English for Specific Purposes, World Englishes, and their rise as research areas

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In the first part of the twentieth century much of linguistics was focused on the languages of the dispossessed: Native Americans, colonial subjects, "benighted pagans" in need of the Bible, Caucasus mountaineers. Doing your research meant living among the poor and learning their languages. Now the world's most influential scholar in language and linguistics (according to the Stanford-Elsevier rankings) writes primarily on English in the university world, and there is a large literature on the English of the educated and internationalised class worldwide. World Englishes (WE) deals largely with the language usage and use of the educated in post-colonial regions, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) deals with the language usage and use of internationalised people worldwide. The same applies to the related studies of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and of English-medium instruction (EMI) or education (EME).

English has become the world lingua franca and at the same time the focus of linguistic research publication has moved towards English. This has happened in part because of the expansion of the topic areas of ESP and WE in the last forty years of the twentieth century, in parallel with the expansion of English. Other areas of English studies like suprasegmental phonology, diachronic studies or even theoretical grammar have not had the same trajectory, so how did these fields of study come to dominate in this way?

From the village to the metropolis

Both WE and ESP represent a turn away from the classical image of a language as a unitary object, with WE rejecting a 'best variety' and ESP

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rejecting a single set of usages that apply in all circumstances. These had actually been the elite form of language learning for millennia. It is at least an entertaining rhetorical exercise to derive study of both areas from Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens's *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (1964). John Swales (2000) cites that volume as the beginning of LSP/ESP. The authors recommended identifying "English for civil servants; for policemen; for officials of the law; for dispensers and nurses; for specialists in agriculture; for engineers and fitters" (p. 189). This was LSP for use in post-colonial territories, not European capitals. It offered "an alternative to daffodils". Rather than teaching the whole language as a system that could be used for anything, we were going for something more motivating, effective, and as Swales says 'manageable'. The German *Fachsprache* tradition began to be applied to language teaching at about the time of Halliday et al.'s proposal (1964) (cf. Hoffman, 1976). As I write the EAP world is overshadowed by the death of Swales, who contributed more than any other to its development. His brilliant early textbook *Writing scientific English* (1971) was written while he was teaching at the University of Libya, again ESP with a non-metropolitan bias as evoked by the examples in Halliday et al. (1964).

Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens (1964) were also early supporters of the idea that there are "varieties of English that are identified with and specific to particular countries from among the former British colonies" (p. 294). They continue: "In West Africa, in the West Indies, and in Pakistan and India (though with reservations to be mentioned below) it is no longer accepted by the majority that the English of England, with RP as its accent, are the only possible models of English to be set before the young" (p. 294). In 1964 the generativists and structuralists (American or European) were interested in languages as fairly abstract systems. For them, variation on either the geographic or the register level was either an epiphenomenon or a source of confusion. Halliday and the neo-Firthians, on the other hand, embraced a view of language which allowed its functions to be considered and did not require a focus on something independent of context underlying the vagaries of *parole* or performance, like shiny rigid *langue* out there, or competence in our native-speaking heads.

We can of course look a bit further back. The ancestors of World Englishes research were traditional dialectology in Britain and the US and perhaps especially pidgin and creole studies. Bennett (1908) describes Gullah in South Carolina, Schuchardt (1914) the creoles of Surinam. Linguists investigated the speech of the rural poor, people with no power or agency.

Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) has a longer direct history. Its research beginnings could be placed in German *Wörter und Sachen* ('words and things') of the 1900s and 1920s and the traditional *Fachsprache* studies which were concerned with the language usage of craftspeople in working-class or obsolete trades. Mehringer (1911, cited from Schilling, 2017, p. 12) emphasised the importance of context: "The more we know about the things, the better we will understand the vocabulary". More directly ancestral are courses like German for Chemists, or Commercial English, not based on formal research, some of which were low-status courses taught by people who really wanted to teach Goethe and Shakespeare. Now, by contrast, LSP, at least as it appears in research, is focused on law, business, medicine, the academy itself, the top of society, and it has its own journals and academic training (whatever teachers of Goethe and Shakespeare may think of it).

Now that English is used for research publication, and even teaching in the higher reaches of academia, and is a widespread 'company language', English for academic and business purposes is in great demand. Furthermore, tools like corpora, multimodal analysis and the genre concept have equipped LSP teachers to provide highly relevant support. Institutions of higher education in many countries have academic English centres and business language units. These require quite large numbers of teachers.

