



## On Specific Expertise in ESP Teaching: “Can-Do” and “Should-Do” Framework

Olga Medvedeva<sup>1</sup>, Larisa Uralova<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*Ever since English became universally acknowledged as a language of international professional exchange and cooperation, teaching it for specific purposes has been widely discussed by language specialists and educators, by learners, by education policy-makers and administrators. Although most professionals welcome the possibility to acquire a “specific purpose” language, there are controversial opinions about how to learn it, what kind of “facilitation” is required, whether it can be mastered independently, without a tutor, and what kind of expertise is expected from such tutors.*

*The aim of the article is three-fold. The authors present the research done among the students of the Law Faculty of Vilnius University, which was aimed at investigating the student’s perspective on the purpose and implementation of the course in legal English. The results of the research are used to show in which way ESP teachers can make teaching/learning process compliant with students’ professional needs. The last but not the least aim of the article is to demonstrate through thought-provoking examples how the linguistic competence of ESP teachers, which is viewed as a prerequisite for delivering a specific purpose language course, can be applied to foster learners’ cognitive and communication skills, as well as their awareness of cultural conventions and peculiarities that become a need of professional communication at the international level.*

*Keywords: ESP teacher, linguistic competence, student perspective, needs and rights, cognitive and communication skills*

### 1. Introduction

The defining features of ESP that are worldwide accepted by scholars and teachers of English today are as follows: the priority of needs and rights analysis, practice-oriented materials and specific teaching tools used in the classroom. The variable characteristics of ESP most often come to the fore when we consider the length of an ESP course, age of the students, their language competence in general English and their professional knowledge (see also [1]).

Different variants of ESP may be singled out when we take into account whether the course is designed as an integral part of an educational program at college/ university level or for using English in a specific professional situation. English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for occupational purposes (EOP) are the variants of ESP to meet the priority needs of these two groups of learners. The first group of learners rapidly grows in number, as more and more young people from non-English speaking countries come to big-name schools where the language of instruction is English. Another argument for teaching EAP is the dominance of English text in scientific and professional publications. The objectives of EAP may be textbook-reading, reviewing academic articles, creating texts of specific format, etc. English for occupational purposes would give priority to case study, role play, problem solution, different communicative skills, etc. When EAP is taught as part of a college program alongside with major courses for degree in sciences or humanities, close collaboration with professors of respective courses is a great asset (see more on CLIL and teaching legal English in [2]).

Most often the teaching / learning of ESP starts at the third level of education and continues as long as the person stays in his professional area; it may take on various modes and prioritize various skills, with differing intensity or focus. Thus, the ESP teacher should take for granted a vast diversity in ESP learners’ needs and preferences that often goes far beyond the standard language teacher training. The accessibility of ICT-assisted budget saving ways of learning languages as well as their enormous potential for meeting learner’s individual needs add to the success of autonomous mobile customized language learning, which seems to be in full compliance with the profile of today’s students and their learning preferences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vilnius University (Lithuania)

<sup>2</sup> Moscow State Linguistic University (The Russian Federation)

The aim of the article is to reflect on today's practice of ESP in several higher educational settings and to share ideas about the practical use of language teacher expertise in teaching English for specific purposes.

## 2. Learners' perspective on the course of legal English

The course of legal English at Vilnius University is an obligatory subject in the 2nd year-students' programme, it covers 96 face-to-face and 174 self-study hours. The collected data shows over 60 % of the respondents would prefer to have more face-to-face sessions; their principle argument is lack of other possibilities to use spoken language in professional context. Over 80 % of respondents stress the need to use the acquired language in the classroom in discussions, role-play, legal tasks solution and other speaking activities. The importance of writing is recognised by over 62 % of the respondents; most students view writing as a purely individual process, 54 % of the respondents rated the collaborative writing at "not useful", 12 % labelled it "a waste of time". Overall, the research shows that legal students evaluate the teacher - student contact as effective and expect the teacher's guidance and interaction in the process of ESP acquisition.

