

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO THE METHODOLOGY OF ESP TEACHING

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Abstract

The ability to master specialized terminology in English plays an ever increasing role in the selection of candidates for employment due to the internalization of the labour market and of the research activity exchanges.

Subsequent to Romania's joining the EU, the vacancies available on the European labour market, including in the academic area, represent the major factor that has determined an increase in the interest paid in the acquisition of specialized terminology. This interest is shared by trainees, trainers, authors of textbooks and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) specialists.

In the present paper, we intend to outline some of the main directions, methods and strategies that an ESP course should follow for providing high-quality and up-to-date information to the trainees interested in acquiring specialized vocabulary for their future workplaces.

Finally, we intend to anticipate trends that the evolution of specialized foreign language teaching methodology will follow in the near future.

Keywords: *ESP teaching methodology, ESP task-oriented documentation, disambiguation strategies for specialized vocabulary acquisition, the use of official on-line resources, technological dimension of ESP methodology.*

1. Introduction

Language teaching methodology has benefited, like many other areas of study, from the advantages which IT technology offers to trainers and trainees and which have influenced the manner of devising the presentation of the studied information, as well as its dissemination and evaluation with the result that, at present, ESP methodology is substantially influenced by the computer-based learning strategies.

The modern computer-based tools of teaching and studying a foreign language have considerably improved the methodology of ESP. Thus, the observation made by Jack C. Richards¹, according to whom, "language teaching can be conceived in many different ways – for example, as a science, a technology, a craft or an art" – has been interpreted and exploited in the present paper as illustrating a new dimension of teaching: the technological one. From this perspective, this article stresses the importance that should be laid on ESP task-oriented documentation and the guiding of trainees to perform high-quality task-oriented documentation in an attempt to help them accomplish future work tasks and surpass linguistic difficulties which are inherent in a multinational company.

By task-oriented documentation work, we refer to the assignment of ordinary professional tasks to the trainees while also providing them the necessary sources for documentation: both the printed resources provided by libraries and the on-line available official ones. From this point of view, the facilities offered by free on-line official

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¹ *Methodology in Language Teaching. An Anthology of Current Practice*, edited by Jack C. Richards, Willy A. Renandya, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 19.

documentation that is available in more than one foreign language are numerous: there are many on-line official documentation sources², which also provide the phonetic transcript and recording of the native pronunciation of the searched word(s), while the contextualization of the terms prevents ambiguous or inaccurate translations.

2. Content

In the last few years in Romania, ESP trainers have noticed a more and more intense concern for acquiring an ILEC certificate, as well as a certificate in medical English (sTANDEM); the latter case is determined by the fact that medical school graduates are eager to obtain a medical position in the European Union countries, especially in the Western ones, hence a particular interest in mastering English for medical purposes. As to the use of English for economic purposes, this has been one of the most common trends in Romania after December, 1989, under the influence of Romania's transition towards a free market economy.

In consequence, the services providing specialized language in English are more numerous both in public and private higher education institutions, as well as in language schools.

2.1. The main difficulties encountered by ESP trainers and trainees

When trying to identify the best teaching methodology and resources for ESP acquisition, trainers face a series of difficulties: the undergraduates and graduates often have a low proficient level that does not allow them to get involved in an ESP course with success³; the teaching methodology that they use should be less theoretical and more student-oriented (thus, trainers must use textbooks that promote tasks which help trainees develop their linguistic skills in general; trainers must also consider the professional tasks that trainees might be assigned in the future; in this respect, exercises which are meant to ensure the accuracy of a translation work have to be doubled by the development of the students' reading, speaking, writing and listening skills). In this respect, the present article aims to present a methodology that relies on the advantages which on-line official documentation provides to trainees. Basically, a special interest is paid in on-line sources of information. Finally, the paper emphasizes the idea that the students' training period must be concluded with a simulation of a specialized certificate examination in the area of specialization in which that student is enrolled (from this perspective, university curricula should include at least training courses for developing the students' skills that are necessary for obtaining a BEC/ILEC/TOLES/sTANDEM⁴ certificate).

When conceiving an ESP teaching methodology, trainers must consider whether their target group is made up of students / employees, respectively whether their target groups have a low/intermediate/advanced level of knowledge. Hence trainers must decide what resources they need to use, the manner in which they should organize the studied notions for trainees, the skills that they have to develop more or most (e.g. for a nurse / doctor, speaking skills are fundamental, as well as reading skills; for an accountant, reading and writing skills are crucial, whereas, for a lawyer: speaking, reading and writing skills are equally important; finally, for a paralegal, writing and reading skills are the most important ones).

