

Teaching common core English in ESP classes: a Way to Promote Translation as a Learning Tool

BENMANSOUR BENYELLES Radia
(University of Tlemcène)

Abstract

Globalisation is a steady on-going systematic process driven by Anglo-American strategies. Accordingly, the English language has become the most taught foreign language all over the world. Algeria is well aware of the importance of English-dominated communication in development. Therefore, English language teaching has been adopted in the Algerian educational programmes. At the university level the teaching of the language is carried out in different fields (Biology, Engineering, Exact Sciences, Economics...) to achieve specific purposes of the learners. The major aim is to make the Algerian students able to communicate effectively in international networking.

Despite this world status, and the relatively long exposure (10 years) to the English language, postgraduate students in the scientific and technological fields are still unable to extract information from documents claiming that their language knowledge is poor. As an illustration the present work focuses on postgraduate students at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Tlemcen. It concentrates on the analysis of the needs of the learners, and presents some useful recommendations with regard to course design. The main suggestions stress on: the promotion of the reading skill, the development of the students' discourse awareness, teaching

translation in order to avoid negative transfer from L1 since no one is in any doubt that students will use Arabic in class, whatever teachers will say or do.

Introduction

The globalisation of the world is a steady on-going systematic process driven by Anglo-American strategies. Accordingly, the English language has become the most taught foreign language all over the world and the international language of communication that achieves different aims of students and workers from all walks of life .This world status has motivated a good number of researchers and scientists to learn English in order to have access to the different documents and references written in English. The availability of a large body of scientific literature written in English has made it possible for researchers to retrieve information from various sources which they can benefit from so as to update academic research and develop their related field of study.

The fact that the English language has gained great importance in today's world has resulted in its teaching at all educational levels from elementary to tertiary level. Hence, governments are introducing mass education programmes to encourage the teaching of English as a first or second foreign language. The aim of such an implementation is to satisfy the increasing needs of a variety of learners hoping to find a place in different economic and educational institutions.

Realising the fact that keeping abreast of the latest developments requires efficient access to information available in English, Algeria, as any other developing nation, has adopted English in its educational programmes. At the university level the teaching of the English language is carried out in different fields such as Biology, Engineering, Exact

Sciences, Economics to achieve the specific purposes of the learners as English for specialisation. The specialisation represents situations where the learner has some clear and precise reasons to learn English. The learned language is a selected repertoire of words and expressions which can respond to specific needs of learners in defined contexts. It is English for Specific Purposes or ESP for short.

1. ESP Teaching Operation

It would, then, seem logical to say that ESP involves an answer to the question: *Why does the learner need to learn a foreign language?* Providing an answer to this question is not an easy task. It is, therefore, needed to carry out an analysis of the definitions and related concepts to understand properly the line of action of the world of ESP. In this vein, Harmer defines ESP as: *'Situations where the student has some specific reasons for wanting to learn a language.'* (Harmer 1983:1); that is to say, the students want to learn the language because they have particular justifications, for instance: to specialise in fields like engineering, banking, accounting and tourism. In a similar way, a researcher may want to undertake some research, while a businessman may wish to interact and carry out business exchanges. Thus, ESP is an approach to language learning based on learners' needs. Its foundation lays in the fact that teacher and planner must investigate the uses to which the language will be put, to determine what these specific purposes are. These needs are then translated into linguistic and pedagogic terms for the elaboration of an effective course.

In sum, ESP is one important branch of the EFL/ESL system that functions as the main branch of English Language Teaching ELT. Therefore, ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, but rather an approach to language learning whereby the content and method are based on the

learners' particular needs. These learners have to reach the intended language level in a shorter time and in a better way through the practice of content-based English language teaching namely ESP. It is, then, fairly clear that the implementation of an ESP course demands *a priori* definition of the learners' needs so as to achieve the planned purposes within the determined area of specialism. The selection of appropriate words and structures will in turn enable the learner to use appropriately the learned language. Hence ESP can be divided into two broad categories:

a- English for Academic Purposes (EAP): It is a study-oriented branch of ESP (Mc Donough, 1984). It shows the learner how to study through the medium of English. In this sense, EAP is taught to students in order to achieve educational purposes. Students need at least to be skilful in listening to lectures, note-taking, reading in the specialised field, writing reports and research articles taking part in group discussions, interpreting graphs, diagrams and tables and so on. In gross, it shows the learner how to study through the medium of English.

b- English for Occupational Purposes (EOP): In such an area, the teaching of English is, therefore, occupation-oriented. It is in employment situations where the learner needs English to practise his job. For example, an air traffic controller may need English to guide an air-craft, the businessman to carry out international trade...etc (Harmer 1983).

