SOME PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES TO STUDENTS OF TECHNICAL SPECIALITIES AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Absract: The main problems connected with teaching English for Specific Purposes at university level are overviewed. The aims and tasks of teaching English for Specific Purposes to students of technical specialities are formulated. The goals, structure and content of ESP course for students of technical specialities are introduced.

The subject of the present paper is an overview of main problems connected with teaching English for Specific Purposes (**ESP**) at university level. Nowadays it is still urgent to discuss what to teach and how to teach a foreign language taking into account the objective social and professional needs of future specialists in our country. Besides businessmen, tradesmen, engineers, scientists and scholars all over the world must know English because it is the international means of exchange of information and experience.

The situation with foreign language teaching in Russian Universities is in some ways different from that of many European countries. In Russia, students in all specialties have foreign languages on the curricula as an obligatory subject for two or three years out of the average five years of the full course. Thus, our students not only want to learn foreign languages, but also have to learn them because students of any subject, any discipline must learn a foreign language as part of their syllabus.

At the beginning of the university course of foreign language teaching it is necessary to formulate its actual – and realistic aims and tasks. Students must know from the start what variety of the foreign language, and to what extent, they are going to master it. Many people get bitterly disappointed and lose interest in foreign language studies because they were not duly informed that it is not possible (if you are not a genius, but these are scarce) in the limited period of learning 2-4 hours for week for 2-3 years – to master a foreign language, to acquire all the various skills: reading special literature, newspapers, fiction, writing scientific papers, understanding the lyrics of songs, everyday speech, etc., etc.

The tasks of teaching English for Specific Purposes must be formulated from the very beginning. In the universities programs these tasks are very humble: to teach students ESP, i.e. as an actual means of communication among specialists of different countries, meaning both – oral and written kinds of communication. In other words, ESP is oriented towards mastering skills for professional communication.

As H. Radford points out the structure and content of language curricula, when modern languages were first introduced into universities, were much influenced by the need to achieve academic respectability (Radford, 1985). And still, it is the most frequent concept of teaching ESP in universities. But the ability to speak the language is not emphasized as much as the ability to write, and, above all, the ability to read the language. Language curricula is therefore dominated by the systematic study of grammar, the regular carrying out of translation exercises into and out of language, the close study of set literary and science texts, the broad study of philological studies of the language (Maddock, 1994).

Another difficulty while teaching ESP at university level is that the first-year students have different language background. From our point of view, the best way out in such situation is a modular type of English course curricula structure, but this is not quite acceptable in our universities because this type of curricula demands great reconstructions in a university programs on the whole. What we can really do is to introduce diagnostic tests followed by an introductory English course if there is a need for students. The goal of the diagnostic test is to check students' knowledge in English and to see if students are ready to take on a Basic Course of ESP. The objects of test are lexical, grammatical and reading skills. Usually the test is based on the 400 most frequent words of school vocabulary / lexis inherent in the Basic Learner's Course, about 15 school grammatical items and 2 texts. The results of the test will show whether a student entering the university is ready to take on the Basic Course of ESP or not. As the result, the diagnostic test shows if there is a need in an introductory course. The introductory course should be devised as a transition course from the general English school course to the university course in ESP. The goal of the course is to review key language features taught at school as well as to form and develop reading and speaking skills of the ESP course. So that is one more teaching problem in ESP at university level.

Another important aspect to be taken into consideration is distinguishing between passive, aimed at recognition (reading, comprehension) and active, aimed at production (speaking, writing) forms of language use. The distinction is essential because these two forms require different means and methods of teaching and – most importantly – different teaching materials (S. Ter-Minasova, 1994).

Teaching methods must be learner oriented. In other words, ESP is concerned, first and foremost, with satisfying the real needs of the students and not with revealing the knowledge of the teacher. The intensive and efficient teaching of grammar, vocabulary, translation, etc. must be scientifically grounded and concentrate only on those items which students actually need for the purposes specified at the beginning of the university course. This is an important statement which in theory is universally accepted but in practice is hardly ever followed.

