Trends in ESP and EGP

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Abstract—The sheer fact is that English for General Purposes (EGP) is a foundation course in any curriculum, which is intended to pave the way for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As a language teacher, it is observed that after so many years of studying English language, numerous number of the undergraduate and graduate students have problems in reading and understanding their specialist texts. It is evident that there are some deficiencies in the General English Course and English for Specific Purposes. Obviously, if the students try to develop effective strategies to tackle the reading skill deeply, they might be better able to deal with their ESP courses. Ironically, the students memorize a lot of grammatical rules as a requirement to pass the university entrance exam before they enter the university. Nonetheless, it is seen that they can hardly use their structural knowledge communicatively and practically in the university. It goes without saying that learning English language is a must for each and every student at university level. All the students take and study General English at university and after that they take and study English for Specific Purposes to fulfill the graduation requirements. The English for General Purposes is very important because it is supposed to equip the students for their later courses. This paper attempts to clarify the diverse dimensions of the EGP and ESP and then provide some suggestions for the betterment of them.

Index Terms—English for Specific Purposes, English for General Purposes

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper two main divisions within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) will be discussed. The first one refers to English as a General Purpose (EGP) and the second one refers to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). A definition for each one will be given and the important ups and downs of each trend will be explained. Also the boundary between EGP and ESP will be touched on. After that there will be a section entitled Needs Analysis. In this part there will appear some investigation towards the needs of the learners. It is indeed difficult to pin down and approach EGP and ESP in several pages. Many scholars around the globe attempt to design some general and specific courses for their learners. They will be successful if they have a thorough investigation of all factors concerned. Now, first of all, it will be better to talk a little about English for general purposes in the next section.

II. ENGLISH FOR GENERAL PURPOSES (EGP)

English for general purposes is, in fact, the foundation for later attainments in specialist field (Trimble, 1985, p. 6). So we cannot ignore its role for future performance. Mainly, some mastery of general English is needed for a learner who wants to study in special field: "Although 'General English' is set off as quite separate from the other 'kinds' of English, it is, of course, the mainstay of all fields, whatever the purpose for which the language is used" (ibid.).

The boundaries of general English are indeed vast. The learners who study it do want to attain some knowledge about English language. The learners pursue a variety of objectives in studying it. It is obvious that general purpose English is not limited, it covers a vast domain indeed. When the teachers want to teach general English they are indeed at pain what to teach because they should impart the knowledge of English to a heterogeneous number of learners. So providing materials for such courses is a hard task (Widdowson, 1984). It is obvious that the teaching material should proceed from easy to difficult ones. But the judgement for easiness and difficulty is not so simple. Sometimes we do not possess a criterion for passing judgement. For example, some grammatical handbooks begin with definite/indefinite article distinction. However, most students have difficulty in understanding the difference and the correct usage for 'a/the'difference. There are some words that accept "the" but there are other words that do not accompany "the". Also, there are places that "the" cannot appear. These details at first confuse most students. These rules exceptions to the rules in fact make the students develop negative attitude towards grammar (Chastain, 1988).

Nevertheless, the language teacher ultimately decides what to teach and how to teach for different age groups with different objectives and motivations. It is the language teacher who decides where to begin and of course from what level.

Broadly speaking, a lot of factors need to be accounted for when it comes to design and develop a general English course. For example, we should take into account the age, purpose, aptitude, attitude, motivation, previous English knowledge, and inclination of the learners (McDonough, 1984). We should also consider the duration of the course, the administrative purposes, teaching materials, the sponsors' intentions, the teachers' methodology and the situation, whether it is English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL), to name just a few. Richards

