

GENERAL ENGLISH AND ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP)

Laimutė Kitkauskienė

Vilniaus Gedimino technikos universitetas, Saulėtekio al. 11, LT-10223 Vilnius

E-mail: vvka@vv.vtu.lt

Studies of the English language take place on different levels, in various settings and contexts. This article is an attempt to survey the link between two types of English – General and Specific – as much as they are involved in teaching English the students of a higher technical school. Recognizing the fact that teaching English is always based on the language skills acquired at a secondary school one must understand the necessity to make language a professionally oriented subject because it should help to build students' better professional skill as well as to contribute to their education as persons maturing active members of a society.

Keywords: ESP, communication, competence, curriculum, education, interdisciplinary subject, general language, professional/occupational needs.

Introduction

Nobody argues that language knowledge is very important nowadays. It is not only reliable basis for better communication. Today it is the source of technological progress as it enables rapid exchange of information and research of common global problems.

The development of language skills aims at active expansion of students' proficiency in English. Language classes at a higher school always make use of the texts of specific professional areas (architecture, business, civil engineering, electronics, environment, management, etc.). Such texts should usually be focused on the communicative needs of the students of a certain higher school. However, teaching/learning ESP includes much more than the teaching of English through specific material and content. Teaching ESP combines development of linguistic skills together with the acquisition of specific information. Even homework assignment should be associated both with the speciality and with the skills mentioned.

Active participation in various interdisciplinary cooperative programmes on the international level requires academic knowledge, scientific competence and objective evaluation of new ideas. The knowledge of English facilitates the access to the resources of new information. Students and teachers are given opportunities to study or to teach for some period at the most prominent schools abroad.

Teaching languages is aimed at raising the quality of language studies and of higher education as well.

Two Types of English

The division of the English language studies into two types requires careful scrutiny of the needs and interests of the learner. Traditionally a secondary school learner or even a college student does not think much of the way he is going to use his foreign language knowledge. He

realizes he needs this subject as it is included in the general curriculum and may become an important component when entering a higher school. On the other hand, general language teaching covers the teaching of the fundamentals of grammar, of expression as well as of phonetics and provides a stronger or weaker basis for possible later language studies. In any case the language teacher both at a secondary and at a higher school is in charge of the correct use of the language by its learners.

Teaching language for specific purposes is determined by different – professional/occupational, social and other – needs of the learner. Therefore English for specific purposes (ESP) includes specialized programmes which are designed to develop the communicative use of English in a specialized field of science, work or technology. To be able to speak on a professional subject is not enough to know general vocabulary. However, a great part of professional vocabulary consists of general words, which either have a shift of meaning or make a new unit, usually becoming a compound word or a combination of words.

In the case of ESP language teaching/learning is purposeful, i. e. predetermined by the need of the student not only to get familiarized with both the language of science and technology, thus with the English language of the subject he studies but also with the subject itself.

Making use of a foreign language the student acquires profound professional knowledge. So the language becomes a means of teaching profession and appears to be significant in the context of the professional world. Nowadays the student has access to the Internet, and the knowledge of English opens him the doors to getting global information and the exchange of the information on the items he is interested in. Therefore, teaching/learning ESP is said to be speciality-oriented as it is submitted to specific (professional) needs of the student. Specific skills come from the selected texts which present special vocabulary and show the richness of the language in that field. Thus, it is difficult to determine where language learning ends and where subject learning starts or vice versa.

On the other hand, language study at a higher technical school does not confirm itself as a discipline in its own. Language becomes an interdisciplinary subject, a kind of intermediary directed towards increasing one's professional career having in view of possible studies abroad according to a great variety of students' exchange programmes or in search of a job which gives satisfaction – the task not easily achieved under conditions of competition in the labour market.

If the student is aware of difficulties of communication he solves this problem by learning languages. In order to provide a proper and thorough foundation in the use of English for professional purposes it is necessary to revise and further develop the student's command of general English, particularly, for many different everyday uses of English. The student, of course, is expected to use English in his professional environment as well as in everyday situations. He must be able to take part in real life events – to ask questions and to answer them demonstrating his knowledge.

