

TEACHING CONTENT AND LANGUAGE IN ESP CLASSES

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REZUMAT

Predarea Englezei pentru Scopuri Specifice (ESS) este un domeniu curent in metodologia predării limbilor străine, care devine din ce in ce mai popular grație faptului că cunoscătorii de limbă engleză doresc sa-și aprofundeze cunoștințele pe care deja le posedă într-un domeniu specific profesional. Cu părere de rău, piața de carte nu oferă manuale de limbă engleză in astfel de domenii ca administrarea publică, relațiile internaționale, managementul. Astfel, profesorului îi revine sarcina de a selecta, planifica și preda engleza profesională cu maximum de beneficiu pentru masteranzi. În afară de aceasta, profesorul se confruntă cu întrebarea: la ce să acorde mai multă atenție - conținutului lingvistic sau celui tematic; cum să realizeze obiectivele lingvistice; cum să formeze masteranzilor deprinderile de utilizare a cunoștințelor lingvistice etc. Articolul de față propune metode de lucru cu textul specializat și găsirea unei balanțe între predarea conținutului tematic și celui lingvistic pentru a forma masteranzilor deprinderi necesare de a funcționa și a utiliza eficient limba străină in contextul profesional in care vor activa.

Many people around the world use the English language in their jobs. Their success or failure may depend on their ability to communicate fluently, to read the latest scientific and technical international publications in English, to correspond by e-mail, in short, to possess proficient language skills. For this reason, the foreign language instruction of the students at university level should be focused and based on the field of their qualification. This type of instruction is known under various names, including: English for specific purposes (ESP), content-based instruction (CBI), integrated content and language learning, content-focused language learning, enhanced language

learning, teaching English through content, immersion, etc. In recent years, ESP has gained recognition for its potential to address students' language and content needs.

Teaching in a content-based context the instructor is faced with several challenges: Should a commitment be made to content teaching/learning as well as language teaching/learning? What should the balance between language and content be? What should the teacher be guided by? Do language aims determine content selection? Do language aims determine content use? Should there be a common source for all content materials? Who and when should make the decision on what

to teach? Should the curriculum be approved? What methods and techniques should be used in ESP? All of these questions require extremely careful and responsible consideration.

The challenge at the top of the list is how to find an appropriate balance between the language and the content to be taught. This issue is of major importance because if we focus on content we neglect the systematic attention to language; if we focus on language we pay little attention to professional content. What should the alternative be? How to incorporate both in our curriculum? In order to answer these questions, we need to refer to what is our main instructional goal in the given educational setting. What knowledge, what skills and what types of final creative products do we expect of our students?

The first thing to clarify is who our students are and what their long term needs are. Do they need to communicate in a professional setting, do they need to be able to make reports and presentations, do they need to be able to read specialized texts and correspond by e-mail? The second in priority question to be answered is what their level of language proficiency is. And the third, which is of paramount importance, is what resources are at our disposal. After we have answered all these questions, we may start designing the syllabus in such a way as to reflect the answers to the questions above.

The master degree students at the Academy of Public Administration definitely need all the enumerated above skills. The job market of today is highly competitive and in order to find a well-paid job, the knowledge of a foreign language is on the top of the list of eligible criteria. The level of our master degree

students' language proficiency may vary from low intermediate to high intermediate and even advanced. But even though they are advanced in their knowledge of the language, they still need to cover the topics included in the curriculum, which is discussed and approved by the members of the chair.

Because our book market does not offer ESP books in the various fields of our students' qualifications (International Relations, Public Administration, Public Management, Constitutional and Administrative Law), teachers are confronted with the task of selecting adequate teaching materials on their own to suit the needs of the students. Due to the wonderful invention, the Internet, this is not impossible. Yet, it is not an easy task. The selection itself requires a lot of time. What we have to look for is specialized reading texts to which we will further propose tasks to be fulfilled by the students.

A specialized text is considered a non-literary text designed for use in a specific field or discipline such as science, technology, health care, business, administration, etc. The text usually contains terminology and concepts particular to the field and follows conventional formats. The purpose of specialized texts is primarily informative. The specialized text is often a vehicle of research, instruction, clarification, or dissemination of information. A good specialized text will be of interest to the student as long as the text is relevant and resourceful enough; the students will improve their skills and abilities, and will be able to exchange useful information during discussion classes and create a bank of resourceful terms in several fields of activity.

