

IDENTIFYING PHRASEOLOGY IN LSP: A 'SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS' PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

It is nowadays currently accepted in LSP circles, as well as in SLA theory, that the ability to make appropriate word combinations is significant for one's proficiency level in a foreign language - as it is for native speakers. Technical terms seem to have a 'predilection' for combining themselves with certain general words to the detriment of their synonyms. Seeing that it is anything but easy for a non-native speaker to sense what these preferences are, LSP teachers are abandoning the ideas that specialised vocabulary is best taught by presenting it in glossaries or lists of terms, or that equipping the students with a good technical dictionary will do the trick. Instead, they are becoming aware of the fact that one of the greatest difficulties in LSP vocabulary acquisition lies in the use of correct combinations between the terms and the so-called sub-technical vocabulary, i.e. general vocabulary, with a higher frequency in specialised language than in general language (Vangebuchten 2005). This understanding raises the question of how to identify the sequences to be taught. As quite a troublesome issue in the context of language for general purposes, the identification of formulaic sequences in LSP is no less complicated.

Specialised discourse is indeed characterised by the vast presence of syntagmatic terms which are often composed of such a large number of elements that they resemble a phrase rather than a term. Compound terms can easily add up to 10 different lexical forms, making them look more like sentences than words. Also, the longer the term, the less likely it is to be used twice in exactly the same way. In other words, the morphosyntactic variability of compound terms is sometimes so strong that their lexicalisation or institutionalisation as a term can be questioned. As is argued by Myking (1989, 270), there are syntagmatic terms that seem to function rather as defining phrases: 'Compounds are not always intended for institutionalization, i.e. as a term. They may function as ad-hoc descriptive or definition-like syntactic phrases, corresponding to the text-condensing compounds of newspaper headlines, etc.' Another factor which complicates the identification problem is the fact that in specialised language,