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Graduate Courses in Languages for Specific Purposes: Needs, Challenges, and Models

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GRADUATE COURSES IN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: NEEDS, CHALLENGES, AND MODELS

ABSTRACT

The 2007 MLA assessment of the state of foreign languages in higher education correctly identifies the need for restructuring both program curricula and governance in order to meet current student needs. In its recommendations for doing so, however, the committee inadvertently defines the goals and objectives of graduate foreign language programs as narrowly focused on the production of future academics. The current reality of the academic job market, institutional demands, and of the global economy calls for a critical reassessment of this assumption. This article considers the potential benefits of, and challenges to, broadening existing graduate curricula, specifically through the incorporation of courses in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), and presents a model graduate LSP course. It is imperative that graduate programs in foreign languages broaden their goals, objectives, and course offerings beyond literary and language competency in order to remain relevant. Expanding graduate course offerings to include LSP as an integral component of existing curricula better equips students to adapt and apply their education to the ever-changing demands of today's global society.

KEYWORDS**:** Languages for Specific Purposes, Spanish for Specific Purposes, foreign languages, graduate foreign language curriculum development, pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

During the 16th Annual CIBER Business Language conference at Canyons Resort, Park City, Utah (April 2014), I conducted an intensive one-on-one survey/interview with foreign language faculty in the area of Spanish for Specific Purposes. The main inquiry in my data collection was what my colleagues thought about the need for courses in the area of Languages for Specific Purposes at the graduate level. The motivation behind this survey is the evident absence of such courses in our graduate programs as well as the growing demand for them by our students. Masters programs in foreign languages can have many outcomes, but the most common are: creating language

teachers, or providing a basis for continued training as literature or linguistics scholars in doctoral programs. Yet, considering the increasing demand on the part of students, local professional and community service organizations, and institutions for training in the area of Language for Specific Purposes, there exist few opportunities for graduate students to gain the necessary experience, training, and expertise to either teach or pursue non-academic interests in this area. In other words, we cannot fulfill these demands without a graduate curriculum that adequately speaks to these needs. Indeed, a cursory survey of course offerings across the United States (discussed below) suggests that, at the moment, there are no PhD or master's programs in the USA that have a focus on Languages for Specific Purposes. The goal of my survey/interview, then, was to assess the need for such courses, ascertain the reason behind their absence, and learn what challenges our colleagues face in developing and integrating graduate-level LSP courses. This article presents the findings of that survey as well as offers a sample graduate course in Spanish for Specific Purposes that I originally designed for use at my home institution as a means of advancing discussion on, and potential models toward, the development and integration of LSP courses and programs at the graduate level.

NEED FOR LSP AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

By now, the history and evolving state of LSP courses at the undergraduate level are well known (e.g., Grosse & Voght, 1990, 2012; Long & Uscinski, 2012). Yet there is little if any information in the literature on the development of, and need for, LSP at the graduate level. This has to do with the times (i.e., the challenges of introducing LSP even at the undergraduate level), as well as with the scope of the surveys and interests of the scholars. Yet, considering the growing interest in, and demand for, LSP courses on the part of students, institutions of higher learning, commercial businesses, and local communities, one might expect to find graduate courses in this area begin to emerge.

As a means of assessing this assumption, I undertook a preliminary survey of graduate course offerings at 59 institutions across the nation. The institutions surveyed were identified using a custom listing search option accessed via the classification section of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching website (see http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/). The search parameters were limited, using three of the six main classification categories as listed by the Carnegie Foundation: Graduate Instructional Program, Basic, and Community Engagement. "Graduate Instructional Program" refers to the type of graduate programs offered at a given school, while "Basic"

refers to the basic classification system previously developed by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. As the title suggests, the "Community Engagement" designation" is an elective category used to identify universities engaged in the community. Within the category of "Graduate Instructional Program," the selection was limited to institutions granting research doctoral degrees in the humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields (with or without medical programs) as well as to those institutions offering research doctoral degrees in a variety of fields, including professional education (i.e., business, education, law, public policy, social work, health professions). The Basic classification category was limited to those institutions classified as RU/H (Research Universities, High Research) and DR/U (Doctoral/Research Universities). Excluded within this category were institutions designated as RU/VH (Research Universities, very high research activity). The exact search query was as follows:

