

The Role of Teaching Materials in the ESP Course: A Case of Business English (Finance and Economics)

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Abstract:

The present paper reviews the literature on the role of materials in the context of ESP. Hence, the true definition of ESP and its varieties are presented as well as the elements that are engaged in development or selection of teaching materials. Needs analysis as a major point is delineated in the following section and the distinctions between ESP and GE (General English courses) are defined. Eventually, the nature of materials is depicted through presenting necessary requirements and criteria for choosing, developing and using appropriate teaching material. In the end, materials in business English (finance and economics) are taken into account particularly and suggestions are made for business English courses.

Keywords: ESP, material, business English, finance, syllabus, needs analysis

1. English for specific purpose

1.1. Definition and background

After the end of World War II, the growth of scientific, technical, and economic activities in international scale shed more light on the necessity of learning and teaching English (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). According to them, “As English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language” (p. 6).

Different needs and interests among the learners affect their motivation for learning. The ever increasing demand for English courses aimed at specific needs led to the emergence of new ideas in the study of language. The purpose of linguistics, traditionally, had been to explain the rules of English usage while the new studies pay more attention to identifying ways of actual uses of language in real communications (Widdowson, 1978). This phenomenon, along with the new

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developments in educational psychology, paved the way for growth of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

According to Hutchinson, and Waters (1987) ESP is “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” (p. 19). By the 1980s, “in many parts of the world a “needs-based philosophy” emerged in language teaching, particularly in relation to ESP and vocationally oriented program design” (p. 51) (Brindley, 1984 as cited in Richards, 2001). Learner’s specific objectives and needs for example business English, news in English, medical English, legal English, tourism English, marketing English, and IT English has led to this definition of the term ESP (Hamp-Lyons, 2001).

ESP requires the careful research of pedagogical materials and activities for an identifiable group of adult learners within a specific learning context. Categories of ESP include various academic English courses, e.g. English for science and technology, English for graduate teaching assistants, and General English for academic purposes, in addition to a number of occupational English opportunities, e.g. English for business, and vocational ESL. Peter Strevens (cited in Dudley-Evans, & ST John, 2013), who throughout his life was instrumental in explaining and developing the movement, provided this extended definition and list of claims: “A definition of ESP needs to distinguish between four absolute and two variable characteristics:

I) Absolute characteristics: ESP consists of language teaching which is:

- designed to meet specified needs of the learner
- related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities
- centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse
- in contact with “General English”

II) Variable characteristics: ESP may be, but is not necessarily:

- restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only)
- not taught according to pre-ordained methodology

III) Claims: ESP claims to be:

- focused on the learner’s needs, wastes no time
- relevant to the learner
- successful in imparting learning
- more cost-effective than ‘General English’.

Anthony (1997) notes that there has been considerable recent debate about what ESP means despite the fact that it is an approach which has been widely used over the last three decades. At a 1997 Japan Conference on ESP, Dudley-Evans offered a modified definition. The revised definition he and St. John postulate is as follows:

I. Absolute Characteristics

- ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
- ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

II. Variable Characteristics

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students;
- Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners (1998, p. 4–5).

Dudley-Evans and St. John have removed the absolute characteristic that 'ESP is in contrast with General English' and added more variable characteristics. They assert that ESP is not necessarily related to a specific discipline. Furthermore, ESP is likely to be used with adult learners although it could be used with young adults in a secondary school setting. (Gatehouse, 2001).

As for a broader definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) theorize, “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning” (p. 19). Anthony (1997) notes that, it is not clear where ESP courses end and general English courses begin; numerous non-specialist ESL instructors use an ESP approach in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication.

1.2. Branches of ESP

It was mentioned earlier that one major development which contributed to the emergence of ESP was the fact that language education focused on the learners' needs. Considering the fact that learners in different fields had different needs, the field of ESP had to provide diverse courses for various groups of learners. Consequently, ESP had to be divided into different branches (Farhady, 1994). Strevens

formulated a taxonomy in which ESP is divided into two major branches: EST (English for science and technology) and English for other purposes. The former is the most prestigious development in ESP (Robinson, 1980). and in some countries, in fact, ESP means EST (Farhady, 1994). The latter category includes English for occupational purposes (EOP) and English for educational purposes (EEP). As far as the development of ESP is concerned, Farhady states that there are inconsistent views with regard to both theory and practice. He attributes these discrepancies to the fact that ESP has been treated independently of the evolutions in language education (Farhady, 1994). However, he states that a general trend of developments can be identified in ESP. These developments can be classified into three eras or generations of “register analysis”, “syntactic analysis”, and” discourse analysis”. It is possible to differentiate between general and specific purposes In each area of ESP teaching. Therefore, English for Academic Purposes, for example, can further be subdivided into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), e.g. English for academic writing or reading, and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), e.g. English for legal studies, etc. (Basturkman, 2010).

