

New Developments in English for Special Purposes (ESP) Lexicology and Lexicography

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Introduction

The fact that languages are living organisms that evolve and vary as a result of different factors, including societal vicissitudes, cultural influences, technological advancements, migration and intercultural communication, among others, requires a continued effort to identify, characterize and represent the new lexical forms and meanings that emerge in various contexts and domains. Lexicologists and lexicographers thus need to always take on new challenges in their attempt to adequately describe and map our ever-changing language landscapes. Not only does everyday language change but also languages for special purposes (LSP) are subject to variation. On the one hand, new terms and senses are incorporated into already existing lexicons, while, on the other hand, micro-languages with a rich variety of novel lexical items keep appearing. Some cases in point are ecotourism discourse which has been accelerated by recent greater awareness of the impact of human activities on the environment (Penz & Fill, 2022); the language of digital technology, now that societies and technologies have become increasingly interconnected (Würschinger, 2021); certain medical talk, as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic (Salazar & Wild, 2022), to mention just a few areas of lexical innovation.

Predicting the degree of future stability of new lexical forms and meanings is no easy feat. Some of them, usually the most creative or controversial ones, typically emerge to satisfy momentary communicative needs, attitudes and intentions. Consider, for instance, the expression *eco-Nazi* recently used to refer to a very radical environmentalist, intolerant towards people with different views. Although it is represented in some of the largest corpora of English (there are 9 occurrences in the *News on the Web Corpus*, 14 in *The intelligent Web-based Corpus* and 10 in the *Corpus of Global Web-based English*) (Note 1), the expression has not found its way into dictionaries and may thus lose ground and then disappear or perhaps just continue to marginally exist without attaining lexicographic status. The opposite scenario however may also be possible, i.e., through repeated use, it may eventually appear in dictionaries. After all, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) has already included morphologically similar formations, such as *neo-Nazi* and *pro-Nazi*, that emerged further to the first attestations of *Nazi* in the 1930s. On the other hand, there are new words and expressions that have gained force over the years and have thus officially been added as lexicographic entries. Still in the context of ecological discourse, the compounds *dark green* or *deep green* and *light green* are now fully lexicalized and present in the OED: a *dark/deep green* is 'a person who is deeply committed to environmental causes or who holds radical green views' as opposed to a *light green* who is instead only 'moderately or superficially committed to environmental causes, or holds moderate green views' (Note 2).

Historical dictionaries like the OED allow the study of meaning evolution retrospectively, but they cannot tell us what the future of the various lexical items listed in them will be like. Corpora instead provide useful indications about the behavior of words, whose mere frequency may suggest that they are either gaining a firm footing or declining in usage. Artificial intelligence today also represents an important resource able to support lexicologists and lexicographers in their research. With a simple query on ChatGPT (Note 3), we can quickly obtain useful neologisms in various fields that are often not yet present in corpora. AI allows us to perform generic searches, while corpora are best queried for specific words or phrases, whose behavior in context may be

observed and compared with that of other ones. If we ask ChatGPT to give us examples of, say, medical neologisms, it will return very interesting data that would be difficult to retrieve otherwise, e.g. *WFH (Work From Home) syndrome*, *pandemic fatigue*, *zoom gloom* and *maskne*, which emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic (Note 4). Although not even ChatGPT can always provide examples of the very latest terms used in a certain field or discipline, it certainly represents a useful tool to collect new items and create initial glossaries. It seems indeed likely that both lexicology and lexicography will benefit greatly from generative AI in the future. This has incidentally been confirmed by research presented at conferences in the course of 2023 and already published in mainstream high-quality journals (cf. Curry, Baker, & Brookes, 2024; de Schryver, 2023; de Schryver & Joffe, 2023; Lew, 2023).

This Special Issue collects 9 research papers covering a wide range of languages for special purposes. The concept of ‘specialized discourse’ is broadly interpreted in that it is made to refer not only to those language contexts where jargon or technical terms are used, but also to situations where less complex but still discipline-specific vocabulary, not so common elsewhere, occurs and recurs. In other words, ESP is understood here as the specific use of English in given fields and related sub-fields, such as tourism and eco-tourism, medicine and the language of Covid-19, etc., encompassing a mixture of terminology and more understandable vocabulary, even to a non-expert ear. As a matter of fact, the degree of technicality of meaning and language choice always ranges along a continuum from precise and specialized to looser vocabulary related to various topics. In natural language the most likely scenario is to come across words, phrases and expressions that even in the same text or context exhibit different levels of complexity and comprehensibility. The former is the cause of the latter, which is strictly related to the concept of difficulty. Put differently, complexity pertains to the objective features of a certain item, while difficulty is subjective and dependent on individual factors. This is a necessary precision in that the two notions of complexity and difficulty are often confused and the two words are wrongly used as synonyms. It is instead obvious that specialized terms are usually unintelligible to the layperson, but familiar to a specialist in a certain field.

The present volume opens with Elisa Mattiello’s paper which examines the role played by new combining forms (CFs) in the expansion of ESP lexicon in several areas, such as science, information technology, economics, chemistry, medicine and so forth. Because of its cross-domain orientation, it works well as an introductory and overview work on the latest neologisms of this type. The study is both qualitative and quantitative in that it discusses the addition of CFs to the OED since the second half of the last century, but it also considers their frequency and distribution in two main corpora of contemporary English, i.e. the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and the *News on the Web Corpus* (NOW), in order to make claims about their stability and profitability.

