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A challenge: teaching ESP in a creative manner

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to present a new educational challenge to readers, namely teaching English for Specific Purposes in an academic environment where the aim is not only the formation of future specialists in economics or fine arts, but also the desire to make students enjoy English classes for the way teaching takes place, for the manner of delivering pieces of information and for the passion for this language transmitted during classes. Moreover, we consider that teaching ESP leaves room for creativity, opening gate towards multiculturalism, general knowledge, towards a universe where there are no limits regarding the power of information conveyed in English.

Keywords: economics; fine arts; challenge; English for Specific Purposes; methods; teaching.

1. Introduction

From our point of view, the purpose of the present paper is to underline the modalities in which teaching English can become an art for the teacher and a pleasure for the students, for the purpose of using such techniques is not only that of transmitting information at an academic level, but the main objective is that of transforming the English courses and seminars into inspiring and skillfully articulated teaching activities. From our point of view, English for Specific Purposes requires enough flexibility from the teacher to adapt one’s techniques and methods both to the requirements of the curriculum and to the level of the group of students, taking into account the fact that each taught course should be masterfully articulated, having substance and smooth transitions. Our purpose is to share some of the activities that
we managed to put in practice and to reflect on the impact these have had on students’ results and lifelong development.

2. A Challenge: Teaching ESP in a Creative Manner

Our experience as far as teaching English for Specific Purposes is concerned has made us reflect on different and challenging ways of making the English classes nearly unforgettable. We are going to focus mainly on the activities taught in the field of economics and arts. We noticed that different approaches need to be used, depending on the taught topic, on the level of English, on the needs of the students, on teacher’s creativity and on students’ perception, appealing to three dimensions: cognitive, volitional and emotional.

First of all, our focus is the way English for Special purposes should be taught to the students from the University of Arts. We discovered that the best way to appeal to them is to make them emotionally involved, thus opening the gates towards a smooth and better learning. One day, we asked our students: “What is the recipe for getting in the mood for creating, for being inspired?” As we have already expected, the answers were different: listening to music, a walk in the middle of nature, watching a movie, talking to friends, an exhibition, the contour of a tree seen in the sunlight, rain in the morning, the clouds before the storm, the smile of a child, therefore we concluded that they only involve if something appeals to their emotional side. Therefore, we decided that the best way to obtain the best results as far as students from fine arts are concerned is by pouring knowledge through their affective side.

Secondly, this basic idea generated others, such as “make every classroom unforgettable”, characterized by variety, new challenges (the input should always be i+1), the surprise element being always present. Of course, the field of arts is so diverse, we can always approach painting, sculpture, graphics, design, conservation-restoration, fashion design, industrial design, photo-video, mural art in diverse ways. Taking into account the specialization of each group, we personalized activities, insisting more on specialized terms.

Thirdly, in order to better comprehend the above-discussed issues, we will provide the scenario of one of the seminars:

Warm up:

In order to get students prepared for the activities to come, we used “Suggestopaedia”, the approach introduced by Lozanov, the Bulgarian psychotherapist who discovered that students can learn a language approximately three to five times as quickly as through traditional conventional ways of teaching. Therefore, I put Vivaldi’s Seasons as a musical support, I put some four posters on the walls representing the four seasons. Everybody was wondering about the next step: their curiosity was at high levels.

Lead in:

We made the comparison between one’s life and the four seasons representing the emotional stages through which each person experiences. This is an essential step in making students lower their emotional barriers while learning a foreign language.

Pre-translation activity:

The next step in my teaching is the translation method. Music is the one which also brings the muse of inspiration to great artists. Therefore, I presented pictures and sculptures such as “Orpheus” or “Apollo”, deities which were connected in one way or another to the world of sounds, not mentioning the artist. The
students are asked to guess the name of the artist, based on connections to previous knowledge, by analyzing the design of the sculptures, the chromatic harmonies of paintings, by making speculations about the period when they were created, by encapsulating them in an artistic trend.

Translation itself:
The teacher finally reveals the identity of the artists, placing them in the history of art, underlining their importance in the evolution of art in that specific trend or the impact had on the followers. Moreover, students establish connections with other artists who are crossing him/her in style, this being a communicative activity that precedes a translation.

Though it is considered that translation is a traditional method, we consider that it is very much useful for acquiring new vocabulary and for recycling the one which is latent, in a passive state. Consequently, students are asked to work on different translation parts in pairs, one of the students has a higher level of knowledge than his/her colleague. In pairs, they negotiate meaning, they focus their attention on specialized terminology in order to have a qualitative translation.

This is the part which is the most time-consuming, for it requires a great effort to pass through the following stages:

1. to decode the meaning of critique about that specific artist (the vocabulary used is not always accessible, therefore the students are asked to make an effort of understanding the gist in their mother tongue).
2. to be able to translate specialized terminology, based on the “specific difference” present in each definition, apart from “the proximum category”. Furthermore, students are asked to work in pairs and translate a specific individual fragment, they cannot ask for their colleagues help, for they are also involved in solving their own text.
3. Mot-à-mot translations are under no circumstances accepted, because the message cannot be conveyed correctly, there is a lack of accuracy and register, the style is not preserved.
4. students should negotiate the meaning of specific syntax constructions, there should be real conversation regarding the transfer of meaning from L1 (mother tongue) to L2.