In an attempt to solve the problem of correct selection of the reading materials for classroom use, we need, first of all, to clarify what criteria should be applied to classifying a reading text as a specialized one. According to Cheryl L. Chapeau De Lopez et al. four basic criteria are used for this purpose: **A. Subject**, **B. Rhetorical Patterns**, **C. Sources**, and **D. Form** [1]. The **Subject** refers to the field of qualification of the students or more specifically to one concrete discipline. The **Rhetorical Patterns** of the text refer to what the text itself does and will include: definition, description, classification, comparison-contrast, chronology, process, cause-effect, hypothesis, argumentation, exemplification, etc. The **Source** is identified according to the style in which the text is written and the type of information in which it appears (a textbook, a journal). The **Form** refers to the graphic appearance of the text. It may be an extract from an article or book, a list of sentences to be placed in the correct order, a table or a graph, a page from a dictionary, an abstract, etc. Selecting the texts, the teacher should also take into consideration not only the proficiency level of the students, but also their interests and background knowledge, as well as the length of the text.

When teaching in a specialized setting, the teacher is often misled by what the primary purpose of the language class is: to teach information in the field of qualification of the students or to develop the students' language skills and knowledge. My firm belief is that a specialized text should not represent the teaching of a given theoretical topic, it should not be reduced to the teaching of terms or the translation from one language into another either. It should, first of all,

concentrate on the development of necessary **linguistic skills** in order for the students to function in a specific field such as to make a presentation in the foreign language, to write a report, to participate in discussions, etc. It should incite the interest of the learner and serve as a basis for debates and discussions. This idea is also supported by Roy Lyster who provides a succinct synthesis of classroom based research from Canadian French immersion classes and mentions that educators should consider ways of integrating more focus on language [5, p. XI]. It's true that the teacher will look for texts that have a semantic/lexical focus, but attention should also be paid to its contextualized communicative function, to the use of **grammar structures** it contains. **Based on these features** the teacher should work out tasks to be practiced and retained by the students.

So, the main objective of working with specialized texts will be to provide practice and reinforcement of basic language knowledge and concepts, by gradually increasing the complexity of the language so that students acquire life-long academic skills in the field of their qualification.

Further, we will focus on the types of tasks to be worked out in order that students gain as much as possible from the text. The tasks should be plausible ones and derive from the content of the text. The synthetic and semantic form of the tasks must differ from that of the text, so that students understand the context rather than simply recognize the form to perform the task correctly. When designing the tasks, the teacher should refer to Bloom's taxonomy which emphasizes the complexity of the cognitive activities involved in learning and the fact that all must be taught and evaluated. The tasks

should stimulate critical thinking while the reader interacts with the text, so that later he/she is able to analyze, synthesize and interpret what has been read and learnt.

One category of tasks, let us conventionally call them **language tasks**, can be fulfilled by understanding and recognizing only specific sentences, phrases, or key words of the text. The learner does not necessarily have to read or understand the entire text but must be able to identify those parts of the reading referred to in the task. For the fulfillment of such tasks the learner depends on the language knowledge (vocabulary and grammar). Another category of tasks, **content tasks**, require from the learner the reading of the entire text and the integration of the information found in different parts of the text.

Some techniques frequently used for the first category of **language tasks** will include: determine the meaning of words from context, find referents, observe the usage of connectors, restate or paraphrase specific information, answer factual questions, recognize definitions, recognize comparison-contrast relationships, recognize classification, recognize sequence (process and chronology), recognize cause-effect relations, recognize fact-hypothesis, recognize description, identify the function of the text, etc.

The second category of **content tasks** will require from the students to analyze the information, to transcode information from the text to a graph or diagram, to verbalize the graph, to compare and synthesize ideas in two similar in content texts, recognize textual inconsistencies, draw conclusions and/or infer from explicit information, predict from explicit information, recognize topic sentences of paragraphs, recognize the thesis statement, recognize the main idea, recognize author's purpose, comment the title, suggest a title, identify source and/or

type of the text, identify intended audience, recognize the tone of the author, draw conclusions and/or inferences from implicit information, infer what preceded, predict what follows from implicit information, make analogy between the information in the passage and a new situation, write an essay on the text, make a presentation to express your personal opinion, etc.

Below I give several examples of language and content tasks designed for the students of International Relations department, as well as some samples of their creative work. The language tasks deal primarily with the understanding of the vocabulary units and less with grammar, which in the case of the English language is not so complicated.

