UNIVERSITY OF TLEMCEN
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (1st Semester)

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Dr Chams Eddine LAMRI
Dr Faiza BOUABDALLAH-HEDDAM
Dr Abdelkader BENSAFA

This Handout is a synthesis of papers and university handouts that were adapted to our students' needs. These sources are mentioned in the list of references

THE ORIGINS OF ESP

Teaching language for specific purposes (LSP) can be traced as far back as the Greek and Roman empires (Dudley-Evans and ST Johns, 1998:1). In the same vein, Strevens (1977) states that the history of LSP goes back to "at least half a century". Regarding English for Specific Purposes (ESP), it emerged at the end of Second World War and it "was not a planned and coherent movement, but rather a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends" (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 6). ESP have functioned and operated in diverse ways around the world, "but we can identify three main reasons common to the emergence of all ESP."(Ibid, 1987: 6): the demands of a brave new world, a revolution in linguistics and a new focus on the learner.

The demands of a brave new world

After 1945, the New World knew an age of massive and unprecedented growth in all the activities especially the economic, technical and scientific ones, inexorably it engenders a demand for an international language to communicate, and this responsibility was accredited to English for various reasons. Consequently"…, it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language…"(Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 6) aiming at fulfilling their daily needs which consisted in the comprehension of the simplest brochure or manuals to most complicated genres of discourses as scientific texts .

A revolution in linguistics

Some linguists, being aware of the world changes, began to focus their studies on the ways in which language is used in real situations. Traditional approach in language study centred the attention on the grammatical rules governing the language usage. However, it was found that discourses vary according to contexts. Then, it was necessary to reorganise the teaching and learning methodologies according to the

language specificities of each situation. The English needed by engineers, doctors, linguists or officers "could be identified by analyzing the linguistic characteristics of their specialist area of work or study. 'Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need' became the guiding principle of ESP". Hutchison and Waters (1987: 8).

Focus on the learner

In the same period learner's motivation towards acquiring a foreign language was the subject study of the educational psychologists, who noticed the use of different learning strategies by learners; they have different attitudes, needs and interests. The idea was based on the statement of tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English you need. It was a natural expansion of this philosophy to plan special courses for each range of specific learners. Strevens (1977:152) notes: "...the existence of a major 'tide' in the educational thought, in all counties and affecting all subjects. The movement referred to is the global trend towards 'learner-centered education". Like the world, language study and concepts of education fundamentally changed, the English language teaching changed with it, and knew the birth of teaching English for Specific Purposes which is considered as the direct result of the world evolution.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESP

"ESP is not a monolithic universal phenomenon" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:9); it has developed at different speeds in different countries.The approaches that we shall describe can be found operating somewhere in the world at the present time.

1. The concept of special language: register analysis

This concept departed from the principle that English of a specific science differs from each other in terms of its grammatical and lexical features of the registers. Register analyses in ESP was tailored for the pedagogic purpose, i.e. making the ESP course more relevant to learners' needs, not intended for the purpose to discuss the nature of registers of English per se. The main purpose of an ESP course was to produce a syllabus which gave a high priority to the language forms students would meet in their field and in turn would give low priority to forms they would not meet.

Register analysis revealed that there was very little that was distinctive in the sentence grammar of scientific English beyond a tendency to favor particular forms such as the present simple tense, the passive voice and nominal compound.

2. Beyond the sentence: rhetorical or discourse analysis

If in the first phase, ESP had focussed on language at the sentence level, in this phase, the development shifted into the level above the sentence :understanding how sentence were combined in discourse to produce meaning. So, ESP became closely involved with the emerging field of discourse or rhetorical analysis. The basic hypothesis of this stage is expressed by Allen and Widdowson (1974) :

« The difficulties which the students encounter arise not so much from a defective knowledge of the system of English, but from an unfamiliarity with English use, and that consequently their needs cannot be met by a course which simply provides further practice in the composition of sentences, but only by one which develops a knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of different communicative acts ».

