

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE STUDY OF SPECIALIZED DISCOURSES

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In sociology, society is defined as a “human group that occupies a reasonably bounded territory and has a reasonably distinctive culture and set of social institutions” (Bruce and Yearley 2006: 286). This definition closely resembles the one that Becher put forward to describe disciplinary groups - “academic tribes, each with their own set of intellectual values and their own patch of cognitive territory” (1994: 153). Drawing on these socio-anthropological perspectives, we can define a specialized community, whether disciplinary or professional, as a type of society that represents a group of people occupying a particular field, sharing a distinct disciplinary or professional culture, and having its own institutions.

Traditionally, the definition of society largely depends on the notion of culture, whose definition varies across the social and human sciences. For instance, according to sociologists, culture is a set of values, norms, beliefs, symbols, language, practices, and material objects that establish the way people live in a given society (Macionis and Plummer 2008). According to Tylor, an English anthropologist, culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1924: 1). Hofstede (2001), a social psychologist, represented culture in the form of an onion showing the different layers that constitute culture, the core being the values and the surface - the symbols. In his mind, practices are determined by rituals, heroes, and symbols, including discursive practices. Nevertheless, although they are apparently different, these definitions all highlight the fact that culture is a complex notion, composed of both tangible and intangible elements.

Hence, one can suppose that the principles of general culture can help understand specialized cultures. Indeed, values and norms are very often expressed in the ethical principles, publication guides, rules of access to studies, and labor market; disciplinary beliefs guiding specialized communities’ practices are often outlined in reference books and other written artefacts; specialized communities operate via a system of symbols, i.e. a specialized variety of general language; they develop professional and research practices typical of their discipline or profession; finally, they produce various material objects, such as books, articles, brochures, tools, etc.

When studying specialized languages and discourses, it is essential to view culture as context-dependent. As early as 1985, Swales made the argument that

it is not only texts that we need to understand, but the roles texts have in their environments; the values congruent and conflictive, placed on them by occupational, professional and disciplinary memberships; and the expectation these memberships have on the patternings of the genres they participate in.” (1985: 219)

He argued that a way to bridge the gap between text and context was textography, an approach combining text analysis with ethnographic techniques such as surveys, interviews,

and other data sources in order to examine what texts are like and why. In this approach, culture offers a prism for the interpretation of text.

One of the main questions related to the study of culture as context is how to access culture, i.e. what data are available to the ESP researcher to understand the cultural underpinnings of specialized discourses. Given the definitions of culture, provided earlier, studying discursive and non-discursive practices is a way to access the values that are at the core of any culture. Rituals, such as recruitment procedures, meetings of staff assessment, and myths and legends in the forms of stories associated with a profession, a discipline or a company are also data that foster the understanding of culture (Durand *et al.* 2000: 4).

These definitions are consistent with Van der Yeught's definition of specialized domains, viewed as "sets of knowledge and practice which transcend their originators and are harnessed to the service of one particular purpose" (2016: 48). In this case, members of a specialized, professional or disciplinary, community possess the "specialized encyclopedia" of the domain, that is to say "all potential knowledge necessary to interpret a domain's specialized communication (2016: 18). Rituals, symbols, heroes and values are part of the specialized encyclopedia, as well as humor, for instance, which is often specific to disciplinary and professional communities (Isani and Van der Yeught 2023).

However, culture can also be accessed through texts. As Wozniak notes, the study of the evolution of professional specialized discourse is in fact inseparable from that of the evolution of the professional contexts in which they are produced and, as such, they represent a relevant prism to characterize the evolution of the professional world¹ (2019: 49-50). The notion of indexicality is useful to this purpose (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Ochs 1992; Lillis 2008) since texts "index" (or point to) certain social structures, values or relations, making it possible to access context through text.

The interface between national culture and professional and disciplinary culture is also a key issue. If national culture is all the elements that explain the ways of thinking and acting of the members of a group (Durand *et al.* 2000: 1), it necessarily influences the professional and disciplinary cultures that develop in a certain national context. As early as 1989, D'Iribarne analysed the influence of national culture in professional practices and showed that the same companies set in different countries adopt different cultural systems, thus adapting to the national culture and context. In this sense, national culture partly determines disciplinary and professional cultures. In turn, some disciplinary and professional cultures are essential in national cultures. Van der Yeught has defined the "civilizational value," or cultural value, of a specialized domain as proportional to its role in the experience of a nation (2012: 20-21). Some professional or disciplinary groups are essential to understand the development of a nation (the legal profession in the USA, for instance), and in this case, their professional culture is firmly anchored in national culture. On the contrary, other disciplinary groups (medical professions, for instance) are influenced to a lesser extent by national culture and, in Van der Yeught's definition, have a lower civilizational value.

