



From Linguistic Aspects to Designing Course of (French) Language for Specific Purposes

Magdalena Sowaa, Greta Komur-Thilloyb, Tatiana Musinova

aMaria Curie-Skłodowska University, Pl. M. Curie-Skłodowskiej 5, Lublin 20031, Poland

bUpper-Alsace University, Rue des Frères Lumière 10, Mulhouse 68093, France

Corresponding author *

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Introduction

ABSTRACT

The necessity of foreign language learning for professional purposes is not an invention of the modern age. Long before official teaching theories appeared, people needed foreign languages for workplace efficiency. In time, due to changing socioeconomic conditions, a formal scheme of language learning became necessary. Although it varies with regard to learning natural languages, this article aims to trace the evolution of job-related language teaching in relation to teaching French. The variety of teaching goals, emphasis on specific competences, learner considerations, as well as the sheer number of teaching conceptions all prove that French teaching methodologists are very active in terms of linguistics and didactics. Moreover, the development of a successful training offer requires the knowledge and awareness of what LSP is. The course writer able to define and understand LSP, is best placed to ascertain the learners' needs and find an appropriate pedagogical solution in terms of approach, contents and tools. The present article will therefore deal with educational concepts inherent in LSP training organization and designing.

1. Introduction

Over the last 40 years, the European Union has made many recommendations and undertaken a number of educational events to develop foreign language acquisition. The member states emphasized unanimously: "Member states should enhance language learning and teaching to promote greater mobility, more efficient international communication in terms of respect for identity and cultural diversity, improved access to information, increased interpersonal exchanges, professional relationships and mutual understanding" (CECR, 2001: 11).

These objectives were paramount in providing the basis for the development of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. Indeed, among the eight fundamental competences required worldwide, communication in foreign languages is the second most important. Similarly, employers explicitly emphasized the importance of foreign languages in social and professional communication. Reports and research carried out in the workplace showed that employees proficient in languages of their professional partners were sought after and much valued. This could be explained by the needs of the labor market which spread across borders (Flash Eurobarometer 2010, Study on Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability Final Report 2015). Evidently the teaching of language for specific purposes (LSP) should never underestimate the needs and objectives of learners motivated by

professional reasons. However, it should be mentioned that the development of a successful training offer requires the knowledge and awareness of what LSP is. The course writer able to define and understand LSP, is best placed to ascertain the learners' needs and find an appropriate pedagogical solution in terms of approach, contents and tools. The present article will therefore deal with educational concepts inherent in LSP training organization and designing.

LSP: from definition to teaching

Defining LSP is not an easy task. In our previous works, we demonstrated that a number of terms to designate LSPs (French, English, German, Polish) was introduced (Gajewska & Sowa, 2014a; Gajewska & Sowa 2014b). There are several designations for this concept such as language for specific purposes, specialized language, professional language, language for professional goals, language for professional needs, language for professional purposes, occupational language, etc.

Despite their linguistic origins, these designations seem comprehensible even to non-specialists thanks to common representations and widespread educational practices. Thus, we decided to take another look at the criteria which are commonly taken into consideration to describe and define LSP.

Though in many cases incomplete or inaccurate on a linguistic level, these criteria are of interest for the domain of language didactics. This being said, to define LSP, we will adopt a different angle of approach, to analyze the four main criteria which are: professional field of reference, language users, the relationship between LSP and general language (GL) and the function of the language in discourse.

1.1. The professional field of reference

The discipline or the specialized field where the language is used may be one of the scope defining criteria (Kocourek, 1982: 26-28). Nevertheless, the context of use is still not a precise criterion. It neither allows to delimit the fields and/or the disciplines nor does it mark boundaries between languages of different specialized areas. So, how should one set the boundaries between language for tourism, or hotel, or catering?

The parameters that go hand in hand with the field of specialty take into account various elements that influence one another. They are of a social (characteristics for a given professional community), intentional (motivated by the objectives from the professional activity) or historical (resulting from the methodology used at that time) nature.

The close correlation of the language with the discipline or the professional situation forces to the to consider the language purely through its link with contextual parameters (knowledge, know-how, circumstances of action) as if these parameters were not part of, or the result of discourse, but were outside of it (Gambier, 1998: 45).

