

Towards Various Aspects of Teaching Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) at Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract.

The objective of the present article is to consider such phenomenon as Language for Specific Purposes on example of the English language and discuss ways of integration of the course in curricula at higher education institutions. The importance of effective teaching of ESP course for formation of specialists of the specific fields in the era of globalization has also been considered in the article. The issues discussed within this topic are: review of existing ESP materials, design of ESP programs and syllabi, model of ESP teacher/instructor, importance of general English for mastering of ESP, significance of good knowledge of specific subjects by ESP learners, reference to language corpora for the purpose of illustration of terms usage, and application of modern online platforms, such as www.moodlecloud.com to facilitate learning process and increase learners' motivation.

The main idea of the paper is to offer division of ESP into two classes: general ESP course and specific ESP course to make parallel with existing General Maritime English and Specific Maritime English courses. Such approach would be beneficial as it would give the learners general knowledge of terminology applicable to the entire field and then would enable students to acquire specific terminology of the related field.

The article is based on author's teaching experience in the field of ESP and is aimed at improving ESP teaching and learning process and raising motivation and interest to ESP in the learners of special courses of English for different specialties.

Keywords: Language for Specific Purposes, ESP, classification of ESP courses, materials design, model of ESP teacher, learners' motivation

Introduction

Language for Specific Purposes is a branch of Linguistics that has become especially important and consequently was singled out into separate branch of Linguistics in the second half of XX century. The factors that conditioned the growth of interest to LSP are scientific-technical progress and globalization that made English "lingua franca" of many fields of human activities. Therefore, mainly English for Specific Purposes is meant when Language for Specific Purposes is mentioned. The XXI century, development and spreading of world-wide-web with huge percent of its resources offered mainly in English is the third factor that strengthened position of English as main language for specific purposes and made ESP a separate branch of Linguistics.

ESP has been subject of research for many years and a lot of issues such as: review of existing ESP materials, design of ESP programs and syllabi, model of ESP teacher/instructor, importance of general English for mastering of ESP, significance of good knowledge of specific subjects by ESP learners, have been discussed in the works of scholars working in the field of ESP. New century offered new technologies and consequently new challenges, therefore addressing such problems as reference to language corpora for the purpose of illustration of terms usage, and application of modern online platforms, such as www.moodlecloud.com to facilitate learning process and increase learners' motivation, became important for successful work in ESP field both for teachers and learners.

The main objective of this paper is to offer division of ESP course into two parts: general ESP course and specific ESP course to make parallel with existing General Maritime English and Specific Maritime English courses. We hope such division and consideration of the issue during design of ESP programs would be beneficial as it would give learners general knowledge of terminology applicable to the entire field first and then would enable students to acquire specific terminology of the related field. Such approach would broaden the scope of ESP knowledge and would increase its quality.

Main body of the paper

The main purpose of any ESP course is to prepare students for work with technical literature in English: technical books, manuals or internet resources. The other important purpose is to develop communicative skills in English in future technical specialists to enable them to communicate with their colleagues from different countries. The other important objective of any ESP course is to facilitate communication between technical specialists from different countries making it more effective and productive.

In today's globalized world knowledge of English, especially of specialized English is of utmost importance as vast majority of books, specific internet resources and technical manuals are available mainly in English. Ahmadi A. in his article "Barriers to English for Specific Purposes Learning among Iranian University Students" mentions: "English is the most important tool to acquire the world's scientific resources; so, the main purpose of Special English is to help students be prepared and learn how to use these resources". (Ahmadi, 2012, p.794)

In order to give proper education to future specialists of different fields, ESP courses are integrated in curricula of higher education institutions. The essence of ESP course as expressed by Tao lies in the following: "The participants of ESP courses believe that what they teach will help students' career advancement and will contribute to the local socioeconomic development" [Kaosar, 2014, p.9].

It is very important to understand the essence of ESP, which was referred to as "approach and not a product" by Hutchinson & Waters. Kaosar says that "approach to process of study and teaching ESP course should be based on the statement "ESP – is English for the profession but not the Profession in English". Such approach is very important as very often ESP learners and higher education institutions' stakeholders believe that students should be taught specific phenomena related to their future profession in ESP course. In reality it is just course of English for the profession as it was fairly observed by Kaosar. ESP is not just a language course as General English courses usually are, it is more training in English for certain profession. Usually ESP is recognized as course of English with specific aim to teach English for certain profession. Therefore specific language is always considered from general language criteria. Specific language is just general English containing terminology of the specific field. ESP can be considered as a cross point of technical field and linguistics. In spite of its specific nature, ESP is still a language course; therefore it is part of Linguistics.