The primary goal of the ESP course is to teach professional communicative competence that is the ability to communicate in English according to the situation, purpose and specific roles of the participants. The ESP course builds on and extends the foundations for accurate communication. It extends the learner's grammatical, lexical and functional skills (Homutova, 1999).

Professional communication may be taught by making up patterns of communicative process. It is based on a situation, as the whole communicative process is actually a continues dynamic series of changing situations (Zykova, 1999).

Communicative situation is a dynamic system of interacting objective and subjective factors, involving a person in communication and defining his speech behavior within a single communication act. There is a great need in making up typical communicative situations, covering the part of the professional communication domain that has not been considered yet, in selecting language and speech patterns to provide communication in typical situations, in constructing a complex of exercise base on the

methods of teaching foreign language. While arranging teaching material it is necessary to pay special attention to the common situations and the way to define their list. In our case these situations are included mainly in the professional communication domain. In general oral communication domain is an aggregate of communicative situations being characterized by similar speech behavior, relations between the communicants and conditions. Professional communication domain is a complex of communicative situations, covering professional activities. This sphere comes into contact with the service domain, sociocultural domain and administrative and cultural domain, as a real communication of specialists cannot be limited by the discussion of purely professional problems. However, professional domain prevails.

Another problem of teaching ESP is vocabulary from the general and professional points of view. Vocabulary plays a key role in teaching foreign languages in general and in professional course in particular. ESP teaching implies teaching the vocabulary of a special text. However, there are no easy points as far as living human languages concerned. Indeed, the vocabulary of a special text consists of three strata, three layers: general words, scientific words and terms. Basic general words must have been learnt before the University. Terms are the gist, the essence of the speciality and are usually better known by students than by teachers. The emphasis, consequently, is on the scientific vocabulary which is, as it were, the skeleton of every special text. However, the general vocabulary is never taught properly at school and has to be acquired at the University level, especially now that the demand for so-called colloquial language has become so great since the prospects of direct, live contracts with foreigners have become so real. This is one more problem to think about.

A very important point in ESP course is the actual words to be studied, the topics to be discussed and learnt, the thematic choice of language to be activated. The next component of ESP course is Basic Grammar. Grammar is seen as an important component of communicative competence. The Basic grammar for the ESP course must be developed on the basis of statistical research and be represented by most frequent communicative grammatical structures and units which are approached functionally (sentence structure, predicate, subject, attribute, etc.) rather than traditionally/ morphologically. However, very often grammar is taught par excellence, in its full splendour, regardless of the actual aims of teaching, of the actual skills to be acquired. Paradoxically, teachers concentrate their (and the students') efforts on those complicated and cumbersome grammar structures which are hardly ever used. The difference between seeing a difficult grammatical form in the text and actually using it is often disregarded and different grammar points are taught with equal enthusiasm. Teaching communication for special purposes must be based on the previous linguistic analysis of special texts resulting in recommendations for teaching those grammar forms and structures which are the most characteristic of these texts. Another urgent problem is a good grammar book. Most textbooks repeat the same definitions which are colourless and difficult to understand because they are "universal", i.e. written regardless of the nationality of the learner. Grammar books must take into account on the one hand the peculiarities of the ESP in question, and, on the other, the characteristic features of the grammar of the student's mother tongue. For example, what is difficult about the English language for Russians may be easy for Italians and vice versa.

Another problem concerned teaching ESP is connected with the teaching material arrangement. According to S. Ter-Minasova, the teaching material for developing passive skills (skills of recognizing the written ESP) is a topical informative text supplied with the learner's commentary.

The teaching material which may be recommended for developing active skills (skills of production, especially at early stage) is a modelled text that is a text which, by

method of analysis through synthesis, is shaped into such a perfect, pure, standard form that it can be safely reproduced by a foreign learner.

