

## Review

# English for Specific Purposes: How to teach English for Tourism

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Nowadays, English has become one of the most widespread languages around the world. Due to its growing use, a tendency for designing specialized courses for the English classroom that target more specific outcomes and industries is observed. By addressing specific audiences and catering for specific needs English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a sample of this category. In this paper, emphasis is placed on English for Tourism and the teaching strategies that are utilized in order to adjust the course to learners' needs. Moreover, the differences between an ESP course and a traditional course will be highlighted. Finally, reference will be made to the responsibilities that both teachers and students have in the ESP frame work.

**Key words:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Tourism, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English has become one of the most widespread languages around the world, a status which, among other teaching innovations, calls for the construction and development of various English courses whose main aim is the knowledge of a particular subject with the English language being the medium of instruction. One of the directions towards such diverse courses is the term and practices of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). More specifically, courses that are held for a specific purpose, ranging from business English to English for Tourism and anything in between, do not address students in the traditional way, but rather integrate all the structures of the English language - grammar, vocabulary, syntax- into the learning of a particular subject. As stated by Hutchinson & Waters

(1987) ESP should be viewed as a method which is not based on concrete tasks and material, but rather on teaching a language, in which the learner has the first word, concerning the content and the strategies used during the lesson (ibid).

As was mentioned above, ESP courses include a number of diverse subjects such as technical English, medical English, Business English, English for Tourism and other. Each course is designed to address learners according to their interests and their field of study. Nowadays, the sector that exhibits particular interest is that of English for Tourism. The fact that English holds such an esteemed position in the world and has become one of the most widespread languages utilized in order to negotiate in jobs related to "trade" "tourism" "technology"

and “business” makes its knowledge on a sufficient level a prerequisite (Otilia Minadora, 2013). Based on its status in such a globalized era, English is most commonly the first foreign language to be taught to non-native speakers and it is also the one employed mostly by people traveling and, thus, a key element in the tourism sector.

Therefore, it is of great importance to put emphasis on the specific tasks and strategies used while teaching English for Tourism in a classroom; strategies that are dissimilar to the ones used in a traditional classroom. The activities used should be focused especially on the aim of the course and the knowledge that learners need in order to be efficiently prepared for the tourism domain. More specifically, ESP courses are addressed only to “professionals” who are going to use a foreign language to their careers (Gavioli, 2005). For this reason, usually all learners are adults who already know English and they learn it in order to adjust it in their work (Fiorito, 2005).

The particular paper aims at providing an in-depth knowledge about what English for Specific Purposes is by focusing especially on the category of English for Tourism and the activities used in the classroom in order to assist learners overcome their difficulties. Also, the role that students and teachers have in the particular English lesson will be mentioned.

### **Strategies used in English for Tourism**

Although it is taken for granted that learners who deal with tourism should have an excellent command of the English language, Afzali and Rezapoorian (2014:53) point out that “ESL students engaged in jobs related to tourism industry, [...] do not perform efficiently while communicating with their customers in these contexts”. Therefore, in order to learn English for Tourism, the implementation of specific tasks that focus especially on the aim of the course and the knowledge that learners need in order to be efficiently prepared for the tourism domain are necessary. Some of the strategies used in English for Tourism are the following:

As Alcantud-Diaz, Ricart Vaya and Gregori Signes (2014:185) note, one of the strategies used in order to promote learners’ knowledge is based on projects. More specifically, they refer to digital storytelling which “helps to improve traditional skills development, mainly speaking and writing along with researching and collaborative tasks and working with computers”. (ibid.). Through this, learners get accustomed to technology and they are trained on how to interview people, conduct research and apply several strategies to solve their problems (ibid. 187).

Webquests comprise another effective strategy in the process of teaching English for Tourism. As Garcia Laborda (2009:258) claims, “web quests are a very common way of using Web resources to research a

variety of topics”. Through these resources learners are able to construct their own projects (ibid) which are based on real tasks. In particular, the projects are based on real tasks such as interaction with customers, organization of journeys so that learners will be better adjusted to their work and a variety of other tasks that reflect the duties of a professional in the specific field (ibid. 260). Although the tasks on webquests do not reflect authentic situations in their full scope and everything is based on projects that learners have to perform within the classroom environment through the particular communication tasks, they still address the needs of the students and allow them to get a step closer to real-life professional goals and activities. In such a way, learners come across terms and problems that they will most likely face in the field of tourism either if they are beginners and about to enter the field or they are professionals with a number of years of experience who would wish to brush up on their knowledge of English and do so by practicing their English skills in correlation to technological advancement.