Though operationally limited from a linguistic point of view, the reference to field of specialty is nevertheless a useful and functional criterion for language didactics. This has been reflected in the denominations of language training programs or the titles of educational books like Business English, français du secrétariat, español del turismo, italiano commerciale. The usefulness of these designations lies in current thinking which automatically associates a language with a communication context in a particular workplace. At the same time, this enables to consider language to be used in a specific working environment.

1.2. Language users

Users are another criterion used by scholars to define LSP. Language knowledge is often taken to be fundamental to enable a speaker to become an active member of any specific professional community. Paradoxically, it is these members who define the characteristics of the language they use. According to some researchers (Porcelli et al, 1990: 11), a classification criterion which reflects language users is not precise and clear enough. Its rigorous application contributes to excluding all non-specialist interactions such as patients,

clients, users of devices, etc. It is possible to expand the categories of people mentioned above on all the language users involved in specialized communication on a daily basis. Eurin Balmet & Henao de Legge (1992: 52) quoted the example of a talk between guests invited for a dinner: “At the end of the dinner, after the host had served delicious dishes, a few guests congratulated her and the conversation dealt with cooking procedures, marinating techniques in different geographical regions, etc. Thus, the topic of the conversation shifted towards the culinary know-how which was not the same for each of them even if they all have enjoyed the dishes served.” Both in many everyday situations, and various professional contexts, specialists and non-specialists interact e.g. during doctors’ consultations, visits to a garage or bank, or purchasing electrical household appliances.

To be understood by a non-specialist, the specialist has to adapt his way of communicating to the possible perception and comprehension of the recipient. Therefore, the way such a speaker uses language is not only determined by the professional affiliation but also depends on situational factors. One can thus conclude that the scope of LSP should not be subject to the professional profile of its user, but should target their level of knowledge as this is decisive for their exclusion or inclusion in the interaction.

Otherwise, LSP only reflects the language used by a specialist communicating with another specialist on subjects they share thanks to their common professional activity.

Although linguistically insufficient, the usefulness of this criterion for language didactics should be mentioned. The designations used to describe the nature of the foreign language training, e.g. English for Lawyers, italiano per economisti, español para medicos, account for the operational aspect of this criterion. Matching language to a professional group or discursive community enables a precise and effective targeting of prospective professionals interested in a specialized language training. In practice, this criterion has proved itself to be an excellent way of attracting a large number of diverse professionals to attend language courses.

1.3. LSP versus general language

When defining LSP, it is common practice to use parameters relating LSP to general language (GL). Researchers and specialists of several disciplines like terminology, lexicography, linguistics, or translation studies are not unanimous with regard to the position and status of LSP in relation to GL. Some argue that LSP is governed by its own rules and essential elements (Hoffman, 1979: 16). They include a complete system of linguistic phenomena which occur in communication and refer to subjects, intentions and conditions of specific communication. On the contrary, others deny the independent and autonomous status of LSP and argue that the latter is always linked to natural language (Grucza, 2002) and stems from GL (Quemada, 1978). Between the two opposed viewpoints, there are researchers who, on the one hand, argue that, whatever the field or degree of specialization, all LSPs do share general language fundamental resources (alphabet, phonology, morphology) with GL. On the other hand, they also believe that depending on the topic, speaker, and recipient, there will be differences with regard to lexicon and syntax.

From a didactic perspective, it is possible to list the dissimilarities between LSP and general language through salient aspects to design and implement language training program. To distinguish between GL and LSP training programs, Mangiante & Parpette (2004: 154) listed the following parameters:

the objective of teaching which is generally wide for GL and narrow/ specialized for LSP;

the duration of training which is often long-term for GL and short-term for LSP;

lesson topics and content range: limited in number as subject to rigorous selection in the case of LSP but numerous (or even disparate) in the case of GL;

competences and pedagogical work by a language teacher who is aware of his/her ineptitudes in the professional field of the language he teaches and who needs to cooperate with specialists in the field of activity.

