ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES:PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract:
English for Specific Purposes(ESP) focuses on the specific communicative needs of particular professional or occupational groups and it has emerged out of Halliday, Mackintosh and Strevens'work,The linguistic sciences and language teaching(1964).Ever since it has developed rapidly and became a significant issue in English language teaching and research and its interdisciplinarity means not only an openness to the approaches and insights of other fields but also its distinctiveness. In this respect, English for Specific Purposes is related to applied linguistics and discourse analysis, pragmatics, sociocognitive theory, communicative language teaching, rhetoric, critical literacy and all these disciplinary perspectives help us to identify what it stands for.

Key words: ESP, needs analysis, communication, linguistics, language teaching

1.Introduction and context of the   study:

As an important and distinctive branch of English Language Teaching(ELT), English for Specific Purposes focuses on practical aspects derived from needs analysis, genre analysis and effective communication. The extraordinary growth of this discipline is also a result of the developments in economy, industry, commerce and communications. The scientific discoveries and technical innovations of the "information age" have triggered bilingual and multilingual communication to become a significant issue in our modern society. The appearance of the Internet has blurred frontiers and contributed to the generation of a networked society that created new communicative situations, culture models, new varieties of language and discourse and even new cyberpragmatics and cybergenres. Consequently, there has been an increased demand for language courses and new approaches to language teaching/learning foreign languages.In Halliday, Mackintosh and Strevens'view the term "special" in English for Special Purposes was used to refer to the language varieties typical of a professional activity. Further on, Hutchinson and Waters (1997, p18-19) explain that"ESP is not a matter of teaching' specialized varieties" of English. ESP is not just a matter of science words and grammar for Scientists, Hotel words and grammar for Hotel staff and so on.ESP is not different in kind from any other form of language teaching in that it should be based in the first instance on principles of effective and efficient learning"[1]

2.Types of ESP

In 1975 the British Council under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Great Britain made a first attempt to classify the various types of ESP and according to their taxonomy there were two branches: English for Academic Purposes(EAP) that included English for Science and Technology(EST) and English for Occupational Purposes(EOP).Later on, Hutchinson and Waters designed a more detailed classification in which three main branches stem from the English language teaching classification tree:EST,EAP and EOP.(!987, p17)
The growth of ESP was influenced , on the one hand , by socio-political aspects such as US leadership after the Second World War which contributed to the fact that English started to considered the lingua franca of commerce, medicine, technology and business, on the other hand it was influenced by the new linguistic trends and communicative theories on language. Elizbieta Danuta Lesiak-Bielawska in her article entitled English for Instrumentalists:Designing and Evaluating an ESP Course , published in English for Specific Purposes World, www.esp-world.info., Issue 43, Vol 15, 2014 points out other factors:
„At the initial stages of its development", she says"ESP remained under the influence of the teaching of the teaching of English for Academic Purposes(EAP) and research conducted in the area(Dudley-Evans and St. John, 2009). The rapid expansion in EAP courses designed for different specialisms seemed to result from the introduction of governmental mass educational programs, with English being the first and sometimes the only language. This was coupled with the growing demand for English as a common medium of communication that, among others, facilitates access to scientific and technical literature".[2]

3.Characteristics:

ESP has certain characteristics:

1.It is designed to meet specific needs of the learners.

2. It is related to content(particular description, occupations and activities;

3.It is centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntaqx, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc.

Dudley-Evans et al (1998) and Strevens offered another definition which included the following variable characteristics:

1.   ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation but it could be used for learners at secondary school level.

2.   ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students

3.   Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system,but it can be used with beginners.

Eman Alsolami, in his article Barriers to Teaching English for Specific Purposes among EGP Teachers in ELI, published in English for Specific Purposes World, www.esp-world, info, Issue 42, Vol 15,2014, mentioned two characteristics:

„ESP may be but it is not necessarily restricted as to the language skills to be learned and may be not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

When asked about the difference between general English and ESP, Hutchinson and Waters said: „in theory nothing, in practice a great deal"(1987). In Strevens' view (1988) „ESP differs from general English in that it is basedon a close analysis of the learners' communivative needs for a specific occupation or activity, as well as a detailed analysis of the language of that occupation or activity".

Eva Donesch(2012) emphasizes the importance of these needs   because as she says „Nowadays teachers are aware of the importance of the needs analysis and perhaps it is this that has been the greatest influence that the ESP approach has had on the teaching of General English."[3]

4.Factors which led to the creation of ESP

Kennedy and Bolitho(1984) include as the factors which led to the creation of ESP the following:

1.The introduction of governmental mass education programs with English as the first and sometimes the only foreign language;

2.The need of English as a common medium of communication as a consequence of the growth of business and increased occupational mobility;

3.The facilitation of access to scientific technical literature.

Three years later, Hutchinson and Waters presented almost the same factors but in greater detail:

1.   The enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. Two forces were dominating the new post-war world-technology and commerce, whose relentless progress soon generated a demand for an international language and, due to the economic power of the USA , it was English which granted this role.