and Rodgers (1990, p. 159) depict in a comprehensive diagram the many-sided components of a language curriculum as follows:
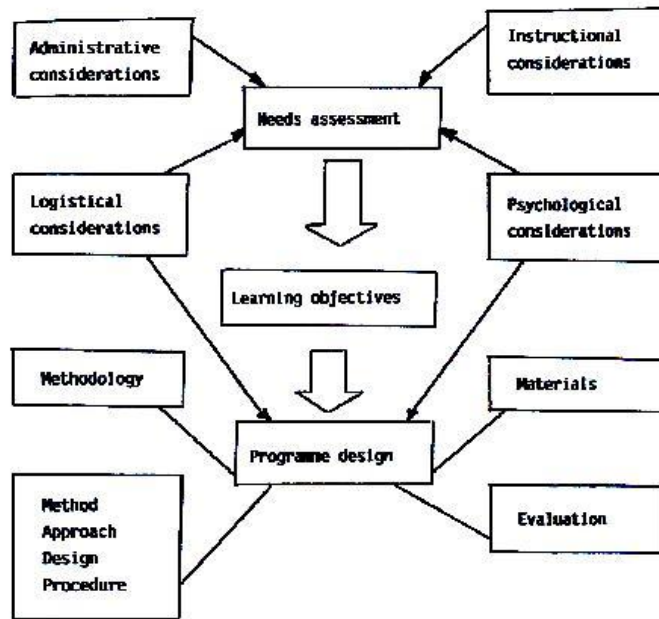
(Richards and Rodgers, 1990, p.159)
Language curriculum development processes

It is evident that a lot of factors are concerned in designing an English language course. It goes without saying that psychological and social considerations play a crucial role in every teaching course. To sum up, the general English course acts as a practical tool or means to the learners. It is, of course, up to the learners who may want to continue the course toward their specialist field or decide to stop it when the course ends up. However, if the learners stop studying further the general English, it is clear that they want to know just generally about English language. But if students want to know more in their special field they need English for specific purposes. Howatt (1974, p. 3) shows this division between English for general purposes and English for specific purposes in the following diagram:
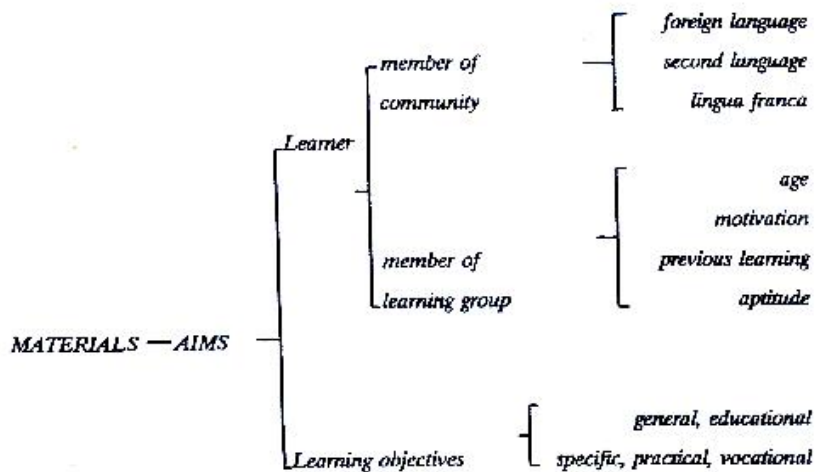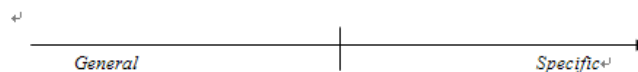

Howatt (1974, p. 3)
Division between ESP and EGP

In the above figure the learning objectives are divided into two parts: the general and the specific ones. In the next section the boundary between ESP and EGP will be determined.

III. EGP AND ESP

Widdowson (1984, p. 1) contends that we are moving on a scale from EGP towards ESP:

As was pointed out in the above section the general course covers a large area and it is indeed difficult to arrange and grade the materials. Most of the grammatical points should be taught in the classroom because the learners have no predetermined objective in studying it. As Howatt (1974, p. 8) states, "The real difficulty lies not so much in choosing what to teach as in arranging and grading the materials. Since a general course has no particular practical objectives, it must set out to teach more or less everything..." The general English prepares the students to encounter their specialist areas professionally.

