SPECIFICITY IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT: THE AIM OF THIS STUDY IS TO OFFER SOME IMMEDIATELY ACCESSIBLE GUIDELINES INTO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP), WHICH HAS GAINED INCREASING IMPORTANCE NOWADAYS. MASTERING SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY FOR DIFFERENT DOMAINS OF ACTIVITY (POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES, LAW, MEDICINE, ENGINEERING, ETC.), METHODS OF TRANSLATION AS WELL AS DESIGNING APPROPRIATE COURSES THAT COULD ENSURE SUCCESS IN ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND INCREASE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ARE IMPORTANT POINTS OF DEBATE. AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PURPOSES OF THE LEARNERS AND THE SET OF COMMUNICATIVE NEEDS ARISING FROM THOSE PURPOSES WILL GUIDE TEACHERS IN DESIGNING DIFFERENT COURSE MATERIALS, IN CHOOSING THE KIND OF ENGLISH TO BE TAUGHT, THE TOPICS AND THEMES THROUGH WHICH IT WILL BE TAUGHT, THE SKILLS AND ACTIVITIES THEY WILL MAKE USE OF. ALL THESE ASPECTS COULD BE PERCEIVED AS A REAL CHALLENGE FOR BOTH TEACHERS AND LEARNERS OF ESP.

KEY WORDS: ANALYSIS, FRAMEWORK, GOAL, RESEARCH, STRATEGY, TERMINOLOGY, TRANSLATION

Specific terminology

As a non-native teacher of English who is not an expert in other specializations that are taught in university environments (law, engineering or political sciences, economics, international relationships, sociology, history, public administration, medicine, etc.) one must admit that the most time-consuming part of preparation for classes is terminology mining. Thus, any teacher should always bear in mind two quite opposite views of the balance between content and language in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching.

Some consider that language input and subject content are separable to be erroneous. Others argue that English teachers are supposed to be experts in language use and they have to emphasize this language in their courses.

Proponents of the latter view recommend ESP instructors to learn from their students and exploit queries about subject content so as to provide opportunities for the students to develop their fluency; produce extended spoken discourse, and effectively share their knowledge of the subject.

In our opinion, this strategy is not as freely applicable in teaching English for Law as in teaching English for Sciences, Medicine or Psychology, for example. There are a few strong reasons for this.

First of all, by using authentic teaching materials teachers inevitably expose students mostly to the United Kingdom or the United States common political, economic or legal systems, in which they are unlikely to have much expertise. Due to this fact it is those systems, but not language, that students often ask questions about.

In order not to get in an awkward situation and to win over students' trust teachers should predict probable critical incidents and prevent them by looking up the meanings of terms and learning necessary information on any political, economic, social or legal issues in advance.

At the same time it goes without saying that students in economics or legal sciences, for instance, are not particularly interested in the economic or legal systems of the United Kingdom or the United States. The most likely scenario is that students need ESP to explain aspects of their own political, economic or legal systems, which they already know about, to international clients who may be non-native English speakers. That is why the focus of teaching ESP should be on relating country-specific authentic materials to students' own jurisdiction. Thus, activities aimed at describing their own social, political, economic or legal systems as well as comparing and contrasting them to those of the United Kingdom or the United States should be used as frequently as possible.

Translation strategies

As linguists most of all, teachers must be fully aware of rather a serious problem that such activities will most probably cause. When asking students to describe in English their own political, economic or legal system, teachers, to a certain extent, force them to use translations. Even if their general English is fluent and accurate enough to let them think freely in this language about universal, commonly-known things, it is very difficult for them to think in English about their own country's politics, economics or law.

This is quite natural, because when thinking about those things students cannot do without certain terms referring to conceptual entities, relations or activities specific to the field of a certain subject. Thus, to be able to speak in English about something relating to their national political, economic or legal systems, students, first of all, must translate the term from their mother tongue into English. This task may be quite a challenge even for a professional translator. Therefore the teacher should be ready to answer students' questions concerning terminology translation.

At this point critical incidents may occur. For example, a typical practical course in any other specialization but the English language should start with reading and listening to authentic texts, with various exercises meant to teach students key terms and give them essential information on a certain subject. In most of the cases feedback is obtained through role-play activities such as imagining a dialogue between customers/clients and company representatives.

Any good textbook provides lists of specific terms and students should be able to choose the closest equivalents from those lists. Unfortunately, students usually feel rather uncertain about their choices when it is necessary to indicate the distinction between the types of Romanian political, economic or legal entities that do not have identical counterparts neither in the United Kingdom nor in the United States. Some of the students might also have doubts

whether to translate the names of documents required for company formation and institutions with which the documents must be filed. In such situations it is obvious that the preceding language input is not sufficient for the students to prepare presentations or conversations properly. Teachers should provide as much additional research as needed.

Any teacher who is driven by the desire of being successful in delivering effective lectures meant not only to convey information, but also to motivate students to learn and improve their knowledge in English should bear in mind that students are not the only ones who have to investigate possible ways of translating specific terms but them themselves as well.

