

RECENT TRENDS IN ASIAN ESP

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Abstract

Due to internationalization and growth of business, English for specific needs has become increasingly important worldwide. English Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a more vital role in Asia. A review of recent trends in ESP revealed the growth of ESP practice in Asian contexts. This study therefore explored recent trends in Asian ESP from 2011 to 2013. *The Asian ESP Journal* as a flagship journal was chosen for a content analysis in this study. Descriptive statistics was used for data analysis to draw the conclusion of the study. Results of the study revealed trends in four areas of interest: authors and geographical origins of articles, topics, skills and targets. Several Asian trends and possibilities were highlighted. Further inquiry should examine a specific area of interest.

Keywords: Asian ESP, English Specific Purposes, recent trends, *The Asian ESP Journal*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The trends, traditions and development in ESP teaching and research have been reviewed continuously and could be seen from several prior research studies. Gao, Li and Lu (2001) reviewed research trends in four Western Applied Linguistics (AL) journals between 1985 and 1997. Hewings (2002) reviewed ESP research published between 1980 and 2001. Master (2005) analyzed written and spoken texts in ESP between 1997 and 2001. Pradhan (2013) provided a detailed account of topic researches carried out in the field of ESP and notes that in research articles published during 2000 to 2010. Gecikli (2013) reviewed ESP trends and research designs published between 2008 and 2013 and surveyed the evolution and current state of the research designs. All these reflect a long history of ESP.

Following the prior study, this present study will review the current ESP trends, focusing on the practice in Asian context. However, this present study specifically focused on the current trends in Asian ESP practice which seems to be overlooked. Asian ESP also has a long history. A review of recent trends to see how far ESP develops in the Asian contexts and in which direction it is moving to is therefore needed for several reasons. English has become a means of communication among Asians. It is an official language among AEC country members. English for specific needs has been increasingly important. Due to the growth of business and advance of science and technology, English Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a more vital role in language education. A look at any issues relating to ESP sheds light to ESP practice in Asian contexts more or less. Two research questions were formulated to review this issue:

- 1) What are the recent trends in the Asian ESP?
- 2) In which directions are the trends moving to?

2. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

This study primarily explored recent trends in Asian ESP from 2011 to 2013 with two specific purposes which were to:

- 1) Analyze the articles in four areas of interest: authors and geographical origins of articles, topics, skills, and targets and
- 2) Predict the directions the Asian ESP trends are moving to.

3. METHODS OF THE STUDY

This study was a content analysis. The results of the study were gleaned primarily from all articles published in the flagship journal of the field, *The Asian ESP Journal* from 2011 to 2013. Seventy articles were analyzed, following Hewings' framework (2002) which included these four categories: authors and geographical origins of articles, topics, skills, and targets. The origins of articles referred to the countries where the studies were conducted. The topics included text/discourse analysis, program description, needs analysis and syllabus design, materials and methods, argument and discussion, testing, teacher training and other. The skills included written and speech discourse. Lastly, the targets involved professionals or students.

To analyze the article, each of these categories was counted according to the occurrence frequency under relevant content. Descriptive statistics illustrated in frequency/percentage tables which were presented according to the range from the most frequently examined to the least. Besides, this tendency was discussed depending on the knowledge/logic behind such presence variation from inter and intra-contextual extents which function as indicators of the Asian ESP inquiry direction.

4. RESULT OF THE STUDY

Four areas of interest were analyzed and results of the analysis were presented based on the four areas.

4.1. Authors and geographical origins of articles

Table 1: Origin of articles from the most to the least

Country	2011	2012	2013*	Total	Percent	Order
China	10	3	4	17	24.28	1
Taiwan	5	6	4	15	21.42	2
Iran	5	4	1	10	14.28	3
Hong Kong	1	2	3	6	8.57	4
Malaysia	1	3	1	5	7.14	5
Thailand	3	0	1	4	5.71	6
Japan	1	2	1	4	5.71	6
Singapore	1	0	1	2	2.85	8
America	0	1	1	2	2.85	9
Lebanon	0	1	0	1	1.42	10
India	0	1	0	1	1.42	11
UAE	0	1	0	1	1.42	12
Saudi Arabia	0	0	1	1	1.42	13
United Kingdom	0	0	1	1	1.42	14

* 2013 included the first three published issues while 2011 and 2012 included all four issues.

