EMP absolute and variable characteristics

Caracteristicile absolute și variabile în predarea limbii engleze medicale

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Abstract

English for Specific Purpose appeared due to an urgent demand for an international language worldwide in the fields of Business, Trading, Medicine, Law, Tourism and since the increasing awareness of General English Curriculum does not fit the learners' specific needs, especially in higher education. Designing an ESP course is a never – ending process which requires permanent improvement and changing in the syllabus, design and ESP teaching materials used within classrooms. The aim of this study was to analyze the challenges that arise in teaching English for Medical Students by examining the ESP absolute and variable characteristics.

Some practical suggestions are also given in order to overcome these problems.

Keywords: ESP, EMP, absolute characteristics, variable characteristics, medical students, needs analysis.

Rezumat

Predarea limbii engleze în scopuri specifice a apărut datorită unei cereri stringente pe plan global de a cunoaște și a comunica într-un limbaj internațional legat de afaceri, comerț, medicină, domeniul legal-judiciar, turism, deoarece Curriculumul general de predare a limbii engleze nu satisface necesitățile specifice ale studenților, în special ale celor din învățământul superior (viitorii specialiști). Proiectarea unui curs de ESS (limba engleză pentru scopuri specifice) reprezintă un proces care necesită o continuă schimbare și eficientizare atât a curriculumului, programei analitice, conținuturilor, cât și a materialelor didactice utilizate în cadrul orelor de clasă. Scopul acestui studiu este de a face o analiză a nevoilor studenților mediciști prin evaluarea și descrierea caracteristicilor absolute și variabile în predarea limbii engleze medicale. Unele sugestii practice sunt, de asemenea, oferite în scopul soluționării acestor probleme.

Cuvinte-cheie: ESS, LEM, caracteristici absolute, caracteristici variabile, studenți mediciști, analiza nevoilor studenților.

Introduction

International labor market is becoming increasingly demanding in competent specialists provided with appropriate communication and intercultural skills necessary for social as well as professional integrity within a definite professional community [9]. Since 1960s, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been thoroughly discussed by many well-known pedagogues and scholars worldwide such as Tom Hutchinson, Alan Waters, Pauline C. Robinson, Tony Dudley-Evans, J. Holmes, Jo McDonough, Maggie Jo St. John and others. ESP started because of the demand for a new brave world in the English language learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), when the Second World War ends and the expansion in scientific, technical and economic progress emerged [2]. English is becoming one of the major components of globalization according to Gural and Smokotin, 2014, whereas there are numerous attempts in the research community to determine its place among different linguistic variants and varieties as well as to single out its characteristic peculiarities making it the universally accepted means of worldwide communication (Seidlhofer, 2001) [6]. Besides its international character, English

has gained a significant role for particular communities and served as basic means of communication. An example of such a community is the health care professionals, where English is accepted as the international spoken and written language of medicine [2]. Thus, according to John Maher the dissemination and exchange of medical information' has steadily placed English on both international and intra-national levels. In his research studies, he also pointed out that even in non-native speaking countries English was often used to publish articles in various local journals of biomedicine. Other similar studies were observed by Benfield and Howard (2000) regarding the growth of English use in medical publications compared to German language, which had declined considerably over a period of time. A well-known researcher J. Swales mentioned in his studies the increasing usage of English in medical context within particular countries, such as Sweden (cited from Gunnarsson, 1998) and Netherlands (cited from Vanderbroucke, 1989) [2]. It is extremely important to train the next generation of medical professionals within an era of international mobility and intercultural practice exchange. English, as being considered the “lingua franca” worldwide” has been recognized an

inseparable component of many higher medical institutions curriculum, especially in developing countries, like Republic of Moldova. It is, actually, a mandatory requirement for getting a medical degree, as well as in attending a range of international publications, conferences, exchange programs, migration project etc., where English is considered the international language for communication. Thus, English for Medical Purposes, has arisen due to professionals need and yet educational strain [1]. Thus, the demand for a well-designed Health Care English curriculum is becoming extremely crucial nowadays.

Aspects and features of teaching English for Medical Purposes

The term EMP, English for Medical Purposes, refers to “teaching of English for doctors, nurses and other personnel in the medical profession” [4]. English for Medical Purposes (EMP) derived from English for Specific Purposes and is focused upon the student’s specific needs within their job-related field. Besides its specific linguistic features, EMP requires specific content-based approach, which will help professionals of this domain to communicate positively with patients, colleagues in real medical settings. Thus, the basic aim is to create

real-life authentic situations closely associated with their future professional environment. For this reason, the course objectives as well as effective teaching materials should be traced out, based on learners ‘needs analysis, which is a vital aspect of any ESP course design [2]. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have defined ESP as an “approach” rather than a “product” [7]. They explain that the learner’s needs lie upon the foundation of any specific language teaching approach, being the rationale of learning English. Methodology and teaching materials are viewed as means of achieving some learning purposes. The paradigm shift from “How is it learnt?” towards “What is learnt?” is focused upon the content or “product “ rather than structure or language itself.

