

## RECENT TRENDS IN ESP TEACHING

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Most ESP courses are based on sponsor needs: in other words, on what the parent institution or company thinks the student's needs are. For example, a needs analysis may reveal that learners need to read specialized books in English. What does this imply for the pedagogic approach? There are several answers to the question, each answer revealing a different trend in ESP teaching. For the sake of clarity, this lecture considers two trends in current ESP teaching, namely, the classic ESP approach and the integrated skills approach.<sup>1</sup> Let us consider the basic distinction between the two approaches using a hypothetical situation. If learners need to read specialized books in English, the classic ESP approach will teach effective reading by reading; the second approach will use an integration of skills, namely, speaking, listening, writing as well as reading per se to teach effective reading. Skills integration is not be confused with the teaching of General English. For General English, teaching the four skills is the aim of the course; in the integrated skills approach we use speaking, listening and writing not as ends but as means to teach reading, as we shall see later.

When considering the implications of the two approaches, I will refer briefly to the well-known classic ESP approach. On the other hand, the integrated skills approach is not only fairly recent but also more controversial; therefore, it will be considered at greater length. Let us now consider the implications of the two approaches.

The classic ESP approach uses the criterion of duplication to select texts and activities. Thus, each class will be a mirror of the expected performance of the student at the end of the course. In terms of materials selection, this means that texts from specialist books form the basis of the corresponding units of the English course. In terms of discourse, this usually implies that students will be taught to identify rhetorical features and cohesive markers of scientific discourse.

The classic ESP approach seems to have reached its full development at the Universities of Birmingham and of Bogota, where it came to be called *team-teaching*. In team-teaching, the English teacher will work together with the biology teacher, for example, and the two teachers will use the same material simultaneously for both English and biology classes. The language teacher is expected to learn the subject matter on the same terms as the students. Therefore, there is a need for close collaboration between subject and language teachers to the point that the work of the two teachers becomes an integrated whole. Usually, there are no separate examinations either – the biology teacher and the English teacher work together to prepare and correct tests.

The validity of the approach is undeniable. As Amparo Leyva, from the University of Bogota, and Tim Johns, from the University of Birmingham, stated in the V ENPULI in São Paulo last July, the system is effective and time-saving. This integration between subject and language work has also enabled failure rates to drop from 25% to 5%.

However effective, the classic ESP approach has been criticized on various grounds. John Holmes, *inter alia*, in a lecture in Florianópolis in 1982 ("Beyond Notions and Functions") has raised

the problem of the use of only objective factual texts in ESP classes;

*If we confine ourselves to the factual texts then our students may leave the ESP course with the mistaken impression that they can read any kind of text. When they encounter an 'ideas' text they may experience some disillusion!*

I take the problem to lie deeper than just disillusion, as I hope to demonstrate in the two ways we can approach discourse. Christopher Candlin<sup>2</sup> has remarked that discourse analysis can be understood in terms of analysing PRODUCT or in terms of analysing PROCESS. In the former, that is discourse as a product, we are concerned with revealing the surface and underlying structures of a text, at a level beyond the sentence. In the latter, that is discourse as process, we are concerned with the interaction between Writer and Reader. When we consider the interaction between writer and reader and, more specifically, the ideological meaning implied by the author, we realize that ESP cannot approach discourse only as PRODUCT. In a country like ours, dominated by imperialistic cultures, it is necessary to select not only factual texts but also ideas texts. It is imperative to train our students to analyse the material critically, to detect hidden purposes or underlying motives. If we stick to factual texts and to discourse as a product to cater for the students' need to read their specialisms in English, we will run the risk of buying foreigners' information at the heavy price of our culture and our identity.

Some people claim that it is difficult for a beginner to detect bias, let alone underlying motives on subliminal persuasion. I've been writing materials to introduce critical reading to beginners and my answer to the contention is "no." Even though time does not allow us to go into details now, I can briefly show you that this is quite possible. If we take, for example, two different advertisements on the same product and have students compare them, they can easily detect bias and techniques of persuasion. The use of advertisements from magazines of specialized readership seems to me very pertinent from two points of view. From the linguistic point of view, it is the paramount example of loaded language. From another point of view, a great amount of information on technological and scientific advances enters the country via journals and advertisements in magazines of specialized readership.

