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**Récits fictionnels et non fictionnels liés à des  
communautés professionnelles et à des groupes  
spécialisés**

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## Foreword

*Avant-propos*

**Shaeda Isani**

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# Foreword

*Avant-propos*

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- 1 Situated in the socio-discoursal and socio-cultural approaches to the study of Languages for Specific Purposes (Belcher, 2004), the contributions to this issue of *ILCEA* engage with the objective of exploring the concept of narrative, both fictional and non-fictional, in the light of its relevance to the field of LSP studies.
- 2 Narrative, as the father of the discipline Roland Barthes underlines (1966), is, like life itself, a universal phenomenon which transcends generations, cultures and borders. Initially related to the field of literary or oral traditions, today its widely accepted metaphorical dimension has made it a transdisciplinary concept which embraces politics, law, medicine and the hard sciences to mention but a few, so much so that Brook, for example, considers the use of the word to be completely “out of hand” and “trivialized” through overuse (cited in Safire, 2004) and Ryan that “few words have enjoyed so much use and suffered so much abuse as *narrative* and its partial synonym, *story*.” (2007: 22)
- 3 Definitions abound, from the simple to the complex, focusing varyingly on formal elements such as sequence of events, temporality, plot, causality, conflict and transformation. Even though our interest lies more in the concept of narrative as applied to the LSP context rather than in a theoretical approach to narratology as a discipline, Abbot’s “bare minimum” proposal according to which “Simply put, narrative is the representation of an event or series of events” (1987: 13), or Genette’s “One will define narrative without difficulty as the representation of an event or of a sequence of events” (1982: 127), are perhaps a little too bare for our purposes. Without getting enmeshed in the imbroglio of “a scalar conception of narrative [in which] definition becomes an open series of concentric circles which spell increasingly narrow conditions and which presuppose previously stated items, as we move from the outer to the inner circles, and from the marginal cases to the prototypes” (Ryan, 2007: 28), we align our acceptance of the term along the lines suggested by Ryan which may be broadly paraphrased as narrative being a representation of events with a spatial,

temporal and mental<sup>1</sup> dimension organized into a sequence of events unified by a causal chain and leading to a closure. (2007: 28-29)

- 4 Narrative also transcends genres and media supports, as Barthes points out in his classic work on the subject:

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* (suspense drama), comedy, pantomime, paintings [...], stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. (1975: 237, Lionel Duisit, Trs.)

- 5 In the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) studies, our interest in narrative embraces both non-fictional and fictional forms. With regard to non-fictional narrative genres—(auto)biographies, ethnographies, documentaries, blogs, etc.—researchers and practitioners working in a socio-cultural approach are interested in identity narrative which studies how individuals forge an identity by projecting their experiences into a story of the self that affords them a sense of unity and purpose in life. In the LSP context, the concept of “professional life narratives” borrowed from Danvers for whom “it is not a question of talking about one’s job but of engaging professional identity through the experience of professional life” (2009: 472. Our translation) is particularly pertinent. Ken Hyland’s contribution on the narratives of storytelling in fringe academic genres such as thesis acknowledgements, bio statements and personal webpages relates to this line of enquiry and examines the “personal” that is so carefully masked in the depersonalised formal discourse habitually associated with academic research genres.
- 6 Other contributions, from a variety of disciplines—environmental studies, communication, diplomacy, oenology and journalism—focus on non-fictional narrative from the specialised genre perspective: Camille Biros examines the blog as a genre through a corpus related to the debate on fossil fuel development in New Zealand; Birgitta Borghoff presents a highly-documented discussion on “entrepreneurial storytelling” in the Swiss cultural and creative industries and discusses her concept of “*entrepreneurializing*” in this context; Jessica Stark presents a corpus-based analysis relative to her exploration of diplomatic memoirs as a specialised genre, a largely uncharted area of study in ESP studies; Andrew James discusses the metaphoric narrative of wine descriptors ranging from Michael Broadbent in the UK to Robert Parker and Ann Noble’s Aroma Wheel in the US; and finally, Caroline Peynaud analyses a corpus of articles from the US press related to the 2016 Rio Games and reveals that narrative, far from being a dominant characteristic of the genre, as may have been expected, tends to play a more implicit role.
- 7 The relation between fictional narrative and LSP studies is of particular interest in the French context of ESP studies since studies in FASP—*fiction à substrat professionnel*—saw their genesis in France in 1999 with the publication of Petit’s seminal article identifying a new genre of specialised fictional narrative highly relevant to LSP teaching and learning. FASP, as defined by Petit, is a genre which concerns popular mass fiction, most typically a thriller set in a more or less contemporary time frame, whose distinctive generic characteristic is the eponymous *substrat professionnel*, i.e. the

professional/specialised environment which nourishes the author’s imaginary, fuels the plot dynamics, defines the characters and leads to the denouement (Isani, 2004: 26).