> Graduate Instructional Program = "CompDoc/MedVet" or "Comp-Doc/NMedVet" or "Doc/HSS" or "Doc/STEM" or "Doc/Prof" and Basic = "RU/H or DR/U" and Community Engagement = "Curricular Engagement or Outreach and Partnerships or Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnerships"

The search criteria used are based upon the hypothesis that, given the profile outlined by the Carnegie Foundation, such institutions grant foreign language programs greater flexibility with regard to program design and course offerings. As a result, we might expect to see a greater number of LSP courses at the graduate level, both cross-listed (graduate and undergraduate) and graduate-level-only courses.

The search parameters yielded a total of 60 institutions, one of which was discarded from this study for being my current place of employment. The university and department web pages of the 59 selected institutions were subsequently surveyed for information on their respective academic degrees and programs (majors, minors, graduate degrees, certificates, etc.) as well as course offerings (at the undergraduate and graduate level). A list of courses, if not course descriptions, were readily available via all 59 institution web pages.

The informal survey itself consisted of 7 primary yes/no questions and a few observational comments regarding the focus of LSP courses and relevant comments regarding any aspect of the institution or program (i.e., unique interdisciplinary programs, or LSP courses outside of the language department). The yes/no questions examined the following:

1. Graduate degrees in foreign/second languages
2. Graduate degree in Spanish (including Master of Arts in Teaching)
3. Program/certificate in international business or related inter-
   disciplinary/international program
4. LSP courses (any language)
5. LSP courses (Spanish)
6. LSP courses (undergraduate level)
7. LSP courses (graduate level)

As this study is interested primarily in the presence of LSP courses at the graduate level, it did not concern itself with the exact number of LSP courses (at either level). Nor did it ask about the nature of the undergraduate or graduate programs (i.e., focus, structure, etc.). That said, the "comments" section of the survey provided space for noting exceptional circumstances observed in the course of completing the survey, such as a unique certificate program, major, or minor and the presence of multiple LSP course offerings.

Not surprisingly, my preliminary findings confirm that despite the presence of multiple LSP courses and even certificate or other such interdisciplinary programs in LSP at the undergraduate level at a vast majority of the institutions surveyed, there are no graduate-level LSP courses beyond an occasional cross-listed elective. This is not to say, however, that no such graduate courses exist. Indeed, a notable exception is GER 524 (Business German) at Purdue University (an institution that incidentally did not fall within the search parameters established for this survey). Yet, as the survey results indicate, such courses nonetheless remain in the minority.

It is clear from this preliminary survey that current foreign language programs are focused primarily on the training and production of future academics in foreign languages (instructors and researchers) destined for jobs in academia. This is in large part due to the narrow focus and organizational structure of existing undergraduate foreign language majors, as critiqued in the MLA report. As with undergraduate majors, this emphasis drives curriculum content and delivery, and marginalizes content and perspectives outside of the canon. While this focus and structure may have sufficed for the purposes of graduate programs in the latter half of the twentieth century, today it is problematic given current trends in the academic job market as well as in higher education.

With current economic weaknesses and subsequent institutional budget constraints, it is no longer tenable for graduate programs in any university

department, let alone languages, to be focused solely on the production of future academics. While certainly an important and necessary part of graduate programs, it should not and cannot remain *the* focus. We need to think more broadly and creatively about what it is that graduate programs in foreign languages can provide our graduating master's and PhD students for success in *any* related career path whether inside or outside of academia.

TRANSFORMING GRADUATE PROGRAMS
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES THROUGH
LSP: SURVEY OF LSP SPECIALISTS IN SPANISH

Extending the recommendations of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages for broadening existing foreign language curricula and governance structures, I call for a reassessment of the goals and objectives of graduate programs in foreign languages beyond the current focus on producing future academics. This means de-centering and repositioning literature and language instruction courses alongside more diverse, interdisciplinary, collaborative, and applied courses that situate language within broader social, historical, geographic, and cross-cultural perspectives, furthering the development of translingual and transcultural language competency (MLA, 2007, p. 3). These goals shift the current emphasis away from language as an object of study in and of itself, to language as an integral aspect of culture pervading all facets of society, from the communicative to the performative. Among the more promising developments in the evolution of language curricula that may transform existing graduate programs in foreign languages along these lines is the emergence of, and demand for, Languages for Specific Purposes.