Brieger as cited by McDonough distinguishes four types of knowledge underpinning most ESP courses:

- General language knowledge
- Specialist language knowledge
- General communication skills
- Professional communication skills [Master, p.472].

ESP students just as General English students are expected to acquire all four language skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Therefore syllabus of ESP course is sometimes more complicated than syllabus of GE course because it is aimed at developing language skills and also teaching terminology and communication in the professional domain at the same time.

The aim of any student undertaking ESP course is to achieve understanding of technical text and to acquire skills of professional communication in English. Technical text and any specific text require 100% understanding as such texts are usually characterized by high semantic density. To achieve this, it is necessary that learners have proficiency in English and good knowledge of their specialization. Sometimes, learners who rely on their knowledge of subject think that they can suppose the meaning. Yet, any unpredictable new meaning or idea can be given in specific text. Therefore, during process of studies and in professional work, it is always better to work out the meaning on basis of vocabulary of the text and not on suppositions as only lexical constituents including terminology, correct meaning can ensure 100% understanding of specific text.

We decided to consider the following issues in relation to ESP course integration and teaching at higher education institutions. These issues are: ways of integration of the course in curricula of higher education institutions; importance of effective teaching of ESP course for formation of specialists of the specific fields in the era of globalization, review of existing ESP materials, design of ESP programs and syllabi, model of ESP teacher/instructor, importance of general English for mastering of ESP, significance of good knowledge of specific subjects by ESP learners, reference to language corpora for the purpose of illustration of terms usage, and application of modern online platforms, such as www.moodlecloud.com to facilitate learning process and increase learners' motivation.

The question when ESP course should be integrated at higher education institutions is a subject of debate. Should it be introduced in the curricula in first years of studies or in Master's program as students at this stage of studies are aware of their specialization and can acquire ESP course in a more efficient way. Students are usually required to have B1 level of English when they start ESP course and those who have B1 level are offered the course from the first year of studies. Yet, later transition to ESP course during last years of studies would be

more efficient as students will be able to make significant contribution to lectures on basis of their knowledge of the subject.

ESP materials: textbooks, internet resources, audio and video materials make inseparable and very important part of any ESP course that condition its success and efficiency. Jo McDonough in her article “English for Specific Purposes: a Survey, Review of Current Materials“ singles out following series of ESP materials: Cambridge English, Professional English, Oxford Business English Express, Oxford English for Careers, etc. In addition to these materials, we have observed that the existing ESP materials are mainly series of Professional English in Use, Cambridge English for Different Specialties for example Cambridge English For Engineering, textbooks developed by different Universities, for example, Polytechnic University of Valencia has its own series of English for specific purposes developed by the lecturers of this University: Introduction to Technical English by A. Jaime, English for Electrical Engineering, English for Mechanical Engineering, English for Industrial Engineering, English for Chemical Engineering developed by M. Carrio, English for Agronomy and Forestry Engineering developed by M. del Saz Rubio. Special attention should be paid to ESP textbooks developed in Iran, course for Industrial Engineering, English for students of Engineering, English for Architecture, English for Medicine, etc. These textbooks are characterized by complicated texts and exercises that require high level of preparation in English, knowledge of specialization and motivation – factors that are crucial in mastering of ESP course. So, ESP textbooks differ from the viewpoint of rendering of information and according to the level of General English they require from the learners. All ESP textbooks generally offer adapted texts but the aim of such textbooks is to prepare students to work with original technical texts.

ESP materials differ from the viewpoint of organization and purpose. As it was observed by P. Master “A series as “Professional English in Use” is predominantly terminological in both overall approach and in individual tasks, whereas English for careers teaches and develops specialist vocabulary and includes strategies for learning as well as word grammar and pronunciation” (Kaosar, 2014, p.475).

