

## Teaching Foreign Language for Specific Purposes: Teacher Development

Milevica Bojović, MA, lecturer  
Faculty of Agronomy Čačak, Serbia  
milevib@eunet.yu

### Abstract

Foreign Language Teachers for Specific Purposes have a lot in common with teachers of general foreign language. For both it is necessary to consider linguistic development 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. The needs to understand the requirements of other professions and willingness to adapt to these requirements differentiate the foreign language teachers for specific purposes and their colleagues teaching general foreign language. ESP teaching presumes teaching of English as a foreign language regarding specific profession, subject or purpose.

**Key words:** ESP, teacher, teacher development, methodology.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been seen as a separate activity within English language teaching (ELT). It is believed that for some of its teaching ESP has developed its own methodology and its research draws on research from various disciplines in addition to applied linguistics – this is the key distinguishing characteristic of ESP. ESP, if sometimes moved away from the established trends in general ELT, has always been with needs analysis and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their field of study or work situation. The emphasis of ELT is always on practical outcomes. The theory of ESP could be outlined based on specific nature of the texts that learners need knowledge of or need-related nature of teaching.

### 2. WHAT IS ESP?

As with most disciplines in human activity, ESP was a phenomenon grown out of a number of converging trends of which we will mention three most important: 1) the expansion of demand for English to suit specific needs of a profession, 2) developments in the field of linguistics (attention shifted from defining formal language features to discovering the ways in which language is used in real communication, causing the need for the development of English courses for specific group of learners), and 3) educational psychology (learner's needs and interests have an influence on their motivation and effectiveness of their learning).

Definitions of ESP in the literature are relatively late in time, if we assume that ESP began in the 1960s. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as an *approach* rather than a *product* – meaning that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology. The basic question of ESP is: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? The purpose of learning English became the core.

Strevens' (1988) definition of ESP makes a distinction between 1) **absolute characteristics** (language teaching is designed to meet specified needs of the learner; related in content to particular disciplines, occupation and activities; centred on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, text, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of the discourse; designed in contrast with General English) and 2) **two variable characteristics**

(ESP may be restricted to the language skills to be learned, e.g. reading; and not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology).

Robinson's (1991: 3) definition of ESP is based on two **criteria**: 1) ESP is normally 'goal-directed', and 2) ESP courses develop from a needs analysis which aim to specify what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English, and a number of **characteristics** which explain that ESP courses are generally constrained by a *limited time period* in which their objectives have to be achieved and are taught to *adults* in *homogenous classes* in terms of the work or specialist studies that the students are involved in.

Each of these definitions have validity but also weaknesses. Considering Hutchinson and Water's definition, Anthony (1997) noted that it is not clear where ESP courses end and General English courses begin because numerous non-specialist ESP instructors use ESP approach in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own specialist personal knowledge of English for real communication. Strevens' definition, by referring to content in the second absolute characteristic, may confirm the impression held by many teachers that ESP is always and necessarily related to subject content. Robinson's mention of homogenous classes as a characteristic of ESP may lead to the same conclusion. However, much of ESP work is based on the idea of a common-core of language and skills belonging to all academic disciplines or cutting across the whole activity of business. ESP teaching should always reflect the underlying concepts and activities of the discipline. Having all these on mind, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) modified Strevens' definition of ESP

**1. Absolute characteristics:** a) ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner; b) ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves; and c) ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

**2. Variable characteristics:** a) ESP may be related or designed for specific disciplines; b) ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English; c) ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation; it could be used for learners at secondary school level; d) ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced learners; and e) Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

### 3. TYPES OF ESP

ESP is traditionally been divided into two main areas according to when they take place: 1) **English for Academic Purposes (EAP)** involving pre-experience, simultaneous/in-service and post-experience courses, and 2) **English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)** for study in a specific discipline (**pre-study**, **in-study**, and **post-study**) or as a school subject (**independent** or **integrated**). Pre-experience or pre-study course will omit any specific work related to the actual discipline or work as students will not yet have the needed familiarity with the content; the opportunity for specific or integrated work will be provided during in-service or in-study courses.

Another division of ESP divides EAP and EOP according to discipline or professional area in the following way: 1) EAP involves English for (Academic) Science and Technology (EST), English for (Academic) Medical Purposes (EMP), English for (Academic) Legal Purposes (ELP), and English for Management, Finance and Economics; 2) EOP includes English for Professional Purposes (English for Medical Purposes, English for Business Purposes – EBP) and English for Vocational Purposes (Pre-vocational English and Vocational English); in EAP, EST has been the main area, but EMP and ELP have always had their place. Recently the academic study of business, finance, banking, economics has become increasingly important especially Masters in Business Administration (MBA) courses; and 2) EOP refers to English for professional purposes in administration, medicine, law and

business, and vocational purposes for non-professionals in work (language of training for specific trades or occupations) or pre-work situations (concerned with finding a job and interview skills).

