

FROM GENERAL TO PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH – CURRICULUM, STUDENTS, TRAINERS

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Abstract: *The present study is an attempt to offer a bird's eye view into the relationship between professional English, meaning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) or 6General English (GE), stressing the difficulties that may appear on the road. There are opinion discrepancies regarding the differences that exist/do not exist between Business English teaching and General English teaching. Therefore, the general purposes and distinctive features are examined to draw a parallel between ESP and EGP to present their common and specific characteristics.*

Keywords: *EGP, ESP, professionals, learners, curriculum*

JEL Classification: *Y80*

1.General background

The starting assumption is that general English is commonly used for day-to-day conversations, whereas professional English is learned and used for specific purposes. The difference between the two kinds of English as a communication method is why people are learning the language. Some researchers argue that no differences between English for Specific Purposes teaching and General English teaching can be defined. However, when defining the ESP, it proves different from General English, at least in the role of the teacher, course design, teaching models, etc., leading to diversified teaching methods employed to achieve the expected teaching goals.

1.1 Brief terminology clarifications

There has been a growing demand for English for specific contexts, so courses were designed to meet these specific needs, and thus new ideas started to emerge in the study of language. Traditionally the aim of learning a new language had been to communicate with people worldwide, and the focus had been on rules of usage; English has become the language for worldwide communication. Communication has become more refined and specific, and new studies shifted attention away from referring to the formal features of language usage to finding how language is used in honest communication (Widdowson 1981). These new

requirements, along with developments in educational theories, contribute to the rise of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Business English is an area of ESP, as it shares essential elements (needs, syllabus, and course design).

General English (GE) is a syntagm used to describe the type of English required for everyday situations. It can be compared to more specific English teaching such as Business English, English for Academic Purposes, Engineering English, and so on. It aims to give language learners a consistent foundation in core grammar and communication. In addition, it focuses on developing basic skills - reading, writing, listening, and oral- through various topics.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) - the general umbrella covering vast fields, Business English included - underwent several stages in being defined after the 1960s when the conceptual term appeared.

Mackay and Mountford (1978:2) state that "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a utilitarian purpose."

Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) considered ESP an "approach," not a different or particular type of language, which does not require different teaching materials or methodology.

Nevertheless, Peter Strevens (1988:1-2) defines English for Specific Purposes by distinguishing between its absolute and variable characteristics.

Robinson (1991:2) claims that students learn *English "not because they are interested in the English language or English language or English culture as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes."

Anthony (1997:9-10) considers that "some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, described it more precisely as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes."

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998:4-5) propose a more precise definition noting that ESP contrasts with general English.

Basturkmen (2006:18) states that in ESP, "language is 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."

As an intermediary conclusion, there are differences between GE and ESP.

1.2. Types of ESP

According to Brunton (2009:22), "ESP is today more vibrant than ever with a bewildering number of terms created to fit the increasing range of occupations that have taken shelter under the ESP umbrella." Traditionally, ESP is divided into two main categories: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). In 1983 David Carter identified three types of ESP: English as a restricted language (i.e., language used by waiters or traffic controllers), English for Academic and Occupational Purposes, and English with specific topics. According to Carter's classification, both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) fall under the same umbrella of ESP. Nevertheless, there is no clear distinction between EAP and EOP, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987:6) write: "people can learn and study simultaneously: it is also likely that in many cases the language learned for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes

up, or return to, a job." The same source distinguishes three main categories of ESP: English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), and English for Social Studies (ESS).

Furthermore, each category mentioned earlier falls into subcategories of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). However, irrespective of its subdivision, the main goal of an ESP is to help learners understand and communicate in any situation, especially in their working environment. Therefore, according to their goals, learners should be channeled to acquire the language that best serves the needs of their occupation.

1.3. Features of General English and Business English as part of ESP

Stevens (1988:1-2) states ESP can be defined by making a distinction between its absolute and its variable characteristics. The fundamental characteristics of ESP are listed as follows: designed to answer particular needs of the learner; related in content (i.e., subject and topics) to specific domains, working environments, and activities; centered on the language appropriate for those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, and semantics; designed in contrast with General English.