² We strongly encourage and recommend students to consult official documents that are available on line as parallel texts in order to identify alone unknown specialized vocabulary.

³ This situation is not rare in Romanian universities (hence the necessity to evaluate the students' general level of knowledge first of all, and only then to decide whether students should attend an ESP course or not).

⁴ sTANDEM stands for Standardised Language Certificate for Medical Purposes; this test has been introduced thanks to a project supported by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme for 2011-2014. Nowadays this test may be passed by Romanian students in Medicine, as well.

Besides the inherent difficulties of creating valuable ESP resources for students and trainees in general, ESP trainers face another difficulty: the *marginal* position occupied by ESP in academic curricula and at workplace, as Marjatta Huta, Karin Vogt, Esko Johnson and Heikki Tulkki suggest: “One of the dilemmas of language teaching, in both academic and workplace contexts, is that resources are often limited and LSP [Language for Specific Purposes – my explanation] becomes marginalized as an activity separate from the rest of daily workplace interaction. Teachers are only peripheral participants in the workplace community, with limited access to the practices and values of the professions they are dealing with.”⁵ The authors quoted above appreciate that for enhancing the quality of teaching a foreign language for specific purposes it is necessary to integrate the trainees within a language environment that is professionally-oriented⁶. Thus, the trainer should consider the needs that the trainees are going to have in the future: individually, at the workplace or in society. In this respect, the present article suggests including in ESP courses on-line documentation, besides the classical one.

2.2. Preliminary, on-going and final assessment

However, any teaching methodology should rely on preliminary, on-going and final assessments, which, in their turn, should be adapted to the needs of the trainees: job interview, the accomplishment of specific professional tasks.

Preliminary assessment is crucial for it informs the student if he/she may keep up with the group of trainees in the accomplishment of the assigned tasks. For students who pass the preliminary assessment it is of crucial importance to continue the evaluation all through the course period and, finally, at the end of the teaching process in order to monitor the trainees’ progress.

The present approach to ESP teaching relies on developing the student’s documentation skills so that, at the end of the training period, those who attended to ESP course are able to manage alone in deciphering or translating a specialized text. Thus, the present article is structured in such a way that it reveals the steps that ESP trainers must follow in selecting resources, assigning tasks, guiding trainees and monitoring their progress. The final goal of this attempt is to train students for facing specialized language in everyday professional contexts.

2.3. Documentation

The documentation strategies mentioned above must insist on the contextualization of terms so that students could disambiguate words or pairs of words that they often misunderstand.

Another important task that trainers must deal with is represented by the sources of documentation that they recommend to trainees and the use of these documentation sources in the process of teaching. Thus, basically, students tend to resort to dictionaries or glossaries when dealing with a specialized text and they find it difficult to identify certain specialty terms and phrases in the ‘printed’ sources of information. However, today, given the large number of official documents that are posted on-line for the general access of the public, students should be guided and encouraged towards making reference to these sources and resources as often as necessary, in parallel with the printed books.

⁵ Marjatta Huta, Karin Vogt, Esko Johnson, Heikki Tulkki, *Needs Analysis for Language Course Design. A Holistic Approach to ESP*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 8.

⁶ Idem.

The present paper focuses on the use of a multiple-source set of documents, including the official on-line documentation (including of visual dictionaries, especially for medicine) together with the classical sources of reference: encyclopaedias, dictionaries and glossaries.

Thus, a Romanian student at the faculty of accounting who is assigned the task of dealing with the chart of accounts and the balance sheet in Romanian and English, if guided properly at the practical course of ESP, will resort to the chart of accounts posted on-line by famous audit firms, for example. Similarly, a law student should be guided to use on-line sources, like European case-law, which facilitates the fast identification of judicial terms in European languages so much the more jurisprudence is uploaded as parallel texts most of the time. Finally, a student in medicine should be encouraged to use anatomical visual dictionaries.

After this initial stage of learning how to search for the translation of unknown specialized terms and phrases, students should be motivated to start speaking, reading, translation and writing skills tests that are, basically, provided by the practical courses used at the university. Tests assigned to students should be progressive as to their level of difficulty. Once terminology is introduced in matching type exercises, fill in the gaps tests could be used, as well as multiple choice tests, to finally ask students solve reading and translation exercises and to draw up writing homework tasks.