My attempts in the teaching of critical reading are far from conclusive. In fact, critical reading is still a gray area in ESP. However, as mentioned before, the teaching of critical reading is imperative, as we do not want our student to be a passive recipient of information.

Let us now consider what the integrated skills approach sets out to do in relation to text types, skills integration and classroom techniques.

Involvement, integration and interaction are the key-words in the integrated skill approach.

It is a well-known fact that the more involved we are, the more deeply and richly we process information. Contrary to what behaviourists claim, all real learning involves the learner's thinking processes. This idea is developed in the cognitive theory, by which the learner is not a passive receiver of learning but is

actively involved; he uses his existing knowledge, his schema, to make sense of new information. Effective learning will only take place if the thinking processes of the learner are involved. The Affective Theory adds an extra dimension to the Cognitive Theory and argues that learning must not only involve the learner's cognitive capacity, but also his emotions, *lato sensu*.<sup>3</sup> Learning is an emotional experience. Thus, effective learning depends on the learner's degree of personal involvement in the content and methodology of the learning process. How can this involvement be achieved? Alan Waters and Tom Hutchinson feel many current ESP materials fail to engage the learner's interest or to challenge his true abilities. They write:

*Texts are so deadly boring and activities reveal such a gross lack of imagination, it is almost as if an implicit assumption exists that science and technology are incapable of being approached in more interesting ways... This is a serious problem, especially when we remember that ESP students are not very motivated. Moreover, the ESP student expects of the content something like the degree of interest and relevance he is accustomed to in his study or work situation.*<sup>4</sup>

Waters and Hutchinson also claim that there are two essential features of materials if ESP learners are to be involved and motivated: the right type of content and the right methodology.

Now what is the right type of content? Many ESP materials contain highly specialized texts which the teacher cannot cope with, however valid they may be for the students' needs. Try to

imagine this situation: the teacher cannot cope with such highly specialized material, the students cannot cope with the language – the result is an inevitable communication breakdown and no interaction at all. Moreover, highly specialized texts are usually dull, expository pieces. As Hutchinson and Waters say, the students probably have to read very dull texts for their work or studies, but they have some strong motivation to do so. But this does not imply that their motivation will carry over to the ESP classroom or that they will accept to learn from dull texts in ESP. The integrated skills approach holds there should be a greater variety of text sources in ESP materials such as newspaper and magazine articles, consumer information leaflets, advertisements, etc., related to the student's specialism. The greater the variety of text sources the materials contain, the richer discourse also tends to be.

It is not only a matter of changing sources. Hutchinson and Waters believe subject matter should be something the learners are reasonably familiar with *but* given a new angle: human, unusual, controversial, and humorous perspectives are likely to involve and motivate the students. In other words, texts should be interesting. In fact, reading comprehension tests have revealed that the more interesting story produced higher comprehension scores. But, as Downing and Leong state in their *Psychology of Reading*, "the desirability of making reading interesting is not a controversial issue in theory. In practice it is often ignored...."<sup>5</sup> What the ESP teacher requires is a text that will generate language work and interaction. This can hardly be achieved with highly specialized or expository pieces. Now if the teacher selects a controversial text for example, students will respond and interact.

Let us consider now the issue of skills. As mentioned before, in the classic-ESP approach we teach reading by reading. However, Waters and Hutchinson take this

*to run counter to views about the nature of reading such as those of e.g. Frank Smith, 'In reading, what the brain tells the eyes is more important than what the eyes tell the brain'.<sup>6</sup>*

In other words, it is information inside your head, your schema, that enables you to read. Say Waters and Hutchinson:

*... it doesn't matter where that information comes from or how it gets there. This is taken to imply that the teacher might use work involving any of the other skill areas (listening, speaking and writing) as well as reading per se to teach effective reading... A narrow focus on reading is boring... The criterion for incorporating an activity into an ESP course should not be whether it duplicates what the student will do in the target situation, but whether and to what extent it increases the efficiency and affectiveness of the ESP learning situation... The target situation analysis guides us concerning what we teach but how we teach must be decided by reference to the potential and constraints of the teaching-learning situation.<sup>7</sup>*

