

**On the Relationship between ESP & EGP:
A General Perspective**

Mohammad Mohseni Far, M.A.

Department of English,

Faculty of Letters & Humanities,

Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran.

Member of Young Researchers Club (YRC), Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz-Iran.

Email: Mohsenifar2007@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present study is an attempt to inquire succinctly into the relationship between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP). In particular, the general scopes of any of them as well as their distinctive features are elaborated upon and examined. Besides, it continues to represent the significant responsibilities that an ESP teacher has to take so as to successfully conduct an ESP class. In closing, it is also highlighted that the potentially major problem of a contrast leading to emphatic separation of these two fields of study is sometimes because of ill-defined descriptions or ill-described definitions.

1. Introduction

ESP is a broad diverse field of English language teaching (ELT). In the 1960s, it was particularly associated with the notion of a special language or register, and with important sub-field of English for science and technology (EST).

Later developments have included a communicative view of language as applied to ESP, recognition of the importance of *needs analysis* procedures and an increasing focus on appropriate perspectives *on language learning and language skills*.

Stevens (1988) defines the absolute characteristics of ESP as follow:

- Designed to meet specified needs of learner
- Related in content (i.e. themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities
- Centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse and semantics
- ***In contrast with general English***

Ten years later, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) offered a modified definition of the variable characteristics of ESP:

- ESP *may* be related to or designed for specific disciplines

- ESP *may* use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English
- ESP is *likely* to be designed for adult learners
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate and advanced students

In this definition the range of ESP has been extended and become more flexible in its modified description. *Probability* in definition makes it open to flexibility, expanding and overlapping nature of ESP. Above all, the most important point to be highlighted is that in this modified definition the absolute characteristic of “*ESP is in contrast with general English*” is removed.

2. Definition and distinctive features

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is as recognizable activity within the broader professional framework of English language teaching (ELT), with implications for the design of syllabuses and materials as well as its presentation and then evaluation.

EGP (English for General Purposes) refers to contexts such as the school where needs cannot readily be specified. It is more usefully considered as providing *a broad foundation* rather than a detailed and selective specification of goals like ESP.

The definition of EGP is an unhelpful polarization, particularly because the meaning of “general purposes” is typically left vague. A more helpful view is

suggested by Strevens, who prefers the term “English for Educational Purposes” (EEP) to account for a school-based learning of a language as a subject element within the overall school curriculum.

Aside from the “rough separation” at definition level, there exists overlapping connection and proportion between them. To clarify their relations, Widdowson (1983) accounts for distinctive features of ESP and EGP; among them these are important ones:

EGP	ESP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The focus is often on <i>education</i>.• As the future English needs of the student’s are impossible to predict, course content is more difficult to select.• Due to the above point, it is important for the content in the syllabus to have a high surrender value.¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The focus is on <i>training</i>.• As the English is intended to be used in specific vocational contexts, selection of appropriate content is easier (but note not ‘easy’ in itself).• Therefore, an EVP syllabus need only have a high surrender value linguistic content in terms of the English foreseen to be most relevant to the vocational context. The aim may only be to create a restricted English competence. .

1. ‘Surrender value’ is a term from insurance policies. Basically, it is the cash value of a policy when it is cashed in. In teaching terms, this is the overall utility (value) of the English taught by the end of a specific course; the higher the surrender value the greater the utility (usefulness) of the English taught.

These distinctive features do not imply “absolute separateness”, but they in turn reveal the “true nature” of them, based on it one can clearly find the overlapping areas and keep track of GE in ESP.

Much of discussion presented up to now were brief and needed theoretical arguments regarding ESP and EGP. It is better to alter the perspective so as to get rid of theoretical assumptions and concepts. The investigator prefers to expand on the role of GE (EGP) and its trace in a typical ESP classroom, so that one can have a better understanding of the actualization of their connection in a real context.

3. Discussion on the trace of ESP & EGP (GE) in practice

3.1 General comment

Some important points about ESP classes and its comparison with EGP ones:

1. Learners and purposes of learning; ESP learners are usually adults who already have some familiarity with English language and they are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular-job-related functions.

In EGP classes, age of learners varies from children to adults and learning English language is the subject of the classes.

2. Based on purposes of learning, aims of instruction are identified; in an EGP class, as a general rule, *four skills are stressed equally*. But in ESP, it is *needs analysis* that determines which language skills are most needed by the students, and the syllabus is designed accordingly. For example, in order to train a tourist guide, the ESP class should promote the development of spoken skills. Another example, one who intends to work in a business administration should be trained in development of reading skills.
3. In a typical EGP class, there is concentration on *teaching grammar and language structures* (mostly in isolation). But in ESP, the focus is on *context*, to ESP, English is not taught as a subject separated from the student's real world/wishes.

