

Chapter 8

New Roles for ESP Lecturers: The Challenges of Training Professional Researchers in Romanian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The pressure on multilingual scholars to disseminate research outcomes through the medium of English has generated the need for programs which prepare them to perform at internationally accepted standards. The task of helping researchers refine their academic literacies entails new responsibilities for language professionals in university departments. This chapter will explore the new roles taken on by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) professionals in Romania within the framework of an MA program designed to enhance communication and research competences of faculty in economics and business. The methodological approach adopted in this study comprises narratives and field notes provided by ESP professionals involved in setting up and delivering the MA program. The findings suggest that responding to the needs of a demanding teaching situation and engaging in interdisciplinary interactions provide both challenges and professional development opportunities for language teaching academics.

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INTRODUCTION

The academic environment has been changing considerably in recent years, particularly in terms of the increasing focus on research performance and the pressure on academics to publish in scholarly journals. Consequently, criteria for evaluating the performance of academics as well as those for evaluating the performance of universities have placed a lot of emphasis on research quality and visibility. In order to comply with institutional requirements and to ensure visibility of their work, researchers from many parts of the world need to communicate research outputs through the medium of English that has undeniably become the language of scholarly publication. Such global trends were manifest in West European countries decades ago (Tusting et al., 2019) and have become operational in countries such as Romania over the last few years.

The pressure to conform to new requirements can be regarded as considerable given the fact that academics in such environments had less time to adjust and to redesign their practice and priorities. These pressures have generated the need for programs which prepare multilingual scholars to perform at internationally accepted standards in their fields of research. Development of English language proficiency and in particular of English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) skills (Flowerdew, 2015) is a key element of training programs and involves training in academic research genres, discourse and rhetoric. Developing ability to communicate research results through the medium of English is a task with implications for all academics, be they language specialists or specialists in various other disciplinary fields. English language academics in university departments need to support the efforts of their colleagues towards better research communication abilities while they need to refine their own skills as well in order to perform this task. Many of them have considerable experience in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) but not necessarily ERPP. New roles and responsibilities derive from here and they represent both a challenge to be addressed and an opportunity for professional development.

This study builds on the authors' experience of training professional researchers within the framework of an academic development MA program ("EDURES"), established in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. The chapter will examine the efforts of English for Specific Purposes professionals to take on their new roles as trainers in several education and research-related disciplines, the challenges entailed by the new roles and the relevant interaction among ESP-applied linguistics lecturers and the program participants, specialists in economics, business, and related fields. In a university dedicated to economics and business education at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels, language lecturers in the modern languages and business communication department usually teach business English, design teaching materials and tests and occasionally train junior ESP lecturers. The establishment

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