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**Accounting for the evolution of specialised languages in times of intellectual progress: theoretical issues and suggestions**

In 1919, Max Weber wrote: “science has entered a stage of specialisation that has no precedent and that will continue for all time. [...] Nowadays, a really definitive and valuable achievement is always the product of specialisation” (2004 [1919]: 7–8). In parallel with scientific specialisation, languages also specialise so that specialists can communicate; specialised varieties of languages (SVLs) emerge to express various forms of specialisedness: medical French, English for economics, German for engineers, etc. Now, in times of fast-paced intellectual progress, how do SVLs evolve?

The common answers provided by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) authors generally draw on John Swales’s proposition that “discourse communities” exist (1990) and that they take care of necessary changes in language. Still, when one examines the case in detail, it is difficult to understand how one discourse community will both solidly agree to use one specialised variety of English and, at the same time, solidly agree that it should evolve thus and not otherwise. In other words, the notion of discourse community may be too compact to account for contrasting views which develop in specialised domains and fuel changes in SVLs. Specific forms of specialisation that develop inside individual persons are necessary to explain disagreement and debate among communities. The rub is that ESP authors have no such notion as individual specialisation in their theoretical arsenal.

Ths suggested answer developed in the presentation is that specialisation is not monopolised by communities (of medical doctors, lawyers, accountants...) because it is originally an individual mental state that belongs in the category of “intentional states” described by John Searle, an American philosopher (Searle 1995; Van der Yeught 2016). Once individual specialisation becomes an accepted concept, debates and disagreements among specialised communities’ members, splinter groups and schools of thought can be conceived, together with the resulting evolution of the relevant SVLs. Given that Searle also theorises “collective intentional states”, accounting for the evolution of SVLs requires a theory of specialisation both as individual and collective mental states, still a conceptual novelty in the community of scholars studying SVLs.

**References**