Most articles originated from fourteen countries. A high percentage of articles (60%) originated from the three highest percentages: China (n=17, 24.28%), Taiwan (n=15, 21.42%) and Iran (n=10, 14.28%). The remaining (40 %) originated from other countries. In 2011, most of the articles originated from Far East Asia: China, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong. In 2012 and 2013, articles included some originating from other parts of Asia: Lebanon, India, UAE and Saudi Arabia. This reflects two main trends: first, the spread of ESP around Asia; second, the acceptance of ESP as a recognized academic discipline in a growing number of Asian countries. It is possible that this discipline is growing and more recognized in other Asian countries.

4.2. Topics

Tables below provide a breakdown of the topic of articles, with seven main categories identified. Articles did not fit these seven categories were identified as 'other.'

Table 2: Percent (and Raw Data) of topics

Topic	2011	2012	2013	Total
Text/discourse analysis	18.15 (5)	8.33 (2)	15.78 (3)	14.49 (10)
Program description	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Needs analysis/syllabus design	22.22 (6)	16.66 (4)	10.52 (2)	17.37 (12)
Materials/methods	3.70 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.44 (1)
Argument	3.70 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.44 (1)
Testing	0 (0)	3.70 (1)	0 (0)	1.44 (1)
Teacher training	0 (0)	0 (0)	3.70 (1)	1.44 (1)
Other	51.85 (14)	70.83 (17)	68.42 (13)	62.72 (44)

The majority of articles have been centered on the category ‘other’ (62.72%, n = 44) while the remaining (38.28%, n = 26) have fall into one of the identified topics. Among all seven identified topics, none was on program description and the majority (31.86%, n = 22) centered on these two identified topics: needs analysis and syllabus design (17.37%, n = 12) and text/discourse analysis (14.49%, n = 10) respectively. Needs analysis and syllabus design outstandingly predominated in 2011 and 2012 but text/discourse analysis becomes the major interest in 2013. Only 6.42% (n = 4) were on these four identified topics each of which equaled in number: materials/methods, argument, testing and teacher training. This reflects two main trends: first and more importantly, sub-discipline variation of Asian ESP; second, needs analysis and syllabus design and text/discourse analysis as major ESP pedagogical interests in Asian context. It is possible that the influence of pedagogical implications will continue in the future.

The two predominant identified topics were examined in further details as shown below.

On text/discourse analysis, the results of the examination included:

a. Genre analysis

- Looking Beyond Comparative Descriptions of Subject Behaviors: A Pedagogically Motivated Qualitative Study of Research Results in Applied Linguistics and Education
(Focus: English for research purposes, genre analysis, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, educational linguistics, and educational and applied linguistics research)
- Exploring Genre Variations in Research Article Introductions within a Single Sub-discipline: EOP versus EAP
(Focus: genre analysis, research article introduction, Sub-disciplinary variation, ESP, EAP, and EOP)
- Argumentative Strategies of Newspaper Editorials in English across Cultures
(Focus: English newspaper editorials, argumentative strategies, cross cultural persuasive discourse, and genre analysis)
- Construing Experiential Organization in Research Article Abstracts: A Genre-based Approach
(Focus: experiential organization, transitivity, process type, generic element, and generic structure)

b. Corpus study

- Corpus Study of Lexical Bundles: Journalistic Discourse in Focus
(Focus: lexical bundles, journalistic discourse, newspaper text types, and referential bundles)
- An Analysis of Lexical Bundles in Research Article Abstracts by Iranian and Native English-speaking Authors of Applied Linguistics Articles
(Focus: lexical bundles, multiword expressions, corpus linguistics, research articles, and abstracts)

c. Specialization

- Exploring Professional Attributes of Being a Qualified Chinese Interpreter in the Field of Exhibition and Convention
 (Focus: professional attributes, interpreter, exhibition and convention)
- d. Business English
 - Recent Developments in Pedagogical Research on Business English in China: A Synthesis of Literature
 (Focus: business English, ESP, pedagogical research, and multi-competent business English talents)

