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Key Aspects of ESP Materials Selection and Design

Abstract:

The paper looks at the key aspects of ESP materials selection and design. It first discusses the purpose of ESP materials, their functions and key characteristics such as authenticity and specificity. Then it goes on to focus on the issue of needs analysis and the role it plays in the process of developing ESP courses and collecting authentic, needs-specific course materials. The author argues that though ESP materials writing is an indispensable element of ESP practice, developing one's own materials from scratch is time-consuming and impractical and is to be treated as the last resort. A discerning ESP practitioner can make a principled choice between materials development and the use of what is already available on the market. In the search for suitable texts and tasks, ESP teachers are aided by ready-made commercial materials produced by knowledgeable ESP specialists, Internet resource, results of needs analysis and the learners themselves.

ESP materials, ESP materials selection and design, ESP materials authenticity, ESP materials specificity, needs analysis

1. Introduction

Materials play an important role in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and materials writing is an indispensable element of ESP practice. For that reason Hutchinson and Waters (2010) contend that there exists already an established tradition, in keeping with which ESP teaching practitioners design and produce in-house teaching materials which are

generally, though not always, addressed to the learners of a particular institution. This pattern of work is considered to be something of an abuse of teachers, few of whom seem to have had any training in the skills and techniques of materials development.

The objective of the paper is to discuss the role of materials in ESP as well as the key aspects of their selection and development. Accordingly, the paper consists of eight parts, *Introduction* and *Conclusions*. The first section briefly refers to the key phases of ESP development and their impact on materials design. It also focuses on the main context of ESP teaching as well as its most important specialisms. The following sections discuss the purpose of materials in ESP, their characteristics and functions while the subsequent parts look at two important issues related to ESP materials – authenticity and specificity. These parts are followed by a discussion on needs analysis (NA) and the role it plays in the process of designing the course and collecting authentic, needs-specific course materials and task stimuli. The sections that close the paper focus on the issues determining the final design of an ESP course as well as the key aspects of selecting and designing ESP materials. The *Conclusions* section sums up the considerations on the choice and/or design of ESP materials best suited to learners' specific needs.

2. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to foreign language teaching and learning that – as opposed to what is known as “General English” or, more disparagingly, “English for No Obvious Reason” (Johns, Paltridge, Belcher, 2014: 1) – is based on learner specific needs. Consequently, needs analysis (NA) is a prerequisite to any ESP course. It not only provides the input for course design but is also the source of authentic, needs-specific materials that can be used during the course.

The inception of the ESP field goes back to the early 1960s and is associated with the name of John Swales, whose *Episodes in ESP* marked the modern beginnings of ESP research (Johns, Paltridge, Belcher, 2014). At the beginning, it was under the influence of the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and research conducted in the area (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 2009). In the course of its development, ESP has gone through several stages and remained under the influence of different principles which had an impact on the design of

course materials. The phases outlined below follow the framework set by García Mayo (1998-1999).

The objective of the first phase referred to as register analysis (1965-1974) was to identify grammatical and lexical features typical of distinct scientific registers. Teaching materials based on these assumptions gave priority to forms that students might encounter in their science studies in English. *A Course in Basic Scientific English* by J.R. Ewer and G. Latorre (1969) is one of the first course books that was based on research into scientific text and the selection of the most frequently encountered grammatical patterns, structural words and lexical items that were common to all scientific disciplines. The subsequent rhetorical or discourse analysis phase (1974-1980) put emphasis on how sentences were used in different acts of communication and how the choice of linguistic features affected the statements made. Concern with these principles led to the development of *English in Focus* series by J.P. Allen and H.G. Widdowson (1973-1978) and other textbook series which took for their starting point an inventory of rhetorical functions rather than grammatical and /or lexical items.

During the early 1980s, the concept of NA gained considerable importance. It has expanded over time to incorporate not only the target situation analysis, but also students' learning needs, their various reasons for attending the course, resources available, etc. NA has become the core of ESP practice and is regarded as a starting point for all further activities. Its current concept not only forces ESP practitioners to consider the surface forms of the language, but also to look below those features. Accordingly, learners' thinking processes, i.e. strategies, that underlie language use and help them cope with these surface forms, e.g. guessing the meaning of unknown words from context, are also taken into account. The skills and strategies approach emphasizes receptive skills. The tasks designed for that purpose require learners to process authentic texts as they would have to do in their work or study settings (using the skills and strategies indispensable in the target situation) and analyze how meaning is encoded and decoded from written or spoken discourse. *Reading and Thinking in English* series by J. Moore and T. Munévar (1979-1980) is an attempt at incorporating some of these concepts into language pedagogy. Last but not least, is the genre analysis approach that looks at the text as a system of linguistic features and choices, and gives rise to a wide range of 'genre-driven' ESP materials and teaching activities, e.g. discussing the purpose of the genre, its communicative conventions, the role it plays in a particular environment and other awareness raising activities.