The classification of ESP courses creates numerous problems by failing to capture fluid nature of the various types of ESP teaching and the degree of overlap between “common-core” EAP and EBP and General English - e.g. Business English can be seen as mediating language between the technicalities of particular business and the language of the general public (Picket, 1989), which puts it in a position between English for General Purposes (EGP) and specialist English. Therefore, some authors suggest (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) the presentation of the whole of ELT should be on a continuum that runs from General English courses to very specific ESP courses as illustrated in Table 1.

Regarding positions 2 and 3, it is only the overall context of the program that decides whether a particular course is classified as ESP or not. At position 4, the work is specified in terms of the skills (it is important to choose appropriate skills to focus on - e.g., some doctors will need to read some medical journal, others will need oral skills to talk with their patients) taught, but the groups are not homogenous from one discipline or profession (scientists, engineers, lawyers, doctors), so the individual members can need texts dealing with their specific profession. Teaching materials prepared need contexts acceptable and understandable to all branches. At position 5 the course becomes really specific – the key feature of such courses is that teaching is flexible and tailored to individual or group needs.

Tab.1 Continuum of ELT course types

General				Specific
<u>Position 1</u>	<u>Position 2</u>	<u>Position 3</u>	<u>Position 4</u>	<u>Position 5</u>
English for Beginners	Intermediate to advance EGP courses with a focus on a particular skills	EGAP/EGBP courses based on common-core language and skills not related to specific discipline or profession	Courses for broad disciplinary or professional areas (e.g. Report writing for Scientists and Engineers, Medical English, Legal English, Negotiating skills for Business English)	1) An academic support course related to a particular academic course. 2) One-to-one work with business people

#### 4. FEATURES OF ESP COURSES

Considering the characteristics of ESP courses, Carver (1983) states that there are three characteristics common to ESP courses:

- 1) authentic materials – the use of authentic learning materials is possible if we accept the claim that ESP courses should be offered at an intermediate or advanced level. The use of such materials, modified by teachers or unmodified, is common in ESP, especially in self-directed studies or research tasks. The students are usually encouraged to conduct research using a variety of different resources including the Internet;

- 2) purpose-related orientation – refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required by the target situation. The teacher can give students different tasks - to simulate the conference preparation, involving the preparation of papers, reading, note-taking and writing. At Faculty of Agronomy in Cacak, English course for Agribusiness Management involves students in the tasks of presenting a particular agricultural product, logo creation, negotiating with the clients (suppliers and buyers), telephone conversation. They also practice listening skills, though the application is restricted because they employ newly acquired skills during their ESP classes with their colleagues and teacher.
- 3) self-direction – means that ESP is concerned with turning learners into users. For self – direction, it is necessary that teacher encourage students to have a certain degree of autonomy – freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study. For high-ability learners it is essential to learn how to access information in a new culture.

Since ESP courses are of various types, depending on specific scientific field or profession, and have specific features, teachers teaching such courses need to play different roles and acquire certain knowledge.

## 5. ROLES OF ESP TEACHERS

As ESP teaching is extremely varied some authors (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) use the term “practitioner” rather than “teacher” to emphasize that ESP work involves much more than teaching. ESP practitioner can have several roles.

*5.1. The ESP practitioner as a teacher* ESP is a practical discipline with the most important objective of helping students to learn. However, the teacher is not the primary knower of the carrier content of the material. The students, especially where the course is specifically oriented towards the subject content or work the students are engaged in, may know more about the content than the teacher. The teacher has the opportunity to draw on students’ knowledge of the content in order to generate communication in the classroom. When the teaching is a specific course on, for example, how to write a business report, it is vital that the teacher adopts the position of the consultant who has the knowledge of communication practices but needs to “negotiate” with the students on how best to explore these practices to meet the objective they have. The relationship is much more of a partnership. In some situations the role of ESP teacher extends to giving one-to-one advice to students (e.g., in non-English speaking countries students will have to publish in international journals and need advice in both language and discourse issues). ESP teachers need to have considerable flexibility, be willing to listen to learners, take interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in, and to take some risks in their teaching.

