

Book Review

Review of Paltridge, B., & Starfield, S. (Eds.). (2013). *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

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With their edited volume, *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (ESP), Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield have offered a great variety of perspectives on key issues in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language with respect to a particular context or community; in other words, with reference to English for specific purposes.

Relatively easy to follow and to understand, the handbook will certainly be regarded as a reliable source of information and references, which should suit any individual, student or scholar not only interested in this area of research, but also involved in applied linguistics and language in general. However, although the book is intended to be user-friendly, it is my belief that its appeal might, on some occasions, be limited for those new to the field, and not already familiar with the relevant terminology and educational theories. In any case, an excellent way to start, especially if the reader does not consider him or herself an expert in this domain of research, is definitely Johns' introduction, "The History of English for Specific Purposes Research". In her introductory chapter, Johns reviews the most significant periods of ESP by predominantly focusing on international publications, as one of the main issues identified in reviewing history is how to handle "research that is either unpublished, published in a language other than English, or in local journals" (p. 5).

The edited volume, containing 28 chapters including the introduction and conclusion, is divided into four distinct parts, each starting with an apt description:

(1) ESP and Language Skills, (2) Areas of ESP Research, (3) ESP and Pedagogy, and (4) Research Perspectives and Methodologies in ESP Research. The five chapters of the first section address issues on the relationship between language skills and English for specific purposes. First, Christine Feak explores ESP and speaking, followed by Christine Goh who provides a detailed account on ESP and listening. Alan Hirvela considers ESP and reading, Ken Hyland surveys ESP and writing, and Averil Coxhead examines what vocabulary for ESP refers to and why it is important.

In the second section, Maggie Charles shows how three differing approaches, namely corpus investigation, genre analysis, and social practices in global and institutional contexts, may come together to deepen our knowledge of English for academic purposes. Jean Parkinson discusses the necessity for teachers of English for science and technology to not only consider language features and genres, but also to focus on perspectives such as discourse community or disciplinary culture and values. While reviewing findings and methodologies, Meredith Marra argues that combining research on English in the workplace with research on English for specific purposes “brings together diverse viewpoints and theoretical perspectives that have the potential to deepen our understanding of language use in workplace settings” (p. 187). Following this chapter, Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini and Zuocheng Zhang offer an insight in the use of English for business in Asia with a focus on Japan and China. Jill Northcott reviews research on legal English in areas such as forensic linguistics and translation studies. Carol Lynn Moder discusses aviation English discourse and Gibson Ferguson considers English for medical purposes. Also discussing health care settings, Susan Boshier specifically focuses on the use of English for nursing research and discusses related areas such as writing or the assessment of the language proficiency in nursing. The last two chapters of this section, written by Paul Thompson and John Flowerdew, contribute in areas that have recently gained an increased attention in ESP; English for theses and dissertations and English for research publication purposes, respectively.

The common thread that unites the four chapters of the third section is their focus on issues pertaining to English for specific purposes and pedagogy. Lynne

Flowerdew begins with a discussion on needs analyses and curriculum development. Needs analysis is said to be “carried out to establish the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of a course” and is defined as “the first stage in ESP course development” (p. 325). More specifically, she discusses needs analysis with respect to English for academic purposes and English for occupational purposes. The following chapter, written by Brian Paltridge, considers discourse structure, language, and multimodality in specific settings and genres, where genre in ESP denotes “communicative events such as seminar presentations, university lectures, academic essays, and business reports” (p. 347). Then, Dan Douglas reviews theory and practice of assessment in ESP, including English for academic and employment purposes. In the last chapter of this section, Joel Bloch describes the role played by technology in the teaching of English for specific purposes. In particular, he not only discusses the use of technology as a tool for language learning as well as a communicative space, but also outlines the ethical controversies over its use in ESP.

The fourth section of the handbook, which includes seven chapters, closely considers research perspectives and methodologies in ESP. Specifically, Hilary Nesi surveys ESP and corpus studies, Ulla Connor and William Rozycki explore ESP and intercultural rhetoric, Catherine Nickerson focuses on ESP and English as a lingua franca, Sue Starfield provides a detailed account on critical perspectives on ESP, Ryuko Kubota and Liz Chiang highlight gender and race in ESP research, Dacia Dressen-Hammouda considers the ethnographic approaches to ESP research, and Paul Prior surveys multimodality and ESP research. This section, including Diane Belcher’s concluding chapter, provides the material to explore and reflect on the various approaches and methodologies encountered in English for specific purposes, which is certainly one of the strengths of this edited volume. As mentioned by the editors, it “provides an ideal gateway for students, practitioners, and researchers to update themselves on contemporary research perspectives in ESP” (p. 403).

To conclude, Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield’s *Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* is compelling, challenging, and thought provoking. The flaws are minor; the one reference I was interested in – Richterich and Chancerel, 1997 (p. 326)

– happened to be missing from the book. Although the edited volume is not open access and rather expensive to buy, which could be considered a serious drawback for visibility and potential readership, I would nevertheless recommend it to any researcher and practitioner interested in language in general and English for specific purposes in particular.

About the reviewer:

Sylvie Thouësny holds a Ph.D. in second language acquisition from Dublin City University, Ireland. Her current research focuses on language learner modeling to assist language teachers in the provision of strategic and effective feedback adapted to each individual. This field of research mainly draws on disciplines such as applied linguistics, human computer interaction, natural language processing, and dynamic assessment. Furthermore, she is the founder and president of Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association committed to making research literature a freely available public resource.