There is a further argument for the trend towards integrated skills. The problem in language teaching is how to give the students sufficient opportunity to reconstruct and revive meanings and materials in the foreign language. A way of rehearsing or recirculating that information is to exploit the same theme using spoken and written material, reading, listening and discussion skills.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, using the language to perform oral and written communication gives the student a sense of achievement. Downing and Leong, in *Psychology of Reading*, have remarked that achievement itself is an intrinsic motivation. The argument is carried further:

*The role of the reading teacher is to provide materials and instruction that will enable the student to see his own progress.... If the teacher ensures success, dramatic changes occur in their self-concepts and a benign circle of confidence begins .<sup>9</sup>*

Our own experience as teachers enables us to assess the importance of a learner's feeling of accomplishment. McDonough has in fact remarked that a pupil's feeling of pride in accomplishment or shame in failure is not only linked backwards to the causes he perceives, but also forwards to how hard he will strive at the next task.<sup>10</sup> Engineering success, making the student feel that he has accomplished something are not new concepts in language teaching. For example, in the Audio-Visual method, based on behaviourism,



*teachers are encouraged to show approval for each and every correct performance by the learners, and every drill is designed so that the possibility of making mistakes is minimized thus engineering success for the students. What food was for the cat, success is for the pupils.*<sup>11</sup>

The difference is that recent theories tend to maximize intrinsic motivation.

However, the use of the oral component of language to teach reading is a controversial issue. Grellet and Smith, *inter alia*, take extreme views. Smith very pointedly remarks that we can read without producing or imagining sounds.<sup>12</sup> In fact, subvocalization does not always match the movements of our eyes. It is a well-known fact that, when we read, our eyes do not follow each word of the text one after the other – many words or expressions are simply skipped; we go back to check something or forward to confirm some of our hypotheses, which is impossible when we are reading aloud. Grellet goes further, claiming that the first thing to consider is that reading is a silent activity – students should not read aloud, which would tend to give them the impression that all texts are to be read at the same speed.<sup>13</sup> Smith and Grellet's arguments seemed to me unrefutable, at least in theory. However, the reality of the classroom proved quite the contrary. Not only do students read better when there is subvocalization, but they also find it more enjoyable. Maria Alzira Nobre's PhD dissertation seems to throw some light on the issue. Experiments with different groups of learners led her to conclude that for beginners or less proficient groups

*a recodificação da fala, isto é, a transformação dos símbolos escritos em um código semelhante ao da fala tem sido considerada um estágio essencial no processo da leitura... como uma estratégia usada pelo leitor para prolongar a permanência da mensagem na memória imediata, enquanto os processos cognitivos decifram o significado da mensagem... Concluiu-se que os sujeitos usam a recodificação como um auxílio à memória, quando lendo.*<sup>14</sup>

Widdowson, *inter alia*, provides further argument for the use of integrated skills or holist methods to teach reading. He makes the point that both reading and writing can be taught together with a mutual benefit in an "integrated skills approach."<sup>15</sup> This idea that the best way to become sensitive to interpretation is to participate in building a text is not actually a new one, as we have already seen it used in literature classes.

There is another side to the argument. If we teach reading only by reading, how can the teacher evaluate comprehension? The pedagogic practice is to ask comprehension or True or False questions. However, the technique of asking questions after a reading or a listening task is a testing technique not a teaching technique. We might also ask, "how true to life is it to answer comprehension or T - F questions after a text?" What do we normally do after reading something? We may discuss it, reject or accept the ideas in the text, we may apply the information in some other context but we are not asked to show our ability to reproduce what we have read. So it has been a common practice with the integrated-skills approach to give students not questions but

problems related to the topic of the text; those problems require the use of English to be solved, this way the content is mobilized to generate language work. Another practice is to ask information-transfer questions, because as Hutchinson and Waters point out, all *real* learning, especially language learning, requires the learner to transfer knowledge learned in one situation to another. Now, problem-solving or information-transfer questions require one to use the language in writing or speaking.

I mentioned previously that the key-words in this approach are students' involvement, skills integration and interaction. We've considered students' involvement and skills integration. Let us now consider interaction, which is obviously related to classroom dynamics. But let us first draw a distinction between input and intake, as explained by Dick Allwright.

