

ESP in the Light of the Globalisation Process A Linguistic Overview

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Abstract

The globalisation of the world is systematic process pushed by Anglo-American strategies. Accordingly the English language becomes the most taught foreign language all over the world. In the Arab world, English has become the language of higher communication in the field of science and technology; post-graduate education; economic affairs; international banking and trade. Thus, the language is getting entranced in the Arab world especially after the second Gulf War and the defeat of Iraq. In the Arab region, English is occupying more and more a room in language use. It is gaining more and more territory from the native language. The international status of English, makes it necessary utilize English in a range of social and thematic areas. The main concern of the linguist is to try to describe the 'special Englishes' at all levels of language, including both its diachronic and synchronic dimensions.

The globalisation of the world is a steady going systematic process pushed by Anglo-American strategies. Accordingly the English language becomes the most taught foreign language all over the world. In the Arab world, English has become the language of higher communication in the field of science and technology; post-graduate education; economic affairs; international banking and trade. Thus, the language is getting entranced in the Arab world especially after the second Gulf War and the defeat of Iraq. In the Gulf region, English is occupying more and more a room in language use. It is gaining more and more territory from the native language. Right after the second Gulf war the Kuwaiti government took a decision to start the teaching of English in Kuwaiti public schools at the age of 6-7. The Jordanian Ministry of Education took the same decision. In addition to this, Higher colleges of technology, the higher institutes of petroleum studies, the universities in United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar are moving fast into a completely English medium instruction.

In the Maghreb countries, and despite the fact that French has had a strong foothold in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, it has been retreating and losing a lot of ground to English. In fact the tendency to what can be termed the shift from French

to English in these countries cannot be concealed. It is mainly due to the logical results of the globalisation process previously mentioned, i.e. the changing needs for an international language world wide. In gross, it can be mentioned that English is has become the dominant language of wider communication and the indispensable key the developing world of science, technology and communication.

Due to the international status of English, native and non native speakers employ English in a range of social and thematic areas (Gramley and Patzold 1992). The main concern of the linguist is to try to describe the 'special Englishes' at all levels of language, including both its diachronic and synchronic dimensions.

The Diachronic Dimension

The intensification of worldwide social relations which linked social localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. The history of English Language Teaching (ELT) does not constitute the exception to the inter-connection between world macro-events and the effect they have had on education, the 'micro' ones. This has created a descriptive framework for the interpretation of the varying rates of ELT through time. As with most developments of human thought, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was not a planned and coherent movement, but a phenomenon that grew out of a number of ideas and tendencies that have operated in a variety of for the birth of ESP as a revolution in linguistics in general and language teaching in particular.

The origins of ESP can be related to the history of development of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). This last can be traced back to the Greek and Roman Empires (Dudley Evans and St Johns 1998). Strevens (1977) notes that the history of LSP teaching –Special Purpose Language Teaching (SP-LT) can go back to the 16th and 17th centuries, where two types of language course were provided: the traveller' language course and what he calls the 'German for science students' type of course. In fact this was the period of new discoveries and experiments, of new approaches to science, which called for a language suitable for expressing accurately the new phenomena described and the concepts identified.

Perhaps more interestingly, Strevens (1977) further extends that the Second World War engendered the need for specialist language courses where students only needed a limited competence in a language in order to fulfil restricted tasks. He gives the example of the Royal Air Force being trained to listen to Japanese fighter aircraft dialogue. The personnel were trained only in listening skills and with a very limited amount of lexical input.

The end of the Second World War presaged an age of enormous and unparalleled expansion in scientific technical and economic activity at the international level. In this frame of mind the rise of ESP can perhaps be seen as the

result of two separate but related developments: the first is economic, the second educational.

As far as the economic factor is concerned, it is logical to say that the economic dominance of the United States after the Second World War has resulted into the demand of the English language as a language for international communication (Hutchinson and Waters 1987). The vast influx of US dollars into many countries around the world created with it the need to communicate in English. The development was accelerated by the oil crises of the early 1970's (Hutchinson and Waters 1987). This has resulted into a massive flow of funds to the oil-rich countries; English suddenly became a big business. The effect was to create a whole new mass of people wanting to learn or say knowing why they needed English that has become the key to the international currencies of science, technology and commerce. The general effect to employ pressure on English teachers to deliver the required good.

As far as the educational factor is concerned, it is worth mentioning that world economy has created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language. Therefore the learner started to be considered as more central to the educational process. This has led to a 'learner centred education' (Stevens 1977). Learners were seen to have different needs and interests, which would have an influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning. In ELT this gave rise to the view that there are important differences, for example, between the English for commerce and the English for computers. This has given rise to a simple idea: if language varies from one situation to another, it should be possible to determine the features of specific situations and then make these features the basis of the learner's course (Swales 1990).

