

# Introduction

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## 1. ESP and EAP – A Brief Overview

The teaching of English for specific purposes (ESP) is an activity within English language teaching (ELT) and can be traced back to the 1960s when unparalleled developments in the scientific, economic, and technological fields created a huge demand for English. This demand concerned a clear need for specific English and so the teaching and learning of English particularly to adults started to shift from general English for no particular purpose with a predominantly grammatical syllabus to a more functional syllabus providing language and skills training for specific professional and academic needs. This shift in focus towards ESP aimed “to help language learners cope with the features of language or to develop the competencies needed to function in a discipline, profession, or workplace” (Basturkmen, 2005, p. 6).

ESP has been defined as “an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19) and so needs analysis has commonly played a fundamental role in the development of ESP courses. Needs analysis has been described as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities” (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992, p. 242). This process can comprise varying methods ranging from tests to interviews and observations, and various sources, which can comprise any of the various stakeholders involved in the course. However, it has been generally agreed that the opinions of the learners “compris[e] an essential element of the needs analysis” (Master, 2005, p. 101) and as such, the learners are often involved in the needs analysis process. This has been criticised, however, since learners

“tend to make inadequate sources of information for a needs analysis” (Long, 2005, p. 20) because although many can explain why they feel they want to learn a language, they are often unable to identify their actual language needs.

Although the focus on needs analysis in ESP is a significant feature that distinguishes it from general English, other characteristics have emerged, particularly in the work of Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), who identified three “absolute” characteristics of ESP, namely:

ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;

ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;

ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, pp. 4–5)

Consequently, although the significance of identifying and meeting learner needs is clear, ESP must also be flexible in its teaching approach(es), given the variety of disciplines in which it operates, and the vast array of language skills, texts, and other features that characterise ESP contexts.

The teaching of ESP, due mainly to its focus on the identifiable needs of learners, is often directed towards adult learners who are typically in a work context and whose English-language needs run concurrently with their professional activity. However, ESP is increasingly being taught in tertiary level institutions and can even be taught to learners at secondary school level (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), although the language needs of younger learners can be less immediate.

English for academic purposes (EAP), in contrast, though typically regarded as a branch of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997; Charles & Pecorari, 2016), was first identified as its own approach to teaching English as early as 1974, and soon afterwards, the term EAP was coined to refer to the teaching of English to overseas students at British universities (Jordan, 1997).

Since its inception, the range of settings in which EAP can be found has increased significantly and it is no longer confined to British universities; indeed, the teaching of EAP can be found in a vast number of higher and further education institutions globally whether in an English-speaking context or not (Jordan, 1997). Moreover, EAP has developed over time and has divided into two main sections, English for general academic purposes (EGAP) and English for specific academic purposes (ESAP). EGAP courses typically focus on common core skills or general study skills, such as critical thinking or note-taking, whereas ESAP courses concern subject-specific skills and language, and so will often focus on the specific language of a single discipline, such as economics or mechanical engineering. This focus on the specificity of different disciplines' language has led to various research approaches in EAP, including genre analysis and corpus linguistics. Genre analysis investigates genres, that is, specific types of texts from a disciplinary subject area that share similarities in content or form, for example, and the contexts in which they are present with the aim "to identify the common traits of academic language in different domains" (Thompson & Diani, 2015, p. 1). This aim is aided by advances in technology that have allowed researchers to analyse language corpora, where huge numbers of texts are collected so that their various discourse features can be investigated.

Over the past couple of decades, the need for ESP and EAP in tertiary-level institutions has grown dramatically, mainly due to the internationalisation of higher education, which, amongst other aspects, has prompted the establishment of study programmes taught wholly or partially in English. English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is "a global growing phenomenon" (Dearden, 2015, p. 2) and the challenges that students inevitably face when studying in a second language have led to a greater need for the provision of EAP and ESP in these institutions (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2010). This growth in EMI programmes has been a consequence of policies that have encouraged greater student mobility, thanks chiefly to the Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) initiative and the Bologna Process in Europe (Coleman, 2006). As such, the importance of ESP and EAP in higher

education institutions in the second decade of the 21st century has never been felt so keenly.