The main area in EAP is English for Science and Technology (EST). It is “the senior branch of ESP – senior in age, larger in volume of publications and greater in number of practitioners employed” (Swales, 1985: x). There are also other important specialisms, such as English for Medical Purposes (EMP) and English for Legal Purposes (ELP). Recently, there has also been observed a growing interest in the academic study of business, finance, banking, economics and accounting (Dudley-Evans and St John, 2009), to name but a few areas.

ESP teaching can broadly be divided into three main areas. They reflect the range of contexts in which the teaching of ESP takes place. Thus the major distinction is drawn between:

- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which involves academic study needs (e.g. English for logistics studies);
- English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) which refers to work related needs and training (e.g. English for secretaries);
- English for Professional Purposes (EPP) which deals with teaching English to doctors, company executives, lawyers (Basturkman, 2010).

In each area of ESP teaching, it is possible to differentiate between general and specific purposes. Thus English for Academic Purposes, for example, can further be subdivided into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), e.g. English for academic writing or reading, and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), e.g. English for legal studies, etc. (Basturkman, 2010).

The availability of ESP teaching materials designed for such a range of contexts of language study is limited and conditioned by marketing interests and predicted sales, currency or import restrictions. As a result, ESP teachers are frequently confronted with the task of either designing needs-specific materials or adapting commercially produced ones to fit various needs and goals. Also, in many cases, ESP course materials are either completely replaced or only partly complemented with Web-based language lessons. These classes offer a great potential for developing foreign language proficiency since they allow teachers to exploit authentic and motivating language input and engage learners in interesting and pedagogically sound tasks (Krajka, 2007).

3. The purpose of materials in ESP

Materials play a crucial role in ESP and have received considerable attention in the literature of the subject. They depend on the methodologies adopted, forming with them “the interface between teaching and learning, or the points at which the course needs, objectives and syllabuses are made tangible to both learners and teachers” (Hyland, 2006: 89).

Materials are used to stimulate and support language instruction and their design and/or adaptation is an important element of ESP teaching practice. Though predominantly paper-based, they may also include audio and visual aids, computer- and/or Internet-mediated resources, real objects, or performance (Hyland, 2006). Since the objective of ESP materials is to expose learners to real language as it is used in a range of professional and/or academic settings, they are to be closely related to students’ target needs. Discussing the role of EAP materials, Hyland (2006) specifies four principal functions.

Materials are used to scaffold learners’ understandings of language use. This function implies that the materials provided to learners are meant to support their evolving control of different texts and engage them in thinking about and using the language. Well-selected and designed materials give learners a chance to get acquainted with a variety of language samples that do not follow a rigid format, but provide the opportunity to discuss, write, analyze and manipulate language salient structures and/or vocabulary. When graded according to the learners’ proficiency level and well-matched to their current learning needs, materials offer constructive feedback on individual linguistic development.

Materials also serve as models since they provide representative samples of correct language use in various work and/or study situations. They thus illustrate particular language features, structures or functions. Using them, learners are provided with an opportunity to examine various possible examples of a genre with a view to identifying their structure and understanding how meanings are expressed in them. Since ESP materials that provide exemplars of rhetorical forms and structures of target genres are to raise learners’ awareness of how texts are organized and how their communicative intentions are attained, it is important that they be relevant to learners’ target contexts and authentic. Only then can they serve as stimuli that can be used as sources of ideas and content to stimulate and promote writing, speaking or discussion as well as to support project work. The best illustration of the

combined model-stimulus exploitation of materials in ESP is the task in which learners – after practicing a given interaction model – are requested to play different roles basing their role-plays on various scenarios of professional interactions. They are thus immersed in a typical field-specific problem situation that provides stimuli for professional communication and requires them to respond to the emerging issues adequately.