According to Swales (1985) English for Science and Technology (EST) is “the senior branch of ESP – senior in age, larger in volume of publications and greater in number of practitioners employed” (p. 98) as the main area in EAP. Other important specialisms, are English for Medical Purposes (EMP) and English for Legal Purposes (ELP). Fields such as business, finance, banking, economics and accounting have gained a lot of attention recently (Dudley-Evans and St John, 2009).

According to Basturkman (2010) English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which requires and also provides academic study needs for example English for business, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) consisting of trainings related to workplace and English for Professional Purposes (EPP) that incorporates teaching English to doctors and other identical occupations are three main areas of ESP teaching.

1.3. Evaluation in ESP

Assessment is a determining element in the ESP. As Robinson (1980) stated, “a component of ESP courses which has not yet been fully developed is that of testing and evaluation. Indeed, some proponents of ESP claim that testing is inappropriate” (p. 32). Tests for general purpose English are typically norm-referenced, whereas those for ESP are typically criterion-referenced. The attractions of criterion referenced approach are obvious. Skehen has reported that it is anchored in external factors, as is appropriate for any test of ESP, and makes a statement about what the candidate can do with language, rather than about how well he can take a test. In addition, there are no problems

with interpretation, since the only decision involved is whether a candidate passes or fails, and a pass means that the job involved, whatever it is, can be done. Theoretically, an ESP test would consist of performance in a real life situation. This is not normally practicable, so what is more common is simulated real-life performance.

In any case, “the main problem is to establish the major dimensions of language performance in ESP contexts and to elucidate the important language constructs that are involved” Widdowson (1998) and others would appear to agree with Ewer that ESP is ‘task- oriented’ and thus a student on an ESP course is tested when he is asked to perform the task for which the ESP course has prepared him (cited in Robinson, 1980). Swales’s definition of a task for ESP includes three specific ESP factors: (1) the fact that the activities are goal-directed; (2) the requirement that the activities are related to the acquisition of genre skills; and (3) that they are appropriate to a foreseen or emerging socio rhetorical situation (Swales, 1985). Swales has also demonstrated that “one of the relevant conditions of language use and learning is the interplay of text and task, whereby difficulty in the former is balanced by simplicity in the latter?” Other ESP course directors, for example, Higgins and Davis have found “the need for more explicit tests” (cited in Robinson, 1980).

More elaborate explanation comes from Hutchinson and Waters’ recognition of three basic types of assessment: “1. Placement tests, 2. Achievement tests, and 3. Proficiency tests” (Hutchinson, & Waters, 1987). Placement tests are used to ‘place’ learners in the ESP course most suited to their needs. It should show not just what the learner lacks, but also what potential for learning can be exploited in the ESP course. Achievement tests evaluate how well the learner is keeping up with the syllabus. And proficiency tests assess whether or not the student can cope with the demands of a particular situation, for example, study at a university or reading technical manuals. Hutchinson and Waters have more thoroughly described the situation: The ‘what’ of ESP course evaluation is concerned with assessing the extent to which the course satisfies two kinds of learners’ needs: their needs as language learners and their needs as language users. The ‘how’ of your test will depend on what suits your teaching situation best (Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. 1987).

2. Determining function of needs analysis in developing materials

The role of needs analysis receives more attention as the abovementioned factors need to be taken into account in order to select, design and use teaching materials. The major role of learners’ needs in designing a course/ syllabus is undeniable. Nation and Macalister (2010)

define curriculum design as the process which “involves the integration of knowledge” using various sources in Applied Linguistics; as such we may refer to researches on language acquisition, teaching methodology, assessing, language description and materials development. Bodegas (2007) in her article *from curriculum to syllabus design: The different stages to design a program* could come up with the following stages which are needed for a course design: shape of the syllabus, organizing the course, language testing and the materials. For an ESP course as Flowerdew (2012) notes, these stages are needs analysis, curriculum design, materials selection, methodology, assessment, and evaluation. According to the foregoing, the needs are determined in an ESP course.

