

THE NEW ROLES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN EMP

Zorica Antić

Faculty of Medicine, Niš

E-mail: fairplaytwo@nadlanu.com

Summary. *This paper addresses some of the major points of modern ESP methodology with special regard to English for medical purposes. The content relies on conclusions drawn from direct observations and author's professional experience of the English language lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Nis.*

In English for Specific Purposes the learner is the center of attention and one of the greatest contributions to teaching ESP is the emphasis it puts on the thorough analysis of the students' needs. In our case, teaching English for medical purposes has an additional requirement which is a close cooperation with specialized subjects teachers. The whole situation demands a change in traditional roles of both students and language teachers.

Key words: *Need analysis, autonomy, cooperation, the role of the teacher, the role of the student*

Introduction

The construction of knowledge is both an individual and a social task. A major interest in EMP is to create knowledge about the specific needs to be covered in specialized language classrooms, in order to make language teaching as efficient as possible.

Designing a course of English for Medical Purposes is a never – ending, open process of constant change and improvement (1). The growing concern with learner involvement means that the ESP teacher needs to realize this process in collaboration with students, so that needs analysis, students' autonomy and the set goals become a process which combines the teacher's professional knowledge and the students' own insights into their learning goals and their expectations with respect to the broader process of language learning.

One of our goals is to establish a course design which would produce learners who will be comfortable in using the English language as a tool for expressing themselves precisely. In order to fulfill this goal, teachers need to let go of their traditional authority and establish collaboration with both students and their specialized subjects teachers.

The New Role of the Student

In learner – centered approaches, course design and teaching often become negotiated, dynamic processes, since needs, expectations and student resources vary within each group and within a single course sequence. This does not mean that students are in total control. It suggests that teachers must take into account student learning styles, strategies and language processing approaches. Students benefit from expanding their learning strategies, so ESP teachers should assist students in

becoming more flexible and more aware of their own learning styles and approaches.

The student – centered approach to teaching ESP brings to the fore the importance of needs analysis. In a word, the student, and his/her needs, is placed at the centre of the course design (2). An ESP course is directly concerned with the purposes for which learners need English (3). It is based on a rigorous analysis of students' needs and should be 'tailor-made'.

It is very important to start the course – designing process with an analysis of the target group of students. Many problems in EFL classes are the result of teachers not paying attention to learners' interests and ignoring students as a source of essential information.

Students' analysis can give two kinds of information. The first reflects what the learners 'possess' – their current level in English, motivation, methods of learning they have experienced. The second information will shed light on what the students want to achieve.

Identifying the learner's needs is a tricky business and we must beware of imposing on him the needs which we think he should have but of which he is unaware (4). It is also important to have in mind that needs may change. While both learners and teachers may have a full and clear picture of needs at the start of the course, it is inevitable that priorities will change as current needs are satisfied or modified, and new needs emerge. Needs analysis is an ongoing process and it is not confined to the beginning of the course. In our case, most students are at the intermediate level and they are motivated by the desire to learn English for professional and academic purposes. The students at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Nis have specific demands concerning the English language. They want to communicate in English with certain groups of people about fairly specific topics. They have a desire to publish

medical articles in respected journals; they want to participate in international conferences. But first of all, when they graduate, they want to be able to speak medical English language (5).

Medical students are adult learners who are highly conscious of themselves and their purpose. For this reason, it is important to make use of what they bring to the class and nourish their interests and motivations. In our case, medical English is taught from the perspective of medicine and health care first and foremost while reinforcing vocabulary acquisition, grammar and structure secondly. Students' interests are maintained because they can readily appreciate the relationship which is established between the English class and what goes on at the workplace, such as medical laboratory. In this way the authentic world is brought to the students and they learn to interact with the language as it is spoken and written in target situation. In order to make this possible, the ESP/EMP teachers must be willing to interact with both experts in the target situation and with the students.

Authenticity in EMP

The teacher relies on his/her own knowledge when assessing the appropriateness of the material to be used for developing students' skills. The material which is used in English for Medical Purposes course includes authentic texts, parts of General English and ESP textbooks, materials prepared by the teacher and topics and tasks related to the field of medicine. Good material contains interesting texts, thought – provoking activities, enables students to use knowledge and skills they possess. A clear and coherent material structure will help the teacher in designing the appropriate course which will, in turn, help the students achieve the sense of progress and accomplishment. The course designed in accordance with the modern ESP methodology will enhance peer work and team work and it will enable shared learning.

