

TEACHING READING FOR SPECIFIC ECONOMIC PURPOSES: IDENTIFYING CRITERIA FOR TEXT SELECTION

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ABSTRACT

It wouldn't be new to affirm that English functions as a global language, and has become the language widely adopted for political, technological, cultural linguistic and educational development. Similarly, it has witnessed such development in its role in the Algerian educational context since 1990's, and more particularly after the advent of globalization process. Yet, within the field of education, the need for English for specific purposes (ESP) continues to increase throughout the world. Therefore, ESP which has established itself not only as a basic branch of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a viable and vigorous movement but has also incorporated on discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. Thus, in very precise and concise terms, the present paper endeavours to define and discuss some principal components related to the subject matter, i.e. reading as a basic linguistic skill, ESP in general, and teaching reading comprehension for specific economic purposes in particular. In addition, the second objective of this paper would be to highlight the criteria needed for text selection as a pedagogical practice for undergraduate student at the Department of Economics.

KEY WORDS: globalization, ESP and language use, reading, Economics, criteria for text selection.

1. Introduction

Needless to state that teaching a native or a foreign language is an activity that like most human occupational approaches can be tiresome yet rewarding, depending on its extraordinarily high number of factors from teacher degree of preparation and communicational abilities and from students', preferences, motivation and expectations. Thus, in the light of teaching/learning English, and more precisely after the advent of globalization process, the demand for English for specific/ special purposes continues to increase and expand throughout the world not only in countries where English serves as native language but also in other countries where it is used as second/foreign language. Therefore, it is indispensable and important to consider the following sub-problems:

- *Does teaching of ESP show similitude with teaching general English?*
- *What are the basic criteria that should be taken into account when attempting to reading texts as an intensive reading activity?*

Thus, in this shortened article, I will summarize my research under three distinct yet interrelated headings:

- 1) Eliciting and explaining at the same time the factors that help characterize the difference between EGP and ESP.
- 2) Reading comprehension skill
- 3) In addition, I will end up this paper by providing some suggestions for organizing reading course for students of economics at the tertiary level.

2. General English and English for Specific purposes

As an umbrella term, English for special or specific purpose has a long history in the field of English language teaching. It has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. However, too little attention has been devoted to explicate how effective an ESP course is in regards to comparing it with general

course. Therefore, for a better understanding of the discrepancies between EGP and ESP, it is compulsory to provide at first a definition based on ESP.

2.1. Review of ESP Literature

English for special purposes arose as a term in the 1960's as it became increasingly aware that general English courses frequently did not meet learners and employers' wants. It may be related to or designed for specific disciplines that are centered on language appropriate to specific activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. According to Strevens (1980)

ESP entails the provision of English language instruction devised to meet the learners' particular needs related in themes and topics to designated occupation or areas of study , selective (i.e. not general) as to language content where indicated restricted as to the language skills included.
(1980, 108-109)

As an umbrella term, ESP embraces two key areas: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English Occupational Purposes (EOP). The former has until recently been the area of the greatest activity and refers to the language required by non- native speakers for the purposes of study. The latter on the other hand constitutes the rest of ESP taking in any work related English language courses.

2.2. Difference between EGP and ESP

In an attempt to clearly understand the common and different points between English for General Purposes and English for Specific Purposes, Wright (1992,01) explains that General English concerned with everyday life assuming that

These universal topics are socializing shopping traveling eating out, telephoning friends ...so when one learns a language one must be exposed to linguistic items relating to universal topics. This is the task of General English course.

According to Brunton Specific English course may contain material pertaining to general English course *when we reach the stage at which any topic constitutes an individual's profession, it becomes crucial that he have mastery of the specialized language.*

3. Understanding Reading

To acquire a language competently, one needs to master the four fundamental linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, and none of them can operate independently and effectively of the remaining ones. Reading, one amongst those skills, is undeniably said to be a primordial key to success in different endeavours in and out of the context of school, and almost the unique ingredient that provides the students with strong basis for the language development and vocabulary expansion.