Before the 1970s NA was generally very informal and little research was done as language teachers based their teaching on “some kind of intuitive or informal analysis of students’ needs” (West, 1994, p. 1). As an accurately done version of NA in the 1970s, Munby (1978) performed a detailed NA having a considerable impact with his instrument of reporting learners’ needs by making lists and ticking boxes. There is a shift in views from outsiders’ views (such as pre-experience learners and applied linguists) which as Long (2005) remarks “focused on the notions and functions supposedly required to satisfy various occupational language” (p. 21) to insiders’ views (such as experts of their domain who therefore have expert insider knowledge, for example, company employees in the target language situation), even though a large number of NAs continue to rely on the views of outsiders (Gilabert, 2005).

Since teachers and students’ interpretation of the appropriate strategies might differ, these needs may contradict with each other. West (1994) notes that NA emerged when grammar-based approaches to language learning was replaced by communicating approaches. As a result, the first step in designing and developing any syllabuses is identifying objectives which should be based on the learners’ needs. According to Brown (1995) NA “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 groups of students” (p. 35). He also believes that needs analysis is an “integral part of systematic curriculum building”, because when it is defined clearly, needs can be identified in terms of goals and objectives, which in return can help to develop materials, tests, teaching activities and evaluation strategies.

In order to decide what should be included in the syllabus, needs analysis must be performed at the start of the program. It is useful in that it provides information about the knowledge, needs, and wants of the learners. According to this Mackay and Mountford (1978) confirm that

all language programs should be developed for the specific needs of the learners. In this vein, a systematic analysis of these specific learning needs is a must for developing the content of a language program in line with learners' needs. Lepetit and Cichocki (2002) believe that needs analysis indicate how to design effective curricula. It also formulates an appropriate teaching program, teaching materials, and approaches. In this regard, Nation and Macalister (2010) emphasize the purpose of needs analysis as a means of examining what the learners know already and what they need to know which means that without NA preparing accessible resources for the learners can be difficult for the practitioners and may lead to developing it could inappropriate curricula.

According to Paci (2013) the purpose of NA is to gain information "about the learners' professional and linguistic backgrounds, their preferred learning styles, learning strategies, their motivation, and their willingness to attend classes, do homework, and commit themselves to learning" (p. 426). With regard to designing the syllabus and providing the quality teaching and materials for the intended setting "Learners' linguistic proficiency and the lack thereof are also very important" (p. 426).

With regard to the significant role of needs analysis in developing the curriculum, designing the syllabus and selecting the material Chostelidou (2011) also states that "Curriculum renewal or reform is most often introduced to realize expectations in terms of its potential to enhance the performance of students as a result of the shift in focus, the change of goals, content and teaching materials and methods" (p. 403). In this case a systematic evaluation of the implementation of the curriculum is required as Hopmann (2003) claims in order to indicate "whether or not the new curriculum has had the impact ascribed to it" (p. 111).

3. Materials in GE and ESP programs

Farhady (2006) believes that because ESP is a descendant of General Purpose English, it follows the trends of methodology in the language teaching field. The reasons why no methodology yet exists for ESP are (1) the failure of different methods of teaching when what to teach became more important than how to teach and (2) ESP teachers have been using the developing principles of EGP.

With regard to the differences between ESP and GE, technicality of lexicon has been considered as the main difference point (Farhady, 1994). Strevens (1980) believes that what leads to the comparison of ESP and GE is that ESP naturally depends on the needs of the learners. Furthermore, ESP as an approach to language teaching which is based on the learner needs is neither a certain type of language and

methodology, nor does it include specific kinds of material. It is an (Hutchinson, & Waters, 1987).

Widdowson (1983) asserts that: “General purpose English is no less specific and purposeful than ESP. What distinguishes them is the way in which the purpose is defined. ESP is essentially a training operation which enables the learners to cope with defined eventuality in future” (p. 5) in case of the characteristics of an ESP course which discriminates it from a GE course Strevens (1980) brings the following notions as ESP is:

- devised to meet the learner’s particular needs,
- related in themes and topics to designated occupation: or areas of study,
- selective (i.e. not ‘general) as to content,
- When indicated, restricted as to the language ‘skills’ included.

It is worth noting that “Successful performance of occupational and educational roles” (p. 427) is the main purpose of ESP courses. (Robinson, 1980). Accordingly drawing a vivid line between ESP and GE would be truly difficult. However, ESP is designed to pave the way for the learners for their occupational situations. Above all, GE deals with earlier steps of language learning whereas ESP is associated with later ones. In the case that GE make a path for the learners in their ESP program (Farhady, H. ,1994). ESP and GE have defined the same role for the teachers which is identifying learners’ current language level, selecting appropriate materials and assigning suitable tasks and, setting course objectives and devising course program. (Zhu, & Liao, 2008).

