

ESP TEACHING INNOVATIONS

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Abstract: *The paper highlights innovative approaches to teaching languages, follows the backgrounds of their emergence, and considers their connections with linguistic and psychological scientific developments. The aim of the paper is to point out the issues applicable in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at Technical Universities of Ukraine.*

Keywords: teaching approach, method, technique, ESP, language acquisition.

English language courses in Technical Universities of Ukraine are aimed at developing professionally oriented communicative competence, i.e. at specific purposes (ESP). The subject is compulsory and according to the latest syllabus it takes 112 academic hours and lasts for the first four semesters of university studies. Taking the aim into account it is obvious that the course must be intensive and the methods to be used most thoroughly chosen. The requirements to ESP teachers are growing with every coming academic year. The greatest challenge for us was and remains to arouse and maintain students' motivation to learning structures and functions of English. Our approach has to be creative, interactive, flexible, and able to change depending on the results obtained at certain stages. It has to be based on well-grounded scientific developments in psychology and linguistics.

A lot of branches of modern descriptive linguistics deal with the various aspects of language use. The first large-scale attempts to unite pure scientific research with the needs of teaching methodology were Leonard Bloomfield ("Language" in 1933) and most notably Charles Fries ("Teaching English as a Foreign Language" in 1945). The latest areas like pragmalinguistics, socio and psycholinguistics, cognitive and narratological approaches have overcome the dogmatism and excessiveness of traditional "pure science". It has become obvious that linguistics can supply all the needed answers establishing the integral body of facts about language structure and function. Hence teaching languages can be regarded as a mere appendage of linguistics. Recent linguistics developments tend to contain seminal ideas applicable to instructional purposes and can be taken into the classroom.

The ties between teaching methodology and psychology are ingenious, close and beneficial. The brightest experiments in language instruction are rooted in psychological theory fundamentals concerning mental and behavioral processes. Psychological backgrounds allow experts to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of suggested teaching approaches, methods and techniques. They provide better understanding of the human element in the language teaching and learning processes. Psychologists of different schools have arrived at the common conclusion that the speaker does play an important role in the generation of human speech and meaningful discourse function. A work to be distinguished in this respect is "Principles and Practice of Second Language Acquisition" by Stephen.D.Krashen [1]. S.D.Krashen's second language acquisition theory, his hypotheses pursue the goal "to introduce teachers to theory and hopefully to gain their confidence" [1, 7].

Modern methods of language instruction show diversity, but according to Marianne Celce-Murcia the notorious and best-established are Cognitive, Affective-Humanistic, Comprehension and Communicative approaches. Cognitive approach that language is rule-governed cognitive behavior and not a habit formation. The cornerstone of Affective-Humanistic approach is that learning a foreign language is a process of self-realization and of relating to other people. The central tenet of Comprehensive method reads that language acquisition occurs if and only if the learner comprehends meaningful input. The communicative approach dictates that the purpose of language and the goal of language teaching is communication in all variety of its forms [2, 8].

The current method of ESP teaching in most Ukrainian technical universities is the Communicative approach with some traits of the other three. Aimed at developing communicative professionally oriented foreign language competence, ESP courses embrace all language activities manifested in appropriate grammar, vocabulary and style. The dominant approach is actually an integrated approach which includes attention to the rule formation, affect, comprehension and communication, which would view the learner as someone who thinks, feels, understands and has something to say. In fact many teachers would find such an approach, if well-conceived and well-integrated, to be very attractive" [2, 9].

Understanding an approach as the most general direction of teaching we can identify a method as a set of procedures coordinated by and associated with the approach and a technique is traditionally defined as very specific activities used in teaching practice. These three manifest themselves through curriculum and syllabus which enumerate the peculiar things students are supposed to master. The courses are designed and the materials are developed taking into account all the given factors. As for the ESP syllabi they are also compound: partially structural, partially text-based. A structural syllabus which comprises a list of grammatical constructions, vocabulary and word-combinations to be taught and learnt proves effective at the initial stages of ESP courses. The text-based syllabus focused on text organization, specific vocabulary items and minor attention paid to grammar appears successful while reading authentic materials on science and technological research.

