ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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Abstract: This article aims to identify the major trends currently operating in and relating to English for Academic Purpose and explores the essential researched field of EAP teaching in university. This exploration of English for Academic Purpose analyses the four main parts of academic tests: listening, reading, writing and speaking. As a result of current global and international forces, teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) is going through the most dynamic period thanks to the internationalization of higher education. This article presents strategies and tools with which to successfully teach Academic English language, the language skills specific to higher education.

Keywords: academic vocabulary, language skills, EAP teaching

1. Introduction

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a recognized branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Like ESP, it incorporates both learners' needs and target situation analyses (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 53-64), but it is more focused than the more broadly-based ESP and it measures a candidate's English –language ability for advanced academic study.

This discipline influences students' communication needs, and in the case of ESL students improving their communication skills through classes in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and the related field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), decisions must be taken with regard to the content of the texts provided for study in these classes.

"English for Specific Purposes (ESP), with its focus on the specific purposes and needs of the learners, is an umbrella term that encompasses both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)" (Dudley-Evans, 2001). While the term 'EAP' clearly relates to the language and skills ESL students need in order to study through the medium of English, 'EOP' is used in situations where students study English for work-related reasons, of which 'Business English' is currently a noteworthy example. EAP/ESP pedagogy differs from general English language pedagogy primarily owing to differences between their starting points. While the starting point in the general English classroom will often be language, in the EAP/ESP classroom it is more likely to be the students and their communication needs (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Dudley-Evans, 2001). This situation is due to ESP and EAP students have more definite and specialized needs than those attending general English classes, making possible a narrower, more clearly defined, pedagogic focus. Dudley-Evans (2001: 132) makes a further distinction, citing Blue (1988) and underlying the distinction between English for General Academic Purposes, or EGAP, which is "designed for pre-study groups, or groups that are heterogeneous with regard to discipline" and English for Specific Academic Purposes, or ESAP, which is "designed to meet the specific needs of a group from the same discipline."

However, it has been noted (e.g. Clapham, 2001) that even where classes were organized according to discipline, students of one sub-discipline may not be interested in reading material drawn from another sub-discipline. It appears to be the case that the issue of specificity – and how specific to become – is one that cannot be avoided, regardless of the apparent homogeneity of class composition (Pulverness, 2002).

2. Academic listening

Academic listening usually involves the non-native speaker of English trying to follow in English:

- Conversation in a social context
- A monologue in a social context
- A conversation among multiple people in an educational context
- A monologue on an academic topic
- Each recording is followed by various questions types to test for compensation (filling out a diagram, fill-in-the blank, multiple choice, true or false short answers)

and write adequate notes on it. A wide range of material is presented involving individual and group interaction, types of discourse and patterns of information exchange. Critical listening 'genres'2 in which training is given include monologues (e.g. stories), dialogues (e.g. phone calls), group discussions, lectures, presentations, recorded announcements (e.g. railway stations), messages (e.g. answer phone recordings) and news items from live television (e.g. BBC WORLD).

As in many ESP classes, there is the question of whether the problems are listening problems or language problems. Definitely much listening to lectures or similar texts is essential. Is also important making students aware of the way lectures are organized, the particular kind of language that is used in lectures (Lynch, 1983) and making sure they know the language, particularly the pronunciation of familiar words, of their own subject.

It is imperative for learners to develop and express ideas unreservedly and to form arguments in their thinking, which can later be expressed in writing. Critical thinking; particularly the freedom to question the validity of propositions and their assumptions is the central platform of a successful approach to academic study in Western contexts. However, as Ballard (in Crooks & Crewes, eds, 1995:151) reminds us, there are 'social and cultural constraints on the expression of such thinking'.

Practicing academic listening, the students develop:

- Ability to follow the speaker’s opinion
- Ability to spell accurately
- Ability to understand and distinguish between different ideas (causes, reasons, effect, consequences)
- Ability to follow the way the ideas are organized (main ideas, specific information and attitude)
- Ability to identify key facts and ideas and how they relate to each other)
- Understanding of factual information)

3. Academic Reading

EAP focuses on skimming and scanning, developing reading speed, intensive reading and access background knowledge predict linguistic and rhetorical features of texts and develop interpretation skills. However, not only has the theoretical basis of reading 'skills' and 'strategies' been called into question (Rosenshine, in Spiro, Bruce & Brewer (eds) 1980, Susser & Robb 1990), but most such materials tend to concentrate on short texts and a limited range of topics.