In brief, the process of modelling a text for ESP students at the initial stage of their studies is confined to the following steps:

1) choosing an optimal pattern scientific text written in standard, normalized language;

2) analyzing it on different levels of linguistic research (grammar, lexis, syntax, style) for pragmatic – foreign language teaching – purposes. The idea of this stage of modelling is to specify: all violations of the norm, stylistic effects, play on words, etc., that is all those moments that cannot be recommended for foreigners to use;

3) synthesizing the results of the analysis;

4) analyzing the modelled text;

5) synthesizing the improved version. The process can go on indefinitely as long as there is room for improvement.

And the last aspect – psychological. Learning a foreign language, like no other subject, requires a special psychological approach, the atmosphere of relaxation, trust even love and faith. Indeed, learning a strange language, a strange world picture, strange (often – alien) mentality is a difficult psychological barrier for many learners. Teaching foreign languages to university students of non-philological specialities is complicated by the fact that for these students a foreign language is not a part of the special, professional education, which may result in a lack of motivation.

Another point to remember while teaching ESP nowadays is that it is necessary to take into account changes in the nature of students' need and the context in which they live, study and work. In any case the syllabus of ESP must improve the students' skills in all the aspects of language activities. The goal is the development of professional qualifications, for practical training abroad, for work in joint ventures, etc.

To make good progress, a student has to practice various language activities, related to reception, production, interaction (or mediation, on particular interpreting or translating), each of these types of activity being possible in oral or written form, or both.

These language activities are connected with very diverse fields, but, considering language learning at university, may be classified into four main spheres: the public sphere, the personal sphere, the educational sphere, and the occupational sphere. (I. Gode-Sokolova, 2000). Each act of language use should be set in the context of a particular situation within one of the spheres in which a person's social life is organized. The number of possible spheres is indeterminate. It may be useful to distinguish between:

ℂℨ the personal sphere centered on home life, family and friends (preferably in school programs than in universities programs of teaching English);

ℂℨ the public sphere in which the person concerned acts as a member of the general public engaged in transactions of various kinds;

ℂℨ the education sphere in which the person is involved in organized learning within an educational institution;

ℂℨ the vocational sphere which will be concerned with the person's job or profession.

In our point of view, the language learning process at university should be more focused on the public sphere in the first and second semesters, and on the educational and vocational spheres in the third and forth semesters, because these are related to the future specialists' needs. (If the students are given the opportunity to study ESP for the third year at university, we believe that this time should be devoted not just to learning a foreign language but also they may choose some special subjects in the language.) In these spheres the situations which arise should be described in terms of:

ɔₛthe locations in which they occur;

ɔₛthe institutions, the structure and the procedures which can normally be controlled;

ɔₛthe persons involved in the relations with the learner;

ɔₛthe events that take place;

ɔₛthe actions of persons involved.

There are some possible situational categories, classified according to the spheres which should be taken into consideration in ESP at the university. They are shown in Table 1 – Table 3.

Table 1

Public sphere

Locations	Public transport, shops, supermarkets, hospitals, entertainment, restaurants, pubs, hotels
Institutions	Public authorities, political bodies, Public Health, services, clubs, societies
Persons	Shop personnel, police, security, drivers, conductors, passengers, bar persons, receptionists
Events	Incidents, illnesses, public meetings, performances
Operations	Buying, journeys by road, rail, air, ship, dining out, services

Table 2

Educational sphere

Locations	Colleges, universities, seminar rooms, Student Union, laboratories
Institutions	College, university, learned societies, professional institutions, adult education bodies
Persons	Class teachers, professors, lectures, library and laboratory staff
Events	Visits and exchanges, sport days, disciplinary problems
Operations	Assembly, lessons, clubs and societies, lectures, essay writing, laboratory work, library work, seminars, home work, debates and discussions

Table 3

Occupational sphere

Locations	Offices, factories, workshops, farms, airports, service industries, hotels
Institutions	Firms, civil service, industries, plants, factories
Persons	Employers/employees, managers, colleagues, subordinates, work mates, clients, receptionists, secretaries, etc.
Events	Mmeetings, interviews, receptions, conferences, trade fairs, consultations, industrial accidents, industrial disputes
Operations	Industrial management; production operations, office procedures, sales operations, marketing, computer operation, works, office maintenance

