

**TO THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING BUSINESS
ENGLISH AS ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES
IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

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Key words and phrases: Business English; communicative skills; English for specific purposes; language learning needs and beliefs; needs analysis; teaching strategies.

Abstract: This paper discusses teaching Business English as ESP on a university level. The authors identify the most efficient teaching strategies used in teaching Business English and connect them with students' language learning needs and beliefs about studying Business English as English for specific purposes. This connection gives a teacher the opportunity for improving the quality of learning. It has been revealed that considered teaching strategies need to be communicative, practical and involve using subject-based activities, goal and relevancy-oriented tasks.

Today, when a foreign language has rooted among different fields of training and among academic disciplines at the university, it may seem that a foreign language for special purposes is something peripheral, private. But if we think about it deeper, people start learning any second language when they have a special purpose for using it.

Objectives of learning a foreign language are determined by the needs of the society, thus influencing on the content and teaching strategies. Learning objectives must comply with the social order and at the same time be realistic to achieve specific learning environment, while the content and teaching strategies are adequate to the purposes and conditions of employment. This connection of purposes, conditions and content of training are essential to create effective strategies of teaching English for Specific Purposes (**ESP**).

There are three reasons common to the emergence of ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner [1]. Strevens gives the definition of ESP by identifying its absolute and variable characteristics:

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I. *Absolute characteristics*. ESP consists of English language teaching which is:

- designed to meet specified needs of the learner;
- related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
- centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse;
- in contrast with General English.

II. *Variable characteristics*. ESP may be, but is not necessarily:

- restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only);
- not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology [2, p. 1 – 2].

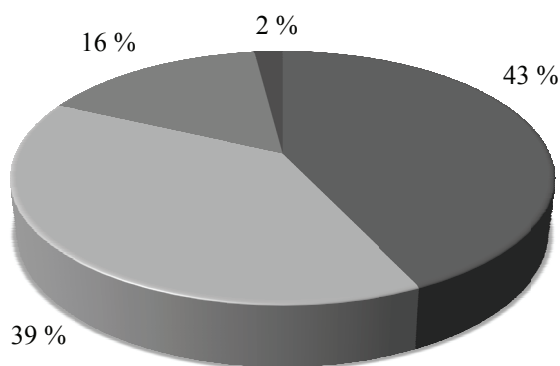
As for a broader definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) theorize that “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning” [2, p. 19].

Speaking about ESP usually involves questions of language acquisition in the professional sphere. At the level of university studies we define ESP as teaching English language to students of different specialties, e.g. Business English – for economics students, Technical English – for engineering students, Scientific English – for postgraduates doing a research, English for medical professionals – medical students, etc.

It is appropriate to recall that between basic disciplines and professions, based on them, there are diverse and numerous links. Besides, the specificity of any particular professional language is largely relative. Since none of the professional languages is complete without *lingua Franca*. Thus, before studying ESP students should master General English. On the one hand, the difference of teaching ESP (in our case it is Business English) from teaching General English consists in the choice of contexts for listening and reading texts and in the choice of lexis in grammar and vocabulary exercises, where examples such as “*I’m going on business trip*” replace “*I’m going on holiday*”.

On the other hand, teaching Business English requires a teacher’s awareness of the subject matter. As a matter of fact, ESP combines the subject matter and English language teaching skills. The role of a teacher at this stage is managing to adapt teaching skills and strategies for teaching Business English. Such integration is very motivating for students because they will have the opportunity to put into practice their knowledge acquired during their Business English lessons in their major sphere of study, whether it is economics, commerce, business management or marketing.

This paper is aimed at studying strategies used in teaching Business English as ESP in connection with students’ needs and beliefs about language learning. At Tambov State Technical University Business English course has been introduced into the curriculum of third and fourth-year students of economics as it is necessary for them to study Business English in connection with their basic studies. In this case students have particular purpose and focus for learning the language as they study English not only to understand everyday speech but also use the language in a special context for career opportunities. A Business English program is therefore built on the assessment of purposes, needs and functions for which English is required.



Language learners' needs and beliefs about studying Business English as ESP:
 ■ – High; □ – Above average; ▒ – Average; ■ – Low

To learn students' language learning needs and beliefs we conducted needs analysis involving students of economics doing Business English course as ESP (100 students). Students were interviewed with the questionnaire in which they were asked to answer questions about why they need learning Business English. The results of students' reaction to the questionnaire statements are shown in the following Figure.

According to this diagram students have a large percentage of high needs and beliefs (43 %) and needs and beliefs above average (39 %). As for those who have average needs and beliefs as well as low needs and beliefs, their percentage is rather small (16 and 2 % correspondingly). This can be explained by the fact that ESP students are usually people who are going to start a career or improve professional skills and who already have some knowledge of General English and are learning the language in order to communicate in some professional area and to do a particular job. So most students for the reason of their sufficient General English level and future career opportunities have quite high motivation and that is why high needs and beliefs in their language learning acquisition.