Rhetorical patterns of text organisation differed significantly between specialist area of use. The structure placed according to the area of work or study. The typical teaching materials based on the discourse approach taught students to recognise textual patterns and discourse markers mainly by means of text diagramming exercises.

3. Target situation analysis

The aim of this phase is to take the existing knowledge and set it on a more scientific basis, by establishing procedures for relating language analysis more closely to learners' reasons for learning. There is a purpose of ESP course that support this phase, the purpose is to enable learners to function in situations which the learners will use the language they are learning, then the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out the right analysis of the linguistic parts of that situation. It will form the syllabus of the ESP course. This process known as "needs analysis". What had been done previously in piecemeal way become something's systematised and learner needs was apparently placed at the centre of the course design process.

4. Skill and strategies

In this phase, it's consider not only the language itself but also the thinking processes that underlie language use. This phase was set up to cope with study situations where the medium of instructions is the mother tongue but students need to

read a number of specialist texts which are available only in English. As a result, it concentrated their efforts on reading strategies.

In this phase , we don't need to focus closely on the surface forms of the language. The focus should be placed on the underlying interpretive strategies, which enable the learner to cope with the surface forms of the language, for example guessing the meaning of words from context, so on. This approach generally emphasise on reading or listening strategies. The characteristic exercises get the learners to reflect on and analyse how meaning is produced in and retrieved from written or spoken language.

5. A learning centered approach

Previously, in the origins of ESP, we knew that there were three forces that had role in ESP and became its characteristics , they were needs, new ideas about language and new ideas about learning. We use all the approaches so far based on the descriptions of language use and the concern in each case is with describing what people do with language, but the concern is not actually on the language use only, our concern should with language learning too because a truly valid approach to ESP must be based on an understanding of the processes of language learning. With this statement, it brings us to this fifth stage of ESP development. The importance and the implications of the distinction that we have made between language use and language learning will hopefully become clear for us to understand each of the stages of ESP development.

ESP DEFINITIONS

Defining ESP has proven to be so problematic to researchers and "producing a simple definition of ESP is not an easy task" (Strevens, 1987:109). Through time, scholars provided different definitions of ESP.

According to Mackay and Mountford (1978: 2) "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose." That is to say, that English should be taught to achieve specific language skills using real situations, in a manner that allows them to use English in their future profession, or to comprehend English discourse related to their area of speciality. In the same vein Robinson (1991: 2) states that generally the students study English "not because they are interested in the English language or English culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes". Anthony (1997: 9-10) argued that "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". This denotes that, the role of ESP is to help language learners to build up the needed abilities in order to use them in a specific field of inquiry, occupation, or workplace.

In 2001 Richards states that ESP teaching aims are: preparing non-native speaking students for study in the English-medium academic context; preparing those already fluent or who have mastered general English, but now need English for specific usage in employment, such as engineers, scientists, or nurses; responding to the needs of the materials of English for Business Purposes; and teaching immigrants the English needed to deal with their job situations. Hence in ESP, "language is learnt not for its own sake   or for the sake of gaining a general education, but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in academic, professional or workplace environments" Basturkmen (2006: 18).

All the above definitions (from 1978 to 2006) can be considered as common core, because they described ESP as teaching specific content and skills of English to

specific group of learners aiming at communicating effectively in academic or vocational situations.

ESP is a recognizable activity of English Language Teaching (ELT) with some specific characteristics. Dudley-Evans and St. Johns' tried (1998) to apply a series of characteristics, some absolute and some variable, to outline the major features of ESP.

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 centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genre appropriate to these activities.

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, but it can be used with beginners.

(Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998:4)

It is obvious that the absolute characteristics are specific to ESP because learners' needs are of central importance when designing language activities. Concerning the variable features, ESP courses can be designed for a specific group using definite teaching methodology, nevertheless, all learners' categories and disciplines can be concerned with ESP. For that reason ESP should be seen simply as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans and St. John illustrate as an 'attitude

of mind'. Similarly, Hutchinson and waters' (1987:19) stated that, "ESP should properly be seen not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning".