## 2. About this Book

Against the background outlined above, a series of three symposia on ESP and EAP were held in 2014, 2015, and 2016 at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, a university where English serves as one of three mediums of instruction. This volume presents a selection of eight of the twenty papers presented at those symposia. Although the volume does not offer an exhaustive representation of the perspectives and experiences shared at the symposia, nor is it conceived as a conference proceedings per se, it does offer a representative sample of the diversity of approaches to teaching and assessing ESP and EAP which were shared on those occasions. Like the symposia, the bond that links all chapters published here is their application to English language teaching (ELT) and/or language assessment. Another common denominator is that all the authors present reflections and research carried out in higher education institutions and adult education contexts. Beyond these similarities, however, the contributions vary markedly in terms of teaching and research contexts: some report the results of meticulously planned research projects, while others describe in detail cases embedded in specific contexts; some analyse the specialised language of particular discourses or domains, while others reflect upon teaching methods and materials; some are set in broad EGAP contexts, while others operate in narrower spaces of ESP or ESAP.

From the diverse vantage points of the various contributors to the volume, there emerge decidedly heterogeneous, and even disparate teaching approaches, research methods, and writing styles. “Disparate circumstances” (Strevens, 1977) being the *raison d’être* of ESP, the editors hope that the reader welcomes this diversity as much as they do. However, they also recognize the necessity to justify the reasoning behind the structure of such an eclectic collection of scholarship. After much deliberation, it was decided to order the contributions in terms of focus, drawing upon Dudley-Evans and St. John’s

(1998) aforementioned three characteristics. Specifically, the first two chapters establish the identification of learner needs and the adoption of learner-centred approaches as the core of ESP research and practice; the middle four chapters—always keeping the learner in mind—present various approaches to analysing, teaching, and assessing the linguistic features of specialised genre and discourse; and the final two chapters demonstrate the necessity of basing teaching and assessment methods and content on the specific language and language skills which contemporary learners of ESP/EAP actually require for study, work, and life. Although each of these thematic strands, among several others, are encountered throughout, the reader will hopefully find that each chapter builds upon and/or responds to the theoretical and practical foundation of the previous.

Jemma Prior sets the stage with her account of a recent action research study undertaken with the participation of undergraduate economics students following her advanced ESAP course. Her research documents how classroom-based negotiation was introduced into the course syllabus to provide the students with greater decision-making powers with the intention of promoting learner autonomy. The fact that the learners were able to participate actively in the decision-making processes of the course also provided them with greater opportunities to practise some of the specific skills the course had been designed to foster, especially writing and speaking. She frames her account with reference to prior studies that had attempted to foster autonomy through providing learners with greater responsibility for their learning and as such, provides an up-to-date contribution to the work of other researchers. She concludes by presenting some of the findings from the evaluation phase of the project, demonstrating that the students were almost wholly positive about being able to negotiate aspects of their course, and that reports of increased motivation from the students had contributed to their achieving greater autonomy.

Next, Karoline Steckley describes the establishment of an English for refugees course at the *Associazione Italo Americana* in Trieste, Italy. Initiated as a well-intentioned community project to support the integration of asylum seekers,

Karoline and her colleagues quickly realised that the needs of refugees stood in stark contrast to the needs of the traditional adult students at their institution. Whereas most adults who come to the Association are Italian citizens seeking conversation courses to improve their oral communication skills for work or leisure, the asylum seekers had diverse national, educational, and professional backgrounds as well as abstract or vague motivations for attending the course. As a result, the teacher-centred approach to adult education employed by the Association proved ineffective. In response, the instructors applied a more student-centred approach which focused on the most immediate needs of the course participants and through a process of trial and error experimented with methods employed in their after-school program for Italian school children. The result was a course that applied experience-based learning principles for the purpose of developing life skills. The net effect was a valuable learning experience for both the course participants and the teachers.

Turning to the features of scientific discourse, Michela Canepari makes a compelling argument in favour of the application of popular books, documentaries, and television series to the teaching and learning of the language of mathematics and physics in a university context. She details how such texts provide an intersemiotic or intralinguistic translation of mathematical theorems and scientific theories, and explains how analysing products of popular culture such as these in the classroom can make the specialised language of mathematicians and scientists more interesting and accessible to learners of languages for specific purposes (LSP), who may only have basic knowledge and minimal interest in these fields.

Framing his experience as an example of reflective practice, Michael Joseph Ennis recounts his efforts to perfect the teaching and assessing of academic writing skills for undergraduate students of tourism studies over a period of five years. Beginning with the triangulation of the needs of his students through personal observation, formal surveys, and a comprehensive literature review, he details the methods and process he employed to select and adapt authentic, relevant materials in the design of a customised course based on the

concepts of ESAP and task-based language teaching (TBLT). Facing common challenges with student engagement, he experimented with the use of various forms of extra credit to incentivise course attendance and the completion of collaborative writing tasks. He concludes by presenting excerpts from student compositions as evidence of the course's success in fostering the development of reading-for-writing skills and intercultural learning.