With regard to the significance of teaching materials in the context of ESP, Lan et al. (2011) showed that English courses for the workplace provided by the university should include learning and teaching materials for speaking and writing skills otherwise the learners would face dramatic problems in producing the language in case they do not gain the appropriate materials and texts.

4. Teaching materials in ESP

The materials of an ESP course are developed and designed when the needs analysis is carried out and the syllabus is designed accordingly. Learners’ needs play the most important role in selection and development of the materials. Throughout the literature there are examples of ineffective or unidentifiable teaching materials. For example Tok (2010) discovered that the tasks and materials are of no significance with regard to learners’ needs and objectives nor are they communicatively effective. According to Farhady (2006) the quality of instruction that the learners receive in teaching is influenced by learners’

perceptions of the course and its objectives, their preferred activity types and their preferences consequently the context which covers all different facets of the course in which the objectives are achieved will change.

The importance and significance of teaching Materials in ESP and how much attention they have received is undeniable throughout the literature. According to Hyland (2006) teaching materials depend on the methodologies adopted, forming with them “the interface between teaching and learning, or the points at which the course needs, objectives and syllabuses are made tangible to both learners and teachers” (p. 89). Design and adaptation of teaching Materials are essential facets of every ESP program because they both stimulate and support language instruction. The role of teaching in ESP context is particularly a provider of materials who tries to select available materials or seeks to adapt the existing teaching materials when necessary and supplementing it where it does not quite meet the learners’ needs.

Although the main teaching materials are commonly paper-based, practitioners implement visual aids, projectors, smart board, computer/internet and real objects for presentation and giving instruction (Hyland, 2006). According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) teaching materials are used:

1. as a source of language
2. as learning support
3. for motivation and stimulation
4. for reference

According to Offord-Gray and Aldred (1998) “the course materials need to go beyond making the language explicit but provide a means by which learners can engage in a process of reconstruction” (p. 149). The adaptation of the teaching materials takes place through *deleting, adding, modifying, reordering, simplifying* (McDonough and Shaw, 2012). These materials are usually reading tasks which are imbued with various blocking words, unidentifiable materials according to learners’ needs, exceedingly easy reading comprehension questions, irrelevant subject matters based on students’ age, time consuming material, inappropriate ESP materials and unclear grammatical structures.

Materials are central point of teaching. Offord-Gray and Aldred (1998) assert that the organization and the content of the educational materials need to be sensitive to learners’ preceding learning experience. For many of the learners, the methodology of the course materials represented a shift from an essentially product-focused approach to a more process orientation.

Lesiak-Bielawska (2015) believe that “Materials play an important role in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and

materials writing is an indispensable element of ESP practice”(1).That is why Hutchinson and Waters (2010) maintain that it is an established tradition which helps ESP teachers develop in-house teaching materials which commonly aim at the students of a specific institution. Teaching materials of an ESP program must be tightly related to learners’ target needs because the very goal of this program is to expose learners to authentic language the way it is used in academic contexts.

With regard to the role of teaching materials in an EAP context Hyland (2006) outlines four major functions:

1. Materials help students with comprehension of language use. In other words, materials support students’ developing control of various texts and involve them in thinking about and using the language. Students can get familiar with different language samples using and being exposed to well-selected and designed materials. They can have the chance to communicate and decipher salient linguistic structures using these teaching materials.

2. Materials function as models because of their representative samples of appropriate language use in different contexts. Learners can investigate different possible instances of a genre considering identification of their structure and comprehending their conveyed meaning.

3. Stimulus materials are texts that consist of a wide range of media such as video, graphic or audio materials, items of Realia, computer- and/or Internet-mediated resources, lectures, etc. They stimulate students’ creativity, planning and engagement with others. While explicit materials, for example a lecture recording, can motivate language use in a considerably structured way, less explicit materials for instance Lego bricks help learners to produce divergent responses.

4. ESP materials eventually consist of reference materials, which emphasize knowledge rather than practice in opposition to materials used for scaffolding and modeling. These materials include texts or Web based information, dictionaries, encyclopedias, explanations, examples of relevant grammatical, stylistic and rhetorical forms and give the learners self-study experience. University websites can be another source for these kinds of materials which can come in tips on academic writing, or in different ESP or EAP textbooks.