On the other hand, according to the same source, two variable characteristics may be attributed to ESP but not necessarily: 1. restricted as to the language skills to be learned (reading only); 2. not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

As mentioned above, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998:4-5) consider that ESP contrasts with general English and adds more variable characteristics. Accordingly, three fundamental characteristics are as follows:

- ESP is defined as meeting the specific needs of the learners,
- ESP makes use of the methodology and activities of the discipline it serves,
- ESP is centered on the language (grammar, vocabulary, register), skills, and discourse particular to these activities.

The variables of ESP are related to or designed for specific disciplines, and it may use a different methodology from that of GE; ESP is generally meant for intermediate or advanced learners, ESP is more likely to be designed for adult learners due to some professional work situations; however, it may also be meant for secondary school students.

Widdowson (1983) considers there are distinctive features of ESP and GE. Thus, he enumerates the most important features of General English: the focus on education, the difficulty in deciding upon course content as learners' needs are hard to predict, the purpose is to convey general English competencies, etc. On the other hand, the most relevant ESP features are the focus on training and the more accessible selection of the appropriate content as the needs of the course audience is clear; the clear objective may be to create a restricted English competence.

2. Differences between General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including Business English (BE)

There have been changes in how researchers, course designers, teachers, and trainers consider ESP and BE versus GE. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, unique vocabulary was considered to distinguish English for Specific Purposes and Business English from General English.

Another approach considers training the skills of communication in English speaking, writing, listening, and reading within a business context essential. In the 1980s, following the trends in GE, BE teaching emphasized more and more the functional areas-formulaic language for recommending, giving opinions, showing agreement, and so on. In addition, during the 1980s, the development of company training programs began to provide employees with opportunities to attend courses in presentation techniques, negotiating, and effective meeting skills. Nowadays, English for Specific Purposes, like the one for the working environment, is highly recognized as a crucial discipline.

2.1 Differences in goals

Starting from definitions, where goals are general purposes learners will be able to accomplish by the end of a program, and objectives are the ones achieved in a course or lesson, we understand that they are included in a curriculum to provide a clear definition of the direction, to guide trainers, teachers, providers on one hand and learners, students, receivers, on the other hand, as well as material designers. (Richards 2001).

The goals for learning English constitute the significant difference between ESP and EGP. The learners are also an essential factor that makes the difference between the two variants of English.

ESP learners are usually adults who are familiar with English and need specialized language to communicate professional information and perform some job-related functions. Thus, they are highly motivated to study as they know their specific purposes for learning English. (cf. Chris Wright, 1992)

By analyzing learners' needs, materials designers figure out the language skills helpful in accomplishing professional tasks; for instance, for an accountant, more numbers, charts, and digits should be focused on. Consequently, the specialized language needs context is taught in real-life circumstances, either a dialogue for a tourism specialization or a contract for international trade, etc.

Compared to ESP learners, the EGP ones differ even from the age point of view; thus, children are targeted, not adults who are already conscious of their needs. Thus, addressing younger learners, EGP courses are mainly focused on grammar, language structure, and general vocabulary. These courses are meant to develop the general language, preparing them to cope with the language in any job-related tasks. EGP courses approach varied themes, subjects, and topics, whereas all four skills are trained.

2.2 Differences in the role of teachers and trainers

The role of the language teacher has evolved from a model in traditional language teaching to a facilitator in contemporary language teaching.

It briefly refers to the fact that the methodology used, and the approached techniques determine the role of the teacher or trainer. In both GE and ESP, or more precisely BE, the teacher should assess the current language level of the learner, select materials, and set tasks that are appropriate to the level and context. Teachers need to set course objectives and establish the course program. To achieve these, teachers ought to have an in-depth knowledge of the language system in terms of skills, functions, structures, and vocabulary. Both positions require the transmission of communicative competence to learners, the GE teacher in social settings and the ESP teacher in a professional or academic setting; learners should be fluent in conversations; thus, the GE teachers rely on grammar and vocabulary in everyday situations, whereas the ESP teachers rely on language in context for fluency in the professional conversations. GE teachers need to be able to impart general knowledge, while ESP teachers need to impart field-specific language knowledge. GE teachers use ready-made syllabus materials such as textbooks and working books. ESP teachers analyze learners' needs, make special material preparations, sometimes design a specific-field syllabus, and help learners handle subject concepts encoded in domain-specific texts. Consequently, there is a difference in the training of GE and ESP teachers, as the latter need to add field-specific linguistic competency to the prior content knowledge, which means that more is needed to be a qualified Business English teacher.

