

EDITORIAL: THE OTHER IN ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

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This Special Issue of *ESP Today* concerns the teaching and learning of English for medical purposes (EMP). In this collection of papers, we aim for a balance between the different fields that inform the EMP practitioner while giving particular attention to genres, professions and areas of interest other than the usual, that of the doctor and the research paper. We have endeavoured to keep the focus on the real-world use of English in medicine and made the classroom and the EMP practitioner central.

Across the world, healthcare is a huge employer. The National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom is the country's largest employer, with a staff of around 1.5 million.¹ Half of these – 750,000 – are clinical staff. A sizeable proportion of these people are foreign-born and speak English as a second language: on average, one in four in the NHS (and more than a third of all nursing staff), while in Australia the proportion is closer to two in four. Similar figures are reported for the US healthcare sector, Ireland and Canada. Healthcare is not only the largest employment sector in countries such as Australia, the US, and the UK, but with their ageing demographics, it is a sector that will continue to expand and one where the percentage of foreign-trained staff will likewise increase. The sheer numbers of foreign-trained medical staff working in Anglophone countries is one explanation of why English is the language of medicine, though English also happens to be a global lingua franca and, additionally, the academic language of medicine. In December 2020, according to SCImago Journal Rank,² all of the top 50 most prestigious scientific (and thus medical) journals in the world all are English-language journals, while 49 of them are published in the UK or the US. In some

¹ <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/the-nhs-workforce-in-numbers>

² <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>

European countries, e.g. the Netherlands, English-language medical journals outnumber those published in the local language.

So, given what we know about the relationship between the English language and the healthcare sector – its status, its utility and its diffusion – and the increasing demand for foreign-born healthcare professionals to alleviate the problem of staff shortages that are all too common in many countries, it is surprising that we know relatively little about the English needed by and used by health professionals.

One reason for this may be that EMP practitioners are looking in the wrong places: many studies relating to healthcare discourse are not published in journals dedicated to language. While this may seem strange, it's nothing new. Almost two decades ago, in 2003, Candlin and Candlin underlined the importance for applied linguists working in the field of medical discourse to broaden their reading and include journals from other disciplines, e.g. *Social Science and Medicine*, *British Medical Journal* – where considerably more relevant research was being published. In 2020, this is still sound advice – and the growth of CLIL and English Medium Instruction (EMI) and thus the appearance of specialised journals have expanded the reading material available. There have also been some other developments in the intervening years. The study of healthcare and medical discourse now has a far stronger identity within the discipline of Applied Linguistics – the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) has a Special Interest Group for Healthcare and Science Communication – while a journal dedicated to the topic, *Communication and Medicine*, was launched in 2004. Nursing language research is also more visible than it was when Candlin and Candlin (2003) highlighted the absence of nursing studies in mainstream language journals (e.g. Boshier & Stocker, 2015; Henderson, Barker, & Mak, 2016; Lu, 2018; Staples, 2015a). However, there are still very few studies of the language used by other healthcare professionals such as radiographers or physiotherapists.

With regards to the field of English for Specific Purposes, the picture is not quite as encouraging. Candlin and Candlin (2003) highlighted the absence of papers on medical language in the *English for Specific Purposes* journal (the leading journal in its field, published by Elsevier) over the previous few years, referencing just one, by Frank (2000). In 2020, the journal still publishes very few studies on the theme of healthcare, while those papers that are published are almost invariably concerned with academic medical language, though this fact should not be taken as evidence of a reluctance to deal with medical topics on the part of the journal. In the ESP literature more widely, studies of academic medical registers predominate, particularly of research papers (and their abstracts), though as Skelton and Richards write in this Special Issue, there is a broad similarity in research writing across the sciences and it is not clear how much more mileage there is in this specific area. Explorations of other genres – case reports, consent forms and medical information, for example – are likely to yield findings of both practical use and theoretical interest. It is encouraging to see that a study focused

on randomised control trials (Stosic, 2021) is set to appear in the next issue of the *English for Specific Purposes* journal, while this Special Issue features two studies concerned with case reports: Guest looks at the teaching of oral presentations of clinical case reports while Mijomanović, Aleksić-Hajduković and Sinadinović present a move analysis of case studies in dentistry – a profession in medicine hitherto rather neglected by ESP researchers.