Though stimulus materials are generally texts, they can also include a wide range of media like video, graphic or audio materials, items of realia, computer- and/or Internet-mediated resources, lectures, etc. They are not used to provide content schemata and a reason to communicate, but also to stimulate learners' creativity, planning and engagement with others. Explicit materials, e.g. a lecture recording, can stimulate language use in a relatively structured way. However, materials that are less explicit and likely to generate various interpretations, e.g. Lego bricks used to symbolize real objects, allow learners to give vent to their creativity and produce divergent responses (Hyland, 2006).

Last but not least, ESP materials also include reference materials, which – in contrast to the materials used for scaffolding and modeling, focus on knowledge rather than practice (Hyland, 2006). This category includes a wide range of materials – typically texts or Web-based information, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, explanations, examples of relevant grammatical, stylistic and rhetorical forms. They are particularly relevant to learners engaged in self-study who have little or no class contact. Also, a great deal of useful information can be found on university websites, e.g. in the form of tips on academic writing, or in various ESP or EAP textbooks.

4. Needs-specific materials and methods

An important characteristic of ESP materials, which is of great significance within communicative approach, and which seems of particular relevance for ESP, is that of authenticity. According to Gilmore (2004), interest in authentic materials is associated with the name of Henry Sweet (1899) and its contemporary reappearance goes back to the discussion on the issue of communicative competence that was initiated by Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1966). Authentic materials are used to create indispensable communication

context in the classroom and to simulate as much as possible the communication observable in the real world outside (Richards, 2001b).

Another key feature of ESP materials is that of specificity. Since ESP focuses on specific, purposeful uses of language, it is common practice that materials designed for teaching ESP are directly targeted at a particular learner group and/or related to their reality. For that reason, it is necessary that the materials developer determine particular features of the target language that should be taught to a particular learner or learner group. Alongside the course specialization, there are also some additional factors that need to be taken into consideration as they are likely to influence the design and use of ESP materials. They include the following variables:

- type of institution, e.g. enterprise or university;
- context, e.g. ESL or EFL educational context;
- classroom setting, e.g. traditional classroom or conference room;
- the use of information technology (IT);
- learner qualities, e.g. proficiency level;
- group make-up, e.g. heterogeneous/homogeneous proficiency levels
- teacher qualities, e.g. experience, expertise in the specific content area (Barnard and Zemach, 2003).

All of these factors need to be considered as part of needs analysis before needs-specific materials are selected, designed and used. Accordingly, the course designer has to take into account whether the target group has enough time for regular classes or whether particular learners will have to rely on a mix of traditional classes, self-study and reference materials. There are also other questions that need to be answered such as those related to the most appropriate teaching approach, incorporation of IT into the course, optimal teaching strategies to cope with the heterogeneous group make-up, etc.

The resultant ESP materials – designed and/or selected – reflect the teaching practitioner's view on the nature of language and learning for it goes without saying that developing or choosing a set of materials for an ESP class, teachers make conscious or sub-conscious statements related to what according to them language learning is and how they feel about the learning process. Thus the conviction that organizing language teaching around such categories as language functions serves learners best will result in an approach that underscores the matching of selected language functions to various communicative purposes.

Likewise, a strong belief that language instruction is to focus on discourse and genre structures will lead to having students analyze discourse structure (e.g. contrasting relationships, transition words, collocations) and genre structures (e.g. discourse moves) and making them see how these structures are used to create a coherent stretch of language with a specific function (Upton, 2011).

The past twenty-five years have witnessed a range of teaching methodologies employed in the foreign/second language classroom. The same approaches have been adopted in teaching ESP since ESP does not appear to have a distinctive methodology (Basturkmen, 2006). If we consider methodological options offered in ESP, it becomes obvious that there is very little difference between teaching ESP and EGP, and it is not possible to say whether general English Language Teaching (ELT) has borrowed methodological ideas from ESP or whether ESP has appropriated ideas from general ELT (Robinson, 1991).

According to Robinson (1991), there are two characteristic features of ESP methodology. First, ESP can base activities on learners' specialism, but need not do so. Second, ESP activities can (but may not) have a truly authentic purpose connected with learners' target needs. It follows that both the objective of an ESP course and its content are adjusted to the needs of the target audience. However, since both methodologies are based on the communicative approach to ELT, teaching English either for general or specific purposes is oriented at the development of linguistic, communicative, cultural and intercultural competences allowing learners to naturally function in English in various professional and/or academic settings (Gajewska i Sowa, 2014).

