ASp

la revue du GERAS

74 | 2018

Diachronie et anglais de spécialité

Nolwena Monnier (ed.), *Languages for Specific Purposes in History*

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018

David Banks

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/asp/5194>

DOI: 10.4000/asp.5194

ISSN: 2108-6354

Publisher

Groupe d'étude et de recherche en anglais de spécialité

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 November 2018

Number of pages: 205–208

ISSN: 1246-8185

Electronic reference

David Banks, « Nolwena Monnier (ed.), *Languages for Specific Purposes in History* », *ASp* [Online], 74 | 2018, Online since 01 November 2018, connection on 06 November 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/asp/5194> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/asp.5194>

This text was automatically generated on 6 November 2020.

Tous droits réservés

Nolwena Monnier (ed.), *Languages for Specific Purposes in History*

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018

David Banks

REFERENCES

Monnier, Nolwena (ed.). 2018. *Languages for Specific Purposes in History*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 206 pp. ISBN 978-1-5275-1119-4.

- 1 At first sight this book is a curiously heterogeneous collection of papers. The subjects treated range historically from the 1st century AD to the present day, geographically from ancient Judea to Lithuania, and linguistically from koine Greek to the Eskimo language, Aleut. The title is a little ambiguous: here it becomes clear that *history* refers to the historical periods that these studies cover, and is not meant to be taken as referring to the academic discipline of history. Despite their disparity, these papers do cohere into a strange unity, which has the advantage of showing that languages for specific purposes have probably existed everywhere and at all times.

- 2 The book is divided into three parts, each dealing with a different historical period.

Part 1 deals with Antiquity and Medieval Times, Part 2 with Modern Times, and Part 3 with Contemporary Times. Part 1 has five papers and Parts 2 and 3 have three each. These are preceded by an Introduction by **Michel Van der Yeught**, entitled “Charting the diachronic dimension of specialised languages: epistemological challenges and pedagogical relevance.” Rather than presenting the typical type of introduction to collections of papers which give succinct summaries of the papers to follow, Van der Yeught takes the option of providing a cogent overview of the field, which is an important contribution in itself. He insists on the notion of specialized languages, as opposed to languages for special purposes, and points out that specialized languages have always existed. He claims that academic interest in such languages is relatively recent due to a long-standing tradition of opposition to the idea of specialization. He singles out interest in lexicological aspects of the question as being particularly important for establishing the beginnings of a specialized language. He also suggests a theoretical foundation for these studies based on Searle’s concept of intentionality. And he rounds off this wide-ranging piece with an argument for the necessity of historical knowledge for teachers of specialized languages. It is perhaps unfortunate that in the bibliography to this interesting piece, what looks like a typesetting error has led to the omission of Swales’ name, which makes it look as though his 1997 article is being attributed to Searle.

- 3 Part 1 begins with a paper by **Michaël Girardin**: “The use of Greek in Judea: new linguistic habits for individuals and the Roman administration.” His study concerns Judea in the period 6 to 136 AD, and is based on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek all had some place in the complex socio-political situation of 1st century Judea, and Latin was the language of power, though rarely used by the local population. There is evidence that fiscal documents were written in Greek, and while this seems to be the only language in which the scribes could write, they may well have been orally bilingual in Aramaic. However, some of the documents indicate that the scribe was not literate in Greek, but knew only those elements necessary for administrative purposes.

This situation created a form of administrative Greek which incorporated elements of Aramaic, Hebrew and even Latin, thus constituting a specialized language.

- 4 With **Leo Carruthers** we leap forward several centuries: “Latin as a language for specific purposes in medieval and Renaissance Britain”. He begins his contribution by claiming that 1704, the date of the publication of Newton’s *Opticks* “marks a turning point in the emergence of English as a scientific language” (p. 35). I find this strange in view of the fact that the periodical *Philosophical Transactions* had been publishing in English since 1665, and that numerous scientists, including Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke and Henry Power, had published in English in the course of the second half of the seventeenth century. The fact that he had earlier published his *Principia* in Latin, had more to do with the different natures of the two books than with a simple change of language. Be that as it may, he provides an enlightening discussion of the role of Latin from the end of the Roman Empire to the seventeenth century. He shows that once Latin had morphed into the various proto-romance languages, Latin itself remained as a specialized language, first as the language of the Church and religion, and subsequently as the language of academia and science.
- 5 **Nolwena Monnier** focuses on Gerald of Wales, who lived from 1145 to 1223: “Gerald of Wales’ books: first ethnological dictionary.” She concentrates on two of the twenty books that Gerald of Wales wrote: *Itinerarium Cambriae* and *Descriptio Cambriae*. He mentions a number of languages, gives many geographical references, and discusses the etymology of certain terms. However, although these books concern a number of specialized areas, such as geography, interpretation and the legal disposition of land, nothing is systematic, and Monnier concludes that rather than being a writer of a specialized language, Gerald of Wales was “more a storyteller” (p. 57).
- 6 In “Foreign language influences and vocabulary for special purposes: some examples from twelfth-century German medical texts” **Valeria di Clemente** studies the creation of specialized lexis in early German medical texts. The texts she considers date from the twelfth century. She shows how the vocabulary used in these texts is highly influenced by Latin, and discusses a wide range of derivational processes, including the various forms of borrowings and calques that were used in the creation of the new German terms. Although many of the terms were short-lived, their creation highlights the creative activity of the writers of these early German medical texts.
- 7 The final paper in Part 1 is “Coping with a foreign language for specific purposes in the early sixteenth century: the Low German translation of Hieronymus Brunschwig’s *Buch der Chirurgia*” by **Chiara Benati**. Hieronymus Brunschwig’s *Buch der Chirurgia* was first published in 1497. It was the first surgical handbook to be published in German and was a compilation made for didactic purposes. In 1518, it was translated from High German to Low German, and it is this translation which interests Benati. Like di Clemente, it is the techniques used for creating terminology that are discussed here. Where Low German already had a related term this was used, otherwise, a loanword was used where this would be understood by the Low German readers. Where necessary the meaning was clarified by, for example, juxtaposition with a synonym, using a paraphrase, or adding a dependant genitive or prepositional phrase.
- 8 Part 2 begins with a paper by **Mariarosaria Gianninoto** which takes us to the Far East: “Learning Chinese for specific purposes in the late Qing period.” The late Qing period lasted from 1644 to 1911. During this period, increasing contact with the outside world meant that it was necessary to provide learning materials for foreigners who wished to

