

## ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES. ANALYSIS OF A BOOK INTENDED FOR TOURISM

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### KEY WORDS

- ESP.
- Communication.
- Language learning.

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper we shall develop a 'pre-use review' of the textbook *How to survive in the U.S.A. (English for travellers and newcomers)*, 1983 by Nancy Church and Anne Moss.

We may say that, as this course is intended for travellers, the four language skills are intended to be developed. This statement is based on the idea that in order to communicate and when being in an English speaking situation, listening, speaking, reading and writing are needed.

Our task will consist of an account of what ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is, theories of learning related to language learning and how to teach an ESP course, followed by a detailed analysis of the chosen textbook.

### ANALYSIS

Hutchinson and Waters define ESP as an *approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners*. This implies the ESP practitioner's task to design appropriate courses for different groups of learners. The *what, why, when, how, where* and *who* are basic questions we need to delineate when designing a course. The authors group them into three main headings:

*Language description*, which answers the *what* by means of the syllabus of the ESP course. When teaching an ESP course the teacher needs to recognise that the various approaches are different ways of looking at the same thing. As Hutchinson and Waters say, all communication has a structural level, a functional level and a discursive level. We can express our awareness to the idea that all of them are complementary and each of them may have its own place in the ESP course.

*Theories of learning*, which answer the *how* through the learning theories. All authors consider the best way to teach, not only ESP, is

eclectic. This means not a mixture of approaches and activities. The key word is "principled-practice".

Three questions can help us know WHY we are doing what we are doing:

1-What theory of learning do I adhere to? We adhere to Krashen's ideas about learning a language. He states a difference between *acquiring* and *learning* a language. When we acquire a language, we are engaged in meaningful interaction in the language and no attention to form is paid. On the other hand, we learn through a conscious process of study and attention to form and error correction (Lightbown and Spada, 1993:27).

2-What is my definition of language? *Language* is a human system of communication which uses structured vocal sounds and can be embodied in other media such as writing, print, and physical signs (Mc Arthur, 1992:571).

3-How do I think languages are learnt? Lightbown and Spada assume that first language and second language learning are similar. Intelligence, aptitude, personality and motivational characteristics, learning styles and age have been found to influence the learning of the second one. We agree that learning a second language in a natural acquisition context or 'on the street' is not the same as learning in the classroom. The belief that learning 'on the street' is more effective is based on the fact that many successful learners had exposure to the language outside the classroom (Lightbown and Spada, 1993:30, 50, 66).

After answering these questions, we are in a position to take "informed decisions" as to how we are going to teach ESP (Mayol, 2003:36).

C- *Needs analysis answers the who, why, where and when* dealing with the nature of a particular target and learning situation.

According to Robinson, ESP is an enterprise involving education, training, and practice, and drawing upon three major realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy and the students' / participants' specialist areas of interest. A major distinction between ESP and ELP

(English for Linguistic Purposes) can be made since the former implies not only teaching English for specific purposes but also teaching it to specified people.

The ESP family tree has two major branches: EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes). We can say that the ESP course we are dealing with does not seem to fit into any of these two branches since the course is intended neither for work nor for study. But when considering Johns' figure of ESP in the USA we find the 'social' area, which might comprise the needs of our students, included in the 'professional' branch.

Robinson states that what is critical to an ESP course is that on one hand 'ESP is normally goal directed' and on the other hand 'an ESP course is based on a needs analysis' (Robinson, 1991: 1-5).

On the view of needs analysis two questions should be taken into account:

Why do these learners need to learn English?

What is the difference between General English and an ESP course?

Hutchinson & Waters (1987:53) answer them assuming that: "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal". What distinguishes ESP from ELP is the awareness of the need rather than its nature. We notice that our students are conscious of their needs, they have asked for an specific course and are willing to learn. All these steps were fulfilled by them. It is now the teacher's task to choose the appropriate course.

According to Widdowson, needs can refer to:

Student's study or job requirements: a goal-oriented definition (Widdowson in Robinson, 1991:7). According to Berwick, this type of needs could be called objectives (Berwick in Robinson, 1991:7). The needs of our group are oriented to the language needed for tourism to manage specific situations in real-life communication situations in a foreign language in a foreign country.

'What the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language', which is a process-oriented definition. This has to do with the learner's personal aims besides the requirements of the target situation.

The students' needs can be seen as:

**Necessities:** Our group of students will need to handle certain specific vocabulary.

**Lacks:** Our students have learnt some English, but there is a gap between the knowledge they have and their needs as tourists.

**Wants:** This need can be said to be fulfilled by the expectation of visiting a foreign country and the wish to be able to communicate in English.