Accordingly, methods and tools available to the ESP teacher are the ones that are used in general ELT and draw on the following approaches:

- activity-oriented approach, which stresses the interdependence of language and context;
- skill-oriented approach, the objective of which is the development of receptive and/or productive skills;
- genre-oriented approach, where language learning focuses on texts representing different genres;

- task-oriented approach, in which learners perform tasks inspired by real-life communicative activities in professional settings (Gajewska i Sowa, 2014).

Referring to these approaches, ESP teachers can construct their own individual, context-specific frameworks that allow them to select and combine compatible procedures and materials in systematic ways for a given local context. These general methodological frameworks may be affected by specialized knowledge that ESP students bring to the classroom as well as learning processes from their specific content areas (Hyland, 2006). Drawing on these, teachers attempt to develop learners' needs-specific competences harnessing – as they go along – such concepts as awareness raising, socioliteracy, concordancing, task-based or problem-based learning etc.

5. Authenticity of ESP materials

One of the characteristic features of ESP is that teachers and course developers pay particular attention to the use of authentic texts and tasks (Basturkmen, 2010). Authenticity of teaching materials has been emphasized within the communicative approach, its concept – widely discussed and a number of definitions of authenticity suggested (Robinson, 1991). Thus in the literature of the subject, the term 'authentic' has been employed to describe language samples – oral or written – reflecting naturally used language forms that are appropriately based on the cultural and situational context (Rogers and Medley, 1988). When the issue of purpose is focused on, the term 'authentic' denotes texts that have not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching (Robinson, 1991; Harmer, 1991; Lee, 1995; Jordan, 1997; Basturkmen, 2010), but for a real communicative purpose (Lee, 1995).

Though the use of authentic materials is emphasized in ESP teaching, it is also argued that the presence of authentic materials in the classroom is no guarantee of authenticity. It has even been suggested that the essence of authenticity does not reside in the texts themselves since once authentic materials are removed from the context in which they naturally function, they are anything but that (Widdowson, 1979). Distinguishing between authenticity and genuineness, Widdowson (1998) contends that another important aspect of authenticity pertains to the recipient of the text and his/her reaction to it. It follows that

authenticity cannot be reached if learners do not respond to the texts provided as native speakers do in real contexts or if authentic tasks are not used in keeping with the field specificity. Consequently, as suggested by Velazquez and Redmond (2007), it is important that teachers focus on the authentic uses of materials and what can be done with them rather than on authentic materials themselves.

The above discussion shows that the issue of authenticity not only manifests itself in text authenticity (cf. Guariento and Morley, 2001), but also encompasses other facets. These – as cited by MacDonald et al. (2006) – include authenticity of competence (cf. Canale and Swain, 1980), learner authenticity (cf. Widdowson, 1979) and authenticity of classroom (cf. Breen, 1985). MacDonald et al. (2006) consider texts used as input to be authentic if there is a correspondence between the materials used in the classroom and the types of texts used outside the classroom. Referring to Canale and Swain's (1980) classification of competence, they contend that authenticity of competence involves the learner's performance that closely corresponds to the performance of native speakers. As observed by Breen (1985), these two kinds of authenticity are targeted at learners who – being provided with suitable materials and help in text interpretation – are given a chance to share their knowledge with native speakers.

Learner authenticity refers to the interaction between the language user, his/her purpose, the communicative situation in which the text is being used and the text sample itself (Lee, 1995). It is defined as the learner's positive reaction towards the text and pedagogical intention inherent in it (Lee, 1995), which is not solely generated by the text authenticity, but rather by its communicative potential.

Classroom authenticity is the last category proposed by MacDonald et al. (2006). It pertains to enhancing authenticity in the classroom by creating conditions in which “the participants can publicly share the problems, achievements and overall process of learning a language together as socially motivated and socially situated activity” (Breen, 1985: 68). There are several possible approaches to enhancing authenticity in the ESP classroom (Belcher, 2012). One of them is the use of tasks inspired by real-life communicative activities, e.g. after watching video, students in an EMP course engage in role plays as patients and doctors (cf. Hussin, 2002; Boshier and Smalkoski, 2002). Another approach involves problem-based learning (PBL) activities which are meant to engage learners in

collaborative solving of typical field-specific problems. These activities prepare learners for functioning in their target communities since they equip them with individual strategies of language learning and problem-solving (Belcher, 2012).

