, Paltridge and Wang re-examine the vexed relationship between text and context. This relationship has, of course, often been discussed in several other fields that span the social sciences and the humanities. Here, for instance, is one by a mediaeval historian:

All texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in that world, with which they entertain often complex and compensatory relations. Texts both mirror and generate social realities, are constituted by and constitute social and discursive formations, which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform depending on the individual case. (Spiegel, 1993:10)

And, for an investigative response, here is an extract from famous anthropologist, Clifford Geertz:

Practically, two approaches, two sorts of understanding, must converge if one is to interpret a culture: a description of particular symbolic forms (a ritual gesture, an hieratic statue) as defined expressions; and a contextualization of such forms within the whole structure of meaning of which they are a part and in terms of which they get their definition. This is, of course, nothing but the by-now familiar trajectory of the hermeneutic circle: a dialectical tacking between parts which comprise the whole and the whole which motivates the parts, in such a way as to bring parts and the whole simultaneously into view. (Geertz, 1980: 103)

And so Brian Paltridge and Wei Wang show us how to oscillate between textual and documentary evidence.

Other new recalibrations of old conundra include John Flowerdew's marriage of linguistic and rhetorical approaches to genre and Christine

Tardy's demonstration of how genre exemplars can now best be seen as situated and intertextual. Another area of useful and highly nuanced re-exploration is that well-known ESP point of departure—Needs Analysis. Both Belcher and Lukkarila and Makalela and Johns offer new, if very different, perspectives on established investigative techniques. The former argue that more attention needs to be paid to how learners perceive themselves as language learners and language users, both in the present and for the future, if we are to provide maximum help with the resources available. Makalela and Johns, in contrast, focus on the tensions and conflicts that can arise in a needs analysis project, how the needs and wants—and doubtless hopes and fears—of students, instructors, consultants, and administrators can be at odds with each other. However, what these two papers share is a move away from the hard, objective kind of analysis pioneered by Munby (1978) to what we might call a “soft” analysis more open to the sensitivities and anxieties of the relevant parties.

The remaining papers I have grouped as being new or relatively new since I do not think these topics would have been much aired in the 20th century ESP literature. At first sight, An Cheng's study of ESP classroom research might seem anomalously placed in this group, but it could well be argued that we have had, over the 50-year history of ESP, all too little careful research in what actually happens in our classes. Others I hope will be interested in taking up some of the questions he outlines toward the close of his paper. Another area that ESP has been slow to accommodate—often for sensible, if not sensitive, reasons—is the “critical” approach to ethnography, discourse analysis, and instructor stance. On the first of these, Sue Starfield shows how a critical perspective allows her to develop a “thick description” of the linguistic situation of a group of black students in a South African University; for the second, Kandil and Belcher use Critical Discourse Analysis plus corpus analysis to reveal what is going on in an important genre on the web.

Lynne Flowerdew examines several of the issues that revolve around corpora and their use for ESP research and practical application. Of particular interest here are her reflections on the different outcomes that can emerge from employing a bottom-up or top-down approach. This is, I believe, a very significant finding for ESP methodologies as corpora become more widely employed as an underpinning for materials development and classroom tasks. Finally, Anna Mauranen raises the whole issue

of native speaker authority and English as a lingua franca in the academic and research world. This indeed is a 21st century issue as nearly everything is now being done in English. Meticulous recent research by Björkman (2010) shows that ELFA English is not, at least in Sweden, after all a “variety” but rather a constellation of accommodative strategies, but even so it also implies that native speakers of English also need to employ accommodative strategies in their interactions with colleagues and participants who have other first languages.

As a person with an interest in discursual silence, let me begin the end of these “explanatory or commendatory concluding remarks” by commenting on what is not in this volume. On the positive and welcome side, I find no focus on the evaluative, interactive, and metadiscoursal features of academic English that have been such a pervasive feature of EAP discourse research in this and the past century; nor indeed has there thankfully seemed any need to promote Move Analysis as anything more than partial and limited kind of investigation. On the negative side, only Mauranen’s paper explores academic speech. And if I look to the future and ask what a similar volume might concentrate on in ten years’ time, I would expect that the ELF findings would have created a movement toward more attention and more resources to genres like poster discussions, conference presentations, and research group meetings. I would also expect that the currently insecure relationship between corpus linguistics and ESP practice would, as the years pass, clarify what a corpus is most good for and what it is less good for. Doubtless, there will be other issues, but then in 2021, somebody else will be writing this *Envoi*.

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