learn Chinese. Gianninoto looks at two nineteenth century examples, Doolittle's vocabulary and handbook of 1872, and a textbook by Wade, from 1867. Doolittle's book covers a vast range and includes specialized vocabulary in no fewer than 85 fields, including international trade, missionary activity, shipbuilding and law. Wade's textbook was specifically intended for British diplomats posted to China. It covers both written and oral language. The section on the written language includes numerous authentic official documents, sometimes with translations and notes; the section devoted to the oral language is more general in nature. These two books can then be considered pedagogical tools for learning Chinese for specific purposes in the nineteenth century.

- 9 Perhaps the most thought-provoking contribution to this collection is **Irina Elsoukova-Lord**'s "Aleut for specific purposes: an ethnographic and linguistic study of the discourse of the Christian Orthodox Mission in the nineteenth century Alaska." She studies the ways in which Ivan Veniaminov attempted to introduce the Christian message into using Aleut, an indigenous language of Alaska in the nineteenth century. She wants to find out "to what extent did the Aleut language allow the re-contextualisation of the Christian message within the local context" (p. 111). Among the difficulties faced by Veniaminov was the fact that in Aleut, the distinction between nouns and verbs is fuzzy, thus making nominalization difficult. Moreover, as Aleut does not allow for abstractions and psychological notions, Veniaminov introduced these notions through the detailed topographical lexis that the language possessed. Elsoukova-Lord uses the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics to great effect to bring out features of the language used. Thus, analysis of the thematic structure shows that familiar entities are used as theme. Analysis of the process types shows that material, mental and relational processes are fairly common but verbal processes are rare. So, in presenting his message in this new language, Veniaminov had to revamp it to a different conceptual world.
- 10 **Carolina Simoncini** brings us back to Europe with "Italian legal language from literature to society." She shows that in the period following the unification of Italy, legal language, influenced by the French system, was relatively simple, with sentences that were short, averaging twenty words. From 1948 onwards, the language became more obscure, and sometimes even the legislators themselves did not understand the texts they were voting on. However, even before this date, legal language was perceived as being used to confuse the uninitiated, and Simoncini uses examples from Italian literature to illustrate this.
- 11 Part 3, headed "Contemporary Times" is given over to three papers devoted to pedagogical considerations. The first is "French as an additional language for mathematics' purposes" by **Catherine Mendonça Dias** and **Karine Millon-Faure**. They consider the difficulties of teaching mathematics to immigrant children in a situation where there are 177 pupils from 46 different countries. They carried out tests on basic geometrical terms, but found that the results were not easy to interpret. They present some case studies, comparing a Romanian pupil with a Thai pupil and a Chinese pupil with one who is a bilingual speaker of Arabic and Spanish. They conclude that immersion alone is insufficient and give suggestions for supplementary activities.
- 12 In "Always take the scenic route: designing activities for teaching English for heritage purposes", **Leonor Pérez Ruiz** describes teaching English for history and heritage *in situ*, using the Spanish Peninsular War as a pretext. Since this is done on the spot, that

is, where the historical events actually took place, it has something of the feel of a leisure activity. Pérez Ruiz shows how reading skills, oral skills, writing and the acquisition of vocabulary can all be integrated into this rather peculiar teaching situation.

- 13 The final paper in the volume is by **Miroslav Stasilo**: “Communicative project based activities: teaching Russian and French to the military and customs officers in Lithuania.” He looks at the teaching of Russian and French in two Lithuanian establishments, one for military personnel, and one for customs officers. He argues in favour of an activity-based communicative approach which is learner-centred. Experience leads to reflection and analysis, then conceptualization, and finally concrete action in the acquisition of the language. He then suggests that this can be usefully blended with a distance learning system.
- 14 It is evident that this book has not been proofread by an English speaker. The result is that, in varying degrees, most of the contributions could be said to be written in some form of global English. While some readers may regret this, even at its most acute, the language is perfectly understandable, and it does not detract from the fact that this is a highly interesting collection of papers. It covers a vast range, but that range in itself shows that the field of languages for specific purposes is perhaps much wider than many might have thought. I would like to think that this collection might spur more researchers with an interest in specialized language to branch out into historical periods and languages that they might not previously have considered suitable.
-

AUTHORS

DAVID BANKS

Université de Bretagne Occidentale, EA 4249 HCTI, david.banks@univ-brest.fr