In contrast, his/her colleagues teaching GL do not have to deal with specialized fields; the availability of teaching materials: contrary to LSP, there is a large variety of GL teaching materials in the didactic literature market.

Thus, the parameters above are extremely substantial for designing and planning linguistic training. They enable teacher to mind the selective and discriminative character of content and competences necessary to teach LSP. Nevertheless, these are not involved in designing GL course.

1.4. Language function in discourse

The way language operates in discourse should not be ignored when defining LSP. From this perspective, the language was said to convey professional knowledge (Lerat, 1995; Möhn & Pelka, 1984). The use of language requires contextual analysis which is fundamental to determine the meaning of terms according to the field or the discipline (cf. “Mouse” in zoology contrary to “mouse” in IT). This said, LSP cannot be considered as an abstract language system, but it works through its use in oral and/or written discourse (texts). According to Kocourek (1982: 21), any language is, in principle, only a set of texts (written and oral) which enable to explain operating mechanisms of the entire system. If languages of diverse activity fields exist, then specialized texts reflecting specific discourse must also exist.

From a didactic point of view, to deem LSP through the lens of its functioning in discourse would be very beneficial when implementing corpora. These are generally a set of texts referring to a discipline or field which is common to trainees enrolled in a specialized language program. The specialized texts find their place in specialized language training not only as a vector of professional knowledge but also as an illustration of the use of language elements mobilized to fulfill the pragmatic goal of the text.

The functional principles of LSP didactics

Once we have analyzed the criteria taken into account in multiple definitions of LSP, it is now important to ask how it can be introduced in class. Such a question refers to the subject of LSP didactics whose purpose is to describe, explain and program the acquisition of linguistic competences relating to the professional field (Grucza, 2007: 11). With regard to the definition above, we would like to focus on the programming aspects which we think are crucial when organizing training. Strevens (1977) argued that programming is not possible if the syllabus writer does not resolve to make multiple pedagogical decisions and choices. These concern among others:

- the competences to be developed in correlation to the specific learner needs;
- lexical units, grammar, language function relating to the specific learner needs;
- topics and content closely linked to specific learner needs;
- specific learner needs for communication.

The elements mentioned above strongly emphasize specific learner needs, which always determine the type and form of teaching content, and which finds its way into the final training program. What characterizes teaching LSP is the diversity and uniqueness of the target trainees who express different needs and expectations. The trainer should satisfy these needs and meet these expectations as effectively as possible. That is to say, the teacher must, in a thoughtful and conscious manner, limit the teaching content to the elements of communicative competence in LSP. Indeed, these elements include those which are strongly needed to carry out trainees’ professional activity. This approach classifies LSP training programs among those which target only a restricted part of the language to be taught (“partitive French” versus “general French”) aim at partial competences which remain a priority for the trainees (Lehmann, 1993; Komorowska, 2005).

French propositions in LSP didactics

LSP teaching has sparked many resolutions which have been applied in many European countries (Gajewska

& Sowa, 2014a). The variety of didactic reflections as well as the diversity of approaches to LSP didactics is particularly prevalent in the French context. Based on linguistic and sociological research on how best to adapt educational offers to the profiles and needs of targeted learners, the French didactic for professional purposes has conceptualized a range of designs. These take into account socio-politico-economic changes which are useful for learners of language for professional purposes. Among the most current and prevalent, we would mention the Français de spécialité [French for Specialty], the Français sur objectifs spécifiques [French for Specific Purposes] the Français de communication professionnelle [French for Professional Communication], and the Français langue professionnelle [French as a Professional Language].

1.5. French for Specialty

French for Specialty (hereafter FS) refers to the language of a professional field and particularly to the whole spectrum of language specific to this area. Any discourse of professional field requires a distinct and inherent use with regard to the lexicon, syntactic structures, stylistics, pragmatics and modalities of communication. The FS approach does not have its roots in a particular didactic conception but results from a “division in areas of specialty more or less well defined. It is a convenient way to identify appropriate fields, topic content, types of learners” (Mourhlon-Dallies, 2008: 26). Associated with specific areas, the FS approach enables to account for the whole of communication situations which are characteristic of a vast number of varied professional contexts. In addition, this provides an opportunity to demonstrate the diversity, complexity and heterogeneity of a field through its professions, workstations, professional duties, the spoken discourses or written texts, etc. What is crucial to this approach is the global presentation of a professional field in order to reach learners who are likely to be involved in. From the point of view of content programming, a teacher’s work is to identify and classify the written and oral discourse production that are part of the field. He/she should retrieve a representative sample (from a point of view of the form and content) which, then, will be used for the teaching purposes.

