

Encouraging Students to Speak in English for Specific Purposes Lessons

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Abstract

Getting students to use English in the classroom is one of the biggest challenges of teaching. ESP lesson is even more difficult. This presentation will describe some techniques to help students speak in scientific English in the classroom and encourage them to use English in their future jobs too. This is a classroom-based research with my students of Medicine at Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel” in Albania. This research encourages students to take an active, collaborative approach to speaking by doing various activities. In addition, it allows the English professors to build a successful work, in particular, work which focuses on the technical English language structure. The aim of this paper is to show the importance of the speaking skills in the ESP classroom in order to get a perfect acquisition of the second language and suggest some activities to promote speaking.

Keywords: *ESP, English for Medical Purposes, speaking, Albania.*

Introduction

The past 20 years after the 1990s have seen great changes in English teaching approaches and contents in Universities in Albania. Before the 1980s the focus was in Russian and French as foreign languages, and after the 1990s English has become the major foreign language. The importance of English is growing more and more with the development of technology in the world. The introduction of Bologna process into Albanian universities has made the English language course obligatory for all the universities in our country due to the recognition of its important role in modern life, as well as its function as a lingua franca. Nowadays, the accessibility to Internet, the influence of computer games, movies, music, documentaries or the exposure to the language make English being well acquired at earliest ages. In Albania General English is taught at school since third grade at primary and then secondary level, students undergo some 10 years of English before they enroll at university. When it comes

to university studies students already have a very good level of English usually and when they study ESP they don't have difficulties because the above mentioned factors helped in language acquisition.

In the Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel" the situation is a little different. This is a private university that provides joint diplomas with the partner universities of Italy and the diplomas issued by our university are accepted by all EU countries. As a consequence there is more interest by students who mostly come not only from Albania but also from Italy, Kosovo and Montenegro. These students come from different learning structures and as a result they have different English language levels. English for Specific Purposes is very important for these students because they have the right to work in every place they want when they finish the university studies and English is widely used in the medical world. That is why they are really motivated to learn ESP and teaching to these students is extremely rewarding but also challenging as a profession. Johns (1990, p. 91) addresses the central question is ESP textbooks. This problem is noticed even in this while teaching English at my university because professors don't have proper textbooks for specific purposes. For example, there are some difficulties in teaching ESP with the students of Physiotherapy. There are textbooks for Medicine or Nursing but not for the specific needs of the Physiotherapy students. Another problem that Johns presents is that "ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited time" (Johns, 1990, p. 91). Even in our university and in Albanian universities there are limited English hour that sometimes are not enough to meet all the students' needs and interests for their future profession.

This study is concerned with the students of Medicine who attended one semester course in English language under the assumption that they all possess necessary pre-knowledge of general English. This study has been conducted in order to get an insight of the importance of ESP and help with the techniques to improve speaking abilities. On the basis of teaching experience and continuous monitoring of students' progress it has been assumed that main factors influencing non-English majors' achievement in learning speaking ESP include: students' background knowledge of English and motivation to learn a foreign language such as English in our case.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes

English is nowadays widely accepted to be the international language of a wide range of occupations. From the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. As for a broader definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) theorize, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p. 19). Anthony (1997) notes that, it is not clear where ESP courses end and general English courses begin; ESL instructors use an ESP approach in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system (Tony Dudley-Evans An Overview of ESP in the 1990s The University of Birmingham, England).

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) stress that ESP courses are generally intensive and narrow focused. They focus on specific skills in specific contexts for specific students. This comes as result of the students' needs, the resources available and the contexts where the courses are conducted. Dudley-Evans 8, and St. John, 1998 define ESP with these characteristics: Absolute Characteristics:

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner.
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines that it serves.
- ESP is centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable Characteristics:

- 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, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however be designed for learners at secondary school level.

English for Medical purposes (EMP)

English for Medical Purposes (EMP) is part of ESP refers to ‘the teaching of English to doctors, English for nurses, English for healthcare in the medical profession’. According to John Maher (1986) EMP is designed:

- a) to meet the English specific needs of the medical learner.
- b) focuses on themes and topics specific to the medical field
- c) focuses on a restricted range of skills which may be required by the medical learner (for writing a medical paper or preparing a talk for a medical meeting).

Today, all the most influential medical journals are written in English, and English has become the language of choice at international conferences. EMP students are usually adults who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular medical-related functions. Many people believe that EMP is still based around basic communication skills and reading and writing skills which just need to be put in context.

Virginia Allum (www.authersden.com) mentioned that there are many areas where EMP is used but perhaps a simple breakdown is to say:

- EMP for workplace readiness. This may be part of compulsory testing before registration in a healthcare profession is allowed. For example, proving language competency before registration with a nursing licensing board such as the NMC (Nurses and Midwives Council) in the UK.
- EMP for use in a healthcare environment where English is not the official language. This is commonly where English is the common language between Health Care Professional and patient if the patient has found himself /herself in hospital in a foreign country. More and more countries are trying to prepare for this problem ahead of time.
- EMP for academic purposes. Healthcare Professionals who want to be part of global discussions during conferences usually need to be able to communicate ideas in English. As nursing progresses to a common global standard of a minimum of degree level, there is a greater need to bring practices and nursing research into the international arena. This usually has to be done in English.

The Importance of Speaking English for Medical Purposes

Many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as Nunan (1991) wrote, "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language." Teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom they may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. Professors should provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, various materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.

