This overview to The Modern Language Journal’s Focus Issue on Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) takes a fresh look at issues examined in a 1991 article by Grosse and Voght. Reflecting on change drivers and growth in LSP, the authors comment on current challenges to the field and future research needs. Their remarks are based on new insights from the Focus Issue authors, a review of literature, and their own observations. From 1991 to 2011, the field of LSP in the United States evolved from a minor role in the foreign language (FL) curriculum, primarily in business languages, to one with a wider base in FLs and interdisciplinary studies. Amid calls for structural changes in language departments from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the push to internationalize professional school curricula for accreditation, LSP practitioners face exciting new opportunities for service and research. The continuing evolution of LSP doubtless will bring further integration of language, culture, and content to the academic and professional worlds.

This Focus Issue contains contributions from authors who have responded to various issues mentioned in our article on the evolution of languages for specific purposes (LSP) in the United States (Grosse & Voght, 1991), namely: the nature of LSP in the United States (Long & Uscinski), the LSP curriculum (Basturkmen, Fryer, Lear, Spring), a rationale for LSP (Doyle), and the assessment of the research base for LSP, including discussion of instruments to gauge the language ability of individuals in LSP settings (O’Sullivan), discourse analysis (Bowles), and the use of technology to enhance LSP instruction (Arnó).

From 1991 to 2011 in the United States, the field of LSP evolved from its minor role in the foreign language (FL) curricula of Spanish, French, and German (mostly in the form of business language courses) to one that is more deeply rooted in the curricula and manifests itself in a wider array of offerings in various fields and target languages (e.g., Spanish for criminal justice, German for engineering, Japanese for education; see Long & Uscinski, this issue, for a detailed analysis of changes in LSP programs over the past 20 years). Nevertheless, LSP still faces numerous challenges, some of which have not changed in 20 years. For instance, although LSP courses and programs are in demand at professional schools of business, engineering, medicine, hospitality, journalism, and social work, LSP practitioners often have to divide their energies between the demands of traditional FL/linguistics departments, for promotion and tenure, and the needs of interdisciplinary programs and professional schools. Caught in the middle, these U.S. practitioners of LSP are often neither recognized nor rewarded by traditional departments for carrying out LSP research.

Amid calls from the Modern Language Association (MLA, 2007) for structural changes in language departments, LSP practitioners and researchers in FL/linguistics programs now face exciting new times and opportunities. However, as noted by Lear (this issue), the road to continued
evolution of LSP lies in sustained collegial collaboration and connection with the community. From our perspective as the authors of the 1991 *Modern Language Journal (MLJ)* article, which serves as focal point for this issue, we are pleased to be able to take a fresh look at change drivers and growth of LSP, current challenges to the field, and future research needs in the field of LSP in the United States, situated within a global context. These observations are based on assertions made by the Focus Issue authors, current literature in the field, and our own observations of trends in the field of LSP since 1991.

**CHANGE DRIVERS AND THE GROWTH OF LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES**

Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed the impact of global socioeconomic and political changes on LSP. Globalization, the tightening of the job market, internationalization of education, immigration, multiculturalism, technology, and academic social responsibility have all contributed to increased demand and subsequent growth and development in LSP. Demand and support for LSP in the FL/linguistics curriculum comes from a diverse broad base of students, administrators, faculty in arts and sciences and professional schools, business leaders, government policy makers, and the local community.

Globalization has increased the demand for LSP courses and programs at universities around the world. As a result of globalization, local economies have become transformed so that knowing more than one language and culture is needed to be competitive. In the current economic crisis and accompanying tight job market, knowledge of other languages and cultures can increase the employability of university graduates. Students with Spanish, French, Chinese, and other language skills are sought by many employers and have a competitive advantage in the job market (Grosse, 2004). In many places, businesses, social services, and hospitals prefer to hire bilingual employees who can serve diverse customers and build better business relationships through their knowledge of other languages and cultures.

Globalization also drives the growing trend toward internationalization of education (Grandin, 2005). Professional accrediting bodies such as the American Association of Colleges and Schools of Business have mandated the internationalization of the curriculum of member schools. To comply with accrediting standards, professional schools work to internationalize their curricula with study abroad, overseas internships, exchanges, LSP courses and programs, and interdisciplinary studies. Encouraged by the accreditation process, universities have added new study abroad, overseas internships, and exchange programs. In addition, interdisciplinary and joint programs in higher education have grown, as well, in the effort to internationalize curricula. These changes have a positive effect on the popularity of LSP programs.

The rise of immigration and multiculturalism has also raised awareness of the need for LSP programs and courses. Around the world, populations are on the move for socioeconomic and political reasons. As a result of the growth of multicultural populations in many countries, there is an increase in the need for individuals with professional language competence to serve domestic customers and clients. In the United States, for example, Latinos are the fastest growing minority group and comprise about 16.3% of the population (Pew Hispanic Center, reporting on 2010 census; see Passell, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011). Abbott and Lear have documented how (mostly Spanish) LSP and community service learning courses help universities train future professionals to serve diverse communities in their local areas (Abbott & Lear, 2010; Lear, 2007; Lear & Abbott, 2008). Immigration has changed the demographics of Europe and Asia, as well, creating a need for LSP programs, often in the form of English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for academic purposes (EAP). Like general FL education, LSP owes much of its development these past 2 decades to advances in technology (Arnó, this issue; Arnold, 2006).