According to Robinson (1991), authenticity is the principal facet in development and selection of ESP materials. Teaching materials must be clearly in line with learners’ objectives and needs which in turn

requires the activities and tasks be genuine. An important characteristic of ESP materials, which is of great significance within communicative approach, and which seems of particular relevance for ESP, is that of authenticity. Richards (2001b) believes the role of Authentic material is twofold; to build necessary communication context in the teaching context and to simulate the communication existing in the real world to a considerable extent.

Basturkmen (2010) believes that use of authentic teaching materials is one of the key features of ESP programs which the practitioners should bear in mind. Authentic texts and tasks as Robinson (1991) denotes ranges from available materials to the ESP teacher which are not developed for teaching the language, to normal materials students use in workplace or academic settings. Finding authentic texts is not an easy task since these materials as Graves (2000) maintains are not “constructed to contain the aspects of language the learner has encountered or learned until that point and so they may not be entirely accessible to the learner” (156). Additionally authentic texts are not always necessary or even realistic, they might be even a “burden for teachers” (Richards, 2001a).

Specificity is other main characteristics of ESP materials. Lesiak-Bielawska (2015) believe that “since ESP focuses on specific, purposeful uses of language, it is common practice that materials designed for teaching ESP are directly targeted at a particular learner group and/or related to their reality” (7). This is why materials developers are required to “determine particular features of the target language that should be taught to a particular learner or learner group”.

Barnard and Zemach (2003) believe that type of institution, educational atmosphere, context of the class, use of technology, qualities of the learners, group make-up and qualities of the teacher must be considered with regard to development of ESP materials because of their indispensable influence on the teaching materials. Whether the ESP materials are designed or selected they are a reflection of teacher’s insight into the nature of the language and learning.

Lesiak-Bielawska (2015) maintains that for ... developing or choosing a set of materials for an ESP class, teachers make conscious or sub-conscious statements related to what according to them language learning is and how they feel about the learning process. Thus the conviction that organizing language teaching around such categories as language functions serves learners best will result in an approach that underscores the matching of selected language functions to various communicative purposes. (7)

Accordingly, developing an ESP course – Business English (Finance and Economics)– for instance, the practitioner or the material developer might implement the texts compiled by finance and

economics teachers for the sake of presenting business concepts and information. The materials can also be taken from any article related to business written by experts of finance and economics. Tasks replicating assignments permit the practitioners to exploit these teaching materials in the educational context or even in the workplace.

Wide angled course, according to Basturkmen (2010) emphasizes a set of generic skills in an area such as Business English skills. While narrow angled courses are provided for particular learners whose aims converge. These classes can consist of English for Logistics, and English for Accountants.

5. A Business English course materials

According to the points delineated throughout this review the following course books are suggested as models of teaching materials which can assist syllabus designers, material developers and ESP practitioners in order to define a fixed framework for the business English courses. Accounting major - as a branch of business - according to the definition given by University of Chicago is

The study of an organization's financial information, accounting is often referred to as the language of business. An organization's financial performance and health are reflected in its balance sheet and income statement. (para. 1)

Graduates of Accounting are then supposed to be able to quantifiably evaluate how choices are affected by incentives and resources when they are given a framework. With this regard one comprehensive reference book for Business English course is "Professional English in Use Finance" by Ian MacKenzie (2006). Based on the details that the publisher, Cambridge University Press, reveals this book is useful for students at intermediate level of English and above. This book consists of fifty units on terminologies of accounting and finance. It's noteworthy that a number of financial idioms and metaphors are also covered throughout this volume.

The publisher claims this book can be used as a course book in the class however more the structure makes it a perfect reference book for self-study. The main sections of this book are as follow:

- Basic terms
- Accounting'
- Banking
- Corporate finance
- Economics and trade

Each unit is consisting of three (or two) sections – A, B and C. The language is presented, practiced and activated through these three sections.

The book includes various terminologies in finance which can equip the learners with the right tool for communication. There are 'Over to you' activities which help students to activate the vocabulary items through using them. The book ends in a language section which presents more activities.

Oxford university press published the book *Business Result* in six levels. The publisher also claims that these books provide the students the communicative tasks so as to furnish them with the required skills for communication at work. The communication skills that this book usually emphasizes assist learners to get prepared for real-world situations. Unlike Cambridge's course book, Oxford has equipped the book with video clips for every unit which includes documentary movies, genuine interviews and dramatized scenarios presenting business communication skills. The publisher claims that this book is truly Practical and present functional language in a work-related context. In addition, "Real-world case studies offer authentic and engaging insights into key business issues" (para 1).

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