It is worth noting that a third branch of ESP called EST, English for Science and Technology has been added. It is a branch of ESP satisfying scientific and technological requirements. The teacher's role would then be to show to the learners how the acquired scientific or technological content can be performed through the English language. For this

reason, some specialists would maintain that EST is a branch which can be introduced within the first two elements, EAP and EOP, depending on the area English would be used for (Strevens, 1977; Mc Donough 1984), since it intersects for occupational purposes and academic purposes, as it has both occupational and academic applications (Blue, 2001).

This implies that an identification of the needs of the learners must be prior to any ESP teaching operation (Markee, 1984). In general terms, it is a systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be (Stout, 1995). However, as far as language is concerned, needs assessment is the process of identifying the students' reasons for studying a language. It refers to the procedure of identifying general and specific language needs of students so that appropriate goals, objectives, and content in courses can be developed (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). It should be directed so as to help learners for future professional communication and be active participants in their world. In sum, analysing the specific needs of a particular group of learners serves as a prelude to an ESP course design, because it determines the 'what' and the 'how' of the ESP course. Yong (2006) also reached the conclusion that ESP materials designers should explore the learners' potential needs and hence decide about the process of learning and learning skills needed to be taken into account (Dudley-Evans and St Johns, 1998). Accordingly, course designers will have recourse to three sources of information:

- 1) - The students themselves
- 2) - The language teaching establishment
- 3) -The institution of language use.

(Richterich and Chancerel, quoted in Hutchinson and Waters 1987:102)

Likewise, the process of needs identification aims at:

- a- clarifying the language skills needed to carry out jobs or studies (Pilbeam 1978)
- b- drawing a profile of present needs, which will make clear the different levels of achievement of different tasks.
- c- determining the amount of language training in terms of facilities.

The data collected at this stage provide information about the amount and the level of performance in the target situation. They can be considered as complementary information to the necessities. The amount of the needed language will be determined accordingly (Robinson 1991; Wright, 2001 Dudley Evans and St. Johns 1998).

2. ESP in the Algerian University

It is worth noting that the Algerian universities are progressively introducing the English-dominated technology. They allow a number of students and lecturers keep scientific and academic links with British and American institutions through the establishment of networks in different forms. This is due to the awareness that much of the modern knowledge is accessible only through the medium of English. Algerian students must learn English in order to have access to international networking. For this reason English is not only taught at the level of English departments but also as a 'module' across the university curricula at both graduate and postgraduate levels. Unfortunately, the Algerian university seems to maintain the weakness of the Algerian educational system; the teaching of large, mixed-ability classes at the level of amphitheatres does not seem either to contribute to the quality of teaching or to raise students' motivation for learning.

However, the English language continues to be taught at different levels of different Algerian universities. The aim is to help the learners to handle communication in a given target situation. Besides the English Language Department, language knowledge is a requirement to fulfil different purposes at the level of the different specialities offered by the University of Tlemcen as in 'Genie Biomedical', Electronics, 'Hydraulics, 'Computing', 'Architecture', 'Genie Mécanique', and Economics. Depending on the institutions the teaching is either performed by language specialists, who are generally part time teachers or subject specialists who try to provide an ELT training rather than using English as a tool of instruction. This requirement is met both at the level of the classical system or the Licence-Master-Doctorate system (LMD)

3. Case Study

The setting of this paper is the post graduation of the Faculty of Economics at the level of the University Abou Bekr Belkaid Tlemcen. It is worth mentioning that the Faculty offers an instruction both within the frame of the classical system and the LMD system. The Faculty, originally the Department of Economics, was established in 1977 to provide undergraduate studies in the different specialisations in Economic Sciences. Since its establishment, the Faculty has welcomed a great number of students from different regions essentially from: Tlemcen, Bechar, Ain Temouchent, and Mecheria, in addition to Magister students from other Arab countries and Mauritania

