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ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: A REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Indisputably, English has become a medium that can be used in the unlimited ways in the new revolutionary world of globalization. Although its normal function is to serve native speakers of English with a wide application in a variety of ways, interestingly, it carries out sub-function of serving non-natives of English in a wider range as a medium of communication between the different cultures all over the world. English for specific purposes is one of the principal offshoots that has emerged in the last few decades and has been internationally accepted as the language of instruction of science and technology. In the last few years, the phenomenon of learning English for specific purposes has begun to appear more and more frequently throughout the process of English language teaching. Unquestionably, this has become a major activity in today's highly automated world. The chief aim of the present article is to review the developmental paces of this field of study in relation to its current position.

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (henceforth ESP) is a newly born branch of English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) and English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) (Sysoyev 2000:1). In turn, the latter two are regarded as the main sub-branches of English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT) along with English as a Mother Tongue (henceforth EMT). However, ESP is the heed compass of the non-native speakers of English (i.e. learners of English as an EFL and ESL). Furthermore, these learners are not experts in English literature or applied linguistic streams (i.e. non-linguistic learners). Such learners major in fields such as veterinary medicine, engineering, etc, in which English constitutes a principal medium of instruction since it is imposed by the academic needs of the specialization (Abdullah 2005:70). Above all, ESP is not concerned with the speakers of English as an EMT, because it proposes to meet the specific needs of a particular group of learners for limited communication as required by the prerequisites of the scientific disciplines or occupational settings. It may be appropriate to illustrate the hierarchical relations between the above-mentioned abbreviated constituents in the following diagram:

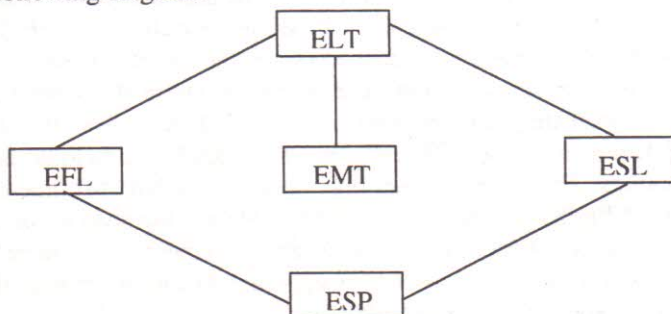


Figure (1)

As obviously seen in Figure (1), ELT is simply divided into three main stems (viz. EFL, EMT and ESL). EFL and ESL come across and emphasize the needs analysis of ESP. Meanwhile, EMT is detached and completely neglects the scope of ESP.

DEVELOPMENTAL PACES

As pointed out earlier, ESP is a developing area of language teaching having emerged in the 1960s in response to the demands of the revolutionary shift in science and technology. In the 20th century, the world became more highly-industrialized and mechanized and started competing in manufacture for peaceful purposes instead of armament. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 6) point out that the end of the World War-II heralded an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. This expansion created a unified world dominated by two forces, viz. technology and science, which in their relentless progress, soon generated a demand for an international language.

Accordingly, a great amount of consideration was put into creating a particular language to meet the demands of automation and technology. Hence, the 1960s could be described as the decade of the emergence of ESP. William et al. (1984:2) stress that ESP began to evolve in the 1960s in response to an awareness that certain types of learners had specialized needs that were not being sufficiently and efficiently met by wide-spectrum EFL courses.

WHY IS IT ESP?

It is worth pointing out that English is internationally accepted as the language of science and technology. It is more extensively used at present than it was before. Comparatively, Greek and Latin had a wide application in the past as the means of science conveying scientific knowledge which resulted in western medicine being originated from the lexicon of Greek and Latin. Currently, the use of English continues to increase greatly day by day; it is estimated that more than a quarter of the world's population uses English in its three varieties, viz. First language (L1), Second language (L2) and Foreign language (FL).

Furthermore, English, like any other language serves its native speakers in a wide range of implementation in different disciplines. Interestingly, it serves the non-natives with a wider range of use, because it facilitates the dealings and contacts between the different cultures for various purposes. Today, more non-native English users interact with each other than with English speakers (Talgeri 2004: 117). The question which arises here is: Is it necessary to teach the whole scope of English specifically for the learners of English as an SL and FL? As stated earlier, English is used as an instrument of instruction in many scientific fields such as medicine, engineering, computer science, etc. Unquestionably, in such disciplines, the non-native learners of English need a greater access to the target language in order to acquaint themselves with the recent innovations and developments in the subject - specializations of such learners. Unfortunately, foreign learners of English are not as fluent as the speakers of English as an L1; they may not sufficiently interact either in the field of their specialization or in the social settings. Therefore, it is not only unnecessary but also time-consuming, to teach the whole range of English, to non-native learners. Hence, the need to narrow down the scope of the English language for specific purposes started to emerge. It is, therefore, crucial to look at English as a modern functional skill. This approach to English creates the right climate for learning English for specific purposes (*ibid.*).

