PREFACE TO THIS VOLUME

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1. Our thanks to contributors and reviewers

As editors of *Representing and Redefining Specialised Knowledge: Medical discourse*, our first duty is to thank both our reviewers and contributors for the hard work they have put into the production of this volume. Each of the papers selected for publication underwent two rigorous blind peer reviews and further revision in the light of various editorial suggestions. The best way of expressing our thanks is to ensure the widest possible readership for this volume. The fact that this is the first volume in the *LISPET - Linguaggi Specialistici e Traduzione Tecnica* series and can be downloaded free of charge from the *ESE - Salento University Publishing* website (*http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/*) is a first step in this direction.

2. Our message to university students

Our second duty relates to university students, all of whom engage with discourse in English in relation to specialised knowledge. We invite you to download this volume as we believe you will benefit from thinking about how specialised knowledge is represented, defined and accessed in today's society. We also advise you to think about how digital corpora can help you master specialised discourse in English. For example, you will sometimes want to check up on specific structures in English, which is where even a rudimentary knowledge of what corpora are and how they represent scientific discourse can be very useful. Like dictionaries and other online tools, online corpora can tell you whether the expressions you would like to use are correctly formed and whether those you come across in lectures or in textbooks are frequently used forms or, on the contrary, rather rare constructions. But, unlike other tools, online corpora go much further in providing you with a more complete picture of the meanings of the expressions you encounter and how best to use them in your own discourse. For example, they are a good guide to those contexts where the expressions you want to check up on are typically used. They also help you identify those

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contexts where these expressions are seldom or never used. So regardless of the degree course you are following, we encourage you to download this volume and to reflect just a little on how online corpora and corpus studies can help you.

For those students whose degree courses require them to constantly engage with specialised knowledge of English in their daily studies, and who need to understand the nature of scientific discourse more fully, may we recommend the added value of *specialised* corpora and *specialised* corpus studies and a small investment in them? Somewhat paradoxically, specialised corpora help all of us to understand how very basic words in English, not just those relating to health and illness, often come to be used in different ways as a result of the different perspectives involved in both specialised and everyday contexts.

In particular, specialised corpora can be a very helpful resource when attempting to master the basic characteristics of scientific discourse. They represent a shortcut to understanding why the grammar rules you learnt at school are so frequently broken when imparting scientific knowledge. One reason for this is that, besides grammatical rules, scientific discourse needs to incorporate and respect power relationships, social, cultural and ethical conventions, sociosemiotic and intercultural factors as well as assumptions about shared knowledge and much more besides. Specialised corpora provide many examples of the interplay between grammar rules and discourse norms and help all of us to understand why spoken and written scientific discourse are so divergent from each other and why mastering their differences is not merely a question of learning specialised lexis. Indeed, as the studies presented here constantly illustrate, understanding how specialised knowledge is represented, and constantly defined and redefined in all types of scientific discourse, not just medical discourse, is far more a question of understanding what lies behind the very different nature of written, spoken and multimodal modes of communication and interaction.

In this respect, we feel we have special duty to encourage students in the later years of their university study, especially Ph.D. students, to invest in specialised corpus studies. Indeed, in different ways and in different circumstances, each of the editors has come to appreciate the value of experimentation that engages students in the construction of specialised corpora, in particular, as recorded in several papers in this volume, in relation to multimedia corpora. Indeed, over the coming years, we can expect specialised corpora to increasingly incorporate viewings of videos, and for university studies in general to deal with far more complex combinations of written, oral and visual discourse than was ever before the case.

Every student should be aware of the digital and multimodal skills that society will increasingly place on them in their careers, a matter that the *Common Framework for Intercultural Digital Literacies* (Sindoni *et al.* 2019)

underscores. In this respect, we feel we have a special duty to encourage all students – whether undergraduate students engaging with the complexities of digital course, for example as part of their translation studies or, for instance, doctoral students engaging in research into specialised discourse in English – to pay special attention to corpus-based multimedia and multimodal studies. Many such studies, as suggested in this volume, and indeed elsewhere, are likely to be undertaken in the field of Medicine and Healthcare, given that the Internet has become a forum where everybody has something to say on these issues.

3. Our message to university colleagues

We have a final duty which is to thank our many university colleagues who have encouraged us to produce this volume and guided us in its execution. There are still, comparatively speaking, few corpus studies that deal with specialised corpora in Medicine and Healthcare, despite the fact that these domains represent a major part of university activity, often including hospital-based care and research. Likewise, there are still few specialised multimodal corpora. As Anne Wichmann observed over ten years ago:

> The technology for recording and storing multimodal data is available, as is software that allows multiple annotations. However, as long as corpus research is driven (and funded) on the basis of just a few aspects of research, such as grammar and lexis, much valuable information could be lost. This paper is therefore a plea to all corpus developers to look beyond their immediate needs and to be a little more visionary in their approach. (Wichmann 2007, p. 86.)

Vision is indeed everything. As this volume goes to press, the third decade in the 21st century is about to be ushered in. We hope this volume, and others that follow it in this and other series, will encourage further investment in specialised corpora in the coming years especially where the relationships between different modes of meaning-making are taken into consideration and where students at all levels, regardless of the degrees in which they are enrolled, are encouraged to take part in specialised corpus-based studies and activities in the furtherance of their digital competences and career prospects.

Lecce, December 6, 2019

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References

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