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A reception study of the articles published in *English for Specific Purposes* from 1990–1999

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ABSTRACT

EAP practitioners in advanced courses have often focused on assisting junior scholars who are non-native speakers of English with their attempts to publish in English. Today, however, university administrators increasingly rely on post-publication data such as citation records. We therefore suggest that identifying heavily cited and largely uncited papers would be an addition to the advanced writing instructor's toolkit. In fact, many proposals have been made to account for citational success and failure. Disentangling these variables is complex and typically requires in-depth knowledge of the chosen sub-field. Here we examine the reception histories of a decade's worth of main articles in the *English for Specific Purposes Journal*, using the *Google Scholar*, *Scopus* and *Web of Science* databases. Analysis of the 15 most cited articles indicates that placement in an issue, gender, first language, author status, and provenance are not major determinants. Instead, area of research interest (i.e., discoursal features of academic text) and type of ESP (i.e., EAP) were the main predisposing factors. We then conduct a close analysis of the two top 1990s papers (both, incidentally, written by women whose first language is not English and working in non-Anglophone settings). We conclude with some implications of these findings for EAP practitioners and their "customers".

1. Introduction

Studies of the textual production of research papers have been a common strand in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research for many years, certainly as far back as James (1984), particularly when being composed by students (e.g., Casanave, 2002; Cheng, 2006; Tardy, 2009) or junior scholars (e.g., Flowerdew, 2000; Gosden, 1995) whose first language is other than English. Among the topics treated in some depth are the possibility of plagiarism (e.g., Flowerdew, 1997), the maintenance of identity in an Anglophone research world (Cadman, 2002), the processes of drafting and revision (e.g., Gosden, 1995) and responses to reviewers' comments (Fortanet, 2008; Kourilova, 1998; Swales & Feak, 2011). One common thread in these studies is that of apprenticeship and acculturation to a disciplinary community where, behind the textual surface, the largely unwritten 'rules of the game' as well as defensible levels of knowledge claims need to be apprehended and acted upon. Hyland, in particular, notes that research articles are "sites of disciplinary engagement" and even goes on to suggest that "the final product is seen as *a social act* that can only occur within a particular community and audience." (our emphasis) (2009, p. 88).

A similar emphasis on the processes of production rather than on the later reception of research articles is also typical of allied fields, such as the rhetoric of science and the sociology of knowledge; however, in these areas it remains less marked

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and less striking than in ESP. One possible explanation for this divergence would seem to lie in the fact that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners are more actively engaged in the urgent business of assisting junior researchers in getting their manuscripts finished and then accepted for publication Indeed, only in those aspects of information science that are primarily concerned with citational studies *per se* (e.g., White, 2001, 2004) is the emphasis placed on what happens to papers and publications *after* they have been published or circulated.

One important exception to this relative neglect of reception is the long paper by Paul, Charney, and Kendall (2001) in which they trace the reception histories of papers in the rhetoric of science. Paul et al. go on to argue that it is only by following post-publication uptakes that we might begin to perceive what might be the effects (if any) of how these works were structured and written on the intertextual responses of their academic readers. They suggest, for example, that if citational uptake can show that papers with orthodox introductions are more successful than those with unorthodox ones, then we have some basis for arguing that writing and rhetoric do, in fact, count for something.

While the arguments of Paul et al. have not always been accepted (Harris, 2005), they have achieved a certain resonance and popularity (Swales, 2004) presumably partly because they offer some reassurance to all those of us concerned with academic writing that our scholarly efforts to assess writing quality and our practical ones to improve it are worthwhile. In addition, of course, they appeal because scholars and researchers can easily recognize that seeing the publication of a research article or achieving the completion of a PhD thesis are not really the main desiderata. This is because these textual products are essentially the *initiations* of processes that can lead to academic and research careers; in other words, while the publication of a scholarly work or the successful defense of a doctoral thesis are indeed significant milestones, they are not the ends of those two roads. More generally, texts themselves are trapped in some non-intertextual black hole unless, and until, they are read, downloaded, annotated, utilized and/or cited by others. Further, as Hyland (2009) as well as many others have recently observed, reception as well as production is of growing institutional importance as citation data and other kinds of reception evaluation criteria (such as awards and prizes) are being increasingly used for various kinds of assessment at individual, departmental and institutional levels. In these circumstances, there would seem to be a case for giving more attention to assisting researchers who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) with the post-production aspects of their English language publications.