One consequence of the focus on the academic in ESP research is the proportion of studies concerned with written medical discourse. It might well be considered an unnatural emphasis given that spoken language is the “most salient, significant and principal mode of healthcare communication” (Clerehan, 2014: 12). And while there are some notable exceptions to this over-emphasis on the written (e.g. the work of Staples, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Staples & Biber, 2014), it is a fact that spoken healthcare discourse receives far less attention in ESP than it warrants, in contrast to the fields of Social Sciences, Medical Humanities or Applied Linguistics, where much of the work currently being conducted into healthcare discourse *does* concern spoken communication. There may well be purely practical reasons for this. The resources in terms of time and the ethical permissions that the analysis of spoken medical discourse require (but are rarely granted) may be beyond the average ESP researcher. Given the difficulties conducting large-scale studies of medical practitioners (with or without patients), classroom-conducted research is particularly attractive to the EMP teacher-researcher. This Special Issue contains a number of such studies.

Along with English for Specific Purposes and Applied Linguistics, there is a third field that has relevance for the EMP teacher, that of clinical communication (CC). CC in its broadest sense is practised by *all* medical practitioners, irrespective of the language of interaction. A sizeable proportion of the world’s medical professionals, as we have said, also have English as a second or foreign language, though levels of attained competency vary widely. Many medical practitioners in the world today function at the overlap of these two branches: the refugee doctor from Syria in a London hospital, the Swiss radiographer using English as a lingua franca in Geneva, the Mexican nurse in Florida. This might suggest that a similar overlap exists in EMP, and while some aspects of clinical communication curricula have found their way into the language classroom (and the occasional coursebook), many EMP teachers remain less aware of the field than they might like. This situation we go some way to rectifying in the State-of-the-Art piece that begins this Special Issue.

This Special Issue has as its title *The Other in English for Medical Purposes*. Our goal was two-fold. As set out above, we wanted to delineate the three fields of study that have particular relevance for the EMP teacher – a teacher who is far more likely to have a background in modern languages, philology or literature than either medicine or even Applied Linguistics. The contributions in this Special Issue, then, relate to Clinical Communication, Applied Linguistics and EMP, with the latter predominating. The introductory paper to the Special Issue is a State-of-the-Art

piece giving an overview of clinical communication and, additionally, the development of EMP, the two fields of the greatest interest to EMP practitioners, particularly those who focus on spoken communication. This is followed by a selection of EMP studies, some small-scale and exploratory in nature, focused variously on teaching practice, student needs, content and the assessment of English for healthcare. This section is then followed by two papers concerned with certain aspects of the language of medicine in English, which owe more to the field of Applied Linguistics. The Special Issue ends with a book review of an edited collection that showcases the very diverse areas of current interest to the Applied Linguist working with healthcare discourse.

The first paper in this Special Issue is “Communication for Medicine: State-of-the-Art” by **John Skelton** and **Catherine Richards**, who look at the character and development of the fields of clinical communication and EMP, tracing the roots of both and pointing out areas of overlap and division. The authors highlight areas where one field can benefit from the skills or knowledge taught in the other, such as genre analysis and reading and writing skills, which are not explicitly taught at medical schools, and Evidence-based Medicine, an understanding of which anyone teaching reading or writing skills to medical practitioners ought to have. They also refer to a third area of interest, an area that is neither truly clinical communication nor truly EMP, but an area where many valuable insights into language and medicine have been uncovered. Some of the papers in this Special Issue may fall into this category for their central focus is that language is what “enables the good doctor to present themselves as they would wish to be perceived and also to reflect on who it is they are” (p. 17). The article is not only informative – many EMP practitioners will have little knowledge of CC – but it is also innovative in linking the two fields.

In the next section of the Special Issue the focus narrows and we move to a collection of studies, most of which are small-scale or exploratory in nature, and with the classroom and/or the student as the focus. **Gabriella Hild**, **Timea Németh** and **Alexandra Csongor** report on a study in a Hungarian medical university to investigate the reaction of their students to roleplaying with international medical students. The study was prompted by the reluctance of students, who were all Hungarian speakers, to interact in English in the classroom. The study aimed to elicit the perceptions and attitudes of the students to the use of international peer-tutors, attitudes which were collated by thematically analysing student responses to interview questions. The authors report that their students showed increased motivation and a greater willingness to interact in English in lessons, and reported a positive attitude to both the activity itself and to the foreign students. International students – most of whom study on English-only programmes – represent a sizeable proportion of the intake in some European medical universities. This study suggests they could be an important linguistic resource for EMP teachers.

