ESP AND THE TEACHING OF MEDICAL ENGLISH
VOCABULARY

ABSTRACT

Teaching of English has meant several things to different people and institutions at different times, from the teaching of grammar and rhetoric followed by literary masterpieces to a vague concern for the aesthetic and moral development of the pupils under the care of the teacher of English. Recent trends, however, reflect a desirably new and practically wider variety of motives. Linked with the changing social needs English is treated as an asset in every walk of life. The global consumption of English for a variety of purposes has resulted in a corresponding increase in the range and quantity of its uses, the proliferation of numbers of different yet related 'Englishes', their increasing function as a vehicle for the media of science and technology, of literature and administration, the emergence of the unexpected roles of English and the consequences of all these for the learners and the teachers of English.

The concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a collective professional response to meet new demands which are less generalised in nature but more closely related to learners' specific needs and purposes. ESP, it is claimed, caters to practical aims, i.e., specific communicative needs of the 'specialist
as opposed to the 'generalist' learner. The concept of ESP is still fairly new, although its practices may have existed for some time. In the absence of a clearly established body of previous research in the field ESP offers a new challenge as a dynamic area. The present study seeks to explore this major and rapidly growing branch of English Language Teaching (ELT). One of the objectives of this study is to examine the range of uses that English has assumed in the new setting and to assess its value in the educational, vocational and professional fields. It is proposed to examine the relevance of ESP to purpose-oriented forms, i.e., ESL (English as a Second Language) proficiency directed to designated areas of study/vocation.

The everyday understanding of ESP is realised in such labels as 'English for Engineers', 'English for Nurses', 'English in Workshop Practice', etc. This implies that ESP texts are differentiated by their subject matter. On this basis we can hypothesise that (a) it is possible to isolate the language of subject/job specialisms as manifested by certain inherent rhetorical features and patterns of discourse which are vitally linked with specific linguistic devices, and (b) vocabulary is a major feature distinguishing special subject matter. As an instance of purpose-specific variety this project will deal with Medical English as characterised primarily with a specialist vocabulary.
Linked with the range of uses is the problem of methodological techniques, syllabuses and materials and a far wider range of roles required of the teacher of English.

This study proposes to address itself to some of the major issues that are vital to the foundations of ESP. Definitions of ESP are numerous, the concept being fluid enough to support a number of interpretations. A great deal of the work in the field is innovatory and experimental. ESP, if it is to survive, must make adjustment with pedagogical realities, a sort of compromise between theory and practice, a cross-fertilisation between the conventional wisdom and new insights. A prominent feature of this study is to establish this kind of link between theory and classroom needs. A study of lexis as part of the total communicative structure of a language of specialism is an area relevant both to ESP and the specialist learner. The model of 'generative vocabulary' as envisaged in this project is an attempt in this direction.

The study is designed to evaluate:

(a) the theoretical framework within which ESP has emerged, definitions of and approaches to ESP, origins of ESP via register (Chapter I).

(b) notional, functional/communicative ideas, linguistic vs. communicative competence, text and discourse analysis in the light of Widdowson's concept of 'scientific discourse', and an appraisal of the
communicative approach (Chapter II). (c) principal stages of task analysis in ESP, needs analysis, syllabus, materials, methodology and teacher training (Chapter III).

Chapters IV to VI will be particularly concerned with the application of linguistic knowledge and insights to the area of vocabulary. Chapter IV deals with the status of lexis in the language system and the role of vocabulary in language teaching. It looks at different aspects of the vocabulary of English and takes up an analytic survey of the growth of specialist vocabularies within the general vocabulary of English.

Chapter V illustrates the communicative potential of vocabulary and its role in the performance of communicative tasks. It presents a model of 'generative vocabulary' drawn on the procedures of word grammar. Chapter VI examines pedagogical strategies for the teaching of Medical English Vocabulary and offers certain principles for the selection and listing of lexical items of specialist use. Topic based lists are provided as illustrations and suggestions made for the enlargement of such lists as per requirement. Representative selection from different areas of contact situations and from the multifaceted nature of medical discourse has been made on the belief that the language that occurs in the classroom is a sample that acts as a trigger for the operation of the general language acquisition process. The concluding chapter (VII)
presents the inferences drawn from the theoretical and the practical aspects of the study.

The general aim of language teaching is to create among the learners a capacity to communicate in a foreign or second language. A great deal of language teaching can be understood as a means of preparing the students for subsequent language learning. Simplification is both a characteristic of good teaching and natural acquisition. The role of the teacher is, above all, to set up opportunities for the learners to engage in genuinely communicative and academically stimulating activities. Language is a tool chest. There are important differences between the different tools but they are used in a family of ways. Language plays us entirely new tricks by a creative use of these tools. Foremost among them are words which make a discourse 'something more than a commonplace vehicle of expression; in journeying from one idea to another one can enjoy the dialectal landscape en route.' The power to use a word in all its richness demands a sensitiveness to word value. It concerns less with the arrangement and more with their choice in a given situation. A study of lexis reveals the potential of words and this is what this study aims at. While the suggestions made herein may not be new the evidence presented in their support, mainly from the specialist discourse, is, and may prove a little more convincing than the casual observation and profession of personal belief that have tended to precede it.

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