

THE DEGREE OF SPECIFICITY IN TEACHING LSAP VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT. *The Degree of Specificity in Teaching LSAP Vocabulary.* Joining a long-running debate in the field of teaching and testing language for specific academic purposes (LSAP), the present study focuses on the degree of vocabulary specificity to be targeted in this type of courses. Researchers' choices range between 'pure' general academic language and input with a high degree of specificity. The present study proposes a categorisation of vocabulary in the following groups: general (high and mid-frequency), general academic, border technical and technical. The category of border technical vocabulary proposed here includes words normally considered as belonging to general language levels B1 and B2, which are used frequently in a domain of study and only incidentally in others. Border technical and general academic vocabulary are proposed to be the focus of teaching and the object of assessment in the courses of specialised language, with technical language not excluded from the teaching process. Choosing the level of vocabulary specificity is one of the most difficult decisions the LSAP teacher needs to take in preparation of a course. He/She needs to consider factors like the available resources or the students' familiarity with the domain. This study analyses the course of specialised language for humanities and arts in Romanian at Babeş-Bolyai University. Based on literature in the domain, on teaching experience and especially on student feedback, this study is hoped to contribute to setting the most adequate level of vocabulary specificity for different groups of learners, in contexts usually built on a multitude of variables, hardly in the teachers' control.

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REZUMAT. *Gradul de specificitate în predarea vocabularului în cursurile de limbaj pentru scopuri academice specifice.* Alăturându-se unei îndelungate discuții în câmpul predării și testării limbajului pentru scopuri academice specifice (LSAS), prezentul studiu se axează asupra gradului de specificitate care poate fi vizat în cadrul acestui tip de cursuri. Alegerile cercetătorilor variază între limbajul academic general ‘pur’ și inputul cu un grad ridicat de specificitate. Acest studiu propune o împărțire a vocabularului în următoarele categorii: general (de frecvență mare și medie), academic general, tehnic de graniță și tehnic. Categoria vocabularului tehnic de graniță propusă aici include cuvinte considerate în mod normal ca aparținând nivelurilor de limbă generală B1 și B2 (putând fi înțelese și folosite, uneori, chiar la niveluri inferioare), dar care sunt folosite frecvent într-un domeniu de studiu și doar incidental în altele. Vocabularul tehnic de graniță și cel academic general sunt categoriile propuse ca focus al predării și obiect al evaluării în cursurile de limbaj specializat, fără a se exclude limbajul tehnic din procesul de predare. Alegerea nivelului de specificitate a vocabularului este una dintre cele mai dificile decizii pe care profesorul de LSAS trebuie să le ia atunci când își pregătește cursul. El/Ea trebuie să țină cont de factori precum resursele disponibile sau familiaritatea studenților cu domeniul. Acest studiu analizează cursul de limbaj specializat pentru științe umaniste și arte, în limba română, la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai. Bazat pe literatura de specialitate, pe experiența de predare și mai ales pe feedbackul din partea studenților, se speră că acest studiu poate contribui la stabilirea celui mai adecvat nivel de specificitate a vocabularului pentru diferite grupuri de studenți, în contexte construite, de obicei, pe o multitudine de variabile, ce rareori sunt controlabile de către profesori.

Cuvinte-cheie: *limbaj pentru scopuri academice, limbaj specializat, specificitate, vocabular academic general, vocabular tehnic de graniță, științe umaniste și arte*

1. Introduction

EAP (English for Academic Purposes) gained prominence as a new branch of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in the early 1980s drawing on previous developments in the sixties and seventies (Hyland 2006, 1; Hamp-Lyons 2011, 90; Flowerdew 2016, 7) as a response to the need of young people all over the world to prepare for higher education in English. In the following decades, the demographic mobility and an ever-growing international connectivity brought the field of EAP to unprecedented development. The range of specialisations of interest for the future students diversified and the concept of a monolithic academic English was rightfully challenged (Hyland 2006, 4). At the same time, the

educational systems in different languages opened to non-native speakers², and this expanded the scientific discussion from EAP to LAP (Language for Academic Purposes). While new contexts brought new challenges, the questions crucial to this field already from its emergence remained also in focus.

Specificity has always been central to defining LAP as a field engaging specialized use of language, as different from everyday interaction, and a significant density of concepts and terms particular to a domain of study. The complexity of this aspect reflected in the theoretical debate, research and class practice migrating between the extremes: on the one hand, arguments have been brought in support of limiting teaching LAP to general academic language; on the other hand, breaking down the specialized language to the domains the students prepare for has been considered the most effective approach. A third view sees specificity as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, a dilemma rather than a conflict (Hyland 2016, 17).

Specificity is not limited to the vocabulary particular to a certain domain. In a survey conducted in 2018 (Vilcu, Van Gorp 2018)³ with 33 respondents teaching LSAP (Language for Specific Academic Purposes) in seven universities in Romania, in different domains, the teachers mentioned various other language and communication aspects they needed to teach: syntactic, morphological and rhetorical structures; particular models of oral interaction (e.g. negotiation techniques, doctor-patient dialogue); specific genres and types of written documents (e.g. theatre review, medical letter, commercial contract); contextual information (e.g. medical protocols, job descriptions); specific legislation (e.g. occupational medicine, health insurance system); use of substances or equipment (e.g. medical, musical, IT applications); cultural context (e.g. patient typology, management styles). However, researchers and LSAP teachers share a continuous preoccupation for the degree of specificity that should be set for the vocabulary taught in these courses. The lack of a definitive and unquestionable answer needs to be taken as a datum, since a variety of factors shape every LSAP teaching context.