Domination of school language teaching by English has also meant an increase in the numbers of university-level teachers of English. To supply the demand from schools, universities and education colleges have to train more teachers, so departments of English or English Education have to expand. The World Englishes 'movement' has not created jobs in non-ESP English teaching, but the jobs have come anyway, mostly outside the first-language English-speaking countries, with increased use of and demand for the language.

Differences between WE and ESP

Many *Forum* writers in *Ibérica* slip between the terms ESP and LSP as I have done without discussing the difference. One cannot quite do this if WE is part of the discussion because ESP and WE have different places in a structural-semantic hierarchy. Under the hypernym Languages for Specific Purposes ESP would have co-hyponyms like Chinese, French, German, and others for specific purposes, with their own hyponyms like German for

Pharmacists or Chinese for Engineers alongside English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Business Purposes (EBP). The hyponyms are both the names of courses for students and areas for research. We could equally well give LSP the hyponyms Languages for Research, Languages for Business, etc. and this accounts for the numerous within-genre cross-linguistic, or cross-cultural, comparisons in the LSP literature. All these categories are fairly familiar, and their names can be given in English since the disciplines exist in a world of English as a lingua franca. As English has become dominant, ESP has taken up more space within LSP, and *JEAP* and *ESPJ* have elbowed the journal *Fachsprache* out of the limelight. AELFE and others have flourished but the Northern European tradition represented by the European Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes seems to have withered. The last of its biennial symposia was the 17th, in Århus in 2009, ending a once-dominant tradition. Nevertheless, LSP is a cross-linguistic unity. Many people work with English for a given purpose and at least one other language for that purpose, and the discourses may be similar across languages or complementary. This is a revealing line of enquiry, from Hoffman's GDR textbook (1976) describing the shared characteristics of the scientific registers of German, Russian, French and English, to Pérez-Llantada (2021, p. 16) evoking the intricacies with which "language choice for research communication purposes cuts across very diverse multilingual research settings and local populations of scientists with in-group multilingual practices." LSP is a coherent field of teaching and research with journals like *Ibérica* and *Fachsprache* dealing with a variety of languages for specific purposes and conferences covering the same range.

World Englishes does not fit well into this kind of taxonomy. Its hyponyms are presumably English in Ghana, English in Slovenia, and very many others, and its hypernym would be Post-colonial Language Studies, under which would come *Le français dans le monde, El mundo hispanohablante*, and a very few others. But these sister areas of studies are not called *World Frenches*, etc., because they are fields within local philological studies. Although pidgin and creole studies have long been cross-linguistic or cross-lexifier, Post-colonial Language Studies as a field has no well-known journals or influential conferences dealing with a variety of post-colonial languages. In fact, post-colonial language studies is an underdeveloped field compared to LSP. This is a consequence of the basis of WE as the linguistic study of varieties of English, which has no particular reason to relate to that of varieties of French. Nonetheless, one could think a comparative study of the

sociolinguistics of Nigeria and Benin or the linguistic aspects of nativisation in the territories might be interesting. Does Yoruba in Benin affect French the way Yoruba in Nigeria affects English? Is it significant that Macaulay's minute recommending English-medium instruction in India (1835) came at the same time as the French authorities closed Jean Dard's Wolof-medium schools in Senegal and instituted French as a medium (1833)? Comparisons of this kind exist in, for example, the history of education (Madeira, 2005).

One cannot compare LSP with the underdeveloped post-colonial language studies, so here I compare WE (in a broad sense) and ESP to see how and why they have participated in the shift of the majority of publication in language and linguistics from study of the languages of the rural poor or the remote past to that of the contemporary languages of the urban middle class.

This difference in the degree of interlinguistic discussion between the areas of study is related to their different positions on the pure-applied scale of academic disciplines and other criteria used by Becher and Trowler (2001). First of all, ESP studies are applied. Like German for Chemists, but unlike *Wörter und Sachen,* ESP is essentially a kind of teaching, serving well-defined needs, and research in ESP exists in the first instance to tell ESP teachers what to teach. This research has become so helpful, and English has become so established in our time, that courses are now called *Negotiation Skills* or *Writing your PhD thesis*, not *Negotiating in English* or *Academic Writing in English.* In fact, the spread of English as a medium of teaching encroaches on the territory of EAP (Dafouz, 2021). Critical EAP and, even more, critical EBP are all very well, but it is the recruitment sections of universities and the marketing sections of businesses that pay the bills and they want, and largely get, a technology that serves their purposes. While 'pure' is not perhaps the word that springs to mind, WE studies are not applied. Information about English in Ghana is not directly marketable and businesses will not pay large sums for courses on Indian English or even China English (though perhaps they should). On the other hand, World Englishes was developed by Kachru in the 1980s as a political gesture to enfranchise the second-language varieties, and all its iterations, including English as a Lingua Franca, have had the character of 'movements' driven by struggles against things like standard-language ideology, native-speakerism, and linguistic imperialism. These genuinely malign frameworks have broadly continued only marginally hindered by WE and its descendants. The Union Jack is still the symbol to click on if you want English in Europe, or the Stars and Stripes elsewhere.

