

NEW APPROACHES TO TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR TOURISM STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is a service - sector which has proved to be constant in times of economic crisis and will continue to grow at a rapid pace in the 21st century and thus communication in foreign languages is vital for this field. However, English, the lingua franca of our century, remains a difficult language to master and , with the emphasis on science and professional subjects, language studies are often neglected in universities*

The present paper examines a few steps in the development of Business English and some new approaches to teaching Business English to tourism students considering the fact that recently, due to the changes going on in the labour market, there has been a shift in the students' needs and a subsequent shift in the pedagogy of teaching Business English students in tourism. By and large Business English is also a very difficult task, because it has to face both the challenges of teaching a foreign language and those of having that very foreign language become another language in itself through its specialized vocabulary with a double communication task. This must be added to the ever new communication skills required of our graduates in the labour market

Key words: labour market, globalization ,Business English, competence, tourism students, universities

1. Introduction and Context

It is a truism to say that English has become the lingua franca of the twenty-first century since research has established that 85% of international associations make official use of English, 70% of the linguistics journals in the world are published exclusively in English, 85% of the world film market is in English, 85% of the scientific articles in the world are written in English, 80% of the world electronically stored information is currently in English .

As business negotiations all over the world are usually held in English the use of this language is more and more extended within this context of an internationalization of the business environment through international companies. In various settings: trade, tourism, journalism, diplomacy, science and technology, politics etc., non-native to non-native communication in English is essential. Being used to communicate with international tourists visiting foreign countries, mastering English is essential for people working in the tourism sector. It is the means for communicating with tourists and understanding cultural differences, and for increasing employees' job opportunities in this international context. English for tourism is viewed as an area of business English ,and integrates Business English and English for academic purposes That is, it deals with teaching the language needed for communication and interaction between people of different cultures in airports, tourism and travel firms, markets and hospitality . Knowledge of English is one of the major criteria in hiring people in the tourism field where poor English proficiency becomes a problem in attracting tourists and entertaining them. That is why English is taught as a core subject at tourism higher education institutions all over the world.but it is not an easy task since *we have to face both the challenges of teaching a foreign language and those of having that very foreign language become another language in itself through its specialized vocabulary with a double communication task*The student must improve his command of English and, at the same time, he must become familiar with business related vocabulary and content. When too much emphasis is placed on the business vocabulary and content, there is the danger of not developing the necessary language skills.*There are other facts which may challenge the process of teaching Business English in universities :large classes with different linguistic competence, non-availability of books and materials, lack of students' motivation,etc.. The solution is to combine the acquisition of language skills and teaching business content in adequate proportion and never ignore the communicative approach to teaching English.The limited timeframe and the limited English proficiency of some of our students turn teaching of Business Communication into a difficult task as such a course requires a high level of language proficiency.The mismatch between the language proficiency of students and the language requirement of the course must be dealt with appropriate strategies of teaching in order to accomodate the increasing needs of communication of our graduates in the field of tourism. The first step is to analyse the communication needs of our students and then organise the methods and materials accordingly.*

Among various authors of English for Specific Purposes to which English for Tourism courses belong there has been a long debate about the learner's needs and whether or not subject-specific texts should be used in classes with students operating in a certain professional area. In the early 1980s Hutchinson & Waters stated that: "there is no justification for subject specific ESP materials "because they understood to focus on the underlying *competences of language* and how they may best be acquired, rather than focusing so closely on the specific language itself." [1]

A few years later Pickett's concepts of *ergolect* and *poetics*, gave another direction leading to the idea that there is a special language that needs teaching, and obviously, materials should reflect this: "The student already knows the routines and transactions to which business English will refer, since these are almost behavioral universals. His task will therefore be the more narrowly linguistic one of acquiring the expressions" (Pickett 1989:6) [3]

The problem is with words, not with situations, as Pickett argued further on.

As Mountford put it later on, "the relevance and appropriateness of teaching materials must drive from the language of the target situation, whether or not there is any evidence that the student's interest in his or her area of study or work as a motivating purpose will automatically carry over into the ESP classroom" (Mountford 1988:83) [4]

AS Business English published materials should take into account certain criteria such as: specificity, appropriateness, validity, flexibility, suitability, quality or time and cost, we believe that they should be a compromise between the two main directions given by Hutchinson & Waters (skills and strategies of learning are important to a successful learning outcome) on the one hand, and by Pickett (the key lexis plays an important role in the teaching process) on the other hand.

It is obvious that the lexis does not represent everything about Business English courses but without this specific lexis the effectiveness of the course will certainly be lessened.

In Pickett's view there is a framework by which Business English can be examined considering the fact that Business language is layered and formed by a process of poetics and the communication partners in business are: business to business, business to public and business to business in the same area.

Within this context, the Business English lexis is not restricted to technical terms only found in a given area such as *discount*, *invoice*; it also includes function words, as in general English: *debt*, *boom* or sub-technical terms, i.e. terms that are found in general English but have different general technical meanings having a broad distribution across disciplines and possibly peaking in a specific discipline: *depreciation*, *slump*, *order*, *invest*, etc.

Pickett also argues that Business English is not a dialect defined by place but by activity, occupation, subject matter or situation and he uses for it the term *ergolect* which is created by the poetics of business language and which is sometimes replaced by the term *register* by some linguists

But it is audience which is important in the choice of language used in a business setting.