Bridging the gap between text and context is, therefore, essential not only to understand text, to provide an interpretative framework to specialized discourses, but also to access the culture of the community under study. In the words of Starfield (2011: 176), "critical ethnographic

¹ « l'étude de l'évolution des discours spécialisés professionnels est en fait indissociable de l'étude de l'évolution du contexte professionnel dans lequel ils sont produits, et, pas là même, ils constituent un prisme tout à fait pertinent pour caractériser l'évolution du monde du travail » (2019 : 49-50).

work, and the understandings of context it affords, can illuminate not only how texts are produced and received but also how contexts for writing are constituted and what constitutes context.”

Teaching ESP as Process of Socialization

Effective communication and interaction with members of specialized communities rely on a deep understanding of their respective cultures. Therefore, it is essential to familiarize future specialists with the specialized, disciplinary and professional cultures of both their own national and international communities. This exposure facilitates what sociologists describe as socialization, a process through which individuals internalize the values, attitudes, and behaviors deemed appropriate within a specific cultural context (Schaefer 2013: 78).

The research in health sciences has largely explored this phenomenon, illustrating that becoming a doctor involves not only acquiring technical expertise, but also internalizing the norms, values, and behavioral expectations of the field (as cited in Bruce & Yearley 2006). For instance, Becker and his colleagues (1976), in their book *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School*, demonstrated that medical education was as much about social integration into the profession as it was about knowledge and skills acquisition. Often referred to as professional socialization, this process entails developing the values, skills, and professional mindset necessary to function effectively within a specific field (Cornelissen and Wyk 2008). Through this immersion, individuals become attuned to the roles and responsibilities within their professional community (Salisu *et al.* 2019), gradually constructing a professional identity (Miller 2013) and earning recognition as legitimate members of their professional society (Sadeghi Avval Shahr *et al.* 2019), which will allow them to contribute efficiently to the serving of the society in general (Higgs 2013).

When considering socialization within a discipline rather than a profession, the more precise term is “disciplinary socialization” (Becher and Trowler 2001: 48). This concept focuses on the ideological underpinnings of a discipline (Taylor 1976, as cited in Becher and Trowler 2001) and is a core component of its cultural framework. As Griffin (2006: 77) notes, disciplinary culture shapes intellectual traditions and defines the distinct ways of thinking and reasoning within a given academic or professional field. In this sense, a discipline can be understood as a shared set of beliefs and conceptual frameworks that guide its members’ perspectives and methodologies (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The three contributions to this issue deal precisely with how culture can be taken into account when designing ESP course content.

TEACHING CULTURE IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: A THREE-STEP APPROACH FOR MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDENTS (BY ISABELLE SINIC)

In line with the ideas expressed in the 1980s and 1990s by the Council of Europe and various researchers, Isabelle Sinic proposes adopting an intercultural approach to ESP teaching and learning, particularly in the context of English for Media and Communication. According to her, this specialized variety of English is ideal for studying the cultural component of ESP, encompassing its sociocultural, communicative, and specialized aspects. The paper describes the design and implementation of a teaching unit for first-year

Master's students in Information and Communication. Based on the premise that cultural competence requires sociocultural knowledge, intercultural competence, and discursive skills relevant to the professional field, the module invites students to write a press release, one of the most essential genres in public relations, following textual conventions of structure, style, and cultural adaptation within a crisis communication scenario in a private company.

TRANSLATION AS A LEARNING TOOL IN LEGAL READING LESSONS: FIRST-YEAR

To acquire a specialized culture means understanding the specialized language of a community that shares or belongs to this culture. Mastery of the terms that comprise such a language is essential. This paper examines the extent to which the translation of words (primarily legal terms), phrases, and even sentences, can be used in legal English ESP courses to help students in the task of understanding legal texts, which contain highly culture-specific elements. With the help of a questionnaire, the authors asked students about their use of translation for reading comprehension. The results show that translation into L1 is frequently used by students to address comprehension issues, particularly given the complexity of legal texts and legal terminology. They advocate enhanced use of translation in legal reading classes to support comprehension and improve student motivation. Translation, viewed as a learning tool, enables learners to bridge their national legal culture with the one they are studying. Interestingly, the authors highlight a correlation between students' reliance on translation and their specialized background knowledge: on the one hand, students use translation to acquire specific background knowledge; on the other hand, the more background knowledge they possess, the less dependent they become on translation.

EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF CHATGPT IN ENHANCING SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

The third paper adopts a less traditional approach to developing students' intercultural competence as well as digital literacy. By designing a workshop entitled *Writing Texts with ChatGPT*, Ivana Pondelíková and Jana Luprichová aimed to address third-year students' needs in writing their bachelor's theses while raising their awareness of ChatGPT's potential to enhance specialized communication in English. The workshop integrated reading comprehension techniques with AI tools and design thinking, which is known to positively influence students' intercultural intelligence, an essential skill for navigating cultural differences in today's interconnected professional world. The results demonstrated that the use of AI improved students' productivity, communication skills, and motivation while also helping them acquire new vocabulary and enhance their writing skills.

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