At this point one might doubt whether translation strategies are worth attention in ESP teaching. Indeed, in the National Curriculum translation is not considered to be a significant component of, say, a politician, economist or lawyer's communicative competence. However, needs analysis clearly indicates that the skill of translating mother tongue terms into English is indispensible in any practice involving communication, particularly written one, with foreign clients/customers. For instance, if a lawyer giving legal advice to a foreigner overuses Romanian terms, this might lead to a communicative failure which, further on, might make a negative impression on the client/customer.

Once teachers decide to help their students learn how to translate specific terms (be they political, economic or legal), they must clearly understand why translation of such terminology requires so much cognitive effort and can hardly be reduced to looking up the equivalents in bilingual dictionaries.

Furthermore, it is obvious that sets of facts and sets of consequences will rarely be exactly the same in two political, economic or legal systems. This is not the case with subject fields like medicine, for example, where concepts are universal and terms referring to them are completely equivalent in different languages.

Thus, evaluation of the degree of equivalence is the main factor determining the choice of the translation strategy.

According to specialists translation strategies can be classified into two main types. One is foreignising and the other one is domesticating. Foreignising seeks to evoke a sense of the foreign while domesticating is aimed at facilitating comprehension through assimilation to the Target Language culture (Venuti 1998).

Although in legal translation domesticating is considered to be a preferred strategy, scholars are not unanimous in their opinions as to its acceptability in translation of particular specific terms. For instance, Weston (1991:23) speaks in favour of domesticating and finds it to be the ideal method of translation. Rayar (1988: 542) on the other hand claims it would refer the recipient to the wrong system, and that might well lead to confusion of the reader who, being accustomed to a different system, will automatically approach the text from his own frame of reference.

When translating specific terms from English into a language such as Romanian, this action might cause some problems. For example, Romanian lawyers might face dangerous situations when counselling an English-speaking client on Romanian legislation.

To convey the meanings of Romanian concepts in English in the most effective way it is necessary to give the client/customer access to the unfamiliar through the familiar. Thus, when looking for a Target Language-oriented equivalent, one might have to take into account what the target system is. Is it the United States, Canada, Australia or the United Kingdom? Or is the

translation intended for an audience for which English is not a native language but is a lingua franca?

Sometimes it may be important to use the established English equivalent. Adoption of such a term as an established equivalent of a Romanian term is a matter of convention in the speech community, therefore in certain cases to use an established equivalent is a must for a politician, an economist or a lawyer as it may be a mark of competence and professionalism.

Care should be taken not to make students believe that their teachers ought to offer them all possible English variants of equivalents. What is really needed is to make students aware of the existing translation strategies and teach them how to choose the most suitable one in a particular situation.

Despite the many advantages of ESP, the task of developing a course with a specific purpose can be daunting, especially if the instructor has little or no prior knowledge of that subject matter. A framework for designing an effective ESP course should be based on the principle that the word 'specific' within ESP depends on properly identifying the learners' needs and building a syllabus that focuses on achieving a specific purpose.

Need Analysis

By need analysis the learning theory refers to a complex process of going beyond what learners will have to do with language in a particular situation. This process can be further broken down into two different stages of identifying *target needs* and *learner needs*. Target needs represent what a learner needs to do in a target situation, whereas learner needs can be described as what a learner must do so that he can learn. Target needs can be further analyzed in terms of *necessities*, *lacks*, and *wants*.
Necessities are the types of needs shaped by what a learner needs to know to be able to function successfully in a target situation. They can be identified by observing what kinds of situations they will need to function in and then analyzing the type of language used in these situations.

Lacks can be ascertained by finding out what the learner already knows so that the course designer can determine which necessities to focus on.

Wants refer to what learners desire to learn or achieve from an ESP course. This is based on how learners perceive what their own needs are and what kind of knowledge or skills they may lack.

Hutchinson and Waters use the analogy of a journey to describe ESP course design. The starting point, that is the lacks, and the initial destination, namely the necessities, can be determined by the process of target need analysis by the instructor. The final destination can be negotiated by incorporating the wants of the learners.

The challenge any instructor faces is how to get from the starting point to the final destination. This involves the process of identifying how and what approach to take. This decision must be made based on the learning situation, which includes needs, potential, and constraints of the route itself.

The process of incorporating factors involved with learning within all facets of course design is called *the learning-centred approach*. Although the context of each individual ESP practitioner can potentially vary significantly, the learning-centred approach to course design can function as an effective place to start this process.

Asking and answering questions to gather information of about who, where, when, what, how and why and incorporating the three factors of language descriptions, learning theory and the results of a need analysis can help guide decisions about the development of an ESP course. With a starting point, perceived destination and a clear image of how to move between the two points, the ESP trainer can effectively select or develop the appropriate materials for the course.