Students' needs and beliefs about language learning have been found to be closely linked to the choice of teaching strategies. During the survey we faced a problem connected with working out the differences between what students want and what they need, and then making a balance between the two. This balance we try to fulfill in using efficient teaching strategies in Business English classes.

This year we have published a new coursebook on Business English of pre-intermediate level called "Business Startup" [3] and have taken it as a pilot project with our students. The book comprises four units devoted to different segments of business. Each unit includes four sections.

1. *Life at work* – Personal information; Jobs; Business facilities; Contacts.
2. *Company* – Who do you work for; Activities; Introducing your business; Successful companies.
3. *Making a career* – Job hunting; Job interview; Teambuilding; Leadership.

4. *Travel* – Travel arrangements; At the airport; Hotel reservation; Cross-cultural aspects and dining etiquette.

The coursebook is aimed at training oral and written communication and forming intercultural skills including stereotypes of thinking and behaviour in the English culture. The emphasis of this coursebook is made for practising communicative skills in the frame of business. At the end of the course students are supposed to use English as means of business communication, know general and special business vocabulary as well as basic business terminology, be able to do business correspondence, pass a job interview, hold meetings and negotiations, make presentations, arrange a business trip, i.e. students should work and communicate independently at the international level.

As it has been mentioned, a teacher is expected to pique learners' interest and create relevant context for the lessons. One of helpful and useful ESP teaching strategies used in our lessons is explaining terms or business realities. Students of economics are supposed to have enough knowledge of the key economic and business matters. So they can be asked to explain them in English, e.g. *What is a balance sheet and how does it work?* or *What is back pay?* While students speak a teacher can provide them with correct words and phrases or correct mistakes. This kind of task is very productive with our students as doing it they not only show their subject knowledge but also use topic vocabulary. Besides, students' answers provide a teacher with the information of students' grammar or word order weaknesses, gaps in their vocabulary or pronunciation problems. Thus, such tasks of explaining specific business concepts help a teacher give students some practice both in their subject matter and the language.

Moreover, not to lose students' interest (and that is one of the most difficult points of teaching) and to strengthen their language learning beliefs, a teacher should prepare for the lesson more thoroughly looking for content specialists for help in designing appropriate lessons in the subject that is taught. For example, teaching Business English a teacher should know key business terminology, company structure, as well as the basics of business correspondence and telephoning, negotiating, job interviewing, etc. Practising the vocabulary and structures that students learn in a specific meaningful context consolidates what is taught and increases their motivation.

To increase learners' motivation we often use as a strategy teaching business idioms (also included into our coursebook). For learners the comprehension of idioms is facilitated by contextual support. The students enjoy the challenge to understand idioms in context and finding their Russian equivalents. Other tasks also involve matching business idioms with their corresponding definitions, substituting for the underlined phrase an idiom with the same meaning, solving quizzes, making dialogues using idioms, etc. Not to overload learners with idiomatic expressions and to involve them in communication without losing their interest, we suggest such teaching strategies as choosing idioms that are frequently used in target language, are not very complicated with grammar and vocabulary and have comprehensible figurative meanings (e.g. *parent company, a start-up, a sleeping partner, rat race, cash cow, a skeleton staff, to shop around, to throw good money after bad*, etc.).

More complexed idioms, like *seagull manager*, *white / black knight*, *brownie points*, etc., should be clearly explained, provided with examples and then practised within the larger context of a short paragraph or a dialogue.

For example, one of the efficient tasks is sketching a situation that elicits learners' answers with the help of idioms, e.g. *asking for a loan*, *discussing how to increase sales or solving problems of going bankrupt*. To help students a teacher can divide idioms into several categories that will be useful in each situation. It is very important to have a plan of instruction that integrates all students in the group in order to give them an opportunity to succeed in learning idioms.

At Business English classes, according to students' needs and expectations, we pay much attention to teaching conversation. These classes will center on work environment and utilize Business vocabulary. As many learners have high needs and beliefs about the importance of vocabulary in language learning, so a teacher uses strategies that support vocabulary learning such as memorizing words, making a list of new words or practicing new words with others.

Concerning students' beliefs about grammar learning, grammar is not of such an importance in mastering Business English. Most students doing ESP course are not interested in grammar corrections if they are sure that other people can understand them. It is more important for them to have a lot of speaking practice though they admit that if you can analyze how a language works, you will be able to speak it well. In the process of teaching ESP grammar takes a second place. Still it should be taught. To meet students' needs a teacher has to make task-based grammar exercises, i.e. use authentic articles for discussion business issues, or write an official business letter that supposes to contain correct grammar structures.

