

TEACHING ENGLISH FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES: GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE SYLLABUS DESIGN AND MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present important guidelines for the two basic elements of Business English teaching – syllabus design and development of teaching materials. We first discuss the importance of application of the recognized Business English (BE)/English for Specific Purposes (ESP) theoretical achievements in practical terms as a foundation for structuring syllabi and teaching materials. Then, we highlight the necessity to incorporate the corresponding language translations of terminology equivalents as well as corresponding cultural models of communication (Anglo-American vs. native). Consequently, we stress a great advantage of local textbooks over global world-wide applicable Business English textbooks. We also emphasize that it is important to design syllabi and materials in BE courses from the very beginning level to the most advanced one. Next, the “all inclusive” syllabus design principle should provide quality motivation of BE teaching concerning all language skills, communicative, scientific, functional and all other aspects of language learning at all levels. Since BE teaching and learning assumes correlation of the knowledge of the specific professional field and a foreign language, it is absolutely necessary to adjust curriculum of BE students to their professional/academic studies. Another guideline is that when preparing BE teaching materials, teachers and textbook writers should almost always use authentic sources of materials. Likewise, cooperation between linguists and experts from the particular professional field is required.

Key words: Business English, Syllabus Design, Materials Development, Teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to present some important guidelines for effective syllabus design and development of teaching materials – the two basic elements of Business English teaching. Their implementation is prerequisite condition for improving the quality and effectiveness of Business English learning and teaching.

This paper concentrates on guidelines for development of Business English syllabi and teaching materials because these segments are not only crucial, but they are segments

with the greatest need for theoretical and scientific intervention. The selection and treatment of the suggested guidelines presented in this summary are based upon theoretical English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Business English (BE) achievements and experience in ESP and BE teaching of the authors of this paper.

The guidelines for designing efficient BE syllabi and development of teaching materials presented in the paper are as follows; – BE teachers should:

- ✓ apply recognized BE/ESP theoretical achievements in practical terms
- ✓ incorporate translation segments and cultural models in BE/ESP teaching and learning
- ✓ use locally developed BE textbooks and other classroom materials
- ✓ develop BE courses at all levels of language learning
- ✓ implement the so called “all inclusive” syllabus design principle
- ✓ adjust the BE syllabus to learners’ professional academic studies
- ✓ give the priority to the selection of materials from authentic sources
- ✓ insist on the cooperation between linguists and experts from the particular professional field

2. APPLY RECOGNIZED BE/ESP THEORETICAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN PRACTICE

This guideline is based on application of recognized BE/ESP theoretical achievements in practical terms as a foundation for structuring syllabi and teaching materials. This means that BE syllabi designers and material developers have to be familiar with traditional and contemporary BE/ESP theoretical achievements in this field before they start their work on planning BE courses. Although this principle can be seen and understood as an implied BE training fact, it is not always the case that BE practitioners have thorough and wide knowledge of the matter before getting into practical BE activities. It is our opinion that obtaining good knowledge of recognized BE/ESP theoretical achievements (e.g. Hutchinson & Waters 1987, Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998, Ellis&Richards 1994, Nunan 1997, Gatehouse 2001, Nelson 1994) makes a crucial point of departure for any practical work.

The implementation of theoretical groundings implies the necessity for introduction of special BE/ESP teacher training programmes.

3. INCORPORATE TRANSLATION SEGMENTS AND CULTURAL MODELS

Unlike globalization tendencies in English Language Teaching (ELT) which have brought about the need to minimize the presence of translation as a part of syllabi and teaching materials (although this modern principle and approach can be justified in English for General Purposes /EGP/ field), it is an absolute necessity to incorporate translation segments in BE teaching and learning. This requirement is based on the specific features of professional/occupational English, in particular terminology and comparative cultural models in certain professional areas. The teaching and learning of terminology is almost impossible without translation and all accompanying problems, such as finding equivalent terms in L1 and L2 and treatment of anglicisms in the mother-tongue language. Translation is also inevitable for effective acquisition of cultural models implying the comparisons of L1 and L2 cultures.

In our opinion, this has been widely neglected by the contemporary theoretical considerations, although many authors, such as Jolly & Bolitho (1998:111) very clearly draw BE/ESP practitioners' attention to the so called "socio-cultural appropriacy".

4. USE LOCALLY DEVELOPED BE TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS

There are obvious advantages of locally developed BE textbooks and materials over global world-wide applicable BE textbooks and teaching materials. With all due respect for famous publishers of BE materials of unquestionably great quality standards, there is no way that these materials can meet the needs to include comparative culture insights and comparative terminology issues as crucial segments in BE teaching and learning. Therefore, locally developed syllabi and materials are a better option, of course, provided they satisfy high quality standards. Podromou (2002:25-33) suggests that there is also greater choice, freedom and scope for spontaneity when teachers develop their own materials.

5. DEVELOP BE COURSES AT ALL LEVELS OF LEARNING

The next important guideline to be applied in developing efficient BE syllabi and teaching materials is that each level of language learning, including the beginner and elementary ones, should be designed as BE. There are still a considerable number of BE

practitioners and theoreticians that will disagree with such a view. For a long time there has been a strong belief, and even a prejudice, with regard to the correlation between EGP and BE, that a prerequisite condition for BE learning was a very good grounding in EGP. This practically meant that BE students needed to attend a number of EGP courses before starting any BE courses. However, the practice of BE has proved not only the necessity for beginner and elementary BE courses, but the existence of unquestionable arguments for designing all level BE courses (Nelson 1994).

