From the case study approach
to drama in ESP

Russell Dinapoli
Universitat de València

Abstract

In this paper, the importance of creative expression in ESP is discussed. The difference between narrative writing and dramatic writing is explained. The similarity between a case study and a dramatic text is noted. The merits of practicing reading aloud in the latter expression in ESP are pointed out, and a method for preparing a dramatic dialogue to be read aloud is given.

Resumen

La importancia de la expresión creativa es la materia de este artículo. Se explica la diferencia entre la escritura narrativa y la escritura teatral. Se destacan, asimismo, la similitud entre un estudio de caso y un texto teatral, así como las virtudes de practicar la lectura en voz alta de un texto teatral en ESP y se presenta un método para preparar un diálogo teatral para leer en voz alta.

In the area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), teachers have as one of their primary goals that of preparing students to be competent second language users in specific professional fields. The sociolinguistic and psychological aspects relative to the language learning process allow for research into activities that consider the needs and learning capacity of the learners. Discourse Analysis in particular has widened the pragmatic sphere of communicative competence.

One of the key learning objectives language teachers pursue is to enhance students' abilities to communicate. Indeed, real communication is a primary objective of the Communicative Approach. Hence, teachers and course books encourage students to use their language skills communicatively.

To be effective, communication must be multifarious. That is, it requires the involvement of many skills. It is the multifariousness of communication, however, which makes it elusive to measuring proficiency.

From the case study approach to drama in ESP
Russell Dinapoli, pp. 66-71
Encuentro. Revista de Investigación e Innovación en la clase de idiomas, 11, 1999-2000

Communication is a multiple process, involving not only the four language skills, including structural and semantic aspects, but also creativity. The multi-skilled components involved in creative expression is the basis of communicative competence. Needless to say, of these communicative processes, the creative skill is less subject to analytical research and to evaluation as to proficiency than the others mentioned.

Yet, despite the gap in analytical research, creativity needs to be included in the language learning process. Furthermore, pursuit and achievement of creative expression as a skill is a prime component in language proficiency.

The elusiveness of the creative process of communication makes it difficult to be taught. In the Communicative Approach, activities of all sorts are used to develop the learners' communicative skills. By and large, these activities center around tasks or game playing. The effectiveness of such exercises notwithstanding, there is a marked dissimilarity between creativity-based and task-based activities: the former can be more easily assessed than the latter. Right and wrong become blurred during the creative process.

A slew of seemingly insurmountable questions immediately come to mind. Can creative behavior be assessed, and if so, by what criteria? What is the role of attitude in the creative process? And what about logic?

Essential to communicative competence, creative expression in second language learning has yet to receive the attention it deserves from scholars. Perhaps it is the elusiveness of assessing creativity in language, coupled with the fact that no clear learning definition has yet been uncovered, that keeps the subject mute in modern linguistics. As a result, language teachers are not being provided with methodological material designed to enhance the creative capacity and sharpen the creative communicative skills of their students. Thus, the creative component is generally absent in the second language learning environment.

Nevertheless, several methodological inquires have developed over the years with regard to the development of the creative component. In the area of English for Specific Purposes, the most widely used and promising so far has been the Case Study approach. Among its more salient characteristics, in so far as ESP is concerned, the Case Study approach is fundamentally communicative. Culturally authentic material is used and the process is totally learner-centered. Equally important is the fact that it is not task-based so much as creativity-based. The emphasis on creative language use in the Case Study approach has been noted by Hammond (1980), Gragg (1982)

Piotrowsky (1982), as well as Dow and Ryan (1987). More recently, Bonet (1997) addressed the multi-skilled aspect of the approach.

One of the key aspects of the Case Study approach is role playing, as Uber Grosse (1988: 132) and St. John (1996:12) observe. Students are required to extract information from a case and then fill in the remaining information using their imaginations, coupled with logic. As Row and Ryan (1987:198) suggest, students create a plausible reality using the given information. Much in the way that an actor does in preparing a role, the student takes a case (i.e., the script) and constructs a character based on the information provided by the author of the case (the playwright). The character building process is strictly creative. But the creativity involved is based on logic. That is, the creative choices the student makes are justified by the given facts and the probability contained in the events specified in the case.

Much in the way actors do in preparing for a performance, the students, in groups, analyze a case (a script), exchange information and rehearse prior to performing (i.e., to presenting their interpretations of the facts given in the case). The rehearsal, or intercommunication (Gragg 1982:2) is an integral part of the creative process.

It is my belief that the Case Study approach can be widened to include dramatic texts by well-known authors such as Arthur Miller and Harold Pinter, to name just two modern English speaking playwrights.

There is a substantial difference between narrative writing and dramatic writing. The former is literary, descriptive, and created specifically to be read; the latter is geared toward dramatic action: it is created to be reproduced orally and visually. Narrative texts are written to be read. Dramatic texts are meant to be performed. Unlike descriptive narratives, a dramatic text has as its core a central dramatic action around which aural and visual elements dynamically orbit. As teacher-playwright W. Packard notes «In dramatic writing, instead of telling a story, one shows it» (1987, 3). That is to say, everything must be shown in concert with the action −with what the speaker wants.

Narrative writing does not fully offer the speaker the opportunity to show what he or she wants. Narratives are expository, full of background material and detail description. The reader of a narrative text becomes a narrator when reading it aloud. If the same reader, however, reads a piece of dramatic writing in the same way, the former narrator is immediately transformed into an actor.