V. Cook asks "What does another language do?" And the answer is: "Learning another language makes people think more flexibly, increases language awareness and leads to better understanding of other cultures." (Cook 2001: 197). But this is one side of the matter. The other is that the person becomes competent in his professional field. Communicative competence is the term which "has come to be used in language teaching contexts to refer to the ability to convey the meaning to successfully combine a knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic rules in communicative interactions" (Savinton 1983: 123). H. Pham thinks that in order "to attain effective communication in international settings, non-native speakers must use linguistic and cultural norms which are mostly set by native speakers of English" (Pham 2001: 7).

Here we again approach to teaching the two types of English – the General and the Specific. Both of them develop one's ability to communicate in any form – oral or written. In both cases linguistic knowledge includes the correctness of grammatical structures, proper choice of words

and precision of their meaning. The primary goal in teaching ESP is to provide the student with practical use of English revising the knowledge built earlier. ESP concentrates not only on the recognition of particular structures of sentences or word combinations, but also on the choice of terms and meanings of words in different kinds of texts. Grammatical competence is the domain of linguistic studies proper, while specific competence includes interdisciplinary field together with the understanding of the particular context the language is used in.

Ann Johns states that while teaching English for Specific Purposes “all language teaching must be designed for the specific learning and language use purposes of identified groups of students” (Johns 1991: 67).

The specific needs of the subject content may not require grammar or phonetics but the latter are always integrated into the process of teaching as they make an important part of the conveyance of the meaning both of the entire utterance and of its separate parts.

What concerns discussions on the analyses of student needs, particularly related to learning interests, one must agree that “curricula should be based upon the most systematic accurate and empirical measures of students’ needs and of the language required by the tasks they must perform outside of the classroom” (Johns 1991: 67).

On the other hand, in order to proceed with day-to-day classroom work the teacher must understand the needs of the student and carefully examine them. There should be close cooperation between the language teacher and his students. Supervising the work of his group the teacher should give his students job satisfaction and organize his classes in such a way that it should be not only some new information but also a pleasant and amusing occupation, and it is not easily achieved.

M. Bojarová notices that sometimes happens that “a number of students tend to become complacent and play safe within a limited range of structure and vocabulary” (Bojarová 1998: 8). Such a situation is very unfavourable as it pre-

vents the student from active learning of the language. The teacher must make the student feel that language learning is “a never-ending process” (Bojarová 1998: 8) and the teacher is to move the student out of the dead point by all possible means (giving some interesting or more complex material for studies, assigning special tasks, etc.).

The student uses a specific language which is the general language with additional spices inherent to a professional language (unknown terms, new meanings of familiar words, some grammar structures peculiar to the language of science or technology, etc.). General English should not be opposed to ESP or vice versa. ESP always rests on the knowledge of general English. The latter is more devoted to learning grammar structures and general vocabulary. The first one aims at consolidating grammar, pronunciation and other skills and at acquisition of a specialized meaning of words in specific professional contexts.

Language teaching is of complex multifolded nature. Considering language is “the means for communication among members of a culture” we realize that it “is the most visible and available expression of the culture” (Brown 1994: 169).

However, the first thing the student is to do is to overcome the feeling of fear and shyness because of possible mistakes. Many a student still may feel like being at school, thus, they wait for the teacher’s instructions. Such students must learn how to learn language independently, that is how to study the language by oneself and become an independent learner. The language teacher should encourage the student to attend the classes and be active during them. Such activity is profitable as it makes him think and share his ideas expressing them in English. Only speaking he learns the language. The teacher must always stress “the need to develop “speakers” sense as communicators at a global level by adding an extra dimension (i. e. cultural awareness) to our communicative competence” (Sifakis and Sougari 2003: 64).

Developing linguistic skills responding to professional needs of the student the language teacher always deals with educational work as

he reflects his disposition and attitude to the problems and topics discussed during language classes.

