



Classification of English for Specific Purposes and Overview of the Language Skills in ESP Context

Vesna Prodanovska-Poposka¹

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Abstract

English is the official language in more than 50 countries around the globe, and is the most common second language worldwide. It is believed that English appears as the most learned and taught language in over 100 countries in the world and that almost half of the population in the world use English, either natively or as a second or foreign language. Since the knowledge of General English is not satisfactory to help professionals function well at work or at vocational educational settings, therefore the necessity for English for Specific Purposes or English as a Professional Language arose. English for Specific Purposes or ESP is a branch of applied linguistics that deals with teaching and learning English as a Second or Foreign Language, with particular emphasis on students' academic, professional, social and cultural needs. This paper presents the earliest classification of ESP and an overview of the basic language skills such as writing, speaking, listening and reading in ESP context. In regard to the productive and receptive language competences speaking, writing, reading and listening in terms of ESP, speaking as a skill in ESP context indicates that being “orally skillful” is not considered to be crucial, due to the fact that it is believed that writing is to be prioritized because written genres were considered essential to professional success in the past. Moreover, authentic texts are important for reading in ESP so the emphasis is on professional information that is in the text, and not within language structures. The vocabulary is an inevitable segment when it comes to reading, as reading is considered as an independent skill (acquiring professional vocabulary independently) and integrated skill. Listening in ESP and Listening in terms of General English are not equivalent,

¹ Faculty of Biotechnical Sciences, St. Kliment Ohridski University; Address: Partizanska bb, 7000 Bitola, Republic of North Macedonia; Email: vesna.prodanovska@uklo.edu.mk

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therefore ESP listening aims to develop active listeners who construct interpretations on the basis of input and ask for the needed information.

Keywords: *English for specific purposes, language skills, ESP classification, English for occupational purposes.*

Introduction

The Beginnings of ESP

English is the official language in more than 50 countries around the globe, and is the most common second language worldwide. It is believed that English appears as the most learned and taught language in over 100 countries in the world and that almost half of the population in the world use English, either natively or as a second or foreign language. Since the knowledge of General English is not satisfactory to help professionals function well at work or at vocational educational settings, therefore the necessity for English for Specific Purposes or English as a Professional Languages arose. English for Specific Purposes or ESP is a branch of applied linguistics that deals with teaching and learning English as a Second or Foreign Language, with particular emphasis on students' academic, professional, social and cultural needs. The main goal of the ESP is to facilitate the communication and the learning process to those who tend to study in this language, or to improve communication in the workplace where its practical application is reflected. Moreover, one of the aims of ESP is the social and psychological integration of students into the target professional or academic community in which communication is fostered mainly in English.

There are several types of ESP classifications made by many authors. This article presents only four of them, focusing on the period between 1983 to 1998 such as David Carter's classification in 1983, The ELT Tree- by Hutchins & Waters in 1987 and the ESP classification by Dudley-Evans & St John, in 1998. English became a generally accepted common language of technology and trade in the 1960s, so in this period a new generation of learners was created, aware about the exact reason, i.e. the purpose of language learning. The rapid development and unprecedented expansion of science, technology and economics created the urge towards the need for effective language courses with clearly defined goals. From the very beginning until today, the ESP has gone through several stages of development.

In 1983, David Carter proposed a classification that included types such as: English as a restricted language, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes and English with specific topics. The first type refers to the language used during particular events such as in hospitality sector with strictly limited repertoires in terms of grammar and vocabulary. The second type according to Carter- English for Academic and Occupation Purposes does not bear specific definition as it is believed that their usage is interchanged. As for the third type proposed by Carter - English with a specific topic - the emphasis shifts to the topic and this makes this type extremely relevant to the expected needs of students in the future. There are experts who believe that this is not a stand-alone type of ESP, but rather an important element of ESP courses and programs with a focus on situational language. It is this situational language that is determined on the basis of studies of learners' needs in relation to the authentic language used in the respective professional environment. ESP courses also have their own specifics. Among their main characteristics Carter (1983) points out the authentic materials, the specific purpose and the self-direction. The role of authentic materials is of utmost importance for the successful conduct of ESP and the achievement of the desired results in terms of the specific communicative competence of the learner. The specific purpose may require the simulation of a conference, involving the preparation of reports, taking notes, reading and writing. Self-direction is seen as that "...the point of including self-direction... is that ESP is concerned with turning learners into users" (Carter, 1983: p. 134). In order to build it the learner needs to have some freedom to decide where, what and how to study. Some authors believe that the main characteristics of the ESP are the time constraints and the homogeneity of the study groups. Homogeneity here does not mean the level of language proficiency, but belonging to the same profession, because the work is specific in terms of skills. In all cases, the specialized courses are to be flexible and according to the needs of the learner or the group of learners.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (Hutchinson& Waters, 1987 p. 6-7), there are three reasons for the development of English for Specific Purposes:

- the Demands of the Brave New World (the development of technology and commerce)
- the revolution in linguistics (setting aside the usual approach i.e. grammar and switching to the usage of language in real communication and situations) and
- the focus on the learner (approaching learners' attitudes to learning, their needs and interests).

Therefore, Hutchinson and Waters emphasized two important historical periods that had and still have a decisive impact on the development of ESP.

The first period was marked after the end of the Second World War and is characterized by unprecedented scientific and technological progress, which is accompanied by a remarkable economic boom worldwide. During this period, the economic power of the United States expanded which as a result positions the English language to become the lingua franca - an international language for communication. The second period is the time of the oil crisis from the early 1970s, which led to a reorientation of Western capital and scientific potential to oil-rich countries. The language of this potential is again English. Therefore, these circumstances challenge teachers to meet the emerging needs of learning English, "...English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers. English had become accountable to the scrutiny of the wider world and the traditional leisurely and purpose-free stroll through the landscape of the English language seemed no longer appropriate in the harsher realities of the market place (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.7)".

According to the ELT –Tree by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ELT is divided into:

- 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'.

One branch of the ESP is English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). As presented by Hutchinson & Waters on page 17 it is clearly demonstrated that they categorize the terms English for Occupational Purposes, English for Vocational Purposes and Vocational English as a Second Language as synonymous.

Hutchinson and Waters, just as David Carter believe that there is no clear boundary between English for academic and English for occupational purposes, arguing that there are people

who study and work at the same time or apply what they learn in an academic setting as soon as they start work. However, one area in particular has influenced the development of ESP in general, called English for Science and Technology which Swales uses to illustrate the development of “the occupational language” in general..” With one or two exceptions...English for Science and Technology has always set and continues to set the trend in theoretical discussion, in ways of analyzing language, and in the variety of actual teaching material.” (Swales 1985, p.x).

Dudley-Evans and St. Johns (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) categorize ESP into EAP and EOP. The first category or EAP is further divided into English for Science and Technology, English for Medical Purposes, English for Legal Purposes and English for Management, Finance and Economics. However, the second category or EOP is further divided into English for Professional Purposes (divided into English for Medical Purposes and English for Business Purposes) and English for Vocational Purposes (divided into Pre-Vocational Purposes and Vocational English)

Dudley-Evans and St John explain that the EOP "includes professional purposes in administration, medicine, law and business and professional purposes for non-professionals in work or pre-employment situations" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 7). This division is supported by examples of English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP). In the first case i.e. the EAP the learner is an experienced professional who shares experience in a language-learning environment, while in the second case students are either just starting out or preparing for a particular profession. Particularly, according to Kim (Kim, 2008, p. 2) EOP refers to the learning and training of adults whose goal is to improve their business potential through better communication in English, i.e. through the improvement of language skills needed for the job they do or intend to do.

ESP Teaching methodology

In terms of ESP teaching methodology many authors mostly describe or recommend techniques, but do not instruct teachers much on how to use them or what is the mutual function of these techniques, and what is the goal of the learners’ specific communicative competence. Likewise, Hutchinson & Waters (1987, p. 18) pointed out that "There is, in other words, no such thing as an ESP methodology, merely methodologies that have been applied in ESP classrooms,

but could just as well have been used in the learning of any kind of English". **General competencies** that are expected to be acquired within an ESP courses are: - communication competence: use of language resources for understanding, organizing, structuring and adapting messages (discourse competence); - information literacy (information, media, technology, library): critical use of information and communication technologies for finding, evaluating and storing information, and for the production, presentation and exchange of information within the course and beyond; - way of learning: developing co-responsibility for one's own learning, self-assessment and defining one's own learning objectives and the use of different learning methods and techniques; - social competence: developing awareness of different cultures and understanding intercultural communication and the development of appropriate communication strategies; constructive communication: developing listening and empathy skills; -creativity, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit: developing critical thinking, taking the initiative, teamwork and group work. Additionally, **Specific competencies** expected to be acquired within ESP course are: developing the ability to use language skills (lexical, grammatical -morphology, syntax, semantic, phonological and spelling) to understand messages and different texts and produce new messages and texts; - developing awareness of the functioning of the language system while noticing the similarities and differences between mother tongue and foreign language (vocabulary, typical grammatical structures, spelling, etc.);

- reading, understanding and analyzing the text; - writing various types of texts; - speaking and listening to convey information and understanding in different situations and for different purposes and critical thinking.