Clearly enough, the beginner and elementary levels, within BE syllabi and materials design, ask for special attention and carefully elaborated methodology.

6. IMPLEMENT THE “ALL INCLUSIVE” SYLLABUS DESIGN PRINCIPLE

When designing efficient BE syllabi and teaching materials it is important to follow the so called “all inclusive” principle. This principle assumes the involvement and combination of versatile language elements classified in both vertical and horizontal fashion. Vertical segmentation refers to all language skills included, whereas horizontal stratification relates to various segments of the BE concerned (a combination of EOP/EAP with the scientific part, communicative dimension and other aspects of language learning) depending on the level of study and concrete professional field. One of the additional purposes of this principle is to provide a greater motivation of BE students. A considerable number of BE materials concentrate on partial segments of BE materials development. Therefore, it is necessary to point out the need for “all inclusive” principles in development of efficient BE materials.

7. ADJUST THE BE SYLLABUS TO THE LEARNERS’ ACADEMIC STUDIES

Since BE teaching and learning processes assume a correlation of the knowledge of the professional field and BE language competence, it is necessary to adjust the curriculum of BE students to their professional academic studies (Edwards 2000).

Very few study programmes have BE courses throughout entire tertiary level education. Most of them have BE courses only at the first year or at the first two years of studies. In this way, the necessary correlation between BE and the knowledge of the

academic field concerned, as a prerequisite condition for effective BE learning and teaching, is not provided. Therefore, BE teachers should plead for an introduction of BE courses at senior years of professional academic studies if, for various reasons, it is not possible to incorporate BE at all years of academic education.

8. GIVE PRIORITY TO AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND COOPERATION WITH FIELD EXPERTS

Teaching foreign languages for general or specific/business purposes tends to show few results without providing real-life situations in the classroom. Carver (1983:131-137) states that there are three features common to ESP (and therefore to BE) courses: authentic materials, purpose-related orientation and self-direction. Therefore, when preparing BE teaching materials, the priority should be given to the selection of materials from authentic sources in the field of expertise, in addition to relevant pedagogic materials. This is the safest and most adequate approach for BE teachers since they are primarily linguists and not experts of the concrete professional field.

“The twinning process”, i.e. the cooperation between linguists and experts from the particular professional field should take various forms and stages, such as: course and syllabus planning, needs analysis, selection of materials, quantitative and qualitative selection of language skills and functions, decisions concerning the scope of terminology register, etc.

9. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we inquired into two very important segments of BE/ESP – syllabus design and materials development. They have been examined through the guidelines the authors of the paper provided as ground rules for BE teachers. But as Lynne Flowerdew mentions, “needs analysis, carried out to establish the “what” and the “how” of a course, is the first stage in ESP course development, followed by syllabus design, materials selection, methodology, assessment, and evaluation. However, these stages should not be seen as separate, proceeding in a linear fashion. Rather, as noted by Dudley - Evans and St John (1998) , they are interdependent overlapping activities in a cyclical process.” (Flowerdew 2013, 326)

Eventually, the authors of this paper suggest that these guidelines should be adopted as standards prescribed for BE syllabi design and materials development. However, it is

necessary to undertake more elaborate and thorough considerations of each individual guideline. They definitely deserve professional attention since they can significantly contribute to BE development in both, theoretical and practical terms.

Bibliography

Belcher, D. 2004. Trends in teaching English for specific purposes. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24: 165-186.

Carver, D. 1983. "Some Propositions about ESP". In the ESP Journal, 2.

Dudley-Evans, T. and St. John, M. J. 1998. *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Edwards, N. 2000. Language for business: Effective needs assessment, syllabus design and materials preparation in a practical ESP case study. *English for Specific Purposes*, 19 (3): 291-296.

Ellis, M. & Johnson, C. 1994. *Teaching Business English*. Oxford. OUP.

Flowerdew, L. 2013. "Needs analysis and Curriculum Development in ESP." *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*, 17. First Edition. Edited by Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Gatehouse, K. 2001. Key issues in English for Specific purposes (ESP) curriculum development. *Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VII, No. 10. <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse-ESP.html>

Graves, K. 2000. *Designing Language Courses: A guide for teachers*. Heinle & Heinle.

Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. 1987. *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johns, A. and Dudley-Evans, T. 2001. "English for specific purposes: International in scope, specific in purpose." *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(2): 297-314.

Jolly, D. & Bolitho, R. 1998. *A framework for material writing*. Cambridge. CUP.

Jordan, R. 1997. *English for Academic Purposes: A Guide and Resource Book for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nelson, M. 1994. *The Complete Business English Course Generator*. London, Media-Time Ltd.

Nunan, D. 1997. *Syllabus Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Podromou, L. 2002. "The Great ELT Textbook Debate". *MET*, 11(4)

Richards, J. 2001. *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Toms, C. 2004. General English coursebooks and their place in an ESAP programme. *Asian EFL Journal*. 6(1). http://www.asian-efljournal.com/04_ct.php