

## ARMs (Authentic Resource Materials) IN ESP – PARTICULARITIES FOR TEACHING MEDICAL ENGLISH

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*Abstract: This paper focuses on establishing the role of ARMs – authentic resource materials in the process of teaching and learning English for Special Purposes (ESP), with an overview of English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Thus, any content of an ESP/EMP syllabus should be determined by the learners' reasons for studying English. This has led to a change in the role that teachers and the used materials have in specialized English classes compared to general English. They are required to work actively with the learners and medical subject teachers in order to create a syllabus that would promote effective learning.*

*Keywords: ESP, ARMs, Medical English, specialized, methodologies*

### Introduction

Effective English language education has become essential in our globally inter connected world. English for Special Purposes (ESP) and Medical English, in particular, is an approach to language teaching and learning which is based on the learner's needs. As a consequence, decisions concerning the content and methods are based on the learner's reasons for learning. For that reason, it should be kept in mind that these language courses are student-centered, namely the students have a key role in determining what they are going to learn. For example, in English for Medical Purposes (EMP), these situations may refer to doctor-patient communication, technical language used in various medical documents such as lab reports, conference language, presentations, writing research articles, case studies, etc.

Teaching English for Specific Purposes, in other words education for specialized English, is generally seen as something different from teaching general English. ESP teachers are required a variety of skills that go beyond the general teaching methodology. Among other things, these skills include some basic knowledge of their students, the particular subject area, course design, material production, organization, etc. Teachers are expected to have a well-developed understanding of, or intellectual curiosity about, the object of their teaching. The ESP course language content usually differs from general English in that, for example, students of medicine wish to improve their proficiency in medical English discourse and it is, therefore, natural that the content of the medical English language course reflects the linguistic features of the discourse. There are two fields where the English language has become of utmost importance: information technology and medicine. IT is a relatively new field in the last ten years and English has been the fundamental language throughout its entire development. However, in medicine English has become widely used during the second half of the 20th century. Thus, at present, the number of English language publications has continuously increased and 90% of all the journals indexed in Scopus or ISI Web of

Science are published in English. Also, English still stands as the official language of most international conferences and a growing number of national journals. Moreover, many healthcare professionals work overseas in Anglophone states to extend their practice. And, as doctors have become more and more convinced of its importance, medical students have also begun to be aware of it.

In ESP course design, the foremost question is *why the learners need to learn English*. As a consequence, being aware of this need will definitely influence the content of the language course. As the structure of a specialized field is never homogeneous, to properly interpret or translate a term, it is necessary to delimit and know their different meanings (Lungu, 2014, p. 258). ESP is related to specific language use, therefore a thorough analysis represents the primary step in ESP course design. For that reason, it is said that these language courses are student-centered, i.e. students have a key role in determining what they are going to learn. This analysis will provide information regarding the situations in which learners will be using the language (Saragih, 2014, p. 61). For example, in English for Medical Purposes (EMP), these situations may refer to doctor-patient communication, technical language used in various medical documents such as lab reports, conference language, presentations, writing research articles, case studies, etc (Long, 2005, p 46). Also, medical terminology is a large and diverse set of terms characterized by unambiguity, monoreferentiality and unambiguity. Generally, medical terms are decontextualized, but for more precise communication, the context enhances the clarity of the message (Lungu, 2017, p. 239).

Teaching English for Specific Purposes, in other words education for specialized English, is commonly accepted as something different from teaching general English. As such, ESP teachers are in need of a variety of skills that are not restricted to teaching methodology. Among other things, these skills include some basic knowledge of their students, the particular subject area, course design, material production, organization, etc. Teachers are expected to have a well-developed understanding of, or intellectual curiosity about, the object of their teaching. Language content of ESP courses usually differs from general English in that it acknowledges that, for example, students of medicine wish to improve their proficiency in medical English discourse and it is, therefore, natural that the content of the medical English language course reflects the linguistic features of the discourse (Nunan, 1995, p. 135).

Teaching is a complex and demanding intellectual work, and, as such, it cannot be accomplished without appropriate preparation. Teacher education should be related to proficiency and competence and encompasses adequate knowledge, teaching and professional skills, interests, and attitudes towards teaching. Among the problems that may develop, there are those often related to the selection of materials, the use of appropriate methods and techniques, determining the basic organizing principles, considering the target situations in which the students will need the language, meeting students' needs, creating a setting that is of interest to students and which would encourage them to participate in activities. This further leads to effective lessons and greater level of learning (Pilott, 2013, p 75).