2.4. Disambiguation

Disambiguation strategies should insist on contextualization through combinations of verbs and nouns, nouns and adjectives, adjectives and adverbs, respectively verbs and adverbs in order to help the student study the terms in concrete professional contexts, while avoiding to make grammar mistakes.

2.4.1. Disambiguation through visual recognition and contextualization

A method that students appreciate when searching for unknown specialized terms and phrases is to use visual dictionaries⁷ (especially for medicine and mechanical engineering) and parallel texts (for the area of social sciences, in general), as well as glossaries that adapted to a distinct branch of an area of study (e.g. the use of technical terms on the economics and finance of health services⁸).

The advantages of using parallel texts are largely exploited by ESP trainers and trainees, as well. Thus, consider the following two tables given below to spot the bolded terms both in Romanian and in English.

Table 1

RO	EN
La data de 27 februarie 2003, Curtea Suprema de Justitie a respins o cerere (...) introdusă de procurorul general, la solicitarea reclamanților, pentru casarea hotărârii din 14 mai 2001 , cu motivarea că era contrară prevederilor art. 1 din Protocolul nr. 1 la Convenție și principiului securității raporturilor juridice. Instanța a considerat că vânzarea fusese realizată cu buna-credință și a observat că principiul securității raporturilor juridice nu fusese încălcat, deoarece	On 27 February 2003 the Supreme Court of Justice dismissed an application (...) by the General Prosecutor, acting at the instance of the applicants, to have the judgment of 14 May 2001 quashed on the grounds that it was contrary to the provisions of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 of the Convention and to the principle of legal certainty. The court considered that the sale had been made in

⁷ See the Free Anatomic Atlas on: <http://www.ikonet.com/en/health/virtual-human-body/virtualhumanbody.php> - accessed on 3rd February 2014.

⁸ J. L. Roberts ,Consultant for Health Economics ,WHO Regional Office for Europe, *A glossary of technical terms on the economics and finance of health services*, World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, 1998.

vânzarea a precedat hotărârea definitivă prin care s-a dispus restitutio in integrum și, chiar mai mult, foștii chiriași nu fuseseră părți în procedura respectivă, astfel încât hotărârea definitivă respectivă nu le era opozabilă.” ⁹	good faith and observed that the principle of legal certainty had not been infringed, as the sale had preceded the final judgment which ordered <i>restitutio in integrum</i> and, moreover, the former tenants had not been parties in that set of proceedings, therefore the final judgment was not opposable by them.” ¹⁰
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The use of multi-lingual parallel texts (see the above table and the one below, *Plan contabil / Charts of accounts / Plan comptable*), which is drawn up by KPMG in 3 foreign languages, facilitates the fast identification of unknown specialized terms/phrases in these languages:

Table 2¹¹

RO	EN	FR
Clasa 1 – Conturi de capitaluri	Class 1 – Capital accounts	Classe 1 – Comptes de capitaux
10 Capital și rezerve	10 Capital and reserves	10 Capital et réserves
101 Capital	101 Capital	101 Capital
1011 Capital subscris nevărsat	1011 Subscribed and not paid in share capital	1011 Capital souscrit non versé
1012 Capital subscris vărsat	1012 Subscribed and paid in share capital	1012 Capital souscrit - versé
1015 Patrimoniul regiei	1015 Patrimony (autonomous companies)	1015 Patrimoine des régies
1016 Patrimoniul public	1016 Public patrimony	1016 Patrimoine public
104 Prime de capital	104 Premium related to capital	104 Primes liées au capital social
1041 Prime de emisiune	1041 Share premium	1041 Primes d'émission
1042 Prime de fuziune/divizare	1042 Merger premium	1042 Primes de fusion
1043 Prime de aport	1043 Share premium contribution in kind	1043 Primes d'apport
1044 Prime de conversie a obligațiunilor în acțiuni	1044 Debenture conversion premium	1044 Primes de conversion d'obligations en actions
105 Rezerve din reevaluare	105 Revaluation reserve	105 Réserves de réévaluation
106 Rezerve	106 Reserves	106 Réserves
1061 Rezerve legale	1061 Legal reserve	1061 Réserve légale
1063 Rezerve statutare sau contractuale	1063 Statutory or contractual capital reserve	1063 Réserves statutaires ou contractuelles
1064 Rezerve de valoare justă	1064 Fair value reserve	1064 Réserves de valeur juste
1065 Rezerve reprezentând surplusul realizat din rezerve din reevaluare	1065 Reserve representing the revaluation reserve surplus	1065 Réserves représentant l'excédent de
1067 Rezerve din diferențe de curs valutar în relație cu investiția neta într-o entitate străină		

