

REPORT:

GERAS 28th Annual Conference

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The GERAS, or *Groupe d'étude et de recherche en anglais de spécialité*, the major French ESP research group, held its 28th Conference in Mulhouse, 22nd – 24th March 2007. The conference theme was specialised discourse and “social partners”, inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, aimed at identifying the types of English required in professional situations and assessing how the issues of professional communication in English are addressed in both teaching and research. A panel of eight representatives of the business community in the trinational area where the conference took place (France, Germany and Switzerland) contributed to a definition of industry’s needs. The business community as represented in Mulhouse stressed a good command of general English, spoken in particular (German too is a plus), but particular training in ESP was not considered to be necessary, as this is thought to be acquired on the job.

Among the guest speakers were Sophie Moirand and Geneviève Tréguer-Felten (Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle), who presented the state of the art in what should perhaps no longer be called LSP, since the object of the study has moved from language, and in particular lexical studies, on to professional communication, and further toward issues of culture and language in action, focussing on the various roles of the players in professional situations. The numerous successive revisions of a Principles of Action Statement in English and French produced by a major French multinational reveal differing

expectations from American and French managers. Here, clearly, language is indicative of cultural orientation. The second keynote speech was given by Angela Chambers (University of Limerick), who also assessed the current situation in LSP research, though from a more didactic angle, stressing the use which can be made of discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. The need for more user-friendly corpus consultation tools and more readily available LSP corpora were stressed, and possible solutions envisaged.

The other papers were given in parallel workshops, and not all can be mentioned here, though several topics can be singled out for comment, starting with the main theme of the conference itself: the relevance of ESP to society. This was variously interpreted in relation to the language usage of different professional communities, such as French judges, who are now required to use English in contexts analysed on one paper or to the increasing trend for French technical writers to use English directly, which was highlighted in another paper. Some of the techniques these writers use to cope with this new challenge were presented, but it was underlined that more research is needed here. One obvious professional group lending itself to analysis is that of LSP teachers themselves, and one paper reviewed the linguistic tools with which they appraise (or *benchmark*, to use one of the terms studied) the various aspects of their work. The French tradition of “civilisation” studies in the framework of modern language learning is put to good use here in an analysis of the success of Neil Bissoondath’s criticism of Canadian multiculturalism: the Caribbean author’s success in recasting highly specialised discourse into language which all the social partners can understand without oversimplifying the issues involved is put forward as his most significant achievement.

Other papers focus on the actual discourse used in the past and the present by different professional groups. The slogans of the New York Stock Exchange in the 1920’s and 1950’s are thus analysed using Kerbrat-Orecchioni’s grid for identifying the implicit. Unsurprisingly, they turn out to reflect unspoken cultural values, which the method is able to pinpoint. *Frugal* and *economical* as used by Jeremy Bentham and their reinterpretation by J.H. Burns and M. Foucault are focussed on from the point of view of both terminology and cultural history. The language used by the editorialists of

learned journals is also studied in both medical literature (*The Lancet* and *The British Medical Journal*) and for in-house copy editors of scientific and medical journals.

Discourse analysis figures in several papers, and is particularly developed in an investigation into the use of *if* clauses by medical researchers of both English and French native language, written and oral, in research articles, conference presentations and editorials. The results clearly indicate that the text type has a profound influence on the sort of if clause used, and reveal where native French and English speakers part company.

Summaries and presentations of the papers given are available on the conference website:

<http://www.ensisa.uha.fr/complements/colgeras>

and those resulting articles which are accepted by the editorial board will appear in the GERAS journal *Asp*:

<http://www.langues-vivantes.u-bordeaux2.fr/GERAS/numasp.php>.
