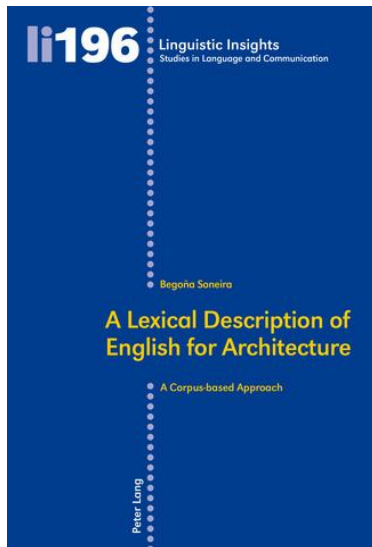


BOOK REVIEW



THE LEXIS OF ARCHITECTURE: NEW WORDS FOR NEW SPECIALIZED PURPOSE

Begoña Soneira. A LEXICAL DESCRIPTION OF ENGLISH FOR ARCHITECTURE. A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH (2015), Bern etc.: Peter Lang. 268 pp., ISBN 978-3-0343-1602-6 (PB).

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Different discourses structure the world in different ways and only the members of those discourse communities can use their discursational norms, values and ideology and manipulate them to suit their social needs. They also share a common understanding of disciplinary lexis. Vocabulary is, as Chung and Nation (2004: 252) claim, “subject related, occurs in a specialist domain, and is part of a system of subject knowledge”, which makes it necessary to resort to the context of disciplinary knowledge to which a term is associated to interpret its “technicalness”. This view of lexis as a mark of lexical identity of each discipline is the starting point of *A Lexical Description of English for Architecture: A Corpus-based Approach*, which follows early studies on English for Specific Purposes (Cowie, 1988; Trimble, 1985) to consider lexical features as one of the main features of scientific and technical discourse.

Mirroring the complex multidisciplinary of the discipline, the discourse of Architecture is articulated by the intricate hybridity of the discourses of science, technology and art, a specialized jargon, referred to in this work as *archispeak* or *talkitecture*. The difficulty posed by specialized vocabulary in the techno-scientific discourse, “increasingly antidemocratic” in Halliday’s words (1993: 21), is viewed as a way to set apart insiders, as a gatekeeper. Specialized vocabulary choice and lexical awareness are thus sociolinguistic competences which novices need to develop as part of their acculturation into the discipline.

The volume takes a corpus-driven approach to, as the title of the volume clearly states, carry out a lexical description of the discourse of Architecture in English which focuses on the process of coining new words by means of technical terms as well as general language compounds, derivation, loanwords, semantic neologisms, terminologizations, and Latinisms. The lexical description is based on data obtained from the analysis of a self-compiled 500,000-word corpus of texts published between 2007 and 2008 in freely accessible online publications in the field of Architecture. The magazines are published in Anglophone countries with texts written in English – although the writer does not specify whether these are written by native or non-native speakers – which address a readership of expert practitioners in the domain. The corpus includes texts from a variety of genres from specialized magazines and websites. Adhering to the commonly applied criteria of reliability, authenticity, currency and diversity for corpus design, the corpus, informed by several Spanish Associations of Architects, retrieved texts from sources acknowledged as representative of the discipline, which are, as the author claims, close to architects’ real communication and reflect the variety and creativity shown in the lexis of Architecture.

As regards the database creation, the author acknowledges the difficulty of grouping, particularly in the case of compounds, and the risk of establishing categories based on the researcher’s judgement and therefore biased and too intuitive. The author opts for open “liberal” selection criteria (p. 40), influenced both by morphological evidence and listedness in dictionaries but also by inductive generalizations; in short, if words were found to be lexically relevant from an ESP perspective. Under these premises, the study combines manual inspection with computerized processing to provide a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the architectural terms identified. The database is then validated with two dictionaries (a specialized one, the *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* and a general one, the *Oxford English Dictionary*) and a specialized glossary (*Archispeak*). The description of the methodology employed for the corpus analysis is in my view the main weakness of the volume. A more carefully detailed description of methods and tools used would have been desirable; also would a more thorough description of frequencies and percentages of use, which is restricted to broad categories, but provides no statistic information of the actual frequency of occurrence of subcategories or specific items. With this the reader would not only obtain a descriptive approach of the lexical profile of Architecture but also a more informed understanding of the strength of specific words, collocations or word formation resources.