The difference between the two modes of expression, narrative and dramatic, is patent. To narrate a text, one only needs to read in a voice that is loud and clear enough to be understood. This is not the case in reading a dramatic text aloud. Unlike a narrator

telling a story, an actor must show it. Actors demonstrate dramatic action, using all manner of visuals, gestures and voice inflection to do so. Moreover, unlike drama, narrative writing tends to be lengthy and written in the past tense (or the narrative present indicative tense).

Drama, however, takes place in the present. There is a sense of urgency about it that avoids expositive lengthiness. For in dramatic texts there is usually something at stake, and the more urgent it is the better the drama.

Herein lies the essential usefulness of dramatic writing in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Practicing dramatic reading aloud can facilitate dramatic expression, which consists of action (what the actor or speaker wants), visuals (what the actor must show to communicate what is wanted), and stakes (what will happen if the actor does not get what he wants).

This sense of urgency is particularly useful in stimulating the creative impulse. Reading a dramatic text, therefore, is not merely a task problem but an expression of a pressing action. For example, the sense of failure and emotional breakdown leading to salesman Willy Loman's suicide in *Death of a Salesman* is a case study, dramatically expressed.

Following is a short scene between Willy Loman and his wife Linda:

LINDA: How much did you do?
WILLY: Well, I—I did—about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence. Well, no—it came to—roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip.
LINDA, without hesitation: Two hundred gross. That's.... *She figures.*
WILLY: The trouble was that three of the stores were half closed for inventory in Boston. Otherwise I woulda broke records.
LINDA: Well, it makes seventy dollars and some pennies. That's very good.
WILLY: What do we owe?
LINDA: Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator.
WILLY: Why sixteen?
LINDA: Well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty.
WILLY: But it's brand new.
LINDA: Well, the man said that's the way it is. Till they work themselves in, y'know. *They move through the wall-line into the kitchen.*
WILLY: I hope we didn't get stuck on that machine.
LINDA: They got the biggest adds of any of them!
WILLY: I know, it's a fine machine [....] My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!
LINDA: Well, next week you'll do better.
WILLY: Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me. (Miller 1976, 35-36).

In creatively preparing to read this scene aloud, the students must answer the following questions: *Who am I? What is my relationship to the other character? What do I want? What keeps me from getting what I want? What can I do to overcome the obstacle?* The answers to these questions must be logical and in accordance with the play (i.e., the case).

Taking Willy as an example, a student might answer the above questions in the following manner:

a) *Who am I?* I'm Willy Loman. I'm a salesman. I've got two grown sons and a devoted wife. I'm well-known all over New England(etc.).

b) *What is my relationship to Linda?* She is my wife. She raised my two sons. I love her a great deal and would do anything to make her happy. I have been unfaithful to her but I would never leave her (etc.).

c) *What do I want?* More than anything else I want to be successful, well-off, and popular. I want my sons to admire me (etc.).

d) *What keeps me from getting what I want?* I'm getting old and feeling tired. I'm not getting anywhere fast. The bills are mounting and I'm not selling enough to make ends meet. My boys can't look up to me if I'm a failure (etc.).

e)*What can I do to overcome the obstacles?* I can try harder. Next road trip I make I'll really do my best. In the meantime, I mustn't show how beaten I feel. I will be optimistic, and avoid all signs of negativity (etc.).

Once the students have creatively built their characters in accordance with the text provided by the playwright, they are then ready to discuss the scene and, finally, to read it aloud before an audience of their peers. For, as Lazar observes, «It is important, when considering using plays in the classroom, that the performance aspect is also taken into account» (1993, 135).

Hence, the approach involves both individual work, in that the student prepares his or her part, and group work: first in pairs, and then the group as a whole discusses the performance and offers feedback. Student interaction and peer evaluation help to stimulate free discussion (Grellet, 1996).

In conclusion, creative expression is a skill that needs to be developed in ESP. Towards this end, drama offers an ideal opportunity. For it brings dramatic fiction into the realm of the Case Study approach. A technique for building a character is essential: the basic text establishes the limits, and the student's logic and imagination do the rest.

Bibliographical references

Bonet, P. 1997. *Applied Languages : Theory and Practice in ESP*. J. Piqué and David J. Viera, eds. Valencia: Universitat de València.

Dow, A. R. and Joseph T. Ryan, Jr. 1987. «Preparing the Language Student for Professional Interaction». *Interactive Language Teaching*. Wilga Rivers, de. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Gragg, C. I. 1982. [1940]. «Because Wisdom Can't Be told». Case No. 9-451-005. Boston: Harvard Business School.

Grellet, F. 1996. *Writing for Advanced Learners of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Hammond, J. S. 1980. «Learning by the Case Method». Case No. 9-376-241. Boston: Harvard Business School.

Lazar, G. 1993. *Literature and Language Teaching: a guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Miller, A. 1976. [1949] *Death of a Salesman*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Packard, W. 1987. *The Art of the Playwright: Creating the Magic of Theatre*. NY: Paragon House Publishers.

Piotrwoski, W. V. 1982. «Business as Usual: Using the Case Method to Teach ESL to Executives». *TESOL QUARTERLY* 16:229-238.

Uber Grosse 1988. «The Case Study Approach to Teaching Business English». *English for Specific Purposes* 7:131-136.

Russell Dinapoli es licenciado en Filología Inglesa por la Universidad de California en Los Angeles y Doctorado en Filología por la Universidad de Valencia, donde imparte clases en el Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana. Ha publicado numerosos artículos sobre el uso de la literatura, textos dramáticos y la utilización de improvisación de escenas como método de aprendizaje de un segundo idioma. Correo-e: russell.dinapoli@uv.es