TYPES OF ESP

David Carter (1983) identifies three types of ESP:

- English as a restricted language
- English for Academic and Occupational Purposes
- English with specific topics.

The language used by air traffic controllers or by waiters are examples of English as a restricted language. Mackay and Mountford (1978) clearly illustrate the difference between restricted language and language with this statement:

> ... the language of international air-traffic control could be regarded as 'special', in the sense that the repertoire required by the controller is strictly limited and can be accurately determined situationally, as might be the linguistic needs of a dining-room waiter or air-hostess. However, such restricted repertoires are not languages, just as a tourist phrase book is not grammar. Knowing a restricted 'language' would not allow the speaker to communicate effectively in novel situation, or in contexts outside the vocational environment (pp. 4-5).
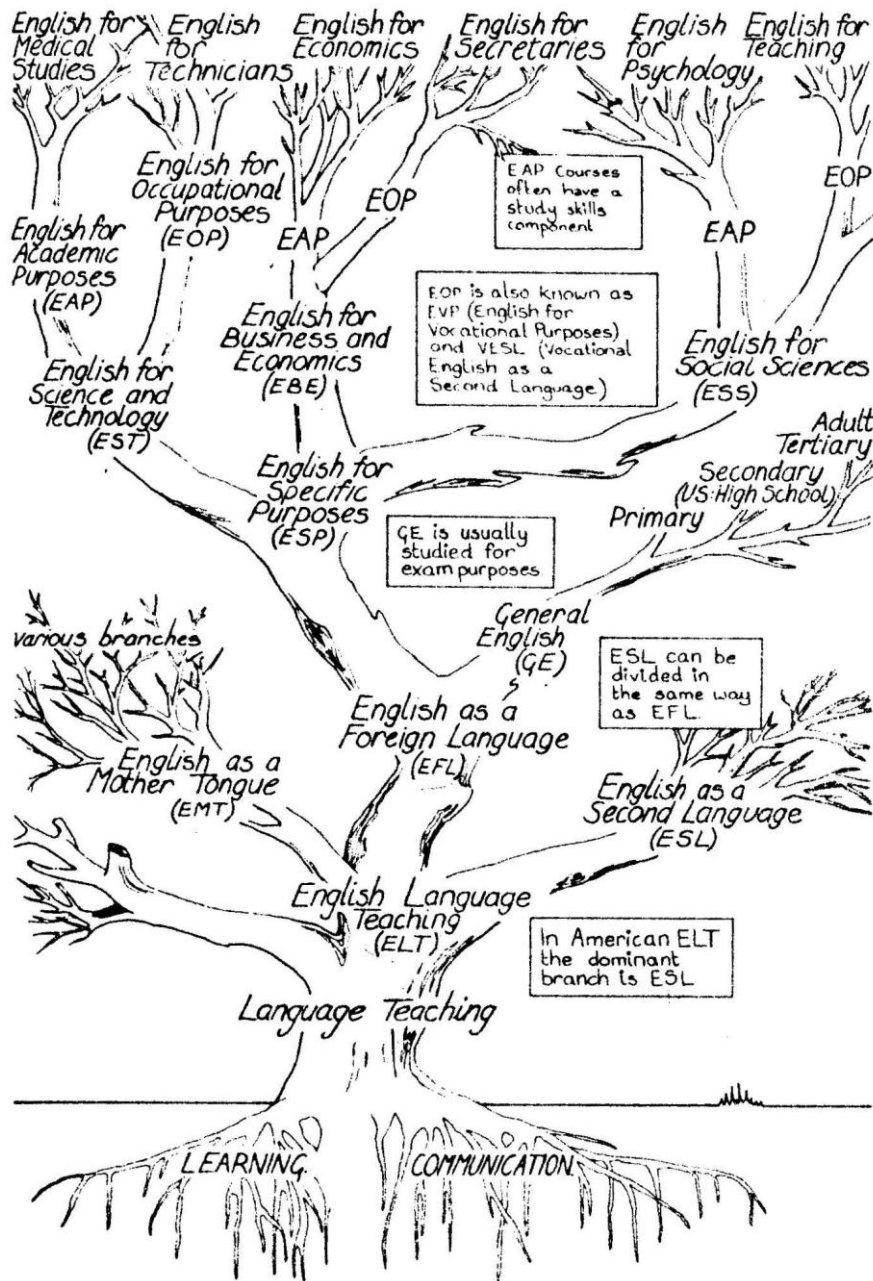
The second type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. In the 'Tree of ELT' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), ESP is broken down into three branches: a) English for Science and Technology (EST), b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and c) English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). An example of EOP for the EST branch is 'English for Technicians' whereas an example of EAP for the EST branch is 'English for Medical Studies'.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) do note that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP: "· people can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely

