

Teaching English in the Communication and Press Field

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the role of the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) professor and the methods used in teaching vocabulary for the students of *Communication and Press Faculties*. This can be considered a difficult task to achieve, as “communication” is a broad term referring to the terminology used in newspapers, audio-visual press, politics and PR (Public Relations) field. Therefore, the paper will focus on the role of the ESP professor, on the choice of materials that should be used according to the areas of vocabulary and the ways of introducing specialized terms specific to this field.

Keywords: press; communication; language; teaching; vocabulary; specialized terms

The field of *Communication and Press* can be considered a mixture of specific content (regarding a particular event in a certain area – politics, culture, environment, education, medicine, economy) and general content (regarding the general ability to communicate more efficiently in “communication and press” situations). Generally, ESP professors have to deal with the very difficult task of mastering language and subject matter beyond the limits of their professional experience. Another issue to be approached is that the ESP professor always has to offer students a motivation in studying a foreign language, as English learning is auxiliary to their primary professional goal/ aim: that of becoming a journalist, reporter, spokesman, PR employee, agent etc. That is why, during courses, the professor has to emphasize the importance of studying English (and of other

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foreign languages, of course) in their future careers through diverse specialized materials, such as newspaper articles, formal letters (business letters, letters of application, complaint letters), texts on mass-media and advertising. Therefore, ESP professors should provide enjoyable courses focusing on developing the students' thinking capacity/ ability (or *critical thinking*). Moreover, specialized terms must be gradually introduced and thus, presenting them in a meaningful context, students will enrich their "communication" vocabulary and will use it in all areas of this field.

It has to be mentioned that ESP began in the 1990s, due to the fast changes in technology (the Internet, wireless laptops, online sound and video, social media, blogs, online communities), changes in economy and culture (digitalization of books, computer-mediated relations, technically-supported independence and interdependence). It is known that ESP content normally includes vocabulary, grammar, scripts and scenarios included in the general academic education, which is more consistent from course to course and trainer to trainer in the English-teaching schools, colleges and faculties. More and more often, this content is has roots in a more thorough research, which comes from content development researchers working within the language school, or from university researchers working in faculties of linguistics. With the globalization of commerce and economy and the continuous increase of international communication in all fields, the demand for English for Specific Purposes is greater and greater, especially in the countries where English is taught as a foreign language (we should mention here: EFL – English as a Foreign Language and ELT – English Language Teaching).

Language is very diverse due to the fact that human activity is more and more diverse. There is a huge variety of walks of life, each of them has its own language and cultural setting. In the last 25 years many such books have been written, their titles being more or less: *English for All Walks of Life*. These walks of life may be divided into two categories: those which are common to everybody and those which deal with specialized topics familiar only to some people. Obviously, the walks of life that are common to many people refer to everyday existence. Examples of these universal topics are socializing, shopping, travelling, eating out, telephoning friends, greetings and introductions, reading newspapers and magazines. Therefore, when we learn a language, we have to deal with linguistic items related to these universal topics; this is the task of a General English course. However, in addition to such topics, there is an enormous range of specialized

topics which are very important only to several groups of the population. The examples are the following: culture, law, sports, hobbies and interests, business, banking and finance, medicine, education, literary criticism, travel and tourism, biology, chemistry, physics, agriculture. Human life (and consequently language) is concerned with many and diverse topics. Every topic requires certain communication tasks to be performed and these tasks require mastery of certain skills. Such skills are: reading and writing texts in different registers, listening in various styles, accents, speaking appropriately in a variety of contexts including socializing, negotiating, interviewing and presenting information. As a conclusion, people who are engaged in different activities need and have to master different skills.

When writing an ESP course, an aspect which must be taken into consideration is that grammar, acquisition skills, vocabulary, specific functions of discipline content are important parts of any ESP course. Based on the professional experience developing the curriculum for Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Science, Gatehouse (2001) pointed out that, when developing an ESP curriculum, three abilities must be integrated into it for a successful communication in occupational areas. The three abilities include: the ability to use a particular jargon in a specific context; to use a generalized set of academic skills and thirdly, the ability to use everyday informal language in order to communicate efficiently. Therefore, ESP professors must take into account the way they can integrate these three abilities into the content of an ESP course.