David Holmes (2004 p 4-6) in his book raises the question, "Who is the most important person in the classroom?" "The student is the most important person, because the university and the teacher are there to serve the student's needs to learn, just as the hospital is there to treat the patients or the conferences that he she will participate. Unfortunately, until lately even in Albania like elsewhere throughout the world the classes were teacher-dominated and teacher-centered not student-centered. Nowadays the teaching methods have changed due to the new curriculum and continuous training of English teachers. They are paying more attention to the students and encouraging them to speak and use English even outside the classroom. Teachers indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.

Activities to promote speaking to ESP Students of Medicine

Professors should try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim they should practice different ways of student participation. According to Jordan (1997), speaking for academic purposes is used to describe spoken language in various academic settings. Speaking for academic purposes refers to participation in seminars, asking questions in lectures, oral presentations, verbalizing data and giving oral instructions in seminars and laboratories and social interaction with other students (Jordan, 1997; Robinson, 1991). Some successful activities that to promote speaking with Medicine students and resulted are:

a. Conversation

The first type is based on having the students interviewing one-another and asking questions, so that there is an independent dialogue between class members, with a minimum of interruption and supervision by the teacher. According to David Holmes (2004) in *Speaking Activities for The Classroom*, one of the types of tasks to stimulate the students to speaking more frequently is interviewing or developing conversations. This technique has resulted very successful with my students of Medicine. We tried dialogues between patient and doctor and they were really motivated to do it well.

b. Discussions

Teachers must create a classroom environment which is accepting and non-judgmental. They should take an impartial role: one who listens and acknowledges, but who does not impose views. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Hayriye Kayi (2006). Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions about the situation in hospitals nowadays.

c. Role Play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Role-play is widely used as an educational method which is very effective for learning about communication in medical education. Students pretend they are in various medical contexts such as hospitals, clinics etc. usually between medical staff and patients. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the students such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and..." (Harmer, 1984) students will go to the doctor, describe their ailment, get a prescription, and get some advice. Doctors will listen to ailments, ask a few questions and then prescribe medicine and give some advice.

d. Storytelling

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking (Hayriye Kayi 2006). For instance, students may bring their own stories during their practice in hospital with patients' health problems.

e. Picture Describing

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. Pictures, especially photos, often generate hundreds of ideas with very little input from the teacher. I have tried this activity with my medicine students who were given different picture to describe in hospital with patients. Students discuss the picture with their groups, and then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This created a debate in the class because they had different opinions for the same picture. Picture describing fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills. (Hayriye Kayi 2006).

f. Presentations

Jordan (1997) lists some important speaking skills in oral presentation such as organizing information into coherent structure, using ‘signals’ to facilitate task of listeners, speaking from notes and achieving greater phonological, grammatical and lexical accuracy. Class presentations help medical students establish and refine their presentation skills, with a focus on the emergency medicine presentation. This activity helps students to develop the skills needed to communicate important information of a medical presentation. Students were really motivated in this activity.

Investigation

Theory

The study investigates the learning ESP in the subject field of medicine by undergraduate students of Medicine in the academic year 2015-2016 the Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”. A survey was conducted among 60 undergraduate students of Medicine, Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”, who learned English for Specific Purposes participated in the case study. English language was their foreign language, the language proficiency level was intermediate - upper intermediate. It was an activity carried out during the English classes with two different groups of medicine. The aim of the study described in this paper is to show the importance of speaking in ESP classes and find out which activities motivate students to use English in the classroom and outside. All the students have just finished their whole session of English learning at our university 72 hours medical English.

The present study aimed to seek answers to the following research questions:

- 1) How important is medical English language for your academic studies?

- 2) Which ability would like to improve?
- 3) How can students' speaking strategies be promoted?

Findings

Question I: How important is medical English language for your academic studies?

The survey indicates that 90% of the students indicates that English language is very important for their academic studies because they find in most of their medical research and as it is global language it widely used by medical professionals in hospitals, clinics, conferences etc.

Question: II Which ability would like to improve? (Multiple choices)

The students' responses to the question are as follows: medical English speaking (65%), medical English reading (48%), medical English writing (50%) listening (40%).

Question: III How can students' speaking strategies be promoted? (Multiple choices)

The students' responses to the question are as follows: Conversations(80%), Discussions (78%), Role playing (85%) Storytelling(70%) Picture Describing(66%) Presentations(75%)

Discussion

The present study aimed at the investigation of the English speaking from the perspective of EFL learners in Albania. In the first question the majority of students accepted that English language is very important for their academic studies because they find it in most of their medical research and they will use it in everyday situations in their future job. In the second question the most important ability that medical students find useful and would like to improve is speaking due to the fact that in the medical field they are going to use this ability more than the other abilities in hospitals, conferences etc. After speaking comes writing as the second most important ability because of the usage in hospital documents and medical researches. The third ability was reading and students think that they will mostly need reading for their medical research and case studies. The last was listening and students think that will mostly use in communication with the patients. In the third question it was investigated that Role playing, conversations and discussions are the most important activities to promote speaking. Role playing is very effective for learning about communication in medical education. Conversation and discussions of

tasks to stimulate the students to speaking. According to students class Presentations would help them to overcome the fear of speaking in front of an audience and be successful in their future conferences participations. They also mentioned that Storytelling and Picture Describing are very important activities to promote speaking and generate many ideas to discuss. The students accept that all the above mentioned activities promote speaking and help them in interactive skills.

Conclusion

Speaking is generally thought to be the most important of the four skills. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in their studies and success later their future career. This paper has discussed the situation of English in Albania, origins of ESP, the importance of speaking EMP and examined issues in ESP curriculum design. Various speaking activities such as those mentioned above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills. Speaking activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

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