

Relevance of English to Technical Courses: English for Specific Purposes and Multiple Intelligences

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Abstract

In the early stages of development of society, education was imparted in an informal way by interacting with fellow beings, internalizing the behavioural patterns of others and understanding and interacting with environment. As experiences accumulated and the knowledge of social and natural phenomenon grew, institutional arrangements were made to pass on this accumulated knowledge to the future generations of technical courses. The institutional arrangement helps people to acquire the accumulated knowledge and benefit them from past experience through English Language for Specific Purposes (ESP). While applying this knowledge to real life situations, they develop capabilities to observe facts, interpret and reflect on these. In this process people also generate new knowledge.

Formerly, standing for English for specific purposes is the term that is now used by an increasing number of scholars' practitioners and institutions in English for specific purposes. The latter is preferred as the term 'special' implies a special language that is different from general English Language Teaching only because it is characterized by a set of specialized lexis and syntax specific to a particular subject or occupational role. English for the specific purposes on the other hand focused attention on the purpose of the learner and refers to whole range of language resources. English for Specific Purposes refers to a specific aim and not a special language.

English for Specific Purposes

According to Hutchinson and Waters the second key reason cited as having a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics. Whereas traditional linguists set out to describe the features of language, revolutionary pioneers in linguistics began to focus on the ways in which language is used in real communication. Hutchinson points out that the one significant discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary. In other words, given the particular context in which English is used, the variant of English will change. This idea was taken one step farther. If language in different situations varies, then tailoring language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is also possible. Hence, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s there were many attempts to describe English for Science and Technology (EST). Hutchinson and waters also said the emergence of ESP has less to do with linguistics and everything to do psychology. As per Strevens' definition, makes a distinction between for absolute and two variable characteristics. According to Anthony 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. Dudley – Evans offered a modified definition on ESP at a 1997 Japan conference: ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner.

The Origins of English for Specific Purposes

As for a broader definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters theories, “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. An ESP approaches in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication. The language used by air traffic controllers or by waiters are examples of English as a restricted language and language with this statement:

The second type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English for Academic and occupational purposes. In the ‘Tree if ELT’ ESP is broken down into three branches: a) English for Science and Technology (EST) b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and English for social studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches: English for Academic purposes (EAP) and English for occupational purposes (EOP). An example of EOP for the EST branch is ‘English for Technicians’ whereas an example of EAP for the EST branch is ‘English for Medical Studies.’ Hutchinson and waters in 1987 do note that there is not a clear – cut distinction between EAP and EOP: People can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job. It appears that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are one in the same: employment. However, despite the end purpose being identical, the means taken to achieve the end is very different indeed. I contend that EAP and EOP are different in terms of focus on Cummins’ in 1979 notions of cognate academic proficiency versus basic interpersonal skills.

Carter identified the third and final type of ESP in 1983 as English with specific topics. Carter notes that it is only here where emphasis shifts from purpose to topic. This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for instance, scientists require English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions. However, I argue that this is not a separate type of ESP. Rather it is an integral component of ESP courses or programmes which focus on situational language. This situational language has been determined based on the interpretation of results from needs analysis of authentic language used in target workplace settings.

Multiple Intelligences

For language preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences, a large component of the student evaluation was based on an independent study assignment in which the learners were required to investigate and present an area of interest.

The students were encouraged to conduct research using a variety of different resources, including the Internet. Self – direction is characteristic of ESP courses in that the point of including self direction is that ESP is concerned with turning learners into users”. In order for self – direction to occur, the learners must have a certain degree of freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study. In Carter’s view there must be a systematic attempt by teachers to teach the learners how to learn by teaching them about learning strategies and multiple intelligences.

The Meaning of the Word ‘Special’ in ESP

One simple clarification is required here: special language and specialized aim are two entirely different notions.

According to Mackay and Mount ford the only practical way in which we can understand the notion of special language is a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well – defined context task or vocation. On the other hand, a specialized aim refers to the purpose for which learners learn a language, not the nature of the language they learn consequently, the focus of the word ‘special’ in ESP ought to be on the purpose for which learners learn and not on the specific jargon or registers they learn.