This study will first propose a classification of vocabulary in the LSAP course according to successive levels of specificity. It is important to mention that this classification does not contain its own purpose. This is not proposed as a categorisation of the LSAP vocabulary in absolute, applicable in any context. It has been realised with the perspective of the students preparing to start their specialised studies in a foreign language in mind. Second, it will show the specificity levels chosen as part of the teaching process, in the context of an

² A multitude of language learning programmes include now courses of academic language, in widely used languages like English, French, German or Spanish, but also in less widely spoken and taught languages, like Romanian, Hungarian or Bulgarian.

³ The results of the survey were presented in Vilcu, Van Gorp 2018 (*Developing Resources for LSP Tests: A Reflection*).

LSAP course (part of the preparatory year for Romanian language at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca). Third, the factors which define this teaching context and their impact on the degree of vocabulary specificity will be presented. The last part of the study illustrates the teaching context and the level of vocabulary specificity with input for the domain of archaeology in relation with the receptive skills.

2. Levels of specificity in vocabulary

Accessing domain specific vocabulary inventories can only be a small part of the LSAP teaching-learning process. Specialised terminology represents a significant share in written texts of different genres and in oral presentations, courses and conferences, which students need to understand in their complexity. The vocabulary analysis in these written and oral texts reveals different degrees of specificity. Research in the domain, study of input materials, my own professional experience of teaching LSAP and feedback from students informed my perspective on the layers of vocabulary specificity which can be identified in the LSAP course:

2.1. General (high-frequency and mid-frequency⁴) vocabulary.

This layer of vocabulary might often be dismissed in LSAP teaching for various reasons: it is common language and it should be taught in the courses of general language; by the time they start their LSAP courses, students should normally be familiar with this vocabulary; it deprives the course of its specificity, etc. It has been shown that general language courses and textbooks usually focus on high-frequency vocabulary, while the LSAP teachers are concerned with either general academic or technical vocabulary (Schmitt and Schmitt 2012). This might leave the mid-frequency vocabulary in a limbo, accessed by the learners rather incidentally than part of a systematic apprehension endeavour. And yet Schmitt and Schmitt showed that high frequency and technical words are not usually sufficient for the students to cope with domain-specific texts⁵ and mid-frequency vocabulary is essential for this process (Schmitt and Schmitt 2012).

⁴ Schmitt and Schmitt see the distinction between low-frequency and high-frequency vocabulary as insufficient. They label the vocabulary between these two categories as mid-frequency vocabulary (Schmitt and Schmitt 2012, 484).

⁵ Nation analyses the number of words necessary for performing typical receptive activities like reading a novel, reading a newspaper, watching a movie, and taking part in a conversation. For a coverage of 98% of a text, which is needed for unassisted comprehension, 8,000 to 9,000

2.2. *General academic vocabulary*

Lists of general academic words have been produced for various languages and became crucial instruments in the process of LAP teaching⁶. A significant number of authors consider that the specificity of the LSAP courses should be limited to this level, supporting the idea of EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes)/LGAP (Language for General Academic Purposes)⁷. Arguments supporting this approach include: the assumption that LAP teachers might not have the necessary level of content knowledge to understand and master technical vocabulary confidently (Spack 1988, Farrell 1990, Hyland 2006); students (especially the ones who attend pre-sessional courses) usually have limited content knowledge, insufficient for completely understanding the meaning and use of technical words (Hyland 2006); vocabulary of this type, the same as generic forms and skills, is transferrable across domains; some of the students do not choose their specialization(s) before starting the EAP course. Moreover, educational institutions often find it more convenient to combine in the same group students who will pursue different lines of study, especially when they are in rather small numbers.

2.3. *Border technical vocabulary*

In my perspective, this category of vocabulary would include words which are usually considered as belonging to mid-frequency vocabulary, relating especially to B1 or B2 (or even lower) CEFR levels. These words are used intensively in studies or in the exercise of the profession in one or some domains and (almost) not at all in others. Some examples would include, for the domain of archaeology, words like: *to dig, to dig up, to bury, to date, grave, ancestor, and ancient*. For English

word-family vocabulary is needed for comprehension of written text and 6,000 to 7,000 for spoken text (Nation 2006, 59). Schmitt and Schmitt conclude that this volume of vocabulary goes far beyond high-frequency vocabulary. Actually, it takes us beyond high-frequency, academic and technical vocabulary combined (Schmitt and Schmitt 2012, 487). This conclusion is consistent with the idea that the gap between high-frequency vocabulary the learners might possess and the technical (or general academic) vocabulary, normally targeted in LAP/LSAP courses is quite large and could hinder the comprehension of written and oral texts.