*Learners in the classroom listen to each other as well as to the teacher, and are exposed, potentially, to much more language than is focused on in the teaching... Content is the sum of what is taught, that is input, and what is available to be learned, that is intake, as a result of the interactive nature of classroom events... A text would be input... But if the teacher explains something in English, the language of that explanation is available to be learned; it constitutes intake. Similarly, all things that get said when errors are being corrected constitute intake, as do all the things said in the second language by other learners.*<sup>16</sup>

It follows that the greater the interaction in the classroom, the greater the intake.

Traditional classroom techniques tend to use frontal teaching or the "shooting star pattern."<sup>17</sup> This implies that the teacher will be talking most of the time and content will be reduced only to input from the teacher; the possibilities of learning from intake will be excluded. There is only one form of communication in frontal teaching - classroom discourse, which is very little interactive because it is always directed by one party - the teacher. Frontal teaching has its advantages, but cannot cater for all the activities that language learning requires. It is also uncreative, because the formal setting does not foster the generation of ideas. Moreover, it gives individual students very little time to communicate. Talk via the teacher means that the teacher will be talking for at least 50% of the time. This leaves in a lesson at most 20 minutes for the students. With say, 20 students in class, this gives them a maximum of 1 minute in which to say something. This obviously results in teacher's overload and students' underinvolvement. As a result, many teachers and course writers have been looking for activities for small subgroups in the language classroom, so that students may learn both from input and intake.

Group work has been used in teaching for many years now, but its application to language teaching is a relatively new concept. Group work is much more interactive because students do not communicate only via the teacher. In fact, every one is equidistant from the material, from the teacher and from each other. The teacher can also give individuals more attention. Co-

operative groups are usually faster than individuals at solving problems; one of the reasons for this is that there are more sources of ideas and the memory load for steps in that solution is also shared. Another argument for group work is productivity, that is, the increased opportunity for meaningful and fairly realistic language use in simultaneous groups compared to the class acting as a whole. Students are also more relaxed in groups because of the lower level of stress associated with performing in a small group as against performing before a large class. Group work cannot be overdone but its use in ESP classrooms for problem-solving activities has revealed dramatic improvements both in students' performance and in the emotional climate in the classroom. On the other hand, group work does not mean a total lack of control by the teacher. It implies a partial shifting of control from the teacher to the students.

As mentioned before, the classic ESP approach teaches reading only by reading. This may narrow down the possibility of classroom interaction and of learning also by intake. Why not capitalizing on both input and intake to make learning more effective? Learner underinvolvement is not desirable. Why should teachers be doing work learners could more profitably do for themselves? Why should teachers provide all the answers? Isn't it more effective to make the student think and work out the answers? Why should we insist only on deductive teaching? Isn't it better if the teacher helped the student to organize his or her own knowledge?

Another feature of classroom dynamics not only in ESP but also in recent language teaching is the frequent use of role-play

and simulations. McDonough has remarked that

*The concept of social role and role play and their use in education is by no means a new one; what is perhaps new is the use of this quasi-dramatic device with people who by definition do not have the linguistic skills to express the conventional expectations for that role, in order to develop just those skills.*<sup>18</sup>

The reason for this emphasis on role-play and simulations becomes obvious when we compare first and second language acquisition. First language develops with personality. Says McDonough,

*In acquiring their first language, as well as learning the language code and how to use it to make utterances, children learn many other associated things, such as the management of social relationships and interaction, ways of categorizing and viewing the world and so on.*<sup>19</sup>

The adult learner masters all this and has a pretty well formed personality, yet his utterances in the second language are baby-like. This can be very uncomfortable and make adult learners sensitive about using English when they are functioning as themselves. In role play and simulations they will use English freely because they are not acting as themselves. There is, so to

speak, a Jungian mask that the student can hide behind. Given the role to hide behind, he can perform much better.

The use of non-verbal discourse and visuals seem to be an important component of ESP reading classes; however, not much has been done in this respect. Not only are visuals motivating, but also an important part of second language learning. Bransford and Johnson showed that pictorial information can dramatically influence our ability to comprehend and retain prose passages. A difficult passage was given to students with and without a picture. Without the picture, there was less comprehension and less retention. With the picture there was more comprehension and more retention.<sup>20</sup> The reason for this seems to be clear. The process of comprehension involves the schemata that the reader brings to the reading passage as well as the information presented in the text (schemata are units of long-term memory, units of organized knowledge that individuals have about their world). Pictures are a way of activating or instantiating this schema and of relating new information quickly and effectively to stored information. This way, the amount of information handling can be reduced to a more manageable level.