In order to integrate the language and the 'specific purposes' various authors have suggested conducting ESP courses as close to the workplace as possible. Crandall (6) suggested making the classroom into a simulated workplace whereas other authors believe that the best place for an ESP course is in the actual workplace rather than a classroom (7, 8, 9).

Occupational context also helps keep the focus more on the specific purposes and less on the language. Several researchers have emphasized that content of ESP courses should be relevant to the field of interest to avoid a mismatch between what is learned in class and its usefulness in the workplace (10, 11, 12). Students in ESP courses should be prepared 'for the realities, rather than merely the theories, of the workplace' (12). ESP courses should concentrate on issues of communication through the use of a process – oriented approach in which learning how to learn is more important than learning how to produce specific linguistic forms. With the process – oriented approach 'learning will continue

beyond the completion of instruction since the aim of such instruction precisely is to develop the capacity to learn' (13).

The Core of Modern Methodology: Autonomy

In a traditional classroom, both learners and teachers were accustomed to a high degree of teacher control. Students may have deeply rooted beliefs about the roles of teachers and students, which may slow down the process of achieving independent learning. It is crucial to show students the range of autonomous options and raise their awareness of the different learning strategies that are open to them. Students need to take responsibility for their own language development, which would in turn prove useful when they have to use English in their professional lives.

The most successful language learning is connected with assuming responsibility for learning (14). Taking responsibility for learning is the first step towards autonomy. A 'good language learner' (15) is one that finds his/her way, asks a lot of questions, makes guesses, organizes his/her information, takes every chance to use the language. Learners are individuals with very different learning styles and needs. Learner strategies aim to help learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to plan and implement effective language learning, help them discover how they learn and apply the most effective method for them. Learner strategies can also help teachers maximize their input and increase the chance of long – term learning. Students' autonomy presents a necessity in society which puts great emphasis on lifelong learning. Since teachers cannot provide the students with all the skills and knowledge they would like to have, the best way to help students is by providing them with strategies on how to learn by themselves. The first step towards autonomy is encouraging the students to take responsibility for their own learning. The concept of student autonomy and successful learning are closely connected.

Some of the strategies for promoting student autonomy include constructive dialogue between the teacher and students, preparation of adequate teaching materials, cooperation with specialized subject teachers, continuous evaluation. Autonomy comes into play when students are allowed to choose what topics to deal with in details and what activities to engage in, when setting problem – solving tasks or when familiarizing students with appropriate learning strategies that enable them to learn independently after accomplishing the course.

In a modern society, which is ever – changing, education is perceived as a continuing process. Rogers (1969) claims that the goal of education is the facilitation of learning. 'The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security' (16).

It can be expected that language teaching responds to the demands of the new world and hence shifts the authority away from the teacher and hands it to the learner (17). Teachers cannot learn for students and in order to increase learner independence and responsibility for learning, the traditional roles need to change (18).

The New Role of the Teacher

The shifting of authority from teacher to student is the most important thing that ESP teachers must learn and accept. Such a situation inevitably imposes a change of the role of language teachers. In this context the teacher is to take on the role of an organizer, a facilitator whose task is to create conditions and opportunities for learning, who is responsible for giving the students help with acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to reach their goals. The teacher is an organizer and a coordinator rather than a director of learners' activities. She/he is an advisor and a consultant who understands and supports students. S/he has to create the most favorable conditions under which learning may take place. The teacher shows great patience, makes all the students participate and has the same interest in all students. The teacher listens to the students and respects them, inspires confidence and empathizes with students' problems.

Probably the most important issue is developing in teachers the understanding and techniques for delivering effective learner strategy instructions to students (19). Learning how to learn a language is a complex skill to acquire. It involves focusing on the process of learning as well as on the content of the learning. It is concerned with being informed about the language itself, about oneself as a learner – through self-assessment, reflection and experimentation – and therefore involves training in independence.

Teachers should teach communicative function of language and insist on fluency rather than accuracy. In the modern ESP, in our case EMP classroom, grammar is not taught traditionally with explanations of grammatical rules – students should be allowed to discover the rules by themselves. Only authentic materials are used and students take an active part in designing the syllabus. As we have said, the modern English language course is student – centered which helps develop student autonomy and learning continues even after the end of the course. Language teaching should be based on the process itself, not on the final product. If the teaching process is in accordance with the students' needs, the final product, communication in English, will be successful.

The teacher should make the lectures interesting. Only interesting lectures attract students' attention and raise their motivation for participating and learning. Even though teachers are no longer the center of the classroom, they should maintain integrity and authority without being distant from the students. Students have more confidence in teachers who are open and honest, who do not hide their feelings and personality.