⁶ A very influential academic word list for English was compiled by Averil Coxhead at Victoria University of Wellington, in 2000. (<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist>). Suggestions for similar tools more oriented towards the learners' productive needs have been made by Paquot (2007), preceded by work by Rundell (1998). For Romanian language, studies have been conducted showing how a corpus of scientific papers can be used to produce lists of academic vocabulary (Rogobete, Mureşan and Chitez, 2023).

⁷ See the difference between the 'wide-angle' and 'narrow-angle' approach in Dudley-Evans (1993).

and for some other languages these words are placed at CEFR levels B1 or B2, with some of them (e.g. *to bury*) covering, with slight differences in meaning, both levels (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bury>). These are normally not considered technical words (at least not in the narrow sense). As an illustration, the glossary of the Archaeological Institute of America (<https://www.archaeological.org/programs/educators/introduction-to-archaeology/glossary/>) includes none of them. There are indeed phrases/syntagms containing them, which should be (and are) part of a list of technical words (*Carbon dating, Radiometric dating, Absolut dating, Relative dating, boat grave, grave goods*). However, in certain LAP teaching contexts, a small minority of the students would be able to understand all these words. I called this layer of vocabulary *border technical vocabulary* because these words are both part of the general vocabulary, and very much used in a certain educational or professional domain (here, archaeology).

I see this basic layer of specialized words as having a crucial importance for the future students' capacity of coping with written texts, oral discourses and university courses. This is because, in spite of their frequency in the specialized written and oral texts, and unlike the technical words, these are words which: 1) the content teachers will never explain during a course, considering them basic vocabulary for the domain (and for the general language⁸); 2) are of crucial importance for understanding any specialized written or oral text in the field; 3) will often be part of definitions of technical words whose understanding will depend on the familiarity with exactly these border technical words (e.g. *excavation* – the *digging up* and recording of archaeological sites, including uncovering and recording the provenience, context and three-dimensional location of archaeological finds – <https://www.archaeological.org/programs/educators/introduction-to-archaeology/glossary/>). Falling between the general high-frequency words and the technical ones and not being part of the academic word lists either, this category of vocabulary is often overlooked during the LAP courses, in the run towards one end or the other of the specificity continuum.

⁸ The students who graduate from preparatory year and continue their studies in the language of the host country will normally attend courses (especially in domains like the sociological and artistic ones, with fewer foreign participants than medicine or engineering, for example) in the same groups with native speakers of that language. The content teachers will probably not know that there are non-native speakers in the group and even if they do, they rarely have the training, time or availability to adapt their discourse for this category of students or to explain more than they usually do in terms of technical vocabulary.

2.4. Technical vocabulary

This category includes words which are (highly) specialized and specific to a domain. Continuing with examples from the field of archaeology, the same glossary of the Archaeological Institute of America provides us with examples like: *Ionic, Doric and Corinthian column, chert, amphora*, etc. Supporting the case for teaching specific LAP, researchers show that students might be more motivated to learn closer to their future field of study. More than that, lack of specialized vocabulary when they start their studies was seen by the students as one of the most serious problems they face (Durrant 2014, 328). Limiting the vocabulary taught in the LAP courses to the general academic words might generate a lack of response to the students' needs. Starting from researchers' suggestion that generic academic vocabulary useful to students across university might not be very large, Durrant explains that this argument has two main prongs: "First, it claims that purportedly generic academic words are not evenly dispersed across disciplines, and so are not equally useful for all learners. Second, it claims that even those words which are used across a range of disciplines are not used in the same ways across all areas" (Durrant 2014, 329). Researchers also argue that the prestige of the LAP teaching domain might be higher if students and content teachers see the benefits which teaching specialized vocabulary and structures might have (Hyland 2006).

3. The specificity level and the real world: human, material and time resources

3.1. The human resources

In the survey conducted in 2018, Vilcu and Van Gorp show that all the LAP teachers were graduates from general language studies and ethnology. To a large extent, they have to rely on self-preparation both for the specialised language they teach, and for LAP instruction. The remarkable level of specialisation they reach in the domain(s) they teach shows in the fact that they find it difficult to change these domains⁹. Knowing and mastering vocabulary in all levels of specificity becomes one of their assets on the job.

Dudley-Evans considers that when teaching "more specialist materials", the ESP teacher might actually need "less knowledge of the content than one

⁹ Almost 70% of the respondents said that they needed to study in the domain for which they taught specialized language much and very much. More than 72% said that they could not change the domain(s) easily.

might need when one is teaching more basic level common core ESP classes” (Dudley-Evans 1993, 3) and refers to units/topics in textbooks on general science and engineering.

“Clearly one needs an interest in the discipline and a willingness to find out about the genre conventions and the favoured ‘stories’, but one does not necessarily need to have detailed knowledge of the actual content. One needs to try to find out how the discipline works, what sort of questions they are seeking answers to rather than necessarily know or understand all the answers. /.../ To put it very simply, one needs to know more about the ‘savoir-faire’ of the discipline than the actual ‘savoir.’” (Dudley-Evans 1993, 4).

