

PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Ana GOREA,
doctor în filologie, conferențiar universitar,
șef Direcție monitorizare, evaluare și control,
Academia de Administrare Publică
de pe lângă Președintele Republicii Moldova

Interesul față de studierea limbii engleze în calitate de limbă de comunicare pe teme cotidiene, care era foarte populară în Moldova imediat după căderea cortinei de fier, a scăzut considerabil în ultimii ani. Accentul se pune pe studierea limbii pentru a funcționa într-un anumit domeniu profesional cum ar fi engleza pentru afaceri, engleza pentru medici, engleza pentru tehnologii informaționale etc. cunoscută în metodologia predării drept Engleza pentru Scopuri Specifice (ESP). În cazul lipsei unui manual de limbă engleză pentru o anumită categorie de studenți, selectarea materialelor didactice, elaborarea curriculumului, organizarea procesului de instruire și evaluare a cunoștințelor studenților țin de responsabilitatea profesorului. Articolul de față conține reflecțiile autorului asupra componentelor enumerate mai sus bazate pe experiența proprie de a preda Engleza pentru Scopuri Specifice la Academia de Administrare Publică de pe lângă Președintele Republicii Moldova.

As the distance of time and space is being erased due to air travel and the Internet, people of different nationalities come closer together by communicating through a common language, which happens to be English.

The boom of learning/teaching English in Moldova started in the early 90s of the previous century when, with the fall of the iron curtain, people realized that there is a whole unknown world on its other side, and, in order to learn about it, an appropriate tool was necessary for cross-cultural communication. English was taught in kindergartens, in general schools, in universities, in language schools, and mostly privately, one-to-one with the teacher. Thus, the age of the learners varied from 5 to

over 60. English replaced with confidence the French language that was previously the most popular due to the belief that it is very close to the native language of the Moldovan population. The quality of teaching and of learning the language changed in two distinct directions. On the one hand, the teachers discovered (besides the only used until then in teaching a foreign language - the Grammar-Translation Method) new methods and techniques of teaching, as the access to foreign publications ceased to be a taboo; on the other hand, the learners themselves had a high motivation of mastering the language by realizing the advantages of knowing English and the opened possibilities.

At the time, the stress was put on learn-

ing general English, which offered to the learners the possibility of communicating in everyday situations. With the passage of time, a period of about 15 years, a decline in learning general English is observed. This is explained by the fact that for the young generation the school instruction of English seems already sufficient for just communication on everyday topics and at this point they want to learn English to be used in a special domain of professionalism. More and more individuals have highly specific academic and professional reasons for seeking to improve their language skills. These students, usually adults, need English for Specific Purposes¹ (ESP) programs, which focus on developing communicative competence in a given field, such as business, technology, administration, medicine, law, etc. A growing demand for ESP training is being observed at the moment. Many young people study English to take the TOEFL, IELTS, SAT or similar tests, as the educational reform encourages the mobility of the students and they apply either for full scholarships or term ones in an institution outside the country where the instruction is only in English.

How is ESP different from general English? English for Specific Purposes means: specialized vocabulary, motivation related to job, very goal-oriented and serious students, learning necessary for life skills. General English, on the other hand, is looked upon as a free-time activity, more freedom in deviating from the program, more time for games, more relaxed atmosphere, general writing skills, etc.

ESP is also different from general English language by the fact that the vocabulary and grammar, which are learned, relate to a particular field or discipline and are aimed at developing skills necessary

in the activity of that professional. For example, a diplomat needs to develop negotiation skills, effective techniques for oral presentations, writing press releases or a policy paper.

The term ESP has a large interpretation in the methodological literature. David Carter (*Carter, 1983*) identifies three types of ESP: English as restricted language, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes and English with specific topics. The language used in air traffic control or by the waiters serves as examples of English as restricted language. English for Academic and Occupational Purposes is based on the long-term professional and social needs of the learner and is taught as an academic discipline for special categories of learners. The third type of ESP is concerned with anticipated future English needs such as attending conferences or working in foreign institutions².

In our context, ESP will be considered as an academic subject. The main characteristics of the ESP are: its authentic content and the learning/teaching tasks, which are selected and adapted to the curriculum subjects that the students attend to make their access autonomous to original professional sources. At the Academy of Public Administration, master degree students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This means that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies.