In a similar vein, the next contribution by **Theodora Tseligka** and **Kätlin Koik** is also a response to a real-world issue: the absence in many non-Anglophone medical schools of modules that relate to medical humanities or 'humanistic' medicine. The paper also concerns the notion of untapped resources, though in this study it is the teachers themselves who are the focus. The authors take the view that many EMP teachers are very well placed, thanks to their academic background in languages, the Arts, etc. to integrate material into their language courses. By using poetry, short stories and visual imagery, the authors firmly believe that medical students can be encouraged to explore in a more humanistic manner, their profession and their professional identities. The paper describes a project to integrate material pertaining to disability into an EMP class in Greece, the results of which demonstrate the educational and linguistic potential of such an approach.

The following paper by **Miguel Ruiz-Garrido** and **María Pilar Molés Julio** focuses on the nurse, with the area of interest the presentation of research by Spanish advanced practitioner or academic nurses. An increasing number of nurses conduct research, and thus are also expected to disseminate their findings to their peers. English is commonly used to both publish and present nursing research though as it is a burgeoning field, it is largely unexplored by applied linguists and EMP researchers. The authors used a questionnaire and conducted follow-up interviews with a group of Spanish nurses to elicit attitude and opinion, as well as to find out what language competencies and skills the nurses felt they were lacking. The authors conclude by underlining the need to teach presentation skills to nurses and by suggesting areas of particular importance to be included in such training.

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The views of the professionals are also the focus of the next contribution as **Andrea Carr** takes on the topic of assessment for medical English, comparing the appropriacy of the Occupational English Test (OET) with the general/academic IELTS. Carr describes an exam preparation programme in the UK for refugee doctors who are required to prove language competency before taking up positions with the NHS. Rather than investigate the exams as a teacher, the author focused on the test-takers themselves, eliciting their views via a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The findings show that an over-whelming majority of candidates prefer the specialised OET, citing its content more relevant and motivational than IELTS. The author suggests that these factors lie behind the higher numbers of candidates gaining the required grade in the OET.

The final contribution in this group of papers comes from **Michael Guest**, who examines the clinical case presentation. Like the nurses in Spain, the protagonists in this study use English to present to their colleagues in a non-English speaking clinical environment. An under-researched medical genre, the case report presentation is very rarely taught by EMP teachers who are likely, says the author, to be unfamiliar with it. The study involved the observation of 36 individual case presentations performed in a number of different hospitals in Asia, and several follow-up interviews. Drawing attention to the narrative characteristics

of the genre, the author also presents ideas of how the clinical case presentation may be taught in the EMP classroom.

The clinical case report is the bridge between the contributions here that are rooted in the tradition of ESP and those that owe more to the discipline of Applied Linguistics. From oral case presentations and how they might be taught we move to a more traditional move analysis of a largely unexplored genre, the (written) dental case report. **Stevan Mijomanović, Irena Aleksić-Hajduković and Danka Sinadinović** explore the communicative purposes and move structure of the dental case report and compare their findings to what is known about its counterpart in medicine. The authors examine a corpus of 20 case reports, finding that most, though not all, of the communicative purposes are shared. While both dental and medical case reports have a similar rhetorical structure, the authors' analysis suggests that dental case studies tend to be longer. The findings will be of use in academic English courses for dentistry.

And so to the final study in this Special Issue. We have moved from a broad overview of two fields of interest to EMP trainers to studies more concerned with teaching and to classroom practice. Our final contribution from **Ignasi Navarro i Ferrando** is concerned with the language we use to talk about health, or in this particular case, disease, namely cancer. It is the most theoretical contribution and uses the approach of critical metaphor analysis to compare the metaphors used in research papers with those used in press articles. The author presents the different kinds of metaphor and their rhetorical function, finding significant differences in the types used in the genres analysed. This present study contributes to the growing body of work investigating metaphor in health communication generally and cancer discourse specifically (see Semino & Demjén, 2017; Semino, Demjén, Hardie, Payne, & Rayson, 2018).

The Special Issue closes with a review by **Emma Putland** of Demjén's edited volume *Applying Linguistics in Illness and Healthcare Contexts: Contemporary Applied Linguistics*. The publication is a rich collection of studies that showcase the value of applying linguistics to healthcare contexts. Putland praises the volume for its 'commendable variety of individuals, scenarios, locations and methodologies' while highlighting the core principle of the volume, underlined by Demjén in her introduction, that of the importance of grounding healthcare research in real-life interactions, and of applying the findings from that research to real-life healthcare scenarios. It is, we believe, precisely this kind of research that is of most interest and value to teachers of English for medical purposes.

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