Towards Developing ESP Materials for Polytechnics

Jalson Jacob
Assistant Professor of English
Govt Polytechnic College,
Vennikulam, Kerala, India

Abstract
It is an undeniable fact of the contemporary world that English has entrenched itself as the preferred language of international business, science, technology and communication. Hence it has become a "must tool" for modern job seekers. The success of the modern diploma engineering professionals depends to a great extent to their ease and fluency with the register specific to their profession. This need-based English study prompts us to an English language teaching environment where the possibilities of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum is effectively used so that the learners use English with ease at their workplaces. This study spells out what ESP is, the components of an ESP material and details the ideas to be borne in mind while developing an ESP material, especially for the diploma in engineering students.

Keywords: Lexical, Rhetoric Devices, ESP, Linguistic Approach, Linguistic Proficiency

Introduction
It is a matter of concern that even after a decade of English learning, students who pursue a diploma course lack the necessary language skills required of them. There are a number of factors which contribute to the lack of English proficiency among students. The English teacher is often beset with the problems of students' inadequate knowledge in English, lack of self-confidence, ineffective teaching-learning process, prejudices about language learning, lack of need-based learning materials and the like. The present scenario is such that the need for English has become manifold and it is high time teachers deliberate ways and methods to enable learners to use the language effectively and fruitfully at the workplace environment.

What is ESP?
ESP involves teaching and learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills to perform particular job-related functions. It is naturally seen as an "approach to language learning" which is primarily based on the workplace language requirements of the learner.

ESP concentrates more on language in context. Language used in a particular discipline is seen to be different from that of the other. The lexicon, syntax and content of articles relating to the Engineering field will have marked differences with those in the medical field. ESP's

main concern is to identify the lexical, grammatical and rhetorical elements of specific disciplines and equip the learners to use those specific language items with ease. "ESP course aims at preparing learners to perform a specific task or a set of tasks related to professional contexts" (Richards 33).

The 'S' in ESP

At first ESP was called 'English for Special Purposes' not 'Specific Purposes'. The change from English for Special Purposes to Specific Purposes was not accidental. English for Special purposes would rather remind one of the restricted or limited use of the language. When John Munby reframed the term, he was aware of the wide range to which this branch of ELT was put to use. People demanded specialised discourses that can be used for specific purposes, say workplace. This demand for 'mastering specific skills at the workplace' created an enormous pressure on content developers to develop courses primarily based on the needs of the workplace and universities and institutes rose up to offer these courses and this triggered the growth of English for Specific Purposes or ESP in short.

The word 'specific' in ESP refers to "specific in language'' and "specific in aim". But it is often construed that ESP teaches special languages different from that of General English. It is to be remembered that it is not any specialized language structures that ESP teaches, but language that is specifically used in particular contexts. Mackay and Mountford have stated:

> The only practical way in which we can understand the notion of special language is as a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well-defined context, tasks or vocation. On the other hand, a specialized aim refers to the purpose for which the learners learn a language, not the nature of the language they learn. Consequently, the focus of the word 'special' in ESP fell on the purpose for which the learners learn and not on the specific jargon or registers they learn. (Mackay and Mountford:4)

ESP Materials - Some Common Considerations

One effective way of developing the workplace linguistic proficiency among the diploma holders is to introduce them to the ESP syllabus. David Carter states that there are three features common to ESP courses: a) authentic material, b) purpose-related orientation, and c) self-direction

ESP scholars strongly support including authentic materials in ESP courses and consider them to be the most important characteristic feature of the same. This tendency towards supporting authentic materials comes from the fact that authentic materials expose learners to the real-world target language. Besides, authentic materials familiarize the learners with the different genres of the professional community to which the students aspire to belong.

Purpose related orientation refers to that aspect of ESP which emphasizes that the purpose of all activities and tasks in ESP should have an orientation towards the generation of language skills, especially that which is required for attaining the target. Carter cites student

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simulation of a conference, paper presentations, note taking, and writing as some of the activities which are used in ESP course.

The third characteristic of ESP course as stated by Carter is self-direction. To quote Carter, "…ESP is concerned with turning learners into users." In order to have a feeling of self-direction, the learners must have a certain degree of freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study" (134).

Nunan sums up these ideas and defines ESP syllabus design as consisting of the following elements:

- Needs analysis
- Goals and objectives
- Content specification
- Learning tasks and activities.

a) **Needs Analysis**

The centrality of needs analysis in the ESP curriculum has been acknowledged by prominent researchers like Munby (1978), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Berwick (1989), Brindley (1989), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), Hamp-Lyons (2001) and others.