ESP materials can be designed by lecturers themselves on basis of course requirements and education system of the country they live and work in. Mainly, this is the compilation of textbooks with relevant texts from different sources and offering of exercises to help students to remember terms and develop language skills.

Syllabi of ESP English should not be based only on one book, as the variety of materials mentioned above can comprise different texts and materials worth including into the syllabi. Listening and other exercises should also be included to guarantee development of all four language skills in the students: Reading, Speaking, Listening, and Writing. Online platforms like www.youtube.com enable teachers to include relevant listening materials dependent on level of English knowledge of students.

The importance of multimedia tools in ESP courses was mentioned by Bret citing Rost: Rost (1990: 234) believes that to develop listening skills self-instruction can play a vital complementary role to classroom instruction" and he outlines how this might best be achieved but maintains that the aid of a trained instructor is necessary. Among the criteria and roles for an instructor that he outlines are selection of motivating authentic materials accompanied by an appropriate variety of tasks, "promoting appropriate listening strategies to deal with particular learner needs" (ibid.) and the provision of feedback on learners' progress. Although Rost discusses this with audio tapes in mind, it is clear that multimedia adequately provides a tool which can deliver many of these prerequisites for effective self-instruction in listening and take on some of the roles of the instructor [Brett, 2000, p.273].

ESP course should be oriented on rendering general terminology of the field to the students. This can be achieved through offering correspondent texts, materials and different exercises in English containing such terminology. Later on, during life-time learning process they should profound their knowledge of specific language independently. This can be achieved by remembering new terms during independent work with relevant specific materials in English.

ESP course should combine different methods of teaching including such traditional method as Grammar-Translation method, audio-visual method and some modern approaches applying new technologies. Blended approach and methodology are recommended to ensure mastering of ESP: traditional classroom learning, multimedia tools, Internet-based learning. Such approach stimulates students and increases their motivation.

Iijma M. Murrow P. Hattori M. in their article “Teaching English Language Skills to Students of Engineering in Japan” say: “Programs of English study must address not only social and business English, but also skills in discussion, description and explanation [4:2]. In order to ensure it the following activities mentioned by Bret should be practiced: “Note-taking, watching the authentic video, using the subtitles to confirm and to check comprehension, doing interactive grammar and vocabulary tasks and using the glossary resource, might all be viewed as beneficial language learning activities” [Brett, 2000, p.279]. Iijma also mentions: “Students should be required to write reports and make presentations. Topics at a basic level can include descriptions that require use of basic technology such as dimensions, shape and materials. Explanations of how to complete simple tasks also provide useful practice. The ability to offer and define points of view with appropriate evidence can be developed by informal classroom debates and by report topics that require the students to recognize two sides of an argument and reach a conclusion” [Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.3].

The other very important factor that makes great contribution to the efficiency of ESP course is the essence of ESP teacher: education of ESP teacher and ability to teach special course to the students. ESP teacher should combine either of the following skills and knowledge:

- 1) Technical specialist + knowledge of foreign language
- 2) Language specialist + knowledge of technical field

Why is it necessary for ESP teacher to be familiarized with subject area and to have some background knowledge of the field? Because it is the only way for ESP teacher to render information to the students on the proper level and reach appropriate results. Even Araujo Nunes mentions in the article "Teaching ESP: the GUT to do it": "In the specific case of English for Science and Technology a proper understanding and appropriate use of discourse is the vital factor" [McDonough, 2010].

The job of ESP teacher is rather difficult as they have to meet requirements of Linguistics and of subject area. Therefore, background knowledge, preparation, education and motivation of ESP teachers are crucial for successful performance of their work. In this respect Tao J. Gao X. in his article "Identity Constructions of ESP Teachers in a Chinese University" says: "English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers may confront embarrassment when working with students who have more knowledge of the related subjects, and skepticism from specialist professors who question their qualifications" [Peyman, 2012, p.1]

Cooperation of linguist and technical specialist during ESP course is one way to reach success in ESP teaching. In some maritime institutions Maritime English is taught by former seafarers with maritime education, who in addition hold CELTA certificate. Our proposal is to have technical specialist to deliver one summative lecture after series of lectures conducted by language specialist, the proportion could be 3:1. Such issue as team teaching is also popular for delivering of ESP courses. "Team teaching (Johns&Dudley-Evans, 1980), i.e. the presence of both content and a language instructor in the classroom is an effective way to resolve the issue".