Twenty years ago, students suffered from a lack of LSP pedagogical materials and from limited possibilities for communicating with native speakers in their chosen professional fields. Clearly, technology has revolutionized LSP language and culture education by giving learners instant access to current information about target languages and cultures and facilitating the formation of “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) across great distances through the use of blogs, Wikis, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, chat, and text messaging by means of mobile communication devices and videoconferencing programs. The ubiquitous presence of the Internet, made possible through wireless technologies, has made it possible for LSP teachers and learners to access instantly rich resources of authentic language materials in their content field, such as live
television broadcasts, streaming video segments, interactive maps, and Google Earth and Maps. LSP curriculum designers can then design courses and materials that reflect socially situated linguistic and cultural behavior. However, Arnó (this issue) warns that the development of new information-technology-based pedagogies must be grounded in a clear rationale.

Another factor that has had an impact on the acceptance of LSP in academe is a new awareness of academic social responsibility on the part of educational institutions. Like their corporate counterparts, university communities now recognize that good academic citizens have a social obligation to listen and respond to the needs of the communities they serve. For instance, in recognition of this responsibility, Grandin and Hirleman (2009) reported on an initiative by the academic engineering community to globalize the engineering curriculum in response to socio-economic realities. This sense of academic social responsibility carries over to professional organizations. In 2007, the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages challenged language faculty and FL departments to respond to needs for new courses such as LSP to provide a more varied FL curriculum and to fulfill their responsibility to the populations they serve. The report implied that it was time to retire the literature-dominated model and create departments with “new structures for a changed world” (MLA, 2007, p. 1). The MLA further cautioned its members that the failure to respond to new needs could lead to declining enrollments in FLs and the possible obsolescence of departments.

At his plenary session at the 2009 Annual Conference of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL), past AAAL president Lyle Bachman added his voice to those in the field of critical applied linguistics (e.g., Kramsch, 2005; Pennycook, 2001; Shohamy, 2007), who for years had been challenging their colleagues to accept their academic social responsibility and to take a more activist stance to improve the lives of their fellow citizens. In his conference plenary address, Bachman urged his fellow applied linguists to apply their expertise to the solving of language-based problems in real-world settings by becoming involved in the community, in government agencies, and in charitable, nonprofit, and volunteer organizations, and by including more LSP courses and programs in the curriculum. However, the realization of these goals in the U.S. context is hampered to an extent by challenges facing the field of LSP, which are explored here further.

CHALLENGES TO THE FIELD OF LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN THE UNITED STATES

The authors in the Focus Issue have identified the following challenges to the growth and development of LSP in the United States: (a) imprecise LSP nomenclature; (b) sources of opposition to LSP; (c) resistance to interdisciplinary cooperation; (d) obstacles to engagement with the community; (e) lack of resources; (f) lack of trained LSP personnel; (g) absence of appropriate LSP assessments; (h) challenges to LSP research, including logistical issues and the hegemony of English in LSP research; (i) the difficulty of application of LSP research results to teaching; and (j) technology issues.

Nomenclature

In this Focus Issue, Doyle, Fryer, and Lear note the need for more clarity in the nomenclature used to refer to LSP research and practice. Doyle (this issue), for example, proposes that the study of languages for business purposes be referred to as Business Language Studies (BLS) to denote a “theory-based field of scholarship” (p. 1) with an “empirically definable domain of inquiry, pedagogy, and curriculum development” (p. 113). Doyle points out that the use of this term would be consonant with the “rise of other interdisciplines in other ‘studies’ programs in U.S. higher education,” (p. 113) such as Translation Studies (Holmes, 2000).

O’Sullivan (this issue) observes that the problem of defining/naming the boundaries of different context areas poses a problem for assessment of learners’ mastery of the language of a given professional domain. He notes that

It appears to be the case that while we can identify particular aspects of language use as being specific to a given context (such as vocabulary, syntax, rhetorical organization), we cannot readily identify exact limits to the language that is used in that context. This is because there are no “exact limits.” (O’Sullivan, this issue, p. 73)

A problem for LSP assessment of gains in a particular domain arises from the fact that any specific language domain (e.g., scientific language) cannot be fully separated from language used in other domains (e.g., medical language) and that language used in any specific domain also interacts with the general domain of language use, which cannot be rigidly defined. O’Sullivan states that developers of LSP assessments need to
develop tasks that will have students engage with the unique uses of language in a given domain in addition to having them compare and contrast language use across domains.