In ESP, one of the very important questions is the level of knowledge teachers should have of their students' specific medical subjects. English for Medical Purposes, like other areas of ESP, is content- and context-based. Therefore, it is inevitable to consider the extent of knowledge language teachers should have of medical subjects. Since the course aims at developing language and skills in the context of medicine, it is natural that language teachers should possess at least some general knowledge of their students' major subjects. Teachers can take advantage of their linguistic background as well as use their students' knowledge of medicine that they bring to the classes. A combination of all these elements will provide a solid ground for successful learning (Brown, 1995, p. 34).

Teaching medical English can be both exciting and unpredictable at the same time. Teachers can experiment with various approaches in order to effectively help learners to achieve their learning goals and learn what they actually need and will be using in future professional situations. The central principle is to grasp the bigger picture of medical English, what is involved in teaching medical English learners and the structure and content of the courses. It involves understanding *who* the learners are, *what* they are going to be taught and *how* they are going to be taught (Harmer, 1996, p. 23).

In our medical English classes, the students have mandatory English lessons in the 1st and 2nd Year of study. Although the course requires them to have at least an intermediate level of English language knowledge, very often this is not the case and the groups can be heterogeneous. Their medical knowledge may also vary depending on interests and aspirations. The course focuses on the learners' needs and it will most likely include *medical vocabulary* and *medical skills* and these are the most likely areas to be taught in a medical English course. The medical vocabulary may refer to various aspects, such as specific prefixes and suffixes, medical-lay equivalents, technical terms used in communication with colleagues or everyday expressions used in communication with patients. Medical skills may include presentations, reports, doctor-patient communication, taking medical history, writing research articles. The skills are those things that future medical professionals will be doing in their careers. These represent the main content of a medical English course. For example, a lesson focusing on medical skills includes teaching *functional language* related to the skill, such as useful phrases for participating in presentations. Medical skills are linked to language skills and in the case of oral presentations, the linguistic aspect would include practicing fluency and listening. Also, activities in EMP courses are most often conducted in groups and pairs, and this form of interaction promotes mutual cooperation, team work, and shared learning (Chrousos, 1998, p. 325).

### **Teaching materials and classroom discourse**

ESP materials criticism is in general restrained to the adequacy with which they meet certain theoretical postulates and to discussion of the postulates themselves. As such, quite little has been done regarding the surveying of the output, so to speak, of the

materials, that is, the kind and relevance of the language practice they engage in the classroom. This is perhaps the more surprising since the ultimate touchstone of any materials must be the pragmatic one of the amount and quality of the learning they stimulate. Thus, the classroom discourse becomes well-documented as far as its specialized nature is concerned. For example, the EFL classroom language operates on three levels: metalinguistically, as the means of instruction; pedagogically, as the content of instruction; communicatively, as a general means of communication. This implies that the gap between classroom discourse (in any normal classroom) and the target discourse of the learning objective is perhaps surprisingly wide. Generally, ESP materials are designed as teaching materials and, as a consequence, their centrality in the teaching situation constantly tends to reinforce the peculiarities of classroom discourse. This is not necessarily an insurmountable criticism: it implies the necessity of providing the conditions for activities that commonly encourage the student to transfer the language taught in the classroom to use in communicative situations.

### **Problems in ESP materials design**

However, the philosophy of materials designed for teaching purposes inhibits the development of such activities. One typical illustration of this is the control of syntax and lexis that is exercised over specially written reading passages. Such simplification is difficult to accept as an adequate basis for control of written discourse any longer; it is only one element and arguably not the most important. The current concern with the rhetoric of written discourse has clarified linguistic features peculiar to texts such as the devices used to secure cohesion on the one hand and the organization of the information content, the management of coherence, on the other. Unless these aspects of text are given at least equal attention in the process of writing teaching texts to that given to the traditional criteria, the information structure of the text will intrinsically be distorted and thus (i) the adapted texts cannot be viewed as a helpful stage towards dealing with authentic materials and (ii) this distortion renders the adapted text potentially more rather than less difficult to comprehend. It is clear, however, that achieving a simplification procedure which allows for these considerations is less than straightforward as Mountford has pointed out (Stein, 1995, p. 66).