So one difference is that ESP is in origin an applied field, fundamentally a technology offering practical tools for actual problems, which has revolutionised advanced language teaching, while WE is 'pure' in terms of not being driven by particular practical problems but instead steered by a series of ideological stances. These stances have had limited effects on policy and attitudes as yet, but it is typical of humanities 'movements' of this kind that they eventually change the climate profoundly.

Another difference is that ESP is more 'urban' than WE (Becher & Trowler, 2001). That is, the ratio of researchers to topics is higher in ESP, and research is concentrated around a few important (even economically important) areas, while WE offers as large a number of topics as there are English-using communities world-wide, each with their own linguistic features, sociolinguistics, and ideological stances.

Similarities

Inspired by the title of Axel Bohmann's book *Variation in English world-wide: Registers and global varieties* (2019) I thought briefly that ESP studies and World Englishes studies might be the same thing, just studying variation on two different dimensions: World Englishes looks at geographic variation, ESP looks at register variation. Illuminating as this might be, it is quite wrong. First, study and teaching in these areas are no longer primarily about variation in vocabulary and syntax. In LSP, since Swales and then Bhatia introduced the importance of genre, and then of the varied contexts and purposes of writing, register variation has taken a subsidiary role, ever more so as modalities of communication have proliferated. Communicative content is seen as genre-determined not individually created – writing is a social process. Using an appropriate register has come to be seen as rather a small part of effective communication, whether in business negotiation or in academic publication. Cheng (2023, p. 8) says "LSP practitioners' specialised knowledge may include their knowledge of their students' disciplinary cultures, knowledge of the epistemological basis of different disciplines, and knowledge of students' valued genres and discoursal practices." Negretti and McGrath (2022, p. 9) call for "deeper engagement with well-established theories of learning such as self-regulation and metacognition to design tasks that investigate and promote student learning, and that encompass the social, cognitive and affective dimensions of genre performance", because "a

straightforward disciplinary framing of research-based writing may not be reflective of the hybridised, fluid and multidisciplinary audiences that our students write for".

World Englishes was never only about describing the forms used in certain places, since its aim was also to legitimise those forms, and to classify the communities they originated in. But since its inception World Englishes has moved away from linguistic descriptions of the phonetics and syntax of varieties to a greater interest in the multilingual contexts in which they are used. Who speaks what language to whom? What status do the languages and language varieties have? What sources are available for language acquisition? More is known now about the findings from treating varieties of English like separate systems and a resource like *eWAVE* (Kortmann et al., 2020) gives rich and insightful information based on such a model. But the concerns of the contributors to *World Englishes* are now as often modelling the status of English around the world, testing sociolinguistic hypotheses or finding the identity associated with a certain formal feature as describing those formal features and their variation on sociolinguistic parameters.

One of the contexts for English use, the internationalised university, overlaps with studies of EAP. The area of English-medium instruction (EMI) can be approached as an EAP issue (Dafouz, 2021) about the registers genres and processes that turn up, or a WE issue about the relation of English to the other languages used in the environment, and how English is affected by use in this environment. English in the university or in international negotiation or within international companies is English as a lingua franca (ELF) and here too WE and ESP overlap. ELF has its own usage and sociolinguistics. "The position of ELF research is that the world has become so interconnected, and English so bound up with processes of globalisation, that a traditional varieties orientation is no longer viable, and that we should, instead, focus on English as fluid, flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural" (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 284).

So fluidity and hybridisation are everywhere in the discourses of both WE and ESP and the related EMI and ELF studies, and structural language features such as noun phrases increasingly nowhere. Another similarity between World Englishes and ESP is their shared focus on the language usage of educated people in middle-class jobs. With honourable exceptions, World Englishes and ELF studies focus on the minorities in post-colonial countries who use English in their daily interactions and the minorities in

other countries who have learned English thoroughly and need to use it in their work or studies. Correspondingly ESP focuses on the language needs of students, secondary school pupils (both "academic purposes"), internationalised business people ("business purposes"), and such people as seamen or pilots ("vocational purposes"). It is striking that the precursors of these two fields, creole studies and German *Fachsprache* studies, were concerned with the language usage of those at the bottom of post-colonial piles and craftspeople in working-class or obsolete trades. *Fachsprache* had a national-romantic interest in "all trades, their gear and tackle and trim", and there was also something romantic about creole studies with their search for the authentic basilect and the authentically African in it. But there does not seem to be much that is romantic about WE and LSP as they exist a hundred years later. Now that ESP/EAP is an applied field its focus has inevitably moved to the areas where there is demand. Similarly, WE, in shifting the focus from the nationally disadvantaged to the internationally disadvantaged, has happened to move towards the locally advantaged.