We think it would be expedient to add general course of technical subjects to be integrated in curriculum of foreign languages specialties especially those delivered at Polytechnic Universities: "The model of the teacher we intend to suggest implies the basic knowledge of special subjects by the teacher of English. This kind of teacher will be able to deal with technical phenomena, will be aware of basic terms in all specific fields and being prepared for each lecture will be able to find the meaning of any new term and it will be much more understandable to such specialist than to ordinary EFL teacher. In his article "ESP in-service teacher training programs" Peyman mentions: "English major ESP instructors can fulfill course goals much better than specialists in the field provided that they possess a certain level of background knowledge in their students' academic subjects of ESP teaching in order to meet this challenge. In other words, ESP teachers are supposed to be knowledgeable in content areas as well and be able to elicit knowledge from students. However, language teachers are trained to teach linguistic knowledge rather than a content subject. Hence, they may be insufficiently grounded to teach subject matters (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)" [Nunes].

The knowledge of GE is very important as it ensures better understanding of the text by learners, so that they concentrate on specific language, terminology, contents and not on such issues as grammar structures, meaning of general words, etc. Therefore departments of Applied Linguistics that generally teach ESP require B1 level of English from students who want to take ESP course. Thus, B1 (Intermediate or Upper-Intermediate) level of knowledge of English is necessary to start ESP course. That would ensure that student concentrates on technical English, terminology and information and not on linguistic aspects of the text.

The other important points for successful mastering of ESP are knowledge of specialization subject by ESP students, motivation and interest to the chosen specialty. As good knowledge of specialty subjects by students of ESP course is significant factor for mastering of ESP course, it would be expedient to integrate ESP course in last year of curricula when students are already aware of their specialization and can make contribution to ESP lectures.

The other important factor of ESP course delivery is usage and application of modern online platforms, such as www.moodlecloud.com to facilitate learning process and increase learners' motivation. Application of online platforms can be defined as one more method of ESP course teaching and learning process. Multimedia tools and internet portal such as www.moodlecloud.org is a good means to present theoretical and practical materials (video, audio materials) and to enable students to create and modify glossaries, to participate in online forums and discussions with co-students after classes. Compilation of glossaries of the learnt terms is always good way of learning technical language. Therefore it would be expedient to compose glossary of the learnt terms, specifying the meanings met in this particular field and www.moodlecloud.org gives technical basis for it. In ESP textbooks and materials terms and interesting words met in technical texts can be rendered via entries of monolingual dictionaries. Remembering of their meanings in English would help to improve language skills in ESP students and explain technical phenomena to them more accurately.

The XXI century – development of world-wide web and advantages given by it ensured new approaches to studies of ESP courses. We consider language corpus as important tool to master specific language and offer the illustration of the newly learnt terms in real language. If reference to language corpus for the purpose of illustration of terms usage is ensured, students can profound their knowledge and understanding of terminology.

Such approach would also prepare them to develop their independent learning style of work in the future. Tsou W. and Chen F. in their article “ESP program evaluation framework, Description and application to a Taiwanese university ESP program” say: With corpus-based learning, students can conduct their own investigations of language, such as analyzing concordance patterns and collocations, as long as a personal computer and Internet connection are available. It is generally agreed that corpus-based learning not only supports the use of authentic language with real examples, but also makes students more active and independent language analyzers and learners (Conrad, 1999, 2000; Hüttner, Smit, & Mehlmauer- Larcher, 2009). Corpus training, viewed in terms of Tassinari’s model, provides learners with a useful skill to develop the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of language for awareness rising, which in turn motivates learning and acquisition. As students are assigned group work, the interaction with peers and teachers adds to the social aspect of learner autonomy (Tassinari, 2012), thus enabling learner reflection on one’s competencies and revealing areas of weaknesses in which decisions for further learning can be made [Tao & Gao, 2018, p.42].

All the above-mentioned issues have one aim to ensure efficiency of ESP course that depends on several factors and raise motivation in students.