There are three abilities necessary for successful communication in a professional target setting, or ability to Cummins’ theory in order to complete the ESP picture. The first ability required in order to successfully communicate in an occupational setting is the ability to use the particular jargon characteristic of that specific occupational context. The second is the ability to use a more generalized set of academic skills, such as conducting research and responding to memoranda. With the health science group, this was largely related to understanding a new culture.

The third is the ability to use the language of everyday informal talk to communicate effectively, regardless of occupational context. Examples of this include chatting over coffee with a colleague or responding to an informal email message. The task for the ESP developer is to ensure that all three of these abilities are integrated into and integrated in the curriculum. This is a difficult task due to the incredible amount of research required. Close collaboration between content experts and the curriculum developer was not possible during the development stages for the health science curriculum.

Business English

Monipally, who is the professor in communications, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmadabad said, “Communication is a fundamental to our social living as eating is to our biological existence.”(The Hindu, Opportunities Tabloid, 2009) Let us try to understand what the term ‘communication’ means. The term has been defined at various levels. It has come from the Greek word *communicare*, meaning “to share to impart, to communicate, its literal meaning is giving or sharing information”. Communication is a dynamic interactive process.

Nine years ago, there was no English course for the MBAs and MCAs in Andhra Pradesh. Information technology, Economical revolution and globalization of business have brought communication to the fore front of academia and industry. Success in this competitive environment depends not just on acquiring knowledge and hard skills but also on developing effective corporate communication skills.

Aspects of Professional Studies

English Courses for professional and management students remained very traditional in nature for decades after independence. The English paper was generally seen as a requirement to be got out of the way with minimum bother in the 1st year, sometimes even in the semester. The syllabus prescribed an uneasy mixture of grammar and vocabulary exercises based on something labeled technical writing and the customary dose of humanism through quality prose and poetry selections. But an English course must be designed to keep abreast of the management students. We agree, literature nourishes our head but update syllabus in the global age gives scope to compete with global students.

The contemporary English is required for the management or professional students at the same time English teachers should be trained as per the requirements and recruitments in Multi National Companies (MNCs)

we know that students who enroll in professional and management courses have a basic knowledge of English. But often students find it difficult to apply this knowledge appropriately in specific situations. It is very important for management students to learn to use English proficiently for the curriculum studies at the technical and management schools and after that to get jobs and perform well at the work sphere.

Knowledge of English is not enough for the professional students but to provide some enabling skills of English to the students. Student centered class rooms should be created, instead of teaching we should make them teach and participate in various language activities. Instead of teaching an English teacher should bring out the inherent skills in them as the students have been in touch with the functional grammar, teacher must not give a chance to feel monotone. Teachers focus on correctness or accuracy in the use of English, adequate stress must be laid on what is appropriate, relevant and effective. Hence, a large number of management and professional students find themselves inadequate when faced with the demands of real life situations.

Soft skills and hard skills should be side by side, unless soft skills are taught, they don't deserve to aspire for MNCs. In the global world, management students are discovering the harsh reality that managerial skills without soft skills would make them knowledge workers, not managers or global leaders. An English Teacher should turn as Corporate Trainer and a Soft Skills Expert.

The management students require sales' skills which is a part of soft skills. In fact, Soft skills are not taught. Some people have soft skills by birth, they are really lucky but some of them may not have, such students are taken care of at Business Schools and Professional Colleges. Some of the rural students may have hard skills but not soft skills, some urban students may have soft skills but not hard skills. If both are with one person, he/she will be globally acclaimed, in management sector or industrial sector.

The young management students or non-technical students are invited to join call centers. The call centers require the candidates who have soft skills than subject knowledge. Moreover, the general perception is that all we are required to do in a Call center is to talk. However, corporate job requires some specific expertise. Candidate may be a great conversationalist but does a candidate speaking skills good enough to satisfy a demanding customer?

Recently, APPSC Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission has also conducted Group Discussions to the Group – I and II candidates.