However, in any such endeavor, it is first necessary to gain some sense of the factors that might lead to a research article's citational uptake or neglect. Many factors have been invoked—institutional provenance (Peters & Ceci, 1982), *kairos* ('timeliness') (Miller, 1992), interest and significance (Small, 2004), innovative methodology and amount of data (Amsterdamska & Leydesdorff, 1989), author status in the field and rhetorical orthodoxy (Paul et al., 2001; Helal, 2009), writing style, gender, and mother tongue (Sanderson, 2008). Obviously, it is no simple matter to assess the relative weight of all these factors. In addition, a further difficulty with reception studies is that they typically require considerable insider knowledge of the chosen research field (cf. Becher, 1987). Therefore, it has to be admitted that reception studies present unusual challenges. The solution in Paul et al. (2001) is to opt for a multi-dimensional methodology (citation studies, rhetorical analysis, observations of and interviews with readers, and experimental work involving textual manipulations of various kinds). Another way into reception histories is well illustrated in the paper by Amsterdamska and Leydesdorff (1989), who correlated the citational histories of four comparable papers produced by a biochemistry research group at the University of Amsterdam with the detailed strengths of the individual products. This second option obviously requires expert specialized knowledge of the field being investigated—as at least one of the two authors obviously had.

It is this second option that we have largely followed in this paper. We chose the leading journal in the field, *English for Specific Purposes* (*ESPJ*), because the first author has a long familiarity with this area. We chose the 1990s as our time-frame because in this field citations are fairly slow to accrete and accumulate; consequently, leaving a whole decade to pass until the present day would seem to allow a fairly clear picture to emerge. At the other end of the chronological scale, as it were, the choice of 1990 as the starting point would prevent any distortions that might have arisen from the fact that the targeted journal was 'new' and not yet established, since *ESPJ* had originally been founded a decade earlier in 1980 (although it did not become an Elsevier journal until 2000). In this way, examining the citational uptake of a whole decade of research articles would provide a solid database of over 150 articles from which we could identify those papers that have emerged as the citational elite. With that in hand, it might be possible to tease out the factors that have led the most highly-cited papers to achieve their comparative prominence.

2. Methods

We began the citation analysis by first analyzing the tables of contents from each issue of *ESPJ* from the period of 1990 to 1999, comprising 34 issues from volume 9-1 to volume 18-4. The journal published three issues per year from 1990 to 1995 and four issues per year subsequently. A total of 154 articles were included, an average of 4.5 articles per issue. For the purposes of this study, any other type of content – editorials, discussion and research notes, book reviews – was disregarded, and the study focused only on original research articles. To establish a baseline comparison of the relative frequency of citations to each article, an average number of citations was derived from three major online sources of citation statistics: Thomson ISI's Web of Science, Elsevier's Scopus and Google Scholar. Google Scholar is a free web-based database which indexes literature in a wide variety of formats from a wide variety of sources, from peer-reviewed articles to conference papers. Although its relevance algorithms and the exact list of sources crawled are unknown, Google Scholar remains a

widely-used starting point for research, particularly because its 'Cited By' feature provides a total number of citations to the referenced article. Scopus and Web of Science are subscription-based professional databases focused primarily on peer-reviewed literature in scholarly journals.

There have been multiple comparative studies of the three databases as citation analysis tools. Schroeder (2007) provides a meta-analysis of 10 studies comparing Web of Science and Google Scholar and concludes that both databases are useful for scholars and can be complementary. One recent study compared the citation search results for the 25 most-accessed articles in the Science Direct database in the 163 social sciences journals among the three citation databases (Levine-Clark & Gil, 2009). The study found that while Web of Science is the established tool for citation analysis, Scopus and Google Scholar provide valuable alternative methods for assessing the importance of scholarly articles in the social sciences, and that the freely-available Google Scholar can be considered a viable complement to or even a substitute for the other subscription-based databases. Other comparative studies (Bakkalbasi, Bauer, Glover, & Wang, 2007; Meho & Yang, 2007; Yang & Meho, 2006) suggest that the combined usage of all three sources provides a broader view of the scholarly impact of works across disciplines.

The initial set of 154 articles went through three rounds of analysis, each narrowing down the pool. Each of the articles was first searched in Google Scholar, and a list of all articles with over 50 citations was generated. The 33 articles meeting this criterion were analyzed using a number of criteria in an effort to isolate any factors which might hypothetically be related to greater citation frequency: issue or year of publication, placement order of the article within the journal, page length, self-citations, citations from within *ESPJ* itself, and the total number of references. Each article was then searched in Scopus and Web of Science, and an average number of citations to each article from the three sources was calculated. (Note that all citation totals are as of December 2010.) These averages were ranked and the top 15 most-cited articles were identified. These 15 most-cited papers were then examined in detail for personal characteristics of the authors, including first language, institutional location, gender, and status in the field at the time of publication to determine if any of these individual factors obviously correlated with frequency of citation.

Finally, a detailed analysis of the top two most citationally-successful articles was conducted. In the first stage, the first author of this article undertook a close reading of the two papers; in essence, this provides the perspective of a contemporary reader who has had close engagement with ESP/EAP papers for several decades. Next, we asked the two authors via email for their views as to what factors they thought had contributed to their article's citational success; lastly, we traced (as far as possible) the actual comments that the top-50 Google Scholar citing authors had made about the two papers, which were then categorized. In these ways, we were able to achieve a certain degree of triangulation: The 'expert reader' perspective was juxtaposed with those of the original authors, both of which were then juxtaposed with the actual citational record, so that conclusions can be drawn.