Another thing in teaching business grammar is taking that grammar material which can be used in specific business situations, i.e. in the real uses of Business English. For example, making future business arrangements can involve using Present Continuous tense, passing on information supposes using reported speech, whereas comparing business offers engages comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. In some cases grammar structures can be drilled while practising for functions like telephoning, emailing or negotiations. A teacher can use it as the basis of grammar presentation, e.g. giving students sentences they have seen before like "*I look forward to hearing from you*" with the prepositions blanked out. It can also be used for tense review, determiners and modal verbs. Thus, grammar, of course, must be taught but in the subject matter context. Such activities have a necessary learning objective but students appreciate them.

Still teaching Business English a teacher should always remember that he trains not only business vocabulary and grammar but also communicative skills. In order to develop learners' communicative skills we often use teaching strategies which involve the following tasks:

Making presentations. Our students usually enjoy such tasks because they imply creativity and freedom. Asking learners to give a presentation about a particular product, company or their current research is always a highly focused activity, where a teacher can both give directions at the preparation

stage (useful vocabulary and grammar, steps of presenting material) and feedback on the performance (discussing language mistakes, presentation construction). A teacher can get benefit from this strategy viewing it as both a teaching and a learning process for a teacher, where some interesting information about different business processes can be acquired.

As an example we can take a task used with our students. They are asked to prepare a presentation of a company and describe its main activities and specialization, staff, main markets, organization, etc. Useful phrases are divided into several parts: opening part – introduction (*I'm ...; I'm going to talk about ...; I'd like to give you some background information..., etc.*), organizing the presentation – describing a company and its structure (*founded in..., divided into..., consists of..., includes..., employs..., cooperates with..., etc.*) and closing part – summarizing (*To sum it up..., If you have any questions..., etc.*). A teacher can enrich these parts with more phrases as well ask students to use grammar structures viewed in the topic (connectors, Passive voice, modals, etc.). Visual aids are always welcome as students also practice how to work with slides and the audience. At the end all students discuss weak and strong points in the presentations and make recommendations for improvement.

Making a telephone call. This strategy is often done in the form of a dialogue. Training telephone English in class can sometimes seem rather artificial as exercises usually ask learners to practice speaking on the phone through role-plays in pairs or small groups. To diversify and enliven English lesson a teacher can focus on creating a more realistic situations to encourage students to practice authentic telephone conversation.

Before the task we usually review phrases used in telephoning. A teacher gives helpful opening and closing phrases for greeting, introducing (*This is... speaking*), starting a conversation (*Could I speak to...?, I'd like to talk to...*), asking for something (*Could I leave a message?, Can he call me back as soon as possible?, Can I have his contact number?*), answering the phone call (*The line is busy at the moment, Hold on, please*), making appointments (*Let's..., We are meeting at..., Shall we meet...?*), repeating (*So that's..., Is that right?*), ending a call (*I'll call back later, Glad to hear from you*). Then students are given different situations like “*You call to your partner's office but he is not here. Leave a message*” or “*You need to organize a meeting with an advertizing manager. Make an arrangement*”. We often ask students to use their cell phones, make notes, ask again, etc. for making conversations more realistic.

Holding negotiations. This strategy can be organized as a group work in the form of a round table with a chief of the meeting and people who take part in it. Before the meeting itself a teacher should discuss with students the key points in making negotiations successful, how people should behave and react, what you should get in the result.

The topics for negotiations may be given at the previous lesson for students to be ready to give some ideas on the issues. The topics can include negotiations within the company about launching a product or with company's partner about cooperation, or it may be the discussion of an employee with the boss about his salary, promotion, holidays, etc.

The useful vocabulary is very important to students as they need to know how to disagree, share opinions, be both insistent and polite, clarify goals and so on. Vocabulary again can be grouped into parts:

– opening (naming topics for discussion): *I'd like to discuss..., The question needs to be discussed;*

– participating (negotiating, expressing opinions, making suggestions, interrupting, arguing, agreeing / disagreeing): *I (can't) agree with you, In other words, you feel that..., I don't see any problem with/harm in that, I understand where you're coming from, however..., I'm prepared to compromise but..., To my mind..., In my opinion..., The way I look at it..., I'm afraid I had something different in mind, Is that your best offer?;*

– closing a meeting (summarizing): *It sounds like we've found some common ground, Let's leave it this way for now, I think we both agree to these terms, Shall we meet again to discuss it?*

A teacher should not avoid reviewing grammar material necessary for this task (modal verbs, conditionals, connectors, etc.). During the negotiations a teacher constantly monitors the process helping students with time limits and vocabulary.