Robinson considers that another characteristic of an ESP course is that the students on it are likely to be adults rather than children, and that it is often assumed that ESP students will not be beginners but will have already study ELP for some years (Robinson, 1991: 3). These characteristics are found in our target group which consists of four women who will travel to the United States of America for the first time. They have studied ELP for three years. The trip will take place in nine-months time.

Assuming that we have completed needs analysis we must now consider *course design*. Following Hutchinson and Waters in their classification of the different approaches to course design, we may say that our teaching-learning situation seems to fit into the *Skills-centred approach*, in which the learner is considered as a *user* of language rather than as a *learner* of language. This approach is concerned with the processes of language use not of language learning. Its aim is to make the learners into better processors of information, by helping them to develop skills and strategies which will continue to develop after the ESP course itself (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 65-77).

When designing a course, we must take into consideration: *syllabus*, *materials* and *methodology*.

A *syllabus* is a document which states what will (or at least what should) be learnt. The main purpose of a syllabus is to segment the knowledge to be learnt into smaller units. We may say that the syllabus of the textbook *"How to survive in the USA"* can be defined as an *organisational syllabus*, since it lists what should be learnt and also

states the order in which it is to be learnt. Besides, the presence of the contents page of this textbook determines this. In addition, it can be said that the teaching-learning process involves the interaction of several syllabuses:

**The teacher syllabus:** the teacher can influence the clarity, intensity and frequency of any item, and thereby affects the image that the learners receive.

**The classroom syllabus:** the classroom creates conditions which will affect the nature of a planned lesson (noise from outside, hot weather, a visitor).

**The learner syllabus:** it is an internal one. The importance of this syllabus lies in the fact that it is through the filter of this syllabus that the learner views the other syllabuses (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 80-3).

According to the different criteria Hutchinson and Waters describe, we can say that the chosen textbook presents a *Functional/task-based syllabus*. The content list is as follows:

1. Welcome to the U.S.A.!
2. Communicating by phone and mail.
3. See America by rent-a- car.
4. Getting around.
5. Places to stay.
6. Handling your money.
7. Getting something to eat.
8. In case you get sick.
9. Enjoying your free time.
10. being a welcome guest.

The complete content list can be seen in Appendix 1.

Robinson mentions the words *situation/topic* to describe the *content-based syllabus*. Answering Bell's question: 'Is there any possible way ... of sequencing situations?', she states that for some ESP situations there may be an order. In this case we can say that in a tourism setting, some situations may be presented in the sequence of:

arriving in the U.S.A., communicating by phone or mail, renting a car. (Bell in Robinson, 1991: 36).

The materials are intended for intermediate level students, from ELP courses. Following Hutchinson and Waters materials design model, we can mention four elements:

*a-Input:* each unit is divided in Parts I, II, III and IV and a review section. (in Part IV a glossary is included).

Referring to unit I, the students will see "real material" as *stimulus material* for activities.

New language items are presented through a customs form. Its aim is to prepare the students to complete it.

Correct models of language use are seen through this form.

At the same time this form provides a topic for communication.

The opportunities for the learners to use their information processing skills are available when answering the questions about the form.

The learners will have the opportunity to use their existing knowledge both of the language and the subject matter as the class develops.

*b-Content focus:* Language is a means of conveying information and feelings about something. There is enough material to generate meaningful communication in the classroom.

*c- Language focus:* Our aim is to enable the learners to use language with communicative tasks and activities and the necessary language knowledge to do so. This is achieved by taking the language to pieces in the different exercises programmed through the unit.

*D-Task:* This is the primary focus of the unit. Learners should be able to use the content and language knowledge to perform the given tasks. The ultimate purpose would be language use.

These four elements should lead the learners to the point where they are able to carry out the task (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:108-9).

Each unit starts with:

#### Part I

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*A-Study this form.* This is the presentation of a customs form. The aim of this is to prepare the students with the topic that the unit is concerned with.

*B-Read.* The text is intended to explain the previous illustration and it provides information about the given form.

*C-Answer the questions.* Seven questions are included so as to consolidate comprehension.

*D-Listen and Answer.* The students will have the opportunity of listening to a conversation at the Customs desk. The purpose of this task is to face the students with a real situation; and thus, provide data for the next exercise.

*E-Listen and read.* This section activates the learners' minds to expand the context in order to introduce new vocabulary (shuttle, terminals) and grammatical items (Negative Yes- No questions).

*F-Answer and act.* The learners are expected to remember the information presented in the previous dialogue and answer some questions about it. They are also encouraged to act out the dialogue.

#### Part II

*A-Study this map.* Students are asked to observe a plan of an airport. The teacher explains them that they would be likely to see something similar during their trip.

*B-Answer the questions.* There are six questions to check comprehension about the plan above. Learners should always be encouraged to find answers for themselves.

*C-Look and listen.* Students are asked to listen to three conversations at the airport, which they have to match each picture. This kind of exercise gives the opportunity for some more imaginative language work.

