

ESP for Administrative Sciences: State-of-the-Art and New Perspectives

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Introduction

Today, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be regarded as one of the most important areas of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). ESP has had a long time to grow and so one would expect the ESP community to have a clear understanding of the programme and perspectives of ESP. How is the field of ESP viewed and interpreted by the ESP community?

Teaching ESP involves teaching English with particular attention to some disciplines such as business, tourism, medicine, law, engineering, banking, marketing or management. ESP instructors tend to have some general Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) experience first. In fact, ESP was described as the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. However, more precise definitions describe ESP as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes.

ESP is a special kind of English Language Teaching (ELT) which is linked to the learners' context. The specific purposes refer to the learners' occupational requirements, vocational training or academic/professional study (Milliani, 1986). ESP can be considered as one of the branches of EFL/ESL which are the main branches of ELT. ESP is "learner-centred", which means

that the ESP curriculum is based on the learners' needs. ESP includes two categories. The first one is English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and the second one is English for Occupational (or vocational) Purposes (EOP). EAP and EOP both share the area of English for Science and Technology (EST).

EAP is the study of English for a particular academic discipline such as economics or medicine. EAP courses are "curriculum-oriented" aimed at the development of the skills needed for the purpose of study (Miliani, 1986). For example, to provide Administrative Sciences students with specialized lessons in their field of specialisation, update their knowledge of the subject matter, read journals in their field, write reports and take notes.

EOP courses, on the other hand, are related to English learners' needs for their "job-related" activities. For example, a secretary will need to focus more on how to write a letter and to direct his/her goal towards this activity; therefore EOP is practical and functional. EOP courses are designed for adults who must follow a job or pre-employment training.

The last branch, English for Sciences and Technology (EST), aims at developing the learners' ability to communicate effectively with their English fellows in the field of science and technology.

The aim of this paper is to present some developments in ESP in general and to lay emphasis on ESP teaching in the Administrative Sciences field . We will discuss some difficulties encountered in this area and will present some new perspectives in teaching ESP in the Administrative Sciences field at the end of this paper.

1. ESP Issues in the Literature

Carver (1983) defines ESP by contrasting it with other forms of English language teaching with no specific purposes namely Teaching English for No Obvious Reasons (TENOR). He states that all uses of English as a Foreign Language should address specific purposes. He mentions three criteria for the definition of ESP:

- a) the use of simulated purposes within classroom setting
- b) the use of real purposes external to classroom setting
- c) the use of relevant literature.

Carver (op.cit.) also mentions three features of an ESP course namely:

- a) the use of authentic materials with purposeful aims that instructors can handle in different ways to suit learners' needs. This exposure to authentic materials will help them more in the teaching process
- b) the implementation of a purpose-related orientation through simulation of conferences, and preparation of papers which can lead learners to note taking, writing, reading and summarizing
- c) self-directed learning in the sense of turning learners into users.

Dudley-Evans (1998) gives an extended definition of ESP in terms of "absolute" and "variable" characteristics. Regarding the "absolute" characteristic, ESP aims to meet specific needs of the learners, to use the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves and to lay emphasis on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

On the other hand, the ESP "variable" displays the following characteristics :

- a) it may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- b) in specific teaching situations, it may use a different methodology from that of general English;
- c) it may be designed for adult learners, either in a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation and it could also be used for learners at secondary school level
- d) it may be generally designed for intermediate or advanced students; and
- e) the courses assume some basic knowledge of the language structure.

Dudley-Evans (op.cit.) describes ESP as an attitude of mind. A similar idea can be found in Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who state that ESP is more an "approach" to teaching English which takes into account the expectations of the learners. Hence, we may consider ESP to be an approach to language teaching in general.

Hutchinson and Waters (op.cit.) mention three phenomena to explain the emerging ESP, namely the enormous expansion of scientific, technical and economic activities on an international scale, the shift of attention to linguistic ways in which language is actually used for communication in real

situations, and the new development in educational psychology, which emphasizes the central role of learners and their attitudes to learning.

So ESP has become a common expression in English Language Teaching (ELT), whether for the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) or for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This concept has grown up out of the awareness that in second language and foreign language (SL/FL) teaching, specific knowledge of the language-- both in terms of quantity of language items and types of language skills and activities, is the only reasonable objective due to the limited opportunity and time students have to learn and use the language. For this reason, teachers would need to have or be prepared to acquire some knowledge of the subject matter and some familiarity with appropriate terminology.

The objectives of ESP teaching are therefore : a) understanding the structure and vocabulary of English as it is used in the natural and social sciences, business and administration, computer technology and communications; b) using English for gathering information, taking notes, evaluating and classifying data, designing plans and diagrams, presenting projects, preparing advertising statements; and c) developing reading, writing, listening and speaking skills that can be applied to related academic and professional activities in English.