Regarding the difficulties that ESP students may face in English for Tourism classroom, vocabulary tends to be more one of the most common. Therefore, explicit strategies should be implemented for its teaching and learning. However, learning and practicing of vocabulary is a shared responsibility of both the teachers and the students. In order to help students learn the vocabulary more easily, it is important to put emphasis on “learning concrete words as it is easier than abstract words” (Xhaferi 2010: 233). Finally, another technique is that instead of teaching vocabulary, teachers should only check whether students understand the words used in the context (Dudley Evans and St John 1998 as quoted in Xhaferi 2010: 234).

### **Differences between English as a foreign language (EFL) and English for Tourism**

As was mentioned above, there are a number of differences presented between teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). One of the main differences between the two is the purpose. For example, in an EFL course, teachers have to follow a specific lesson plan which covers all four skills speaking, writing, reading and listening. On the contrary, each ESP course deals mostly with “language in context” without focusing on grammar rules or ways of structuring the language (Xhaferi, 2010). The skills taught and developed within the classroom are the ones the learners need for the exact purpose they came to the class. In the case of English for Tourism emphasis is mainly placed on communication skills and, thus, through improving the students’ speaking skills as they have to become competent in using English in their work environment where the English language is

required.

Furthermore, another difference that could be highlighted is that EFL aims at teaching the foreign language from the beginning step by step and by covering all essential parts with details, contrary to the ESP which is a more intensive course exclusively to prepare learners for their work. Xhaferi (2010: 236) states that students have the opportunity to “use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context” and that makes them feel more motivated.

Another feature that should be taken into consideration is that an ESP course contains “specialist language and content” (Robinson, 1991). However, Robinson (1991), emphasizes that an ESP course does not necessarily have “specialist language” but the tasks of the course are specialized (ibid.). For example, the activities used during the lesson, are not based only on the course book or regular homework. Especially, in English for Tourism, the students have to learn practice dialogues with “future” customers or learn about the organization of a hotel and their services. An EFL course, on the other hand, is directed towards a wider context and contains lots of exercises which aim at a different result.

Lastly, another difference between an EFL and an ESP course is that the latter is characterized as “learner-centered approach” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The learner instead of consuming time with each skill that a regular English course entails, he gets only “a restricted area” (ibid) which focuses on the subject of the particular ESP course. As Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 67) state “the learner is used solely as a way of locating the restricted area”, therefore the ESP course becomes only “learner-restricted” (ibid). In such a way, the learners do not have the opportunity to pay attention to all the parts they would like but they have to follow a specific program.

### **Responsibilities of the ESP teachers**

Another element that should be highlighted is the teachers’ role. As it is well known apart from the efforts on the learners’ side, teachers play an important role as they are the ones who teach them the necessary material. However, their qualifications do not differ greatly from a regular teacher of English (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). For example, ESP teachers should be positive to the “ESP content” and have a good command at the particular subject that they teach (ibid). More specifically, teachers should be pleasant to learners while teaching, and also well prepared in order to solve any questions and difficulties the students may have.

Apart from that, their duty is not only teaching (Robinson, 1991). More specifically, they are responsible for the administration and the organization of the “ESP course” (ibid). Furthermore, their role is to investigate “analytic” methods in order to collect all the material that

they need to teach and adjust it to the needs of the particular course, but also to the needs and learning styles of the students they have in front of them. Teachers are also the ones who evaluate students’ exercises and provide them with feedback (ibid).

On the other hand, students in an ESP course have another perspective for the role of the teachers. As they admit the teaching techniques changed and this brought also changes to the learners’ behavior and teachers’ role as well (Altenreiter, as quoted in Tatzl & Millward-Sadler & Casey, 2013). From their point of view, the role of the teacher is to facilitate the learners and at the same time make them feel free and responsible for themselves (ibid.).

### **Responsibilities of the ESP learners**

Another aspect that should be highlighted is the responsibilities that ESP students have. Students should be interested in the particular course as it is related to their future work (Fiorito, 2005). In such a way, when they enjoy the course, they will be more motivated to continue their effort and improve not only their English but also their skills concerning their future work (ibid).

Apart from that, learners have awareness of the reasons they learn English and that makes them more concentrated on their own goals (ibid). What makes things easier is the fact that they can learn English in “authentic context” and not as “a mechanical skill” that they are not going to use and forget immediately after the lesson (ibid).

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above, the ESP course is an approach that contains many different subjects that aim at preparing learners efficiently for their work. The greater dissimilarities between ESP and EFL are the age of the learners and the purpose for which they enroll in either class along with the way the English language is approached and taught in each of the cases, meaning that in the former case there is more emphasis on the context and content of the subject taught through English, while in the latter the English language is taught more structured covering all its aspects and forms. In addition, ESP courses do not solely utilize the textbook, unlike more traditional courses, but learning also takes place through web quests and a lot of technology integration that simulates real life tasks for the professionals. Lastly, both teachers and students have equal responsibilities for the techniques employed in teaching and learning, respectively.

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