A teacher who assumes the role of the source of knowledge and who is accustomed to being the center point of the lesson cannot work efficiently neither can he/she make students develop the attitude that enables them to learn successfully. ESP courses present a challenge for teachers because they have to learn how to share their power with the students, to cooperate in decision – making and constantly adjust to changes.

ESP teachers are in a special position among language teachers as they do not only teach language but also content to a certain extent. However, content, in our case medicine, is taught secondarily as a means to an end which is to train our students for acting in medical context in English. The relationship between the ESP teacher and the students is different than in General English classroom: the student is an expert in the field in which the teacher has very little knowledge. This special relationship influences methodology. For instance, in ESP, communication is more often initiated by the student. Contrary to the General English teacher, the ESP teacher holds a background position and this is one of the most difficult lessons he/she has to learn.

A Three – Way Dialogue

The question that inevitably arises, concerns the level of knowledge that language teachers should have about their students' specialized subjects. It is believed that an EMP teacher should have some general knowledge of the students' specialist subjects, take advantage of his/her linguistic knowledge and use it in the context of medicine with the aim of constant development. ESP teachers have greater responsibility than general language teachers. They should be more flexible and willing to cooperate with both experts in the field and students. Interdisciplinary team teaching is another characteristic of ESP methodology and it is crucial for a successful ESP course. Tandem teaching introduces the necessary contents and promotes the relationship between subject teacher, ESP teacher and students. Such coordination, which can be represented in the form of a functional triangle, or a three – way dialogue, promotes the status of a foreign language as university subject. The language teacher acts as an intermediary between the students and the subject teacher. In team teaching, the language teacher acts as a person who is knowledgeable about communication, about the way that the language works and he/she does not have to deal with the actual subject content. This approach integrates medical knowledge and English language teaching, students learn language in context and they are motivated to apply the medical knowledge they possess during language classes. The teacher does not have to be an expert in the field of medicine but should show interest and positive inquisitive attitude towards the medical content. The EMP teachers need to be flexible in teaching and prepared to take risks.

The analysis of the role of EMP teacher has led us to the conclusion that the characteristics the effective EMP teacher should have are similar to those of a good doctor. Just like teachers, doctors should inspire confidence in their

patients who put their lives in doctor's hands. In order to justify this confidence, doctors are obliged to maintain high standard of work and respect for the human life (20).

Patient care must come first and each patient should be treated with prudence and caution, utterly respecting their dignity and privacy. A doctor should respect patients' rights, participate in decision – making concerning health-care and provide clear and understandable information. Doctors must constantly develop their professional knowledge and skills but always be aware of the limitations of their professional competence. There is no place for bias, all patients should be treated equally.

Even though the areas of work are different, both the doctor and the EMP teacher must be aware of the enormous responsibility and influence their profession has on the human life. Continuous development and improvement should be primary goals of their professional careers.

Compared with being a teacher of General English, 'becoming an effective teacher of ESP requires more experience, additional training, extra effort, and fresh commitment' (21).

Conclusion

Language teaching is always characterized by a search for more effective ways of teaching foreign languages, in our case English. When designing a course it is important to bear in mind that the ultimate objective is to help students to learn as efficiently as possible. Modern methodology puts learner autonomy as one of its basic postulates because students should be able to continue their learning even after the course itself has finished. The purpose is to

enable the students to become more effective and independent learners of English.

An emphasis on the special needs of the learners and designing a specific course of English which would most effectively meet those needs are probably the most important concerns of teaching English for medical purposes. Medical students want to learn the material which will be useful and relevant to their professional lives (22). The demand for English teaching in the medical field is an example of English for specific purposes (ESP) (23), a type of program that may concentrate on language learning in general while keeping to a specific purpose (23,24). In other words, ESP classes are content – based. Content, in our case medicine, is integrated in language teaching and necessitates close cooperation between language teacher and specialized subject teachers.

The traditional roles of students and teachers have to change. Students are used to authoritative teaching styles: discussing, consulting or reacting critically are unfamiliar approaches to learning. Teachers are seen as the fountain of knowledge and are expected to initiate them into the domain of medical sciences. Whether on an ESP course, where content area plays an important part, students will be able to replace the vessel-to-be-filled attitude with active and interactive participation will depend mostly on the teacher. The teacher thus has to learn to listen to learners and be willing to respond to their subjective learning needs. This calls for considerable personal sensitivity from the teacher, flexibility in terms of teaching style and mastery of a wide range of methodological alternatives (25) all with the aim of providing students, future doctor, with strategies for lifelong learning.