The first section of the volume addresses word formation. Compounding is described as one of the most productive means to create new words in architectural discourse, and it is the one to which the author devotes most attention in the volume. A very detailed and well-illustrated list of the compounds in the corpus is analyzed in terms of concepts such as lexicalization and listedness, date of coinage, transparency and interpretability, spelling, conciseness, compactness and

recursivity, semantics. The section also explores derivation, as argued a specific trait of specialized discourse and also a frequent resource of word formation. As for derivation this is found to affect mainly nouns and adjectives, with residual occurrence in adverbs and verbs. Suffixation is according to the data presented considerably more prevalent than prefixation of nouns and adjectives and less frequently of verbs. Finally, the description of word formation resources ends with the analysis of conversion and backformation, clipping, blending and acronymy and analogical formations, considerably less frequent than the compounding and derivation.

Borrowing is viewed in section 2 as inspired by a pragmatic motivation, since the word has proved its suitability and efficiency in another language. Loanwords from a variety of languages are classified into two groups: necessity loanwords, those borrowed to fill lexical gaps created in the target language by new and innovative discoveries, abstract concepts, theoretical constructs or technical equipment; and luxury loanwords, those terms which the author considers superfluous and coined mainly to respond to stylistic reasons such as euphemism, local atmosphere, brevity or humour. Although the former respond to necessity, the latter convey the importance of historical and cultural exchanges. The findings show that most loanwords in the first category, the most frequent one in the corpus, had already been included in existing dictionaries or glossaries, while those in the second group had not and are therefore one of the contributions of the study.

The final section deals with semantic neology, mainly metaphors, and the acquisition of new semantic nuances. The author explores scientific, social, language and arts and visual metaphors as well as other semantic changes or “terminologization”, that is, terms taken from general language but used with a technical meaning, and “migration of terms”, technical terms from one language which are used in another.

The findings ratify the productivity of lexical tools such as compounding, derivation, borrowing or semantic neology as devices for coining new words, also a powerful resource as models or templates for newly created combinations which can be constructed by means of analogy from already existing terms. The ductility of the lexis allows the labelling of new concepts by resorting to allusion and analogy, an essential tool in a technical field like Architecture, so closely connected with the creation of new designs, the use of new technologies and the inspiration of new ideas. The coining of new words is viewed as a response to the new challenges of the architectural discipline, a device to fill lexical gaps, but it also fulfils a creative purpose. The language of Architecture appears a highly resourceful language laden with neologisms and a high degree of rule-bending creativity which mirrors the specific nature of this discipline, sensitive to the development of new phenomena as much as inclined to art, creativity and humanistic thought. It is, as argued in the volume, their linguistic positioning, their pragmatic and stylistic positioning that goes beyond mere terminological needs, that creates the sense of cultural identity of Architecture.

The inclusion criteria of certain words or sequences in the database analyzed in the study, which are not yet listed in general or technical dictionaries or glossaries but which might eventually become stable, and the analysis of the historical evolution of some terms, which were originally seen as neologisms but are now part of the core vocabulary, emphasizes the evolving nature of lexis formation. The main assumption supported in the volume is that words or combinations of elements undergo a continuum of lexicalization, institutionalization and are eventually listed in dictionaries. The absence of certain terms which were included in the analysis from general reference dictionaries might be due to their too technical character. These dictionaries might also have failed to interpret the apparent semantic transparency of these words, since, as argued, only an insider can interpret the semantic subtleties and lexicalized meaning of the discourse of Architecture.

The findings show a tendency towards compacting, illustrated in the combination of various resources explored, compounding borrowing, neoclassical combining forms, clipping or acronyms in long and dense strings of words, which the author summarizes as “fostering a sense of opacity, lexical density, technicality and lexical identity” (p. 237). The informational density of disciplinary prose and, more specifically, the packing of information in the noun phrase, and the sophistication of discourse created by means of linguistic colonization, neologism, terminologization and metaphorical connotations of word coinage certainly imply the complexity of its meaning, which relies on background knowledge to be interpreted. It is for this reason that lexis is viewed as creating boundaries, since only initiated readers possess enough subject-matter knowledge or adequate knowledge of the rhetorical and generic conventions used to introduce disciplinary content.

A more comprehensive review of the literature on ESP and lexical description studies might have enhanced the analysis provided in the volume, and so would a more integrative, more consistent approach of this in the presentation of conclusions, which would have provided the reader with a clearer picture of the authors’ claims interpreted towards the background of what has already been written on specific discourses. Despite that weakness, the volume provides a valuable detailed description of the lexical profile of the discipline, which highlights the complex nature of Architecture. The study will be of great interest to both practitioners and novices alike; to scholars interested in specific discourse analysis as well as to the layman interested in Architecture.

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