*D-Problem solving.* The students are asked to create their own solution to a communication problem, in so doing they use both the language and the content knowledge developed through the unit. This is an unstructured exercise in which there are no 'correct answers'.

*E-Asking for and giving directions.* In this exercise the learners are



are being asked to “role play” following a pattern. When doing this exercise, they should keep in mind how to get information. This practice will give them more confidence.

### Part III

**A-Study this form.** The students are asked to see if they understand the form presented. With this exercise, earlier work is recycled through a similar activity.

**B-Answer the questions.** Three questions are presented to check understanding.

**C-Listen and read.** Two conversations that often occur at an airport are presented with the aim of providing more language situations and expanding the students’ skills.

**D-Answer the questions.** The students are given a set of questions to be answered about the previous dialogues.

**E-Act out the scenes.** At this stage students should be able to use the means to act out in simple English with their partners. Learners need practice as well as learning the means for expressing their ideas.

### Part IV

A cartoon is presented as a relaxing activity

**A-Read.** This section is intended to provide additional hints to travellers and newcomers to the U.S.A. This is seen as further input related to the rest of the unit in terms of subject matter and language.

**B-Compare.** This activity is useful for students who have learnt some British English before. This is a good opportunity to explain the differences in pronunciation, meaning, spelling and usage.

**C-Glossary.** An alphabetical list of important words from the unit is given. Definitions are provided in simple English.

**D-Review.** This section is designed to show students how much they have learnt and how to test themselves so that they can make progress on their own. The tasks should lead students to transfer the language skills acquired to their own experience. The exercises could

be done either as homework or as classroom exercises, oral or written.

According to Hutchinson and Waters, methodology has to be experienced in the classroom. Since this is a pre-use review of the book, we expect that the classroom skills and techniques used in General English teaching, can be successfully employed in this ESP classroom. The techniques found in the textbook are:

**1-Gaps:** they create the demand of thinking which is required by learning. Throughout the unit, different kinds of gaps such as media, reasoning, memory, opinion and certainty are found.

**2-Variety:** it is essential to keep the mind alert. Varieties of medium, classroom organisation, learner roles, exercise activity or task, skills and focus can be achieved as the unit develops.

**3-Prediction:** it is essential both to language use and language learning. For example, when the site plans of the airport are presented, the learners have the opportunity to activate their minds and get ready for learning.

**4-Enjoyment:** This is an aspect of pedagogy often forgotten with adults. If a lesson is boring, it is a bad lesson. Besides the teacher’s activity in the classroom, we can mention the presence of the cartoon in the unit.

**5-An integrated methodology:** It is noticed the high degree of recycling and reinforcement material throughout the unit. We may say that this technique is carried out well enough.

**6-Coherence:** We may say that it is clear within the unit where the lesson is going.

**7-Preparation:** We find that the material presentation leads students to build up a context of knowledge and thus their minds are prepared to learn. Preparing the learners to learn should be as important as the teacher’s planning of classes.

**8-Involvement:** Learners should be involved cognitively and emotionally through guiding questions. They should not be difficult to answer and at the same time the teacher should provide the necessary time for the answer.

9-*Creativity*: This technique is found in different sections of the unit where different activities show that it is a dynamic course.

10-*Atmosphere*: The good relationship between teacher and student within the classroom is another factor that leads to effective learning. The fact that our target group is eager to travel can be mentioned as a positive factor to create a cooperative social climate in the classroom (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 128-142).

## CONCLUSIÓN

In this paper we have cleared up some concepts related to the aim of ESP. We have stated our position in relation to the theories of learning a language and learning a second language. We have developed the stages we have to follow when teaching the ESP course applied by our students.

After making a conscious analysis of the chosen textbook, we can conclude that the positive hints found are:

The different units of the book present 'unit coherence'.

The pieces of "real material" presented may help develop both the students' motivation and interest.

The way in which the units are organised, by means of constant repetition, and reinforcement.

Provides confidence to the learners and a fulfilled goal to the ESP practitioner.

The learners' needs will be mostly achieved by the end of the course. If we find that the existing.

Material is not enough we might add some exercises or change some of the texts to make them more appropriate to the learners' needs.

Keeping in mind that this is a pre-use review of the textbook, it is necessary to mention some considerations we think are important for a better result:

The textbook does not include a well-assessed evaluation, to solve

this we think we should take a placement test at the beginning of the course. At the same time, we should have to design an achievement test in order to test how well the learners are keeping up with the syllabus. This might be done twice: after unit V and at the end of the course.

Personally, we would like to mention the fact that the book might not be as attractive as it should, since it is presented in black and white.

Finally, we hope that this ESP course will satisfy our target group needs and will fulfil the educational goal.

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