The Department receives students holding a Baccalaureate from different streams: Exact Sciences, Economics and Management, Economic Techniques and Accounting. Previously the Faculty used to accept the students holding a baccalaureate in literary streams on condition that they sit for an examination in mathematics; these last are no

more accepted since they got problems in assimilating mathematics and accounting. These students are supposed to prepare a Licence in Economics in different specialisations. The Licence is either a four- year degree course or a three-year degree course depending on whether they are in a classical system of instruction or LMD. After the Licence instruction, students can attempt to reach post graduate studies. If they hold a classical Licence they have to sit for an examination to have the right to pursue their studies. The Magister is generally obtained after a training of at least two years. During the first year, the student has to study given modules depending on his speciality; this is followed by a series of exams whose results will determine the success during the theoretical year; this is followed by a second or even a third year where the students are supposed to write a thesis .

a. Presentation of the Problematic

Despite a relatively long experience in EFL learning, the subject specialists still claim that the postgraduate participants have difficulties in performing the required tasks both in terms of productive and receptive skills. It seems clear for the subject specialists in post graduation that the level of language proficiency of their students remains low. A number of them have even 'lost' a scholarship in China because of low achievement in the English language proficiency. A great number of other students got problems in getting inserted in the professional life because of the same problem. Therefore, it seems necessary to assess the different needs of the learners. The drawn profile can prove two major types of information: the current level of ESP and the target use of English (what to achieve in ESP in the future domains). These steps remain of crucial importance in order to avoid the emergence of a great number of problems in the construct and conduct of the language course.

b. Results of the Study

The results have confirmed the assumption that the teaching materials do not rely on any Needs Identification and Analysis (NIA) step which is considered as a pre-requisite for the design of an ESP course, in addition to the fact that learners present important lacks in terms of language knowledge including the lack of an appropriate vocabulary repertoire and the basic syntactic structures that help them carry out the tasks required by the ESP situation. The learners have acquired some learning habits that have proved to be ineffective learning strategies used in order to overcome the different language problems especially the lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Besides, it has been proved that the students may be confronted to different uses of the English language both for academic and professional reasons, the training can precede, follow or be simultaneous with the studies or occupation. The informants have explained that in their postgraduate training, they are specialising in a particular field and are compelled to undertake a research to obtain a Magister's degree. The majority have explained that such an adventure is difficult without an accurate knowledge of the English language. The students may, then, be enrolled as subject specialist teachers that may postulate again for doctoral studies; some researchers are sent to foreign countries as scholarship holders to pursue their studies, here again the English language is a pre-requisite for the selection of students. One of the informants maintained that she has 'lost' a fellowship because she lacks a good working knowledge in English language. In both professional and academic purposes the students are generally involved in a variety of tasks including spoken and written interactions.

c. Interpretation of the Results

The collected data has helped us to conclude that the students will be involved in a variety of situations during and after their post graduate training. These situations may require the practice of a variety of activities within the practice of the four language skills within equal amounts. As far as the speaking skill is concerned, the economist is supposed to provide oral presentations to negotiate contracts participate in seminars and conferences and talk to visitors. The listening skill is, therefore, automatically required in the conversation or presentation processes. The writing skill is also widely practiced as in note-taking, writing summaries of books or articles, reports on personal experiments, business reports, and advertisements. The reading skill remains the most widely practiced skill among post graduate students since the primary activity of the student is to be able to read and comprehend the wide range of literature available in his subject area to pursue research or practice his job. Moreover, all the interviewees have evoked the wide use of translation to achieve their final objectives. In a great number of situations they needed to be able to function fluently in two languages alternately, or translate the extracted information from the English sources into French or Arabic.

Moreover, interviews have been conducted with ESP teachers. The main findings of the interviews can be summarized as follows:

- There is a general consensus on the low language proficiency of most post graduate students.
- The greatest priority is given to the teaching of the language rather than economic knowledge due to the lack of knowledge in the area.

