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**AN OUTLOOK ON MODERNISM IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR
SPECIFIC PURPOSES**

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Abstract

This article tackles the new methods in teaching English for Specific Purposes, which deals with the specific communicative needs of individuals or groups of individuals. Throughout the last decades, ESP has become one of the most prominent areas of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. A series of innovative ideas have influenced ESP: critical approaches, social constructivism and discourse analysis. Certain aspects such as collaborative approaches, communication and discourse variation should be given the proper attention. New ESP approaches focus on the importance of what the individuals study and give them the opportunity to use English in order to acquire even more information, as their interest in their domain will motivate them to interact more with other speakers. This paper compares and contrasts the modern trends in ESP teaching which put emphasis on communicative situations, needs analysis and a more practical approach of the discourse. ESP contains an increasing number of specific terms, especially customized to fit a wide range of jobs connected to the ESP domain. There are two major factors: the phenomenon of globalisation and the increasing mobility of the world's workforce, that will cause an increasing demand for specialized register English courses. In addition to this, the economies of the emergent countries will be in high demand of workers who have a good command of English as a second language, especially for the workforce of transnational corporations, therefore a good command of English for Specific Purposes is desirable.

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1. Introduction

According to the most recent studies, English is the most widely spoken language worldwide, with approximately 380 million native speakers and 1.12 billion speakers as a second language. It is understandable why English is referred to as *the Lingua Franca of the Modern Age*, as it has become the most important language for foreign learners over the last half of a century. There are economical, political, financial or military reasons why English has become a *world language*. For example, English is, by international treaty, the official language form maritime and aeronautical communication. The linguistic awareness of teachers has grown in importance as the demand for effective English teaching has also increased.

One essential constituent of teaching English nowadays is represented by English for Specific Purposes, or ESP for short. This component has been referred to as *Applied English Language*, because its contents and goals are designed according to the needs of a specific group of learners. English for Specific Purposes makes use of the general methodology up to a certain level, although it is centered on the specific language domain considered to be appropriate to the specialized register in terms of grammar, vocabulary or discourse (Anthony, 2005, p.106). ESP is designed mainly for adult learners in a professional work situation, as we are about to see.

English for Specific Purposes refers to the study of language, discourse, contexts of use and the direct application of these discoveries to the practical domains. This is what basically makes the difference between ESP and General English. In a more recent article it is stated that:

Unlike other pedagogical approaches, which may be less specific needs-based and more theory-driven, ESP pedagogy places heavy demands on its practitioners to collect empirical needs-assessments data, to create or to adapt materials to meet specific needs identified and to cope with often unfamiliar matter and even language use (Belcher, 2004, p.31).

ESP can be described as a mixture of methods, strategies and techniques whose main goal is to offer a perspective over the content of the specialized register. Still, native speakers of English will have to accept accommodative techniques in their own interpersonal interactions with non-native speakers of English.

2. Problem Statement

The problem that arises is: what makes English for Specific Purposes so special and what is that makes the difference between ESP and General English? Hutchinson was asked: *What is the difference between the ESP and General English approach?* He answered: *In theory nothing, in practice a great deal* (Hutchinson, 1987, p.64). Most English as a Second Language students are young people who try to gain good command of English in order to use it as a communication channel, whereas English for Specific Purposes learners are usually adults who already have a good command of English. They learn English in order to be able to communicate in the specific technical register and to perform job-related tasks. In addition to that, in contrast with ESL, ESP focuses mainly on language patterns in specific contexts rather than on teaching grammar and language structures. ESP covers subjects ranging from Robotics or Aerospace Engineering to Medicine. However, as far as the interests and motivations of students are concerned, ESL and ESP diverge. All four language skills (Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing) are

trained equally in ESL classes, whereas in ESP classes a needs analysis that points out what skill is to be developed more should be done.

ESP has several features, as defined by some researchers (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p.18):

- customized to meet the specific needs of the learners;
- goal-directed;
- based on analysis of needs;
- refers strictly to the activities of the specific register that it deals with;
- centered not only on linguistic issues, such as grammar or vocabulary, but also focused on the skills required by the technical domain in which English is to be used;
- ESP students participate in intercultural communication and the development of intercultural competence.

