

Introduction

To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.

(Robert Louis Stevenson)

The City of ELT

Once upon a time there was a city called ELT. The people of ELT led a comfortable, if not extravagant, life, pursuing the noble goals of literature and grammar. There were differences, of course: some people preferred to call themselves EFL people, while others belonged to a group known as ESL. But the two groups lived in easy tolerance of each other, more united than disunited.

Now it happened that the city was surrounded by high mountains and legend had it that the land beyond the mountains was inhabited by illiterate and savage tribes called Scientists, Businessmen and Engineers. Few people from ELT had ever ventured into that land. Then things began to change. Some of the people in ELT became restless. The old city could not support its growing population and eventually some brave souls set off to seek their fortune in the land beyond the mountains. Many in ELT were shocked at the prospect. It was surely no place for people brought up in the gentle landscape of English literature and language.

But, as it turned out, the adventurers found a rich and fertile land. They were welcomed by the local inhabitants and they founded a new city, which they called ESP. The city flourished and prospered as more and more settlers came. Soon there were whole new settlements in this previously uncharted land. EST and EBE were quickly followed by EAP and EOP (the latter confusingly also known as EVP and VESL). Other smaller groups took on the names of the local tribes to found a host of new towns called English for Hotel Staff, English for Marine Engineers, English for Medical Science and so on. A future of limitless expansion and prosperity looked assured.

But as with all things the reality proved less rosy. A number of people at the frontiers were forced to abandon their settlements and return to the larger cities. Many settlers, who had come to the newly developed land because ELT could no longer provide them with a living, longed for the comforts and certainties of the old city. Others were confused as to where their loyalties lay: were they still citizens of ELT? Was EAP an independent city or a suburb of ESP? Did the people of English for Medical Science owe allegiance to EAP, EOP or ESP? Worst of all, there were even examples of groups from ELT being transported against their will to the new territories. Added to all this, the Scientists, Businessmen and other tribes were becoming more demanding. Some began to resent the interference of the settlers in their area; others complained that the promised benefits had not materialised. The future in short began to look, if not gloomy, then a little confused and uncertain for the brave new world of ESP.

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Which brings us to this book. It will, we hope, serve as a guide to all present and future inhabitants of ESP, revealing both the challenges and pleasures to be enjoyed there and the pitfalls to be avoided. But first let us take a moment to explain the title we have given to the book, for in doing so, we will not only explain our reasons for writing it, but will also be able to present a plan of the itinerary we shall follow. What, then, is a learning-centred approach to ESP?

ESP, like any form of language teaching, is primarily concerned with learning. But it is our view that in its development up to now, ESP has paid scant attention to the question of *how* people learn, focussing instead on the question of *what* people learn. It has, in other words, been language-centred in its approach. We would not wish to dismiss this language-centred approach. It has provided some very important insights into the nature of specific language needs. However, we feel that, if it is to have any real and lasting value, ESP must be founded in the first instance on sound principles of learning, and it is with this purpose in view that we have proposed a learning-centred approach to ESP. In the following pages we shall explain what this shift in focus entails for the ESP practitioner.

The book is divided into four sections (see figure 1).

Section 1 is an overview of the origins and development of ESP and considers the question of how ESP fits into the general landscape of English Language Teaching.

Section 2 looks at basic principles and techniques in course design. How, in other words, do you create a course to fit the needs of a particular group of learners?

Section 3 is concerned with the practical applications of the course design in the form of a syllabus, materials, methodology and assessment. Put briefly, having completed your course design, what do you do with it?

Section 4 considers the role of the ESP teacher and provides information about resources to help the teacher.

The book is intended to be very much a practical guide, and to this end we have supplied a number of Tasks at the end of each chapter. These are to get you thinking about the issues that are raised in that section and, in particular, to help you relate our necessarily general points to your own specific situation. If you are concerned with teacher-training, these tasks may also be useful as workshop or seminar activities. Although they are placed at the end of the chapter, they can often be more valuable if done before reading the chapter itself.

Your guide, route and mode of travel presented, it remains only to wish you an interesting and enjoyable journey.