ESP VARIETIES

One of the major functions of ESP is that it meets the exigencies of academic studies; in such situations, it is known as English for Academic Purposes (henceforth EAP). The other principal impact, is that it proposes to meet the demands of various occupations; in such situations, ESP is known as English for Occupational Purposes (henceforth EOP). Furthermore, each variety of ESP "EAP or EOP" can cover many scientific and professional fields. For instance, EAP can be ramified to serve different disciplines, e.g. English for medical studies, English for Economics, English for Psychology, etc. Typically, EOP can cover the needs of many careers, such as English for technicians, English for secretaries, English for teaching and so on. It would be pertinent to clarify the principal categories and sub-categories of ESP in the following tree-diagram:

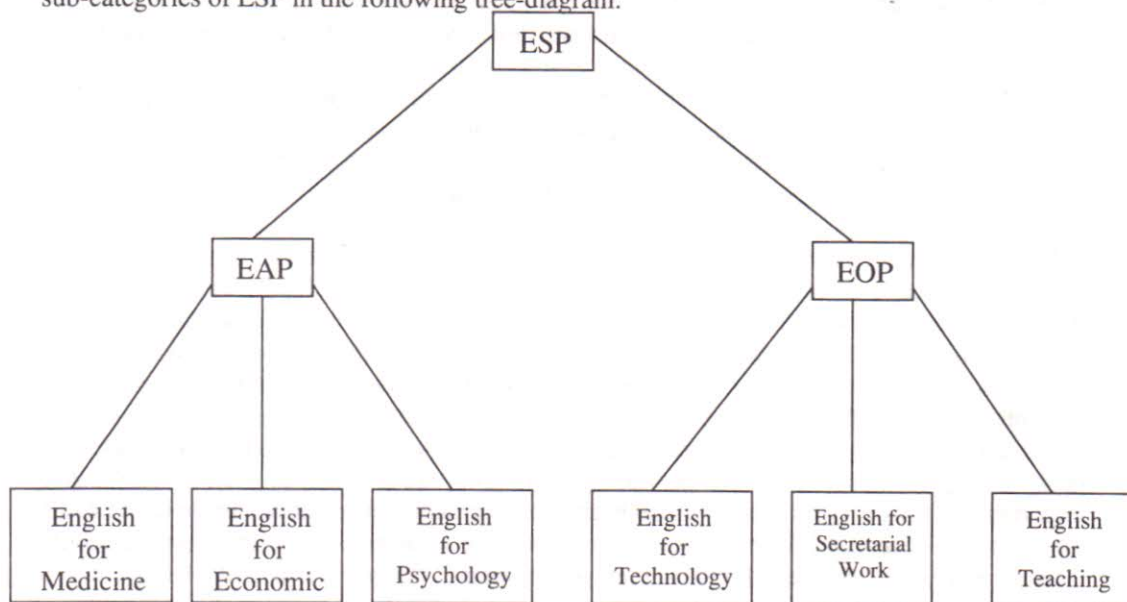


Figure (2) : Categories and sub-categories of ESP

Figure (2) simply states that ESP has two major categories, viz. EAP and EOP. The subdivisions of EAP and EOP are the main ramifications and they are not the only ones, the list is almost endless. In this regard, it is worth demonstrating that the definition and classification of ESP is a matter of controversy among the different scholars of ESP. To illustrate, Cater (1983:133) divides ESP into English as a restricted language: EAP and EOP, and English with specific topics. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:17) classify ESP into: English for Science and Technology (henceforth EST), English for Business and Economics (henceforth EBE) and English for Social Sciences (henceforth ESS). Each of these offshoots is in turn, subdivided into two subsidiaries – EAP and EOP. An example of EAP for the EST branch is English for medical studies, whereas an example of EOP for the same branch "EST" is English for technicians. McDonough (1984:6) provides another classification, where he classifies ESP into EAP and EOP, labels EST as the main hierarchy of the former, i.e. EAP. Strevens (1977:81) and Robinson (1991:3) present family-trees of ESP in which there is a great correspondence among the different branches and sub-branches of the tree-diagrams.