The ESP book market is abundant in various textbooks for business English, English for Law, Medical English, English for Librarians, English for Nurses, English in IT, etc. But yet, for such fields as Public Administration, International Relations,

Public Management, which are largely taught and are popular among students in Moldova, no ESP textbooks have been compiled so far.

In the case, when there are no available textbooks designed for the given category of students, it is up to the teacher to select the materials to be taught and to make the learning more enjoyable and useful for the students. M. K. Phillips suggests four principles that practitioners should consider before deciding on an ESP methodology for a particular course. These principles are Reality Control (manipulating a task's difficulty/simplicity); Nontriviality (ensuring that learners perceive tasks as meaningful); Authenticity (ensuring that the acquired language is the same language naturally generated by the learner's discourse community); and, Tolerance of Error (overlooking errors unless they prevent communication (Phillips, 1981).

So, the instructor is faced with the following tasks: to plan the contents, to analyze the learners needs, to set the learning objectives and design the curriculum, to select the materials, to work out tasks for each unit, to organize the classes in order to establish a positive learning environment in the classroom, and to evaluate students' progress. The enumerated tasks are being described below based on my personal experience of teaching ESP.

Planning the contents. The questions that the instructor has to answer at this point are: What relevant to the qualification of the student topics should be included for discussion in the foreign language? What should the student be able to know and do at the end of the course? What practical abilities should he/she possess?

Ideas for the topics to be included in

the program may be taken from the programs of the disciplines that the students study in their mother tongue. If, for example, these are students qualifying in Public Administration, the topics would include: Introduction into Public Administration, Authority and Power, Actors of PA, Types of Government, Central Public Administration Bodies, Local Public Administration Bodies, Public Services, Public Policy, Public Management, etc. Both the instructor and the students should be aware of the fact that in the foreign language classes the stress is put not on the theoretical contents of the given topics but on developing language skills. Many teachers take on them the responsibility of teaching theory of the contents of the disciplines in English while it should be developing communication skills in the foreign language based on specialized terminology. So, the instructor should look at the topics for discussion through the prism of developing necessary for functioning in the professional field skills. By answering the second and the third questions regarding what the student should know and be able to do in the foreign language, the instructor should focus on appropriate for the given category of students knowledge and skills. The students should get sufficient knowledge in order to develop their productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing. In oral communication they should develop skills of explaining, categorizing, arguing, building their arguments to convince the audience, make presentations, conduct a conversation with the interlocutor, etc. In writing students should learn how to write effective CV, e-mails, messages, various business letters, summaries of the read texts and articles, synthesis of various read and listened to texts, etc. For the whole pe-

riod of teaching, the instructor should keep in mind that these abilities are developed in order for the students to successfully communicate in an occupational setting and use the particular terminology characteristic of this specific occupational context. The time devoted to developing language and academic skills should outweigh the time devoted to the acquisition of content knowledge.

Analyzing the needs. The needs of a given group of learners are analyzed in the first lesson, when the instructor with the help of a specially prepared questionnaire finds out in the first lesson what knowledge or skills the learners of this particular group need. In the first lesson, I explain what it means to learn a foreign language and which the areas to focus on are. Learning a language is acquiring knowledge about Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Grammar. Based on these, the learners develop four languages skills needed in

communication: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. After that I ask the students to fill out the questionnaire which includes phrases like: read with a dictionary, read articles related to my field, pronounce difficult words, write essays, write summaries, write letters, improve pronunciation, improve spelling, speak fluently, do grammar exercises, study grammar, learn pronunciation rules, learn the grammar rules, make a telephone call, make a complaint, analyze and synthesize, support an argument, discern information, develop listening skills, communicate with foreigners, listen to English speech, write dictations, spell difficult words, organize information, take notes when listening to a lecture, develop an idea, understand when people speak English, support arguments, express an opinion, etc, with which I ask to complete a table of the type below. I also encourage the students to add their own ideas.

<i>What I can do</i>	<i>What I need to improve</i>	<i>What I want to learn</i>
<i>Read with a dictionary</i>	<i>pronunciation</i>	<i>To write summaries</i>

Learners complete the table by answering the questions: Which of the listed above areas do you feel confident about? Which do you need to improve? They also need to differentiate between language *skills*, language *knowledge* and learning *strategies*.