Authentic texts used as input can range from anything that is available to the ESP teacher, but not produced for the purpose of language teaching to materials normally used in the learners' workplace or study situations (Robinson, 1991). Accordingly, developing an ESP course – English for Logistics – for example, one might make use of the texts written by journalists for the purpose of presenting logistics concepts and information. One might as well select texts written by logistics specialists and/or related to the logistics sector (such as quotation forms, shipping instructions, documents used in foreign trade, etc.). The exploitation of these materials might be based on tasks replicating assignments performed in the workplace (such as completing the quotation form, dealing with urgent delivery problems, etc.) or tasks logistics students might be expected to perform during their studies.

Authentic texts play an important role in demonstrating 'real' language use and their selection usually follows the stage of needs analysis which has to take account of various factors such as the content of the materials, which must be appropriate to learners' age, interests, needs and goals, proficiency level, etc. (cf. Karpova, 1999). It is, however, not always easy to find suitable authentic texts since as Graves (2000: 156) points out, they are not "constructed to contain the aspects of language the learner has encountered or learned until that point and so they may not be entirely accessible to the learner". It follows that authentic materials are not always necessary or even realistic, and in some cases – are a real "burden for teachers" (Richards, 2001a).

Although Swales (2009) argues that authentic texts are generally the preferred option, he is well aware of various problems that might arise during the process of materials selection in EAP, e.g. the materials might be too complex, either linguistically or in terms of content. In such cases, editing the text and/or its certain 'skeletonization' are possibilities that are available to the teaching practitioner. When a suitable authentic text cannot be found, teachers are recommended to make occasional use of instructor-written materials.

Discussing the issue of authenticity, Belcher (2012) points out that published materials are not always the best choice. She contends that it makes little sense to conduct needs analysis

as input for ESP courses if we choose generic commercially available materials that do not respond to the specific target needs of our learners. What is needed are needs-responsive instructional materials collected at the stage of needs analysis, adapted and/or developed from the specific target situation by the ESP teacher, i.e. the person who has expertise in language learning materials design, language instruction as well as in the specific content area.

6. Specificity of ESP materials

The question how specific the course should be in terms of the target audience is one of the key issues pertaining to the choice of ESP materials and course development. It has been discussed in relation to second language writing instruction and the debate over the purposes of EAP classes is considered to be one of the most persistent and controversial questions (Ferris, 2001).

On the continuum that stretches from teaching EGAP at one end to the most focused and targeted language instruction towards the other, it is possible to draw a distinction between ‘wide angled’ and ‘narrow angled’ courses (Basturkmen, 2010). The former are designed for more general groups of learners and focus on a set of generic skills in an area, e.g. Business English skills. The latter are meant for very specific learner groups, i.e. learners who appear to be homogeneous in terms of their needs and/or who study English having a particular type of academic and/or work environment in mind, e.g. English for Logistics, English for Accountants. Developing more focused courses, it is possible to design courses for sub-areas within the broad fields of work or study, e.g. English for Financial Accountancy or English for Logistics Management.

In practical terms, the focus of the course is determined by the findings from needs analysis. From a theoretical point of view, however, ESP course development is to be preceded by careful consideration of two additional issues (Basturkmen, 2010) – one that pertains to the notion of general varieties of language and the other that relates to the notion of generic skills. When it comes to the former, one has to agree with Hyland (2008: 113) questioning the assumption of “a single core vocabulary for academic study irrespective of discipline”. As for the latter, it does not seem justifiable to assume the existence of a set of generic

academic skills relevant to the needs of students in a wide range of disciplines. As pointed out by Hyland (2004: 151), different disciplines have their own ways of “crafting arguments, reflecting ideas of what is of value and how it can be communicated”. Adopting a different perspective on the issues leads to the development of wide-angled EGAP courses, which reflects the unwillingness of many universities to fund the design of highly specific narrow-angled courses (Hyland, 2002)

Commenting on the issue, Belcher (2006: 139) argues that the two-way divide suggested by ‘wide- and narrow-angled’ course designs is a ‘nonissue’ for many teaching practitioners since “instructional decisions should have more to do with the learners themselves than with instructor preference or beliefs”. Undergraduate students without majors or low-proficiency adults are more likely to benefit from a wide-angled approach, whereas postgraduate students – doctors or nurses – may prefer a narrow-angled approach. Also, as suggested by research findings, teachers are not always the best judges of what will motivate their learners (Murray and McPherson, 2004). It thus goes without saying that learners should be allowed a voice in the selection of the course content as well.