On need analysis and syllabus design, the results of the examination consisted of:

- a. Specialization
 - Learning Needs of Thai Civil Engineering Students
 (Focus: needs analysis, learning needs, engineering students, and ESP)
 - An Impact Study on Alignment of Biomedical Engineering ESP with Content Subjects
 (Focus: ESP curriculum development, alignment of ESP and content subjects, biomedical engineering ESP, roles of ESP and host department, and collaboration between academics and professionals)
 - Overcoming English Proficiency Challenges through Needs Assessment
 (Focus: needs assessment, EAP, ESP, and learning needs)
 - A Needs Analysis of Culinary Arts Majors' ESP Learning in Taiwan's Context (Focus: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), needs analysis, and culinary arts curriculum)
 - Investigating the Academic English Language Target Needs of Undergraduates at the Faculty of Applied Science at Al-Aqsa University: Students' Perceptions
 (Focus: English for academic purposes, needs analysis, and target needs)
- b. Business English
 - Curriculum Development for Business English Students in China: The Case of UIBE (Focus: business English, curriculum development)
 - Developing a National Curriculum for BA Program in Business English of China (Focus: business English program, curriculum design, English language teaching)
 - ESBP Course Design for Chinese International Business Personnel
 (Focus: international business personnel, course design)

The examination reflects this main trend that genre analysis, corpus study, specialization and business English will influence text/discourse analysis, and need analysis and syllabus design.

4.3. Skills

Articles presenting text and discourse analysis were further examined. These articles fell into those which analyzed writing or those which analyzed speech.

Table 3: Writing or Speech

	2011	2012	2013	Total	Percent
Writing	0	9	8	17	70.83
Speech	4	2	1	7	29.16

It is clear that analysis of written text has recently been prevalent. The majority of articles analyzed writing (70.83%, n = 17) while the remaining analyzed speech (29.16%, n = 17). There was none in 2011 but the interest in written analysis has increased significantly in 2012 and 2013. On the other hand, the interest in speech analysis has decreased drastically in 2012 and 2013. It is possible that written analysis still predominates.

4.4. Targets

The articles presenting text and discourse analysis were also examined further. The examination divides these articles into those which targeted at professionals and those which targeted at students.

Table 4: Professionals or Students

	2011	2012	2013	Total	Percent
Professionals	13	6	4	23	33.33
Students	14	18	14	46	66.66

It is clear that students have recently been the dominant focus of ESP study in Asian context. The majority of articles targeted at students (66.66%, n = 46) while the remaining targeted at professionals (33.33%, n = 23). There have been steady increases in studies targeting at students while there has been a drastic decrease in studies targeting at professionals. It is possible that students will still be the main focus in Asian ESP.

5. CONCLUSION

Several present trends and possible tendencies were highlighted:

a. Localization

It seems likely that ESP research and practice will continue to spread geographically and locally around Asia and the present trends of article publication suggest that reports of work in middle-east countries will represent particular areas of growth in ESP. There will be a growing number of Asian countries to originate ESP work. Most importantly, the regional economic integration of AEC will play a major role in language education for specific needs.

b. Growth of ESP as academic discipline

Interests in sub-discipline variation of Asian ESP have been increased. Among the variation, needs analysis and syllabus design and text/discourse analysis are major areas of ESP pedagogical interests. This reflects the growing influence of ESP in the future. This also reflects that ESP may become a more recognized academic discipline.

c. Genre analysis and corpus analysis

Genre analysis and corpus study have been prevalent. It is highly likely that this influence is developing over the next decade or so.

d. Specialization

The analysis of ESP courses in specific contexts has become predominant. This reflects that the specialization of ESP courses is growing in Asian contexts.

e. Growth of business English

The rapid growth of courses in Business English around Asia is reflected in the increasing percentage of publications in this area. The growth of Business English courses in universities is likely to draw more attention from ESP practitioners.

f. Skill Focus

Analyses of written text and discourse, English for specific needs or skilled practitioners, and mass media tend to draw more attention to ESP practitioners.

g. Targets

Students tend to play a vital role in Asian ESP in the future. It also reflects a tendency of professionals due to the growth of internationalization, localization, business English and specialization of skilled practice.

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