- Lack of collaboration on the part of subjects' specialists constitutes a major problem in the enhancement of teaching process.

On the other hand, the students' interview highlights a number of findings that corroborate the results obtained through the teachers' interview; these can be listed in as follows:

- Most subjects hold a positive attitude towards the ELT situation since they are aware about the requirements of the target situation
- Most respondents have expressed a clear need for the teaching of teaching of language system elements namely grammar and vocabulary.
- Most of the respondents agree with the fact that the results of the teaching learning situation are negative and consider themselves as beginners
- The use of translation seems to be one of the major requirements of the target situation.

d. Interpretation of the Results

The findings could be interpreted as showing a certain conflict with the major objectives of the national educational policy which aims at promoting the teaching of foreign languages to help the Algerian joining the globalisation process. In the early stages, the learners seem to lack the necessary awareness to be more thoughtful about the process of EFL acquisition; this would suggest the need for an explicit awareness raising instruction (Ourghi 2002) in order to enable the learner to perceive the language in emotionally positive way, therefore help language acquisition to occur in an optimal way. Furthermore, ESP learners need a considerable help in linguistic form (grammar and vocabulary) which is necessary

to the performance of the tasks and skills required by the target situation.

What is most outstanding is the widespread transfer from the Arabic language which is clearly noticeable when producing pieces of language at the phonological, lexical, and grammatical levels. Besides the evident lacks in grammatical knowledge and the mechanics of the comprehension and production of accurate language, the students lack the necessary awareness of how to recall the language knowledge in order to perform the different tasks they are involved into during and after the learning process. It might be suggested that the subjects do not know how to extract information from the texts they are exposed to, and make use of the clues picked up in texts to comprehend the writers' thoughts and enrich their language knowledge in terms of the linguistic levels (grammar and vocabulary). Without an explicit awareness of the constituents of a text, the students cannot be expected to proceed the comprehension step.

e. Remedial Work

To provide a successful remedial work, it becomes necessary to consider the whole language curricula at different educational levels, i.e. designers have to try to bridge the gap between primary language curricula (middle and secondary schools) and the university language programmes. One needs to be aware of the fact that primary language experience is related to different language environment (technical education schools and general education schools). Each type provides a given type of knowledge, with huge gaps in the syllabuses designed for both; at university level the requirements of the ELT situation differ completely from that of the primary levels; for this reason it becomes evident that aims and objectives of English language learning in Algeria need to be determined

with a collaboration of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Objectively, the students of economics need English in reading their specialist literature, academic journals, English drawings, instructions, attending conferences/lectures/technical or business negotiation in English, communicating with foreign partners, going abroad and receiving foreign visitors. These are perceived as target needs which are very much language centred; but the learners may have subjective needs or wants which cannot be ignored since the subjective needs will form and stimulate their learning motivation (Hutchinson and Waters 1987). Brindley (1989) also considers that one has to identify and take into account a multiplicity of affective and cognitive variables which affect learning such as learners attitudes, motivation, awareness, personality, wants, expectations, and learning styles. It has been noticed that such wants involves the improvement of both special English and general English including a number of skills – reading and writing then speaking and listening. Therefore, we can conclude that the learners have their own general and specific needs both objectively and subjectively, that need to be filtered as common core needs. They need to improve general English knowledge in the four skills and need to somehow excel in common core technical English, including translation.

Proposals for remedial work may start first by suggesting a set of procedures and principles that need to be taken as essential principles in deciding about unit content in such an ESP situation. It recommends the building of teaching materials based on the promotion of the reading skill. Readers need to be able to pick up clues that enable them develop the productive skills by understanding the writers' train of thought

and the use of structural patterns. Therefore, much of our efforts as teachers should be conducted to train our students to interpret texts and to practice with them the predicting skills. As a result, they will understand texts through all language levels by using both the structural approach and the functional approach in such a way that one level needs to accommodate the other (Harmer 2001). But if we consider students' learning habits with regard to the reading skill, we realise that many students are used to a word by word approach and to a concept of reading which implies knowing the meaning of every word in a printed text rather than to an interactive approach that stresses on the learners as active participants. Comprehension exercises need to train students to practice skimming and scanning a text as frequently as possible in order to achieve the real purposes of reading; if we consider the target needs of the learners it can be concluded that the future economists are required to practice adequately a set of productive activities since they will be involved in the practice of the four skills. The selected texts are selected according to given themes in the field of economics as related to their main area of interest. In selecting the teaching activities, the teachers need to develop their students' discourse awareness.