⁹ For the full versions (English and Romanian) of the judgment use the following links:

<http://www.scj.ro/strasbourg%5Cgrigoras%20romania%20EN.html> – accessed on 12th March 2013, as well as:

http://www.euroavocatura.ro/legislatie/581/Hotararea_CEDO_in_Cauza_Grigoras_impotriva_Romaniei– accessed on 12th March 2013.

¹⁰Idem.

¹¹ <http://www.kpmg.com/ro/ro/editie-speciala/pagini/planul-conturi-2013.aspx> - accessed on 1st March 2014.

1068 Alte rezerve 107 Rezerve din conversie ⁴ 108 Interese care nu controlează 1081 Interese care nu controlează – rezultatul exercițiului financiar.	1067 Reserves from foreign exchange differences in respect to a net investment in a foreign entity 1068 Other reserves 107 Conversion reserve 108 Minority interest 1081 Minority interest - profit (loss) for the period.	réserves de réévaluation 1067 Réserves provenant des différences de taux de change corrélés a l'investissement nette dans une entité étrangère 1068 Autres réserves 107 Réserves de conversion 108 Intérêt minoritaire 1081 Intérêt minoritaire – résultat de l'exercice financier.
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2.4.2. Disambiguation through synonymy and its application in short contexts

Using synonymy (including Romanian translations) and afterwards contextualization for the specialized terms that are studied could be of great help for trainees who are eager to develop vocabulary skills. For synonymy exercises to be efficient, students should also be encouraged to keep record of the new word usage in short contexts, like:

- Verbs + nouns:

To foresee = to anticipate, to predict (a prevedea = a anticipa). E.g.: A person who intends to commit a certain act can **foresee** the result of this act.

To provide = to set forth (a prevedea = a stipula). E.g.: The clause **provides** that any litigation shall be settled through arbitration.

- Nouns + adjectives:

Mandatory provisions = compulsory provisions (= prevederi obligatorii). E.g.: The contract contains **mandatory provisions** for each party.

Lenient penalty = a non-grievous penalty (= pedeapsă lipsită de severitate). E.g.: The judge passed a **lenient penalty** for the accessory to the fact.

Biased juror (= jurat părtinitor) = a juror who lacks impartiality. E.g.: The **biased juror** was replaced with an impartial one.

- Adjectives + adverbs:

Allegedly guilty = supposedly guilty (= presupus vinovat). E.g.: The **allegedly guilty** driver is being tried at the Tribunal.

Grievously harmed = seriously injured (= grav vătămat). E.g.: The **grievously harmed** citizen crossed the street when the traffic lights were red.

Deliberately perpetrated = intentionally committed (= comis în mod deliberat). E.g.: A **deliberately perpetrated** criminal act is punished at least with imprisonment.

- Verbs + adverbs:

to debate intensely = to discuss (= a dezbate intens). The MPs are intensely **debating** the bill / the MPs are debating the bill **intensely**.

to secure entirely (= a securiza în totalitate). E.g.: The role of the guards **is to secure** the building / the role of the guards is **to secure** the building **entirely**.

to deter efficiently = a preveni în mod eficient. E.g.: The Government uses many instruments that **deter** fiscal evasion **efficiently** / that **efficiently deter** fiscal evasion.

3. Conclusions

Specialists in foreign language acquisition and academics who deliver practical courses of foreign languages in colleges and universities must maintain an updated data basis

of both printed and on-line resources of texts and documents that are fundamental for the areas of study for which they provide foreign teaching courses, alongside with the textbooks they are using at seminars and courses. In this way, ESP trainers keep up with the latest terminology that is used in the domain for which they provide practical courses and are able to advise trainees how to use on-line documentation in order to manage individually to translate unknown terms even in the absence of a printed dictionary.

References:

- Huta, Marjatta, Vogt, Karin, Johnson, Esko, Tulkki, Heikki, *Needs Analysis for Language Course Design. A Holistic Approach to ESP*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 8
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