3. Results

The initial citation search in Google Scholar produced an average number of 81.8 citations for the top 33 articles, while Scopus produced an average of 24.6 and Web of Science produced an average of 17.4. Google Scholar produced the widest range of citation results, from a high of 187 citations for the top-cited article to a low of 51 for the lowest-cited article, a range of 136. In comparison, Web of Science had a range of 37 (from a high of 42 to a low of 5) and Scopus had a range of 51 (from 58 to 7). These results are not surprising since Google Scholar is not limited to scholarly journals, and includes theses, books, and abstracts, as well as foreign language citations and some duplicate references; the inclusion of monographs, in this particular context, is both useful and advantageous since books of various kinds form an important part of the ESP literature. To compensate for these variations, a cumulative average of citations from all three sources was calculated and used to rank the 33 articles from most- to least-cited. The citation averages ranged from a high of 95.3 to a low of 23.0, with the majority of the articles at an average of 40 or below.

After this initial ranking, the frequency of citations per issue was analyzed to test for whether a particular issue or year produced an abnormally high citational uptake, but no such skewing was found. The order of articles within an issue was next analyzed to test for primacy effect, that is, if earlier positioning in the issue, particularly selection as 'the lead article' affected the frequency of citations. The numerical order of each article within its journal was recorded, and the total number of articles for each position counted. Results are shown in Table 1.

While the last two positions were slightly less cited, and the first two positions slightly more cited, the largest percentage of articles were in the middle positions. Thus, no 'lead article' effect was found, even though the editors during the survey

Table 1
Placement order of articles.

Order	#	%
1	7	21.2
2	7	21.2
3	10	30.3
4	4	12.1
5	5	15.2
	33	100.0

period would discuss which article would make the best opening paper—a practice that continues to this day (B. Paltridge, personal communication 3 February 2011).

The page length of each article was counted to determine if longer articles were generally more frequently cited. The average page length for the 33 articles was 16.6 pages, which was exactly the same as the average page length of the top 10 most frequently cited articles. While the top five articles were slightly longer on average at 17.4 pages, this difference of under a page was not considered significant. Overall, the longest article was the second-least cited while the shortest article was the least cited. Next, to test for the possibility that author self-citation might artificially inflate the citation averages, the complete citation results from Scopus for each article were analyzed. Out of the 813 citations produced by Scopus, only 23 self-citations were found, or 2.8%. The majority of these 11 authors cited themselves once. Thus, this limited amount of self-citation was not considered to have had a significant impact on the overall ratings. Similar results were found for the number of citations to an article from within *ESPJ* itself. For the 33 articles, the average percentage of citations from other articles published in the journal in the Google Scholar results was 5.1%, with only two over 10%; so again this was not considered a significant factor.

A recent piece in *Nature* suggested that the number of other authors that an article cites may influence the number the times the article is cited in return (Corbyn, 2010). To test for this possible effect, the number of references in each article was compared to the citation rankings. For the 33 articles, the average number of references per article was 31.0, ranging from a high of 70 to a low of 9. Comparing the ranked order of references per article to the ranked order of average citations produced no clear pattern. While the top five articles had a higher average of references (43), the average number of references in the top 10 articles (32), the top 15 (31.7), the top 20 (32.4) and the top 25 (31.3) all adhere closely to the overall average. The higher average for the top five articles results from the particularly high number of references by two authors: Salager-Meyer with 57 references and Hyland with 70. The other three articles in the top five, however, have an average of 29.3 references, below the overall average. The article with the second-highest number of references (Jacoby & McNamara, 68) has the second-lowest average citations (23.7), while the article with the second-highest average citations (Mauranen, 94.3) had only 27 references. Thus, in our study, there is little evidence of a correlation between a greater number of references cited in an article and the average number of citations it received.

Since none of these 'technical' factors was found to correlate with the citation rankings of the top 33 articles, the analysis then turned to the 'personal' characteristics of the authors of the 15 most-cited papers subset to see whether these might have affected the rankings. These 15 most-frequently cited articles, based on the average of citation totals from Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus are shown below in Tables 2 and 3.

4. The top 15: possible variables for success

Certain personal characteristics of the authors of the top 15 articles, such as first language, institutional location, gender, and status in the field at the time of publication, were then examined to determine if any of these individual factors obviously correlated with the frequency of citation. First language was established via the personal knowledge of the first author, reviewing author biographies, and, where necessary, contacting the author via email. The results show that, for 40% of the top 15 authors, the first language was English (6), while the remaining 60% were comprised of a variety of other languages: Finnish (2), French (2), Spanish (2), Chinese (1), a Nigerian language (1), and Punjabi/Hindi (1). The fairly high frequency of Anglophone authors can be expected in a journal devoted to the study and teaching of the English language. However, we note that in our sample English speakers were not the majority, and a wide diversity of other first languages was represented.