However, in some cases the students do not need to gain mastery of general English to tackle their specific problems because they have the knowledge of their profession through their native language (Robinson, 1991, p. 4). They have studied in their own language about their job. They just need a little amount of English to get access to the latest happenings in the world. So they can somehow manage to understand the related texts on their job area because they have the necessary background knowledge in it. They just need a little exposure to English language to understand their specialist texts.

Nonetheless, some linguists believe that it is inappropriate and counterproductive to separate EGP and ESP. McDonough (1984, p. 7) writes: "Such fragmentation [the many branches of ESP such as EST, EOP, EAP...] is no more true than the opposite, monolithic view, which is often represented as ESP versus EGP...". Here it is felt that if the students possess some knowledge of English language they will understand the kind of language that is related to their specialist field. So it is unnecessary to divide English to EGP and ESP. Widdowson (1984, p. 1) points out, "...GPE [General Purpose English] is less specific and purposeful than ESP. What distinguishes them is the way in which purpose is defined, and the manner of its implementation". It is obvious that what distinguishes ESP and EGP is the purpose and objective of the course and the way it is implemented.

IV. NEEDS ANALYSIS

Generally, "needs analysis" is one of the processes of curriculum development in which the reasons behind the syllabus are determined in detail and in advance (cf. Nunan, 1991). Needs analysis is carried out to clarify many dimensions of a syllabus which are of paramount importance in any educational system. It brings to light both the students' needs and the educational institute's and/or system's basic requirements. The type of communication which needs to be done whether written or spoken is determined in advance. The formality of language whether it is formal or informal is taken into consideration. Meanwhile, the methodology, the period of course, materials, etc. are specified as far as possible.

One important factor that should be taken care of before the course begins is the aim and purpose of the students. As Tarone and Yule (1989, p. 33) state:

Establishing what the learners need to know involves determining what the learners' aims are in learning the language (for example, getting a job as a sales clerk, or earning a BA in engineering), and then looking at the sorts of communicative behavior which native speakers of the target language... engage in to achieve such aims....

So before the commencement of the course, the teacher or the institute may carry out a needs analysis. Needs analysis can be defined as the analysis and investigation of the learners' needs (cf. Munby, 1980). Howatt (1974, p. 5) states: "In order to do so [what to teach] we must examine the purposes of the teaching course in more detail". Therefore, needs analysis attempts to determine the students' needs and purposes. Robinson (1991, p. 5) writes that we are teaching English not for specific purposes but for specified people. By specified people it is meant that our students are particular kind of people who need particular training.

Widdowson (1984, p. 178) believes that the expression 'learner needs' is open to at least two interpretations. On the one hand, it refers to the terminal behavior of the learners. That is, what the learners will do with the language when the course comes to an end. This is called a goal-oriented definition of learners' needs. On the other hand, it refers to the process of language learning. This is a transitional one and refers to the actual procedures of learning. This is called a process-oriented definition of learning. We come to the conclusion that learning a language should be treated as a process rather than as an end. On the whole, we cannot teach every aspect of the linguistic system because the domains of structures are limitless. We can just teach a sample of language system. So it is better to involve learners in doing some tasks in the classroom. In this way they try to deal with the problems individually and attempt to learn by their own ability. They rely less and less on the teacher's assistance. It can be said that the teachers are better to supply the learners with the means and tools of learning so the learners try to learn for themselves. One of the ways which could better promote language acquisition is the problem-solving activities in which the learners self-confidence and self-reliance are increased.

It is the language teacher who decides what to teach to a heterogeneous group of students. Most of the time the teacher can reliably analyze the learners' needs with his/her intuition and provide the material. As Tarone and Yule (1989, p. 21) write: "practicing language teachers frequently organize their teaching on the basis of some intuitive, informal analysis of the needs of their students". So the language teacher is the most eligible person to study the learners' behavior in the classroom.