that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job" (p. 16). Perhaps this explains Carter's rationale for categorizing EAP and EOP under the same type of ESP. It appears that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are one in the same: employment. However, despite the end purpose being identical, the means taken to achieve the end is very different indeed.

The third and final type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English with specific topics. Carter notes that it is only here where emphasis shifts from purpose to topic. This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions. However, I argue that this is not a separate type of ESP. Rather it is an integral component of ESP courses or programs which focus on situational language. This situational language has been determined based on the interpretation of results from needs analysis of authentic language used in target workplace settings.

English for Medical Studies

English for Technicians

English for Economics

English for Secretaries

English for Psychology

English for Teaching

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)

EOP

EAP

EOP

EAP Courses often have a study skills component

EAP

English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

EOP is also known as EVP (English for Vocational Purposes) and VESL (Vocational English as a Second Language.)

English for Business and Economics (EBE)

English for Social Sciences (ESS)

English for Science and Technology (EST)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

GE is usually studied for exam purposes

Adult

Tertiary

Secondary (US High School)

Primary

General English (GE)

ESL can be divided in the same way as EFL.

various branches

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

English as a Mother Tongue (EMT)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English Language Teaching (ELT)

In American ELT the dominant branch is ESL

Language Teaching

LEARNING

COMMUNICATION

The tree of ELT: Hutchison, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: a learner-centred approach :*p17

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ESP AND EGP

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that there is no difference between the two in theory; however, there is a great deal of difference in practice. ESP, like any other language teaching activity, stands on facts about language nature, learning, and teaching; it is, however, often contrasted with General English.

ESP teaching approach is known to be learner-centred where learners' needs and goals are of supreme value, whereas General English approach is language-centred, and focuses on learning language from a broad perception covering all the language skills and the cultural aspects of the English speaking community

"the general with which we are contrasting the specific is that of General education for life, culture and literature oriented language course in which the language itself is the subject matter and the purpose of the course" Robinson (1980: 6). However, In ESP after the identification and the analysis of specific learning needs, students learn "English en route to the acquisition of some quite different body of knowledge and set of skills".

Further distinction between General English courses and ESP is that, learners of the latter are mainly adult with a certain degree of awareness concerning their language needs (Hutchinson & Waters 1987). Whereas, General English courses are provided to pupils as compulsory module at schools, their unique purpose is to succeed in the examinations.

Basturkmen (2006) maintains that General English Language teaching tends to set out from a definite point to an indeterminate one, whereas ESP aims to speed learners and direct them through to a known destination in order to reach specific objectives. "The emphasis in ESP on going from A to B in the most time- and energy-efficient manner can lead to the view that ESP is an essentially practical endeavour" (Basturkmen, 2006: 9)

Widdowson (1983) establishes distinctive features of ESP and EGP.

The most important EGP features are:

   1. the focus is often on education;

2. as the learners' future needs are impossible to predict, the course content is more difficult to select;

3. due to the above point it is important for the content in the syllabus to have a high surrender value.

The most relevant ESP features are:

1. the focus is on training;

2. as English is intended to be used in specific vocational contexts, the selection of the appropriate content is easier;

3. it is important for the content in the syllabus to have a high surrender value, most relevant to the vocational context;

4. the aim may be to create a restricted English competence.

To conclude, what is the difference between the ESP and General English approach? Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53) answer this quite simply, "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal".

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