Sources of Opposition to Languages for Specific Purposes

In spite of the demand for LSP and policy statements by professional organizations on the need to restructure language departments to prepare students for employment in a global society (e.g., MLA, 2007), faculty in those units are often resistant to such institutional reform (Doyle, this issue; Fryer, this issue). Echoing Byrnes (in press), Doyle (this issue), and Fryer (this issue), note that established literature and linguistics faculty still do not recognize LSP as a legitimate academic interdiscipline, perhaps due to its applied (or instrumental) nature, a perceived lack of theoretical foundation, and feared loss of enrollments from traditional courses in literature, culture, or linguistics to LSP. Such opposition to LSP by senior faculty in language departments may jeopardize the chances for promotion and tenure of junior faculty who are involved in LSP. Doyle characterizes this issue as one “of academic politics and gate-keeping, [which] persists for nonEnglish BLS” (p. 106) in spite of policy statements by the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (2011) on the evaluation of work done by language faculty in nontraditional fields (e.g., area studies, FL pedagogy, technical translation).

As a result of this opposition to LSP, rewards and incentives for tenure-track language faculty to engage in LSP teaching and research are limited. In addition, according to Long and Uscinski (this issue), many LSP practitioners are contract faculty (e.g., lecturers, instructors, adjunct faculty), who are not rewarded for carrying out even mainstream language-related research, much less investigations into nontraditional fields. Lear (this issue) notes that this opposition also makes it difficult for LSP faculty to find the time to incorporate community service learning (CSL) into their courses.

Fryer (this issue) believes that LSP will not gain its legitimate place in the academy until graduate school programs promote the study of LSP research at major research institutions and reward faculty for engaging in this type of investigation (for further discussion of this topic, see Lafford, this issue). However, these established institutions are often slow to incorporate new (nontraditional) options for their students in their language degree programs.

Another example of institutional inertia regarding the incorporation of LSP programs in university curricula can be seen in faculty resistance to interdisciplinary collaboration. Lear (this issue) notes that the sustained collaboration needed between LSP teachers and content specialists in other disciplines (e.g., from colleges of business) is a time- and work-intensive affair without a sufficient reward structure. Basturkmen (this issue) also points out the challenges that arise when trying to integrate LSP language support programs (e.g., EAP) into international students’ programs of study without adequate communication between content specialists and language and literacy (EAP) teachers about students’ needs. In addition, Basturkmen notes that many students do not feel they have the time in their schedule to take advantage of EAP support options made available to them.

Another question arises over the specificity of the material that should be offered in EAP courses. Strong theoretical arguments have been proposed by scholars such as Hyland (2002b, 2006) for creating English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) to expose students in a given area of study to ways of crafting arguments in that specific discipline, rather than presenting them with a generic academic writing course. However, developing such specialized courses is a labor-intensive undertaking, and EAP course developers may not have the time or expertise to develop a range of ESAP curricula in various disciplines.

According to Fryer (this issue), a faculty member’s participation in interdisciplinary work and research often poses a problem when that individual presents his or her materials for promotion and tenure. Internal university promotion and tenure committees in a given department may not understand or appreciate the collaborative nature of LSP research across disciplines. In addition, finding established outside scholars with academic backgrounds that would allow them to judge interdisciplinary work adequately and fairly may be difficult.

Other collaborations that are difficult to effect and maintain are partnerships between the university and the community. Lear (this issue) notes that CSL work is often tied to the reality of long-standing “town–gown” problems that have caused community members to distrust the motives of university personnel entering their neighborhoods. Establishing relationships of trust on which CSL partnerships can be built is a time-intensive process. Even after campus–community relationships are in place, they need to be nurtured and maintained. A lack of sustained
engagement between universities and local communities, perhaps due to turnover in contact personnel, can lead to the dissolution of university–community partnerships.

Lack of Resources

Several Focus Issue authors (Basturkmen, Fryer, Lear, Spring) cite insufficient resources for LSP as a major challenge to its development. Cuts in funding at the national, state, and institutional level may lead department heads to decide to have their faculty cover core courses that students need to graduate, rather than using faculty resources to teach LSP courses, which are often only isolated elective courses and not part of established certificates, minors, or major tracks. Fryer (this issue) notes that in some cases, the positions of critical personnel responsible for LSP instruction have not been filled following the retirement of those LSP faculty members, due to economic hardships faced by their language departments.

Spring (this issue) points out the great variety in administrative and departmental needs and structures that exists in universities providing LSP options. She also notes that although office staff and instructors are often stretched to their limits, “some aspects of these [Flagship] programs draw more on academic paradigms, curricular alignment, and individualized instruction and advising, all of which can be accomplished very cost effectively” (p. 153).

Lear (this issue) notes that despite the fact that universities often encourage their faculty members to work across disciplines, funding line structures that funnel money from deans’ offices directly to individual disciplinary units do not typically build in resources for interdisciplinary work. Such transdisciplinary collaboration often requires external funding for projects involving faculty from more than one unit (e.g., Centers for International Business Education and Research [CIBERs], Flagship programs). In this current economic crisis, such external funding will become even scarcer or nonexistent in many cases. In addition, Lear points out that as universities find themselves depending more and more on income-generating models, university administrators should prioritize LSP and CSL programs, which cultivate ties with potential donors, such as the community and alumni from the LSP programs.