Needs Analysis (NA) is considered to be a quintessential procedure for identifying the needs of the learner prior to the commencement of any ESP course. NA is often considered as the corner stone of any ESP course design because unless one gets familiarized with the needs of the learner, no effective course can be designed.

In the early 70s when ESP courses were starting to gain popularity, needs assessment was generally informal in nature and confined only to assessing the language requirements of the learners. It was mainly focused on determining the needs for which a particular learner or group of learners required language and on arranging the needs according to their priorities.

Ever since its evolution, needs analysis has been defined and interpreted in a number of ways. "Needs Analysis refers to the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students" (Brown 35).

b) Formulation of Objectives

Setting up of goals and objectives of the course are of paramount importance in an ESP syllabus design as they point to what the students are going to achieve at the end of the course. Besides, the course objectives provide a guideline for the teachers and students on what to expect from that language programme.

Kathleen Graves states that "goals are ways of putting into words the main purposes and intended outcome of the course while objectives are statements about how goals will be achieved. Goals and objectives should clearly portray what the students can realistically achieve within the constraints and resources of the course" (75). Goal is an umbrella term which encompasses the overall purpose of the course whereas objectives are 'learnable and teachable units' to achieve the goal.

To formulate correct goals and objectives of an ESP course one should find answers to what Hutchinson and Waters called 'language description'. The questions that comprise 'language description are 1) what topic areas will need to be covered? 2) What does the student need to learn? 3) What aspects of language will be needed? and 4) How will they be described? Finding the right answers to these questions help one frame the correct goals and objectives.

c) Content Specification

Content Specification involves content conceptualization and selecting and grading of the content. In any ESP programme, content gets special significance as it is seen as the vehicle by which language proficiency is acquired. The goals and objectives developed in accordance with the needs of the learners help one choose the right content.

Content conceptualization is determining which language items (vocabulary, functions, notions, grammar, language skills) are going to be given more importance and which aspect of ESP learning will be included in the content. Following features have to be considered while choosing the content.

c.1 Length: Contents which are shorter in length are seen to be effective than those which are lengthy. Terse and condensed materials help learners stay focused and are generally successful in maintaining the interest of them. Lengthy texts are seen to have a negative correlation with reading comprehension and fluency. It does not mean that complex and long texts are to be dispensed with. Based on the workplace requirements teachers should give training in comprehending and gaining control of long, complex texts by introducing them to the different reading strategies.

c.2 Density of Information: Subject matter content is fundamental to ESP materials. This content which is also called carrier content should provide "the learner with appropriate language knowledge to understand their discipline and establish their careers and successfully communicate with members of their discourse community" (Hyland 20). However care should be exercised while choosing this carrier content for if it is too dense with information it will add to the complexity and shift away from its intended objectives.

c.3 Materials: Material selection, adaptation and writing is of utmost importance in an ESP syllabus design because it determines what kind of language the learners will be exposed to and what they will learn out of it. Lewis and Hill put forward five considerations while selecting/developing materials. Materials should be 1) useful 2) interesting 3) relevant 4) prompt to study further 5) worth doing.

c.4 Self-Sufficiency: Content should make the learners autonomous i.e. learners should take control of their learning. If the content helps learners achieve the intended objectives without requiring additional materials outside the textbook, provides guidelines for the learners on what to learn and how to learn and encourages to take learning outside the classroom, the content is said to be self-sufficient.

c.5 Significance: Content is said to be significant if it reflects the aims, targets and objectives of the course, provides current and relevant information needed for the learner and has apt and precise concepts and coherent ideas.

d) Tasks and activities

Language learning activities in ESP should train the learners to handle those situations that they are likely to come across in their future professional environment. Most of the discourses that an engineer comes across will be through spoken and written mode.

Some of the characteristics of the learning activities in ESP are (a) It should be interesting, (b) It should suit the mental level of the learners (c) It should have a scope for building positive attitude, self-confidence and professional etiquette, (d) It should reflect the need of the learners.

Conclusion

Based on a brief overview of the basic characteristics of ESP material, it can be concluded that developing ESP materials is not an easy task. Whether to select ready-made texts available in the market or to develop materials for classroom use is still debatable. One common consensus is that any material which equips learners to use English with ease at the workplace and those that increase learners' interest in their studies can be used.

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