Sometimes, before the course begins, the teacher carries out a needs analysis. To obtain more information of the students' needs, the questionnaire technique might be used. The details asked from the students help the teacher a lot in designing the course and his/her later decision-making.

In a succinct form Nunan (1991, p. 17) asks some questions from the language learners. This form is brief and to the point. In the following form the interviewer asks some questions orally and the learners answer them:

Interviewer: Date:
Name:
Current proficiency level:
Age:
Years of formal education:
Number and type of previous courses:
Nationality:
Marital status:
Length of time in target country:
Present occupation:
Intended occupation:
Home language:
Other languages spoken:
Preferences relating to methodology:
course length:
intensity:
Learning style:
Purpose in coming to class:
Language goals:
Life goals:

The classroom teacher can use the information elicited from the learners and provide the necessary materials for the classroom.

Sometimes the students who want to learn English, whether general or specific, do not know what reading materials are constructive and useful for them. The students are eager to learn language but they do not know where to begin. So it can be concluded that the information provided by them in the forms may be misleading. Here it is the experienced language teacher who decides what to teach, where to begin from and how to teach.

Generally speaking, before the course begins the teacher gives a placement test. By doing so he measures the learners' level of English knowledge and diagnoses their strength and weaknesses. In this way he can place the learners in a classroom which suit their level better.

V. SPECIFICATION OF CONTENT

Generally, it is a dilemma for language teachers to specify what to teach. As was noted in the above sections, the teaching of general English brings about some difficulties for language teachers because most of the grammatical points are unfamiliar for the students and there are a lot of points that should be taught in the classroom.

However, in ESP it is rather easy what to teach because the aims of learners' are more specific (Widdowson, 1984). The teacher chooses materials according to the students' specialist field. But it is believed that if we confine the learners to prespecified materials, it restricts the learners' competence. Widdowson (1984, p. 8) points out: "...that increased specificity of language use means an increased restriction of competence". The teacher or course designer should prepare the kind of materials that are appropriate and feasible for the specified kind of learners. Robinson (1991, p. 4) states that it is the activities that are central rather than the kind of content including special terminology:

It may often be thought that a characteristic, or even a criterial feature, of ESP is that the course should involve specialist language (esp. terminology) and content. I suggest, however, that an ESP course need not include specialist language and content. What is more important is the activities that students engage in. These may be specialist and appropriate even when non-specialist language and content are involved.

Generally speaking, we learn a language for fulfilling different purposes. Sometimes we learn a language to visit a foreign country, to use language in the world of business, to use it in higher education, to help our children to use it in school, to use it in our job, to teach it to others and so on. When we learn a language we play different roles. Howatt (1974, p. 7) talks about the roles and activities that the learners play:

(i) The role itself: doctor, businessman, teacher, parent, tourist, etc.
(ii) The language activities that the role involves: talking, reading, corresponding, writing reports, etc.

(iii) The topics that arise: health symptoms, insurance arrangements, money, etc.

(iv) The intentions behind the use of language: polite socialchit-chat, persuading, arguing, giving opinions, describing, explaining, etc.

(v) The need for different kinds of people: talking to fellow specialists, public officials, friends, customer, etc.

When a teacher is due to teach in a language classroom he/she should take into account the kind of skills which are emphasized, i.e., the skills which are most needed by the learners (reading, writing, speaking and/or listening). Also the kind of style which is used is important, whether it is formal or informal one. Furthermore, the kind of people that the students would encounter after the end of the course is also important.

Therefore, the materials should be in a way that encourage the learners' progress rather than inhibit them. They should be encouraging and interesting. They should not cause boredom in the learners. Chamberlain and Flanagan (1978, p. 37) believe that:

... materials have to accord with student notions of progress in their vocational studies. Related to this are the indications that materials must also take specific account of available information relating to the learner's exact language attainments, his background at home and in society, his assumptions about university life, his vocational and social aspirations. The pattern of such factors in any given institution is likely to be unique even if in particular respects analogies can be drawn with ESP programs elsewhere.

