A GENERAL VIEW ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESP AND EGP

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Abstract: The present study is an attempt to inquire succinctly into the relationship between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP). In particular, the general purposes as well as their distinctive features are elaborated upon and examined. The points of contrast leading to the emphatic separation of these two language varieties sometimes occur because of inadequate descriptions or definitions. The aim of this paper is to draw a parallel between ESP and EGP in order to present their common and specific characteristics.

Key words: ESP, EGP, common features, distinctive features

1. Introduction

We have to admit that the study of the English language is very important nowadays. It is the basis for better communication between people either specialists or not. Today English is the channel for technical progress as it enables the rapid exchange of information and research of the common global problems. Any specialist of any science field should properly use both ESP and EGP in order to communicate any specialized and non- specialized subject for professionally-oriented activities.

2. Definition and Distinctive Features

The definitions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as conceptual term appeared in the literature only in the 1960s. Hutchinson and Waters (cf. 1987, p.19) define ESP as an "approach" rather than a product, meaning that ESP does not involve a particular type of language, teaching materials or methodology.

Peter Strevens (cf.1988, p.1-2) defines English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by making a distinction between its absolute and its variable characteristics. He considers as absolute characteristics the following. ESP –the English language teaching is:

- designed to meet specified needs of the learner;
- related in content (i.e. themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
- centred on the language appropriate for those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse and semantics;
- in contrast with General English.

According to Peter Strevens (cf.1988) the variable characteristics of ESP may be:

- restriction to the language skills to be learned (reading only);
- use of no teaching methodology.

Robinson (cf. 1991) defines ESP on the basis of two criteria:
1. ESP is normally "goal-directed" and
2. ESP courses develop from a needs analysis which aims to specify what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English, and from a number of characteristics which explain that ESP courses are generally constrained by a limited period of time in which their objectives have to be achieved and taught to adults in homogenous classes in terms of the work or specialist studies.

Strevens' (cf.1988) definition with reference to the course content may confirm the impression held by many teachers that ESP is always and necessarily related to the subject content. Robinson's (cf. 1991) definition with reference to the homogenous classes may lead to the same conclusion. We have to admit that much of ESP is based on the idea of a common-core of language and skills belonging to all academic disciplines or cutting across the whole business activity.

Dudley-Evans, T. & St. John, M.J. (cf. 1998) offer a modified definition and express their revised view on the essence of ESP from two perspectives: absolute characteristics and variable characteristics. According to them the absolute characteristics are:

- ESP meets the learner's specific needs;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
- ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse, and genres appropriate for these activities

They consider as variable characteristics the following:

- ESP may be related or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate and advanced learners.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (cf. 1998) 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. The range of ESP has been extended and become more flexible in the modified description.

Anthony (cf.1997) notes that, it is not clear where ESP courses end and general English courses begin; numerous non-specialist EGP instructors use an ESP approach in that their syllabi are based on the analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication.

ESP is a course within the wider professional framework of the English language teaching (ELT), with implications for the design of syllabus and materials as well as its presentation and then evaluation.

English for General Purposes (EGP) refers to contexts such as the school where needs cannot be readily specified. It is more useful to consider EGP providing a broad foundation rather than a detailed and selective specification of goals like ESP. (Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. 1987, p 53-54).

Aside from the rough separation at the definition level there is an overlapping connection and proportion between them. In order to clarify their relation Widdowson (1983) establishes distinctive features of ESP and EGP.

The most important EGP features are:
1. the focus is often on education;
2. as the learners' future needs are impossible to predict, the course content is more difficult to select;
3. due to the above point it is important for the content in the syllabus to have a high surrender value.

The most relevant ESP features are:
1. the focus is on training;
2. as English is intended to be used in specific vocational contexts, the selection of the appropriate content is easier;
3. it is important for the content in the syllabus to have a high surrender value, most relevant to the vocational context;
4. the aim may be to create a restricted English competence.

Surrender value stands for the overall utility (value) of the English taught by a specific course, the higher the surrender value, the greater the utility of the English taught. These distinctive features reveal the true nature of EGP and ESP.

3. The learners and their purposes

The learners and their purposes for learning English constitute the major difference between ESP and EGP. ESP learners are usually adults, who are familiar with the English language. ESP learners are highly motivated because their needs are catered to. They are learning the language in order to communicate professional information and to perform some particular, job-related functions.

In ESP course, it is needs analysis that determines which language skills are useful for the learners to be able to accomplish certain professional tasks (e g. for a tourist guide, courses should be focused on the speaking skills).

ESP courses are centred on the context. The English language is taught as a subject related to the learners' real needs and wishes in a particular field of human activity. The English language is usable immediately in the employment context. The learners are highly motivated as they are aware of their specific purposes for learning English. (cf. Chris Wright, 1992)

The age of EGP learners varies from children to adults and learning the English language is the subject of the courses. EGP courses are mostly focused on grammar, language structure and general vocabulary. EGP courses are responsible to the general language acquisition and, for the vast majority of learners, they are extremely

useful. EGP helps students to cope with any subject-matter course. It gives them the ability to generate more language. EGP learners, if well-taught, can use English to cope with the language in any undefined tasks. EGP courses deal with many different topics and each of the four skills is equally treated. Due to the   general nature of these courses no needs analysis is conducted.

4. Conclusion

It is hard to draw a clear line where EGP courses stop and ESP courses start, we use such labels as Business English, or Medical English to distinguish between ESP and EGP. We consider that the two are highly interrelated. One may ask "What is the difference between the ESP and General English approach?" Hutchinson et al. (1987, p.53) answer this quite simply, "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal". When their book was written, of course, the last statement was quite true. At the time, teachers of General English courses, while acknowledging that students had a specific purpose for studying English, would rarely conduct a needs analysis to find out what was necessary to actually achieve it. Teachers nowadays, however, are much more aware of the importance of needs analysis, and materials writers think very carefully about the goals of learners at all stages of materials production. Perhaps this demonstrates the influence that the ESP approach has had on English teaching in general. Clearly the line where General English courses stop and ESP courses start has become very vague indeed.

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