LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

ESP, perhaps more than any other area of ELT, is being influenced by the non-ELT world. This reflects the diverse needs of varied learner groups - from pre-service students to in-service professionals; and their diverse learning experiences - from broadly-based general education to specifically-designed management training. So, ESP has received noticeable contributions from:
- *ELT methodologies* which teach *language knowledge* and *language skills* in a range of business contexts through communicative activities.
- *Communication training* which develops effectiveness of the total communication process by looking at the *message* in terms of its *form and delivery*.
- *Management disciplines* which provide *professional content* on key areas.

This article will look at two key questions. Firstly, what is the scope of ESP? In other words, what is the range of courses that fall within our professional domains as teachers or trainers? And secondly, what methodological models can we use to provide the training programme we have designed?

LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE, LANGUAGE SKILLS AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

To start with, I'd like to give a brief (and therefore rather over-generalised) history of ELT by focusing on two periods - the pre-communicative era and the post-communicative era. Pre-1975, the emphasis of most language teaching was on developing knowledge of the language forms in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Identified through linguistic analysis, these elements were subsequently organised into teaching programmes and course materials.

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Students learned *about* the language rather than *how to* use it. The communicative revolution of the mid-70's clearly established fluency as the prime objective of language teaching and language training. Out went language drills; in came pairwork and small group communicative activities. In the early years of the communicative revolution, accuracy was sacrified for fluency. The battle cry was 'Get the students to talk at all costs'. One could be forgiven for thinking that the 'accuracy versus fluency debat' would remain centre-stage. Yet in ESP, another dimension was identified, namely effectiveness, making it into a three-cornered contest. In the red corner we have accuracy, claiming that without the correct use of language forms, the results will be flawed. In the blue corner we have fluency, claiming that if you can speak, somehow you will be able to get your message over. And in the green corner we have effectiveness, claiming that it is the total performance (linguistic and non-linguistic) which determines the success or failure of communication.

I'd like to spend a few more minutes on the 'fluency versus effectiveness versus accuracy debate' to show why, in my book, they are separate areas. My reasoning goes as follows:

* Firstly, all normal native speakers are fluent in their mother tongue; however, they are not all effective communicators. Therefore fluency, the objective of communicative language teaching, will not necessarily lead to effectiveness. Similarly, amongst non-native speakers, I am reminded of some students I have taught whom I would rank fairly highly on the fluency scale, yet considerably lower on the effectiveness scale. Thus, fluency does not equal effectiveness.
* Secondly, all educated native speakers can form correct sentences in their mother tongue in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Yet this linguistic accuracy does not automatically lead to effectiveness of communication. The same is true of non-native speakers. I have taught many students who have had an excellent knowledge of linguistic forms, but who would not be considered as effective communicators. On the other hand, there are those `natural communicators', who break the language rules, yet transmit convincing and effective messages. Therefore, accuracy does not equal effectiveness.

My conclusion is that we have three different (yet related) elements or skills: accuracy, fluency and effectiveness. And it is important that we decide which one (or two or three) our particular training course shall concentrate on.

THE ESP FAMILY

ESP courses can be roughly divided into three main categories, depending on their structure and goals.

Course type	ORGANISATION		
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Tertiary*
Soft ESP	Language	Content	
Communication skills	Communication	Content	
Hard ESP	Content	Language or Communication	Communication or Language

The table shows three members of the ESP family. Each can be considered a type of ESP course. The table goes on to show the organisational principles around which each course type is structured. I have divided these organisational principles into primary, secondary and tertiary to show their relative weight in the course design.

Let's start with *soft ESP* courses. These are courses where the primary structure of the course materials is linguistic. In other words, a glance at the contents page of a soft ESP book will show the traditional linguistic categories (grammatical, functional and lexical). So what differentiates it from a general English course? Content. However, the `specialist' content, be it business, technical or legal is an `add on' to give the materials a flavour of the specific area. In other words, they are a credible vehicle, but not authentic in terms of content or context. They are good for developing language knowledge and communicative fluency; they are less good at developing communication effectiveness.