The location of the author at time of article publication was determined by reviewing the author contact information in articles and, where necessary, contacting the author via email. Results were similar to the first language data: the United

Table 2
Average citations for top 15 articles.

Average	Google Scholar	Web of Science	Scopus	Author	Year	Vol.	Issue
95.3	187	42	57	Salager-Meyer, F.	94	13	2
94.3	186	39	58	Mauranen, A.	93	12	1
74.7	137	39	48	Hyland, K.	94	13	3
71.0	124	34	55	Belcher, D.	94	13	1
57.0	121	19	31	Nwogu, K.N.	97	16	2
52.7	88	30	40	Myers, G.A.	92	11	1
50.3	97	24	30	Kuo, C. H.	99	18	2
48.7	98	21	27	Brett, P.	94	13	1
44.7	84	18	32	Connor, U. and Mauranen, A.	99	18	1
42.3	95	13	19	Gains, J.	99	18	1
42.3	92	17	18	Holmes, R.	97	16	4
41.7	94	12	19	Bhatia, V.K.	97	16	3
41.0	76	22	25	Posteguillo, S.	99	18	2
40.3	73	20	28	Valero-Garces, C.	96	15	4
36.7	81	14	15	Salager-Meyer, F.	92	11	2

Table 3
Authors and titles of most cited articles.

Author	Title
Salager-Meyer, F.	Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse
Mauranen, A.	Contrastive ESP rhetoric: Metatext in Finnish–English economics texts
Hyland, K.	Hedging in academic writing and EAP textbooks
Belcher, D.	The apprenticeship approach to advanced academic literacy: Graduate students and their mentors
Nwogu, K.N.	The medical research paper: Structure and functions
Myers, G.A.	Textbooks and the sociology of scientific knowledge
Kuo, C. H.	The use of personal pronouns: Role relationships in scientific journal articles
Brett, P.	A genre analysis of the results section of sociology articles
Connor, U. and Mauranen, A.	Linguistic analysis of grant proposals: European Union research grants
Gains, J.	Electronic mail – A new style of communication or just a new medium?: An investigation into the text features of e-mail
Holmes, R.	Genre analysis and the social sciences: An investigation of the structure of research article discussion sections in three disciplines
Bhatia, V.K.	Genre-mixing in academic introductions
Posteguillo, S.	The schematic structure of computer science research articles
Valero-Garces, C.	Contrastive ESP rhetoric: Metatext in Spanish–English economics texts
Salager-Meyer, F.	A text-type and move analysis study of verb tense and modality distribution in medical English abstracts

Kingdom and the United States combined constituted 40% of the countries represented, while the remaining 60% consisted of a variety of other countries: Spain (2), Venezuela (2), Finland (1), Hong Kong (1), Malaysia (1), Nigeria (1), and Taiwan (1). Again, a fairly high frequency of articles from English-speaking countries (and especially those with highly-developed higher education sectors such as the UK and USA) could be expected in the context of the *ESPJ*, but again these two countries do not comprise a majority. A breakdown of gender shows that of the 15 authors, seven were female and nine were male. This nearly-even distribution of gender among the top-cited authors does not suggest any citational bias against female authors; indeed, three of the top five are women.

So far then, analysis of the authors of the top 15 articles has not produced any personal factors that would seem to correlate with being highly-cited. For example, no bias against non-English speakers or women was found. There remains the issue of status in the field, a somewhat more subjective characteristic. Of the top five, Salager-Meyer had published a number of studies prior to her 1994 paper, but had not achieved the prominent position she now occupies; Mauranen (1993) and Hyland (1994) each had some earlier publications—in Hyland's case, mostly dealing with aspects of ESL pedagogy—but their current eminence did not really emerge until the end of the century. In 1994, Belcher was in a non-tenured position at her university and her reputation was not yet built, while Nwogu had apparently returned to Nigeria after completing his PhD in the UK. Of the following ten, by the time of their *ESPJ* publications, Myers, Connor and Bhatia can be considered as established: Greg Myers' book on biology had been published in 1990, Ulla Connor's on contrastive rhetoric in 1996 and Bhatia's on genre in 1993. Most of the others were at that time little known; none more so than Jonathan Gains, whose 1999 article was apparently based on his M.A. thesis at the University of York (UK) under the supervision of Graham Low. (Our attempts to find more information about Mr. Gains have proved unavailing.)

Additionally, the citationally-successful authors were not predominantly located at major universities or research centers. Only Myers at the famous department at Lancaster University and possibly Mauranen at the Language Centre at Jyväskylä in central Finland could be said to be working in units where a vibrant collectivity of scholars were working on applied language studies. Many of the others would seem, in terms of their professional ESP interests, to be operating in relative isolation. Thus, taken together, these results show that the personal characteristics of these authors do not account for their being ranked among of the 15 most-cited article authors in the 1990s.

