

PECULIARITIES OF ESP INCORPORATION WITHIN REGULAR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TRAINING CURRICULUM: WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHY IS IT DIFFERENT?

Introduction

This paper discusses the findings of the research into the aspects of learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at Borys Hrinchenko Kiev University in terms of standard curriculum and taking under consideration the peculiarities of training of the pre-service teachers and regular philologists.

The investigations were carried out over a period of three academic years - from 2007 to 2010. Research involved gathering data on learners' views on their learning needs and expectations, on encountered difficulties in learning at university, on the ranking of preferences for language skills, i.e. the degree of importance of proficiency in different areas of language, and collecting and analyzing learner's self-assessment data and feedbacks throughout the course.

The techniques of gathering data included different types of questionnaires administered to learners at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the courses.

The aim of research was to consider the issues of learning English on a university level and explore the ways of improving the quality of learning.

The world of English and English in the world

1. General overview

Although English is not the language with the largest number of native or "first" language speakers, it has become a *lingua franca*. A lingua franca can be defined as a language widely adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other's and where one or both speakers are using it as a "second" language. Many people living in the European Union, which Ukraine aims to integrate as soon as possible, for example, frequently operate in English as well as their own languages (where these are different), and the economic and cultural influence of the United States has led to increased English use in many areas of the globe. Like Latin in Europe in the Middle Ages, English seems to be one of the main languages of international communication, and even people who are not speakers of English often know words such as *bank, chocolate, computer, hamburger, hospital, hot dog, hotel, piano, radio, restaurant, taxi, telephone, television, university and walkman*. Many of these words have themselves been borrowed by English from other languages of course (e.g. *chocolate, hamburger, taxi*, etc.), and speakers of Romance languages are likely to have a number of words in common with English. But there are many "false friends" too, where similar sounding words actually mean something quite different, for example, *eventualmente* (= in case) contrasts with English *eventually* (in the end).

Whatever the spread of English across the globe and whatever its overlap with other languages, there has been an intriguing debate over the years as to how many people speak English as either a "first" or a "second" language. Estimates of speaker numbers are somewhat variable. For example, Braj Kachru (1985) suggested between 320-380 million people spoke English as a first language, and anywhere between 250-350 million as a second language. On the other hand David Crystal (1995 and 1997) takes 75 territories where English "holds a special place" (territories which include not only Britain, the USA, Australia, Canada, etc. but also places such as Hong Kong, India, Malaysia and Nigeria) and calculates around 377 million first language speakers of English and only 98 million speakers of as a second language.

In 1983, however, Kachru made a prediction which, if correct, means that there are now more second language than first language speakers. He wrote:

One might hazard a linguistic guess here. If the spread of English continues at the current rate, by the year 2000 its non-native speakers will outnumber its native speakers.

From B Kachru (1983: 3)

David Graddol, writing some fourteen years later, thought it would take until at least 2007 before this position was reached (Graddol 1997).

It is not necessarily the case that English will remain dominant among world languages. However, there is no doubt that it is and will remain a vital linguistic tool for many business people, academics, tourists and citizens of the world who wish to communicate easily across nationalities for many years to come.

There are a number of interlocking reasons for the popularity of English as a lingua franca. Many of these are historical, but they also include economic and cultural factors which have influenced and sustained the spread of the language:

- **Economics:** a major factor in the spread of English has been the spread of commerce throughout the world, and in particular, the emergence of the United States as a world economic power. Of course other economic blocks are hugely powerful too, but the spread of international commerce has taken English along with it. This is the twentieth century phenomenon of “globalisation” described by a journalist John Pilger as “... a term which journalists and politicians have made fashionable and which is often used in a positive sense to denote a “global village” of “free trade”, hi-tech marvels and all kinds of possibilities that transcend class, historical experience and ideology” (Pilger 1998:61). Thus one of the first sights many travellers see arriving in countries as diverse as the Czech Republic and Brazil, for example is the yellow twin-arched sign of a McDonalds fast food restaurant. Whether we take a benign view of such “multinational” economic activity or, like John Pilger and many others, view it as a threat to the identities of individual countries and local control, English is the language that frequently rides on its back.
- **Travel:** much travel and tourism is carried on, around the world, in English. Of course this is not always the case, as the multilingualism of many tourism workers in different countries demonstrates, but a visit to most airport on the globe will show signs not only in language of that country, but also in English, just as many airline announcements are glossed in English too, whatever the language of the country the airport is situated in. So far, English is also the preferred language of air traffic control in many countries and is used widely in sea travel communication.
- **Information exchange:** a great deal of academic discourse around the world takes place in English. It is often a lingua franca of conferences, for example, and many journal articles in fields as diverse as astrophysics and zoology. The first years of the Internet as a major channel for information exchange have also seen a marked predominance of English (through such a situation may not continue). This probably has something to do with the Internet’s roots in the USA and the predominance of its use there in the early days of the World Wide Web.
- **Popular culture:** in the western world, at least, English is a dominating language in popular culture. Pop music in English saturates the planet’s airwaves. Thus many people who are not English speakers can sing words from their favourite English songs. Many people who are regular cinemagoers (or TV viewers) frequently hear English in subtitled films coming out of the USA. However, we need to remind ourselves that “Bollywood” produces more films than Hollywood and many countries, such as France, do their best to fight against the cultural domination of the American film-making.