Swales (1985) uses the term 'ESP practitioner' to designate the facilitator of specialized knowledge rather than the 'ESP teacher' to highlight the difference between an ESP and a GE teacher. In BE, the tendency is to employ 'trainer' because some BE trainers come from a business background or have worked for companies themselves and have valuable knowledge of how companies are organized and run, which adds value to the language knowledge.

All in all, ESP teachers, as language teachers, should perform the essential functions of any teacher: organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, and controller doubled by the additional specific linguistic competency facilitator. Besides qualifications, the BE trainer should be aware that the audience will consist of adults; thus, an outgoing personality, interest in interacting with people, and curiosity about all aspects of business, are desirable; this is the best way for the trainers to unlock the learners' motivation and learning potential.

2.3. Differences in curriculum and course design

The curriculum and course design refer to the process of turning raw data about a learning need into programs and materials that will lead the learners to a certain level of knowledge. In other words, this is the use of theoretical and practical information to conceive a syllabus, then to create, select, and adapt materials following the syllabus, to develop a methodology for teaching those materials, and provide assessment methods by which progress to the specified goals will be measured.

The course design for GE focuses on general topics connected to culture, literature, and linguistics. At the same time, ESP concentrates on materials and themes related to language application in different specific environments, such as business communication in a business context.

There are three main approaches to ESP course design: language-centered course design, skills-centered course design, and learning-centered course design (Hutchinson and Waters (2002).

Language-centered course design begins with the learner's needs and proceeds through various stages of analysis to a syllabus, selection of appropriate materials, and evaluation of performance following the goals. One of the major flaws of this model is that learner counts only in the first phase, that of recognizing the needs, and not throughout the process as it should be thus, it is not learner-centered.

Skills-centered course design is an approach that assumes to take the learners more into account as compared to the language-centered approach. The skills-centered approach is based on two fundamental approaches: theoretical and pragmatic. The theoretical principle states that language behaviors are specific skills and strategies learners use to produce or comprehend discourse. Therefore, such a course will focus on its learning objectives and consider them in terms of performance and competence.

The pragmatic approach of the skills-centered course design is the outcome of the classification provided by Widdowson (1981), who distinguished between goal-oriented and process-oriented courses. The ESP course strives to overcome all the disadvantages of this approach, focusing on the process rather than the goal; the emphasis is not on reaching specific goals but on enabling the learners to accomplish as much as possible. The most valuable idea is that the ESP course should help learners to develop and train abilities and strategies that will continue to refine even after the ESP course finishes. The skills-centered approach is considered to take the learner more into account than the language-centered one; nevertheless, it still treats the learner as a language user rather than the /learner of the language.

The learning-centered approach, compared with the first approach where the learner is almost invisible, and with the skills-centered approach, which takes the learner into account very little as well, gives the most concern to the learners enhancing the transmission of information, the learning. Learning is a process in which the learners use knowledge or skills to make sense of the flow of new information. Learning is an internal process that builds upon the already acquired knowledge and relies on the ability and motivation to use it. The third approach seems the best of the three as it takes account of the learner at each stage of the design process as a dynamic one, as needs and resources may change over. Following the feedback, the course design may suffer changes and adaptations. The ESP real-life learning situation determines the nature of the syllabus, materials, methodology, and evaluation procedures.

3. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, there is no clear-cut separation line between GE and ESP; people use syntagms such as Business English, English for engineers, or Medical English to make a distinction. We consider that the two are closely interconnected, and a possible answer to the difference between them is that the practice makes the difference: "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal" (Hutchinson et al., 1987).

The syntagm BE is used to cover the English taught to a wide range of professional people and people undergoing training and education preparing for a business career; thus, the focus is both on language and equally on skills training in the process of teaching. This is a challenge for teachers and trainers nowadays as they realize the utmost importance of assessing the needs and selecting the most appropriate material for those needs, as well as with the learners' goals at all stages of materials production and the learning process. The part of BE trainers in the process is even more striking as they are responsible for settling on a syllabus and selecting materials while developing a consciousness of the needs and concerns of businesspeople and remaining flexible enough to respond to those needs. There is no 'best' methodology; nevertheless, when the learner is at the center of the learning, it makes the whole process the most productive. In BE teaching as part of the ESP, a desirable approach would be to combine language and real situations related to the working business environment.

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