

Research Article

Challenges of Teaching English for specific purposes in Algeria: the case of English in medicine

Dr Farida Djaileb

University of Oran

ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the challenges encountered in the teaching of ESP in Algeria, and the main deficiencies encountered by the learners due to inadequate programmes used in the faculty of medicine. Medical students need English for various reasons since today scientific research is based on English. The implementation of such programmes requires a lot of effort and needs the contribution of the administration, the medical staff and both teachers and students. We suggest to offer English courses to students of medicine. Thus, we are trying to design a course directly related to the needs of medic's students, and at the same time to provide a practical training so that to equip them with the necessary tools to communicate. Thus the main question is the following :What are main difficulties of teaching English for medical purposes ? And what are the problems encountered during both the teaching and the learning process ? In this paper, we will try to answer these questions. The findings reveal that inadequate preparation of the materials used, lack of well-trained teachers of ESP and lack of motivation are the main problems.

Keywords: ESP, medicine, needs, authenticity, syllabus

1. Introduction

ESP learners use the language for practical purposes. Learners are taught how to interact with foreigners, read instructions in manuals, and write articles. The Expansion of Esp throughout the world has focused attention on students the communicative needs as the starting point for course design, and shed light on strategies of language teaching. They need the language to acquire knowledge in their specialities. This fact implies that the content of the course should be determined according to their expectations. Thus, this paper attempts to examine the forth coming questions :

- What are the deficiencies encountered during the process of teaching English for medicine in the faculty of medicine ?
- Does the materials used in the classroom are adequate and appropriate, and meet the learners' needs ?

2. The Rationale

We have to admit that we have to face serious problems in the teaching of ESP in Algeria, even if today within the LMD system, the module of ESP is introduced as one of the main important modules in the licence LMD, and the majority of the Master at the English department are ESP master that focus on the the preparation of ESP teachers in various fields such as biology, medicine, tourism and computer sciences.

The reasons behind choosing this particular topic is two-fold. It is my experience in the medical field as a teacher of English which pushes me to make such a choice. Second, my intention is to come up with a syllabus appropriate to the needs of the students. Inspired by the reform (1992) that was put in France to the necessity of specific English in the medical field, i intend to apply the same frame in this study. This reform has elaborated new directives in the teaching of languages in

France ; for example, reformers have proposed the teaching of English in the faculties of medicine.

3. Review of the literature

This study deals with a theoretical review of issues of the research. Definitions of various concepts such as ESP, EMP, aims, objectives, needs analysis. We have insisted on the linguistic concepts such langue/parole, competence/performance, communicative competence, usage and use. As teachers, we have to understand these notions before teaching a language. In fact, knowing a language implies knowing its grammar first. We must be concerned with linguistic knowledge (principles and rules of sentence construction), and other types of knowledge (schematic knowledge and background knowledge). Language varies according to its functions, and may be different according to different situations. In fact, it may differ in terms of lexis and syntax. The focus is on discourse rather than text. 'Discourse is the language above the sentence or the clause.' (Stubbs, 1983). Our concern in this work is the scientific discourse, and more particularly the medical discourse. The words that constitute the scientific text are elements that have to be used in the medical register. Consider the following example : 'Malnutrition may cause iron-deficiency anaemia'. In the building of this sentence, the words are specifically technical ; however, the syntactic elements are not different from general English. The frame is similar ; whereas, the fragments that build this frame are different. Moreover, the learner must rely on his schematic knowledge to solve problems, and the teacher must teach him or her the way to perform abilities in producing and understanding patterns of scientific sentences. He/she must be aware of the rhetorical techniques of scientific discourse such as classification, definition and

comparison. Therefore, the understanding of these concepts may allow them to create meaning in the words of Widdowson (1990). In addition, in a course of medical English, objectives have to be stated in advance for the learners in order to develop their abilities. For this purpose, the course designer should predict the objectives of the learners. One of the main concepts of linguistics is discourse analysis since discourse is a matter of how sentences are used to achieve meaning. Consider the following sentences:

- Prevalence of obesity increases with age.
- The very old are not often obese.
- Most of their fat contemporaries have already died.
- There is a well-marked familiar tendency