Having cleared away what might be called the more meretricious explanations of citational success, we can now see from Table 3 that the answer would appear to lie in some combination of topic and treatment. With the partial exception of Belcher's ethnographic case studies, all the papers deal with discoursal features of written texts. In effect, no papers on spoken discourse, or about ESP needs analysis, pedagogy, syllabus design, or assessment make it into the top 15. Aside from Gains, they also all deal in some way with the academic and research genre set, primarily research articles, but also grant applications (Connor & Mauranen), academic books (Bhatia) and textbooks (Myers). The disciplines chosen for investigation are limited to medical sciences, physical sciences and social sciences, there being no articles in Table 3 dealing with law, humanities, or business. We can also see that the primary foci of this group of papers are on text structure, comparative analysis and/or on more interactional features, such as hedging, modality or pronoun use. Only the second Salager-Meyer article mentions a straightforward grammatical feature such as verb tense, and none invoke vocabulary. All this said, there may be other factors that may come into play, such as innovation, originality and timeliness, and, to explore these, we now turn to a fairly detailed analysis of the two papers that, by some way, have to date become the most cited.

5. The top two: what makes them citationally successful?

As we have seen, the two most citationally successful papers were the 1993 article by Anna Mauranen (AM) entitled "Contrastive ESP rhetoric: Metatext in Finnish–English economic texts", and the 1994 article by Françoise Salager-Meyer

(FSM) entitled "Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English discourse". For the sake of simplicity, the former paper will be referred to as *Metatext* and the latter as *Hedges*. We will discuss the former first.

5.1. The Metatext paper

Metatext consists of 15 pages of prose (with one table), an appendix containing two longer textual extracts, and a bibliography listing 27 references. In other words and in terms of these basic characteristics, AM's paper would be pretty typical of others from its decade.

Re-reading this paper nearly 20 years after it was conceived and written, it has, from a contemporary viewpoint, a number of features that may distinguish it. Although *Metatext* accurately styles itself as a "small-scale study" (p. 7) since it deals with only four economics articles, two written by Anglophones and two by Finns, the paper comes across as being comparatively rich from intellectual and cultural perspectives. First, and unusually for *ESPJ*, the empirical results occupy, at most, five pages in the middle of the paper; much of the rest of the paper is devoted to scene-setting, discussions of the concepts of culture, genre and rhetoric, contrastive studies of academic texts, detailed analyses of the various possible realizations of metatext (however defined), and authorial presence. The final section is entitled "Conclusion", but because of its length (over two and a half pages) and its careful reflections on what has been discovered from the preceding textual analysis, it now reads much more like a "Discussion".

Metatext opens with this elaborate sentence:

> The lively interest in economic discourse and rhetoric that has been spreading among economists, discourse analysts, and educationists since the latter half of the 1980s has largely focused on texts that have written in English, mostly assuming at least implicitly that English is the writers' mother tongue and Anglo-American culture their common background. (1993, p. 3)

The corpus for AM's study consisted of Economics articles and, indeed, the 1990 decade was perhaps the heyday of studies of Economics discourse: there was in 1991 a specialized conference on the topic at Birmingham University (Henderson, Dudley-Evans, & Backhouse, 1993), the publication of two volumes by McCloskey, *Knowledge and persuasion in Economics* (1994), and the *Rhetoric of Economics* (1998), and a series of papers by Tadros (e.g., 1994) and others. One possible contributing factor, therefore, for *Metatext*'s success might lie in its choice of this discipline for analysis.

As readers of AM's opening sentence might expect, she soon moves on to argue that attention also needs to be given to the English-language publications of economists whose first language is other than English—in her case, Finnish. However, before exploring any emerging contrasts between Anglophones and non-Anglophones, AM has a lengthy section on "Basic Concepts". She first challenges the concept of the universality of science: "But science or more widely, academic research, does not exist outside writing; and so we cannot represent it, or realize it, without being influenced by the variation in the writing cultures that carry it" (p. 4). With that in place, she then adopts the following position: "If we draw a distinction between genre and rhetoric, it can be argued that aspects of academic writing which tend to be universal are conditioned by genre, while the more variable aspects fall under the domain of rhetoric." (p. 4). Then, after some reflections on various options for creating persuasive discourse, AM reaches this position:

> It can be assumed that, on the whole, similar rhetorical means are available in different writing cultures, but their frequencies and preferred uses differ. Therefore, similar means are expected to be employed in texts written by speakers of Finnish and English, but their relative frequencies are expected to differ. (p. 5)

So, this extensive discussion of "basic concepts" may be another contributing factor.