Over the last few decades, a set of considerable investigations in FL reading have been conducted that have provided numerous insights for FL reading theories and reading instruction. The basic rationale of such research was to seek for an accurate and correct definition of reading. It has led to the argument that reading can be defined from two standpoints: common knowledge, and scientific view.

For the popular literature, reading is the ability of processing one's aptitude or capability to recognize the shape of a finite number of letters and alphabetical symbols that are connected to form an infinite number of meaningful items, clauses and sentences respecting the punctuation and division of paragraphs. In this regard, reading serves as a purposeful activity that helps the learners in *'developing a considerable range of habitual responses to a specific set of patterns of graphic shapes'* (Fries 1963:121).

Thus, representing the process of reading follows a common sense description of three related dimensions:

- As an opening stage, the learner recognizes the written characters he meets in print, which are organized in particular spatial order; (from the left to the right when speaking about all Indo-European languages, while it is completely the reverse for Hamito- Semitic ones); and masters their pronunciation.

- In the subsequent phase, he combines them into meaningful conventional items and sentences respecting the rules of syntax that may not resemble those of his native language. Additionally, the mastery of the printed words can be done successfully through a consistent vocabulary and syntax activities, which should not be underestimated for they contribute well in enhancing learners' comprehension of reading.

- Once the recognized written symbols are combined into meaningful items and sentences, the learner controls then the third stage that of interpretation.

In such a case, the three related dimensions discussed above are then closely related to three linguistic skills i.e. *recognition with phonology* (how to pronounce sounds in various combinations), *structuring with syntax* (rules that govern word order), and *interpretation with semantics* (when the learner assigns the accurate meaning of the printed symbols, then comprehension takes place).

However, from the scientific perspective, numerous neurological researchers notice that reading is not merely a product-oriented approach that constitutes language form, but also an intricate process actively involving both hemispheres of the brain that endeavours to negotiate understanding between the learner and the writer of the text. Furthermore, it is an inside-the head factor that plays a crucial role in comprehension. Here, reading is merely regarded as an end product or a process-oriented approach that deals with language content.

For Nuttall (1996) the central ideas behind reading are:

- ✓ *the idea of meaning;*
- ✓ *the transfer of meaning from one mind to another;*
- ✓ *the transfer of a message from writer to reader;*
- ✓ *how we get meaning by reading;*
- ✓ *how the reader, the writer and the text all contribute to the process.*

Nuttall (1996) quoted in **Berardo** (2006,61)

4. Reading and Criteria of Text Selection:

Before pinpointing the potential criteria that any teacher should base on for the selection of reading texts, it would seem necessary to define at first “what a text means?” shedding focal light on its fundamental contribution within teaching / learning of reading comprehension.

4.1. Towards a Definition of a Text:

Broadly speaking, text may be defined as:

A unit of language in use ... and it is defined by its size... a text is best regarded as semantic unit: a unit not form but of meaning. A text has texture and that is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. It derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a unit with respect to its environment.

Halliday et al (1976: 12)

From this definition, it is obvious to consider ‘texture’ as fundamental criterion that characterizes a text. Recently, it has been supplemented by **Halliday** and **Hassan (1985: 99)** with that of ‘structure’: texts are characterized by the unity of their structure and the unity of their texture.

This implies that the text may count as a text when it is well structured, containing set of sentences arranged in chronological sequences; and has a texture when there is link between different parts of it.

Thus, the comprehension of the text is ultimately determined by learner's abilities to construct different representations that include surface code, which reveals the linguistic relationship that exists between the different parts of the text presented in chronological order, and text base, that requires learner's mental capacities, and skills that exceed those required for the comprehension of linear print.

Nevertheless, reading a text does not stop solely at understanding words and sentences it contains, but attempts also to reveal the message to be conveyed, whereby interaction takes place between the reader and the writer via the text. In this domain, **Hoey (2001: 11)** claims that:

The text is visible evidence of reasonable self-contained purposeful interaction between one or more writers and one or more readers in which the writer (s) control the interaction and most of (characteristically all) the language.