7. The role of needs analysis (NA) in selecting and/or developing ESP materials

Teaching ESP is often described as a learner-based approach, which implies that one of the fundamental responsibilities of the ESP practitioner is to investigate the gap between learners’ current and target competencies (Belcher, 2012). The diagnosis, referred to as needs analysis (NA), is a starting point for further activities and involves thorough research into the objective and subjective needs of the learner group and several other factors related to the planned ESP course, such as information about the environment in which it is to be run.

When it comes to the objective needs of the target learners, the needs-identifying responsibility implies first of all the necessity to collect and examine data, usually available in the form of samples of written or transcribed texts, audio or video recordings from the target community (Belcher, 2012). Having collected suitable NA data, ESP practitioners – acquainted with most recent development in genre theory – can go on to conduct analyses of discourse samples collected from target communities. They do so by

looking at both macro- (rhetorical) and micro- (lexicogrammatical) level characteristics of both written and spoken genres. These routine communicative events represented by memos, balance sheets, job interviews, for example, are not often considered in isolation but in the contexts in which they naturally function and interact with other genres (e.g. application letters in response to job advertisements) (Belcher, 2012).

Advances in technology have considerably expanded the range of options available to ESP teachers and increased the importance of new forms of research activity that study linguistic phenomena through large collections of machine-readable texts: corpora. In spite of some criticism directed at using information technology (IT) tools in the study of discourse (cf. Swales, 2004), it seems that corpus linguistics has a lot to offer to ESP practitioners. First, it gives access to mega-databanks, incorporating authentic spoken and written discourse. Second, with the help of relatively easily accessible concordancing software, such as AntConc, which is the most popular, or Wordsmith Tools (Scott, 2013) (Kamasa, 2014), ESP practitioners can compile and analyze specialized corpora, determine the distribution of specific lexical and grammatical features, let alone compare expert and learner texts (Belcher, 2012).

In ESP, decisions concerning the course content are based on the diagnosis of learners' needs and objectives, the latter being dependent on the contexts of language use. This means that conducting the target situation analysis of a given place of work or study is a *condicio sine qua non* of each ESP course. Such analysis was conducted by Candlin and his associates (1976), who carried out field observations of language use on the job and developed EMP courses for training overseas or non-native English emergency room doctors.

As has been suggested, it is advisable learners' needs be assessed continually, at regular intervals, during the life of each course (cf. Robinson, 1991). This is most obviously because needs may change as the course progresses. As learners become more and more involved with the course, their attitudes and approach to it may change. They might as well become aware of the needs they have not realized at the onset of the course. This is the reason why ethnography seems to play a very important role in NA. It allows researchers collect in-depth information related to learners' needs and can be understood as either deficiency analysis or ongoing ethnographic needs analysis. The former

technique was employed by Jasso-Aguilar (1999), and Boshier and Smalkoski (2002). Basing her NA on various sources of information (e.g. employed hotel maids), Jasso-Aguilar (1999) made use of observation in addition to unstructured interviews and questionnaires. Owing to that, she managed to identify gaps between the desired performance and the current level of the target learner group. Boshier and Smalkoski (2002), on the other hand, reinforced their ethnographic assessment of learners' needs, i.e. observations of nursing students performing concrete tasks in the laboratory, with the interviews conducted with the students themselves and the teaching staff.

Special attention should also be paid to ongoing ethnographic needs analysis. In an EMP team-run (language specialist and nursing instructor) course, Hussin (2002) engaged her learners in such analysis of their needs. Her visits to the students' placements allowed her to further identify their needs and thus to supplement the analysis of their case notes and discharge summaries. She also encouraged her students to suggest learning tasks and provide data of their own language performances. This enabled them to practise language skills in class and then to try them out immediately in the target situation.

NA can make use of one particular or several different research strategies. Depending on the research technique employed, the focus of NA changes. The target situation analysis that focuses on professional performance, e.g. doctors in casualty, can be used as a starting point for developing a course (cf. Candlin et al., 1976). The assessment of communication difficulties in a professional setting, conducted before and during the life of the course, focuses on the learners' current performances and its objective is to help them overcome communication deficits. Ongoing ethnographic NA, in turn, focuses on the on-site performance of the learners who are often analysts of their own needs. Assessing their own needs, they not only participate in the process of syllabus and materials development (Shi, 2012), but also prepare for their future working lives (Hussin, 2002).