*5.2 The ESP practitioner as course designer and material provider* Since it is rarely possible to use a particular textbook without the need for supplementary material – sometimes no really suitable published material exists for identified needs - ESP practitioners often have to provide the material for the course. This involves selection of published material, adapting material if it is not suitable, or writing it. ESP teachers also need to assess the effectiveness of the teaching material used whether it is published or self-produced. However, since the teachers are encouraged by their employees to write new material there is a danger of constant re-invention of the wheel; advantages of published materials are ignored even when they are suitable for a given situation.

*5.3 The ESP practitioner as researcher* Research has been particularly strong in the area of EAP (genre analysis). Regarding the research into English for Business Purposes, there is a growing interest in investigating the genres, the language and the skills involved in business communication. ESP teachers need to be in touch with the research. Teachers carrying out a needs analysis, designing a course, or writing teaching materials need to be capable of

incorporating the findings of the research, and those working in specific ESP situations need to be confident that they know what is involved in skills such as written communication.

*5.4 The ESP practitioner as collaborator* It is believed that subject-specific work is often best approached through collaboration with subject specialist. This may involve cooperation in which ESP teacher finds out about the subject syllabus in an academic context or the tasks that students have to carry out in a work or business situation. Or it may involve specific collaboration so that there is some integration between specialist studies or activities and the language. It might involve the language teacher specifically preparing learners for the language of subject lectures or business presentations. Another possibility is that a specialist checks and comments on the content of teaching materials that the ESP teacher has prepared. The fullest collaboration is where a subject expert and a language teacher **team-teach** classes; in EAP such lessons might help with the understanding of subject lectures or the writing of examination answers, essays or theses, while in EOP they might involve the language teacher and a business trainer working together to teach both the skills and the language related to business communication.

*5.5 The ESP practitioner as evaluator* The ESP practitioner is often involved in various types of evaluation - testing of students, evaluation of courses and teaching materials. Tests are conducted 1) to assess whether students have the necessary language and skills to undertake a particular academic course or career which is important in countries such as the UK, USA, Australia where large numbers of international students do postgraduate course or research and need internationally required tests, e.g. International English Language Test Service (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and 2) to assess the level of their achievement – how much learners have gained from a course. Evaluation of course design and teaching materials should be done while the course is being taught, at the end of the course and after the course has finished, in order to assess whether the learners have been able to make use of what they learned and to find out what they were not prepared for. Evaluation through discussion and on-going needs analysis can be used to adapt the syllabus.

## 6. TRAINING OF ESP TEACHERS

Most teacher training courses contain four basic elements:

1. *Selection*, initial and terminal, is necessary because not every human being would become an adequate language teacher. Each teacher has continuing responsibility throughout a career which can last for thirty years or longer. This responsibility makes it essential that potentially ineffective individuals should be discouraged from entering the profession by adequate pre-training or post-training selection procedures.
2. *Continuing personal education*. Teachers should be well-educated people. Minimum standards accepted for teachers vary from country to country. There are variations in how the trainee's personal education is improved – either simultaneously with his/her professional training; or consecutively where first two or three years of study with no elements of training as a teacher are followed by the fourth year containing methodology of foreign language teaching or one year post-graduate course of teacher training; or, as in many countries, by in-service courses. Either way, the assumption is that graduates' level of education is to be regarded as insufficient.
3. *General professional training as an educator and teacher*. This element involves what *all* teachers need to know regardless of which subject they teach – the components are as follows: a) educational psychology, the study of child development, social psychology, and the principles of educational thought – the component intended to lead the trainee to understanding of the nature of education; b) an outline of the organization of education in a particular country – the teacher should be aware of the different kinds of schools, of normal and unusual pathways through educational

network, of responsibility, control and finance, of sources of reform and change, of the main features of history of education in the country where he will teach; c) an awareness of the moral and rhetorical function of the teacher: the building of standards, character, enthusiasm;

d) knowledge of, and skill in, class management, discipline and handling of various groups of students; e) knowledge of, and skill in, basic instructional techniques, and understanding teacher-learner interaction; f) Acceptance of the fundamental need for the preparation of lessons; g) understanding the role of curriculum, syllabus and teaching materials; h) a teacher should be committed to keeping in touch with the teaching profession.

4. *Special training as a teacher of a foreign or second language.* The complexity of this training which constitutes the core of most teacher training courses can be made simpler if the distinction is to be made between three aspects of it. They are:

1) The **skills** component which includes three different skills required by the teacher: a) *command of the language* the teacher is teaching – this component must ensure that teacher's command of foreign language is at least adequate for class purposes; b) teaching *techniques* and classroom activities – the major part of teacher training is to assimilate a great body of effective techniques; c) the *management of learning* – it is a crucial part of teacher's classroom skills to learn how to assess from moment to moment the progress of each individual in the class and how to manage the classroom activities so that most able learners are not frustrated by being held back, while the slowest are not depressed by being left behind.