Teaching ESP in the field of Administrative Sciences is different from other fields. This difference is due to the fact that it has developed under certain conditions leading to some specific characteristics. In the next section we will briefly present the Administrative Sciences field and highlight some of its characteristics as a scientific field.

2. The Administrative Sciences Field

The Administrative Sciences Field (ASF) is characterized by the heterogeneity of the background, the practices and the research programmes of its members. The multidisciplinary nature of the ASF members contributes to the lack of unity in this field. This diversity can be observed through the variety of the research programmes, the methods and the approaches utilized by the ASF members (Aouni 1996). According to Westin *et al.* (1994), the background of the members has an influence on the choice of methods and tools used for analysis. The diversity of the members' background also explains the influence of other scientific fields, such as natural and social sciences on the ASF. Whitley (1984) points to the

influence of the scientific developments of other fields on the ASF, particularly the impact of philosophy, history and sociology. Moreover, the terminology used by the ASF members can refer to different meanings/contexts which makes teaching ESP within the ASF field a challenging task for instructors.

In order to illustrate the link between the different ASF disciplines, we will present some contributions of management sciences to other disciplines such as accounting, finance, marketing, information systems and human resources management. For example, in the accounting discipline, the management science tools are utilized to establish some procedures to assist with auditing, cost control, quality control of computing procedures, validation of auditing reports and an intensive use of sampling techniques to provide information to accountants. The management science techniques are widely utilised in finance. The statistical models and mathematical programming are applied to risk management and portfolio selection.

In marketing, mathematical programming is applied to create advertising programmes and market competitiveness strategies. Statistical tools such as questionnaire validation and hypothesis-testing are frequently applied in the disciplines of information systems and human resources management. In other words, the different disciplines of ASF are interrelated and teaching ESP in this field has to take this aspect into account.

The content of the ESP curriculum has also to consider the fact that each ASF discipline has its own specificity as well as some interaction among the various disciplines. We suggest that the terminology has to be unified and the economic interpretation has to be the same within the entire ASF. In the next section we will discuss the necessity for establishing a unified content for the ESP courses prepared for the ASF.

3. The ESP Course in Administrative Sciences

Teaching ESP in the ASF is a challenging task . ESP instructors should be creative in their teaching, flexible with their learners and aware of their different needs for successful communication. Markee (1984) states that the ESP course content should be appropriate to the learners' needs. Students' needs analysis should help instructors to build adequate ESP courses to reach the aims and objectives of ESP in the ASF and develop suitable and relevant ESP materials .

The analysis of learner needs distinguishes between “target needs” and “learning needs”. The former are what the learner needs to do in the target situation and the latter are what the learner needs to do in order to learn. “Target needs” are concerned with the learner and with what he has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For example, the learner must understand texts in Administrative Sciences, communicate with lecturers or experts in this field of specialisation, get information from articles and written documents, etc. As for the “learning needs”, teachers may ask the learners to describe their own needs themselves and the shortcomings they may have. This information can be gathered by using questionnaires and interviews, or by observing learners.

4. Difficulties in Teaching ESP in the Administrative Sciences Faculties

Robinson (1980) reported that many instructors teach ESP without any formal training in the specific subject matter. In Administrative Sciences Faculties in general, ESP teachers are not specialised in the ASF. They have an EFL background and hold a degree in General English. The ESP staff is generally made of part-time teachers who do not master the subject matter of Administrative Sciences. However, these teachers do their best to try and gather the necessary materials to suit their learners’ needs, to teach them adequate vocabulary and structures and help them to read and understand the ESP content.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) observed that the ESP instructor should not become a teacher of the specific subject matter, but rather an interested learner of the subject matter. We have also remarked that many ESP teachers are indeed ESP learners since they are not experts in the ASF but try to adapt General English teaching to ESP teaching.

Miliani (1986) suggested that ESP instructors have the freedom to choose from different teaching methods and adapt them to the teaching context; they should also take advantage of their previous experience and the different teaching techniques to enrich their ESP courses and meet their learners’ needs. However, ESP instructors at the Administrative Sciences Faculties have generally little teaching experience, and this does not really help them to achieve their mission as ESP teachers. For many of them, facing the burden of selecting what to teach with little or no previous teaching experience in General English or ESP is quite a difficult task.

Another difficulty faced by language instructors is the lack of textbooks and materials designed to teach in the specific context of Administrative Sciences. There is often absence of collaboration between the English language teachers and the subject specialist teachers. Such collaboration may be a great help to learners as it may contribute to bridge the gap between the learners' knowledge of the speciality and the teachers' ignorance of it (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). In addition, lack of pedagogical coordination and follow-up puts much responsibility on the teachers' shoulders who are totally in charge of the ESP course, from teaching to testing. As Strevens (1988) remarked, teaching ESP raises many problems related to learners, teachers, methodology, materials and assessment .