According to Mangiante & Parpette (2004), the FS approach is based on the offer or “supply.” It is consistent with some trainings provided to professionals, which do not necessarily have a direct link to prevalent and particular needs expressed by learners. Such a training anticipates the needs of potential learners who can choose a training from a brochure or list of available courses which were designed in advance by the training institution. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that what they learn will be of benefit to them in their everyday professional lives. None of the elements such as didactic materials selected for the FS course, contents, or assessment methods does not depend on from the real needs of the target audience of learners, but rather from subjective and arbitrary choices made by the institution or trainers. In the case of technical French, one can possibly deal with contents related to various branches and/or professions from various industries (such as electronics, mechanics, building and public works, automotive etc.). Given the diversity of topics, it can be concluded that the technical French course advertised in the offer made by a training institution will target a highly general (but not specialized) level of knowledge in the subjects addressed in class.

1.6. French for Specific Purposes

In contrast to the FS approach, the French for Specific Purposes (hereafter FSP) is an educational approach which is based on “demand”: it takes into full account the specific and real needs of the targeted audience who determine, right from the beginning, the training program to be set up. Instead of aiming for the entire field, the FSP approach deals with a concrete case (profession or position). In compliance with the needs expressed by the learners these courses can be labelled “tailor-made.” Indeed, it can only be created after having received a concrete request for instruction from a real and precise applicant. The purpose of FSP course is to transpose, in an operational manner, the training needs expressed in content and pedagogical activities.

The FSP's goal is to train learners to react and interact in situations likely to occur (or which have already occurred) in their professional lives. Looking at the above-mentioned example of technical French, the FSP training will address teaching content in a different manner than in FS. First, the training institution will receive a training request for technical French for Polish engineers who are part of a French team responsible for a project to build a waste treatment facility (WTE). Then, it will design a language program focused exclusively on professional tasks that the targeted audience will need to accomplish in French language when communicating with their French colleagues. The course writer will on the one hand prioritize linguistic and communicative aspects that the professional activities can involve. On the other hand, the course designer will take into account knowledge and linguistic know-how required by the real issues to be solved in professional communication.

1.7. French for Professional Communication

In comparison to the FS and the FSO, which are both directed towards the acquisition of more or less specialized language content, the approach denominated the French for Professional Communication (hereafter FPC) is the concept of cross-training in various areas of specialty. The FPC is an approach to LSP where the scope is most important: it does not target any specialty or professional area, but emphasizes the use of language in a wide range of activities performed in French. In the work environment, regardless of the company profile, field of activity, job or position, it can occur that different professionals perform similar professional tasks. Interacting with a customer, answering the phone, writing business letters, taking part in a meeting, etc. are equally important to a personal assistant, hotel receptionist, secretary or senior executive. These are the language activities common to various work contexts that outline the framework of a FPC training program. Its objective is not merely to present language but also cultural aspects of the work environment through typical communication situations in the workplace. These aspects are shown through the information integrated in the socio-economic context and as tasks to be performed. This brings the didactic activities in class closer to the company's communication practices.