The Synchronic Dimension

It becomes evident to say that an ESP initiative involves three spheres of knowledge: the core of the language, pedagogy and the content of the students' specialisms. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake a linguistic analysis in order to try to describe those 'Special Englishes.' The major difficulty would be then to compare them to 'General English' and to draw the attention to the differences between the two, which arise at all the levels of language.

In this vein Robinson posits that:

the general with which we are contrasting the specific is that of general education for life, culture and literature oriented language course in which the language itself is the subject matter and the purpose of the course. The student of ESP, however, is learning English en route to the acquisition of some quite different body of knowledge

and set of skills.

(Robi

nson1980 : 6)

In providing general English courses the sole priority of the teacher is to widen the general educational programme. In other words, learners are taught the elements of the language essential to any programme (Broughton 1981). The aim behind such a process is, generally, to prepare learners to pass examinations and tests whether they are sufficiently fluent in the English language or not since general English courses do not cater for the learner's immediate operational needs as opposed to ESP; these courses are known to be language-centred, i.e. teachers are more concerned with transmitting their message than satisfying their learners needs and expectations.

In an ESP context, the aims and objectives of the courses are different as compared to general language. In traditional literature differences between specialized and general language in the lexical, morpho-syntactical, textual and pragmatic features are constantly pointed out as central issues. (Mc Donald, 1980; Robinson, 1989-1991; Scarpa, 2001; Serianni, 2003).

ESP courses are goal directed. ESP teachers have to carry out a needs identification and analysis in order to design the relevant materials. The starting stage would be that of defining the notion of the discourse of the specialities the students are concerned with, i.e. the notion of 'Specialized Discourse' (Robinson 1991). This discourse does not in fact represent a sociolinguistic variety but an actual language which embodies a mixture of combined more or less specific features coexisting in a quantitatively different degree as compared to general English.

The most outstanding feature of this Specific language is the lexicon. As Sager *et al* put it, "**the lexicon of special languages is their most obvious distinguishing characteristic**" (1980:230) which prevails from the related syntax. The reason is that a large number of these lexical items is used exclusively in their specific context and hence carry only one meaning (the notion of monoreferentiality or semantic uniqueness). Besides these words are information carriers of a referential precision. They lack any kind of emotional and connotative meaning.

As for the syntactic features, it is generally agreed that ESP shares the same syntactic features of General English but it is different from that in the frequency of use. Conciseness and precision, which are a central matter in ESP, are usually syntactically achieved through the omission of phrasal elements such as articles prepositions, and other function words; by avoiding relative clauses and subordination in favour of solid, long, nominal groups and coordination with complex premodification and nominalization which are persistent in Specific language and help giving more objectiveness and precision. In other words, ESP need to be characterised by elementary surface structures and very simple Syntax

(Brekke 1989). The choice of tenses is also essential in ESP. Brekke maintains that the present seems to be the most widespread especially in scientific texts though the use of other tenses is regulated by the degree of generality of what is being reported. In addition to this one need to point at the considerable use of the passives in ESP. Robinson (1991) claims that the passive assures a degree of depersonalisation of the language used.

The next level would logically be the *Textual Features* that need to distinguish specialized discourse. These generally depend on the text genre, which establishes word order; the argumentative models, the distribution of information within texts, the textual organization of interactions, i.e. texts in ESP follow a codified accepted pattern depending on the standard methodological framework of the discipline in question and on the purposes of the texts, as in the case of summary, abstract, letters, contracts, etc. surely in any case emotive language is to be avoided as this dimension is not appropriate in scientific matters.

Algeria, like the rest of the Maghreb and Arab countries is well aware of such a key role especially, the importance of English-dominated communication in development; i.e. recognizing English as a factor for economic and intellectual growth. This recognition has made Algerian policy makers to make English part of the official curriculum at all levels of education (middle, secondary and university levels). The major aim is to make the Algerian students able to communicate effectively in international networking. This crucial aim is part of the current Algerian economic policy which tries to give rise to opportunities of partnership as a logical outcome of the globalisation process.

Due to the fact that English is the language of research and publication, it is necessary to add that these objectives are important for Algeria to obtain a respectable international status in the complex and thoughtless globalisation process, whose indispensable secret of success has proved to be the economic and business success of the country. Due to the incontestable role of English as an international language that is taught to achieve different 'global' roles, its spread among the intellectual 'class' would help the country to increase economic opportunities with a variety of partners.

Being aware of the fact that English is a 'relay language' for interpretation and translation in different business and scientific and technological opportunities, leading strategic national companies have set up their own language courses through workplace oriented programmes to enable their staff and employees to fulfil different types of purposes whether scientific or business; as Sonatrach the national oil firm which offers regular courses for both business actors who need to fulfil multiple contracts with English speaking oil firms, and groups of scientists to enable them undertake different types of research. In like manner different ESP centres have been established all along the country to ensure different types of English language training for different types of engineers and technicians.

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