Determined by NA results, the content of an ESP course needs to take into account language issues and socio-cultural elements related to language use in a professional and/or academic setting(s) (Gajewska i Sowa, 2014). However, defining the syllabus and content of an ESP course is only part of the process of course design. The final shape of the course is the outcome of a dynamic interaction between a number of elements, such as

the course designers' approach to syllabus and methodology, (in)accessibility of ESP teaching materials on the market. These variables are mediated by contextual constraints (e.g. the status of English, logistical and administrative matters, learners' motivation and expectations) (Robinson, 1991).

The above discussion points to the recently raised needs-analysis-related debate which focuses on the issue of power. Discussing 'institutional power relations', Benesch (2001) contends that if target communities of practice are solely defined by those in power (i.e. teachers, supervisors, employers), they become narrowly defined places where learners have to cover certain amount of subject-area material in a limited period of time, irrespective of their educational, linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds. Instead, target discourse communities need to be seen as places where novices have rights too – “to be included and accommodated – hence as interactive social systems that can, and should, change as new members join (Belcher, 2012: 7).

8. Selecting ESP materials

One of the myths concerning teaching ESP is the conviction that every ESP practitioner is also a good designer of course materials. Dudley-Evans and St. John (2009) unanimously contend that the task of the majority of ESP teachers consists in providing good materials, not creating them. This implies appropriate selection from the materials accessible on the market, their creative use, adjusting exercises and tasks to the needs of target learners as well as supplying additional exercises and language input.

When selecting ESP materials, most teachers – after having identified the context, learners' needs and language expectations for the course, first turn to published textbooks and other materials (e.g. Internet resources) in the attempt at finding something that would address the identified needs of the group. The materials selection process is greatly facilitated by the use of systematic evaluation procedures that help to determine whether selected materials are consistent with the needs of learners they are to serve, as well as with the official views on the nature of language and language learning (Nunan, 1998). It starts with the evaluation of the appropriateness of individual textbook units, texts or

activities against some simple criteria that help decide whether the content and genre are relevant for a particular purpose.

However, the more specific and focused the needs are, the less likely it is that there are any published materials appropriate for the ESP group, especially compiled into a textbook. As pointed out by Jones (1990), materials highly targeted at learners' specific needs in a range of ESP contexts would not be marketable to more general and broader audiences.

When it comes to supplying learners with needs-specific texts, exercises and tasks, ESP teachers can adapt materials originally designed for other purposes and/or edit published materials for their particular teaching contexts. The range of options suggested for the purpose is enormous and includes such adapting strategies as deleting irrelevant material, simplifying materials or activities, modifying materials or activities to make them either more demanding or more accessible to the learners, to name but a few (for more details see Hyland, 2006; Bocanegra-Valle, 2010)

Designing tailor-made ESP materials by the teacher is a time-consuming activity and not very economical. Estimates vary – one teaching hour is reported to require from 5 (Pilbeam, 1987) to 15 writing hours (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 2009). That is why developing one's own ESP materials is considered to be the last resort. A discerning ESP practitioner can make a principled choice between materials writing and the use of commercial materials produced by other ESP specialists who have the knowledge of the relevant discourse theory and research, not to mention target-domain data (Belcher, 2012).

In the search for the tailor-made ESP materials, the teacher is aided by Internet resources. Also, materials collected at the NA stage can serve as authentic, needs-specific course materials and task stimuli, e.g. videotaped interactions, audio taped phone messages or written documents gathered on-site can perform the function of language teaching tools (Hussin, 2002).

In addition to that, the source of significant course materials can be the learners themselves who may be requested to create portfolios that include genre samples from the subject-specific areas. The outcome of their ethnographic work collected in the form of

expert texts, lecture recordings, to name but a few, enables individual students access authentic materials that are relevant to their needs (Belcher, 2012).

9. Developing ESP materials

Looking at a wide array of instructional materials that ESP teaching practitioners can make use of, one needs to agree with the contention presented above that developing new materials from scratch is clearly impractical. There are, however, situations in which teacher-generated materials are indispensable to make the course successful, e.g. the lack of ready-made commercial materials, a gap in the course materials, etc. The decision to use teacher-contrived texts also has much to do with the role the materials are to play, with teacher-designed texts offering ‘enriched input’ flooded with exemplars of the target structure (Ellis, 1999).