While I agree that the LAP teacher needs to be very knowledgeable in relation with the micro-skills specific to a certain domain, it is hard to imagine him/her as someone whose role is to pass on a black box, placing himself/herself in the vulnerable position of not being able to provide answers to questions the students are likely to ask. Moreover, this strategy might work - if the teacher is willing to assume it - when he/she has resources at hand with input, tasks, level of specificity, assessment instruments, etc. already selected for the course by the educational programme developers. However, this is rarely the case with LAP, especially with less widely taught languages. When the teacher is in the position of creating rather than selecting teaching material, with little or no help from more experienced colleagues or from subject specialists (Krekeler 2013), their instruction in the domain and a satisfactory understanding of the content become instrumental for providing the students with the adequate learning resources.

3.2. The material and time resources

The issues related to material resources (textbooks, teaching instruments, written and oral input, etc.) make the difference between English¹⁰ and the less widely taught languages apparent again. Scarcity of resources is only one of the problems the LAP teachers in less widely taught languages need to face. The groups of students are often very heterogeneous, which puts even more pressure on the teachers when they need to select/adapt/create teaching materials.

Christian Krekeler analysed the dilemma one of his colleagues faced when asked to teach a course of specialised language. Being a general language teacher, his colleague had been asked to teach an LSAP course for accountancy

¹⁰ While a quite significant number of resources have been developed in languages like German, French or Spanish, for other languages the resources are scarce and the deficit goes deeper for certain specialisations. As an example, there is a significant number of resources for the medical domain in Romania, while for other specialisations less than five (going to zero) resources can be found, leaving the teachers the ‘liberty’ to create their own teaching and testing materials.

in German. After investigating all the factors which might determine such a decision, Krekeler concluded: "...taking on LSAP courses under such circumstances requires a pioneering spirit – and time" (Krekeler 2013, 58). Time is one of the most important resources an LAP teacher needs, especially when he/she teaches students with a challenging - fascinating as it may be - combination of specialisations. Even if the teachers are committed, interested and determined to offer their students a course of the highest quality, they will need time to study, to select teaching materials, to prepare tasks and exercises and then, after judging their efficiency and measuring them against the students' reactions, to be able to adapt them again accordingly. Numerous LSP or LAP teachers complained about the lack of time which hinders their activity (Krekeler 2013, Szawara 2015, Kawaguchi 2015). More than that, while discussing the challenges of a course of Japanese for business, Kawaguchi proposed solutions related precisely to the time necessary for producing the course. Developing and teaching the course involve additional work for the faculty members who already teach other courses. "How much they can commit to the business Japanese course depends on whether they will receive a salary increase, release from existing workload, or additional staff" (Kawaguchi in Trace, Hudson and Brown 2015, 156).

Educational institutions are not always very perceptive to the role and the importance of the LGAP/LSAP courses, which might bring them in the position of being marginalised and underfunded. Other teachers (content teachers and, surprisingly, some language teachers) see these courses as useless and time consuming (the students could go on learning general language in this time). From the point of view of some content teachers, they might also be misleading, since the LAP teachers are not always seen as sufficiently knowledgeable in the domain. All these factors bring the LAP courses into what Raimes called 'the butler's stance' (in Hayland 2006, 10). The students might soon catch on that and lose confidence in the utility of the course, which will make the LAP teachers' mission even more difficult.

4. The course of humanities and arts

4.1 The context

When choosing the specificity level for the LAP courses, decision makers at different institutional levels, course developers, and teachers need to have in view the literature in the domain, but also many variables: the students' level of general language, teachers' experience, logistics, course objectives, resources, etc.

The course presented in this study is the LAP course in Romanian language for humanities and arts, part of the preparatory year (language year) at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. The students are mostly high school graduates who, after finishing the preparatory year, will study in one of the following domains: philology (language and literature, applied modern languages); philosophy; history (history, heritage studies); theology; culture studies; architecture and urbanism; visual arts; art history and theory; theatre and the arts of performance; cinematography and media; music. These domains are grouped together through a government decision which is renewed every year and are included as such in the syllabus of the course which is called “specialized language: humanities and arts”. There are not enough students for the group to be further divided. In the academic year 2020-2021 the group included students with the following specialisations: music, language and literature, graphics, theatre, film, interior design and in 2022-2023: history, philosophy, language and literature, fashion design and painting. There are no textbook or other resources. The course starts after most of the students took the B1 level exam in general language. Some of the students might still be studying level B1. There is one 5-hour practical course of specialised language per week.

4.2. The students

The students in the course of specialised language for humanities and arts are mostly high school graduates (some are BA graduates, who will pursue master studies), with a variety of L1 (Arabic, French, Spanish, Russian, English, German, etc.). Most of them will do their studies in Romanian (unlike in other domains; for example, medicine studies can be pursued in English and French in Romania and many students choose one of these options, even if they graduate the preparatory year in Romanian).