In order to illustrate that, we should mention a study about the lexis of Business articles found in newspapers, by Posteguillo & Palmer who distinguished between two types of articles: Business Press Articles aimed at the actual business community to give information and sometimes even influence the economic development of the country and Business News in the Press which were articles aimed at the general public, simply giving information on business events.

The results showed that there were some similarities, owed to the fact that they both belong to the same journalistic genre, but there were also differences attributed to the different intended audiences of the articles.

Since there are two different types of audiences, there is also a gradation of difficulty in the articles – simpler language for the general public and moving to the more complex for the business people themselves, leading to the idea of the layering of specialist lexis which has now started to become accepted in the literature.

Nevertheless, the new formula used in class by Business English trainers today – meaning a good mix of teaching experience and real understanding of how business texts function in business communication represents a great improvement in business English teaching.

Traditionally, Business English classes were teacher-centered, with teachers explaining vocabulary and grammatical structure. However it is obvious that focusing on a descriptive grammar is likely to inhibit learners' language acquisition. Students under teacher-centered systems are learning passively with fewer opportunities to use the language which severely prohibit the development of their language competence needed in the authentic communicative world. If not, theoretical or abstract instruction can be counterproductive, creating negative attitudes amongst learners. There is considerable evidence that grammar instruction and error correction do not lead to improved accuracy or fluency in expression.

In the late 90s the shift in pedagogy from the very traditional textbooks to materials that focus more on developing the new skills required of our graduates on the labour market has become more and more evident since this approach contributes more to their success in the job market after graduation.

2. Business English for Tourism Students

Nowadays English is taught to students to help them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to qualify them for the tourism labor market and the emphasis has been increasingly placed on communication skills and new economic terms permeating from the IT and other domains and vast economic information to be covered. We believe that this kind of approach will have two important consequences: greater opportunities for our students on the labour market, both in our country and abroad, in the current globalizing and ever-changing environment and a more challenging and rewarding type of English class. Completing tasks is a good approach to realize modern learning. The way how practical language abilities are acquired through doing tasks cannot be replaced by teacher's instructions of the grammatical structures and explanation of vocabulary.

The English courses taught focus on: a tourism and hospitality background knowledge component in order to increase their awareness of the language which will be used in their future workplaces; a speaking component related to enhancing their English-speaking skills and oral fluency as being the major requirement for graduates to work in the field of tourism; a writing component targeting on developing the writing skills needed for tourism workplaces; and a translation component to help them know how to translate the language of tourists. In the vast world of English for Specific Purposes, that of the English of Tourism is one of the more attractive since all of us are tourists on countless occasions throughout our lives, and hence, as teachers, can bring our own real experience and opinions to the language classroom. However, teaching of the English of tourism is a complex endeavour.

If we examine the textbooks, learning tasks, and examinations used in the teaching of English to tourism undergraduates in our universities we will find that each faculty/higher institute uses a different textbook mainly including materials that the teachers collected from different sources, and having both English for tourism and English for general purposes materials. All the textbooks include English listening and speaking activities and writing, grammar, reading, and vocabulary activities are also emphasized. Teachers focus on reading skills, grammar structures and tourism and hospitality terminology and quite recently, there is interest in any forms of teaching that aim at improving their speaking or listening skills.

There is also a variety of English learning activities that can help students to develop their English skills and qualify them for their future careers, including: group discussion, role playing and letter writing. Unfortunately, in the past the tuition did not focus on the development of English oral communication skills and this is one of the shortcomings in the English language preparation of tourism undergraduates in our institutions. That is why nowadays, teaching English for tourism is probably better achieved through a topic-based focus which, if correctly handled, fulfils the double role of providing a meaningful framework within which students can improve their language knowledge and skills, while at the same time integrates language classes into the students' wider experience of tourism. It avoids the too-obvious repetition of language items they have already seen. Moreover, a topic-based approach helps guarantee that the language items covered are those genuinely needed within the field chosen.

Therefore, as all the studies show, English communication skills are most needed for tourism workplaces and thus listening and speaking skills should be emphasized in students' English courses. Besides, these courses need to make the most use of technology-based activities which can enhance students' oral communication skills. Laborda's two studies (2003, 2009), for example, showed that using computers promote foreign language learning through increasing students' language use, and that they can help tourism students to develop their English oral communication skills.

3. Conclusions:

In the process of economic globalization, business discourse is language use in all economic and social interactions centering on trade, commerce, investment, management, finance, marketing, tourism, etc. Richards & Rodgers pointed out that the commonest solution to the "language teaching problem was seen to lie in the adoption of a new teaching approach or method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, 244)" [7]. However the teaching problems cannot be solved by resorting to any single particular approach. Zhang proposes a tripartite curriculum for teaching Business English, which is composed of three component parts: subject knowledge, business practice and language skills Business English, which aims to cultivate business expertise rather than just teaching language skills and discrete knowledge of the subject areas as is often promoted in the ESP literature. [8]

Business English has got a great emphasis by instructors and researchers due to the boost of economic development and economic globalization in the world and although the teaching of Business English has its own problems, the solutions and teaching innovation in the research have proved effective in motivating learners' interest and developing their language skills. All of them play an important role, since good communication skills in English are vital for our graduates in tourism.

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