Determine the meaning of words from context. This task is especially effective with apparently familiar vocabulary that very often students overlook. The primary meaning of the verb '*to move*' means '*to change place or position*', while in the following context "*The NATO alliance moved Thursday toward resuming formal relations...*" [2] has the meaning '*to make a formal proposal*'. The meaning of '*to gear*' is '*to equip with gears, to adjust or adapt*'. Knowing these meanings it is not difficult to explain what is meant in the context "*The State Department is geared more towards the Secretary than the White House*" [4]. So, in the case when students read quickly, they may not get into the details of the meaning if not paid attention to. As a consolidation exercise for the given vocabulary I hand in to students word cards with the learned vocabulary and ask them to give their explanations of the words as used in the text.

Special attention should be paid to the meaning of phrasal verbs and idioms. The literal meaning of the verb '*to shy*' is '*to move suddenly as from fear*', while the

phrasal verb *'to shy away'* means *'to shrink from'*, as well as *'have misgivings (doubts) about'*, which is contained in the following context *"While not shying away from the serious differences of opinion..."* [2].

The meaning of the idiom *'a long shot'* in the sentence *"Membership in the EU – a long shot in the best of times – now looks more unlikely than ever"* [6] means *'a possibility with little change of success'*. In the sentence *"It takes only a back-of-the-envelope calculation to see that it would be possible to do artificially what the mountain did naturally"* [3], the idiom **back-of-the-envelope calculation** refers to rough calculations that test or support a hypothesis. It originates in the practice of quickly jotting down calculations on the nearest available piece of paper, such as the back of an envelope, a napkin.

Find referents. This is a kind of exercise that helps students see the cohesion in a text. In the sentence *"No one can question the secretary-designate's leadership potential for breaking through encrusted patterns or her formidable presence in a negotiation"* [4], no name whatsoever is given in the text, but knowing that the newly elect secretary is Hilary Clinton and seeing the feminine pronoun, the students apply this knowledge and understand who the referent is. Not less important is for the students to observe the *use of connectors in a text*, which also contribute to its logical and sequential organization.

An efficient exercise is *paraphrasing*. A paraphrase is a restatement of another person's ideas using our own words. Such expressions as *'enduring influence'*, *'the concept permeated'*, *'he was reared in*

poverty', *'was compiled by his disciples'*, *'concern for virtue rather than wealth'*, *'the two cornerstones of his system'*, etc., taken from an article about Confucius, need to be paraphrased when students write summaries in their own words. Paraphrasing can be done in several ways: by asking students to look for synonyms of the key words they underlined in the text to be summarized, for example *'lasting'* for *'enduring'*, *'spread'* for *'permeate'*, *'brought up'* for *'reared'*, etc; by asking students to change word forms or grammatical structures. For example, the phrase *'was compiled by his disciples'* can be converted from passive into an active voice sentence *'his disciples put together'*, etc. Another way to paraphrase is *Tell a Friend* method. In this case the student focuses on the meaning of the passage and finds a completely new way to explain it in a short form.

Comment on the meaning of the statements. The commentary on the meaning of statements rather often requires knowledge of the historical background, or looking for additional sources to clarify the meaning, especially if this is a culturally oriented text. Such statements as the following serve as examples *"Beltway system of leak and innuendo"* [6], *"They toiled in sweatshops and settled the West"* [7], *"Our Founding Fathers"*, *'a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today'*. These may be absolutely clear to any American, as for the Moldovan student the teacher will have to provide the necessary explanation. Besides its literal geographical meaning as a beltway that encircles a city, *'inside the beltway'* is a phrase used to characterize parts of the real or imagined American political system, issues that occur in

Washington, the capital of the USA. It is meant to invoke matters that are important primarily within the offices of the Federal government, its contractors, lobbyists, and the media which cover them. The phrase 'beltway system of leak and innuendo' is a form of metonymy meaning that some important news may get outside the 'Washington Beltway' and become known to the people at large, thus creating possibilities to gossip. The Moldovan student should also be explained that by 'our founding fathers' are meant the political leaders and statesmen who participated in establishing the American Independence by signing the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. In his speech "I have a Dream" by 'a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today', Martin Luther King meant Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the USA, and the fact that the people who participated in the March on Washington of 1963 as part of the civil rights movement, gathered in front of Lincoln's memorial in Washington.