For me, like for so many LAP teachers in Romania and around the world, one of the most pressing questions was related to the level of specificity I should choose for my course. Is LGAP the only possible choice, given the combination of specializations in the group? However unescapable this alternative might seem, a lot of other factors need to be considered – for example, the spread of the specialisations is hard to be covered with general academic language; reduced use of such a choice has been proven for groups with domains much closer to each other (Hyland and Tse 2007, Durrant 2014). This can only result in frustration for the students and a questionable efficiency of the course itself, in spite of the huge amount of work the teacher would still need to invest in designing and delivering the course and the assessment instruments.

In order to determine the level of specificity I should pursue in my course I decided to conduct a needs analysis (NA) with different categories of

stakeholders, like students who were going to begin the LAP course, but also graduates from the preparatory year who had started their specialized studies. In order to increase the number and the relevance of the responses, the part of NA for which questionnaires were used was addressed to medical students. At the same time, I continued to ask the students in the domains of humanities and arts for feedback after they finished their first semester or first year in their new line of study. The most relevant answers received during NA were related to the skills and sub-skills the students considered were the most important and the ones related to the biggest difficulties which they faced in their new study environment. The questionnaires included also open questions, so the students were free to share their own concrete experiences¹¹.

The information coming from preparatory year graduates who started their specialized studies was, ultimately and decisively, the one which determined my choice of the degree of specificity in the course. For choosing the level of specificity of vocabulary in the course of specialised language some information resulting at the end of the survey was very relevant. This relates to: the difficulties the students have in understanding the courses and presentations, not because of the new technical terms, which are explained, but because of the general language and of what was called here border technical words, which the teachers and colleagues use; writing texts and abstracts, which is harder due to the fact that the students do not have enough familiarity with the general academic vocabulary; answering in examinations – for which the students noticed that do not have the necessary level of language. It was also crucial for my uneven approach of the skills and sub-skills in the course and for deciding what type of work should be done in the classroom, with all the group, or at home, individually.

NA and the feedback I received over the years from the students led to my understanding of the layers of specificity in vocabulary, as presented above, in Chapter 2. In the specific conditions of this LAP course, I consider that the layers of specificity which need to be focused on are the one of general academic vocabulary and the one of border technical vocabulary. They are vital for the students to be able to read texts and to follow courses and conferences. The technical vocabulary is normally explained by the content teachers. However, all the explanations and all their discourse come in language structures built, to a great extent, on the high-frequency and mid-frequency vocabulary, on academic words and on border technical vocabulary. It is true, by the time they start their

¹¹ All the instruments used in the survey, the same as the presentation of the responses to the closed and open questions are available on the ALTE website (https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/Guidelines_Illustration_final.pdf). They accompany the *Guidelines for the Development of Language for Specific Purposes Tests*, illustrating the way in which this resource can be used.

course of specialised language, the students should have a good grasp of the high-frequency vocabulary. However, the academic and the border technical vocabulary should be taught and practiced, to the extent possible, during the LAP course. The technical words will not be excluded from the range of vocabulary in the course and exam; however, they will not constitute the focus of the course and will not be the object of assessment. The specificity level will thus occupy the central part of the continuum, not excluding its extremes.

The choice of this level of vocabulary specificity for this LAP course audience can be supported further through the following arguments.

4.2.1. These students are not yet domain specialists, who only need target language instruction. Consequently, the objective of aiming at highly technical vocabulary in the LAP course proves futile for various reasons. First, it would be difficult for them to understand and to master specific concepts in the absence of basic subject knowledge; the content teachers will not only explain these concepts and terms better, but will also know exactly when, in course progress, certain concepts need to be introduced and clarified, giving the students the chance to use them as part of their learning process. Second, the students might simply forget the terms they learnt as part of the LAP course by the time they start their specialized studies, if these words have not been integrated into a coherent and progressive line of study. Third, some students might want to or have to change their study option. In this case, a highly specialised technical vocabulary for a different domain than their own will almost completely lose utility.

4.2.2. The students' level of general language needs also to be addressed. I agree that LAP courses are not meant to be remedial courses for the general language (Hyland 2006, 116). However, the difference between EAP and LAP is relevant at this point. Our students start the preparatory year without any knowledge of Romanian language. In one academic year (28 weeks of study) they need to get to B2 level in general language and to do the LAP course in the last weeks of the second semester. At the same time, it will rarely be the case for students who take EAP classes to step into a completely new territory when it comes to the language, since learning English is part of educational systems all over the world and access to international news, entertainment, communication, etc. is provided in English to a very large extent. This exposure to language provides a much larger basis in general language, which will help in all the phases of the learning process. In the case of less taught and used languages, like Romanian, much more will need to be built at the levels of mid-frequency vocabulary, general academic vocabulary and border technical vocabulary¹².

¹² I agree that the study of specialized language does not need to start after the students master a core vocabulary and that a stepwise modality of language acquiring has not been supported by research

4.2.3. Researchers analysed also cases of EAP and of specialised studies being taught in countries where English is not the official language, like in Singapore and Hong Kong (Hyland 2006, 3). As for Romania, a report of the Ministry of Education¹³ shows that at the end of 2022, more than 10.000 students were enrolled in higher education programmes with English as a teaching language. The teachers who deliver the courses in these programmes are, in a vast majority, native speakers of Romanian, not English (or French, the other language in which similar programmes are taught). This impacts on the language they use in course, limiting it to the academic register (Hyland 2006, 4). However, when it comes to academic programmes taught by teachers in their mother tongue, the whole discourse becomes much more complex for the non-native students, participant in these programmes. Some of the most interesting responses received from students as part of the NA conducted in 2018 and in the following years were related to their capacity of understanding their content teachers, with all the discourse complexity and phonetic aspects specific to the native speaker, but also with contextual and cultural knowledge hard to access by non-natives.