Need, supply and demand in research and teaching

Aside from fluidity and hybridisation, there is a different shared discourse on research in English and LSP, one of need, demand and supply. Hyland suggests that "the supply of published work may be increasing while the demand for it is falling" (2023, p. 30). Cheng observes that "many genre analysis studies may not have been as responsive to needs and the corresponding pedagogical implications as hoped for" (2023, p. 12).

One of the many bits of information I picked up in a long career as an EAP teacher is the difference between need and demand, or, more precisely, how economists in the 1980s defined this difference. Need is what people objectively need to have. Demand is what they are able and willing to pay for. There is a large need in the world for cures for tropical diseases, but less demand because there is a limited supply of money to pay for them. There is little objective need for more computer games but an immense demand. As Hyland and Cheng suggest, these terms can be used in discussion of research in the areas in question.

Most research in EAP, and much in English for Business Purposes (EBP), is done in university departments and is therefore subject to pressures within the university. We can model the departments of a university on the

parameters of need, demand and supply in research and teaching. The volume of teaching in a department and hence the number of teachers employed is largely determined by the number of students demanding the course. This number in turn is determined by individual interest or fashion and, largely, the demand for particular expertise in society. Society needs or at least demands quite a lot of physicians, lawyers, teachers, civil engineers, and managers, so departments of medicine, law, education and the school subjects, and civil engineering, and business administration typically have plenty of students meeting this demand. The rewards offered by society differ, so competition is variously intense, but supply of students for the departments is fairly large. Society demands some astronomers, archaeologists, and general linguists, but not many, so provision is made for relatively few places in these disciplines, even if individual demand for these places may be quite high so that competition for the places may be quite intense. There can be departments whose graduates are needed in society but which fail to attract sufficient demand from individual students, like perhaps chemistry or Chinese studies. In any case, the university employs teachers according to the demand for teaching, which is loosely related to social needs. Demand for teaching in EAP and even EBP is quite high, so quite a lot of teachers are employed.

The other parameter of need, demand and supply concerns the quantity of research. Even though the administration may not want to pay them to do research, individual teachers mostly experience a need or desire to do so, if only to keep or improve their jobs. There is thus a steady production from each department according to the number of teachers, and this research is of interest to colleagues in the field, if not to anyone else. I will call this base-load research and many English teachers produce it or wish they could. Over and above this base-load there is some degree of need or demand from society. Society wants or even needs plenty of research in medicine, for example, and it has political support. Consequently, such departments produce a great deal of research, much more than the mere base level due to the number of teachers, and probably employ a good number of full-time researchers. At a lower level society is willing to pay for research in archaeology. Consequently, departments of medicine attract plenty of research money, and even archaeology attracts some, and their staff members can devote a good deal of their time to research, which in general they like because it is interesting and advances their careers.

So a department of medicine has plenty of teaching and carries out well-funded research strongly demanded by society. By contrast, a department of general linguistics has little teaching and little social demand for its research, however much it may be valued by other linguists. They are at opposite quadrants of the research-teaching graph, but both have a balance of teaching and research, one with large amounts of both, one with small. Unbalanced departments usually have high student demand for teaching but relatively low social demand for research, as expressed by research grants and full-time research posts. This is typical of professional fields like law and business, and the humanities. Many students need to take courses in English to use or teach the language. This creates demand among the teachers of such courses for theory and research, but only among them. Outside the field there is little social demand for research in English, but teachers experience institutional pressure and desire to do research. Whatever the field, the individual's way forward is prestigious research. So the teachers of English are forced to publish if they are to keep their jobs. However much the university promises to reward good teaching, the most glittering prizes and the most collegial respect are for the research stars.