The teaching content should emphasize the means rather than the ends. The materials should not be presented in isolation but in a way that are familiar to the learners (Widdowson, 1985, p. 28). They should emphasize the communication process. The students should be involved in language learning as an on-going process rather than as a neat product in itself. When language is studied for its own sake it is, in fact, treated as a product. But when language is used as a means and used for communication, i.e., for the negotiation of meaning between the interlocutors it is referred to as process. So the language teachers had better facilitate language learning and using rather than dwelling on grammatical rules and structures.

Some linguists (cf. Robinson, 1991) believe that it is wrong to isolate language into items and present them according to the coverage, range and frequency. It is believed that this is a mechanical way of introducing language. It is better to present language as a whole in chunks, however (cf. Widdowson, 1990). Language is for communication not for exercising linguistic items.

The purpose of ESP courses should be to create a capacity in the learners for their future performance (cf. Widdowson, 1984). If the students possess enough ability, they can encounter every unseen problem. The students should be allowed to maneuver on the basis of their competence in the classroom. They should not be restricted to a limited range of language according to mechanical findings of range, coverage and frequency. Widdowson (1985, p. 16) prefers teaching speech acts and functions during a course of instruction rather than grammatical structures:

There seems no reason at all why we should not, for example, say for this course we will select undertakings, promises, warnings, definitions, classifications', and so on rather than for this course we will teach the simple present tense, present continuous, count and mass nouns', and so on.

It is evident that practicing language functions are more useful and constructive than presenting linguistic items. The learners should feel that they are doing meaningful communicative activity rather than doing grammatical exercises (Widdowson, 1985, p. 47). With the development of communicative language the use of authentic language developed. In this way the learners can be involved in meaningful and natural type of language.

VI. CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, the amount of material contained in a course of instruction depends on the duration of time, the administrative requirements, the learners' learning rate, the ease and difficulty of materials, the volume of materials, the attractiveness of teaching courses and so on. Most of the time the courses have the problem of time limitation. The learners are to cover a huge amount of material in a limited period of time. As McDonough (1984, p. 1) puts it, "ESP programs are typically imbued with a sense of urgency, stemming from the time constraints frequently imposed by learners and their sponsors". It is most of the time difficult and burdensome to learn many things in a short period of time. It can be claimed that learning does not take place overnight, especially learning of a language, rather it is an incremental process which takes time and patience.

Generally, the course should be organized and graded in a way which most desirably makes learning easy. The new materials should not discourage the learners rather they should be incorporated to the previous materials. There should also be enough revision without causing boredom in the learners. One of the most important factors in language acquisition is the revision (Brown, 1987). On the whole, the newly learned materials can easily be forgotten without revision. So revision causes the materials to become permanent part of the learners' long-term memory. Therefore, in order for the materials to move from short term memory to long-term memory there should be enough revision. It should be meaningful as far as possible. It can be concluded that 'cyclical' learning (cf. Howatt, 1974) is preferable to linear' learning. In linear learning the materials are presented one by one without enough repetition but in cyclical learning there is a revision of introduced material from time to time.

To sum up so far, the writer of this paper has elaborately discussed the main trends in language teaching and language learning. We succinctly touched upon the traditional methods of approaching language teaching and some

new models alike. It was said that the focus of attention is on the learning process and basically on the learner rather than on the teaching or teacher. Nowadays, it is tried to present the syllabus in a way which is simple and easy to acquire. The meaningful learning is emphasized and the revision of the materials is an important factor for preventing the students to forget them (Brown, 1987). That is, by the revision of the previous material, the students retrieve what they have learned and this retrieval halts the forgetfulness process.

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