4.2. Criteria for Text Selection:

It is worth pointing again that the selection of texts to which learners respond, tends to be of paramount importance within teaching / learning context, especially when these texts closely match the teaching goals, and the learners' needs.

This view, indeed gains such considerable support, after conducting various studies that strive to reveal the sources of learners' comprehension deficiencies, and whose findings obtained clearly demonstrate that, in some cases, the teachers' selection of specific texts genre, may stand as one among these sources, more specifically, when these texts do not fit the learners' preferences, and their existing level of proficiency.

For this, evidence suggests that, the teacher should at first glance find his learners' lacks, and interests whereby to choose texts appropriately that suit most of them.

In this sense, **Nuttal (1996)** identifies three basic criteria that should be taken into prominence for the selection of the text: *suitability of the context*, *readability* and *exploitability* i.e. the selection of texts must necessarily involve considering these criteria, and none of them can operate effectively and independently of the two remaining ones.

Concerning the *suitability of the context*, since it is impossible to choose a specific text genre that pleases all the members of the class, the teacher should therefore include a variety of reading texts from many sources whereby to heighten the learners' interest and foster an intrinsic desire to read over a length of time. To do so, ESP teachers are required to ask a set of questions:

- *Does the text interest the students of Economics?*
- *Is it relevant to the students' needs?*
- *Does it represent the type of material that the students of Economics will utilize outside the classroom?*

Furthermore, in terms of *readability* of foreign language texts, ESP teacher should avoid choosing texts that are either too easy or far too difficult for learners' level. Yet, he can instead of that provide them with texts that are accessible in terms of their aim that the teacher attempts to fulfil from such reading tasks is to make the structural, and lexical features of the language that expresses them, and challenging their intelligence at the same time to make the reading tasks “**difficult but achievable**”. **Scrivener (1994: 149)** cited in **Harmer, J (2001: 207)**. Whereby to check the readability of the material, ESP teachers are required to ask the following questions:

- *Is the text too easy/ difficult for the students of Economics?*
- *Is it structurally too demanding and complex for them?*

With respect to *exploitability*, the text content has to be developmentally, and linguistically, appropriate for improving the learners' comprehension strategies, and overcoming the vast amount of their reading deficiencies, because at the end, the basic learners deeply engaged in the meaning-making process of the selected text and therefore arrive successfully at thorough understanding of it. It is therefore unavoidable and essential for ESP teacher to consider the following questions:

- *Can the text be exploited for Special teaching Purposes?*
- *What skills and strategies can be developed by exploiting the text?*

To sum up, these basic criteria, it is necessary to list the following significant points:

- ❖ Students of Economics should have opportunities to read different types of text structures e.g. narrative, expository, descriptive, contrastive ... and so forth.
- ❖ Text should be of interest to the struggling readers.
- ❖ Text should be at the learners' instructional or low frustration level, moreover, it should contain some highlighted key vocabulary, headings clues, and other supporting details that complement the text whereby to facilitate comprehension, and help the learners predict what will be read.

5. CONCLUSION.

As a global language, English has indeed become a primordial tool for cultural, political and technological development and has been given much concern in the Algerian educational setting after the advent of the globalization process. Yet, within the field of education, be it native or foreign language teaching /learning context, ESP learners are still said to confront a number of serious difficulties that threaten their acquisition whenever learning takes place. This is probably due to the unequal consideration of the four fundamental linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Inspired by this thought, the researcher has strived throughout this research paper to consider one amidst those skills notably reading, and has therefore intentionally tackled its crucial importance in learning in general. Furthermore, this

paper has also shed light on explaining and scrutinizing the similarities and differences between EGP and ESP. In addition, as a conclusive section I have attempted to consider some factors that should be taken into account once selecting a reading text as an intensive activity for Students of Economics at the tertiary level.

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