Communicative activities (productive: speaking, writing; receptive: listening, reading; interactive: oral interaction, written interaction), spoken and written texts

should promote the learner's motivation; learning should stimulate their interest and sensitivity to the world around them and to their future profession. Thus, developing a course in English for Specific Purposes must result in a course that covers the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening with particular emphasis on reading and writing. The ESP course must be built on and extend the foundations for accurate communication. It must extend the learner's grammatical, lexical and functional skills and cover the public, educational and occupational skills. As a model it should include Basic Learner's Vocabulary, Basic Grammar, Diagnostic Test, Introductory course, Achievement Tests to Introductory Course, Student's Book, Teacher's Manual, Tests to Student's Book, Workbook, Sci-Tech Text Reader, Audio-Visual Aids and Final Tests.

Here is Diagram 1 that shows the components of ESP course as the complex.
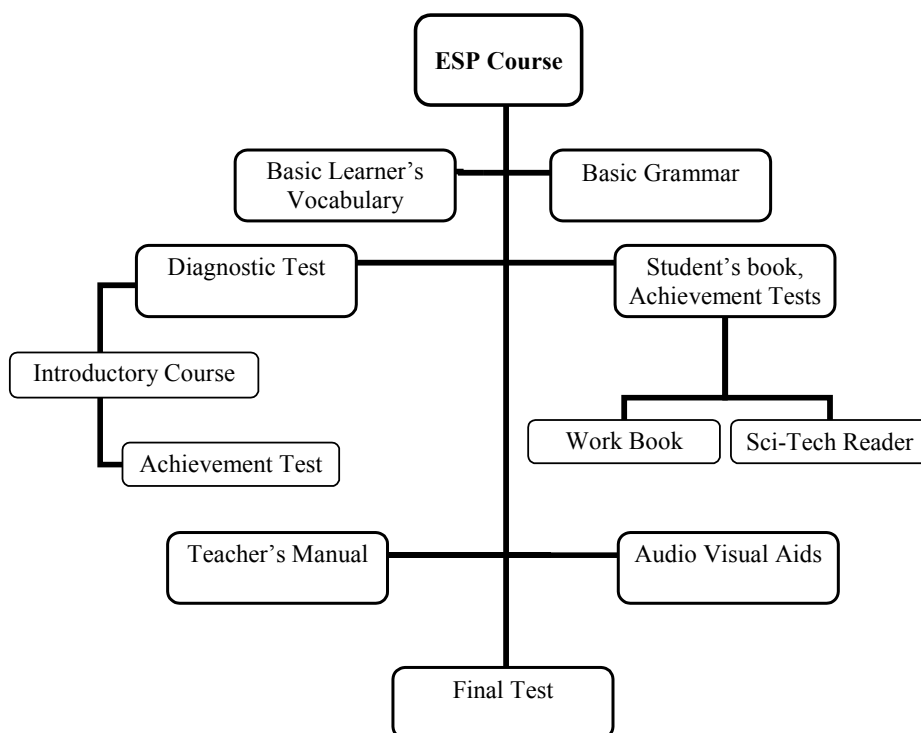

Diagram 1 ESP Complex

Now we are going to speak about the purposes of each ESP component according to Diagram 1.

Basic Learner's Vocabulary.

For teaching purpose the Basic Learner's Vocabulary should be subdivided into several layers such as terminology, which covers about 50 % of the Basic Learner's Vocabulary, auxiliary lexis (25 %), international lexis, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, frequent word forming elements and wordbuilding models.

Basic Grammar.

It is developed on the basis of statistical research and is represented by most frequent communicative grammatical structures and units which are approached functionally (sentence structure, predicate, subject, attribute, etc.) The goal is to give the students grammar knowledge which are necessary for developing communicative skills.

Diagnostic Test.