LSP programs also often lack adequate teaching resources, especially for less commonly taught languages. Again, external funding, such as that provided by CIBERs, Language Resource Centers, and Flagship programs, is often needed to create appropriate LSP materials. Fryer (this issue) also notes the need to have LSP materials freely available to instructors on the Internet (see, e.g., Orlando Kelm’s resource Web page containing resource materials to teach business Spanish and business Portuguese at: http://orlandokelm.wordpress.com/).

Lack of Trained Languages for Specific Purposes Personnel

Long and Uscinski’s article (this issue) shows that LSP instructors at U.S. institutions of higher learning have tended to hold a Ph.D. in traditional literature programs, or else they are instructors or adjunct faculty with a master’s degree. In only a few cases have LSP faculty obtained a Ph.D. in language acquisition or language pedagogy or have had extensive pedagogical training.

In this Focus Issue, Arnó, Basturkmen, Bowles, Fryer, and Lear all point out the need for more specialized training of LSP instructors. Given that LSP faculty are often required to review disciplinary content (e.g., business, medical information) along with language skills, they often feel ill-prepared to explain professional course content beyond their areas of expertise. Fryer and Lear call for more LSP teacher development in the content areas they will be teaching and note that LSP pedagogical training of heritage learners of less commonly taught languages should be a priority. Basturkmen observes that although EAP programs are widespread, EAP teacher education has been limited and should be prioritized. Future and current EAP teachers need to understand issues in the field and should be given the skills to investigate learner needs and characteristics of various disciplinary discourses. Bowles suggests that LSP teacher training should require LSP practitioners specifically to raise their awareness of qualitative research, which could lead to a higher level of engagement with LSP research on the part of future LSP faculty.

Assessment Issues

O’Sullivan (this issue) expresses concern over the possible alienation of the field of assessment from mainstream language learning and teaching due to the specialized language used in the assessment literature. He views this distancing as a challenge to systematically researching important issues in LSP assessment, such as the application of current assessment theories to different populations (heritage vs. other second language [L2]
learners), the applicability of the findings from English-language assessment research to LSP assessment, and the ecological validity of current LSP assessments. For example, instead of using scales with criteria that reflect general language proficiency, LSP assessments must use rubrics that reflect the “precise” (Douglas, 2000) nature of language use in specific domains. O’Sullivan suggests the use of various assessment instruments (e.g., portfolios or domain-specific projects) to address some of these issues. He also states that closer ties among the developers of language curricula and materials, instructors, and testers are needed for assessment to be considered part of a successful LSP learning system.

Other assessment issues mentioned by Focus Issue authors include those dealing with learning, teaching, and assessment of cultural competence (Fryer) and program assessment (Fryer, Basturkmen). Fryer notes the need for high standards of LSP research and assessment, as well as reflection on how well outcomes are being attained in various programs. Basturkmen suggests prioritizing the development of methodologies for assessing the effectiveness of EAP implementation. She points out that although Gillet and Wray (2006) argued that some studies offered evidence of the effectiveness of presessional EAP, they noted that questions remain about the methodologies used to assess that effectiveness. Before conclusions can be drawn about the value of EAP programs, those questions will need to be investigated.

**Challenges to Languages for Specific Purposes Research**

Several of the Focus Issue authors (Basturkmen, Doyle, Fryer, O’Sullivan) comment on challenges to the production of LSP research in the United States. As mentioned previously, the lack of LSP personnel trained in quantitative and qualitative research methods as well as the lack of institutional rewards for such research create serious barriers to such an enterprise.

Another challenge to the production of non-English LSP research in the United States is the lack of a substantial theoretical and empirical base. O’Sullivan (this issue) believes that this deficiency results in much work being undertaken by “educators who are reacting to a specific situation, for example, finding a solution to a given assessment problem, rather than by researchers who are attempting to build a cohesive theory” (p. 83). In addition, Doyle (this issue) and Fryer (this issue) state that LSP research in the United States has been focused on pedagogical matters and is in need of trying theory to practice. O’Sullivan believes that more communication between LSP practitioners and researchers in the United States and their LSP counterparts in Europe or ESP/EAP scholars in the United States could help bridge this gap.

According to Hyland (2002a) the field of LSP has suffered from “the relative paucity of work on spoken genres” (p. 117). As a result, Bowles (this issue) notes that LSP teaching materials often lack authenticity in spoken discourse norms within given professional domains, and LSP instructors are, therefore, often unaware of those norms. However, Bowles concedes that the gathering and analysis of authentic spoken discourse from professional settings is time consuming and costly. In addition, both Bowles (this issue) and Basturkmen (this issue) note that carrying out ethnographic research in professional settings may be challenged by company confidentiality policies and privacy laws.