1.8. French as a Professional Language

Chronologically, the most recent, French as a Professional Language (hereafter FPL) focuses on the simultaneous development of the language and professional competences (Mourlholon-Dallies 2006, 2008). This training concept assumes that language (in this case, French) is a *sine qua non* condition to obtain and maintain employment. That's why the FPL emphasizes the development of both linguistic and professional contents which should be included in the training program. In addition, these contents must, in every way, fulfill the requirements of the specialty field, profession and position. Types and modalities of professional interactions (situation or context of communication: email writing, business meetings, reports, vocabulary to use, complying with text genres) as well as professional behavior in the workplace are therefore crucial for FPL. These interactions, tasks and behaviors in any professional activity can be broadly divided into three main areas that are common to most professions. According to Mourlholon-Dallies professional activity is mainly carried out in three major areas called "work zones" which are:

- private area, "[...] where the person works behind closed doors, without face-to-face contact, or telephone calls (which does not prevent him from reading his e-mails and answering, or leaving a message on an answering machine)";
- collaborative area "which deals with exchanges between colleagues and sharing work between professionals (suppliers, subcontractors)";
- customer area which encompasses "interactions of services, in the presence or mediated by computer, telephone, etc." (Mourlholon-Dallies, 2008: 83).

The analysis of tasks undertaken and carried out using the language within each of the above-mentioned areas makes it possible to extract typical interactions and behaviors for a professional field (job, position) which will subsequently provide content for language training. The FPL concept is equally well suited to courses for people learning French as a foreign language, or second language or as their mother tongue. It is intended both for immigrants or young unemployed French people.

What is characteristic for the FPL and absent in the French for Specialty, French for Specific Purposes, and French for Professional Communication is the co-presence of elements forming part of various fields, among which the notions like language, occupational activity and profession are identified. The interrelation between language and working context and environment is a significant feature of the FPL approach, since language and job competences cannot be considered as separate from the action itself.

The teaching concepts described above differ in many points while providing teachers with a dissimilar program vision for LSP training programs. The table below shows the most visible disparities between the four approaches. It repeats partially the content and structure differences between the trainings “offered” and trainings “requested” mentioned by Qotb (2009: 141).

Table 1. French for professional purposes: significant features and teaching approaches

	French for Specialty	French for Specific Purposes	French for Professional Communication	French as a Professional Language
Origin	Offered by language training centers, Alliance Française, cultural centers, language schools, etc.	Requested by professionals, students, etc.	Offered by language training centers, Alliance Française, cultural centers, language schools, etc.	Requested by professionals, students, unemployed workers, etc.
Target audience	Too wide range of audience to group all specialties, e.g., engineers, mechanics, builders, electricians, etc.	Restricted within the same specialty, e.g. training for engineers only building a specific facility (WTE)	Very wide and diverse to group various trades and positions	Restricted within the same profession or position, e.g. housekeeping training in a hotel
Language needs	Unclear or unidentified	Well-identified	Interdisciplinary and common to different professional communication situations	Well-identified by tasks and types of professional interactions
Content	May or may not relate to the audience attending the course	Relevant to the target audience	May or may not relate to the audience attending the course	Relevant to the target audience
Topics	Concerned with discipline topics, e.g. for technical	Communication situations, e.g. technology to	Interdisciplinary and common topics in different	Interactions, behaviors and activities

	French: machines assembling and machinery, processing, energy transmission, building materials, etc.	consider, oven or kiln construction, smoke treatment system, ash handling systems, clinker disposal, etc.	work contexts, positions and tasks, e.g. letter writing, talking on the phone, informing customers, etc.	identified in typical areas of work for a profession and/or position
Role	Uncertain necessity for professional or academic career	Necessary for professional or academic career of learners	Uncertain necessity for professional or academic career	Necessary to get and keep a job
Usefulness	Random	Immediate & urgent	Random	Immediate & urgent

Conclusion

The present analysis demonstrated that, in terms of the LSP teaching approaches, French researchers stay strongly active and the outcomes of their educational and didactic work are manifold. The analysis of different approaches to the LSP teaching as far as the language and educational aspects are concerned emphasizes the fact that each course and training program is unique. Even if it is always a question of LSP, each training is not only governed by its own parameters and devices, but also oriented towards specific audiences and objectives.

The diversity of elements that are taken into account when LSP course writing does not allow the teacher to apply the same solutions every time or get stuck in a rut. Furthermore, LSP does not have the same meaning according to the field of specialty, profession or position. It does not represent the same competences for everyone either. This said, teachers should be aware of all these different aspects. A clear understanding of the underlying components which determine each approach to LSP, will encourage them to accurately identify key program parameters and thus create courses according to the expectations and professional needs of the target audience.

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