This first lesson discussion gives the instructor a very clear idea about who the learners are and what they need to learn or improve in reference to the English language. The teacher can also determine the level of language proficiency of the students in order to know what level of the difficulty of the materials to teach. In our situation, at the Academy of Public Ad-

ministration, in the majority of cases we have to deal with mixed ability groups. This makes planning and teaching more complicated but not impossible. If the group is a mixed ability one, during the first semester the first year master degree students are taught general English (from a communicative textbook), but gradually specific terms or topics are also presented. This is typical of many other institutions (see for example *Nijole Netiksiene, 2006*). Stress is put on presenting or revision of the grammar items. In the second and third terms, emphasis is put on English as used in the field of professionalism and on developing the corresponding

skills. It is not a bad idea to involve the students in planning, many are already established professionals and they can suggest topics they really need for their jobs.

Setting the learning objectives and designing the program. Having determined the proficiency level of the learners and their language, it is time to design the long-term program, also known as curriculum. The contents of the program should meet the requirements put forward by the Ministry of Education and reflect the competences of the learners by the end of the course at three levels: knowledge and comprehension, application, and integration. This is a taxonomy of proposed objectives elaborated by the Moldovan methodologists (Gutu V., 2007). The objectives for the knowledge level of the topic The Declaration of Independence of the USA might be: Relate the context of writing the Declaration to the historical events in the USA; Identify the purpose and explain the importance of the Declaration; for the application level: Explain the structure of the Declaration, Comment on the complaints included in the Declaration; for the integration level: Demonstrate awareness of the Declaration of Independence as a historical process developed in protest of unfair conditions; Create a personal Declaration of Independence to voice complaints about the treatment of young people.

Selecting the materials to be used. For this, it is necessary to mind that the subject area should be both important and interesting for the learners. Materials selection and development depends entirely on the instructor. We cannot complain today that we do not have adequate authentic materials. It's true, there are no well-thought over textbooks, but for a resourceful

teacher, it is not complicated to find necessary and interesting materials to teach. The Internet serves as an infinite source of materials. For the Public Administration students I select texts taken from the websites of the UK Government <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>, of the USA Government <http://www.usa.gov/>, of the Moldovan Government <http://gov.gov.md/>, which offer a lot of useful information in any field of human activity (crime, justice, education, environment, home and community, health and well-being, money, tax and benefits, travel and transport, etc.) The most recent information on the UK Government webpage is how to treat and prevent swine flu, for example. The websites also contain mini-videos that can be watched and discussed. Students can take a virtual tour to Downing street 10, to the White House and other important places right in the classroom.

For the advanced groups I often select articles from such magazines as: **Newsweek** <http://www.newsweek.com/> and **The Economist** <http://www.economist.com/printedition/>. Other wonderful sources for selecting shorter texts are **Words in the News** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/>, which offers a large selection of short authentic texts in various fields of human activity; and **Breaking News English** <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>, which contains ready made ESL lesson plans for studying current events and news. The best thing about all these sources is that the information contained in them is of the latest hour.

For the master degree students of the International Relations Department I selected for discussion the following texts in

the 2nd term: *Text of Barack Obama's Inauguration speech* (Jan.20, 2009), Martin Luther King's speech "*I have a Dream*", the *Declaration of Independence of the USA* and the *Declaration of Independence of Moldova*, articles from the *Economist*, *Newsweek*, and *Foreign Affairs* such as *Allies Expected to Resume Ties with Russians* (published in *Newsweek* March 5, 2009) connected to the topic of NATO and diplomatic relations between states, *How Development Leads to Democracy* (published in *Foreign Affairs* March/April, 2009) connected with the topic of development and modernization of democracy, *Homecoming* (published in *Newsweek*, March 14, 2009) connected to the topic of world migration, etc. Many articles were selected on the current situation in such countries as Ukraine, Georgia, Russia, Moldova, etc.

The given authentic contexts acquainted the students with the particular ways in which the language is used. We emphasized on the use of phrasal verbs, of idioms, of specific for the English language structures, on terms typical for the international relations field, etc.

Working out tasks for each unit. Selecting the materials is only the beginning step in planning the teaching during the lesson. Having already decided on the topic and the main text to be read and discussed, the teacher also needs to design tasks for the students to be done in order to benefit from the work. I usually select a text that can be adjusted to the topics from the field of specialization of the learners. When I have already decided on the text to be included in the lesson (unit), I work out a set of Discussion Points connected to the topic, but which will further be consolidated while reading the text. The

before-reading discussion points introduce the students into the topic, raise some questions in connection with it, and make them start thinking in that direction. Another task besides the discussion points will be working on the active vocabulary contained in the article, on collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms, grammar structures, even pronunciation of difficult words, all these will deal with the language itself. Asking students to read a text and underline the words that are profession related is a task that students enjoy.