After a section on previous studies in Finnish–English contrastive rhetoric, there is a final piece of necessary preparatory work—the clarification of what AM understands by "metatext" and how it can best be sub-categorized and analyzed. After considerable discussion, it becomes clear that she will limit herself to metatextual elements that serve the purpose of textual organization, and focuses on just four types: "connectors, reviews, previews, and illocution markers" (p. 9). She, in particular, has this to say about the middle two of these types:

> Most preview sentences contain anaphoric references, and most review sentences also prospect clearly ahead. This is not surprising in view of the common interpretation of metatext as helping to orient the reader, to guide the reading process by indicating the organization and progression of the discourse. For successful orientation, it is necessary to build upon what has gone before, as well as anticipate what is to come. (p. 10)

Thus, a third candidate feature emerges.

A fourth possibility would lie in her results and her interpretation of them. On the former, her data show that English writers use more than twice as many metatextual elements as their Finnish counterparts. The more impersonal and implicit writing style of the Finnish economists, she summarizes as "poetic", while the more metatextually explicit, reader-oriented Anglo style is summarized as a "marketing" rhetoric. This metaphorical contrast is likely to resonate, especially with those interested in contrastive studies. She speculates that one cause of the difference may lie in the fact that Finland is a relatively homogeneous society, wherein more can be taken for granted, but throughout this long concluding section AM refrains from offering value judgments as to which rhetorical style is 'better'. Among the references there are a number, in Finnish, that

cite studies of Finnish writing, so a final—and fifth—possible contributing factor for the citational success of *Metatext* might be its relevance for studies of Finnish discourse.

If we now turn to Mauranen's own thoughts on the matter, we are given a rather different picture from her emails (quoted with permission). She notes that "with the metadiscourse paper, there was also a crossing of metadiscourse with contrastive rhetoric, a very up-and-coming research area, but not much done yet at the time." So, a sixth possibility is the combination of these two types of analysis. On both her paper and that of FSM, she says "Some papers are simply in the right place at the right time." So, here we have an invocation of *Kairos* that has played such an important role in discussions of the Nobel-Prize-winning Watson and Crick's letter to *Nature* on DNA. She elaborates by observing that metatext and hedging were just coming to prominence in the early 1990s: "they broke out of the moulds of lexicogrammatical traditions, they gave tools for tackling the interpersonal aspect of academic writing which had been ignored in the ESP tradition so far." She draws an analogy with genre analysis and what it had been able to do slightly earlier by opening up new perspectives on text structure. She adds pertinently, "however much better you say the same thing later, you can't say it for the first time again." So, a sixth candidate for prominence would be timeliness, and a seventh, the combination of two emerging research strands, which has subsequently given it something of the status of a foundational text.

After these observations based on close reading and the author's own perceptions, we turned, in an effort to complete the triangulation, to the citational record, using the first 50 'Cited By' entries for *Metatext* in Google Scholar. In this case, we decided to ignore self-citations because now the primary focus was on how *Metatext* had been picked up by others. (There were also a handful of entries that we were unable to trace). As expected, most of the references to the paper were fairly concise and largely neutral, using either AM's methods or results as one of the points of departure for the citing text. However, on occasion, the discussion was considerably more extensive, as in Bunton (1999). The tabulated results are shown in Table 4 below.

The emerging picture is now somewhat clearer. Our first suggestion that the choice of Economics texts might have been serendipitous is clearly misplaced (*Metatex*t is not referenced, for example, in McCloskey (1998)); nor is there any backing for our fifth proposal—that AM's findings might have been taken up by either scholars of the Finnish language or practitioners concerned with Finnish writing. Indeed, all the citations in the first 100 on the Google Scholar list fall within EAP, contrastive rhetoric and/or discourse analysis. As Table 4 shows, there is some limited uptake of categories 5 and 6 above. The characterization of genre and culture (#6), as two of AM's "basic concepts" was our second suggestion; while we did not directly mention category 5, it might be implied by our fourth suggestion because of AM's concerns about the dominance of an Anglophone rhetoric.

As it has turned out, 70% of the citations fall within the first four categories in the table, and are focused around two themes. The first theme is contrastive rhetoric (#1), especially in terms of a diminished role for metatext in Finnish academic prose, and its origin in different persuasive strategies in different cultures (#3), arising from somewhat different responsibilities for academic readers and writers. The second and somewhat less productive theme (#2 and #4) concerns narrow- and broad-angle conceptions of metadiscourse, and how best its various component elements can be categorized and labeled. That said, there is little direct textual evidence in the citing commentaries for AM's perception that her paper may have been successful because of its combination of metadiscourse and contrastive rhetoric, but the close alignment of the two themes throughout the citing literature suggest that this may indeed have been the case—an issue we return to in the concluding section. And, if this is so, then we can see that *Metatext*'s appearance in 1993 was presumably 'timely'.

5.2. The Hedges paper

If AM's paper strikes the contemporary 'expert reader' as having a certain essayist quality, that by Francoise Salager-Meyer (FSM) comes across as firmly grounded in the relevant prior literature and in her quantitative and qualitative data. The number of cited works (57) in the *Hedges* paper was exceptional for its decade; further, her references are consistently and regularly deployed through all sections of the paper. The quantitative data itself is displayed in the form of fairly complex graphs and supported, where appropriate, by Chi-square statistical tests—both features uncommon in *ESPJ* articles of that time.

