

Educational Approach for the Languages of Specialization: Teaching English for Specific Purposes and the Teacher's Development

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Résumé

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes has been seen as an activity which is separated from English Language Teaching. For that, teachers of Language for Specific Purposes have a lot in common with teachers of general foreign language. It has been assumed that if one discipline which is ELT has developed its own methodology, ESP will follow it. However, this is not always the case because the theories of teaching are going to be applied differently between ELT and ESP. For both disciplines, it is worth considering linguistic developments and teaching theories to have insights in contemporary ideas regarding their own position and role as well as the position and role of foreign language learners in education and to face new technologies offered as an aid to improve their methodology. In this paper, we are going to focus on the importance of learning and teaching ESP as a crucial discipline of ELT, its types, features of ESP courses, and the role of ESP teachers.

Introduction

The difference between ESP and GE approaches is quite simply in practice for a great deal rather than in theory. In the early times of the emergence of ESP this was true to some extents because teachers of General English courses acknowledged that students had specific purposes to achieve through studying English. For that, they rarely conduct a needs analysis. After that, the teachers of General English had selected some materials to meet the learners' needs as published textbooks have improved and ESP approach has influenced the teaching of English in general. Despite the fact that many General English teachers are using ESP approach to language teaching basing their syllabi on learners' needs and how English is used in communication, ESP teachers use an approach which is different from that used by teachers of GE because ESP derives from the tools used in facilitating success in the professional life. Since the difference in presenting the courses of both GE and ESP is very great, the focus is going to be on the role of teachers in teaching ESP and how the course is presented.

1. ESP Background

In the late 1960's the term LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) appeared in relation to the

Educational Approach for the Languages of Specialization: Teaching English for Specific Purposes and the Teacher's Development

English language teaching. This term generally refers to the teaching of English for specific and utilitarian purposes. It is defined to meet specific needs of learners. In other words, ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions and methods are based on the learners' reasons for learning. For instance, in:

- English for Academic Purposes students will enter an English speaking university.
- English for Business and Management students will enter Hotel and Tourism Professionals English university.
- Business English for business people.
- Medical English for nurses, doctors, etc.

Therefore, the principle of ESP is the following sentence: "Tell me what you need English for, I will tell you the English you need." (Or what you need English for?). ESP is English for vocational purposes, where the word "vocation" is used loosely to include education and all kinds of employment. The placement of ESP among other branches is clearly shown in the following tree (Fig. 1).

Educational Approach for the Languages of Specialization: Teaching English for Specific Purposes and the Teacher's Development

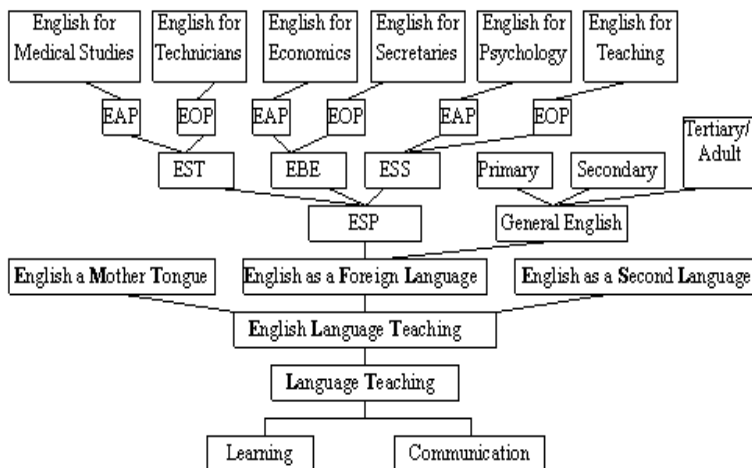


Figure 1: The tree of ELT (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, simplified version).

Pauline C. Robinson (1989) considers ESP as a type of ELT (English Language Teaching) and defines it as: “Goal oriented language learning” (Robinson, Pauline C. ed. Hywel Coleman, 1989: 398). This means that students have a specific goal that they are going to attain. In other words, ESP is a sphere of teaching English language including Technical English, scientific English, English for medical professionals, English for waiters, and English for tourism. Aviation English as ESP is taught to pilots, air traffic controllers and civil aviation cadets who are going to use it in radio communication. ESP can also be considered as an avatar for as avatar of

Educational Approach for the Languages of Specialization: Teaching English for Specific Purposes and the Teacher's Development

language for specific purposes. Therefore, "English for specific purposes is a term that refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career (like law, medicine) or for business in general" (International Teacher Training Organization, 2005). Thus students study English for Specific purposes to reach a given level in the subject field they are interested in Hutchinson and Waters (1992) emphasize ESP to be an approach not product which means that the focus on language learning not language use is highlighted.

2. Types of ESP

Generally speaking, there are three types of learners' expectations about courses of ESP which are:

1. Cultural-educational.
2. Personal and individual.
3. Academic/occupational.

The first two are related with the learners' own background, the expectation of his success, and about being optimistic or pessimistic about the ESP course. In fact, these expectations, whether they are occupational or academic are the ones most commonly expressed when a needs- analysis is mentioned. These types of expectation are two sub-branches of ESP and they become a reason for learning English: either English for Occupational

Educational Approach for the Languages of Specialization: Teaching English for Specific Purposes and the Teacher's Development

Purposes or English for Academic Purposes (EOP and EAP). Kennedy and Bolitho (1984) added the type which is called EST for scientists and technologists. The first two types are explained in the following.

A. *English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)*

EOP is taught in such a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work or profession (Kennedy and Bolitho, 1984: 4). In English for Occupational Purposes, the teachers will be adapt the courses to whether the learners are learning English before, during, or after their training in their jobs. For example, the content of the course of those who are engaged in a medical course is different from those who are already doctors and now need to operate in English.