The next two chapters adopt corpus-based approaches to analyse specialised discourse and ESP learner interlanguage, respectively. Valeria Fiasco's corpus-based study employs mixed methods in an attempt to triangulate how and why Anglicisms are often used instead of their Italian equivalents in the reporting on Brexit found in three Italian newspapers. Analysing the frequency data, Fiasco reveals that numerous loanwords are used with their British English connotations within the Italian Brexit discourse, in particular proper nouns and specialised terms from the semantic fields of politics or business and economics. She also finds that many general English terms found in her Brexit corpus are not commonly used in Italian and/or only occur once in the entire corpus. The qualitative analysis reveals that newspapers employ divergent strategies based on assumptions about their respective readers. Some Anglicisms appear with an Italian equivalent or a brief gloss to assist non-specialist readers in comprehension, but most occur with no attempt to translate or define at all, when comprehension is assumed. Fiasco suggests that a corpus such as this could be applied to help learners understand specialised English words and phrases with the support of their L1s.

With more explicit attention paid to learners of ESP, Letizia Cirillo describes the construction, analysis, and application of a local learner corpus consisting of opinion articles written by undergraduate university students studying business studies. This particular corpus offers insights into the metadiscourse markers employed by students to fulfil various rhetorical and pragmatic functions. Cirillo argues that teachers could use similar customised learner corpora to inform syllabus design, lesson planning, and individualized feedback and instruction. In addition, students could be urged to exploit such corpora for

the purpose of peer and self-assessment, in this case of their overuse, underuse, or misuse of textual metadiscourse markers and their perhaps unreflective use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. This learning strategy can be especially effective when students are given opportunities to compare their tendencies with data found in various reference corpora.

The final two chapters demonstrate the extent to which the specific needs of learners in different contexts can give rise to divergent perspectives on teaching and assessing ESP. Sharon Hartle reflects on English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and testing occurring at her Italian university in light of the position of English as a global *lingua franca*. These reflections are driving in the direction of teaching and testing to “realistic” norms which transcend the native-speaker model of English by focusing on the real-life communication needs of learners. Based on an open-ended questionnaire, students studying tourism management at her institution seem to be primarily motivated to learn English for the purpose of communicating with other non-native speakers in international contexts, rather than to achieve native-like proficiency. In light of this, Hartle argues that teaching advanced language courses and assessing advanced language proficiency should focus in particular on the complexity of grammar and lexis, rather than native-like accuracy and range. In this pursuit, she presents an analysis of a small corpus of learner texts to reveal the most common errors of her students, arguing that instruction should focus on those errors which might impede communication. The project is culminating, at the time of writing, in the explicit inclusion of *interactional competence* in the descriptors used for C1 oral proficiency exams at her institution, and the deemphasising of errors which may mark the test takers as non-native speakers, but do not impede communication.

Finally, Todd Marshall, who in contrast to Sharon Hartle works in the context of an American university, suggests that one area where his English language learners should become more native-like is their pronunciation, for the sake of mutual intelligibility. He suggests that pronunciation is too often neglected in university English as a second language (ESL) instruction in the United States, despite the fact that students are often required to pronounce English



words correctly, that is, similar to a native speaker, in order to excel academically during their studies and in the US labour market after graduation. Although he values the offering of standalone pronunciation courses, he proposes integrating the teaching of pronunciation across the language curriculum. Drawing on his personal experience teaching and from the established body of research and scholarship in the field, he offers his seven “secrets” to teaching pronunciation, including training students to use the International Phonetic Alphabet to increase their familiarity with English phonics, integrating mini pronunciation lessons into each lesson in response to commonly occurring errors, teaching memorisation techniques, drilling students on phonemes and minimal pairs they have already memorised, teaching students stress patterns, tailoring exercises to the practical needs of students, and, finally, finding ways to make all of the above fun for the students.

The strength of this volume is that the perspectives of the authors are rooted in practical experience and classroom research conducted while teaching ESP and EAP to adult learners in various contexts, which makes the book of particular interest to practitioners in analogous contexts. One possible limitation is that all but one of the authors are based at institutions in Italy. However, the editors and authors share the belief that despite its predominantly Italian perspective, the accounts in this volume will still serve as a valuable resource for colleagues teaching at universities and community programs in other parts of the world. Furthermore, as representatives of both the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and TESOL Italy, the editors sincerely hope that this modest contribution to the field will entice some readers—based in Italy or abroad—to share their own work at future editions of our ESP/EAP symposia and/or in future resulting publications.

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