Language learning humanizes student's activities developing his cognitive and social experience as well as his understanding of his own needs and preferences. Being a learning process it encourages him to seek and find ways how to connect what is in the book to what is in his mind, thus his creative thinking is being developed. The student is taught to extract new information from the text, to reveal his speaking skills on a given topic or to construct a presentation according to an assignment. Graduates of a higher school are expected to be competent users of English and later to be able to work at language studies independently.

Although teaching/learning ESP is related to professional training it also gives a lot of information on everyday life, on the culture of one's own or of other countries, development of new technologies in the field of studies, favourable or unfavourable situations there, etc. Familiarity with such items widens the insight of the student, forms his attitude to human – spiritual and moral – values, develops his intellectual skills and ability to think, makes him sensitive to cultural problems.

Education is always included in the curriculum of each school – be it comprehensive or specialized, secondary or higher. It means that education is a part of teaching which contributes to the quality of the result – it builds human personality making him an important member of the community. It is important to train a competitive, productive individual. However, it is no less important to form an individual which is participatory and open, compliant and self-confident, independently thinking and ready to help. Education builds the human being for the community. Even textbooks are compiled taking into account education. Education and training activities go together. It is impossible to separate activities associated with the development of language skills and acquisition of professional knowledge from educational goals.

Conclusions

1. The basic assumption is that professional language development is to be rooted in the curriculum based both on the knowledge stored earlier at a secondary school and on the needs and interests of the student at a higher school.
2. The aim of teaching ESP is to develop both linguistic and professional skills and/or abilities as well as knowledge and competence.
3. To achieve constructive results in teaching/learning ESP the classroom practice is oriented towards developing language skills.
4. Textbooks or texts selected should have special subject orientation. Task-based exercises should be constructed according to professional interests.

References

- Bojarova, M. 1998. *Issues in Practical English. Eltecs. The British Council*. Prague, May.
- Brown, H. D. 1994. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs N. J.: Prentice Hall Regents, 215.
- Cook, V. 2001. *Second language Learning and Language Teaching*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Johns, Ann M. 1991. "English for Specific Purposes (ESP)", in *Teaching English as a Second or a Foreign Language*. Boston, Massachusetts, Heinle and Heinle, 67–77.
- Pham, H. 2001. "A second look at the question of the ownership of English". *Teacher's Edition* (November): 4–10.
- Savington, S. J. 1983. *Communicative competence: Theory and Classroom Practice*. Massachusetts, etc. Addison – Wesley Publishing Company.
- Sifakis, N.; Sougari, A. 2003. "Facing the globalisation challenge in the realm of English language teaching". *Language and education* 17 (1): 59–71.

BENDRINĖ IR SPECIALYBĖS ANGLŲ KALBA

Laimutė Kitkauskienė

Anglų kalbos mokomasi įvairiais lygmenimis, skirtingoje aplinkoje ir bendruose ar profesiniuose kontekstuose. Šis straipsnis – tai bandymas aptarti sąsają dviejų anglų kalbos rūšių – bendrinės ir specialybės. Aukštosios technikos mokyklos studentai mokosi specialybės. Tai susiję su jų būsima specialybe ir darbu, baigus mokyklą. Todėl anglų kalbos mokymas yra orientuotas į profesiją. Pripažįstant tą faktą, kad kalbos mokymas aukštojoje mokykloje visuomet remiasi tais kalbos įgūdžiais, kurie įgyti vidurinėje mokykloje, suprantama, kodėl taip sunku mokytis specialybės anglų kalbos – studentas neturi pakankamai įgūdžių. Profesinė kalba padeda studentams įgyti geresnį profesinį meistriškumą ir prisideda prie jų asmenybės – būsimąjo visuomenės nario – lavinimo ir brandimo.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: specialybės anglų kalba, bendrinė kalba, bendravimas, profesiniai poreikiai, tarpdisciplininis dalykas, gebėjimas (mokėjimas), išsilavinimas.

Įteikta 2006-01-16; priimta 2006-02-22