A further problematic area is whether the material provided by the course can be exploited in the way a specialist would use authentic materials; whether, for example, the operations performed by the student on text and diagrams correspond to the use a scientist would make of them. This represents one of the aspects of providing students with an adequate introduction to the language skills involved in studying in English. It has become clear that in the teaching of language for academic purposes, it is not sufficient to develop materials which aim to introduce the student only to the linguistic features, without paying attention to the strategies required by the student. Rarely has been the case in which teaching materials attached sufficient importance to the behavioural aspect of specialist language.

### **Methodologies for ARMS (Authentic Resource Materials)**

There seem to be two major ways of approaching an authentic text for use in the classroom. On the one hand, it can be viewed as a repository of natural language use and, on the other hand, it can be seen as the stimulus for a variety of communication skills. The former methodology is concerned with explicating the text, while the latter one with developing skill transfers of the type involved in, for example, note taking. The first one deals with information extraction, the second with its application; therefore, both approaches are relevant.

Authentic materials comply admirably with the procedures involving the induction of grammatical rules that can be tested against other occurrences in the text and generalised to create new formations. The criterion for selection of the text can be, on the one hand, the relevance of the subject matter and, on the other hand, the importance of the language points exemplified and their frequency of occurrence. Specially constructed texts exemplify a particular language point with high frequency, having the marked advantage consequent upon its authenticity as a considerable motivational factor, alongside the occurrence of the linguistic point in a natural context.

Adopting the cloze technique could be a less rigidly structured approach to the use of authentic materials for teaching grammar. Still, there is no reason for which the technique should not be applied to authentic discourse, being arguably most appropriately applied to natural samples of language use. The rich context that is thereby provided furnishes a maximum of contextual clues to interpretation. Such an approach has two distinct advantages. Firstly, it provides practice in inductive techniques for the interpretation of authentic discourse which are of vital importance for the student to acquire if he is to achieve autonomy in handling the language and in his own language learning. Secondly, the representative sample of language points covered by cloze procedure will ensure that problems of real difficulty to the student will be identified; the cloze passage can act diagnostically and provide the input to straightforward language improvement sessions. Thus, the student selects his own personalized syllabus, a technique which is virtually impossible when using specially written pedagogic materials since they tend to be based upon a predicted item selection and sequence.

The major difference between traditional approaches to language learning and the approach loosely characterised as ESP, in so far as the latter represents an identifiable unified approach, lies less in the attitude to language than in the essential difference in methodology as the predicted language item syllabus — whether this is expressed in structural or notional terms — as opposed to task oriented learning. The former, through having no specified task relevance, has to rely upon inventing teaching techniques which are extrinsically motivating as a result of the entertainment value of the devices used. Authentic texts can be used as stimulus for discrete skills of the type involving different modes of information transfer. The information contained in the text as reading of listening passage can be transferred to the written mode as in report-writing or to the oral mode in 'lecturesses' through the mediation of note-taking. In

order to successfully stimulate the art of taking notes in the lecture situation the point of the exercise is precisely the redundancy and richness of textual rhetorical clues provided by authentic discourse. The use of authentic texts has also been proven possible for providing the content of sessions intended to practice seminar strategies. Obviously, the presentation of featurettes based upon the subject matter of the text will give students the opportunity to practice such techniques as interrupting, time-gaining, floor-keeping, clarifying etc. There is created a situation in which there is a real communicative need for these verbal strategies by dividing the class into groups and giving them different texts or different parts of the same text upon which to work with the instruction that they will have orally to convey the 'gist' of the passage to the other members of the class. Any passage in which the information is itemized can prove suitable for this purpose, each group having to communicate the content of one or more sections to the other members of the class. It is also possible to manipulate the access different groups of students have to the information contained in a series of texts in order to set up a problem-solving situation based upon the sharing of relevant knowledge.

One consequence of the use of authentic materials in this manner is that the teacher is no longer the undisputed authority on the text and must acknowledge the student's expertise in the subject. As a result, the teacher must adjust his role to meet the changed relations obtaining between teacher, student and text. Even in the case of a lesson oriented towards structural learning and where the teachers' role will most closely resemble the orthodox one, it is quite possible, as mentioned earlier, that it will be the students rather than the teacher who set the objective for the lesson. In classes devoted to a direct attack on the comprehension of a text the responsibility will be more evenly shared between teacher and student; the teacher's role will be an advisory one, that of, in effect, a linguistic consultant called in by the students to elucidate difficult points. We are thus suggesting that the emphasis should be put on student-centred situations where the focus is upon *learning* strategies rather than *teaching* technique and, ultimately, the student should be responsible for his own progress.