Other studies (Robinson, 1991, p. 53), classified ESP in two categories: EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes). There is also a series of subcategories of EOP, such as *Business English*, *Professional English* (e.g. English for doctors, lawyers etc.) and *Vocational English* (e.g. English for aviation, tourism etc.) There is not a clear distinction between EAP and EOP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 90):

People can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up or returns to a job.

Table 01. EAP versus EOP

English for Academic Purposes	English for Occupational Purposes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. suitable for students; 2. teaching and learning processes are likely to be influenced by the syllabus designed for the courses; 3. uses English as a medium of training in the learners' study-related roles; 4. the learning process focuses on the language of academic performance. 5. English as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) – a language proficiency used to validate and utilize academic language. 6. Content-based 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. practised by workers; 2. teaching and learning processes are likely to be influenced by cross-cultural differences. 3. learners use English as a tool to communicate in their work. 4. The learning process focuses on the language of job performance. 5. English as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) – a language skill used to collaborate with co-workers. 6. Context-based

There seems to be general agreement that ESP teachers do not necessarily need expertise in a specific technical domain. Yet, they are required to meet two basic conditions: awareness and feel for a specific technical registry. Bell indicated the three C's to help ESP teachers enhance their knowledge and skills in a specific field of ESP: (Table 01).

- *Curiosity* – the ESP teachers should be interested in the subject area and want to learn more about specific topics;
- *Collaboration* – ESP teachers should ask for feedback from specialists;

- *Confidence* – will grow as ESP teachers are willing to analyze a new subject area. (Bell, 2002, p. 83)

Until recently, ESP courses were customized for intermediate or advanced adult learners. Nowadays, things have changed: most students begin practising academic or vocational English in middle school. This is because today ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines. In specific teaching situations, ESP may use a different methodology from the one used in General English, as long as it is in the learner's best interest.

Harding stressed the fact that general skills, such as those considered as applicable to General English, e.g. ability to communicate, pragmatism or use of authentic materials, are also suitable for ESP classes (Harding, 2007, p.47). Specifically, there is no need for ESP teachers to follow a course book strictly. They should consider their students' needs and comprehend the nature of their subject domain. ESP teachers should also identify students' language needs in relation to their area of interest.

Other aspects deal with the use of situations or texts from students' domain of interest, authenticity or the use of authentic materials so that students are motivated to interact in a proactive way and to understand the content of ESP classes.

One important aspect of a suitable ESP class development is the teachers' assumptions on the teaching stages that will be used as the foundation which later ESP classes will be developed on. As a consequence, these stages will give an appropriate outlook on the theoretical background and they will help decide upon the most correct methodology that should be applied. Needless to say, all assumptions made should take into consideration the specificity of each learner.

3. Research Questions

To understand the internal mechanism of ESP elaboration techniques, we need to ask ourselves which are the structures that form ESP and to recall the very beginning of ESP development approaches. Up to a point, they focused mainly on vocabulary, grammar and syntactical characteristics. In other words, they did nothing but follow the trends of that time. But it seemed that this particular kind of approach was going to no result, so specialists decided to put more emphasis on a more communicative and pragmatic basis. Therefore, more recent outlooks on cognitive studies have provided a more appropriate framework to apply the cognitive strategies that students use in order to acquire ESP notional content.

Five decades ago, Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964) introduced the concept of *register analysis*, which explains the proportion in which the language varies according to the type of speaker, the situation and the purpose for which it is used. Their approach had a very important aim: to highlight the grammatical and vocabulary characteristics of different registers of English, as in scientific, technical or academic English. Their works are considered to be an essential contribution to the consideration of ESP status as a new tendency in Applied Linguistics.