Considering the evident lack of graduate-level LSP courses indicated in the preliminary survey, I sought to consult fellow specialists in LSP to ascertain their comments on the need for, and potential role of, LSP in graduate programs and the challenges in developing such courses and programs at the graduate level. To that end, I conducted one-on-one surveys with faculty members specializing in the area of Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP), with questions that addressed the role of, and challenges to, LSP courses in foreign language programs. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed and coded using a qualitative table. In addition to the interviews, I relied on my own experience as a specialist in SSP, drawing on formal and informal discussions among the faculty at my own institution as ethnographic work. I use my experience as a way to further exemplify certain challenges faced in the development of graduate LSP coursework. I briefly discuss my findings below.

From the initial coding I found the following for each survey research question:

1. What role will LSP play in the development of foreign language programs?

Answers emphasized that the most successful and active departments are those that offer LSP and other opportunities to actually use the language in practical settings. Interviewees highlighted the fact that LSP is increasingly becoming the driving force nationwide and that departments not featuring LSP are waning. They also noted that, unfortunately, since most universities do not produce language-proficient graduates (meaning in professional as well as other specialized areas), the military, the US Department of State, corporations, and others, have turned to commercial entities to provide personnel who truly have communicative proficiency. Lastly, they stated that PhD degrees in LSP need to be offered at universities designated as high research institutions. If such institutions do not offer these degrees, interviewees note, private entrepreneurs will.

2. What obstacles/challenges do you face in establishing a LSP program?

Answers noted faculty skepticism, a fear of change, and doubts about the need for, and application of, LSP in real life. Interviewees also highlighted a lack of interdisciplinary perspectives, the problem of labeling, as well as the limitations of one's own field of "expertise" (i.e., an instructor with a lack of degrees and professional experience in the health care industry teaching Spanish for health care providers). Also indicated was a perception that LSP is not considered an important field in its own right, but rather one of many sub-areas within linguistics.

Focused coding of the interviews revealed the following:

1. Role of LSP: Crucial for student careers; LSP is important, needed, and useful.

2. Obstacles for LSP: Faculty itself; subcategorization of the field; minimalization of importance; lack of knowledge of what the field is about; fear of change; protection of faculty's area of "expertise."

As indicated above, the survey showed that there is a need for graduate-level courses in LSP and that there is indeed interest among LSP specialists in developing such coursework. One of the biggest obstacles, however, remains an internal audience: namely, our own departmental faculty.

As Alán José most recently noted during a presentation at the Second International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes at the University of Colorado-Boulder (April 2014), resistance to such change is due to the

existence of different audiences. These audiences are present when creating LSP courses, when justifying the creation of such courses, and whenever the subject comes up. One audience is external, the students who want to "consume" or take the classes and who will benefit from learning how to use languages in such a specific manner. Another audience is the internal one: the departments and the faculty. Additional factors affecting this internal audience include the structure of an institution's departments as well as the kind of university or college. This particular audience is not so easily convinced, as a result of the politics of boundary policing and possibly even self interest. Other faculty and administration colleagues are simply resistant to change or have difficulty in adapting to new and different ways of doing things. Other reasons for resistance can be traced to departmental limitations (i.e., budget cuts, competing interests, personality clashes within a given faculty, and ultimately fear of change). In short, the political structures in which we work, rather than student, professional, and community needs, seem to predominate in dictating the agenda and curricula of our graduate programs.

Indeed, these challenges corroborate what many surveys on, and histories of, LSP indicate about those faculty facing the development of undergraduate courses and curricula in the area, both historically and today (c.f., Grosse & Voght, 1990, 2012; Long & Uscinski, 2012; Fryer, 2012; and Long, 2013). And yet, despite these challenges, the field has grown and developed considerably over the course of the previous three decades, as these very surveys illustrate. Unfortunately this means that the onus of change, as history affirms, rests upon the shoulders of individual instructors and the collective specialists in LSP, forging a future space for the field within the existing curriculum, one course at a time.