Answers like the following ones show that the language problems the students face when starting their specialised studies do not start with the technical language, but with the complex linguistic structuring through which it is delivered: “I did not go to classes at all in the first semester because I did not understand my teachers.” (W., Lebanon, medicine); “All the lessons were difficult for me. Actually, I only understood what was very clear and simple, because the teachers spoke very fast and used metaphors I did not know. It was ok for me to read anything, and it was ok to speak.” (G., Syria, painting); “The first semester was difficult because of the language, not because of course content. The language my teachers and colleagues used was colloquial language, with many idiomatic expressions, short forms and different intonations.” (L., France, kinesiotherapy). All these students had taken their studies in Romanian very seriously, they graduated from the language year with good results and yet the impact of the first semester/year of specialised studies was a very significant one. They all managed to continue their studies, some of them already graduated.

Experiences like the ones presented above, along with the quantitative results of NA show clearly that the students who study abroad need to be equipped with adequate coping strategies, which can be prepared as part of the LAP course.

in second language acquisition (Hyland 2006, 10-11). However, more experience with the use of language can definitely help when the students start learning for their future specialisation.

¹³https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2022/Transparenta/Starea_invatamantului/Raport-Starea-nvatamantului-superior-2021-2022.pdf

4.3. The course

The specialisations of all the students in the group are addressed. The first course of specialised language is dedicated to humanities and art disciplines in general, focusing on academic vocabulary which might be of use for all the specialisations. The course is based on discussions about the role of humanities and arts in our life, types of sciences, sub-domains of the disciplines they will study, their experience with the field, what they think will be most important and most difficult when they start their specialised studies. Vocabulary introduced and explained in this course includes lexemes like: branch, field, object of study, concept, conception, research, investigate, divide, contain, etc. Elements of the academic vocabulary are recycled in every course, with the whole group. Each of the other courses is focused on one of the specialisations of the students in the course. The class activities are mainly focused on the oral abilities (listening and speaking) and the vocabulary specificity is kept at a level which is both comprehensible and of use for all the students. While this choice was, to a certain extent, determined by the context of the course and the teaching conditions, the students' feedback was very positive about this ("The most useful thing was that you combined specialisations in one course and I could learn diverse vocabulary which helps me with my courses and the fact that you chose themes which help me with what I study now." – G., Syria, painting; "The different discussions we had were very useful. I learnt a lot of new words and I could talk about my field of study in Romanian." – Z., Syria, Letters; "The greatest profit from this course for me was opening a perspective on different events. As an Asian student, I always accept the teachers' ideas and opinions and, step by step, I lose my own position on a topic. But when I saw the vivid debate among colleagues, I was very inspired." – V, China, Letters).

The work the students need to do at home is specialised for each domain (e.g. the materials on philosophy are only for the student(s) who will study philosophy). They need to read texts, to resolve tasks (related to vocabulary, text comprehension, but also integrated tasks – e.g. they need to write their opinion on questions approached in the texts they read). As a level of complexity, they are usually texts (published higher education courses) of the type: introduction in archaeology/graphics/interior design, etc. and texts of popularisation. The materials are deposited in separate folders, in a common drive and the students will each access the ones for their specialisation. Any questions the students might have about the homework can be addressed in class or in separate tuition sessions. Along with the texts they need to process (which I select and for which

I create tasks), I also include a list of vocabulary for each specialisation in the drive. The words range between border technical and technical vocabulary. The writing tasks are also done individually, and they are sent for feedback.

The courses which are done in classroom with the whole group are focused on the oral skills in the effort of equipping the students with strategies for coping with the specialised courses when they start their studies. The survey conducted in 2018 and part of the feedback the graduates from the course of humanities and arts sent showed that the biggest challenge the students needed to face was related to understanding the courses taught by the teachers in class. As a result, I considered that they need to be familiar with this type of discourse and part of the input material in class are small fragments of real courses taught for each (or as many as possible) of the disciplines. The videos are only a few minutes long and are part of introductory courses, with a reduced level of complexity and with less technical vocabulary. The videos are discussed in relation with: vocabulary (including expressions or syntagms from the common language – idiomatic, popular, colloquial), discourse structures, speech delivery strategies, para-verbal language, etc. Another fundamental element of these courses are the discussions, debates and presentations from the students, which help them become more confident with their oral production abilities in relation with their future subject of study.

Assessment has a common part (listening), with tasks of comprehension and of note taking, while the other exam components (vocabulary, reading, writing, speaking, integrated tasks) are subject specific.

This course has been redesigned in order to increase its efficiency and to help students build strategies for coping with their future educational environment. The course is permanently open to feedback and to change.