Many researchers and methodologists have discussed about the types of ESP and classified them into two main categories: English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and EAP (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991). Both English for Medical and Legal purposes, actually, fall into two groups: Medical English for *Academic Purpose* and Medical English for *Occupational Purposes*. English for academic level, which is different from English for medical purposes for doctors and

practitioners, teach in the first place medical students who learn terminology, which they're going to use in their future practice. Whereas, Medical English for Occupational Purposes is primarily focused on certain doctors at a hospital who are already practicing English.

In order to make distinction between these types, researchers identified their characteristics.

Stevens defines ESP by making difference between absolute and variable characteristics:

Absolute characteristics according to Stevens are as follows:

- ✓ It should be designed to meet specified needs of the learner (i.e. medical students should be able to efficiently use specialized vocabulary as well as communicate within a particular job-related setting like dentistry, pharmacy, General Medicine, nursing etc.).
- ✓ It is related in content (specific topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities (i.e. identifying the diagnosis, describing the disease, case history, writing a medical report, etc.).
- ✓ It is centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics etc. and analysis of this discourse.

A whole-to-part orientation instead of a part-to-whole approach is applied. In other words, there is a shift from basic structural units of language (out of context) towards utterances embedded in a meaningful context. Leaver and Stryker (1989) in their research claimed, “language proficiency is achieved by shifting the focus of the course from the learning of language per se to the learning of subject matter”. The priority is given to teaching the topic content rather than merely its grammatical and structural features [2].

- ✓ It should be taught in contrast with General English. However, still what are the major differences or similarities between what it should be taught for professional language and common one? The differences are not so many. ESP is important mainly for: 1) the specialized lexis; 2) motivation related to future profession; 3) goal-oriented students; 4) little linguistic justification for highly specified texts; 5) specialized, international technical terms, which lead to no crucial comprehension barrier.

Variable characteristics. ESP may be, but is not necessarily:

- ✓ restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading, writing only);
- ✓ taught according to any pre-ordained methodology [7].

Robinson's (1991) definition of ESP is based upon two *criteria* and a number of *characteristics*:

- ✓ ESP is normally 'goal-directed';
- ✓ ESP courses develop from a needs analysis which aims to specify what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English.

Whereas, characteristics involve:

- ✓ ESP courses are generally characterized by a limited time period in which the objectives have to be achieved;
- ✓ ESP classes are taught to adult learners within homogenous groups in terms of their work or studies that the students are involved in

Although each of these characteristics show both validity and weaknesses, great emphasis is focused on the idea of a common-core of language and skills, as well as mirror the underlying concepts and features of the disciplines. While reflecting upon these mentioned above, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998)

modified Stevens' definition of ESP and described:

1. Absolute characteristics:

- a) ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
- b) ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
- c) ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, analysis and genres.

2. Variable characteristics:

- a) ESP may be related or designed for specific disciplines;
- b) ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
- c) ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation; it could be used for learners at secondary school level;
- d) ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced learners;
- e) Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners [8].

Discussions

Depending on the absolute and variable characteristics of ESP, English for Medical Purposes course should be

designed according to the following features:

- *authentic material* (highly focused on how to use real documents and task in order to be able to manage future real-world scenarios and situations, i.e. Medical documents, journals, reports, prospects, brochures, listening and viewing medical documentaries and website videos etc.);
- *purpose related orientation* (simulation of communicative tasks, i.e. patient-doctor dialogue, breaking bad news, giving advice or recommendations on health style, short talks or mini-reports on risk factors, describing the fever chart etc.);
- *self-direction* (learning is focused on self-autonomy of the student, teaching self-strategies to help him/her manage future professional situations i.e. programs exchange, international conferences etc.).

The teaching is directed towards language in context (content-based approach), rather than towards separate language structures and grammar. It is aimed at creating authentic situations that closely represent the real professional world that is students work in. The content and context based approach combines the Basic English language and medical knowledge of domain.

Conclusions

EMP teaching comprises a number of goals like language acquisition, development of communication, skills of knowledge, understanding of the specialized texts, integration of language skills into professional environment, as well as ability to become further autonomous speakers. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to identify the major characteristics of an ESP course in order to satisfy the learners' needs and create a positive attitude towards the teaching learning process.

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