## 3. Specific expertise in ESP teaching

Teaching English for specific purposes requires implementation of certain specific objectives in the educational programme for teachers of foreign languages. The linguistic competence of a teacher who is a graduate in Foreign Languages is only a prerequisite for applying some of his professional knowledge in selecting the teaching materials for a specific course and profession-oriented exercises and assignments to be used in the classroom or outside it. We strongly believe that linguistic approach advocated here may be a powerful tool in developing not only ESP students' (traditional) language skills, but also to develop their cognitive abilities and their socio-cultural awareness in the professional context.

Since one of the distinguishing features of ESP is the specific vocabulary used in a certain domain of knowledge or occupation, in this article we will consider the possibilities and appropriateness of using the linguistic expertise specifically in this aspect of ESP teaching.

The concept of lexis is much bigger than the concept of vocabulary. When we speak about the lexis in ESP, we include single words, traditional typical collocations, fixed or semi-fixed units, that are used ready-made. The part of lexis for ESP that requires special treatment are traditional collocations and fixed/semi-fixed combinations.

Fixed word combinations in ESP are not that frequent but seem to be growing in number [3,4]. Semi-fixed combinations, as they are called in linguistics, are much more numerous and, which is more important, they easily become elements of certain terminological systems and are widely used in specialized texts. Many specialists working on standardization of terminology refer them to terms or terminological word combinations [5,6,7].

An ESP teacher, having a degree in linguistics, is well equipped to give his class the necessary linguistic information to facilitate the adequate understanding of structurally and semantically complex lexical units. They disclose a whole set of conceptual features that are necessary for a complete understanding of the concept that is represented not by a simple word, but by a combination of words. Therefore, including semi-fixed word combinations in teaching lexis for specific purposes adds to developing general cognitive abilities of students, which is an asset in itself. It gives a student a deeper insight into a specific phenomenon represented by the combination of words. This approach is of paramount importance when students have to deal with abstract notions, on the one hand, or with terminological word combinations where the components happen to be words of General English that the students know but in different meanings.

Listing their language needs, ESP students often name the ability to communicate with colleagues in an informal situation, that is, when people tend to use a lot of professionalisms that are not terms proper, but have specific functions in this type of communication. Some of them belong to the colloquial layer of language and are loaded with emotiveness and evaluation. They can make the process of communication on professional topics livelier and more effective; as an example, you may consider the communicative effect of such "banking" phrases as "*Bullets are better than revolvers*" or "*It's a wildcat scheme*".

Having sufficient linguistic expertise, the teacher is able to help ESP students comprehend and master semi-fixed and fixed combinations in specialized texts and professional communication by highlighting various ways of representing verbalized concepts, by describing productive syntactic structures, by explaining the semantics of English word combinations, and by revealing socio-cultural information comprised in word combinations.



The article format does not allow us to provide examples of all the above-mentioned “teaching” opportunities; let us describe in detail just a few.

The insight into the semantics of English word combinations enables students to get a deeper understanding of the expressed concept as the global meaning of the combination is not the simple total sum of the meanings of the word components. One (usually the first) component of the word combination may be used not only in its major or figurative meaning that ESP students may know from their general English. It can represent metaphorically a concept that is valid only for a specific science or a specific occupational situation. Both components may be metaphorically. Another possibility is transference of meaning through metaphor and other semantic mechanisms at the level of a word combination. ESP learners’ awareness of these semantic change possibilities in a word when it is used in word combinations may be and should be developed. It helps prevent misunderstanding conditioned by inter-language interference. It may also be a key to taking in all the aspects of the concept that is represented by a complex lexical unit in professional discourse. To illustrate, let us consider the phrase *balloon maturity* (a bank loan, usually a mortgage, requiring a large, lump sum payment at maturity). The meaning of the component “balloon” does not correspond to any of the denotation meanings of the word, the word is used metaphorically. The image of a balloon becomes the basis for the metaphoric representation of the overall character of payment which is effected only once but on a large scale. The same image with the same semantic result is used in *balloon loan*, *balloon interest*, *balloon mortgage*. The second components are used in their registered meanings for common terms in banking sphere.

