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COPENHAGEN STUDIES IN LANGUAGES: LSP – NINE STUDIES ON LANGUAGE FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES. Edited by Niels David-
sen–Nielsen. København: Handelshøjskolens Forlag,
1991. 159 pages

The last two decades have seen an upsurge in linguists' interest in language for special purposes (LSP). Today, LSP enjoys a privileged position as the principal research and teaching discipline at the Danish business schools. Accordingly, LSP has found its way into a plethora of titles of books, monographs, journals, and papers – nationally as well as internationally. *Copenhagen Studies in Language*, a publication from the Faculty of Modern Languages, The Copenhagen Business School, is no exception: its latest thematic volume is on LSP.

The title therefore immediately caught my attention. Would this volume shed any new light on the ongoing controversy over what LSP is and what it isn't? Would it satisfy my own somewhat vague and rather broad definition of LSP as an operational concept that can be used to explain processes and pinpoint the dynamic aspects of communication: how do experts read, write, listen and speak a language (native or second/foreign) for professional (special) purposes and how should they address themselves to lay people to be highly communicative?

The volume begins with text corpora. And it ends with text corpora. In the first paper "*Problems in the use of text corpora in linguistic research*", Carl Vikner argues that text corpora are research tools and not research objects. Vikner defines a subject language as a sublanguage that vests a particular linguistic "authority" in its users and suggests that LSP researchers' interest should focus on the users' linguistic competence. Following this he argues that text corpora do not lend themselves to linguistic monitoring of communicative competence and that data problems therefore are not the preserve of 'traditional' (read: non-corpus based) linguistic studies. Performance data in the shape of text corpora, he argues, are precisely as problematic as any other form of data. Vikner then goes on to discuss four popular views which, he claims, are common 'misconstruals'. The first 'misconstrual' is that corpora are open to direct

observation. Vikner points out that linguistic structure cannot simply be read off but has to be constructed through a process of interpretation. The other views regarded as erroneous are that corpora constitute a particularly reliable source of information, that they constitute a source of quantitative data, exclusively, and that scientific theories or descriptions are definitive. In his discussion of the last view Vikner draws attention to the particular problem posed by tagging. Tagging presupposes a specific theory, and for linguists working within other theories the corpus' usefulness is bound to be limited. Vikner, however, certainly does not reject the use of corpora. On the contrary, he concludes that text corpora – like dictionaries – should be regarded not as research objects but as research tools.

In the last paper Gunhild Dyrberg and Joan Tournay reports on a legal text corpus in English, French, and Danish in a paper entitled “*Constitution d'un corpus de textes juridiques*”. The test universe investigated though, is restricted to general contract law. Dyrberg and Tournay – together with colleagues from the Aarhus Business School – have sought to obtain equal representation of different text types. Based on Danish contract law, they divide texts into seven classes which are considered sufficiently universal to reflect texts typical of the three different national law systems. However, yet another delimitation is made: the formation and validity of contracts and breach of contracts are the principal text categories. Following Vikner (?), the corpus has not been tagged.

The thematic volume contains three papers on technical and scientific language and the borderline between these languages. In the first of these papers, written by Christian Quist, “*Semantic features of scientific and technological languages*”, the approach is terminological. Quist ventures to set up criteria along which a hierarchy of special subject languages in science and technology can be built. Placing texts in a co-ordinate system with one axis dubbed ‘specialization’ and the other ‘abstraction’, Quist, so very technically, shows that the language of mathematics differs from that of electrotechnology because it is within an area where abstraction values run high. Furthermore, using examples of polysemy and homonymy, Quist postulates a spatial orientation of the languages so that for instance the language of medicine in certain respects can be considered a derivation of higher languages of physics and chemistry. According to Quist, languages of science are assumed to occupy a higher position in the hierarchy than languages of technology. This may, indeed, seem a daring statement, and Quist, knowing this, admits that all he can

hope for is ‘an approximate delimitation’ between the boundaries examined, be they between science and technology, between general language and special languages or between individual special languages and groups of them. He goes on to postulate that this method of presentation, provides a tool for description of various pragmatic aspects of LSP texts at different levels of “technicality” and “scientificness”.