Another logistical challenge to carrying out LSP research is the difficulty in measuring the relative effectiveness of LSP instruction. For instance, finding a legitimate L2 control group against which to measure linguistic gains and improved cultural knowledge acquired in LSP classes is complicated by the fact that LSP students are often heritage learners who are taking the LSP credit as an elective (rather than as a requirement). Given this situation, LSP research faces some of the same “legitimate control group” challenges found in research that attempts to compare the domestic classroom to study-abroad programs. Students who participate in study abroad are a self-selected group, voluntarily participating in a program in the target culture; therefore, they cannot be easily compared to domestic classroom language learners taking the course as a requirement.

On a global scale, the target language of most LSP research has traditionally been English, which is used as an international lingua franca (LF; Seidlhofer, 2004). As a result of the global relevance of the teaching and learning of English, communities of practice have been formed by ESP–EAP researchers in the United States and abroad who share ideas at international conferences and who publish in venues with an international following (e.g., *English for Specific Purposes, Journal of English for Academic Purposes*). Unfortunately, Bowles (this issue) reports that the same level of international communication does not currently exist among LSP scholars around the globe working with languages other than English. This lack of communication may be a factor
leading to the relative paucity of analyses of workplace oral and written discourse in those languages vis-à-vis the abundance of English-based investigations of discourse used in various professional domains. Thus, communication needs to be fostered not only among LSP international scholars working on the same (non-English) target language, but also among LSP and ESP scholars in the United States and around the world. Such new avenues for the exchange of perspectives would benefit all concerned.

Application of Languages for Specific Purposes Research to Teaching and Materials Creation

Another challenge to the advancement of the field of LSP in the United States and around the globe is the difficulty that applied linguists face when adapting insights from LSP research on workplace discourse to LSP instruction and to the creation of LSP pedagogical materials. Bowles (this issue) finds that the linguistic detail provided by research involving (a) the analysis of conversations, genres, and corpora and (b) improved ethnographic descriptions of a discourse community’s needs cannot immediately be applied to the production of appropriate LSP teaching materials and teaching methods by LSP practitioners. Bowles (this issue) notes that scholars in the emerging field of applied conversation analysis (Bowles & Seedhouse, 2007; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005) are working to provide a bridge between conversation analysis research and LSP.

Technology Issues

Arnó (this issue) and Fryer (this issue) mention that LSP teachers are challenged by the need to keep pace with the technological skills of younger students who have grown up with technology and are “digital natives” (Arnó, Soler, & Rueda, 2006). However, these students may not possess the critical literacy skills needed to use technology effectively, a situation that Vie (2008) referred to as “digital divide 2.0.” Arnó also points out that online language learners face the challenge of self-direction and the need for training and support.

Arnó (this issue) also notes that technology-based language learning tasks need to be ecologically valid, authentically reflecting activities performed in professional domains and involving collaboration and problem solving within a scaffolded environment to facilitate learning. Although LSP students are sometimes working professionals who have experience with Web 2.0 applications and social networking to interact with others in their profession, Arnó stresses the fact that more LSP learners need to become aware of the advantages of online collaboration.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In addition to addressing some of the issues discussed in the previous sections on challenges, the Focus Issue authors identify three major areas of LSP in need of future development, namely, program expansion and assessment, teacher training, and languages for specific purposes research priorities.

Program Expansion and Assessment

As Long and Uscinski’s (this issue) study demonstrates, the depth and breadth of university-level LSP program types in the United States have expanded in the last 20 years. However, Fryer (this issue) points out that BLS and, by extension LSP, need to expand to the K–12 level to effect longer sequencing of LSP development and higher ultimate attainment levels. Basturkmen (this issue) points out that LSP programs (mostly focused on English) already exist in Europe, often in vocational secondary schools and technical high schools. For example, in Austria, ESP is required as a subject for almost 65% of students who attend vocational and technical secondary institutions (Hüttnner, Smit, & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009). Despite the recent cutbacks in federal spending and monies to fund educational projects, it is hoped that the K–16 vision of the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996) will prevail and encourage partnerships between universities and K–12 schools to create a seamless bridge of LSP studies throughout the educational career of students seeking to apply their linguistic and cultural knowledge in workplace contexts.

Because ongoing assessments of LSP programs and the effectiveness of their instruction are vital to the growth of the field of LSP, Basturkmen (this issue) suggests several avenues of program assessment inquiry. For instance, English-speaking institutions accepting international students should determine the level of English proficiency needed for them to be successful in their coursework. In addition, universities need to explore the relative attainment of intercultural competence and language and literacy skills in different types of LSP programs (e.g., EAP and ESP in various domains).
Teacher Training

As mentioned earlier, several Focus Issue authors note the need for more extensive training of LSP instructors. In the United States, much of the LSP faculty training has taken place under the auspices of CIBERs or at individual institutions with strong LSP programs (e.g., Monterey Institute of International Studies and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). The target audience for many of these programs includes language educators and Ph.D. students wishing to prepare themselves better for the job market.

The CIBER with the longest-running LSP teacher training summer workshop (Faculty Development in International Business, Workshop for Professors of Business Spanish) is located at the University of South Carolina and dates from 1990. Other examples of CIBER-funded LSP teacher training institutes are located at the University of Pennsylvania (Lauder Center), the University of Memphis, Purdue University, and Florida International University. Purdue’s Doctoral Symposium on Foreign Language Pedagogy for Business and the Professions, first held in October 2010, gives Ph.D. students the opportunity to prepare for the academic workforce, which will increasingly welcome individuals able to teach and expand LSP curricula.