Interpretation of meaning. Very often the use of specific vocabulary units requires not just understanding their meaning, but also their interpretation for the given context. For the article *Team of Heavyweights*, [4] students will be asked such questions as: How do you understand the 'maxims of conventional wisdom' in paragraph 1?; What is meant by 'constellation' in paragraph 2?; explain the phrase 'the challenge of distilling order out of a fragmenting international system' in paragraph 2; comment on the conclusion Kissinger makes in paragraph 12.

Recognize the thesis statement. The thesis statement in a speech or essay contains the main points the speaker or writer will make. So, students are directed

to observe these main points in the first paragraphs. In the lecture delivered by U.S. Ambassador Michael D. Kirby at the Academy of Public Administration on the topic "*My thoughts on the place of Moldova in the world*", students identify the following thesis statement "*We are talking about Moldova's place in European history, European civilization and European culture, and within the idea and ideals we call Europe.*" The points that the Ambassador develops further in the course of his speech are: Moldova's place in European history, civilization and culture and what the Moldovans have to aspire for in regards to joining the European Union. Identifying the thesis statement helps the student organize his own thoughts while making the summary or when commenting on the given text.

Comment the title. The title "*The Breadbasket Becomes the Basket case*", which has the following summary "*Ukraine's president was once considered a hero. But his country has spiraled into chaos and despair*" [6] needs special interpretation. *Breadbasket* is referred to a country or region which because of richness of soil and advantageous climate produces an agricultural surplus which is considered vital for the country as a whole. *Basket case* initially was a British slang for a quadruple amputee during World War I, while at present it also stands for a mentally-ill person or a badly run organization. In the given title it means a badly run country by the then-president Viktor Yushchenko. The title of the article *Team of Heavyweights* by Henry A. Kissinger can be easily understood in the context of the English language. The title of the Russian translation of the article is

accompanied by the following explanation «Команда тяжеловесов. «Созвездие» советников Обамы в сфере национальной безопасности», which prepares the reader from the start with what to expect to read in the article.

Two texts that I usually ask students in International Relations to read are the Declaration of Independence of the USA and the Declaration of Independence of Moldova. First I start with defining the objectives of the class, which include: relate the context of writing the Declarations to the historical events in the USA and in Moldova; identify the purpose and explain the importance of the Declarations; explain the structure of the Declarations; comment on the complaints included in the Declarations; demonstrate awareness of the Declarations of Independence as a historical process developed in protest of unfair conditions; write a synthesis to compare and contrast the two Declarations, create a personal Declaration of Independence to voice your complaints.

Having read and discussed the Declarations students have to create their own declarations following the given instructions: Create your own Declaration of Independence to voice your complaints. Structure your Declaration according to the following format: 1. **Preamble** (To whom would you send your complaints? Why? What reasons would you give for your decision to write out your complaints?) 2. **Statement of beliefs** (What makes you think your complaints are worthwhile? What are the reasons the rules are the way that they are? Why should rules be changed?) 3. **The list of complaints** (What should the reader notice specifically about your complaints? What do you need to keep in mind to make sure that your

audience understands your complaints? What kinds of events inspired your complaints?). 4. **Prior attempts to redress the situation** (Have you already tried to make changes in rules? How did you try to change the way things are?). 5. **Declaration of Independence** (Is it possible to say in a single sentence what it is that you really want to happen? What changes should happen right away? What changes should happen later on?)

Below is a sample of a Declaration of Independence created by my student Tatiana Stahi, gr. 114 IR.

The Declaration of Independence
of the Young People from the
Republic of Moldova

Youth Organization „NEW
GENERATION”, February 7, 2011

Youth Organization „NEW GENERATION” of the Republic of Moldova, recalling the natural duty of the young people to guarantee the continuity of social life, underlining their role of agents of promoting social, political, economic, cultural tradition in the flow of human history, bearing in mind that young people have an important mission in every field of human endeavour and the fact that they are destined to guide the fortunes of mankind and are the pitcher of values, considering that in the age of technological and cultural achievements, the enthusiasm, creative abilities and fresh skills of the young people should be devoted to the progress of all peoples, recalling human rights stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, the European Convention of Human Rights, adopted in 1950, the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, adopted in 1991, the Law on Youth, adopted in 1999, taking into account that the rules, that guide the activity of young people do not meet

the priorities of the youth development programs, young people continue to be compelled by the impossibility of having a favorable framework for their activities, considering the violation of rights to free education, to decent living, to secure economic activity, to free speech, that must be heard and taken into account, right to a good job, pointing out that authorities and older generations are deaf to the wishes of young people, and blind to their efforts of supporting the development of our society, proclaims solemnly.