It must be mentioned that the ESP used by the students of the Faculties of Communication and Public Relations is much more complex than the ESP taught at other faculties, as it comprises almost all fields: *Politics, Mass Media, Advertising, Law, Crime and Punishment, Economy, Culture, Medicine, Entertainment, Social Aspects (Employment, Traffic and Accidents, People, Drugs), Environment, Sexuality, Immigration, Human Rights, Computers* and many others. Therefore, the professor faces the difficulty of teaching a comprehensive vocabulary, approaching each and every field and trying to structure all these topics into distinct sections, so that the student can thoroughly study them.

As far as I am concerned, I have been teaching English at the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations for many years, therefore, along this time I have understood all the problems raised within such a field and I have tried to find solutions for approaching it as efficiently as possible. It has to be pointed out that the students of the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations are extremely

interested in foreign languages, especially in English, and they themselves come with suggestions regarding the way we are to approach a certain field, i.e. they sometimes bring newspaper articles and advertisements, they have debates on various topics by expressing their opinions, by making comparisons and giving pros and cons. Both full-time and distance learning students are aware of the fact that English is their “window” opened to the world, allowing them to be up to date with the latest news in any field. As future specialists: journalists working for newspapers, magazines and TV stations, Public Relations employees, Human Resources employees, agents, spokesmen, even editors, the students of the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations have to master English language and express themselves fluently and correctly both in speaking and writing, thus becoming a part of the international system of communication.

Therefore, considering that the ESP specific to this faculty is much more complex than the ESP taught by me at the Faculty of Law and even at the Faculty of International Relations and European Studies, I have come to the conclusion that the efforts and imagination required for such a course are bigger. Anyway, as far as *ideas* are concerned, the objectives of such a course are: introducing the political, economic and cultural elements of international communications and their interconnections, developing the understanding of the complexity of international communication and its implications on local, national and global levels, appreciating how media technologies and systems of international communication affect entertainment and systems of information, examining controversial issues within the field, especially the role of communication in national development, the relative power of governments and media organizations, the problems of regulation and the impact of communication technologies, providing an interdisciplinary approach that starts from a range of social sciences, primarily Media and Communication Studies, Sociology, International Relations and Cultural Studies, Gender studies, engaging students in debates on key issues regarding international communication and encourage their critical thinking. Moreover, as far as structure is concerned, the aim of this paper is analyzing the ways of approaching ESP within the Faculty of Communication in point of vocabulary, grammar, reading and speaking.

As it has been previously mentioned, my English course is generally structured on fields of interests, like Politics, Media, Economy, Environment, Culture, Entertainment and many others. If, for example, we decide to approach the field of Politics along two courses, the students will be given newspaper articles

commenting on different political events all over the world, i.e. wars or other types of conflicts, peace agreements, elections, meetings between important party leaders. We usually start with the articles reflecting the political life in Romania, then the events in Europe, United States, Middle East, Africa and Southern and Central America, however taking into account the students' interests and choosing the most interesting events, so that the students can be stimulated enough to take a very active part in all discussions and applications. Considering the learners' overall language proficiency, the authentic materials are considered to be appropriate although students may find the vocabulary quite difficult.

The course starts with a warm-up, i.e. a 10 minutes' conversation on a certain political event in Romania or abroad (as we have taken "Politics" as an example). After the conversation, students are requested to read and translate the article(s) prepared for the course. During this process, the students encounter new words belonging to a specialized vocabulary; consequently, they have to write these words and use them in different types of exercises, as it will be seen later in this paper. Therefore, such words and phrases may be detected and written down: *an opinion poll, a rating, the front-runner, turn-out, they are two points ahead, to be a vote winner, in-fighting, neck and neck, on the hustings, a smear campaign, a snap election, a landslide victory, to carry a lot of clout* etc. If the respective English course approaches the topic of "Mass-Media", in the article the students could find words like: *columnist, a banner headline, newscaster, bias, to be a sell-out, to be given front page treatment, spoof, preview, press review, a phone-in, to hype, a gag, muckraking, a news blackout* etc.