Two innovative initiatives at Florida International University address some of the challenges to LSP development noted by the Focus Issue authors. The first is the Faculty Development Program in Spain—Teaching Spanish for Business: A Global Approach, a summer program led by Professor Maida Watson in Salamanca, Spain, since the year 2000. This week-long program, which combines workshops on teaching business Spanish with company visits and seminars by international business experts, is the only LSP training conducted abroad that specifically targets U.S. educators at the secondary or postsecondary level. The second initiative is a 1-day K–12 Language for Business Conference, which attracts elementary and secondary teachers interested in creating LSP business curricula at their institutions.

Although it is promising that LSP training programs are offered at various venues around the country, they are normally of short duration (usually a week) and take place in the summer. As Lafford (this issue) notes, more graduate and Ph.D. programs with an LSP focus need to be created to move the field forward. Longer term (a semester or longer) LSP teacher training courses should be a required part of those curricula.

Languages for Specific Purposes Research Priorities

Several LSP research priorities are mentioned by the Focus Issue authors, including the following: issues of nomenclature, the need for theoretical grounding, a call for more studies involving the discourse analyses of oral and written LSP texts, the use of longitudinal and multimethod approaches, research on assessment, investigations into the use of languages other than English in professional settings, pedagogical research, and the use of technology for LSP teaching and research.

Nomenclature

Doyle (this issue) notes the need for basic BLS research on the nature of BLS as a field of LSP, and how it blends findings from the study of intercultural communication, translation studies, genre and discourse studies, linguistics, psychology, history, sociology, and so forth, on the way to developing its own meta-theoretical and metacritical discourse. Doyle also calls for a study of how BLS reflects power relations during periods of diachronic and synchronic change as various languages reposition themselves to become or remain competitive.

Doyle (this issue) suggests carrying out further applied LSP research on the following topics: teaching methods in various types of LSP courses (e.g., in-class, on-site, experiential, online); development of curriculum and pedagogical materials using technology; assessment of learner linguistic and cultural outcomes; continuing education; LSP faculty training; and BLS policy at the local, regional, and national levels.

Theoretical Grounding

As mentioned earlier, several Focus Issue authors note the need for more theoretical grounding of LSP research in the United States in languages other than English. Theories that have shown promise for their application to LSP research include genre-based theories (e.g., systemic functional linguistics, based on work by Halliday, 1978, and Swales, 1990) and socially-based theories of interaction (e.g., sociocultural theories of language acquisition, based on Vygotsky’s, 1978, ideas). Doyle (this issue) calls for a broad, systematic, theory-based BLS research agenda to provide insights into the ways linguistic and cultural knowledge function in a competitive global economy.
Discourse Analysis of Oral and Written Languages for Specific Purposes Texts

Tardy (in press) has provided a succinct overview of various research methods used to analyze LSP written texts, namely: text, register, and genre analysis; multidimensional analysis (Biber, 1988); discourse analysis; and intercultural/contrastive rhetoric, among other methods. The use of all these methods to analyze LSP texts needs to be explored further in future LSP studies. Bowles (this issue) notes that studies of spoken and written LSP discourse have gravitated toward greater contextualization of discourse in specific domains and have moved away from a focused concentration on the lexicogrammatical features of texts. This change can be seen in the large number of corpus-based studies on professional written texts and qualitative ethnographic studies of oral interaction in workplace settings. Bowles suggests continuing in this direction with a greater focus on spoken texts, the study of which has lagged behind written textual analysis.

Need for Longitudinal Studies

Lear (this issue) echoes Ortega and Byrne's (2008) call for more longitudinal studies of advanced L2 capacities when she notes the need for this type of study to gauge the long-term effects of CSL in LSP. Lear suggests following pre- and post-CSL testing of linguistic, cultural, and workplace knowledge with a delayed posttest 1 to 5 years after graduation. Comparisons could also be made between what students transfer in terms of academic course content from LSP courses and CSL experiences to the workplace versus what they transfer from other university courses over time.

Need for Multimethod Approaches

The use of various methods to gather data to triangulate and corroborate research findings is commonplace in many forms of linguistic research. However, Bowles (this issue) notes that, in the last two decades, corpus-driven methods have been appropriately utilized in the study of language for academic purposes, due to the relative stability of genre texts and the discourse communities that produce them. Alternatively, ethnographic and ethnomethodological methods have been useful in the study of workplace and professional discourse, where a fluid corporate culture reigns. Bowles proposes more use of multimethod approaches to discourse analysis that would combine ethnographic case studies, reader responses, and interviews, along with corpus-based analyses to arrive at a more complete picture of the professional discourse community under scrutiny.