The first thing which needs to remember at the time of a group discussion and interview is that one should be neatly dressed. It is the first impression of the candidate which to a great extent influences the interviewers. Tip to Toe should be taken care and voice should represent the confidence of the candidate. Basically, the candidates are tested leadership qualities, knowledge of the subject matter analytical ability and clarity of thought and conviction and flexibility in Group Discussion. So, it is necessary to train the management students or professional students in those areas.

Besides these skills a management student expected to learn negotiation skills, conducting meetings, telephone and mobile phone skills. As the IT Industry has been developing that it has not had before, a fully operational, international supply chain. The IT industry has moved off shore from the USA and UK to places like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Gurgaon and Noida. Thus, it has created opportunities for smart graduates or post graduates with excellent communication skills.

India, at present, is severely in short of qualified young men and women who have excellent communication skills in English with quality of leadership. Though, 5,00,000 management and professional graduates are manufactured in the Business Schools and Technological colleges and the universities, only 50,000 students are acquiring required skills every year.

Therefore, it is time to inculcate and motivate the students to learn more than their subjects. It is the duty and responsibility of an English teacher. It is a basic fact of social science that human beings live in groups. Language is a necessary concomitant of inter group and intra-group communication. It is the strongest of bonds in any social group and is the symbol and mark of group identity. Mother tongue is that language with which one is emotionally identified. It is the language through which the child recognises and organises his experience and environment around him. It is the language through which one expresses one's basic needs, ideas, thoughts, joys, sorrows and all other feelings. This is the language, which if one gives up and adopts another language; one may become intellectually alive, but grows emotionally sterile.

Albert Schweitzer, an outstanding man of this century, who was equally at home with Latin, Greek, French and German, wrote in his autobiography:

My own experience makes me think it is only self-deception if any one believes that he has two mother-tongues, he may think that he is equally a master of each. Among other things what stands out in the above observation is the relationship of mother tongue and creativity. It is generally accepted that no one can develop precision of thought and clarity of ideas without acquiring the ability to speak effectively and to read and write correctly and lucidly in one's mother – tongue. (James Brabazon, 2000, 165).

With the explosion of knowledge in the modern world and the breaking of the time and the space barrier, language isolation is also breaking down. More languages are learnt by more and more people for mutual economic co-operation and cultural enrichment. The quantum of languages other than mother-tongue to be learnt depends on the purpose or functional need and motivation of the learner.

The speed and frequency of international communication has made it mandatory for people seeking higher education to learn multiple languages. In fact, it is recognized by educationists all around that a person has to learn at least 5-6 languages in order to participate meaningfully in the scientific and technological century life. The teaching and learning of all these languages may appear to be a burden if the instrumentality of languages may appear to be a burden; if the instrumentality of language is not appreciated and adequate attention is not given to the methods, materials and media while teaching languages.

Unfortunately in our country language teaching is by and large purposeless and mother-tongue teaching is taken for granted. The basic difference between mother-tongue teaching and other tongue teaching is seldom realized by teachers and teacher educators. The other tongue teacher is usually required to begin by teaching the mechanics of the language, but the mother-tongue teacher is to introduce the student to (a) the visual representation of a language system already mastered by him (b) the standard elegant forms of speech and to various colloquial standards of speech, (c) different styles and genres of writing (d) different registers such as language of science, language of philosophy, etc., and (e) different varieties in language use. (Skehan, 1989).

In a manner of speaking, it can be said that India is a country of minorities. Every state is a multilingual as the union. For the linguistic minorities, particularly those speaking unwritten tribal languages, it is essential that special efforts are made to draw them to the main stream of Indian bilingual schooling if adopted will help them integrate without offending their identity.

In the third stage, the children should be introduced to literature with a view to developing both creative and critical appreciation. They should be introduced to the language of science, language of philosophy, etc., more emphasis need to be given to skills which will enable them to study subjects through the language medium without handicaps as is happening now. There should be attempts to give elements of linguistics in teaching the formal grammar of the language. Content should be chosen in a way which will help overcome social attitudes based on superstitions and conservatism.

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