Innovative approaches to teaching English emerged in response to the need to better facilitate and accelerate learning. It was caused by the growing popularity of English in the world going globalized. The claim for a single all-purpose method though advertised from time to time has not been satisfied and will hardly ever be. Innovative unconventional approaches rose “as a reaction to conventional assumptions about such things as the structure of the various components of language or of various kinds of text, about how language is processed in the brain and how it is used in interpersonal communication; about the nature of human learning in general and of language learning in particular; about the nature of younger and older language learner and such parameters as memory, emotion, readiness, motivation and perception [2, 24].

A lot of innovative approaches are worth considering while designing a certain ESP course. Elements of storyline, case-study, role play, delayed oral response methods, of the Natural approach, even silent way learning can be used in class when the teacher strives at interacting and modifying the process in accordance with actual situation. One of the less known is the Diglot-weave Input, evidently based on Comprehensive Approach. Proceeding from the assumption that the teachers’ task is to provide comprehensible input in massive amounts Robbins Burling, an anthropologist at the University of Michigan, developed his diglot-weave model based on code switching [3]. At his experimental classes in French reading R. Burling changed the lexical and grammatical expression of several pages of a French novel into a form of English heavily influenced by French syntax, which was weird but understandable. Then the researcher started modifying the text adding more and more French features to it. The objective was to keep the text comprehensible. So making the text of the novel more and more ruled by the French language grammar and full of completely French vocabulary the students could read the novel. Sprinkling foreign language elements wherever the context made their meaning clear turns learning into fun, especially scaffold with pictures and body language. Obviously it is motivating at the initial stages of learning as it allows even the beginners to work with large amounts of comprehensible input.

The method was strongly criticized by the scholars who put accuracy and correctness in focus, as such deliberate mixing two languages and producing strange looking and sounding texts can lead to violation and corruption of both native and target languages [4, 3]. Hardly applicable as a method Diglot-weave input technique can be used within ESP classroom framework along with widely known cloze exercises.

An experience of using mixed language texts with EFL University of Florence students majoring in biology was described and analyzed by Carol Bradley in 2003 [5]. Teaching her ESP course she found her low-level students facing a stressful challenge to pass an intermediate level in grammar and reading comprehension. Both the students and the teacher had to reveal inventiveness, patience, stamina and persistence. C.J. Bradley was inspired by the well-known expert Mario Rinvolucri’s workshop which claimed that teachers need exercises that use both languages in ways that skillfully move the students away from their mother tongue. So the teacher referred to oral two-language story-telling as a variant of the “sandwich” method and used diglot-weave input to teach reading. Like R. Burling himself C.J. Bradley focused on developing reading competency following Burling’s four-step program of systematic intermixture of language systems. Step one provided word-for-word translation emphasizing assimilation of syntax. The second step introduced grammatical markers (aspect, tense etc.). “Smaller class of morphemes” like pronouns, conjunctions are presented at the third step. And the final step focuses on learning vocabulary. Grammar is also taught through mixed diglot-weave two-language contexts. The students’ reaction to the suggested methodology was positive and the group worked through a set of twenty-one types of diglot-weave exercises followed up by cloze and multiple choice.

Carol Bradley’s experience proves the efficiency of diglot-weave technique in ESP classroom. Rather cumbersome and time-consuming at first, it can yield compelling results in teaching terminology, reviewing special grammar and vocabulary.

The so-called humanistic and psychosuggestive approaches draw the attention to such long-neglected issues as learner environment, ways to increase students’ receptivity and reduce the anxiety in class, to eliminate the psychological barriers that slow the learning down and foster the so-called affective filters. The proliferating idea of humanistic holistic approaches is to keep classes pleasant, nonthreatening and fun, to encourage and support students, create businesslike but mild and congenial atmosphere.

Today much attention is given to the use of information communication technologies in ESP teaching. Computer assisted language learning (CALL) has got a new dimension due to the rapid development of new up-to-date technologies. M-learning, e-learning, u-learning are getting more and more popular because they provide access to authentic language environment 24 hours a day. Educative platforms, all sorts of dictionaries and thesauruses, international tests training programs have become available to everybody anytime. CALL seems to be a powerful tool for self-dependent learning first of all. The crucial role of language instructor is not being to be diminished at all.

Alexander von Humboldt is said to have noted that language cannot be taught and one can only create conditions for learning to take place. These ones are English teachers who will ever remain in creative search of better ways to make their classes impressive, inspiring and efficient.

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