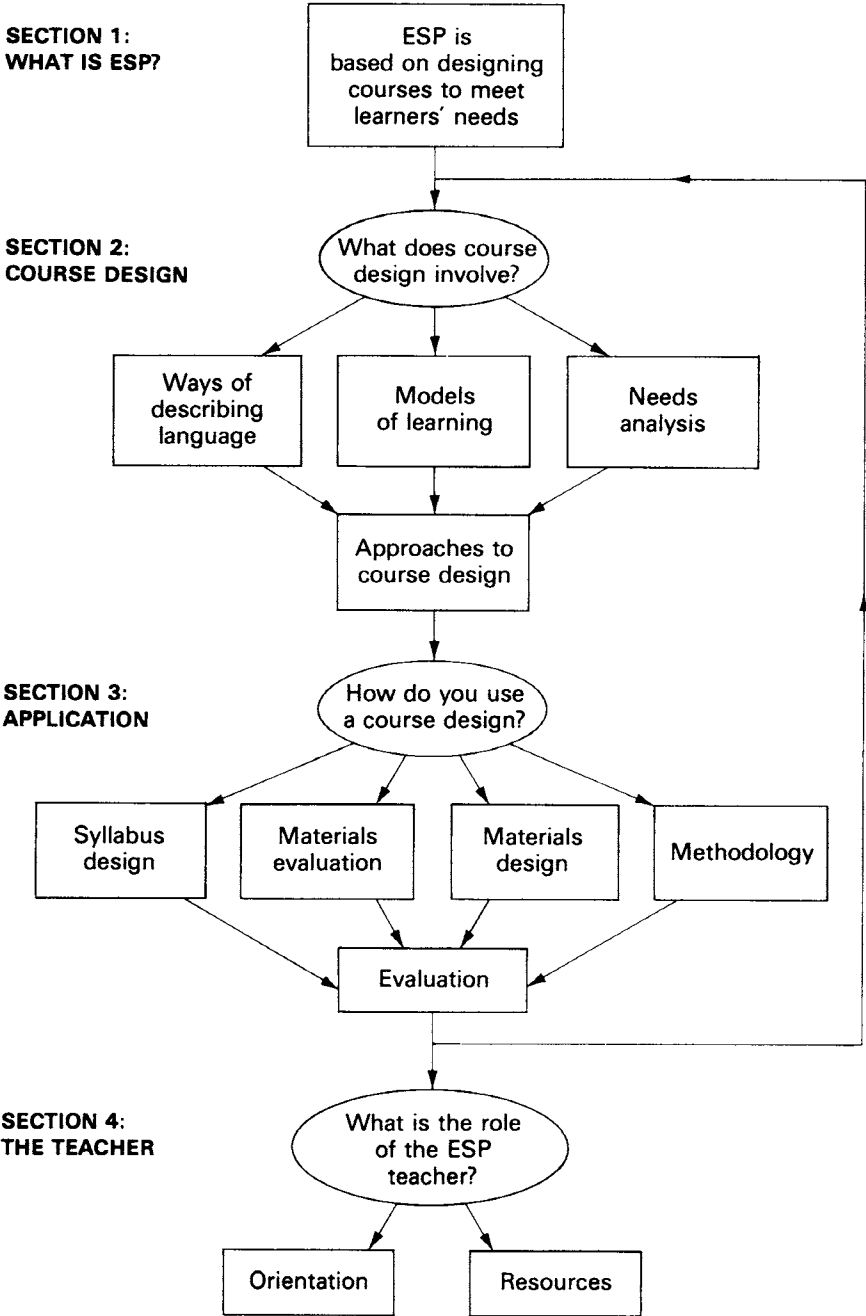


Figure 1: Outline of 'A learning-centred approach to ESP'

Section I *What is ESP?*

Particulars are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed.

(Dr Samuel Johnson: *Preface to Shakespeare*)

Our concern in this section is to arrive at a workable definition of ESP. But rather than give a straight answer now to the question ‘What is ESP?’, we would prefer to let it gradually emerge as we work through the section. Let us begin instead with a simpler question: ‘Why ESP?’ After all, the English Language world got along well enough without it for many years, so why has ESP become such an important (some might say the most important) part of English language teaching? In the following three chapters we shall briefly survey the factors which led to the emergence of ESP in the late 1960s and the forces, both theoretical and practical, which have shaped its subsequent development. In Section 2 we shall look in greater detail at the elements we outline in this section.*

* It is our intention here only to establish the background for the concepts and procedures we wish to present in this book. For a thorough and detailed explanation of the development of ideas and practices in ESP, we would recommend *Episodes in ESP* by John Swales (Pergamon, 1985).

1 The origins of ESP

We will now discuss in a little more detail the struggle for existence.

(Charles Darwin: *The Origin of Species*)

As with most developments in human activity, ESP was not a planned and coherent movement, but rather a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends. These trends have operated in a variety of ways around the world, but we can identify three main reasons common to the emergence of all ESP.