As a conclusion to the intensive interviews and field work, I argue there is a need to critically assess and revise the following within our departments and through future publications:

- Current state of foreign languages (graduate language programs)
  - How designed (focus of coursework): What kind of courses do we offer and why? What is the objective of the graduate program and mission (school and program)?
  - Statistics on graduating PhDs (number of graduates & placement)?
  - Strengths and weaknesses of these programs (as a whole)?
- LSP courses at the graduate level
  - What do we mean by graduate-level LSP courses (practice centered or pedagogy course)?

- How are they different from other language courses at the graduate level?
- Potential value of graduate LSP courses to language departments and university campuses?
- How best to approach challenges to graduate LSP courses
  - Problem of "expertise": who is qualified to teach these courses (linguists, all Spanish-language faculty, qualified instructors with professional backgrounds in the specialization taught)?
  - Challenge of integrating culture and theory (critical thinking)
    - How do we design courses that go beyond translation, vocabulary, and grammar?
  - Challenge of place within existing graduate programs
    - How do LSP courses fit into current graduate curricula, what problems of a lack of vision for the future of grad programs are there?

MODEL GRADUATE COURSE IN SPANISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

In order to produce change, we need to provide model courses. To this end, I offer the following model based on a class I designed for use at the University of Memphis.

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SYLLABUS
SPANISH 7895:
TEACHING SPANISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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COURSE DESCRIPTION/RATIONALE

This course presents a multicultural approach to the teaching of Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) and civic engagement. We will discuss/study the effects of multiculturalism on the communication practices of the professional setting as well as theoretical and experimental research in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP). The main focus is to understand the importance of teaching Spanish for the professions, how to approach the teaching of this subject, and how to apply one's knowledge in the classroom. We will become familiar with how to design a teaching portfolio focusing on Spanish for Specific Purposes and civic engagement. This course has been designed for traditional as well as non-traditional students. The course will be taught in Spanish.

OBJECTIVES

1. Introduce participants to the field of Spanish for Specific Purposes within a theoretical framework for Language for Specific Purposes studies
2. Present the skills and competencies related to SSP
3. Present different methodologies and strategies for a SSP course
4. Present primary materials that may be used in SSP
5. Present classroom activities (methods) for the SSP course
6. Present supplementary materials for development of the SSP course and curriculum

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- Understand and assess the status of LSP in the context of globalization
- Understand and critique questions and issues concerning LSP currently debated among academics
- Analyze and critique theoretical and practical aspects of LSP (i.e., specialized communication practice, second language acquisition, linguistic and cultural awareness, etc.)
- Assess the impact of globalization on intercultural communication within specific domains of social interaction and professional practice (i.e., education, health care, law enforcement, etc.)
- Understand the interdisciplinarity, plurality, and diversity of LSP
- Assess LSP in the classroom context
- Create a teaching portfolio with a sample syllabus as well as sample course objectives and lesson plans on select topics in Languages for Specific Purposes
- Reach out to engage local professionals

TEXTBOOKS

Douglas, D. (2000). *Assessing language for specific purposes*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gómez de Enterría, J. (1990). *La enseñanza, aprendizaje del español con fines específicos*. Madrid: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares.

Pérez-Llantada, M. C., & Watson, M. (2011). *Specialized languages in the global village: A multi-perspective approach*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

COURSE COMPONENTS AND EVALUATION

Attendance and participation
Attendance and active participation are compulsory in this class and are essential elements to success in this course. Only two absences will be accepted. With each unexcused absence in excess of two, the student will lose 5 points per absence. Arriving late to class will count as an unexcused absence.

Homework
The student has to read the material from the book and the articles in eCourseware assigned for each day at home. Please note that homework may also include reading reactions, summaries or exercises from the book.

Exams
The course is divided into 5 parts and will consist of five (5) exams, as follows:
- Part I. The Sociocultural Impact of Globalization on Specialized Languages
- Part II. The Rhetorical View of Specialized Languages: Effective Communication in Intercultural Context
- Part III. Discourse Practices, Disciplinary Communities, and the Construction of Professional Identities
- Part IV. The Impact of Globalization on Languages for Specialized Purposes
- Purposes: Reflections on Language Instruction and Language Policy

Suggestions
Part V: Languages for Special Purposes in Practice
The course is divided into 5 parts, each followed by an exam on that part. Each exam will include definitions and explanations of the theoretical concepts and their practical application as addressed in class and assigned readings.