Language competences/ skills in ESP

Language skills have been set as productive and receptive. Productive are the speaking and the writing and the receptive are the listening and the reading. However, the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages** lists five skills such as in addition to reading, listening and writing, speaking is divided into speech interaction and speech production, with speech interaction involving conversation between at least two people and production of a person's speech on a topic i.e. monologue. Nevertheless, many researchers on the topic argue the limitation to the four skills, such as Paltridge & Starfield (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, p. 31-33) on the ESP topic

suggests that vocabulary is the fifth skill and Celce-Murcia adds up vocabulary and grammar along with the established four skills (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Speaking

Speaking is a key skill that can be used to assess language proficiency. Using a language in communication has proven to be the most difficult skill because it is a set of several language skills. Proper or successful communication is one of the main goals of foreign language teaching today however, the skill of speaking is still neglected due to many reasons. When acquiring the speaking skill, the final goal goes beyond attaining a level of mother tongue i.e. as native speaker, but rather a reversible process i.e. to be understood among those who use it and understand them. In these modern times, high-tech software and apps are even “overused” among learners from every age nowadays, thus whether through technology or in real professional situations, speech interaction most often takes place between speakers whose English is not their mother tongue, and most often serves as a lingua franca. Teaching speaking is the very first skill of the Foreign Language Acquisition and according to Brown (1994) teaching speaking refers to teaching accuracy and fluency. Teaching accuracy deals with teaching language usage or language oriented teaching. Teaching fluency deals with teaching language use or message oriented teaching. On the other hand, when it comes to speaking as a skill in ESP context, being “orally skillful” is not considered to be crucial, due to the fact that it is believed that writing is to be prioritized because written genres were considered essential to professional success in the past. Similarly, research in ESP is more focused on writing than speaking because of the relative ease in collecting and compiling written data (Feak, 2013).

Reading

Number of authors pointed out that reading is the most important language skill in ESP emphasizing the fact that learners find it the easiest, although this is not always the case in practice. According to Grabe & Stoller reading as a skill is actually a set of skills such as “...phonological awareness, word recognition, a large recognition vocabulary (i.e., words that readers can comprehend but not necessarily use on their own), main idea comprehension, knowledge of discourse structure, inferencing skills, and a range of strategies that support appropriate goals for reading (Grabe&Stoller, 2009, p. 441)”.

However, a proficient reader needs to be skillful in comprehension, cognitive analysis, synthesizing and predicting. The above-said is thoroughly confirmed by the elaboration of the matter by Schleppegrell & Bowman (Schleppegrell & Bowman, 1986, p. 18) explaining that these skills require intensive and extensive reading, intensively in regard to analyzing shorter paragraphs and improving vocabulary, grammar and comprehension, and extensively in terms of reading longer paragraphs faster, in order for learners to understand and focus on the main ideas. As for the teaching English for academic purposes, reading is necessary because students seek information, acquire comprehension and acknowledge new information, as well as synthesize and re-examine information, all these attained through reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2001, p. 187). Authentic texts are important for reading in ESP so the emphasis is on professional information that is in the text, and not within language structures. Skills that are recommended and practiced in teaching reading in both- General English and ESP are skimming-reading a text quickly to get a general idea of meaning and scanning- reading in order to find specific information. The vocabulary is an inevitable segment when it comes to reading, as reading is considered as an independent skill (acquiring professional vocabulary independently) and integrated skill. Vocabulary in terms of ESP differs from the vocabulary of the General English and is quite diverse. However, solid vocabulary in terms of general proficiency in foreign language does not refer to solid vocabulary within ESP. Unlike the independent reading, reading as integrated skill is a link to or appears complementary to the other language skills. Reading is most often associated with speaking and in English for science and technology with writing.