The corpus for the study consists of five medical research articles and 10 medical case reports, all published in leading journals. Since medicine is an important disciplinary ESP area, both at that time (FSM quotes seven directly relevant

Table 4
Types of commentary on Mauranen (1993).

	Commentary	Total
1.	Contrastive academic rhetoric (esp. Finnish/English contrasts)	14
2.	AM's narrow view of metadiscourse (i.e. metatext)	8
3.	Different persuasive writing strategies in different culture	7
4.	Taxonomies/categories of metadiscourse	6
5.	Challenges from the academic periphery to the Anglophone center	4
6.	Characteristics of genres (in relation to culture and writing)	3
7.	Single instances of other comments	9
		52

discourse-analytic papers on medical discourse) and in the future, here is a first candidate for citational uptake. A second would be her lengthy discussion of written hedges, which leads her to a tripartite depiction: Hedges (1) inject useful vagueness (as a "threat-minimizing strategy" [p. 153]); (2) reflect appropriate author modesty; and (3) communicate the difficulty, on occasion, of reaching accuracy or precision. For this, she utilizes a taxonomy of *shields* ("may", "probably", "suggest"), *approximators* ("somewhat", "roughly"), *personal expressions* ("to our knowledge"), *intensifiers* ("particularly encouraging") and *compounds* of the above ("it seems reasonable to assume…"). Obviously, this characterization of form-function links presents itself as a second reason why FSM's article would be cited. However, the inclusion of intensifiers, probably deriving in part from Lakoff's famous but puzzling definition of hedges as "words or phrases whose job is to make things more or *less* fuzzy" (1972, p. 462) (our emphasis), may give rise to some demurrals—so a third suggestion.

A fourth candidate would be her decision to "determine whether the frequency and types of hedging techniques used in the different rhetorical sections of research papers (RP) and case reports vary from one section of the article to the other" (p. 151). Although previous studies had looked at IMRD-sectional differences in terms of other features, such as tense, voice and complementation, as she claims, *Hedges* broke new ground. The results themselves are somewhat expected; most hedges in discussions, least in methods, with introductions and results in the middle. More interesting perhaps is the finding that nearly all of the hedges were of three of the five possible types (shields, approximators and compounds); this finding presumably can be taken to underscore the scientific character of the reported medical research. Further, the distribution of hedging types (shields throughout, but approximators more prevalent in Methods and Results) might, more tentatively, provide a fifth hypothesis for uptake. Finally, FSM's paper closes with an extensively referenced section entitled "Pedagogical Implications", in which she suggests a range of exercise types and activities designed to assist students with English as an Additional Language with their negotiation of knowledge claims. Thus, here we have a sixth possibility that might account, at least in part, for the highly-cited post-publication trajectory of this paper.

FSM's own e-mailed take on her paper (quoted with permission) is straightforward and is as follows:

> There could be a very simple—although not flattering/gratifying—reason for its popularity; it was relatively easy to conduct a similar study in different languages and different fields! This gave rise to lots of cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary research. So hedging became a very fashionable research topic.

So, a further and obviously persuasive reason for its popularity lies in its emerging status as a model template for further research. Later, she sent a follow-up email, citing the Corbyn study mentioned earlier, in which she offered the thought that a further explanation might lie in her exceptionally large number of references.

We next examined the *Hedges* paper by again scrutinizing the first 50 'Cited By' entries in Google Scholar. Again we ignored self-citations (i.e., papers written or co-written by FSM) and again there were a few texts that we were unable to read (a couple of books were not available, a link to a thesis was broken, and two citing papers were in Chinese). As in the *Metatext* case, most of the research paper references were concise, parenthetical and mainly neutral, although more extensive treatments of *Hedges* could be found in doctoral theses. We grouped the citing references as follows.

Of the seven suggestions culled from the close reading, we found no discussion of the problematics of including intensifiers as part of hedging (Suggestion # 3), nor was there any direct and ostensible invocation of FSM's paper as a valuable methodological model (Suggestion # 7)—a finding to which we will return in the final section. Indeed, as Table 5 shows, the predominating citational uptake revolved around the topic of hedges in academic discourse (Suggestion # 2), with the top two categories in the table comprising more than 50% of the total citations that we managed to trace. These 29 citations focused mostly on the roles of written hedges, how they might best be functionally classified, and how they are prototypically realized in linguistic form.

In addition, we traced seven instances that referenced FSM's study of how hedges were distributed differently across IMRD sections and across her two target genres of medical research articles and medical case reports (Suggestions # 4 and # 5). As for medical discourse as a primary focus (Suggestion # 1), uptake here was to us surprisingly infrequent, constituting only 13% of the total citations. Then there was a minor take-up (4 citations) of FSM's closing observations regarding the pedagogical implications of her study. Finally, the 'expert reader' entirely missed the finding that three citing authors would make use of the fact that *Hedges* focused on the two most widely read and cited medical journals in the world as a warrant for their own comparable studies.