The considerable difficulty with reading is the academic texts involved. The students use a wide range of reading strategies in order to receive more benefit from the course. General efficient reading strategies such as scanning to find the book or chapter, skimming to get the gist and careful reading of important passages (Wallace, 1980, pp. 9-51) are necessary as well as vocabulary building exercises in the student's own area. Learning about how texts are structured can help students to read more efficiently.

Understanding meaning: deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words and word groups relations within the sentence/complex sentences implications - information not explicitly stated, conceptual meaning, e.g. comparison, purpose, cause, effect.

Understanding relationships in the text: - text structures the communicative value of sentences relations between the parts of a text through lexical and grammatical coherence devices and indicators in discourse.

Understanding important points distinguishing the main ideas from supporting detail recognizing unsupported claims and claims supported by evidence - fact from opinion extracting salient points to summarize following an argument reading critically/evaluating the text.

Reading includes:

- Articles or excerpts from books, magazines or newspapers on academic topics of general interest
- Each section is followed by various question types to test for comprehension (filling out a diagram, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice true or false, short answers)
- Practicing academic reading, the students develop:
- Ability to follow an argument, an opinion, a series of facts or ideas
- A range of reading skills including reading for main ideas and reading for details, as well as understanding the structure of a text at both sentence and paragraph level

4. Academic Writing

EAP teachers need to concentrate on the process of writing - planning, organizing, presenting, re-writing, proof-reading, etc. (Robinson, 1988). Writing classes are often task based and project work allows students to work in their own field (see Bloor & St John, 1988). Projects also allow students to become familiar with ways of working. This involves developing a willingness to accept responsibility for their own learning so that they are able to learn independently using initiative and self-discipline. They need to develop the ability to think logically and independently, to be reflective and critical, to analyse, to synthesise and to be creative:

- describing processes and developments: expressing purpose, means and method, degrees of certainty,
- reasons and explanations/cause and effect describing developments and changes
- describing a sequence of events/time relations.
- developing an argument: presenting arguments, ideas and opinions expressing certainty and doubt supporting an argument: illustrating and exemplifying ideas refuting arguments, ideas and opinions drawing conclusions.
- Writing skills: different kinds of writing, organisation - presentation and layout spelling and punctuation including graphs, charts and tables' style revising the essay - proof-reading.

Practicing academic writing, the students develop:

- Ability to write about information shown in an accurate and concise manner
- Ability to use an appropriate register (formal/neutral)
- Ability to write accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- Ability to organize ideas clearly and cohesively)
- Some of the common mistakes made by students in Academic writing are:
- Using informal words instead of academic words.
- Giving personal opinion in an IDEAS type task
- Telling stories about your personal history. Academic writing asks to use "examples from your own experience", but this does not mean telling about your life. It means describing examples of things in the world that you know about, have studied or have learned in the media.
- Giving evidence which is too detailed or specific to a subject
- Being emotional or too dramatic when giving your opinion in an OPINION task. Academic writing is unemotional using impersonal phrases.

5. Academic Speaking Skills

This is becoming increasingly important as teaching methods change to involve more students, joint projects and group marks. Academic speaking classes try to help the students to be more aware of what is involved in seminar and to supply them with some of the interactional language that is used there. Students will be given practice in making presentations, taking part in discussions on academic topics and so on. Vocabulary related to personal feelings and beliefs as well as basis traditional phrases (e.g. additionally, furthermore, and so forth) are important in the speaking section. Command of all verb tenses is also critical since the discussions may focus on topics or beliefs about events or situations of the past, present and future).

Practicing academic speaking, the students develop four important skills:

- Fluency shows how confident they are in speaking English. If they can speak for an extended period of time, that is an indicator of strong fluency.
- Vocabulary. Being a good speaker means constantly growing your vocabulary.
- Grammar. Grammar does matter and the fewer mistakes the students make, the better their speaking skill will be.

- Pronunciation is a complex area, with a lot of sub skills that can be practiced. A skilled speaker can use the sub skills of pronunciation to emphasize and make the communicative effect of their speech more impactful. The sub skills of pronunciation include: word and sentence stress, intonation, rhythm and the use of the individual sounds of a language.

6. Conclusions

EAP teachers are often interested in areas such as cross-cultural studies, academic and study skills development, learning styles, effective teaching methods, integration of students into the wider community, and international education. English for Academic Purpose takes the communicative needs of the learner in an academic context as central, and also uses the most modern methods and techniques available (Musumeci, 1997).

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