1 The demands of a Brave New World

The end of the Second World War in 1945 heralded an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. This expansion created a world unified and dominated by two forces – technology and commerce – which in their relentless progress soon generated a demand for an international language. For various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, this role fell to English.

The effect was to create a whole new mass of people wanting to learn English, not for the pleasure or prestige of knowing the language, but because English was the key to the international currencies of technology and commerce. Previously the reasons for learning English (or any other language) had not been well defined. A knowledge of a foreign language had been generally regarded as a sign of a well-rounded education, but few had really questioned why it was necessary. Learning a language was, so to speak, its own justification. But as English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language – businessmen and -women who wanted to sell their products, mechanics who had to read instruction manuals, doctors who needed to keep up with developments in their field and a whole range of students whose course of study included textbooks and journals only available in English. All these and many others needed English and, most importantly, they knew why they needed it.

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This development was accelerated by the Oil Crises of the early 1970s, which resulted in a massive flow of funds and Western expertise into the oil-rich countries. English suddenly became big business and commercial pressures began to exert an influence. Time and money constraints created a need for cost-effective courses with clearly defined goals.

The general effect of all this development was to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods. Whereas English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers. English had become accountable to the scrutiny of the wider world and the traditional leisurely and purpose-free stroll through the landscape of the English language seemed no longer appropriate in the harsher realities of the market place.

2 A revolution in linguistics

At the same time as the demand was growing for English courses tailored to specific needs, influential new ideas began to emerge in the study of language. Traditionally the aim of linguistics had been to describe the rules of English usage, that is, the grammar. However the new studies shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language usage to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication (Widdowson, 1978). One finding of this research was that the language we speak and write varies considerably, and in a number of different ways, from one context to another. In English language teaching this gave rise to the view that there are important differences between, say, the English of commerce and that of engineering. These ideas married up naturally with the development of English courses for specific groups of learners. The idea was simple: if language varies from one situation of use to another, it should be possible to determine the features of specific situations and then make these features the basis of the learners' course.

Swales (1985) presents an article by C. L. Barber on the nature of Scientific English which was published as early as 1962. But it was the late 1960s and early 1970s which saw the greatest expansion of research into the nature of particular varieties of English – for example, descriptions of written scientific and technical English by Ewer and Latorre (1969), Swales (1971), Selinker and Trimble (1976) and others. Most of the work at this time was in the area of English for Science and Technology (EST) and for a time ESP and EST were regarded as almost synonymous. But there were studies in other fields too, such as the

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analysis of doctor-patient communication by Candlin, Bruton and Leather (1976).

In short, the view gained ground that the English needed by a particular group of learners could be identified by analysing the linguistic characteristics of their specialist area of work or study. 'Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need' became the guiding principle of ESP.

3 Focus on the learner

New developments in educational psychology also contributed to the rise of ESP, by emphasising the central importance of the learners and their attitudes to learning (e.g. Rodgers, 1969). Learners were seen to have different needs and interests, which would have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning. This lent support to the development of courses in which 'relevance' to the learners' needs and interests was paramount. The standard way of achieving this was to take texts from the learners' specialist area – texts about Biology for Biology students etc. The assumption underlying this approach was that the clear relevance of the English course to their needs would improve the learners' motivation and thereby make learning better and faster.

The growth of ESP, then, was brought about by a combination of three important factors: the expansion of demand for English to suit particular needs and developments in the fields of linguistics and educational psychology. All three factors seemed to point towards the need for increased specialisation in language learning.

Tasks

- 1 Why was ESP introduced in your country or teaching institution? What kinds of ESP are taught?
- 2 'Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need' (p. 8). How justifiable do you think this claim is for ESP?
- 3 'The clear relevance of the English course to their needs would improve the learners' motivation and thereby make learning better and faster' (p. 8).
 - a) Give three ways in which 'relevance' can be achieved.
 - b) In what ways can motivation affect language learning?

2 The development of ESP

The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley.

(Robert Burns)

From its early beginnings in the 1960s ESP has undergone three main phases of development. It is now in a fourth phase with a fifth phase starting to emerge. We shall describe each of the five phases in greater detail in later chapters, but it will provide a useful perspective to give a brief summary here. It should be pointed out first of all that ESP is not a monolithic universal phenomenon. ESP has developed at different speeds in different countries, and examples of all the approaches we shall describe can be found operating somewhere in the world at the present time. Our summary must, therefore, be very general in its focus.