Discussing the issue of teacher-generated material, Hutchinson and Waters (2010) propose a materials design model, which provides a coherent framework for the integration of various aspects of learning: *input*, *content*, *language* and *task*. Dudley-Evans and St John (2009), on the other hand, describing the process of preparing new materials, contend that the impetus for the development of new material can come from two different sources: the availability of suitable carrier content, i.e. subject matter of an exercise, or the lack of it. Hyland (2006) argues that though the materials development process can vary widely, depending on local circumstances, it typically begins with the identified need for materials, e.g. students require further practice in a particular area, which is followed by the teacher exploring a given area in order to gain a better understanding of the particular skill(s) or feature(s) involved. Next, an appropriate input source is located, e.g. a text or video, and exploited to design interesting and credible activities or tasks that relate to learners’ target needs. Finally, after being used in the classroom, the materials are evaluated for their success in meeting the needs identified at the onset of the materials design process, typically through teacher judgements and/or learner questionnaires.

As mentioned before, methods and tools of ESP teaching do not considerably depart from general ELT. What makes ESP tasks and/or exercises different from those used in EGP is not the form, but the fact that they are oriented at a goal. Even if these assignments deal

with grammatical issues, grammar is only referred to when analyzing language functions, texts, types of discourse. Thus it is treated as a means to an end and helps carry out concrete target community activities. It follows that in ESP teaching, linguistic competence is not the end in itself, but a kind of tool, thanks to which it is possible to reach target professional competence.

Producing teacher-generated materials, one is to remember that ESP courses tend to be constrained by a limited time period, during which the course objectives are to be realized. Owing to that, materials provided to learners cannot be expected to cover a wide array of target situations typical of a given workplace. Instead, an ESP course needs to partly focus on teaching individual strategies and thus make learners more autonomous and able to use acquired competences in the future. Another possibility of coping with the time constraints of the course is rhetorical and lexicogrammatical awareness raising, i.e. raising learners' consciousness of how written and spoken texts achieve what they aim for. It has been argued that instead of making students acquire a wide array of target genres, a much more realistic goal can be met by teaching them to first analyze and eventually produce more sophisticated genres, initially with and later without, ESP teacher guidance (cf. Hyland, 2006; Johns, 2012).

Another scaffolding approach involves acquiring a sequence of progressively more challenging genres. First students are immersed in selected genre samples and thus provided with texts and context-rich environment. After being modelled the construction of the text by the teacher, they make an attempt at its collaborative construction, independent text production to be finally given the opportunity to reflect on what they have learned about the genre (de Silva Joyce and Hood, 2012).

10. Conclusions

It has been often observed that ESP is a materials-led movement and that part of the role of the ESP practitioner is to write appropriate materials to meet the needs of the target learner group. The author argues here that though materials development is a very important element of ESP practice, designing them from scratch is best regarded as the last resort. It seems only justified when all other possibilities of providing learners with

needs-specific materials have been exhausted (cf. Dudley-Evans and St John, 2009; Hutchinson and Waters, 2010).

Making an attempt at the selection of appropriate materials, it is important that ESP practitioners become familiar with ESP textbooks currently available on the market. In the case of well-established disciplines, such as banking or accounting, for example, teachers can choose from a wide range of off-the-shelf ESP textbooks that are well grounded in recent research and replete with authentic target community or workplace data. This does not seem the case with younger subject areas (e.g. logistics, music), for which there only very few or no subject-specific textbooks available.

To provide learners with the materials catering for their specific needs, many ESP teachers are confronted with the challenge of designing tailor-made materials, adapting materials originally designed for other purposes or editing published materials related to a given subject area. In doing so, they can be considerably aided by relevant studies in the ESP specialty (e.g. EMP) and/or sub-specialty field (e.g. English for Casualty Doctors) as well as in the target field itself (e.g. healthcare communication) (cf. Boshier and Smalkoski, 2002). It is also indispensable that they have various contacts and experiences in the target setting (e.g. clinics in various healthcare settings). Since the majority of ESP teachers are not experts in the target field, it seems that the more experiences they have in the target setting and the more they know about it, the more efficient they are likely to be in defining the course objectives and selecting appropriate materials for it. In the cases when there are not subject-specific ESP materials currently available or when published materials can only be drawn on selectively, language instructors are left no choice but to develop new ones.

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