After reading and translating the article, the students are required to discuss about the subject of the article, expressing their opinions and bringing a solid argumentation. The vocabulary practice comes next, students being asked to choose the right explanation (multiple choice exercise) for several words encountered in the article, for example:

1. *Embroided*

A. *involved*

B. *praised*

C. *disappointed*

2. *Edited*

A. *discovered*

B. *printed*

C. *cut out*

3. *Embellish*

A. *to give no details*

B. *to give fewer details*

C. *to give more details*

4. *Off-the-cuff*

A. *planned*

B. *improvised*

C. *prepared*

Another exercise is the “fill in the blanks” type, like the following:

Fill in each blank with a word from the following list: spot, charging, high-profile, nominees, appeal, missing, high, watch, suffer.

Newcomers flex their muscles in the battle to lift an Oscar

British hopes are...for tonight’s Oscar ceremony, but US television executives fear this year’s lack of big name...may lead to fewer viewers tuning in to ...the show. With stars such as Robert Redford, Paul Newman, Clint Eastwood and Jack Nicholson ...from the line-up, analysts believe the ceremony will...from not having the star...of previous years. Sources at the ABC network, which is ...a record \$ 510.000 for a 30-second advertising...say they would have been happier with more...nominations.

The Daily Telegraph

In addition, the students’ next task is to choose the appropriate endings for several sentences which have been taken from the article previously studied. For example, in case the article describes an environmental issue:

1. *Organic vegetables are not really organic because*

A. *farmers spray chemicals to fertilize them*

B. *chemical fertilizers, carried in the atmosphere, fall to the ground*

C. *they are grown according to intensive farming methods*

2. *For organic farmers, chemical fertilizers falling from the sky are*

A. *useless*

B. *a benefit*

C. *a nuisance*

3. *When compared to organic farms, the soil on intensive farms receives about*

A. *four times the amount of fertilizer*

B. *three times the amount of fertilizer*

C. *twice the amount of fertilizer*

In order to check the students' understanding of the text, they have to say whether some statements are true or false, like in the following examples, taken from a sports article:

1. *The phrase "Terrible starters but masters of suspense" is fully justified later in the extract.*
2. *Argentina's scores were 1-0, 1-1, 2-1, 2-2 and 3-2.*
3. *The semi-final against Brazil ended in a draw after 90 minutes.*
4. *Nigeria played 30 minutes extra time to qualify for the final.*
5. *The journalists deplored the referee's mistake.*
6. *Both teams in the final played attacking football.*
7. *American spectators responded well to an unfamiliar sport.*
8. *European universities have no reason to envy sports facilities in American universities.*

Last but not least, the ESP professor must take grammar into account. Actually, I consider grammar to be the basis of a language, therefore students must possess very good knowledge of grammar before they start studying ESP. Certainly, grammar is continuously practiced during the ESP course, meaning that students have to make translations from Romanian into English; the sentences and texts to be translated challenge them to use all tenses and moods, as well as Singularia and Pluralia Tantum nouns, the adjectives' degrees of comparisons, prepositions and phrasal verbs. Generally, the meaning of these sentences have a connection with the topic of the article(s) to be discussed during the respective course, thus offering students the possibility of practising the new vocabulary.

To conclude, the aspects presented in this paper are an attempt to direct the reader's attention to the complexity of ESP field, trying to find possible solutions for a very efficient approach of ESP within the Faculties of Communication and Public Relations, also taking into consideration the fact that learners' needs are becoming more and more complex year in year out due to the constantly changing demands of society.

References

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