2. Historical Background - the Growth of ESP

From the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA in ESP (e.g. The University of Birmingham, and Aston University in the UK) and in the number of ESP courses offered to overseas students in English speaking countries. There is now a well-established international journal dedicated to ESP discussion, "English for Specific Purposes: An international journal", and the ESP SIG groups of the IATEFL and TESOL are always active at their national conferences. In Ukraine too, the ESP movement has shown a slow but definite growth over the past few years. This has led to a rapid growth in English courses aimed at specific disciplines, e.g. English for Chemists, in place of the more traditional 'General English' courses. The knowledge and usage of English that school leavers possess gives rise to concern. Students find it very hard to cope with learning ESP basically because of lack of the General English skills. The ESP course introduces learners to English for economics, i.e. the kind of language they will face in their future profession. Learners have to master terms used in economics, to be able to understand formal professional texts and authentic recordings of lectures and produce formal pieces in writing as well as to be able to make professional presentations and participate in discussions on contemporary economic issues. The above mentioned rises an urgent necessity of not only investigating, but formulating definite criteria and amounts of ESP for those learners of English language, who are referred to the category of pre-service teachers or regular philologists.

The question that may naturally occur is why school leavers do not possess adequate language skills, and an attempt has been made to tackle this question.

Definition and perception of ESP abroad and in Ukraine

3. Ukrainian concept of ESP

As described above, ESP has had a relatively long time to mature and so we would expect the ESP community to have a clear idea about what ESP means. Strangely, however, this does not seem to be the case. In October this year, for example, an intense debate took place on the TESP-L e-mail discussion list about whether or not English for Academic Purposes (EAP) could be considered part of ESP in general. Some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. No specific investigation upon the issue has been carried in Ukraine, which allows us to consider the definition of Tony Dudley-Evans, co-editor of the ESP Journal as a basic one. Being aware of the current confusion amongst the ESP community Dudley-Evans set out his own extended definition of ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics (see below).

Definition of ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1997)

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
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 systems

The definition Dudley-Evans offers is clearly influenced by that of Strevens (1988), although he has improved it substantially by removing the absolute characteristic that ESP is "in contrast with 'General English'" (Johns et al., 1991: 298), and has included more variable characteristics. The division of ESP into absolute and variable characteristics, in particular, is very helpful in resolving arguments about what is and is not ESP. From the definition, we can see that ESP can but does not necessarily correlate with a specific discipline, nor does it have to be aimed at a certain age group or ability range. ESP should be seen simple as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans describes as an 'attitude of mind'. This is a similar conclusion to that made by Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) who states: "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning". This arouses the other urgent necessity of considering learners' priorities in studying English.

The problem of priorities consideration

4.Learners' Priorities in Studying English

To obtain a clearer idea of learners` priorities in different aspects of language learning, the respondents were requested to indicate how important it was for them to become proficient in various areas of language use. The questionnaire administered at the University of East Anglia (Kenning, 2001) has been adapted for this purpose. The respondents were asked to prioritize the importance of different skills in certain areas. The data are presented in the Table 1. For comparison, the first and third year students` ratings (unimportant, important and essential) are given in the same column. All the figures in columns show the number of students who ticked appropriate answers. The questionnaire was administered to the 2 groups of first year students (30 persons) after the first term of doing ESP at university, and to the 2 groups of the third year students (30 persons, respectively) after a semester of ESP, i.e. before the final exam. It is of interest to compare how learners' attitudes change in the course of studies.

The Table is divided into six sections (numbered 1.1 to 1.6 to simplify analysis), which covers different language skills and applications.