When the meanings of the components are transferred to bring out some particular characteristics of the concept and do it in a very brief but memorable form, the cognitive abilities of learners become involved and make the process of understanding and learning such word combinations more interesting and effective. The teacher should encourage the students to guess the meaning of the combination, and only then consult a specialized dictionary.

It is worthwhile to spare some attention for another specific lexical part of the ESP course, the so-called recurrent (traditionally repeated) words and words combinations in professional discourse. We can do it on the example of one of the written forms of business contracts - a consulting agreement. A business contract of any kind nowadays is by far the only way to legitimize relations between business partners. Authentic consulting contracts may be applied as teaching materials in ESP courses for businessmen and lawyers.

A consulting agreement is a contract between a company and an individual (or a consulting company). As our observations have shown, though the number and the type of essential sections is practically the same in most contracts, there is no one and for all fixed position for them. That mostly depends on the cultural tradition in compiling official documents and also on the amount of the linguistic and specific knowledge of a compiler. English speaking businessmen from the UK and USA prefer a large-scale, detailed set of sections. They prefer agreements with standard sections, and only rarely include some particulars. That can be accounted for by keeping to a settled character and arrangement of contracts to avoid intercultural misunderstanding between the parties to agreement. The contract compilers prefer to operate with the inventory of language units that is traditionally fixed and is rightly understood by representatives of different cultures. See examples of specific language used in different sections of a contract: general provisions - *render services, take obligations, deemed valid*; term of contract - *to be in the effect, devote time and effort, commence services, for the moment of, in conjunction with*; compensation - *to reimburse the expenses, itemized written account, pursuant to the terms, upon presentation of*; confidentiality - *to divulge information, remedy at law*; cases of termination - *breach of agreement, valid subpoena, minor infractions, notwithstanding the foregoing*, etc. It is obvious that acquiring these language units should involve the comparison of linguistic means in different languages and broader socio-cultural information about the appropriateness of their use.

#### 4. Conclusions

The presented linguistic expertise-based approach in teaching ESP course can be summarized into the following:

1. Teaching ESP should be aimed not only at teaching English as a specific type of this language but as a means of ensuring professional competence.
2. ESP teachers should be ready to draw heavily from linguistics to develop students’ cognitive skills and language awareness that lead to deeper comprehension of complex concepts and raises the level of academic and professional development.



3. ESP course should be short on theory for students; the teaching time should go mostly to practical assignments based on typical occupational situations or true-life cases in which the students are personally involved.
4. Teaching ESP should be aimed at developing sociocultural competence that is one of the factors that guarantees success in professional communication.

## References

- [1] Dudley-Evans, T. et al. "Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multi-Disciplinary Approach", Cambridge: CUP, 1998
- [2] Liebenberg, E. "Reconciling Language Teaching and Legal Concepts", <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-165912638/reconciling-language-teaching-and-legal-concepts> (last assessed 10/09/2017)
- [3] Fedulenkova T. Idioms in Business English: Ways to Cross-cultural Awareness// Domain-specific English: textual practices across communities and classrooms/ Giuseppina Cortese and Philip Riley (ed.). Bern; Berlin; Frankfurt-am-Mein; New York; Oxford; Wien: Lang, 2002
- [4] Kamaidanova N., Totskiy E. Cognitive Aspect and Translation of Terms in a Special Text// Innovative Approach to training specialists in the age of Educational Globalization/ Proceedings of the 3-rd International Scientific Conference: Vladimir State University, Vladimir, 2013
- [5] Glaser R. Relations between Phraseology and Terminology in English for Specific Purposes// Linguistic Features and Genre Profiles of scientific English: Leipziger Fashsprachen-Studion, -- Band 9. – Frankfurt-am-Mein: Peter Lang, 1995
- [6] Dictionary of Banking terms by Thomas P. Fitch. Barron's, 1997
- [7] Longman Dictionary of Business English. J.H.Adam. Longman, Relod, 1993