Our second member is the *communication skills* course. Here the emphasis is on effective transmission of a message. Key areas addressed in this type of programme or materials are: What is the best *medium* to use? Should it be written or face-to-face; in a presentation or through a meeting? How can the message be best *structured*? Should it be logically or chronologically; from general to specific or viceversa? And how can the message be best *delivered*? In a formal or informal style; with questions during or after the information? Here the emphasis is on developing communication techniques (in contrast to communicative fluency). As with soft ESP courses, content is not a primary focus, although it may be provided as an adjunct in order to contextualise the course within the students' professional area, e.g. effective presentations for marketing personnel or effective negotiations for finance managers. These

communication skills courses are clearly valuable for communication effectiveness; they are less good at developing language accuracy or communicative fluency.

Our third member is the *hard ESP* course. Here the driving force, in organisational terms, is the learner's specialist area and the key questions which he or she needs to deal with. Below are two examples, the first from marketing and the second from personnel.

Marketing

Marketing
The market environment
Buyer behaviour
Market segmentation: targeting and positioning

Products
Product type and mix decisions
Product development decisions

Pricing
Pricing strategies
Placing

Distribution channels
Whole saling and retailing

Promotion
Communication and advertising
Personal selling

International marketing
Entering foreign markets
Global versus local marketing

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Personnel

Job analysis
The nature and steps in job analysis
Job description and person specification

Planning and recruiting
Forecasting personnel requirements
Recruiting job candidates
Job advertising

Selection and interviewing
Selection methods
Interview structure and conduct

Training and development
Identifying training needs
On-the-job training methods

Compensation, Incentives and Benefits
Pay
Incentives and benefits

Appraisal and career management
Appraisal
Career planning and management

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AN APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY

Now that we have identified our learners' objectives, prepared the course outline and designed the programme, what about the best way or ways to deliver the training? What techniques from the trainers' repertoire will help our learners to achieve their (our) objectives? Cutting through the gimmickry and fads that have preoccupied ELT, a basic model of skills development is shown in Figure 1:
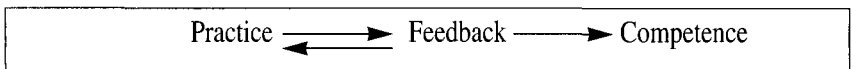
Practice ⟷ Feedback ⟶ Competence

Figure 1

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Thus the feedback loop is central to developing competence, which, hopefully, will result from the practice and feedback provided both inside and outside the classroom. However, this model, though simple, is concerned with *learning* and not with *learners*. In other words, it does not take into account our *learners* and **their** learning-style preferences; in short, it lacks learner-centredness. Honey and Mumford have suggested that each learner has a preferred learning style that he or she brings to a specific task. In their book, *Manual of Learning Styles* (1992), they identify four styles. Using these four learning styles as a starting point, we can identify the following four types of learners and their learning characteristics:

1. the activist - learns by doing the task
2. the theorist - learns by understanding the underlying theory
3. the pragmatist - learns by practising in a controlled environment
4. the reflector - learns by watching others doing the task

The next question is how can we apply this model to classroom teaching? One starting point is to identify the mix of learning style preferences among our students. For this Honey and Mumford have devised a questionnaire which identifies an individual's dominant learning style. However, the authors suggest that the four styles are roughly equally spread through the population. So, as a starting point let's outline a classroom lesson which provides an opportunity for each learner's dominant style. The resulting plan for a business English lesson might look something like *Figure 2* on the following page. The lesson consists of up to six stages. The possible permutations are:

Stages 1, 2, 3 and 6
Stages 1, 4, 5 and 6
Stages 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Let's look at each stage in more detail:

Stage 1

This stage provides informational content around a business or professional area. In order to develop the students' subject knowledge, the input text should be accompannied by an appropriate task. The input text used as a model may be either a listening or a reading text. If the objective of the lesson is to develop communication skills, the input text should provide a model for the output task (Stage 6). In other words, a presentation provides a suitable input model for developing presentation skills, a meeting for developing meeting skills, etc.