Languages for Specific Purposes Research on Languages Other Than English

Due to the aforementioned hegemony of English as the focus of most LSP research around the globe, Bowles (this issue) advocates for more theoretically grounded empirical research on languages other than English. In addition, research into the changing status of the native language versus English in the workplace (where English is an LF) is needed. Bowles also points out that future research could include the study of other languages used as an LF (e.g., Mazeland & Zaman-Zadeh, 2004, on Finnish as an LF).

Research on Assessment

The Focus Issue authors identify several areas of LSP assessment in need of further research. For instance, Fryer (this issue) not only notes the need to measure LSP learners' linguistic and cultural outcomes in both classroom and workplace settings, but he also stresses the importance of obtaining assessments, by employers and internship coordinators, of LSP students' abilities to apply their linguistic and cultural knowledge in the workplace environment. Lear (this issue) also specifies the need for developing appropriate instruments and standards for assessing linguistic and cultural gains in CSL courses.

Another important assessment topic to be investigated involves exploring the ways learners use prior workplace experience and professional knowledge of their professional domain in their home country when learning how to use an L2 to communicate with speakers of that language who work within that same domain in other parts of the world or within minority communities in the LSP learner's home country. Researchers could also find out how LSP teachers adjust their teaching, course content, and outcome assessments when working with LSP students with and without prior work experience in their field.

O'Sullivan (this issue) notes that the current LSP assessment literature is characterized by a focus on practice rather than on theory and by a lack of communication among scholars investigating LSP assessment issues in various languages. Therefore, he recommends that language test developers communicate more effectively with language practitioners, by using less technical jargon, and that closer ties be forged among LSP testers,
LSP language curriculum and materials developers, and LSP teachers in the field. O’Sullivan also brings up the need to create culturally appropriate methodologies for assessing linguistic and cultural competence in different population groups, most especially the linguistic needs and abilities of immigrants in various social contexts. In addition, he points out that language tests for immigrants are often not affordable, which disenfranchises immigrants without substantial financial resources.

Pedagogical Research: From Planning to Implementation

Research priorities in the field of LSP pedagogy include research on academic versus workplace LSP, curricular research on CSL in LSP, and research on the use of technology in LSP.

Research on Academic Versus Workplace Languages for Specific Purposes. Basturkmen (this issue) suggests investigating students’ and instructors’ perceptions of the benefits and difficulties of implementing different models of EAP integration as well as the effectiveness of EAP programs on students’ linguistic attainment and their ability to carry out their studies. Basturkmen also points out the need for more research into work-related LSP, which could take the form of studies across workplace settings (e.g., engineering vs. business venues) and broad surveys targeting organizations in government and industry as well as language schools, training institutes, and universities in order to:

- aim to identify how often and how many work-related LSP programs are run (or other forms of instruction), for which languages, the range of professional and work areas targeted and the features of LSP courses created (such as, short or long term, pre-, during or postexperience). (p. 23)

Basturkmen also suggests identifying characteristic features of different types of LSP programs run by different institutions (e.g., university, private language schools, industry training organizations, government agencies), and discerning the impact of learners’ background professional knowledge on instructors’ decisions about course content and assessment.

Curricular Research on Community Service Learning in Languages for Specific Purposes. Lear (this issue) is very clear about the need to develop models and standards that would address the blending of CSL experiences into LSP courses and that would form part of an institutional infrastructure designed to facilitate the development and maintenance of CSL and LSP programs that would best serve the needs of their stakeholders. Research on CSL and LSP must also be disseminated in traditional outlets of investigation, such as scholarly publications and professional conferences, to advance both disciplines. However, as noted previously, university faculty are often not rewarded for carrying out LSP research or for developing and disseminating CSL and LSP instructional materials. If LSP faculty were compensated for these efforts, then more extensive needs analyses involving focus groups, on-site visits, and interviews with professionals in various domains—to determine the type of language they need to communicate with speakers of the target language in the workplace—could be implemented.

As noted previously, LSP and CSL programs have the potential to serve as examples of income-generating models through the sponsorship of employing corporations or the support of alumni from these programs. Carrying out CSL and LSP research and having those studies appear in prestigious journals is vital to this effort, for such visibility brings these fields to the attention of funding agencies. A well-written grant proposal listing several citations of theoretically grounded empirical CSL and LSP research published in prestigious journals can enhance the competitive edge of that proposal.

Research on the Use of Technology for Languages for Specific Purposes. Arnó (this issue) proposes more investigation into the relative effectiveness of different technologies and modes (i.e., distance, blended, and face-to-face learning) for the teaching of LSP courses. In addition, she notes that researchers need to analyze authentic electronic professional texts for students to become aware of the characteristics of electronic communication in their professional domain. Moreover, LSP research needs to investigate the way technology is used to form social networks in professional contexts and the use and effectiveness of mobile technologies for LSP training. Finally, Bowles (this issue) suggests carrying out research on how computer-mediated communication (CMC) is realized in specific domains, especially in languages other than English.

Recent and Current Initiatives to Expand Languages for Specific Purposes Research in the United States

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the field of LSP research in the United States is poised for significant
development and expansion. Lafford (this issue) discusses advances made by the genre-based, theoretically grounded content-based instruction (CBI)/LSP programs at Georgetown University and the Monterey Institute for International Studies. In addition, the three new initiatives described next augur well for amplifying the theoretical and empirical grounding of the LSP research database in the United States and for expanding connections between LSP scholars in the United States and around the world in global communities of practice.

