

## Introduction

English is gradually becoming a world language, a common language for international communication; a development fuelled in recent years among others by advances in information technology and by globalisation which has been gaining pace in business and science in particular. English has now firmly established itself as the lingua franca of international communication, eg in medicine where globalisation has struck hard and where the pace and proliferation of ongoing research is particularly prominent. Scholars' and practitioners' interest in English for medical purposes has, of course, followed suit. Thus, medical translation is becoming big business and global and national translation businesses alike as well as global translator organisations (eg the American Translators Association) are currently establishing specialist "medical" translation units and offering post-graduate courses on English for medical purposes and English medical translation. Language scholars in business schools and universities are responding to the need for scholarly input. Hence, in 1999 the 12th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes featured a well-visited workshop on English for Medical Purposes, organised by Ines Busch-Lauers, some the contributions of which appear as articles in this thematic volume of *Hermes*. At the Aarhus School of Business we now put an extra effort into meeting the demand for scholarly input in this growth area, among others by issuing bilingual medical dictionaries, investigating presentation modes in package inserts, organising conferences, seminars and PhD courses in medical writing, and breaking new ground by running internet-based distance learning courses in English for medical science.

The present volume of *Hermes* is yet another attempt to shed light on the issue of medical English. Featuring four original contributions, the volume addresses a range of issues from the rhetoric of science and sociology of academia by Salager-Meyer to critical language and register awareness by Høy and Askehave/Zethsen to translation methodology by Plested.

The rhetoric of science has so far been explored mainly at the syntactical level, where focus has traditionally been on hedging and other kinds of mitigation behaviour. In her original contribution entitled *Rhetorical evolution of oppositional discourse in French academic writing*, Ms Salager-Meyer adopts a diachronic text perspective while analysing direct or indirect conflict in academic confrontational discourse in the *Results* and *Discussion* sections of French medical journals from 1810 to 1995. Salager-Meyer observes that while French-speaking scientists predominantly voice their professional disagreement in an authoritative, categorical, direct and personal way, the late 20th century has seen a slight change in the tone of voice of academic conflict which has now become more “low key”, the main vehicles of mitigation being hedging or shifts from person to object thematization.

Medical language is characterised by the highly technical nature of its vocabulary, its abundance of professional jargon and in texts written by physician-writers a conscious rhetorical focus on the subject to the apparent exclusion of persona and audience. The translation of such texts from one language into another and from one genre into another (called ‘inter-generic translation’) represents an intriguing challenge for text writers and translators; a challenge addressed by Askehave & Zethsen in their paper entitled *Medical texts made simple - dream or reality*. Askehave & Zethsen analyse functional aspects of language usage in patient package inserts translated from English into Danish, and they argue that for patient package inserts to become legible to layman, specialist register features, be they lexical, syntactical or stylistic, must, and indeed can, be abandoned.

In her article *Morphological considerations concerning the nationalisation of medical terms*, Ms Høy pursues the same issue of register awareness, though from a somewhat different angle. The simultaneous decline in knowledge of the classical medical languages, Latin and Greek, and the hegemony of English as today’s *lingua franca* of medicine, calls, according to Ms Høy, for an overall Danish language policy to aid producers of medical texts written in Danish, in particular by setting up general guidelines for construction and spelling of compounds. Ms Høy substantiates her point by analysing the so-called neo-classical compounds and by competently illustrating the challenge facing the morphologists trying to bring order to the current confusion within this field.

Translation orthodoxy argues that translation into a given target language is the prerogative of a native speaker of that language. This orthodoxy is challenged by Ms Plested in her article entitled *Translating medical texts into a foreign language: Some methodological considerations*. Ms Plested argues that careful monitoring of the translation process using an adirectional translation model and full use of linguistic, methodological and subject field competences specific to contextualised medical communication will do the trick and will, indeed, make it possible for non-native translators to translate medical texts into English; texts that are perfectly acceptable to the medical community and publishable in prestigious international journals.

This thematic volume can hope only to shed selective light on the issue of medical LSP, but we hope it will provide interesting reading, also for those who take a general, non-medical interest in language for special purposes.

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