The target situation puts heavy emphasis on translation competence in ESP both from and into the foreign language, for this reason translation has often been referred to as the fifth skill in ESP along side with the other four basic skills. Ross (2000) maintains that translation holds a special importance at an intermediate and an advanced level. Translation is recognised as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes different forms of communication and understanding between strangers. Besides, the type of activities suggested in the ESP classroom may provoke the use of the other tongue, i.e. when students are linguistically incapable of

activating vocabulary for a chosen task. The amount of use of the Arabic language in the case of our sample population may also well have to do with different learning styles and abilities, therefore no one is in any doubt that students will use their L1 in class, whatever teachers will say or do (Harmer 2001), it provides a sense of security and validate the learners experiences. Such a type of use need to be exploited in order to compare phonology, vocabulary, word order and other language points, since, according to Ross (2000) if students are aware of the differences, language interference and intervention from their own language are likely to be reduced. The teacher can explicitly point out differences between L1, L2 and English. For this purpose translation may be useful, because it can be interactive, learner centred, and promotes learners' autonomy in using authentic materials (Mahmoud, 2006).

Translation can be planned as post-reading comprehension activity; on the basis of the knowledge acquired during the comprehension activities, the students in pairs may be asked to translate selected passages from English to Arabic, then the pairs exchange their translations and translate passage back to the English language, finally the translation activities English- Arabic- English are compared with the original texts. The ultimate analysis may allow raising learners' awareness of vocabulary, grammar, style and language transfer. In the same vein, Cook (2002) maintains that bilingualism and translation in the classroom are really quite authentic together with the conscious focus on the differences between languages with focus on form and a bit of focus on meaning and use.

In order to avoid an association with the grammar translation method, Linder (2002) advocates translation activities as natural learning methods for promoting

contextualised language use, discourse and textual level language competence, and cultural transfer skill. However, this new orientation in ESP teaching will imply the search for texts and the teaching methodology which could meet this demand satisfactorily. At least one can maintain that on the basis of the feedback acquired from the study of a given business theme in an authentic text, and the knowledge of L1 (phonology, grammar and lexis) the students can be able to reflect the lexico-grammatical mismatches between English and the Arabic languages and propose well reasoned translation solutions in the target situation (academic or occupational).

To conclude with, the present paper has attempted to provide a clear idea of the importance of reconsidering the processes of needs identification and analysis in deciding about course content in an ESP situation. However, this vision cannot be attained without a transformation and reconsideration of the deeply-rooted teaching principles in most of our post graduation teachings.

Conclusion

To conclude one need to mention that the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research needs to encourage the necessary efforts of improving such a primordial side of the EFL policy due to its importance in improving scientific research and its contribution to the socio-economic development of the nation. Yet it still remains difficult to convince the learners to change the attitudes towards foreign language learning not least English, because of the limitations in the job market. Besides, in an area that is worth for future research, one may wonder about the role of teachers, and social and political involvement in developing students' motivation for research requirements, therefore, help to break the phenomenon of failure. Responding to such a type of problems

will not only solve one problem of ELT teaching, but help to transform the vision towards foreign language teaching in general.

It is still true that much needs to be done in order to build up a sound pedagogical framework that provides reforms to the foreign language policy in response to the requirements of the globalisation process. The university needs urgently to develop new strategies, new ways of thinking, learning and doing within its language policy. New roles, new international understandings and relationships have to be moved forward. This challenge needs to be developed by such an educational institution since it is considered as a driving force in the socio-economic development of the nation. In sum, what the language policy needs to take into consideration in the development of ESP is the creation of opportunities for the expansion of such a field not only in terms of academic orientations, as it is believed by the great majority, but also encourage the occupational side especially with regard to the requirements of the new world order: the economic welfare and the scientific and technological growth.

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