Bernard Barber (1962) had an important contribution to the design of ESP methodology, as his research focused on lexicology and structuralism. Herbert's *The Structure of Technical English* followed a functional notional approach based on lexis and syntax. Ewer and Lattore's *A Course in Basic Scientific English* (1969) focused on a more structuralist approach and analyzed items according to their frequency as well as systematic drills design.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to identify which methods would be the most viable in teaching ESP courses. We should start from the premises that students have already acquired notional content specific to the National Curriculum during their previous stages of education, hence the material to be presented in ESP classes should be graded in length and complexity. For example, some possible resources for technical texts might be textbooks, professional papers and articles, scientific dictionaries or even websites of transnational corporations. A principal criterion of selection can be represented by elements such as frequency or range, whilst others can be included for reasons such as their usefulness as describers or definers.

5. Research Methods

In the early steps of ESP development, traditional methods focused on language at the sentence level, whereas in the later stages, modern methods shifted the emphasis to the level above the sentence, analysing the way the combinations of sentences and phrases serve the speaker's purpose. At this stage, it is important to understand how specific linguistic features influence the type of statement made in each case and how these issues are combined in order to become understandable at a certain stage. Still, there have been debates on the specific features used in General English compared to ESP. For example, one could think of tense choice depending on the notion of time in General English, whereas in ESP they depend on the degree of generality. Researchers have tried to identify the organizational patterns in texts and the linguistic realisations by which tense patterns are used in ESP.

Paragraphs can be classified in two major types: the physical and the conceptual type (Trimble 1985, p. 38). Physical paragraphs are important up to a point, whereas conceptual ones contain general informative notions. Using specific rhetorical techniques, these notions can be combined into chunks of information within ESP discourse, according to several criteria: time, space, causality and result. Trimble's method has been closely related to Mann and Thomson's theories on rhetorical structures. Their opinion led to a choice of teaching materials based on discourse approach. This proved useful for students to recognize textual patterns and discourse markers.

Most papers on ESP can be divided in three categories:

1. Discussion papers related to the process of teaching, e.g. *ESP at Crossroads* by Hutchinson and Waters or *Teaching the Communicative Use of English* by Widdowson and Allan;
2. Papers that deal with the National Curricula, e.g. *How to Arm Your Students: A Consideration of Two Approaches to Providing Materials for ESP* by Phillips and Shettlesworth or *Further Notes on Developing an English Programme for Students of Science and Technology* by Ewer and Hughes-Davies (1971);
3. Papers containing mainly useful teaching materials and methodological hints e.g. *Writing Scientific English* by Swales (1977).

Most of these researchers have managed to demonstrate that there is a close relationship between research and methodology and they should be studied as a whole rather than considering them separate notions. This would be the starting point of a new approach, that is considering the student as the central axis of the needs and wants analysis process.

6. Findings

In the early steps of ESP development, traditional methods focused on language at the sentence level, whereas in the later stages, modern methods shifted the emphasis to the level above the sentence, analysing the way the combinations of sentences and phrases serve the speaker's purpose. At this stage, it is important to understand how specific linguistic features influence the type of statement made in each case and how these issues are combined in order to become understandable at a certain stage. Still, there have been debates on the specific features used in General English compared to ESP. For example, one could think of tense choice depending on the notion of time in General English, whereas in ESP they depend on the degree of generality. Researchers have tried to identify the organizational patterns in texts and the linguistic realisations by which tense patterns are used in ESP.

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7. Conclusion

To conclude, judging by the various aspects and approaches identified so far, we consider that ESP will be exposed to a continuous influence of several factors and trends. There is no doubt that ESP research and practice will boost interest in ESP in geographical areas where an increase in specialisation of ESP courses is highly required.

However, there seems to be a small delay between the rapid growth of ESP courses and the research in this domain. Hopefully, the development of ESP courses will determine an emphasis on innovation in the field of ESP research. In addition to this, areas of theory that have had a systematic influence on the development of ESP appear to have the same beneficial impact on ESP in the years to come.

It is our belief that learners will become more aware of the importance of ESP and understand that English has a major social component as a means of communication. If a personal opinion is allowed, then we consider that the ever-increasing use of English as a means of communication in interpersonal relationships between native and non-native speakers of English is likely to have a major impact and it will probably trigger an even more extended use of ESP programmes throughout the world.

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