

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM IN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: As English is considered the lingua franca of the twenty-first century, everyone needs to have a good command of English today and the importance of teaching English for professional uses and particularly in the field of tourism is undeniable. English proficiency is required in all professional areas but it becomes essential in the tourist industry because of its specific characteristics.. English Language has played an important role in the development of tourism and in this field, English is used widely for travel as well as in client contact and is of outmost interest at the tertiary level. But its interest should not be restricted to tourism students: English for tourism is one of the most attractive areas of English for Specific Purposes(ESP) because, after all, all of us are tourists on various occasions nowadays.

Key words: professional, tourism, English, area, purpose

1.Introduction and the Context of the Study

English is the fourth most widely spoken native language in the world, and in terms of sheer number of speakers, it is the most spoken official language. It is the primary language used in international affairs having official status even in nations where it is not the primary spoken language. English is indisputably the primary language of global trade and commerce and tourism since in many countries, most tourism authorities and other officials in contact with the public speak English to interact and engage with tourists and immigrants.

2.Teaching English for Specific Purposes

The advancement of business and communication technology in the course of past twenty years has revolutionized the field of English language teaching and has radically swerved the attention of course designers from teaching English for Academic purposes to teaching for more specialized purposes, English for Specific Purposes(ESP)

The teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) falls within the framework of what is generally called English for Specific Purposes (ESP), taking place in essence, and as its name suggests, in an educational environment. The reasons for its increasing relevance is due to the fact that English has changed from simply being another foreign language into having become a universal form of communication in all walks of life. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998:95) state that the teaching process of any kind of language for occupational purposes should take as a starting point the analysis of the four traditional skills within an appropriate context, that being, as far as possible, the conditions given in the workplace.

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is more general compared to ESP because it does not focus on the specific job disciplines but it is more based on general basic skills required by students in order to be prepared for the workforce. Examples of basic skills in EOP are the same as in ESP: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

“ 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). Pauline C.Robinson(1989) describes ESP as a type of ELT(English Language Teaching) and defines it as “goal-oriented language learning” which means that students have to attain a specific goal in the process of learning. According to the same author, “Students study ESP not because they are interested in the English language as such but because they have to perform a task in English. Their command of the English language must be such that they can reach a satisfactory level in their specialist subject studies”(p.396)

The term "specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose for learning English. Students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This means that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies. The ESP approach enhances the relevance of what

the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts.

ESP assesses needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content for the teaching of relevant skills. As a matter of fact, ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation.

Hutchinson and Waters too draw the attention to a “learning –centered approach” “in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning. An ESP program is therefore built on an assessment of purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required .

The aim of ESP courses is to equip the learners with a certain English proficiency level for a situation where the language is going to be used, i.e., target needs (Sujana, 2005) . A number of ESP researchers have argued that as language in different context varies, methods and contents of second language teaching should vary to meet the needs of learners in specific situations (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). According to the same authors, three terms can be used to explain “needs”: ”necessities”, “wants” and “lacks”. They define “necessities” as the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner should know in order to work effectively and efficiently in the target situation.

ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism and business management.

3. English for Tourism

Among the many vocational areas that make the world of English for specific purposes, that of English for tourism is one of the most attractive because all of us are tourists on countless occasions, bringing our own real experiences to the classrooms. Such a program, might, for example, emphasize the development of reading skills in students who are preparing for graduate work in business administration; or it might promote the development of spoken skills in students who are studying English in order to become tourist guides.

The focal point of teaching English for tourism is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world ; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners.

In the field of English for tourism students most of the studies have focused on the analysis of the required skills and needs in work place, adequacy and appropriateness of instructional materials and strategies. Al-Khatib (2007) examined the communicative needs of tourism and banking personnel by shedding lights on their perceptions of needs, wants, lacks, and attitudes toward English in order to include what is needed and exclude what deemed less important to them. It has been observed that the type of work plays a significant role in evaluating and using of English. The most common reasons for communicating as a travel agency worker were found to be offering destination guides, writing and sending email and faxes, making on-line ticketing, browsing the internet, making on-line hotel booking, etc. Travel agency users were found to be heavier users of English than their banking counterparts. The results of the study indicated that the most important skill for tourism personnel is writing. When instructing an EOP course an issue to take into consideration is that using adequate language learning and professional strategies are required in tourism field). In designing a course for students of culture and tourism, Barancic (1998) used an integrated approach to get the students involved in the syllabus he wanted to teach. The approach he invented consisted of 8 components: knowing the class and their knowledge, determining the goals to achieve, the way we measure the success, making decisions with students involved, creating syllabus, deciding on the real teaching techniques and method and getting feedback during the course. The application of the approach indicated that the teachers are faced with needs which are of a less academic and more realistic nature.

4. Conclusions

Students of tourism should be aware of the enormous importance of English in their education because it is an essential tool in any field of their future activity: management, tourist information, promotion of tourist destinations, intermediary companies, hospitality and transportation, etc .Consequently, students of tourism should be highly motivated to learn English and although more often they will probably focus on oral rather than written skills, in their career they must be able to elaborate written documents such as letters or budgets, they should keep telephone conversations, make presentations to audiences, attend fairs and conferences and understand all types of written information on tourist destinations.

For example, students of tourism can be taught practical English conversation used in hotel and catering industry, various issues concerning tourism industry , tips on job interviews and writing resumes , reading and understanding articles concerning such issues of tourism. This is due to the students’ desire to improve speaking English and their need to learn English for future jobs rather than using it in everyday life.

Good material should be based on various interesting texts and activities providing a range of skills, one piece of material serving for developing more than one skill, e.g. reading, listening, speaking, writing. Texts as learning materials can be used for learning and practicing a wide range of skills. In ESP course, they can be sources for new vocabulary, communicative or reading skills. They can trigger various activities: warming –up activities(pre-teaching and activation of new vocabulary or grammar structures, discussing questions concerning the topic);receptive activities-work with the text itself, reading, listening(various reading strategies e.g. aloud, quiet, skimming, scanning, with or without translation, informative); productive activities-practising of acquired knowledge, follow-up activities-next improving, developing, using of acquired knowledge.

In conclusion, carefully identified needs and appropriate teaching materials for tourism students will produce not only satisfied customers but also plenty of professional fulfillment in their future career.

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