5. An example

This chapter presents an analysis of a small corpus of texts (two written texts and one oral presentation), which can be used as input for a course in the domain of archaeology (preparatory year, specialised language for humanities and arts).

The purpose of this analysis is to show the proportion of vocabulary in the categories defined under 2 (high-frequency and mid-frequency, general academic, border technical and technical vocabulary) and to indicate the categories recommended as focus in the course.

The small corpus includes texts which could be representative for the course of specialised language from the point of view of vocabulary specificity, text

dimension and level of difficulty. The written texts are part of a higher education printed course in archaeology and sum 1266 words (only the words included in the categories above were counted). The first part was extracted from the chapter on the history of archaeology and the second text is part of the chapter *Excavation methods and techniques*. From the oral text I extracted 1233 words belonging to the above-mentioned categories. The text presents the typical work an archaeologist does (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR8Xbae0ay8>). This is part of a documentary about a museum of archaeology meant for audience interested in history and archaeology, but not specialist in the domain. Consequently, the level of technicity is not high.

The results are presented in tables and diagrams showing the number of words and collocations according to the categories defined in Chapter 2 above and examples for each category. The tables also include examples of low-frequency words and of names in the texts (persons, places and titles of studies or books). The list of general academic words includes also linkers which are not common to everyday interaction.

The inclusion of the words in the corresponding categories was based on the consultation of technical dictionaries for archaeology, the consultation of academic vocabulary lists for English (the Academic Word List), intuition and experience. The distribution of some words between the list of high and mid-frequency and that of general academic words could be refined.

The words in the inventory are not unique entries, they were counted every time they appeared in the text. This way a more accurate picture of the proportion of vocabulary in the texts could be obtained.

I included the words as they appeared in the text, and sometimes I kept not the headword, but a related word because this 'fits the profile' of the text better. For example, I preferred to keep the word *hidden*, instead of including the headword *hide*. The text mentions treasures hidden in the ground, while the headword *hide* would lose the intended connotation.

The results show that the general academic words and the border technical words represent approximately 40% in both the written and the oral texts. They are extremely relevant for the students' understanding of written and oral texts and are recommended as the focus of teaching for multiple reasons: many of these words are likely to be unknown to the students; the context of this course is a rare opportunity for the students to have these words explained; these words are of crucial importance for understanding the oral and written texts in their future line of study; while the content teachers will explain the technical words as part of the courses, they will not normally explain any of the words included in these two categories.

Table 1. Distribution of words in the written texts

categories of vocabulary	high and mid-frequency words	general academic words	border technical words	technical words	names	low frequency words
distribution						
number of words and collocations (total: 1266)	420	431	63	211	121	20
percentage	33%	34%	5%	16.5%	19.5%	2%
examples	interest, old, first, history, artist, time, know, object, world, event, meet, important [interes, vechi, primul, istorie, artist, timp, ști, obiect, lume, eveniment, întâlni, important]	amplify, signification, manifest, found, initiate, extend, describe, prevail, acquire, comprehensi ve, for instance, regarding [amplifica, semnificație, a se manifesta, înființa, iniția, extinde, descrie, predomina, procura, cuprinzător, de pildă, cu privire la]	dig, wrap, gather, spread, sink, ditch, hole, rock, statue, treasure, surface, hidden [săpa, împacheta, aduna, a se întinde, scufunda, șanț, groapă, piatră, statuie, comoară, aduce la suprafață, ascuns]	helmet, icon, cult, vestige, hieroglyphs, inscription, excavation, medieval, archaeological site, prospect, necropolis [coif, icoană, cult, vestigii, hieroglif, inscripție, excavare, medieval, sit arheologic, prospecta]	Thotmes IV, Khefren, Mesopotamia, Thucydides, Homer, Iliad, Oddysey, Old Kingdom of Egypt, Athens, Rome, Alessandro Farnese [Tuthmes al IV-lea, Khafra, Mesopotamia, Tucidide, Homer, Iliada, Odiseea, Vechiul Regat Egiptean, Atena, Roma, Alessandro Farnese]	exhortation, palpable, resound, meticulousness, plunder, vessel, overpass, pundit [îndemn, palpabil, răsuna, meticulozitate, a prăda, navă, pasarelă, expert]

Table 2. Distribution of words in the oral text

categories of vocabulary	high and mid-frequency words	general academic words	border technical words	technical words	names	low frequency words
distribution						
number of words and collocations (total: 1233)	470	424	75	216	23	25
percentage	38%	34.5%	6%	17.5%	2%	2%
examples	think, help, find, object, picture, place, question, time, person, village, year, present [crede, ajutor, găsi, obiect, imagine, loc, întrebare, timp, persoană, sat, an, prezent]	distinguish, research, examine, measure, investigate, interpret, reach a conclusion, method, natural sciences, characteristic ics, task, role [distinge, cerceta, examina, măsura, investiga, interpreta, ajunge la o concluzie, metodă, științe naturale, caracteristic i, sarcină, rol]	draw, bury, remove, grave, skeleton, dish, rock, cemetery, bone, trace, depth, tools, bracelet, ring [desena, înmormânta, îndepărta, mormânt, schelet, vas, piatră, cimitir, os, urmă, adâncime, unelte, brățară, inel]	carve, restore, vestige, clay, settlement, aerial archaeology, archaeological complex, remains, corrosion, funeral ritual, numismatic catalogue, funerary offerings [sculpta, restaura, vestigii, lut, așezare, arheologie aeriană, complex arheologic, rămășițe, corozivitate, ritual funerar, catalog numismatic, ofrande funerare]	Tisa, the Carpathians, Arpad, Ladislau the Saint, Szabolcs, Jósza András [Tisa, Carpați, Arpad, Ladislau cel Sfânt, Sabalcs, Jósza András]	roam, slurp, allot, plow, far-off land, bovine, caldron, defunct, minutely, aforesaid [cutreiera, sorbi, plug, meleaguri, bovine, căldare, defunct, minuțios, odinioară]