Finding information about learners' needs and previous experience can be done through various questionnaires, surveys, group discussions, individual talks, etc., where learners may be asked to list areas in which everyone foresees using ESP. However, such data should not be overused. Finding out this information does not mean that instructors should teach only what their learners want. In developing a new course, the need analysis will help instructors bring together the required and desired in formulating goals and objectives, conceptualizing the content of the course, selecting teaching materials, and course assessment.

Course Aims and Content

Formulating goals and objectives for a particular course allows the teacher to create a clear picture of what the course is going to be about. Clear understanding of goals and objectives will help instructors to make sure what material to teach, and when and how this material should be taught. Another important aspect of this stage in designing an ESP course is to state *realistic* and *achievable* goals and objectives.

When taking into account information about the learners, goals, and objectives, instructors need to determine which aspects of ESP learning will be included, emphasized, integrated, and used as a core of the course to address learners' needs and expectations. There may be different ways of conceptualizing the course content. Instructors can focus on developing basic skills, communicative competence, intercultural competence, vocabulary awareness, etc.

Selecting and Developing ESP Materials

Teaching materials are 'tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suite the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course' (Graves K., 1996: 27).

It is a well-known fact that many teachers are dependent on the available materials and thus are required to use the same textbook over and over again. Potentially there is nothing bad in using the same teaching materials, if everything is conceptualized through a learner-centred approach. The same article or audio story can be used for developing reading or listening comprehension skills, cultural awareness, expanding vocabulary, etc.

Experience showed that all teaching materials, be they prescribed or self-generated have advantages and disadvantages. For instance, an advantage of using self-generated materials is that language in the text can always be tailored so that it is comprehensible, interesting and also up to date.

A major disadvantage of utilizing self-developed materials for the ESP course is that it leads to a dearth in activities focusing or utilizing listening. Commercially produced textbooks often come with a video or audio component that can help provide practice for listening or serve to be a model for a dialogue in a particular situation.

In self-generated materials it would be possible for the instructor to compensate for the lack of an audio CD or tape by modelling a dialogue with another student, during class.

However, in doings so it becomes difficult to present students with a more natural and fluid form of interaction, especially if the dialogue is presented for the first time. The modelling of the dialogue becomes more of a process of reading from a script and this makes it difficult for the teacher to simultaneously monitor students in whether they understand or need repetition. Moreover, the process of modelling a dialogue 'live' during class poses the challenge of replaying or repeating a portion of the dialogue for further practice or emphasis.

In order to overcome this lack of authentic materials for listening, the teacher could pre-record some of the dialogues with the help of someone else. This would be much a preferable approach than simply modelling dialogues 'live' during each class. If possible, the instructor should make a conscious effort to include wider variety of English speakers due to the need of students majoring in the field to be familiar with international multi-national forms of English.

Course Planning and Assessment

After formulating the major objectives of the ESP course and choosing the right teaching material, teachers should start planning the course. There may be different ways of organizing activities. The most common approach is the one traditionally used by the Communicative Language Teaching: pre-activity, activity, follow up. Teachers start with what students already know or with a fairly simple task, and then pass to more complex activities.

Another approach that has recently become quite popular is that of *'recycling' materials*: students learn information about the L2 country and then recycle it in the activity about the L1 country.

Course evaluation is the last, but not the least, important stage. Teachers should evaluate their courses to improve and promote their effectiveness. Evaluation can be done in two different ways: *implicitly* and *explicitly*.

Implicit evaluation takes place during the course, when learners, by their grades, participation, and motivation, give clues to the teacher on how their learning is going on.

Explicit evaluation may take place at the end of the course or after the learners have experienced it. Using questionnaires, surveys, talks, etc., teachers ask the students to express their attitude towards the subject matter, instructional methods, activities, teacher's role and so on. Evaluation of the course is a brave step for teachers, as they should be open-minded in hearing and implementing learners' comments.

Course Development

Developing a new course is not just planning a course. In teaching, instructors are constant learners. With professional experience, their views, teaching concepts, and methodological knowledge are continuously changing. From year to year, they have different learners with different needs and background. That will inevitably make it necessary and important to modify every course and adjust it to a particular group of learners.

Furthermore, quite often in the classroom things take place in an unexpected or unplanned way. Flexible teachers are open to making necessary changes while teaching. They can see what can or should be modified, added, or changed to make the course reflect learners' interests and needs. Therefore, course development can be seen as an on-going process.

Conclusion

In teaching ESP efficient development of basic communicative skills is harnessed to the skill of terminology translation, which accounts for considerable cognitive effort and significant amounts of time spent by the teachers, especially when they are neither native speakers nor experts in different fields of activity, on preparation for activities aimed at describing students' own political, economic or legal systems as well as comparing and contrasting them to those of the United Kingdom or the United States.

A need analysis can give instructors two kinds of information. On one hand, there is the learners' current level in their L2-ESP, field knowledge in L1 and/or L2, motivation, methods of learning they have experienced, etc. On the other hand, there is valuable information on what learners want to achieve.

Teaching and learning ESP materials should always engage the learners in a process of developing skills for evaluating their own speaking or writing in order to allow them to become independent learners in their workplace.

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