The first of these initiatives will take place at the 2012 CIBER language conference at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. A plenary panel at that conference, titled Advancing the Field of Languages for Specific Purposes: Insights and Models, will have specialists in the field of L2 acquisition, translation studies, and corpus-based discourse analysis share the theoretical underpinnings of their research and make concrete suggestions about how these frameworks can be applied to LSP studies. This session will be followed by a workshop, titled “Advancing the Field of Languages for the Professions: How to Conduct Research and Successfully Publish in Languages for the Professions,” in which those scholars demonstrate how LSP research could be carried out using methodologies and theoretical frameworks that characterize research in the aforementioned fields of study.

The second initiative, the First International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes, will take place in 2012 at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, under the leadership of Professor Lourdes Sánchez-López, Director of the Spanish for Specific Purposes Program at that institution. The theme of the conference will be “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” and the conference topics will include the following: programmatic structures for LSP programs; sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and pragmatics in the teaching and learning of LSP; distance learning, experiential learning, and community outreach for LSP; needs analysis for LSP; methodological issues for LSP; the LSP instructor and faculty training; current issues and challenges for LSP; action research in the LSP classroom; and LSP and technology. At this international conference, it is hoped that LSP practitioners and researchers from the United States and their colleagues from around the world will strengthen and expand their ties to foster global dialogues on issues of interest to all those involved in the field of LSP.

A major step forward in creating communities of practice that will connect LSP practitioners and researchers from the United States with their counterparts from around the globe can be seen in the third initiative discussed here. Eastern Michigan University (EMU), which hosted an annual conference on the teaching of languages and cultures for business and the professions for 16 years (1982–1997), has recently renewed its leadership role in international business and language education by spearheading the creation of the Global Advances in Business Communications (GABC) Journal and Conference. The conference rotates annually among the three partners, EMU, the Technological University of Malaysia, and the University of Antwerp. Its goal is to provide the opportunity for academics and practitioners to share information on their research, teaching, and business practices in the context of the changing nature and level of global business communications.

The GABC conference is interdisciplinary, bringing together scholars researching in various fields related to the organization’s theme, including international and cross-cultural business communication and negotiations, global aspects of integrated marketing communications, communication aspects of international law and global business ethics, and languages and business communication. The meeting also focuses on new and innovative technological applications such as e-Semantics (cross-cultural, language-based international issues associated with search terms, string searches, Web design, Web site user friendliness, and electronic advertising keywords).

The first event in the GABC series, attended by some 100 educators from 16 countries, was hosted at EMU in June 2009. The spring 2010 meeting—organized by the University of Antwerp—was held in Belgium in collaboration with the Association for Business Communication European Convention hosted by Lessius University. The spring 2011 GABC conference was coordinated by the Technological University of Malaysia in Johor, and in summer 2012 the event will return to EMU in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

These three current initiatives—the CIBER 2012 panel and workshop on LSP research, the First International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes in 2012, and the founding of the GABC journal and conference series, as well as the genre-based, theoretically grounded research and CBI curriculum projects being carried out at U.S. universities such as the Monterey Institute of International Studies and Georgetown University (see Lafford, this issue)—bode well for the continued maturation of LSP as a theoretically and empirically grounded field in the United States.
As more LSP researchers in the United States take on the task of carrying out grounded native language and L2-based LSP research and publish in mainstream linguistics journals, and as U.S. graduate programs create LSP specializations in their programs, the field will gain visibility and respect.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

With great interest, we have read the observations of the Focus Issue contributors concerning the changes that have taken place in the field of LSP in the past 2 decades. We look forward to the next chapter in the evolution of LSP and predict continued growth and demand for LSP courses and programs. We come to this positive conclusion in light of the strong forces driving change in our profession, specifically globalization, multiculturalism, internationalization of education, demands of the workplace for linguistic and cultural competency, a growing sense of academic social responsibility, and continued technological advances.

In terms of the challenges facing LSP today, we see much hope for resolution of the major challenge to the field in the United States that stems from opposition from our colleagues in FLs and linguistics as university administrators embrace programs that respond to the MLA’s (2007) call to restructure traditional language departments and cultivate community partnerships and potential donor bases. We see a growing acceptance and mutual respect between LSP practitioners and language theoreticians and between traditional faculty members and faculty who support an updated paradigm. We also see talented faculty who embrace change, fulfill their academic social responsibility, and work together across disciplines in a powerful model of collaboration and collegiality. The evolution of LSP will continue as the field leads the profession further in the direction of a more holistic approach to language learning through its integration of language, culture, communication, content, and context for real application in fields such as business, engineering, medicine, law, hospitality, and community service.

NOTE

1Details on the CIBER-based LSP teacher training programs in this section were the result of research carried out by Will Thompson, affiliated with the University of Memphis CIBER.

REFERENCES