Language in context —————> ESP	Language in isolation —————> EGP
--	--

4. Combination of subject-matter (which learners are familiar with) with English language creates a meaningful context which is highly motivating. This meaningful context increases motivation that is a positive indication of a successful learning.
5. Regarding the term “specific” in ESP, it should be noted that not only does it mean English for specific purposes, i.e. English language at service of specific purposes, but also it implies specific purposes for learning English. In other

words, the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to it. Therefore, learners are able to use what they learn in ESP classes right away in their work and studies. This means that ESP enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English.

In sum, ESP assesses and analyzes needs and integrates motivation, subject-matter and content with the help of relevant language skills.

To have a successful ESP class and track the connection of ESP and GE in operational terms, the study focuses on touching upon the responsibilities of two important factors/variables which are ESP teacher and learner.

3.2 The significant roles of ESP teacher

An ESP teacher is typically one who has experience in teaching English as a second language (ESL). Thus, s/he can exploit his/her background knowledge and adapt teaching skills he has already learned to conduct the ESP class. An important note is that the teacher needs to look for content specialists for help in designing and conducting the class appropriately.

3.2.1 Setting goals and objectives: To design a syllabus with realistic goals and arranging conditions for checking and evaluating students' achievements. One of the goals and objectives will be choosing and later evaluating appropriate and relevant language skills.

3.2.2 Organizing courses: After setting goals (long-term aims) and objectives (short-term aims); these aims should be transformed into an instructional program with the timing of activities. Selecting, designing and organizing course materials as well as providing relevant language skills and elements are of great importance in this phase.

3.2.3 Creating a learning environment: Teacher has to take advantage of his/her skills for communication and mediation in order to create a learning environment. This is because students acquire language when they have opportunities to use the language in interaction. Teachers as a reliable source and model have to transfer their skills to their students to enrich the learning environment. In order to do so, teachers should:

- Listen carefully to the students
- Give them feedback
- Support them
- Build the learner's self-confidence to communicate
- Focus much more on the language skills they need

3.2.4 Evaluating students: Teacher should evaluate students to identify their problems and find solutions to them. As a result, on the basis of evaluation, teacher shows them the right way so as to progress.

3.3 The significant responsibilities of ESP learner

The learner comes in the ESP classroom with a broad-spectrum of characteristics, among them; interest for learning, subject-content knowledge and well-built adult learning strategies are important.

3.3.1 Interest and motivation for learning: People learn a language when they have opportunities to work with language in a context that they comprehend and find it interesting. Accordingly, ESP is a powerful means for providing such opportunities. The more interesting materials, the more attention; the more learners pay attention to the meaning of the language they read or hear, the more they learn and are successful.

3.3.2 Subject-content knowledge: ESP learners are generally cognizant of the purposes for which they will need to use English. Having oriented their education toward a specific field, they see English training as complementing this orientation. Knowledge of the subject area enables the students to identify a real context for the vocabulary and structures of ESP classroom. As a result, they take advantage of what they already knew about the subject-matter to learn English. The more meaningful and real context, the more interest and accordingly the more successful learning.

3.3.3 Focus on learning strategies: learning strategies are those skills learners have already developed in using their native language. These strategies definitely will make learning easier. They permit them to learn faster and more efficiently.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, from all of ESP curriculum design, it can be concluded that general English (GE) language content, grammatical functions and acquisition skills are important and dominant in curriculum development and course design. The problem concerning contrasting leading to emphatic separation of these two fields of study is sometimes because of ill-defined descriptions or ill-described definitions. To wrap up, the investigator intends to point out some thought-provoking quotations on the relation of EGP and ESP below;

1. Anthony (1997) notes that it is not clear where ESP courses and general English (GE) courses begin.
2. Hutchinson and Waters (1987; 53) maintain that what distinguishes ESP from general English (GE) is an awareness of the need.
3. Robinson (1991: 2-4) suggests that in an ESP class, language is as a “service” rather than a “subject” in its own sake.
4. Hutchinson and Waters liken ESP to the leaves and branches on a tree of language, in this tree, roots and trunks are underlying language knowledge and support.

References

- Boston, J.S. 2006. How suitable are EGP textbooks for ESP classes: an analysis for passport and passport plus. *Syllabus & Materials Module*, 1, 1-19.
- Chen, Y. 2006. From common core to specific. *Asian ESP Journal*, 1, 1-27. Available at http://www.asian-esp-journal.com/june_2006_yc.php
- Gatehouse, K. 2001. Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum Development. *The Internet TESL Journal*, VII, 1-16. Available at: <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse-ESP.html>
- Johnson, k. & H. Johnson (eds). 1999. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Lorenzo, F. 2005. Teaching English for specific purposes. Available at: <http://www.usingenglish.com/articles/teaching-english-special-purposes.html>