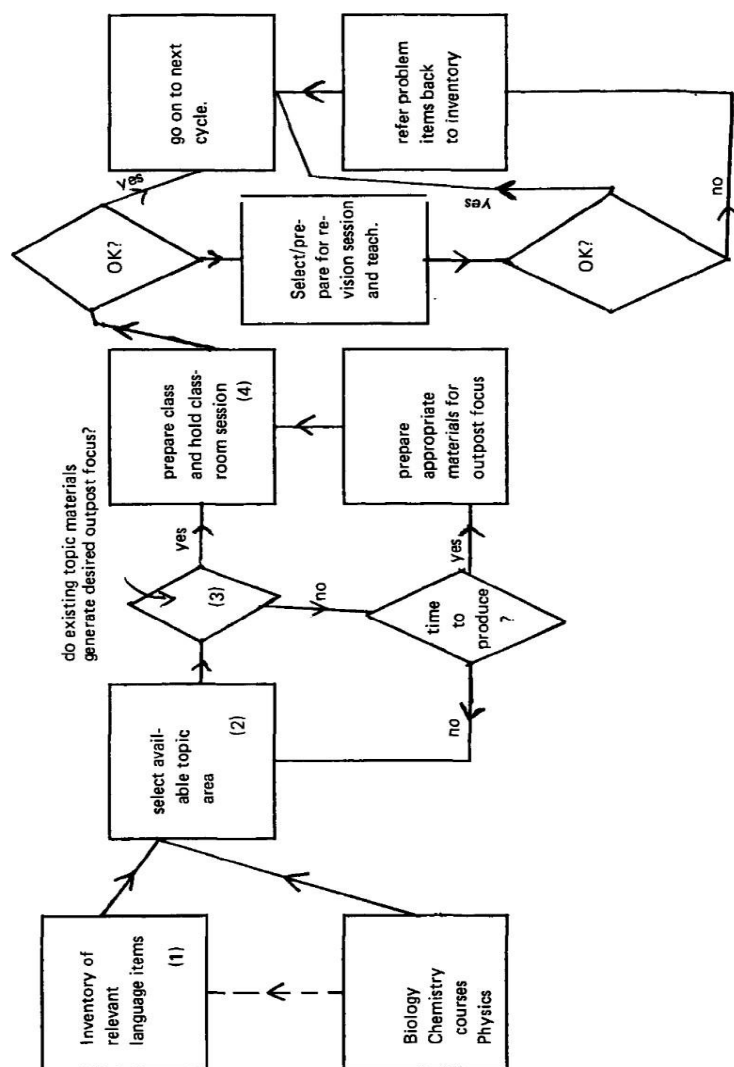
In addition, group work clearly has an important function. Thus, it allows for differential pacing within a class that can be vital when authentic materials are used. It permits the differential handling of language problems; it requires the students to discuss their problems and then implies a high level of cooperative activity in their approach to a text: this turns the lack of homogeneity in terms of linguistic level to advantage and permits the integration of students or widely differing achievement. At the same time, grouping within the class asks for the different selections of material for different groups, both to stimulate communication and to increase the degree of specialization.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have shown that ARMS represent a more practical alternative — as they are readily and cheaply available in all subjects at different levels — to the

expense and time involved in creating specially written materials which tend to suffer from the defects discussed in the first part of this paper and in any case are an unrealistic solution when faced with an immediate but short-term need. As such, the course materials could then become less an ESP textbook in the accepted sense rather than a set of resource material together with procedural guidelines for their exploitation. These we are building up as a teachers report in note form on the manner in which they have used authentic texts. Most ESP materials are an attempt to insert a specific subject content into an EFL framework. In our opinion, this attempt has quite a doubtful validity. We attempt to tackle the problem from the opposite viewpoint, that of accepting the subject matter and the modes of behaviour appropriate to it and adapting or developing new methods or techniques.

OVERVIEW OF MATERIALS SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR PRODUCTIVE SKILLS



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