Supply, demand, WE and EAP

A final similarity between WE and ESP is their dramatic growth. In the first half of the twentieth century linguistics had few students and limited demand for research outside its own community. Admittedly, synchronic English linguistics expanded in the fifties and sixties and became fashionable with generative grammar and Chomsky's exciting claims about human uniqueness. But the lack of social demand for trained theoretical linguists and the bursting of the language-faculty bubble meant that the field shrank again. But demand for English teachers worldwide and for LSP training increased. The number of university teachers engaged in various forms of English teaching, either teacher training or EAP, increased along with demand for their product in the form of qualified school (etc.) teachers or bilingual academics.

In the best of cases, or the best of university systems, the increasing number of university teachers meant increasing amounts of base-line research in both English linguistics, often WE, and in EAP and EBP, so that the volume of research was driven by supply rather than demand or need. But most

institutions in many environments responded by creating classes of teachers who have no research commitment. They have no obvious upward career path other than spending unpaid time creating a research record. Neither the relatively lucky doing supply-driven research nor the unlucky trying to become researchers against the will of the institution can afford to care whether their research meets a need.

In a pure-ish humanities field of study like WE this matters less. WE is actually a boon for most English teachers anywhere in the world because they can write about the English around them, which they know more about than anyone else. WE thus offers an opportunity for local research that has an international platform. There are a lot of different environments for English and a lot of different 'varieties', and also several models to be tested and a range of ideological stances available, so there is a good deal of research to be done. Furthermore, there are important issues of justice and power which need to be addressed for a better world.

The relatively large supply of researchers creates more tensions in ESP because it is an applied subject supposedly aimed at solving learners' problems. It would be crass to say that ESP is a technology or applied field and therefore the only justification for research is need or at least demand, but need is a big part of the justification, and particularly of the justification for universities and research councils to pay for the work. Because there is a need for ESP teaching, we need to know what ESP is and there is consequently a need for research in the area. This research has been spectacularly successful and transformed English language teaching from intermediate level upwards. But the volume of research in ESP is not determined by the need for it but the number of teachers producing the base load. But what can hard-pressed teachers do? There are a lot of them and they will not get better jobs if they do not do research. One solution has been to focus on the local situation, to investigate research articles or student writing in "TESOL/applied linguistics or language-related disciplines" (Cheng, 2023, p. 12). Cheng (2023) and Swales (2019) criticise this area of study as not responding to a real need, and it does seem somewhat introverted. There is however an incentive to write about research articles. The 'urban' nature of EAP (Becher & Trowler, 2001) means that the chances of a given article in EAP (in particular) being relevant to someone else's research are fairly high, so its number of citations are likely to be much higher than those of an equally valuable article in general linguistics or Yoruba studies. Metrics that compare publications according to the number

of citations are likely to favour EAP publications above those from more 'rural' areas of linguistics and language studies, and this worsens the concentration on a few central topics.

When I started writing about these issues I thought I was going to complain about research that focuses on the relatively privileged, WE publication that is repetitive, and ESP research that does not meet a need (Swales, 2019). But a consideration of the plight of the large number of university teachers of English worldwide makes me think that actually the problem is that there are too few acceptable objects of research. The criterion of need and the metric of citation push EAP researchers (especially) towards the same few topics. Ideally both pressures could be alleviated if LSP could see itself as a humanities subject in which supply-driven research enlightens rather than solving today's problem. ESP research could open its field of study even more towards something more like the old non-applied *Fachsprache* or dialectology, allowing interest in specific language uses that are not needed for teaching, perhaps especially non-elite ones in the tradition of Pennycook (2006) and Preisler (1999). We might have to be more tolerant of publications that are just 'nice to know' for the wider audience rather than 'need to know' (Cheng, 2023). My impression is that an LSP journal like *Ibérica* shows that this is easier to do in LSP than in the narrower constraints of ESP and that *ESPJ* might need to follow. *JEAP* may be too restricted by its title, and might need to change it (*Anglica*?). That one teaches EAP by day should not be a hindrance to spending the evening looking at the English of radio hams (yes, they still exist), either contrasted with their equivalents in other languages or just as contributions to philology. Reviewers would not question the need for a particular piece of research, but could focus more on its originality, intrinsic interest and tendency to illuminate general issues. LSP and WE could merge even more than they already have done in ELF and EMI studies, so that EAP teachers could be writing more about the English usage and rhetoric of local homepages or notices for international students or guidebooks from this perspective or even the English of Spanish PhD theses, treating it as a variety to be described. Many BELF (Business ELF) studies look at communication across varieties of English and a WE lens might be interesting here.

Either solution would be less dispiriting than confirming the known within a narrow range of topics because one wants to get published in an EAP journal. However, both suggestions imply that much research in our field is and should be humanities research, driven by base-line supply, and not

necessarily responding to a demand or the somewhat different criterion of a need.

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