Emergence of English for Specific Purposes

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Introduction

The present day world is a world of specializations. Fracturing, deconstructing, and generating knowledge are some of the practices that we find in the sphere of sporadic knowledge explosion. Mad with the phobia of specialties, learning language also has got some vibrant attitudinal changes in the critical pedagogy. We have many abbreviations that are growing in currency for labeling the current practice of teaching-learning the English language. Purposes and ideological intentions of learning languages have undergone wide peripheral changes. It is in this context the paper examines the emergence of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

What is ESP?

In English for Specific Purposes, the purpose for learning the language is paramount and the curriculum is designed to meet the specific needs of the learner. All the definitions on ESP have two elements in common: the sense of purpose and the sense of vocation. It is axiomatic that in ESP the practical application of language for a specific vocational purpose overrides the other aspects of language learning. This sense of purpose gives language learning an immediacy and relevance that is absent in 'General English' learning. The widespread growth of the English language and its diversity of usage in various countries and in various vocations have shaped up the dynamics of ESP into a comprehensive and universal entity.

ESP is an ever evolving phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends all over the world. The emergence of ESP can be attributed to the following trends:

1. The Demands of the 'Flat World' (Friedman, 8)
2. An Evolution in Linguistics
3. Focus on the Learner

The Demands of the 'Flat World'

The end of the Second World War witnessed an unprecedented expansion in science and technology all over the world. This expansion created a unified world dominated by two entities – scientific technology and commerce. There was a strong need for a truly global language for both these entities to grow at a rapid pace. The demands of the 'Flat World' are aplenty and those demands can be met only with the help of an international language. The following reason could be attributed to the global spread of English: the superlative economic growth of the Unites States, the dawn of the computer age, and the shift towards a global free trade policy. The effect of all these influences created a whole new world of people who wanted to learn English, not for the pleasure or prestige of learning the language, but because English was the key to the developments in technology and commerce. As English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, it created a new generation of learners, who were seen to have different needs and interests that were more specific to their vocations. It was understood that the specific needs and interests of these learners would have an important influence on their motivation to learn.

Linguistic Evolution of ESP

Register Analysis

In the 1960s and 1970s, ESP was at its developmental stage and many linguistic theories evolved from the works of Jack Ewer, Peter Strevens and John Swales. According to them, analyzing the registers of different areas of specialization like, Electrical Engineering, Information Technology, and Mechanical Engineering helped to identify the grammatical and lexical features of those registers. Teaching materials for different areas of specializations were developed based on those linguistic features. A good example for such a syllabus is that of *A Course in Basic Scientific English* by Ewer and Latorre, 1969 (Hutchinson, 10). The

aim was to produce a syllabus which gave high priority to the language forms students would meet in their specialized area of study and in turn would give low priority to forms they would not meet.

Rhetorical Analysis

Register analysis focused on sentence grammar, but then attention shifted to discourse. The concern of research therefore was to identify the organizational patterns in texts and to specify linguistic means by which these patterns are signaled. These patterns can then form the syllabus of the ESP course. The Rhetorical Process Chart from *EST: A Discourse Approach by Louis Trimble* (Hutchinson, 11) is representative of this approach:

EST Rhetorical Process Chart

Level	*Description of level*
A.	The objectives of the total discourse EXAMPLES: 1. Detailing an experiment 2. Making a recommendation 3. Presenting new hypothesis or theory 4. Presenting other types of EST information
B.	The general rhetorical functions that develop the objectives Level A EXAMPLES: 1. Stating purpose 2. Reporting past research 3. Stating the problem 4. Presenting information on apparatus used in an experiment – a) Description b) Operation 5. Presenting information on experimental procedures

C.   The specific rhetorical functions that develop the general rhetorical functions of Level B

        EXAMPLES: 1. Description: physical, function, and process
                   2. Definition
                   3. Classification
                   4. Instructions
                   5. Visual – verbal relationships

D.   The rhetorical techniques that provide relationships within and between the rhetorical units of Level C

        EXAMPLES: I. Orders
                      1. Time order
                      2. Space order
                      3. Causality and result

                   II. Patterns
                      1. Causality and result
                      2. Order of importance
                      3. Comparison and contrast
                      4. Analogy
                      5. Exemplification
                      6. Illustration

As in the first Stage, there was an implicit assumption in this approach that the rhetorical patterns of text differed significantly among the specialized areas of use. For example, the rhetorical structure of commerce texts was regarded as different from that of science texts.

Target Situational Analysis

The objective of an ESP course is to enable learners to function adequately in the target situation. The target situation is the scenario in which the learners would most likely use the language. In such a situation, the ESP course design process should begin by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the discourse features of that situation. The identified features will form the syllabus of the ESP course. This process is usually known as Needs Analysis or Target Situation Analysis. The most thorough explanation of target situation analysis is the system set out by John Munby in *Communicative Syllabus Design*, 1978 (Hutchinson, 12). The Munby model produces a detailed profile of the learners' needs in terms of communication purposes, communicative setting, the means of communication, language skills, functions, and structures. Target Situational Analysis is another step in the development of English for Specific Purposes.

Skills-Centered Approach

The skills-centered approach is a response to the idea of having specific registers of English as a basis for ESP and the constraints of time and resources. The principal idea behind this approach is that to use language in specific situations learners need to develop certain skills and strategies that the learners use to produce or comprehend discourse. As different learners require different skills, an attempt is made to restrict the learning process to specific skills. The skills-centered approach is more focused and it also restricts the objectives of an ESP course. This approach could not meet the demands of ESP.

Focus on Learner

In all the stages outlined above, the focus is on the language used in specific situations. All the stages try to explore what people do with language in particular contexts. But our concern in ESP is not with language use – although this will help to define the course objectives, our concern is with the learner and the needs of the learner. ESP as an approach brought about a paradigm shift in ELT and this paved way to the birth of a learner-centered approach. The focus now is not on how you teach but on how you enable the learner to learn. The following are the characteristics of the learner-centered approach:

1) Learners are informed about how they are learning and what they are learning.

2) Learners are encouraged to take responsibility of their learning.

3) Collaboration among learners is encouraged.

4) Learners are provided with self-reflection opportunities.

5) Learner-centered approach uses relevant and meaningful content and real-life scenarios to engage the learners.

6) Learner-centered approach responds to the individual needs of the learners.

7) Learners are provided a multi-sensory learning experience.

8) Learner-centered approach promotes critically thinking.

Conclusion

Today, English for Specific Purpose involves multidimensional pedagogical strategies that include using communicative approach, learner-centeredness, lesson planning, blended learning, and differentiated learning. There is focus on both the content and the strategies. Now, the need of the hour is to develop content that is relevant and meaningful to the learner. Learners should be able to relate to the textbooks and supplementary materials. When ESP textbooks are far removed from the culture of the culture of the learner, they give the feeling of getting into a 'plastic world' without any sense of emotional attachment. Real-life scenarios based on the cultural background of the learner increase engagement and improve outcomes. The evolution of ESP has reached a point where content-specific textbooks and supplementary materials should integrate the content that is culturally relevant and use multidimensional pedagogical strategies.

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