Motivation of ESP learners can be conditioned by three factors:

- 1) Interest of students to specialization subjects
- 2) Good knowledge of General English that facilitates acquisition of ESP course and students will mainly have to concentrate on terminology
- 3) Understanding the importance of ESP for successful work and career development in the future

In the present work we would like to offer our idea regarding organization of ESP studies and compiling syllabi. We think it would be expedient to divide specific language learning into two stages: general course of ESP and ESP course related to one particular specialty. The fact that we are currently employed at maritime higher education institution gave us basis to apply existing samples of division of Maritime English into General Maritime English and Specific Maritime English offered in model course of Maritime English 3.17 developed by International Maritime Organization. Maritime English for Navigation, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Radio Communications represent the implied Specific Maritime English.

English for Specific Purposes includes English for different specialties from different fields of human activities. It comprises: Medicine, Technical fields, Economics, Law, etc. All these various fields have relevant ESP courses that differ from each other. Our offer would be to offer general introduction course for each of these fields with consequent specific courses. The idea occurred to us as we have recently been asked to compose syllabi for different technical specialties, such as Civil Engineering, Architecture, Telecommunications. ESP courses for any of these specialties are too specific and direct transition of the students even with B1 level of English to this course would be difficult. Course in general technical English covering to certain extent all technical issues would be perfect foundation for students to acquire ESP course directly related to their specialties. We would like to offer to use Cambridge Professional English in Use for Engineering (by M. Ibbotson) for this purpose. It has general character comprising topics that refer to all engineering issues. The textbook contains the following chapters divided into many sub-chapters and topics covering all technical fields:

- I. Design
- II. Measurement
- III. Materials and Technology
- IV. Manufacturing and Assembly
- V. Fluids
- VI. Mechanisms
- VII. Electricity

Dividing ESP for technical fields into: 1) General technical language (technical English) and 2) Specific technical language (English for Electrical Engineering, English for Mechanical Engineering, English for Industrial Engineering, English for Chemical Engineering, English for Civil Engineering, English for Architecture, etc. would guarantee that ESP learners will learn technical language on two levels: 1) general technical English; 2) specific technical English.

We think it is expedient to bring lexical-semantic classification of terms offered by Gotsiridze R. in her thesis “Perfection of independent reading skills of specific text via computer at technical higher education institutions” in which she singles out the following classes:

- 1) Conversational lexical means used in special literature that do not represent terminology, *e.g. to boil, oil, test, etc.*
- 2) General scientific terminology that can be used in any field, *e.g. structure, dynamic, forecasting, etc.*
- 3) General technical terminology used in all engineering fields, *e.g. fuel, engine, electricity, etc.*
- 4) Terminology used in concrete technical field *e.g. machine building: lathe, sliding washer, grip, etc.* [Gotsiridze, 2003, p.51]

According to this classification the first three classes can be covered by general technical English course, whereas specific technical English course will offer the last class - terminology used in concrete technical field and would comprise the first three as well.

The other example could be made on the example of ESP course for Medicine. There should be offered general ESP course for Medicine that would be relevant for all specialties in Medicine. After students acquire such a course that would cover all aspects of Medicine in general they can be offered ESP course in their specialization. Such “two layer” ESP course would broaden the scope of ESP knowledge and would increase its quality that would help students in their future careers.

All points discussed in the present article are important steps for integration and teaching of ESP courses, yet one of the most important factors is interest and motivation of all stakeholders, creation of good conditions, material-technical basis, availability of relevant literature and devoted highly-qualified ESP teachers.

Conclusion

In the modern globalized world the English language plays important role as a “lingua franca” of various fields of human activity. Therefore, teaching of English for Specific Purposes should be integrated and given due attention at higher education institutions. Proper knowledge of ESP is a guarantee of successful professional cooperation for specialists of different fields with their colleagues from foreign countries. In addition to communicative factor proper knowledge of ESP ensures access to literature and internet resources, as vast majority of such resources are offered in English today. That would ensure exchange of ideas, promotion of achievements of the field and timely integration of novelties into different fields of human activities in various countries. As mentioned by Iijma in the article. “Teaching English Language Skills to Students of Engineering in Japan”: “It is a grand mission for educators engaging in engineering education to foster excellent engineers for international, as well as national benefit” [Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:1].

Due to the above-mentioned factors stakeholders of higher education institutions should view ESP to be as important as specialization subjects are and to consider these courses not only as language courses but as important step to successful professional career of students in the future.

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