Frequent questioning seems to be another feature of classroom dynamics in recent ESP teaching. Hutchinson and Waters believe that questions are an essential element in classroom work. In introducing a topic, questions help to reveal what the learner already knows. In other words, by instantiating the learner's schema, by relating new information to what the learners already know, we maximize perception and consequent retention. This is again grounded on the fact that comprehension is an interactive process involving both the text and what the reader brings to the text in the way of

background knowledge. At each main stage in the lesson, frequent questioning checks the level of understanding so far reached. Moreover, frequent questions help to involve the learner and, above all, to build up the habit of questioning in the learner himself.

Referring back to my initial assertion, ESP courses are based on students' needs. I hope it has become clear that the classic ESP approach gears the effectiveness of the course to a compliance with those needs. On the other hand, more recent approaches take account not only of students' needs, but also of their expectations, their motivation, their possible contributions and, above all, of what makes for an effective *and* pleasant learning situation. In other words, learning is seen as involving the whole person. This seems to be, in fact, the essence of the Communicative Approach to language teaching, which is based on the Cognitive and Affective views of language learning. Recent ESP teaching has been particularly associated with this approach.

The examination of needs as well as of the social-psychological factors involved in learning comes together with a trend towards a greater degree of realism in the classroom in terms of texts included, the types of activities and the kinds of interaction between people.

By now you've probably realized the paradox between the title of this lecture - Recent Trends in ESP Teaching - and the number of times I said "this is not a new concept." In fact, more recent approaches do not seem to advocate anything new; rather they seem to draw attention to a change of emphasis that is already discernible: the humanization of the ESP learning process.

To close, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Alan Waters and Tom Hutchinson, from the University of Lancaster,



whose views on communicative language teaching inform this paper. I cannot always provide the reference, for a great deal of the information was obtained in personal exchange of ideas.

My thanks are also due to Reinildes Braga, Luiz Otávio de Souza e Sônia Pimenta, our M.A. students whose theses I'm most pleased to supervise and who have provided valuable insights into gray areas of the reading process, such as the interconnection of verbal and non-verbal discourses, the cognitive and affective bases of reading as well as critical reading.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> When I expand on this basic distinction, I do not mean to imply that ESP teaching consists of two mutually exclusive and monolithic sets of pedagogic principles.

<sup>2</sup> C.N. Candlin, "Discourse Analysis" (University of Lancaster, mimeo ).

<sup>3</sup> The contribution of the Cognitive and Affective Theories to language teaching is explained by Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters in "Issues in ESP: Learning Theories" (University of Lancaster, mimeo ).

<sup>4</sup> Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, "Creativity in ESP Materials or 'Hello! I'm a Blood Cell'" (University of Lancaster, mimeo), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> J. Downing & Che Kan Leong, *Psychology of Reading* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 252-53.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, "How Communicative in ESP?" (17th International IATEFL Conference, London, April 1983) p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Hutchinson and Waters, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Steven McDonough, *Psychology in Foreign Language Teaching* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1981), p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Downing & Leong, p. 246.

<sup>10</sup> McDonough, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> McDonough, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Smith, *Reading* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Françoise Grellet, *Developing Reading Skills* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Alzira Nobre, "Recodificação e o Processo de Leitura: Um Estudo do Processamento Lingüístico por Falantes não Nativos do Inglês" (V ENPULI, São Paulo, July 1983).

<sup>15</sup> H.G. Widdowson, *Teaching Language as Communication* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Allwright, "What do We Want Teaching Materials for?" (ELT JOURNAL, 36, October 1981).

<sup>17</sup> Tom Hutchinson, "Group Work: Some General Hints" (University of Lancaster, mimeo ).

<sup>18</sup> McDonough, *Psychology in Foreign Language Teaching*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> McDonough, p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Danny R. Moates & Gary M. Schumacher, *An Introduction to Cognitive Psychology* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1980), p. 186.