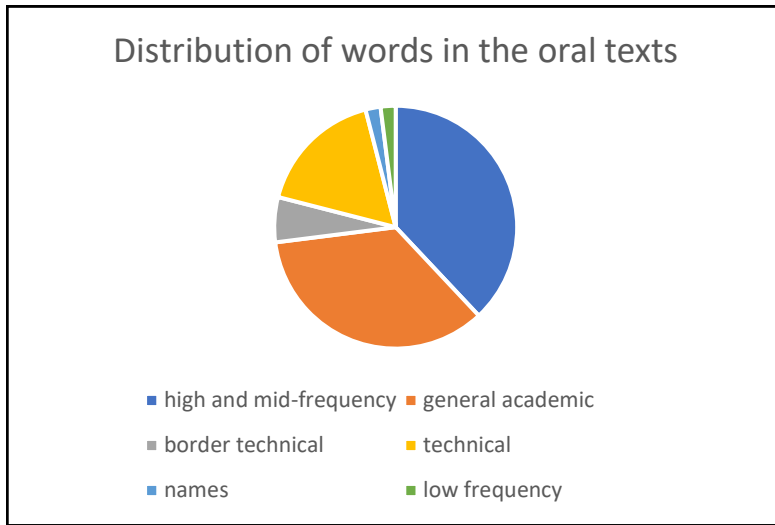


Figure 1. Distribution of words in the oral texts

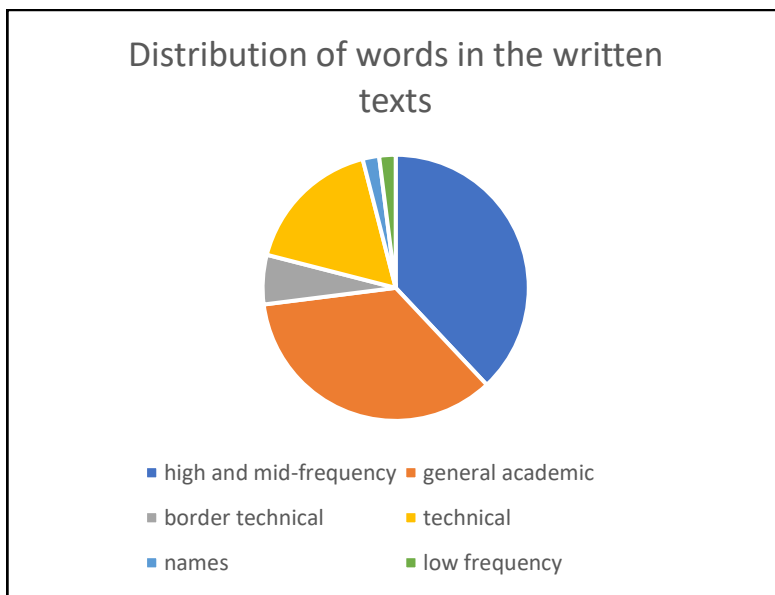


Figure 2. Distribution of words in the written texts

6. Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to contribute to the discussion on the level of vocabulary specificity in relation with the course of specialised language

for academic purposes. This is a vast discussion indeed, since this type of courses covers considerably varied contexts and the choice of the level of vocabulary specificity is impacted by a multitude of factors (the available resources, the students' familiarity with the content and their level of general language, the teachers' experience and specialisation in the domain, etc.). The categorisation of vocabulary can help the teachers decide on the level of specificity which would best fit the students' needs. This study proposes four categories of vocabulary: general (high and mid-frequency), general academic, border technical and technical vocabulary and recommends as the focus of teaching and the object of assessment the general academic and border technical vocabulary. The analysis on the corpus for the course of specialised language for archaeology shows the significant percentage these two categories occupy in the texts (approximately 40%). The examples collected from the written and oral texts are both relevant for the domain and potentially difficult for the students in the absence of explanations and representative contexts.

The study needs to be continued and refined from different perspectives: first of all, the analysed corpus needs to be larger, including more written and oral input. The vocabulary for other domains should be included in the analysis. It should also be tested to what extent the students are familiar with the border technical words in their future line of study once they graduate from B1 and B2 general language courses.

It is only hoped that this study, based on research, teaching experience and especially the students' feedback, can help teachers decide on the level of vocabulary specificity for their courses, in contexts similar to the one presented here.

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