

University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine -Setif 2-

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of English Language and Literature

Level: 3rd year

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Semester 1 : Introduction to English for Specific Purposes

Lecture 1: General Overview

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a teaching approach that is employed to equip learners with a certain English proficiency level for a target situation where the language is going to be used. This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the areas of this module.

1. English as a Lingua Franca

The status of English as a global language promotes the materialization of ESP as explained by Bottery (2000, p.6) “the development of globalization has been associated with the dominance of the English language. The power and influence of English have been widely recognized nowadays in the context of globalization.” Globalisation dramatically strengthens global relations regardless to territorial boundaries; people around the world can become familiar socially and economically over geographical barriers through the medium of language. Consequently, with the English language assuming such a global significance in the modern times, it is quite appropriate and relevant to think in terms of “global English”. Crystal (2003) believes that a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops to a special role which is recognized in almost every nation. It is generally agreed that English is the most widely used foreign language in education, research, publication and industry (Crystal, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Pennycook, 2007).

2. Emergence of English for Specific Purposes

To trace back the origins of ESP, from **the early 1960's**, ESP has grown to become one of the prominent areas of English language Teaching (ELT) (Basturkmen, 2010; García Mayo, 2000; Rahman, 2015). The ESP movement has shown **a slow but steady growth** over the past four decades. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.6) **“ESP was not a planned and coherent movement, but rather a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends.”** Therefore, the emergence and growth of ESP then was brought about by a combination of three main factors: the demands of a brave new world, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

i. The Demands of a Brave New World

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) affirm that the end of the Second World War and the oil crisis of the early 1970s were two key historical periods in the emergence of ESP. By the end of the Second World War, the early sixties witnessed new perspectives of changes, and consequently new developments concerning the activities and exchanges in scientific, technical and economic activities on an international level. Therefore, there was an urgent necessity for an international language to meet different purposes..

ii. Revolution in Linguistics

While traditional linguists set out to describe the formal features of language usage that is to say grammar, new influential ideas started to emerge in the field of language where studies shifted to focus on the ways in which language is used in real communication; i.e., language use (Widdowson, 1978). The idea was that if language in different situations varies, then, tailoring a language course to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is possible. Therefore, one of the reasons that led to the emergence of ESP was the development in language theory which put much emphasis on learner's specific needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 8). In short, the English needed by a specific group of learners can be clearly identified by determining the features of specific situations and make them the bases of language instructions.

iii. Focus on the Learner

New influential concepts in educational psychology also helped in the development of ESP movement, where there was a radical shift towards giving learners and their attitudes the central role in the learning process. In this respect, to Strevens (1977, p.152) notes "...the existence of a major 'tide' in the educational thoughts, in all countries and affecting all subjects. The movement referred to is the global trend towards 'Learner-centred education'. That is to say, learners can construct their own knowledge through employing different learning strategies, using different skills, and being motivated by different needs and interests. Therefore, focus on the learners' needs became of paramount importance in the process of designing specific courses to better meet these specific needs and purposes.

All in all, ESP emerged as an answer to the social demand associated with prosperous business environment. By that time, ESP has grown to become one of the main areas of ELT, especially at tertiary education, since it is directed towards meeting specific needs of the particular learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Gatehouse, 2001).

3. Definitions of English for Specific Purposes

ESP acronym stands for English for Specific Purposes. From the early 1960's, scholars believe that successive debates have taken place throughout different ESP events to come up with a clear idea of the what

is ESP and different issues related to it (Dudley- Evans & St John, 1998). Therefore, defining ESP has proved to be a challenging task to researchers that “producing a simple and straightforward definition of ESP is not an easy task” (Strevens, 1988, p. 109). In the following, the major definitions in ESP literature are to be reviewed:

Mackay and Mountford (1978, p.2) claim that “ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose.” In other words, the purpose depends on the learners’ needs which can be either of academic, occupational or scientific character. In the same line of thoughts, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) consider ESP as “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners’ reasons for learning”. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) believe that principles of ESP based on the answer of the following key question: “why does this learner need to learn English?”

Richards and Rodger (2001, p.107) regard ESP as a movement that seeks to serve the language needs of learners who need English in order to carry out specific roles (e.g. student, engineer, nurse) and who need to acquire content and real-world skills through the medium of it rather than master the language for its own sake. In the same line of thought, Basturkmen (2006, p.18) in her turn, states that “ESP is understood to be about preparing learners to use English within academic, professional or workplace environments and a key feature of ESP course design is that the syllabus is based on an analysis of the needs of the students.”

Zhang (2013, p.72) notes that “ESP is a goal-oriented and well targeted instruction system, which stresses the combination of English language learning and specific purposes of professional learning.”

Based on the definitions given, it can be concluded that ESP is a language teaching approach that aims at preparing learners to use English within academic or professional environments.

Reflection Questions:

- Why was ESP introduced in your country? (Hutchinson and Waters 1987:8)
- What does the ‘S’ refer in ESP? Justify

Homework:

- **What is ESP and what is not ESP?** (referring to Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)