The after-reading tasks might include questions on the text to check the comprehension of the read material, opinion questions, debatable questions raised in the text and by all means a creative task for homework. These might be to make an oral presentation or a one-minute speech connected to the topic, as well as a writing task, which might include writing the summary of the article, writing a synthesis, writing an argumentative essay, etc. For example, having discussed and analyzed the Declaration of Independence of the USA and the Declaration of Moldova from the point of view of their structure, the students of the IR Department had the task to write a synthesis in which to compare the two Declarations from the point of view of their similarities and differences. The creative task included writing their own Declaration in which to voice their complaints about the treatment of young people in Moldova.

Speaking in front of others may be one of the greatest fears at beginning, but with constant practice, the fear disappears and confidence appears. The first to speak in front of the group should be those who are more confident and proficient and with a high level of risk taking. Giving presen-

rations is a necessary skill for everybody not only for those who do it due to their work obligations. Being practiced repeatedly in class improves the language and the skills of the learners.

Establishing the learning environment. This is the stage when the teacher performs his/her classroom roles and namely that of a guide, participant, adviser, prompter, actor, etc. and the student has the responsibility of performing the tasks designed by the teacher. At this point the students have to be encouraged and helped by the teacher.

Taking into consideration the contingent of learners at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Moldova, the teacher should create an adequate classroom atmosphere, i.e. the learning environment, in which any learner should feel comfortable, not to affect his/her ego as a professional in the field or as a personality. Situation in which students would interact with each others should be created as often as possible. Thus they will learn from each other and support their efforts in acquiring the language skills. When listening to the students, the teacher should listen carefully and give his/her understanding and feedback. Good language learners are great risk-takers, since they make many errors in order to succeed. Often learners consider themselves handicapped because they are unable to use the foreign language to present themselves as well-informed adults. That is why the teacher should create an atmosphere in the language classroom which supports them and be tolerant to the mistakes the students make. Students must be self-confident in order to communicate and the teacher's responsibility is to build that confidence.

Evaluating of the students' performance. Evaluating students does not mean giving them marks only, but also identifying their learning problems, finding solutions to them and making choices which determine what and how they should learn. The teacher becomes the source of information to the students about how they are progressing in their language learning. To be fair in this case is paramount. It is necessary to give deserving marks from the very start by indicating what knowledge or skill the student lacks at a given point in his studies.

The teaching/learning process is a two-way street and the greatest responsibility for learning lies on the adult student, who should be in charge of developing English language skills. The most successful student is the one who already works in a context when English skills are needed. In this case, he/she pays more attention to the meaning of the language he/she hears or reads in class because they find its immediate application. Adults usually work harder in order to master a language but the skills they already have allow them to learn faster and in larger quantities. The potential of motivated adult students is rather high and it is possible in a limited number of hours to attain good results. It is important that after the language course ends, the language learning doesn't stop. Foreign language learning (as well as the native) should naturally continue throughout our lives.

Conclusion

I would like to stress that it is important to involve as much as possible the students in the ESP classes in helping with the clarification of things that the teacher might not be knowledgeable about. In such a way students are given productive op-

portunities for communicative practice. At the same time, they feel valued for their professional expertise. Thus, relationships between ESP teachers and students can be seen as richly collaborative because all participants have their areas of expertise and are trying to share with and learn from each other.

I would like to conclude by citing Marjorie Rozenberg who mentions: "our

students deserve the best we can give them and that includes a relaxed, but energetic and lively atmosphere in the classroom, creating a community to which both learners and teachers are eager to belong." (Rozenberg, 2004:37). In general lines, ESP classes should be based on the principle that the teacher has the freedom to innovate and the student the freedom to create.

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8. The letter 'S' stands more often for 'specific' though 'special' is also encountered with the same meaning.
9. For more information on the debate of the types of ESP see the articles by Kristen Gatehouse (Gatehouse, 2001) and Catherine M. Thomas (Thomas, 2002).

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Recenzent: Zinuida CAMENEV, doctor în filologie, conferențiar universitar

E-mail: annagorea@gmail.com