TABLE 1. Language skills and areas of application.

1.1

READING	UNIMPORTANT		IMPORTANT		ESSENTIAL	
	1 st year	3 ^{r^d} year	1 st year	3 ^{r^d} year	1 st year	3 ^{r^d} year
ESP texts	17	3	10	22	3	5
Newspapers	18	7	8	13	4	10
Magazines	25	16	3	6	2	6
Books	25	9	3	12	2	9

1.2

SPEAKING	UNIMPORTANT		IMPORTANT		ESSENTIAL	
	1 st year	3 ^{r^d} year	1 st year	3 ^{r^d} year	1 st year	3 ^{r^d} year
Presentations	13	7	10	13	7	10
Formal conversations	13	5	10	15	7	10

Informal conversations	4	2	19	22	7	8
1.3						
WRITING	UNIMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		IMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		ESSENTIAL 1 st year 3 rd year	
Summaries	9	7	18	20	3	3
Formal letters	11	6	19	20	-	4
e-mails	21	6	7	20	1	4

1.4

LISTENING TO	UNIMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		IMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		ESSENTIAL 1 st year 3 rd year	
Lectures	4-	4	26	22	-	4
TV/Radio	28	8	2	20	-	2
English speakers	1	1	16	19	13	10

1.5

TRANSLATING	UNIMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		IMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		ESSENTIAL 1 st year 3 rd year	
FromEnglish	2	1	16	19	12	10
IntoEnglish	3	1	14	16	13	13

1.6

OTHER USAGE	UNIMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		IMPORTANT 1 st year 3 rd year		ESSENTIAL 1 st year 3 rd year	
For telephoning	7-	4	23	24	-	2
For studies	1	1	26	22	3	7
For travelling	2	-	28	28	-	2
For exams	1	-	27	28	2	2
Grammar	2	-	25	26	3	4

Let us examine the data in the Table 1 closely. Professional reading (ESP texts) is almost a priority for both groups, while presentations are out of favour with the first year students. The third year students, who have already had some experience in making presentations in the classroom during the ESP course, are well aware of the importance of being able to speak in front of their peers, and in public in the future.

Majority of the first year students are also unaware of the significance of electronic communication (e-mail), and they are focused on formal letters as a consequence of the English training at school: writing a formal letter (of no type specified) is included in school curriculum.

The issue of translation, both from and into English, is appreciated by all learners. For them, translation remains the main tool of comprehension. It implies that students are unable to grasp the meaning without translating from their mother tongue. Only proficient users of foreign language stop translating in using either productive or receptive skills. The examination-orientated learning remains a preference to nearly all students: only one person out of thirty (first year questioned ones) and the marginal student, as a matter of fact, marked the exam question as unimportant.

Grammar also remains important or even essential to majority along with listening to native speakers of English and to TV/radio. An ability to participate in formal and informal conversations is marked by majority of students as well. The third year students unanimously ranked telephoning skills as rather important while considered less important for the first year students.

Finally, the important aspect in ESP learning remains an ability to understand lectures in subject matter. For obvious reasons, the third year learners, whom we may consider more experienced in having various lectures in English, ticked this item as their priority, while some of the first year students considered this item as irrelevant.

Conclusion

If we agree to the definition of ESP given in this article, we begin to see how broad ESP really is. In fact, one may ask 'What is the difference between the ESP and General English approach?' Hutchinson et al. (1987:53) answer is quite evident, "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal". At the time, teachers of General English courses, while acknowledging that students had their specific purpose for studying English, would rarely conduct a needs analysis to find out what was necessary to actually achieve it. About 10% of teachers nowadays, however, are much more aware of the importance of students' needs analysis, and certain methodologists think very carefully about the goals of learners at all stages of materials production. Perhaps this demonstrates the influence that the ESP approach has had on English teaching in general. Moreover, the line between where General English courses stop and professional ESP courses start has become very vague indeed.

Rather ironically, while many General English teachers can be described as users of an ESP approach, basing their syllabi on a learners' needs analysis and their own specialist knowledge of using English for real communication, it is the majority of so-called ESP teachers that are using an approach so distant from the one described above. Instead of conducting interviews with specialists in the field, analyzing the language required in the profession, or even conducting students' needs analysis, many teachers of English in Ukraine have become slaves to the published textbooks available, unable to evaluate their suitability based on personal experience, and unwilling to do the necessary analysis of students' needs and preferences.

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