These sentences presented in isolation are not enough to mean. The teacher may ask his or her students to build a coherent passage in order to create discourse. Thus, these sentences may be linked through the use of items such as but, because, in addition

In addition, the schematic knowledge is very important in the comprehension of medical texts. The role of the teacher is to show him or her the main tactics to understand the deep meaning of the text. One of these tactics is to rely on his or her previous knowledge in order to solve the problems of the text. Widdowson (1990) points out the following: *Convergence needs not to be complete....We arrive at the degree of convergence necessary to the purpose of interaction.*

Furthermore, materials preparers have to use authentic texts for reading instructions. According to Van Lier (1996), 'authenticity relates to the interaction between the students and the teachers and is a personal process of engagement.' In addition, authenticity relates to the types of the tasks performed in the classroom. In this work, we are concerned on the design of an appropriate syllabus for effective teaching. According to Prabhu (1987), a syllabus is a statement of what is to be taught. So, it is a support for the teachers, but ESP teachers should modify and delete according to the learners' expectations. The syllabus suggested is based on the procedural approach (Prabhu, 1987). The best way of teaching grammar is to focus on meaning or message rather than form. It is based on tasks that can be performed by the students in the classroom such as role plays (patient/Doctor), and they are real tasks.

4. The findings

The findings of this study are based on the survey conducted in an ESP classroom and several observations collected from various classrooms, and direct contact with different teachers who taught ESP for many years. In what follows, an attempt will be made to answer questions raised in this study, and to demonstrate the problems and challenges in the teaching of English in medicine. Finally recommendations are suggested in order to try to solve problems.

1. Issue one : Learners of EST, and more particularly Medical students encounter difficulties in comprehending authentic medical texts. Usually students can not negotiate meaning because they need the required skills such as the cognitive

skills, behavioural skills and learning strategies. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to provide them with the necessary tools to overcome their difficulties at this level. One of the tactics provided by the teachers is to rely on their schematic knowledge.

2. Issue two : the problem of translation from English to French. They can not explain the high technical terms because they can not think in English, but in French or Arabic and then translate. Thus, interference may occur.

3. Issue three : Generally, the students guess the meaning of words by using their knowledge of the subject. This is not a systematic process, but an intuitive one. ESP students think that language is words, and the acquisition of technical words is enough to acquire a language.

4. Issue four : Students are frightened by grammar. Grammar items are boring for them. They tend to forget that a sentence is segmented, and the elements have specific function (subject, verb).

5. Issue five : Reading is a problematic area. Students don't give much importance to reading since the majority of them rely on translation ; furthermore, oral fluency remains the most difficult area. Fluency describes language production which has features associated with native speakers.

6. Issue six : The learners make mistakes in speaking. They focus on content and neglect form. This is due to the fear of mistakes, and focus on form and neglect the content.

7. Issue seven : The teachers have to authenticate the material they have to use in the classroom. The activities must be associated with instances of use.

8. Issue eight : The students lack techniques of writing compositions. They lack the techniques of writing articles and summaries in English.

9. Issue nine : Teachers need to get formal specific training in ESP, and the administration must avoid recruiting general English teachers. Moreover, they should be trained in the domain of medicine. They have to do some studies in order to be able to teach the content of medicine. The problem is how to find an ESP teacher who would be competent in the scientific knowledge.

5. Recommendations

An effective design of a medical course in English depends on description of use without neglecting the systemic knowledge and the knowledge of the subject matter. This requires an adequate methodology. We are involved with the teaching of the formal properties of language as well as their functions. Our objective in this research work is to present in brief some of the principles and procedures used in a very simple way to guide teachers teaching medical English. The design of a programme that I presented to my students years ago is based on my own experience in order to help medical students to comprehend different texts including instructions in manuals, laboratory materials and to write articles in English, and of course to conduct correspondence with other researchers.

Therefore, the first prescription for effective teaching is motivation being aware that a teacher should like what he is

doing and motivated in teaching medical English. Second prescription is that he should be prepared psychologically to teach advanced students and specialists. The third prescription is that he should be ready to explain any medical topic in English, and show to the students that he or she possesses the scientific knowledge. Generally speaking, ESP teachers should be well-trained since teaching ESP is no more a question of teaching the underlying structures of language, but how to practice these structures in real life.

6. References

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