The following papers focus on specific ESP areas: some of them take a lexicological or lexicological-lexicographic approach, while others address strictly lexicographic issues, such as the creation of ESP glossaries, the improvement of ESP dictionary entries and the addition of lemmas to online specialized reference tools. The first group of papers includes Daniele Franceschi’s contribution on English-Italian dictionaries of sports and games terminology; Antonella Luporini’s study of artistic vocabulary, again from a bilingual perspective involving English and Italian; Gesuato, Castello and Gaballo propose the design of a multilingual hairstyling glossary; and finally, Silvia Cacchiani’s paper discusses the challenges of representing paradigmatically related Covid-19 terms in online resources.

After providing an initial overview of the existing bilingual English-Italian dictionaries of sports and games terminology, Franceschi presents an improved hypothetical e-dictionary entry to illustrate the advantages of online multimodal and multimedial lexicographic resources, while also discussing the challenges of creating and updating them. Luporini instead shows how a specialized corpus of bilingual texts specifically related to art and cultural heritage can be effectively utilized for the analysis of Italian lemmas and their English counterparts in this field; the patterns retrieved in the corpus are then compared and contrasted with the ones appearing in four general Italian-English dictionaries and the possibility of creating a large-scale specialized bilingual dictionary of art, which is non-existent to date, is discussed. Gesuato, Castello and Gaballo illustrate a corpus-driven term extraction and description procedure, focusing in particular on translation equivalents and phraseologies in English and Italian, with the aim of creating glossary entries that cater to diverse users, namely (trainee) language practitioners and professionals alike. In this first group of papers, Cacchiani finally contributes to the recent strand of work on the language of Covid-19 first through the examination of the glossaries available on the websites of the UK Parliament and Government, i.e. on credible and authoritative platforms, and then by comparing them with other lexicographic resources with specific reference to some selected entries.

The other four papers in the volume follow a more lexicological approach. Cristiano Furiassi examines the use of

idiomatic toponymic phrasemes in Bajan, the English-based creole spoken in Barbados. The data analyzed is specifically from an amateur printed collection of expressions employing territorial place names, namely the ones of former sugar-cane plantations. It is shown how the paremiological inventory of Bajan consists not only of well-established and brand-new proverbs and proverb-like phrases, but also of lexical items that are the result of a “resemanticization” process of English-derived toponyms on the basis of the islanders’ communicative practices. The latter reflect the archetypally different *weltanschauung* of Barbadians from that superimposed by British colonizers in the past. Silvia Sperti investigates the use of terms in the context of migration discourse typically involving English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) speakers, i.e. officers, legal advisors, mediators, asylum seekers and refugees, who contribute to the development of linguacultural representations partly deviating from those produced by native English speakers. These instantiations cannot be included in mainstream dictionaries and glossaries, which are consequently unable to satisfy ELF speakers’ practical needs. Therefore, the creation of adapted lexicographic tools, that employ a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach, is called for. Sara Corrizzato describes some cases of lexical adaptation and innovation in promotional discourse appearing on the American Instagram pages of nine agri-food Italian companies selling their products internationally. The analysis shows that the new words and expressions identified basically aim at reinforcing the ‘Made in Italy’ concept. While some of them appear to have been created “on the fly” and will most probably not gain stability, other innovative uses are expected to linger in the food lexicon. Finally, Lorenzo Buonvivere’s contribution is a case study on the combining form *eco(-)lodge* in the context of ‘ecotourism talk’, which is examined by searching both native speakers and learners’ dictionaries as well as specialized and general English corpora. While examples of usage mostly describe an *eco(-)lodge* as a type of luxury and exclusive accommodation to be found in natural – i.e., non-urban – contexts, dictionaries define them only with reference to their supposed minimal environmental impact. Therefore, there appears to be a process of semantic bleaching going on in ecotourism discourse, whereby the meaning of *eco-* is exploited to advertise a form of niche tourism, which incidentally does not always align with ecological concerns.

With this volume, we have ultimately tried to put together a collection of papers showing that the lexicon of ESP is in constant flux, which makes it necessary to always monitor it so as to advance both theoretical and empirical enquiry and to be able to accommodate new forms and meanings in the dictionary.

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Notes

Note 1. Consult <https://www.english-corpora.org> to access these corpora.

Note 2. Retrieved December 20, 2023, from <https://www.oed.com>

Note 3. ChatGPT 4, <https://chat.openai.com>

Note 4. People who suffer from the *WFH syndrome* typically multitask work and home chores to the point where

they never get sufficient time to relax thus feeling depression, anxiety, stress, burnout and fatigue all mixed into one; the term *pandemic fatigue* was introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) to indicate a widespread sense of distress affecting the entire population as a consequence of the prolonged state of crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, whose end could not be foreseen; *zoom gloom* refers to the mental and physical exhaustion after working many hours on the Zoom platform; and *maskne* is a blend (*mask+acne*) indicating a number of skin conditions that can stem from wearing a mask.

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