- 8 Essentially an Anglo-American phenomenon, FASP covers a wide range of specialised disciplines and professions thus generating a host of sub-genres, some of the most prolific being legal FASP, medical FASP, forensic FASP, journalism FASP and art FASP, for example. It is also present in many different forms of media: the earliest examples of FASP were novels—Earl Stanley Gardner’s Perry Mason novels (1933–1973) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), are “pre-founding” examples of legal FASP—, rapidly followed by films, *Twelve Angry Men* (1957), for example, which is a cult legal FASP film. These “classic” media supports have been somewhat side-lined today by the sheer number and ubiquity of FASP TV serials and series (innumerable legal FASPs but also other domains, such as chemistry in the widely acclaimed *Breaking Bad*, for example). Graphic novels are another media support which lends itself to the genre, with the ever popular legal FASP (*Judge Dredd*) or the more uncommon but nevertheless unexpectedly prolific financial FASP (the *Largo Winch* series, amongst others). Shooter video games also come under the FASP umbrella, such as *Trauma Center*, for instance, a medical FASP.
- 9 Even though research in FASP-driven studies today has opened up new lines of enquiry which study the genre as a literary phenomenon in its own right, the obvious teaching/learning link between FASP and LSP was clearly identified at the outset in the very title of Petit’s 1999 founding text, “*Fiction à substrat professionnel: une autre voie d’accès à l’anglais de spécialité*”.<sup>2</sup> FASP authors, in general, are or were members of the profession they fictionalise. They capitalise on their insider knowledge to heighten the illusion of reality and authenticity through highly accurate fictional representations based on their expert knowledge of the specialised environment in question, its specialised subject-domain knowledge, its institutions and professionals and, perhaps most importantly, their specialised language, discourse and culture. In so doing, they provide LSP teachers with a goldmine of subject-domain content-cum-language source material ranging from the highly technical to layman-accessible popularisation—not to forget the added bonus of intrinsic learner motivation!
- 10 Critical studies have been published regarding the issue of possible factual errors (Charpy, 2009; Genty, 2009) and about how misleading fictional representations shape erroneous public perceptions (Isani, 2004; 2005). Such drawbacks, though real, have been relativised by research carried out in the academic setting establishing the existence of learner critical distance vis-à-vis fictional representations relative to their specialism (Chapon, 2015).
- 11 In the area of fictional narrative, Michel Van der Yeught’s contribution provides a theoretical overall approach to FASP studies by discussing the distinctive *substrat professionnel* in the light of the concept of “specialised encyclopedias” which he relates to Umberto Eco’s philosophical acceptance of the term “encyclopedia” and its adaptation to literary criticism by French linguist Jean-Jacques Lecercle. In a more applied approach, Adriano Laudisio studies the role of narrative in a corpus of highly popular American legal FASP TV series and analyses the popularisation strategies used to render technical legal concepts and procedures accessible to lay-audiences. Also in the sub-genre of legal FASP, Thierry Nallet’s contribution is a landmark publication in that, to my knowledge, it is the first paper to appear on Spanish legal FASP—and in Spanish, too!—thus underlining the inherently translingual and transcultural

dimension of FASP mentioned earlier (as well as providing a welcome tempering of the hegemony of English in FASP-related research...).

- 12 Two contributions deal with the hard sciences through the prism of science-fiction, a genre whose relation to FASP remains a vexed question. Marie-Hélène Fries discusses the perceptions shaped by fictional representations, a key line of enquiry in FASP studies, by analysing the “grey goo scenario” in science-fiction dealing with nanotechnologies. Marie Thévenon’s interests lie in ESP/EST teaching/learning classroom practices which she examines through three different media supports, a novel, a film and a video game. Gilberto Diaz-Santos’ interests in FASP also lie in the field of teaching/learning but with a paradoxical twist in the tale in that he gives an account of the dynamic learner production/activity achieved through using FASP pedagogic supports out of the ESP context, for general English or journalism students.
- 13 The study of narrative as applied to LSP studies is not a mainstream area of research in our discipline. This is regrettable since, as the contributions to this issue of *ILCEA* reveal, the triangulation defined in terms of narrative studies/specialised language/disciplinary specialism is a promisingly rich and diversified field of enquiry likely to interest both researchers and practitioners across the many disciplines, languages and approaches which constitute our discipline—and therefore, deserves to be pursued.
- 14 In conclusion, I would like to pay a very sincere tribute to the host of reviewers who agreed to take on the unpaid, unacknowledged and often unappreciated task of sorting out the wheat from the chaff and turning brass into gold. To the 22-odd anonymous and invisible reviewers whose learned minds and lynx eyes spotted the omissions and commissions and the villainous little gremlins lurking in between the lines of the contributions to this issue of *ILCEA*, my most grateful thanks.

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## NOTES

1. “Some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world...” (Ryan, 2007: 19)
2. *Une autre voie d’accès à l’anglais de spécialité*: another way of accessing ESP.

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