The **skills** component requires practical training in performing the skills themselves. There is a great range of activities which can be summarized as follows: a) the observation of specially-devised demonstrations of specific techniques and of complete lessons; b) the observation of actual class; c) practice in the preparation of lesson plans; d) micro-teaching – the teaching (by the trainee) of several items or techniques with the possible use of camera recordings; e) peer group teaching (i.e. teaching fellow-trainees) as a form of exercise; f) being a teacher's assistant in real class; g) teaching real classes under supervision; h) discussion of the trainee's teaching; i) post-training, in-service courses of various kind (ESP courses for teaching EMP or EBP).

2) The **information** component – the needed body of information can be divided into three parts: a) *information about education* – about different approaches to the task of teaching language; b) *information about the syllabus and materials* he will be using – the syllabus, the prescribed textbooks, other teaching materials (readers, workbooks, etc.) and aids (flashcards, wallcharts as well as tape recorders and language labs) make up the tools of the teacher's profession; c) *information about language* – when the teacher enters his course of training, his understanding of the nature of language is likely to be scanty; this information refers to knowledge of normal stages in the infant's acquisition of his mother tongue, the existence of common speech defects and whose job is to treat them, relation between speech and writing, literacy and education, notions of the 'correctness' and social judgments on language, language variety including dialects and accents, language in contact, artificial language, language and thought, and many more. The **information** content can be learned from reading or lectures.

3) The **theory** component – the language teaching profession makes connection with theoretical studies in several disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, social theory, education. The theoretical studies are likely to find a place when the trainee has attained a sufficient

level of personal education and when he is preparing to teach high-level learners. Alternatively, they can be included in postgraduate teacher training as the interdisciplinary approach of applied linguistics which integrates appropriate parts of the disciplines most relevant to language teaching. The **theory** component can be assimilated from discussion, practice in solving problems, tutorial explanations and time to absorb new ways of thinking.

Currently, in Serbia ESP teacher training courses are run as in-service courses; as high-education level courses they are for the first time included in new curriculum as an optional subject in fundamental academic studies (the fourth year of study) at the institutions dealing with educating language teachers, Faculty of Philology in Belgrade in particular (Faculty of Philology, 2006).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Using skills as a framework of ESP, ESP teachers are provided with the necessary knowledge and tools to deal with their own students' specializations. It should be remembered - ESP teachers are not *specialists in the field, but in teaching English*, their subject is English for the profession but not the profession in English. They help students, who know their subject better than the teachers do, develop the essential skills in understanding, using, and/or presenting authentic information in their profession. A professional ESP teacher must be able to switch from one professional field to another without being obliged to spend months on getting started. He/she simply brings the necessary tools, frameworks, and principles of course design to apply them to new material. The material (the content) should be provided by the *professors or experts in the subject*. It should always be **authentic** (the main purpose of teaching skills is to enable students to deal with authentic information despite their level of English), **up-to-date** (the informational exchange is growing more intense), and **relevant** for the students' specializations (they ought to be given the information representative for their *target language use situation*).

Unfortunately, ESP teachers often feel isolated both from professionals in their students' specializations and their colleagues in other institutions. They also have difficulty in getting or exchanging information in the field. We can conclude, therefore, that the necessary ESP network should be provided.

## REFERENCES

- Anthony, L. (1997). ESP: What does it mean? ON CUE. <http://www.interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.jp/~cue/pc/anthony.htm> Retrieved August, 2006.
- Carver, D. (1983). Some propositions about ESP. *The ESP Journal*, 2, 131-137.
- Dudley-Evans, T., and St John, M. (1998). *Developments in ESP: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Gatehouse, K. (2001) Key issues in English for Specific Purposes: (ESP) Curriculum development. *TESL Journal Vol. VII, No.10*, October 2001, <http://www.iteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse-ESP.html>, Retrieved August, 2006.
- \*\*\*Informer for students of Faculty of Philology, Faculty of Philology, Belgrade, 2006.
- Hutchinson, T., and Waters, A. (1987) *English for Specific Purposes: a Learning –centered Approach*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Picket, D. (1986) *Business English: Falling between two stools*. Comlon 26: 16-21.
- Robinson, P. (1991) *ESP Today: a Practitioner's Guide*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International.
- Strevens, P. (1978) *New Orientations in the Teaching of English*. Oxford: OUP.
- Strevens, P. (1988) ESP after twenty years: A re-appraisal. In M. Tickoo (Ed.), *ESP: State of the Art* (pp. 1-13). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Centre.