2.   The emerging of a new mass of people wanting to learn English- the key to international currencies of technology and commerce. This mass of people joined together particularly new generations of learners who knew specifically what they were to learn and why

3.   The oil crises of the early 1970s involved a massive flow of funds and western expertise into the oil rich countries. Therefore, English suddenly turned into "big business" and, on the other hand, commercial pressures began to exert an influence in the acquisition of this language. Time and money constraints created a need for cost-effective courses with accurately specific goals.

4.   The need for several countries to update their knowledge.

In their book entitled English for Specific Purposes:A Learning –Centered Approach(1987)Hutchinson and Waters represented the relationship betwee English for Specific Purposes and English Language Teaching under the form of a tree in which the roots of the tree represent the learning communication while the trunk, the language teaching. The next division is represented by the English language teaching in which tree branches stem out as English as a Mother Tongue(EMT); English as a Foreign Language(EFL) and English as a Second Language(ESL).

The branch of EFL divides into General English(GE), and English for Specific Purposes(ESP).ESP distinguishes English for Science and Technology(EST);English for Business and Economics(EBE) and English for Social Sciences(ESS).In Cook's view, there are both external and internal goals for language teaching.

The external goals are represented by the uses of language outside the classroom(e.g. being able to get things done in the real world, such as being able to buy groceries or provide medical information.

The internal goals relate to the educational aims of the classroom-improving attitudes to speakers of other languages, promoting thinking skills such as analysis, memorizing and social goals. According to Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed in his study The ESP Teacher: Issues, Tasks and Challenges(English for Specific Purposes World, www.esp-world.info, Issue 42, vol 15, 2014) ESP teaching is generally understood to be very largely concerned with external goals. "In ESP",he says, "the learner is seen as a language learner engaged either in academic, professional or occupational pursuits and who uses English as a means to carry out those pursuits. External goals suggest an instrumental view of language learning and language being learnt for non-linguistic goals. In a general ELT situation, goals are generally linguistic(such as development of oral competence or a wide vocabulary, or ability to use a wide range of grammatical structures. In an ESP situation, it is understood that the learner would want to achieve "real world" objectives requiring specific linguistic competencies"[4]

In their study entitled Materials for Specific Purposes in B.Tomlison, (ed), Developing Materials for Language Teaching(pp 306-323), Londonn: Continuum, Bernard and Zemach (2003) observed: "Clearly the line between where General English courses stop and ESP courses start has become vey vague indeed. In fact, the dividing line between ESP and EGP is not always clear; where do

we place, for example, a course designed for a Korean business person who is to assume a post abroad in the near future?If the learner's proficiency level is very low, a great dela of course content will probably be of a general English type with emphasis on survival situations. Most would probably agree that the course should be classified as ESP, simply because the aims are clearly defined, and analysis of the learner's needs play an important role in deciding what to include in the course. However, we believe our example demonstrates that ESP should not be regarded as a discrete division of ELT, but simply an area (with blurred boundaries)whose courses are usually more focused in their aims and make use of a narrower range of topics". (pp 306-307)[5].

In designing an ESP syllabus one of the most important steps is needs analysis and in this regard Basturkman observes:

"Needs analysis in ESP refers to a course development process. In this process the language anf skills that the learners will use in their target professional or vocational workplace or in their study areas are identified and considered in relation to the present state of knowledge of the learners, their perceptions of their needs and practical possibilities and constraints of the teaching context. The information obtained from this process is used in determining and refining the content and method of the ESP course.(p.19, Basturkman,H., 2010, Developing Courses in ESP, Bansingstoke, Uk, Palgrave/Macmillan).[6]

Needs analysis is considered to be the cornerstone of ESP.According to Munby(1978) if a group of learners'English language needs can be accurately identified and specified, this can be used to determine the content of a language programme that will meet these needs.[7]

5. The Roles of the ESP Practitioner

According to Dudley Evans, there are five different roles to be performed by the ESP practitioner: teacher, collaborator, course designer and materials provider, researcher and evaluator.(1998).

1.   As a teacher, the ESP practitioner has to create opportunities has to create opportunities of learning, to generate authentic communication and to choose the appropriate teaching methods to suit the students' needs.

2.   As a collaborator, the ESP practitioner should collaborate with other ESP practitioners and subject specialists since he/she lacks the knowledge of the content.

3.   As a course designer and material provider the ESP practitioner should create his own materials and/or adjust the authentic materials used in workplace and benefit from a huge amount of educational resources and teaching materials.

4.   As a researcher, the ESP teacher should be preoccupied with the students' target needs, goals and interest, upgrade his knowledge on the subject matter he is teaching and look for authentic materials.

5.   As an evaluator, the ESP teacher should consider the different stages in the evaluation process. For instance, before the course he/she should evaluate his students' needs, during the course he/she should evaluate the effectiveness of his students' response to the teaching methods and at the end of the course he should evaluate the students ' learning outcomes.

6. Conclusions:

English for Specific Purposes(ESP) can be defined as the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language for the specific purpose of using it in a particular domain. Its evolution along the decades reflects the developments in language teaching and language itself .The major technological changes in the 1980s brought about the use of computers in language teaching and learning and the impact of the Internet on this process was enormous. Thus, the scientific discoveries and technical innovations of the "information age" have triggered bilingual and multilingual communication to become a significant issue in our modern society. The appearance of the Internet has blurred frontiers and contributed to the generation of a networked society that created new communicative situations, culture models, new varieties of language and discourse .

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