Post-translation:
Students are also asked to create associations with other works of art belonging to different artists, based on:
- style
- the artistic trend
- the similarities/differences established with other creators
- the influence they had on their followers
- the place occupied in the history of arts

As a follow up (assignement), students are kindly invited to bring images of works of art which they consider relevant for the evolution of art at a specific moment, being prepared to offer clues to their colleagues in order to guess the identity of the artist, establishing connections to previous works of art of the same author or to creations belonging to other artists that have in common the same topic or motifs of they are representative for a specific cultural trend.
To sum up, the examples provided above emphasize the importance of having solid general knowledge, free and inspired association of ideas based on similarities, differences, comparisons and contrasts, not to mention basic knowledge of artistic trends, representative creators and their works of art. Last but not least, we believe that a specific delicacy of artistic connections is needed in order to transform a sparkling idea into a terrifically wonderful boule de neige project.

Regarding the topic of teaching economics in a creative way, we could not agree more that the channel of perception is totally different. If we were to make a comparison between the two types of students, we would say that while the students at the Faculty of Arts perceive the English language first of all by using one’s heart, emotions, feelings, subjective perception — in a word, the ones from Economics need to be approached mentally, with numbers, graphics, concrete information. If the attributes of an artist are the volatile inspiration and an individual perceptive eye, the features of an economics student are the taste for specific data and an analytic eye. Therefore, the methods used for approaching them are different, similar to the dilemmas one has while dealing with heart and mind.

Referring to economics, it is essential to underline the communicative approach as more appropriate than suggestopaedia. We believe this is appropriate for economics people are more oriented towards dialogue than expressing themselves visually, as it is the case of art. In this respect, we suggest an ice-breaker such as providing individual cards with quotations from the world of business:

- it can be either a conclusion of the evolution of market
- it can be a fragment from an article referring to economy matters
- it can be a quotation taken from a successful businessman (e.g. Steve Jobs)
- it can be an idea which can be transformed into a debate.

We have tried out cards with fragments extracted from Steve Jobs inspiring discourse (http://www.youtube/watch?v=nzoNZoiAbbA&feature=related) and the effect was fantastic: I have seen students expressing their opinion about the inspiring ideas of the video, this phenomenon was so involving and inspiring for most students from the class and they became engaged in a debate about the path to success, bringing further examples and supporting their opinions with solid arguments. Therefore, our conclusion is that providing students with meaningful quotations related to the field of economics can lead to inspiring seminars full of energy, thus giving the students the possibility to analyze economic events by using specialized terminology such as “devaluation”, “leveraged buyout”, “pegged”, “market evolution”, “trade dynamics”, “profit”, “rate”, “income”. A useful resource would be Mackenzie’s English for Business Studies, published by Cambridge University Press.

A possible warm-up activity would be a brainstorm on the evolution of prices if the government decides to introduce higher taxes on gas, for example. This type of communicative challenge is meant to make students active, to prepare them for judging things in perspective, according to the “Think Big” interventionist state economic strategy.

Another analysis task which is suitable for economics students is the one which can be encountered in the IELTS examination, that is compare, contrast and describe charts, tables, providing a detailed synopsis of the specific task. In this respect, students should be familiarized with these techniques of “compare and contrast” and work from a very useful book, Check your Vocabulary for the IELTS Examination, by Rawdon Wyatt. This type of structured, critical thinking is useful for high-level jobs such as the ones offered by the European Commission.
Continuing the creative part in a communicative way, students receive cards with a given beginning on an economic issue (e.g. If income tax reduces, the impact would be…/ If the government introduces another tax on road maintenance, it means that…), being invited to develop their own ideas, making predictions about what is going to happen, supporting their arguments with examples and relevantly developed ideas.

From our point of view, the opposite of these types of open-ended activities are those which are of the “fill in the gap” type, which is restrictive and very much focused on specific terms to be deduced from the context, not being among the favourite requests, just like error correction exercises. In order to enrich students’ knowledge on specialized terminology, we consider that this is a useful resource: Dictionary of Financial and Business Terms, by Roberto de Paula Lico Júnior.

3. Conclusions

To sum up, we believe that where there is will, there is a way of making teaching ESP interesting and challenging for both parts, creating a win-win situation in the case of students focused on improving their level of knowledge in fine arts and economics.

As we see things, on the one hand, Lozanov’s suggestopaedia is appropriate for students from the University of Arts, for their emotional barriers are lowered and they respond quickly to learning, increasing their learning speed considerably. On the other hand, what is appropriate in the case of economics students is the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, for the emphasis is on interaction through dialogue using specialized terminology.

In a nutshell, we consider that practice makes perfect, but as a teacher, one should always be in search for more from oneself and the students, facilitating learning and making it as pleasant and useful as possible. The higher one’s expectations from oneself, the more demanding for students. The purpose: intellectual growth from both sides, having a pleasant and challenging educational process.

References

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