B. *English for Academic Purposes*

EAP is generally taught in academic institutions for students who need English in their studies. In fact the language which is taught in this type is based on a particular disciplines based on higher levels of education when students are specializing in their studies or are intending to specialize before starting their studies in a particular subject. They are going to focus on study skills such as listening to lectures,

taking notes, writing reports, ...etc.). This will be a form of students' English course.

3. Characteristics of ESP

Absolute Characteristics

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners.
2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
3. ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable Characteristics

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English (GE).
3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.
4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system.

4. Characteristics and Features of an ESP Course

One thing that should not be forgotten in presenting ESP courses is the organization of courses since there should be different curriculum with different types of exercises and different materials.

The organization of the ESP course is very important because it is the key factor which leads to achieve a satisfying goal in the course. There are many factors playing a great role in organizing ESP course. In fact, the teacher should be aware of the specific purpose for which English is learnt. The teacher should be aware of the answer of questions such as; what does the student need to learn? What aspects of language are going to be needed and how they are going to be described? (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p 19,22). Hutchinson and Waters (1992: 22) speak about “learning theory” which provides the theoretical basis for the methodology, by helping us to understand how people learn. Hutchinson and Waters (1992) focused on another aspect which discusses questions such as; ‘who’, ‘why’, ‘where’, and ‘when’ and their relation with the nature of particular learning situation and target. These are described as ‘needs analyses. In order to organize the course effectively and achieve the intended goals, three steps such as the following should be followed.

A. Selecting material

The choice of materials in ESP determines the running of the course and highlights the content of the lesson. Materials can be an introduction into the new learning techniques and help teachers and learners during the process of learning. Teachers determine which aspects of ESP learning will be taken into account. Yet only one piece of material can serve for developing more than one skill, e.g. reading, listening, vocabulary etc. Materials should also function as a link between already learnt ('existing knowledge') and new information. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992).

B. Types of activities with text

As a learning tool, texts can be used as a material for practicing a wide range of skills. the ESP course may develop different skills in the learners such as communicative and reading skills and vocabulary. To make the working with a text as more effective as possible, the focus should be on all students' skills. Thus, Using productive and receptive such as providing students with audio-tape and video-tape while working with printed texts is a good method of work.

C. Creating a learning environment (motivation)

This criterion is very important. For that, creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom is the primary factor which will help in achieving the setting objectives. Creating a pleasant atmosphere is directly related to motivation which is a very crucial part of students' work since it affects their future negatively or positively. Harmer describes motivation as "some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action" (Harmer, 1991: 14). Students should be motivated as much as possible in order to, achieve the real aim of the activities.

5. The Role of the ESP Teacher

ESP is taught in many universities across the world. Many professional associations of teachers of English exist here and there. Much attention is devoted to ESP course design. ESP teaching has much in common with English as a foreign or Second Language and English for Academic purposes (EAP). Quickly developing Business English can be considered as part of larger concept of English for Specific Purposes.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) prefer to name the teacher of ESP using the term "ESP practitioner" as this definition seems to be more detailed and

complete. They distinguish the following key roles of ESP practitioner:

- Teacher
- Course designer and materials provider
- Collaborator
- Researcher
- Evaluator

The first role which the teacher of ESP should play is 'a teacher' which is synonymous to that of the teacher of GE yet the methodology changes since here the purpose is more specific. In ESP classes, the students are the primary knowers of the content of materials not the teacher. In the first role played by the teacher, he should create a communicative atmosphere in the class based on the students' knowledge. In the second role, the ESP teacher becomes a course designer and material provider; he prepares the courses and provides students with the materials needed for their studies. The teacher's task does not stop at providing students with printed texts, it exceeded that to the adaptation of published materials when they are not suitable. The third role is a collaborator. In This role the ESP teacher in order to meet the specific needs of the learners and adopt the methodology and activities of the target discipline, the ESP practitioner must first work closely with field specialists as discussed by Johns

et al. (1988). After that, the teacher is likely to make a research in order to design the aim(s) behind his course in order to fulfil the students' needs. The role of the ESP practitioner as 'researcher' is especially important, with results leading directly to appropriate materials for the classroom. The last role is that of an evaluator. Evaluation is not new in the case of the ESP teacher. But it is different in its importance because he should be involved in the testing of students and noticing the effectiveness of the teaching and the students' progress. In addition, the Practitioner of ESP should evaluate the testing materials and the course aim.

6. The Training of an ESP Teacher

Training the teachers is very important for ESP courses as it enables them to meet students' needs. Thus, teachers should follow some steps about themselves.

a) *Selection*: The selection phase is very important because not all teachers are able to become an ESP practitioner. Thus, it is worth selecting those who are willing to be ESP practitioners.

b) *Continuing personal education*: Teachers should be well educated either in the courses of their studies when they were students in their fourth year or in their post graduate studies in their field

Educational Approach for the Languages of Specialization: Teaching English for Specific Purposes and the Teacher's Development

of specialization, or simultaneously in their professional training.

c) *General professional training as an educator and teacher*: This step is related to all teachers since it deals with what all the teachers should know. Teachers should know the psychology and sociology of teaching and have an educational thought especially the role of syllabus and teaching materials and how to manage students' skills.

d) *Special training as a teacher of a foreign or second language*: This step make the teachers understand the students' needs which is mainly important for the courses because this will be helpful to them.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the importance of ESP course and how the ESP teacher should prepare his course which is totally different from that of the General English teacher because the ESP teacher is a practitioner in addition to being a teacher. He provides the students with materials and designs a syllabus, collaborates with subject specialists, conducts research and evaluates the course and the students. In addition, the ESP teacher should understand the course he is going to present and be aware of the class objectives, and especially have some interest in the subject he is teaching.

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