It will be noticeable in the following overview that one area of activity has been particularly important in the development of ESP. This is the area usually known as EST (English for Science and Technology). Swales (1985) in fact uses the development of EST to illustrate the development of ESP in general:

'With one or two exceptions... English for Science and Technology has always set and continues to set the trend in theoretical discussion, in ways of analysing language, and in the variety of actual teaching materials.'

We have not restricted our own illustrations to EST in this book, but we still need to acknowledge, as Swales does, the pre-eminent position of EST in the ESP story.

1 The concept of special language: register analysis

This stage took place mainly in the 1960s and early 1970s and was associated in particular with the work of Peter Strevens (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964), Jack Ewer (Ewer and Latorre, 1969) and John Swales (1971). Operating on the basic principle that the English of, say, Electrical Engineering constituted a specific register different from that of, say, Biology or of General English, the aim of the analysis

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was to identify the grammatical and lexical features of these registers. Teaching materials then took these linguistic features as their syllabus. A good example of such a syllabus is that of *A Course in Basic Scientific English* by Ewer and Latorre (1969) (see below p. 26).

In fact, as Ewer and Latorre's syllabus shows, register analysis revealed that there was very little that was distinctive in the sentence grammar of Scientific English beyond a tendency to favour particular forms such as the present simple tense, the passive voice and nominal compounds. It did not, for example, reveal any forms that were not found in General English. But we must be wary of making unfair criticism. Although there was an academic interest in the nature of registers of English *per se*, the main motive behind register analyses such as Ewer and Latorre's was the pedagogic one of making the ESP course more relevant to learners' needs. The aim was to produce a syllabus which gave high priority to the language forms students would meet in their Science studies and in turn would give low priority to forms they would not meet. Ewer and Hughes-Davies (1971), for example, compared the language of the texts their Science students had to read with the language of some widely used school textbooks. They found that the school textbooks neglected some of the language forms commonly found in Science texts, for example, compound nouns, passives, conditionals, anomalous finites (i.e. modal verbs). Their conclusion was that the ESP course should, therefore, give precedence to these forms.

2 Beyond the sentence: rhetorical or discourse analysis

There were, as we shall see, serious flaws in the register analysis-based syllabus, but, as it happened, register analysis as a research procedure was rapidly overtaken by developments in the world of linguistics. Whereas in the first stage of its development, ESP had focussed on language at the sentence level, the second phase of development shifted attention to the level above the sentence, as ESP became closely involved with the emerging field of discourse or rhetorical analysis. The leading lights in this movement were Henry Widdowson in Britain and the so-called Washington School of Larry Selinker, Louis Trimble, John Lackstrom and Mary Todd-Trimble in the United States.

The basic hypothesis of this stage is succinctly expressed by Allen and Widdowson (1974):

'We take the view that the difficulties which the students encounter arise not so much from a defective knowledge of the system of English, but from an unfamiliarity with English use, and that consequently their needs cannot be met by a course which simply provides further practice in the composition of

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sentences, but only by one which develops a knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of different communicative acts.’

Register analysis had focussed on sentence grammar, but now attention shifted to understanding how sentences were combined in discourse to produce meaning. The concern of research, therefore, was to identify the organisational patterns in texts and to specify the linguistic means by which these patterns are signalled. These patterns would then form the syllabus of the ESP course. The Rhetorical Process Chart below (from *EST: A Discourse Approach* by Louis Trimble (1985)) is representative of this approach:

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description of level</i>
A.	<p><i>The objectives of the total discourse</i></p> <p>EXAMPLES: 1. Detailing an experiment 2. Making a recommendation 3. Presenting new hypotheses or theory 4. Presenting other types of EST information</p>
B.	<p><i>The general rhetorical functions that develop the objectives of Level A</i></p> <p>EXAMPLES: 1. Stating purpose 2. Reporting past research 3. Stating the problem 4. Presenting information on apparatus used in an experiment – a) Description b) Operation 5. Presenting information on experimental procedures</p>
C.	<p><i>The specific rhetorical functions that develop the general rhetorical functions of Level B</i></p> <p>EXAMPLES: 1. Description: physical, function, and process 2. Definition 3. Classification 4. Instructions 5. Visual-verbal relationships</p>
D.	<p><i>The rhetorical techniques that provide relationships within and between the rhetorical units of Level C</i></p> <p>EXAMPLES: I. Orders 1. Time order 2. Space order 3. Causality and result II. Patterns 1. Causality and result 2. Order of importance 3. Comparison and contrast 4. Analogy 5. Exemplification 6. Illustration</p>

Figure 2: Rhetorical Process Chart