References

1. Richards JC, Rodgers A. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; 244-253.
2. Little D. *Self-Asses Systems for Language Learning: A Practical Guide*. Dublin: Authentik Language Learning Resources Ltd. in association with CILT, 1989.
3. Brumfit C. *Common sense about ESP: Problems and principles in English teaching*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979.
4. Perren G. Forward in Teaching languages to adults for special purposes. CILT Reports and Papers, 11, London: CILT, 1974.
5. Antić Z. Towards Uniformity in English for Medical Purposes: Evaluation and Design. *Srpski Arhiv* 2009; 137(7-8):454-457.
6. Crandall J. Adult ESL: The other ESP. *English for Specific Purposes*, 1984; 3:91-96.
7. Holliday A. Assessing language needs within an institutional context: An ethnographic approach. *English for Specific Purposes*, 1995; 14(2):115-126.
8. MacDonald M, Badger R, White G. The real thing? Authenticity and academic listening. *English for Specific Purposes*, 2000; 19:253-267.
9. Svendsen C, Krebs K. Identifying English for the job: Examples from health care occupations. *English for Specific Purposes* 3, 1984; 153-164.
10. De Beaugrande R. User-friendly communication skills in the teaching and learning of business English. *English for Specific Purposes*, 2000; 19:331-349.
11. Fincham M. Hospital communication. In A. Waters (Ed.), *Issues in ESP*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1982; 5:63-98.
12. Mavor S, Tayner B. Aligning genre and practice with learning in higher education: An interdisciplinary perspective for course design and teaching. *English for Specific Purposes*, 2001; 20:345-366.
13. Widdowson HG. English for specific purposes: Criteria for course design. In L. Selinker, E. Tarone, & V. Hanzeli (Eds.), *English for academic and technical purpose: Studies in honor of Louis Trimble*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1981; 1-11.
14. Naiman N, Frohlich M, Stern HH, Todesco A. *The Good Language Learner* (Research in Education Series 7). Ontario: Ontario Institute for studies in Education, 1978.
15. Rubin J, Thompson I. *How To Be a More Successful Language Learner*. Boston: Heinle&Heinle, 1982.
16. Rogers C. *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1969.
17. Britten D. Three stages in teacher training. *ELT Journal* 1988; 42(1):3-8.
18. Stevick EW. *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways*. New York: Newbury House, 1981.
19. O'Malley JM, Chamot A. *Language Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
20. Antić Z. *English for Medicine, Textbook*. Medicinski Fakultet, Niš, 2005; 83.
21. Strevens P. The learner and teacher of ESP. In D. Chamberlain and R. Baumgardner (eds) *ESP in the Classroom: Practice and Evaluation*. London: Modern English Publications in association with the British Council, 1988.
22. Pratt D. Five perspectives on teaching in adult and higher education. Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, Florida USA; 2002.
23. Hutchinson T, Waters A. *English for specific purposes: a learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; 6-8.
24. Robinson P. *ESP today: a practitioners' guide*. New York: Prentice Hall; 1991.
25. Prabhu NS. There is no best method-why? *TESOL Quarterly* 1990; 24(2):161-76.

NOVE ULOGE NASTAVNIKA I STUDENATA U ENGLSKOM JEZIKU ZA POTREBE MEDICINE

Zorica Antić

Medicinski fakultet Niš

E-mail: fairplaytwo@nadlanu.com

Kratak sadržaj: Rad se bavi nekim od osnovnih postulata savremene metodologije engleskog za posebne namene sa posebnim osvrtom na engleski za potrebe medicine. Sadržaj je zasnovan na direktnom posmatranju kao i na profesionalnom iskustvu autora kao predavača engleskog jezika na Medicinskom fakultetu, Univerziteta u Nišu.

U centru engleskog jezika za specijalne namene nalazi se student, a jedan od najznačajnijih doprinosa podučavanju ESP-ja jeste upravo posebna pažnja koja se posvećuje detaljnoj analizi potreba studenta. U našem slučaju, podučavanje engleskom za potrebe medicine treba da ispuni još jedan dodatni zahtev koji se ogleda u bliskoj saradnji nastavnika jezika i nastavnika stručnog predmeta. Selokupna situacija uslovljava promene tradicionalnih uloga kako studenata tako i samih nastavnika.

Ključne reči: analiza potreba, autonomija, saradnja, uloga nastavnika, uloga studenta