The groups of ESP learners are often quite heterogeneous. Students have different backgrounds and motivations. Their difficulties vary from areas of grammar to general vocabulary and scientific terminology. Their interest in the language itself is not very high and they are more interested in the subject matter than in the target language. Most of them have an instrumental motivation to learn English (Broughton, 1981). Besides, they tend to consider the ESP course as a less important part of their programme as they can generally succeed and get their degree in Administrative Sciences without a very good mark or good knowledge of English (Robinson, 1991).

As far as teaching is concerned, ESP teachers in the ASF are in need of adequate teaching materials. Swales (1980) stated that the choice of a good ESP textbook has always been a failure. The unavailability of appropriate textbooks may also contribute to this failure, as it is the case in many Administrative Sciences Faculties. It is also difficult for teachers to select a textbook which satisfies all learners' needs, interests and expectations. The few textbooks available do not cover all the areas of specialities, but only the most common ones like management, marketing, and finance.

Furthermore, the specialised materials, when available, do not always follow the evolution of the subject matter .The ASF as any other field is in continual development which implies the emergence of new concepts and new terminology. The textbooks presently used are neither reviewed nor updated and the Administrative Sciences content is often outdated.

Most of the ESP lessons in the Administrative Sciences Field deal with general topics and definitions since textbooks specific to the different disciplines of the ASF are not always available. In their lessons, teachers deal mainly with terminology and grammar rather than interact with the

learners. We think that there should be a collaboration between language instructors, subject specialists and textbooks designers. This partnership will not only reduce the difficulties faced by teachers and learners of ESP, but also enhance the ESP level for the learners and the institution in general.

To summarise, the use of an adequate textbook is critical to ESP instructors who constantly meet the challenge of adapting to the variation in learners' skills, abilities and interest. Also ,ESP instructors' lack of knowledge of the subject matter, their lack of experience in the teaching field, the absence of collaboration with their colleagues-subject specialists and the unavailability of recent materials, make their mission difficult to achieve.

5. New Perspectives in the Teaching of ESP in the Administrative Sciences Field

Teaching ESP to Administrative Sciences students requires an analysis of the needs of this community of learners as a priority. Besides, the concepts and the terminology being in a state of permanent change and progress, the latters should be revised and updated. Concepts such as e-commerce, e-business, e-banking, globalization of economy, supply chain management, knowledge economy and networking should be introduced in newly designed ESP curricula and coursebooks. This process needs the collaboration of both ESP curriculum developers and ESP learners.

Anderson (1988) proposed the concept of Business and Education Together (BET), a model which consists of a collaboration or partnership between business and educational institutions. This implies that ESP curriculum designers should take into account the employers' needs for trained workers: the company identifies the required skills of the workers and the university is in charge of the curriculum design that qualifies people for the required skills. Through this model, each partner has a unique contribution to make for the mutual benefits of the parties involved.

Therefore, business can play an important role in designing an ESP curriculum since it determines how it is taught and how information is presented. In this way, business and education partnership can contribute successfully to the economic development of a nation.

Teaching ESP through the Case Method approach can provide learners with the opportunity to develop a wide range of useful skills. The interaction between learners and instructor can make the learning process more interesting

and helpful to improve the vocabulary of the learners, for example. The Case Method is widely used in Business Schools in North America to teach business content. This method is mainly based on a problem solving approach. Through discussion and role-play in small groups, the students learn how to manage decision-making situations. This approach aims at improving the learner's communicative skills and English comprehension and expression. The Case Method can help learners to explore the links that exist between the different disciplines of the Administrative Sciences field. In the small group discussions, learners can use appropriate English words and expressions and administrative language in its context. By means of some decision-making situations, this approach can give learners the opportunity to practise reflection-in-action by acting as professionals (Boyd, 1991). In fact, such approach to learning can greatly facilitate the acquisition of oral and written communication skills. Thus the learners will be better prepared for their professional careers in Business and Administration (Drew, 1993).

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented some developments related to ESP, with special emphasis on the teaching of ESP in the Administrative Sciences field. We have pointed to some difficulties related to the teaching of ESP in Administrative Sciences Faculties in general, mainly the lack of a specialised curriculum and specialised textbooks for teaching ESP to students reading for different Administrative Sciences disciplines. Also, the fact that ESP learners have different backgrounds in English as well as different motivations makes this task even more challenging. We have presented some perspectives for teaching ESP within the Administrative Sciences field, and insisted on the urgency to develop a new curriculum based on the learners' needs. The new curriculum can be taught through the Case Method with small groups of students. Such approach to teaching ESP can contribute significantly to improve the learners' language and communication skills.

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