Stage 2

Whereas the first stage focuses on the informational content of the input text, stage 2 focuses on the language content. This may be a grammatical area, a functional area, key vocabulary or pronunciation patterns. One text may lend itself to different language foci and the teacher will need to decide which focus best meets the students' needs. At any rate, the focus on language forms and patterns will appeal to the theorists' learning style preference, as they fit the new forms into their existing knowledge.

LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND CONTENT
A sample lesson plan

STAGE 1

INPUT TEXT
FOCUSING ON CONTENT
Listening or reading text chosen for its informational
content and accompanied by a content-based task.
What text?   What task?
Presentation   *Information transfer*
Meeting   *Note-taking*
Report   *Comprehension questions*

STAGE 2   **STAGE 4**
FOCUSING ON LANGUAGE   **FOCUSING ON COMMUNICATION**
What language?   What communication?
Grammar Function Pronuntiation Vocabulary   Presentation Meeting Report Letter

STAGE 3   **STAGE 5**
PRACTISING LANGUAGE   **PRACTISING COMMUNICATION**
What exercises?   What tasks?
Controlled exercises, eg   Controlled tasks on, eg
 Gap/fill   *Presentation structure*
 Sentence manipulation   *Presentation delivery*
 Word families   *Chairing a meeting*
 Sound contrasts   *Concluding a report*

STAGE 6

OUTPUT TASK
PUTTING IT TOGETHER
A speaking or writing task based on the model presented in stage 1
but linked to the student's personal/professional experience.

Figure 2

Stage 3

While stage 2 is concerned with the presentation of language forms and patterns, at the third stage the students get an opportunity to practise those forms and patterns through a range of controlled exercises. This controlled practice will appeal to the pragmatists who like to test out the practical applications
of the forms presented.

Stages 4 and 5

While stages 2 and 3 focus on the language forms presented in the input text, a parallel operation may be carried out for communication skills, for example presentations, meetings, phoning, interviewing, report-writing, letter-writing, etc. In this way the fourth stage would look at models for a particular mode of communication. In the same way as stage 2 focuses on the forms and functions of the language, stage 4 can analyse at the techniques and strategies of communication. Examples are:

— opening a presentation,
— linking ideas in a presentation,
— summarising and concluding a presentation,
— delivering effectively to an international audience in terms of tempo, volume, visual aids, etc.,
— controlling a meeting and
— inviting contributions to a meeting.

As stage 3 provides controlled practice of the language forms, stage 5 provides controlled practice of the communication strategies and techniques.

Stage 6

So far, stages 2-5 have presented and practised language forms and communication strategies. The final stage provides the opportunity for free practice. In language skills courses, the objective of this stage is to enable the students to use the language forms presented and practised in earlier stages in a free context. In communication skills courses, the objective of this stage is to enable the students to use the communication techniques presented and practised in earlier stages in a free context. Naturally, the context for communication should be based on and correspond with the model presented in stage 1. As far as learning styles is concerned, this final stage appeals both to the activists as well as to the reflectors, who will benefit from and develop

confidence from seeing the activists 'in action'.

And so the lesson has almost finished. The only element we have not yet mentioned is the role of feedback in stage 6. But as we have seen in *Figure 1*, practice and feedback are the indispensable elements for developing competence.

CONCLUSION

ESP is undoubtedly a hybrid which draws on influences from different disciplines. The balance of ingredients will depend on the specific needs of a particular student group. The model presented in this paper hopefully captures some of the elements to be considered when designing and delivering training programmes to adult pre-service and in-service professionals.