Presentation of an academic article
Each student will choose one of the articles in eCourseware and will prepare a presentation on that article. This will demonstrate the student's ability to understand and analyze an academic article. Specific instructions about the presentations will be given in class.

Final teaching portfolio and civic engagement

The final project will be a teaching portfolio. In this project, the student will demonstrate his/her ability to develop a teaching portfolio that follows the methods in the SSP field. The portfolio will include a sample syllabus, sample materials, performance assessment and rubrics. Specific instructions about the final teaching portfolio will be given in class. The project will be turned in the day of the final exam.

Digital public engagement project

Students will experiment with, and explore, new Internet-based tools and their application in engaging citizens in public deliberation and problem-solving. In engaging in a community-based project, students will create a web-based tool to connect the University with the Latino community as well as with different professions.

Final presentation

Students will present their teaching portfolio. Presentations will take place the last day of class. Each student will need to have a PowerPoint or handout.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Participation	10%
Homework	10%
Exams	45%
Final presentation	10%
Final teaching portfolio and civic engagement	20%
Article presentation	5%

COURSE CALENDAR

Schedule of topics and assignments

Date	Readings	Class Section	Important Information
Week 1	The Sociocultural Impact of Globalization on Specialized Languages	Part I	

Schedule (continued)

Date	Readings	Class Section	Important Information
Week 2	The Sociocultural Impact of Globalization on Specialized Languages Exam I	Part I	
Week 3	The Rhetorical View of Specialized Languages: Effective Communication in Intercultural Contexts	Part II	Civic engagement[1]
Week 4	The Rhetorical View of Specialized Languages: Effective Communication in Intercultural Contexts Exam II	Part II	
Week 5	Discourse Practices, Disciplinary Communities and the Construction of Professional Identities	Part III	Civic engagement
Week 6	Discourse Practices, Disciplinary Communities and the Construction of Professional Identities Exam III	Part III (review)	
Week 7	The Impact of Globalization on Languages for Special Purposes: Reflections on Language Instruction and Language Policy Suggestions	Part IV	Civic engagement

[1] Students will engage in community service. Guidelines will be provided

Schedule (continued)

Date	Readings	Class Section	Important Information
Week 8	The Impact of Globalization on Languages for Special Purposes: Reflections on Language Instruction and Language Policy Suggestions Exam IV	Part IV	
Week 9	Practical aspects of teaching Spanish for Specific Purposes	Part V	Proposal for teaching portfolio: abstract due midnight TBA
Week 10	Practical aspects of teaching Spanish for Specific Purposes	Part V	
Week 11	Practical aspects of teaching Spanish for Specific Purposes Class Presentations	Reading in eCourseware	First Teaching portfolio draft due midnight TBA
Week 12	Practical aspects of teaching Spanish for Specific Purposes Class Presentations Exam V	Reading in eCourseware	
Week 13	Assessing Languages for Specific Purposes (Cambridge Language Assessment)		

Schedule (continued)

Date	Readings	Class Section	Important Information
Week 14	Review		Final Teaching Portfolio due midnight TBA
Week 15	Final exam and Presentations of teaching portfolio		

CONCLUSION

The needs of students in the twenty-first century are changing. It is imperative that graduate programs in foreign languages broaden their goals, objectives, and course offerings beyond a focus on literary and language competency in order to remain relevant. I contend that expanding graduate course offerings to include LSP as an integral component of existing curricula better equips students to adapt and apply their education to the ever changing demands of today's global society. To this end, we must continue to update our programs through graduate level LSP courses as these provide a platform for the acquisition of specialized skills in the use and teaching of SSP and other LSPs. Ultimately, I envision the spread of graduate language programs in LSP across the United States. Such a development would revolutionize language programs, anticipating the needs of students well into this century as graduates attune to the challenges and necessities of their world and in turn adapt and respond to the needs of future generations of students. Yet, given the challenges faced today, it is for us to take the initial step toward the development and integration of those first classes. It is my hope that the graduate level SSP and Civic Engagement course outlined here will serve as a model and inspire others. It should generate further discussion and debate among LSP specialists, linguists, and Spanish language, literature, and culture scholars alike.

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