The goal of the test is to check students' knowledge in English and to see if students are ready to take on a Basic Course of ESP.

Introductory Course.

It is devised as a transition course from the general English course to the university course in ESP. The goal of the course is to review key language features taught at school as well as to form and develop reading and speaking skills of the ESP course.

Achievement Test.

It checks student's proficiency in English and again their readiness to take on the Basic ESP course.

Student's book.

It likely contains 4 or 6 units with a review unit at the end. Each unit comprises several texts for different kinds of reading, developing skills of reading for main ideas (skimming), reading for specific information (scanning), reading for detailed understanding (to achieve 100% comprehension), as well as listening and speaking skills. All the texts should be linked by the same topic. They are supplemented with lists of key vocabulary and expressions, grammatical explanations and a wide variety of exercises. All the units of Student's Book are followed by Tests.

Teacher's manual.

It will give detailed suggestions on how to teach the course, as well as complete answer keys to the Student's Book and Workbook and transcripts of listening activities.

Work Book.

It will contain various exercises that provide additional practice on the teaching points presented in the Student's Book. It could be used for class work and home work.

Audio-Visual Aids.

It will contain recordings of conversations and listening exercises used in the Student's and Tests.

Sci-Tech Reader.

It will contain additional authentic texts of different genres to each unit of the Student's Book as well as various tasks to develop reading skills. The Reader is supplemented with a Booklet on the structure of Sci-Tech Texts of different genres, Reading and Translating Strategies, most frequent logical and semantic connectives of different types of texts. The active reading skills will be needed and used in ESP courses in transition form from the "learning to learn" stage to the "reading to learn" stage, and later the learners will use them in their career and life to produce accurate, thoughtful, and informed responses to what they have read.

Final Tests.

It will be represented by collections of authentic texts on the topics covered in the Student's Book with communicative tasks aimed at testing reading, speaking, listening and writing skills developed during the course.

Making up a conclusion, we may say that there is a great need in making a full ESP course covering the part of professional communication that has not been considered yet carefully, in selecting language and speech patterns, in constructing a

teaching ESP complex based on the modern methods of teaching a foreign language to students of technical specialities at university level.

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Некоторые вопросы обучения английскому языку в специальных целях студентов технических специальностей в университете

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Ключевые слова и фразы: английский язык в специальных целях; обучение английскому языку; социальный заказ и профессиональные потребности; структура и содержание учебного курса английского языка в специальных целях; университетский уровень; цели и задачи обучения английскому языку в специальных целях.

Аннотация: Рассмотрены основные острые вопросы, связанные с обучением английскому языку в специальных целях в университете. Сформулированы цели и задачи обучения английскому языку в специальных целях студентов технических специальностей. Представлены структура и принципы отбора материала для создания учебного курса по английскому языку в специальных целях для студентов технических специальностей.

Einige Fragen der Ausbildung der englischen Sprache in den speziellen Zielen der Studenten der technischen Berufe in der Universität

Zusammenfassung: Es sind die grundlegenden Fragen, die mit der Ausbildung der englischen Sprache in den speziellen Zielen in der Universität verbunden sind, untersucht. Es sind die Ziele und die Aufgaben der Ausbildung der englischen Sprache

in den speziellen Zielen der Studenten der technischen Berufe abgefasst. Es sind die Struktur und die Prinzipien der Auswahl des Materials für die Schaffung des Lehrkurses nach der englischen Sprache in den speziellen Zielen für die Studenten der technischen Berufe vorgestellt.

Certains problèmes de l'apprentissage de l'anglais à des fins professionnelles par les étudiants des options techniques à l'université

Résumé: Sont examinés les principaux problèmes importants liés à l'apprentissage de l'anglais à des fins professionnelles à l'université. Sont formulés les buts et les tâches de l'apprentissage de l'anglais à des fins professionnelles par les étudiants des options techniques. Sont présentés la structure et les principes du choix du matériel pour la création du cours d'enseignement de l'anglais à des fins professionnelles pour les étudiants des options techniques.