Writing

Equivalent to the reading, throughout the last century, writing was observed as a linguistic skill, and with the development of cognitive psychology the focus was set on the learners' cognitive skills that include learning, memory, attention, language, reading, writing, reasoning, problem solving, etc. (Grabe & Stoller, 2009, p. 440). Consecutively, writing was not acknowledged as a result but rather as a process that involves" ... comprising the cognitive processes of planning, generating, organizing, using long-term memory resources, producing text, monitoring, reviewing, rereading, evaluating, and editing". (ibid). In addition to these processes, plenty of recent research focuses on reading and motivation, as important factors in the writing process. Ken Hyland (2013, p. 95-113) considers that the concept of writing in the language of the profession differs from the

concept of writing as a process. He believes that the task of a language teacher is not only to control linguistic errors or sort out style, but also to respond to "...a complex diversity of genres, contexts and practices. As for the specific needs of the ESP learner, the writing genre has a crucial role in terms of writing. Hence, Hyland (Hyland, 2013) lists the most frequent written types of works in ESP, such as:

Undergraduate essays, student dissertations and theses, research articles, scientific letters, book reviews, and peer review reports on journal submissions. Writing as a skill is an obligatory segment of every profession and it is essential to prepare future professionals for any situations in practice, so it is very important to be approached entirely with proper teaching and learning strategies for successful acquisition.

Listening

Listening has had a status of a neglected skill similarly as the other three language skills. Listening is to be considered as an important segment in daily life and in foreign language classroom as well. Besides being a basic skill inevitable to implement the language learning process, it is considered that 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening (Nunan, 1998). Rost (Rost, 2005) claims that listening is "...a complex cognitive process that allows a person to understand spoken language", pointing out that listening in mother tongue and in foreign language are very much different. Hedge (Hedge 2000) believes that listening develops automatically with the practice of grammar, vocabulary and speaking. Listening in ESP and Listening in terms of General English are not the equivalent, therefore, according to Brown (1994) ESP listening aims to develop active listeners who construct interpretations on the basis of input and ask for the needed information. This construct involves cognitive processes (bearing accent and vocabulary skills) as well as skills to facilitate interaction and comprehension. ESP listening is also dependent on knowledge about: Language in terms of Phonology, syntax and vocabulary; Context, facts and experiences such as background knowledge or schema; and Language use – as discourse (Anderson, 1995). Listening is a means to acquire a foreign language therefore a means to acquire proficiency in ESP.

Conclusion

English for Specific Purposes or ESP is a branch of applied linguistics that deals with teaching and learning English as a Second or Foreign Language, with particular emphasis on students' academic, professional, social and cultural needs in terms of content and methods. Due to the influence of the changed social and economic conditions in the world, which contributed to the need to acquire general and specific knowledge of English, thus it became the most learned language that led to the development and introduction of ESP. The scope of the English for Specific Purposes is very broad, as it covers English for Academic Purposes, English for Occupational Purposes, English for Vocational Purposes i.e. Vocational English, English for Science and Technology, English for Medical Purposes, English for Legal Purposes and English for Management, Finance and Economics. In regard to the productive and receptive language competences speaking, writing, reading and listening in terms of ESP, speaking is the very first to come to when discussing General English, yet, when it comes to speaking as a skill in ESP context, being “orally skillful” is not considered to be crucial, due to the fact that it is believed that writing is to be prioritized because written genres were considered essential to professional success in the past. As for the specific needs of the ESP learner, the writing genre as a crucial role in terms of writing covers undergraduate essays, student dissertations and theses, research articles, scientific letters, book reviews, and peer review reports on journal submissions. As for the reading, authentic texts are important for reading in ESP so the emphasis is on professional information that is in the text, and not within language structures. Skills that are recommended and practiced in teaching reading in both- General English and ESP are skimming-reading a text quickly to get a general idea of meaning and scanning- reading in order to find specific information. The vocabulary is an inevitable segment when it comes to reading, as reading is considered as an independent skill (acquiring professional vocabulary independently) and integrated skill. Listening in ESP and Listening in terms of General English are not equivalent, therefore, it is significant to point out that ESP listening aims to develop active listeners who construct interpretations on the basis of input and ask for the needed information. ESP listening is also dependent on knowledge about language, context and discourse. In conclusion, English has gained a status of Lingua Franca due to its important role in higher education, therefore English for Specific Purposes is a significant component in internationalization of the higher education and the educational process, which would lead to improved knowledge and proficiency of English in a broader sense.

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