After the task is done students always give their feedback providing it with tips for improving both the language and the structure and atmosphere of the meeting.

Writing a business letter (CV) covering letter. To use this strategy a teacher should explain students the structure of the letter and analyze a sample of a business letter (CV) covering letter. If the task is to write a business letter students are given a tip sheet which helps them write the body paragraphs of a letter. A teacher should explain the importance of avoiding contractions, ambiguity and passive voice and that a business letter should be as prompt as possible and focus only on the most relevant points.

For teaching to write a CV for a given job we encourage students to use a computer for creating and sending their CVs by e-mail together with the covering letter. To develop this task we ask students to exchange their CVs and check them and then to arrange job interviews where one group of students will be candidates and the others will be interviewers. Thus, the task develops both writing and speaking skills.

All mentioned strategies are valuable because they develop both students' language and communicative skills integrating with each other. Besides, students develop their ability to use their knowledge acquired on their basic studies on economy, management, etc. in practice. But we must admit that if a teacher has a group where students show different language proficiency, he should distribute the tasks and roles in such a way that they will be able to cope with the task and even catch up with advanced students.

Apart from using the above motioned teaching strategies there is one more important factor in teaching ESP – it is establishing positive learning environment in the classroom evaluating learners' progress. Interviewed students mostly disagree that people should not say anything in a new language until they can say it correctly. It shows that practising is very important for students even if they do not have enough language proficiency. Most students

note that their beliefs are often defined by the context in which they learn as well as their previous learning experience. To break the ice of students' fear and to lift their spirit increasing their beliefs, a teacher can use different games for practising all sorts of business vocabulary, grammar and communicative skills.

Incorporating authentic video materials in Business English teaching is also an efficient teaching strategy that consolidates learners' beliefs and presents a challenge to learners bringing about a sense of 'realness' to the learning process. Working with authentic materials (e.g. videos, newspaper and journal articles on economics, business issues, etc.), students find it interesting and useful for their future professional activity.

Authenticity of materials serves as a tool for raising students' cultural awareness, thus contributing to the development of their communicative competences. Using authentic video materials enhances students' motivation as they feel that they are learning in a natural environment which meets their needs and beliefs. Besides the language students can make acquaintance with some extra-linguistic features such as reaction, body language, etc. At our lessons we use video materials in such topics as making a reservation at a hotel, holding a business meeting, visiting other companies or factories, negotiating and so on. However a teacher should always remember about the level of learners and therefore try to adapt video materials to this level, e.g. less advanced learners can be provided with transcripts. So the difficulty of a given piece of material must be carefully assessed before students watch it. There must be a lead-in stage introducing the material and giving some background information to warm students up including such materials as newspaper articles, pictures, vocabulary exercises, etc. Comprehensive pre-teaching is necessary because even students with good command of General English may feel embarrassed with specialized information, terminology, idioms. The tasks may also be graded from easier to more challenging depending on the level of learners.

Thus, though General English courses exist to provide students with a foundation in the English language, ESP courses are tailored to the specific English speaking needs of students in their individual fields. The survey shows that teaching strategies, on the one hand, and that is very important, depend on language learners' needs and beliefs, and on the other hand, it is necessary for a teacher to develop students' skills in all types of the communicative activity to make them master a foreign language. Motivation and dedication are the highest points in language learning which lead a teacher to use the most efficient teaching strategies. The efficiency of the course depends on a teacher's responsibility to find a balance between students' needs and a compulsory program referring to their individual needs. This also includes creating friendly environment to help learners avoid stress, fear of failure that interfere with the learning process and can prevent students from learning the language successfully.

So, to provide effective Business English teaching it is important first to determine learners' necessity and need for it, to identify specific purposes for studying it, to define special tasks for practising topic vocabulary and grammar which brings the achievement of goals with the help of using the language, select suitable teaching materials meeting goals and objectives of the course.

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К проблеме преподавания делового английского языка как языка для специальных целей в вузе

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Ключевые слова и фразы: деловой английский язык; коммуникативные навыки; английский язык для специальных целей; потребности и убеждения изучающих язык; анализ потребностей; стратегии преподавания.

Аннотация: Рассмотрено преподавание делового английского языка как языка для специальных целей на уровне вуза. Выявлены наиболее эффективные методики, используемые в обучении деловому английскому языку, которые связывают их с потребностями и убеждениями студентов, изучающих деловой английский язык как язык для специальных целей. Связь предоставляет преподавателю возможность улучшения качества обучения. Рассмотренные методы преподавания должны быть коммуникативными, практико-ориентированными и вовлекать использование тематических, целенаправленных и актуальных заданий.

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Статья поступила в редакцию 27.01.2014 г.