The second paper mainly on technical and scientific texts, “*LSP, science and technology: a sociological approach*”, also explores the link between scientific and technological language. The author, Bodil Kragh, in a refreshingly straightforward tone sets out to clarify, from a historical and empirical point of view, what is known about the distinction between science and technology and the relationship between them. She argues that linguistic definitions of LSP are in themselves awkward because it is absolutely imperative to relate linguistic findings to the actual language user and the way in which he understands his professional world. We must, in other words, adopt a sociological approach. Following this, the question is asked ‘what is a profession’ and how can we define a discipline. Again medicine is offered as an example. Once a discipline has been delimited sociologically, its technical language can be defined straightforwardly as the language used professionally by its practitioners. Kragh’s conception of LSP (in this case the LSP of medicine) is that LSP does not contain a number of different (sub)languages. Furthermore, she sees it as belonging to the same system as language for general purposes (LGP), and thus the difference between LSP and LGP becomes a question of quantity rather than quality. Finally, in a discussion of the distinction between science and technology, Kragh argues that there is no causal connection between the two: they are relatively independent but interacting worlds.

The third paper on technical and scientific texts “*Les textes techniques: leur éléments constitutifs et leur réalisation en danois*” by Lena Munck describes technical texts in terms of their use of technical terms and linguistic features in the text parts which link the technical terms together. Striking a successful balance between semantics and pragmatics, Munck manages to characterize technical texts both semantically and pragmatically as either descriptive, directive, or manipulative. The paper, concentrating on descriptive and directive texts, describes two “maxims” the texts must observe to be successful: clarity (defined as appropriate layout, non-ambiguity, condensation and precision) and reliability (somewhat oddly defined as objectivity and impersonality). These

features – dubbed pragmatic – are embedded in linguistic features, e.g. objectivity is acquired by means of the non-temporal present tense. Semantically an important factor is shown to be completion: in technical tests you commonly define the degree of completion of a product, for example using adjectival past participles. Equally important is the propositional content: it is characteristic of technical texts that they have temporal and spatial references and indications of method, instrument, purpose and cause – just to mention a few.

A fifth paper, by Bodil Nistrup Madsen, is purely within the terminological tradition as is Quist's paper. Its title "*In terms of concepts*" and introduction leave us in no doubt. It is Madsen's interest to define 'concept'. This, she claims, is a "set of characteristic features denoting properties common to entities of a class"; a definition which must be said to be at odds with traditional definition of concepts as units of thought. 'The characteristic features' can be classified according to types of properties (function, purpose, etc.) and are more specific than 'characteristic features of LGP'. Madsen, in other words, goes on to describe virtual reference as opposed to actual reference connected with use in a given context. Finally, the term 'term' is defined not as the linguistic expression of a concept but as a linguistic sign, and she claims that the terms differ from 'ordinary words' in that they are used in the communication between experts and in that their concepts belong to a specific subject field.

"*Equivalence in translation of LSP texts: Theoretical and practical aspects*" is the title of a paper by Lisbet Pals Svendsen. Svendsen discusses examples of total equivalence versus partial and zero-equivalence and how translators can tackle the problems of equivalence. She points specifically to localization strategies for transferring an original term directly to the target language supported by some sort of comment. In other cases the translator should explain the term and, alternatively, coin a new phrase. Svendsen rejects the view that there should be a virtual barrier between equivalence and non-equivalence in the translation of LSP texts. In her opinion the translator of LSP texts should endeavour to reach functional/communicative equivalence. This implies that equivalence should not exclusively be established at the terminological level. Rather, in some instances the translator should move on to the textual level.

Then follows two papers concentrating on noun phrases in legal language: "*Semantic analysis of complex N-bars*" by Carl Vikner and

“Some problems related to automatic analysis of nominalizations in Danish” by Søren Juul Nielsen and Helle Wegener. Where the former investigates the contributions of complex noun phrases to the semantic interpretation of sentences, the latter explores the relationship between argument structure, theta-roles and syntactic realization in nominalizations. Vikner points out that legal language differs from LGP in that it abounds with NPs with complements and he goes on to state that modifiers have a semantic value which is dissimilar to and independent of their head nouns whereas the semantic interpretation of complements is closely tied to the head nouns.

This special issue contains nine papers on LSP, but it gives no overall picture of recent achievements in ongoing LSP research. Instead it gives a snapshot of some of the current LSP projects at the Copenhagen School of Business. Several of the papers in this special issue, though, do address the central questions on which most of the last decades’ LSP debates have focused: what is the rationale of defining a ‘language for special purposes’ as different from a ‘language for general purposes’ and at which levels of comparison would a distinction between the two provide any real insights? However, there is little agreement between the papers on this question and the volume is not awfully coherent despite a surprisingly narrow selection of authors, all from the Copenhagen School of Business. So, I was left a little frustrated and do not feel that this volume sheds much new light on the controversy over what LSP is and what it isn’t?

On the whole, though, it is an interesting volume because it raises issues relevant to research in LSP in general and to the teaching at the business schools in particular. Also, I was delighted to see that I am not alone in defining LSP as an operational concept productive in approaches to language usage characteristic of specific professions and specific social functions.