Table 5
Types of commentary on Salager-Meyer (1994).

	Commentary	Total
1.	Importance, functions, value of hedges in academic text	17
2.	Types and taxonomies of hedges	12
3.	Distribution of hedges (across sections, genres, disciplines)	7
4.	Medical discourse and hedges	7
5.	Need to teach hedges and ways of doing so	4
6.	Choice of corpus (top-ranked medical journals)	3
7.	Single other uptakes	3
		53

6. Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study are encouraging in a number of ways. First, it shows little effect on citational uptake of what might be considered to be extraneous variables. For instance, 'padding' a paper with a large number of unnecessary references (Corbyn, 2010) apparently does not work. There is also no evidence—despite widespread folk beliefs to the contrary—that 'big names' generate more citations simply because of their status rather than because of the intrinsic merit of their studies. Secondly, our reception study has not revealed any discrimination that might derive from authors' institutional location, first language, or gender. Rather, as we have seen, three general factors appear to correlate with the citational success of most of the 15 articles from the 1990s in our core group: (a) the choice of material for analysis; (b) the adoption of a discourse-analytic approach; and (c) an emerging recognition that they had something new and productive to offer. In terms of this last, they were indeed in 'the right time and place'. We can see this in AM's metaphorical contrast between the rhetorical strategies of her two groups of economists, in FSM's extensive quantitative analysis, in Hyland's complex detailing of hedging categories, in Belcher's 'insider' view of her professor–student interactions, and in Nwogu's expansion of move analysis to cover all sections of research articles. Further down the rankings, one could also note FSM's useful conclusions of what a textbook is educationally good for and less good for. As for the mysterious Jonathan Gains, his article must have been one of the first to analyze nascent forms of electronic communication—hence, presumably, its citational success.

Despite all this, it remains conceivable that there are other motivations for citing that 'fly under the radar'. Apart from personal affiliations and disaffiliations, there are possibilities such as those raised by the two top-cited authors; AM suggesting that the juxtaposition of contrastive rhetoric and metadiscourse and FSM observing that her paper offered an easy-to-follow model were likely to be winning strategies. However, it would seem to be the case that citing authors may not be inclined to show such allegiances in precisely those terms, since we do not find statements like:

- In this paper, we follow Mauranen (1993) in combining metadiscourse and contrastive rhetoric.
- This paper adopts the analytic procedures described in Salager-Meyer (1994).

More generally, one little-recognized merit of reception studies is that they can make practitioners, old hands as well as newcomers, more aware of past efforts and previous achievements. The data such investigations produce can help identify so-called 'landmark studies' in particular fields and in ways that are more objective than the preferences and predelictions of individual editors of edited collections. For larger and longer-established disciplines, this can be less of an issue because they typically have specialized journals devoted to this topic, such as the *History of Economic Thought*, *Earth Science History* and *Social Science History*. In younger, smaller fields, such as English for Specific Purposes, this is not the case and interested newcomers have to rely on introductory monographs and collections that may—or may not—provide a historical perspective. Further, ESP today is at something of a crossroads as fewer and fewer of those individuals who helped establish the specialty in the 1960s and 1970s remain active. In this context, it is significant that the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) has announced that its next conference in 2013 will have the history of EAP as its theme. Reception studies thus provide one kind of valuable bridge between past and present.

This paper has investigated part of the reception history of articles published in *English for Specific Purposes* in the 1990s. Naturally enough, comparable investigations of articles published in the preceding decade and in the following one will likely turn out to have very different outcomes. In terms of the latter, the 2000s saw, for instance, the rapid rise of corpus linguistics, the evolution of ethnomethodological and ethnographic approaches, a revival of interest in multi-word lexis, the emergence of the English-as-a-Lingua-Franca movement, a new attention to spoken academic genres, partly as a result of recent corpora such as BASE and MICASE, and a growing interest in a much wider range of academic genres. In consequence, the implications for today's rising young scholars (both NS and NNS) of findings based on the 1990s must remain general and somewhat speculative. One suggestion would be to follow novelist E.M. Forster's famous dictum of "only connect", but with the rider "Do not do so slavishly." More specifically, the advice might be: "Connect to either the currently fashionable areas of investigation, or connect to useful emerging methodologies, or connect to contemporary topics of interest; however, do not try to connect to all three." After all, successful papers engender in their readers both a sense of recognition and a sense of surprise. So, we might encourage an alternative approach to a well-explored discipline such as Economics, or a standard study but of an under-researched area, say, Art History, or an unusual topic in a well-known genre, perhaps a study of acronyms and their spelling-outs in a corpus of research articles. Or, indeed, perhaps something else as long as it connects the old and the new.

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