In the name of all representatives of the young generation in the Republic of Moldova, in the virtue of universal human rights, and in front of the whole world, the Young People from the Republic of Moldova are independent, free to claim their rights, which are the foundation for the active involvement in the advancement of spiritual and material life of our society. The New Generation is the keeper of the traditional values of our nation.

Independent Young People from the Republic of Moldova, declare that they are ready to have a continuous constructive dialogue with the other generations in the country and abroad, as well as with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, in order to ensure the positive dynamics of social progress.

So help us god!

Adopted in Chisinau, by the Youth Organization "NEW GENERATION".

This kind of a task is not just demanding students to fulfill a creative task in order to use language skills and knowledge, but also gives them skills of drafting a declaration following a sample structure as future civil servants.

As follow up of discussing and analyzing Martin Luther King's speech "I have a Dream" students are asked to

write and deliver their speeches on the same topic and use some of the eloquent techniques and figures of style like M.L.King does, such as repetitions, metaphors, similes, allusions, quotations, etc. Below are included two such speeches composed by Marina Metelskaya and Natalia Mocanu from group 114 R1.

"I have a dream."

Today it is up-to-date to talk about the orphans' state in our modern developed world. And I address my speech to everyone – the authorities, different organizations, to all people in our country and beyond its borders.

How difficult is it to be an orphan? To know this we must ask the orphan children. How difficult is it to be unloved children? We can only imagine that, as it's so customary for us to hear: "My child, I love you!"

Children are wonder deeds from heaven. Their purity makes them little angels that will make your day very colorful. Their enthusiasm makes you feel you're in another world!

Everyone knows that children will always accept you for who you are, regardless of your physical appearance, economic status and so on. Why can't we accept them? Why can't we make their dream come true, give them love?! And why must they be so alone and unloved?

In our daily life people forget about the existence of such poor children. Every day (in most cases) the orphans are in the captivity of social indifference, at worst in the captivity of human atrocity. And they can't stop it. "Children are one third of our population and all of our future" (Select Panel for the Promotion of child health, 1981). In spite of that, currently, children who are abandoned, become unprotected.

Orphanhood acquires a global character, it is especially spread in the developing countries. In Africa, for example, about thirteen – million children were orphaned by AIDS. In the last years orphaned children numbers have increased significantly due to many other diseases lingering in Africa. However the international community tells us every day about the perfection of children's rights protection system. According to the statistics the vast majority of orphans are found in the third world, living in inhumane conditions and suffering of unspeakable violence. Where is the protection of these children? I don't see that.

Developed countries have organized different child care systems. For instance, the system of fosters family in the USA, it's relatively effective, but annually the authorities find 70-80 thousands of new orphans. Young families abandon their children very often, they forget that "every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man" (R.Tagore), it is a pity, but people forget about that.

Once a philosopher said that "to raise the children is the feat". And I ask you: let's be the heroes, let's perform the feats and we will help so many unhappy children. It is estimated that if one of five families adopted one child, the orphanages (or children's homes) would disappear in all countries. And we can do it! We can help these children!

Despite everything, please, don't be indifferent! Don't be violent! And let's help the orphans! I call you for charity! And you will get the most expensive gift in your life – love, love of many forgotten children!

I have a dream that one day people will forget about such a word as "orphan". I have a dream, that people will remember

such a word as "charity". I have a dream and I hope children everywhere will live in big happy families!

Speech: *"I have a dream"*

Esteemed audience! I'd like today to express my opinion on my biggest dream, namely to build a better world. The recent period shows that the enormous human, moral, and spiritual potential and civic culture of our society sinks under a mask of apathy. This creates the need to strive for a better world.

We live in a contaminated moral environment. We feel morally ill because we say something different from what we think. We don't believe in anything. We ignore each other. We care only about ourselves.

Because of this each of us must contribute to the eradication of violence, hatred between peoples, conflicts in society. Each of us should love their neighbor, act as he would like to behave with him, cooperate in solving problems of common interest. Each of us should take into account that "the power to change the world is found nowhere but within our own lives".

I am sure that through joint efforts we can implant hope in the breasts of millions of people, in order to build a peaceful world without conflict, acts of terrorism, violence. We can together lead to reducing disputes between states, the disappearance of conflicts among nations, due to reinforce humanity's belief of faith in love, peace, friendship, compassion, humility, or forgiveness.

I have a dream that the world will be as one:

No hell below us, above us only sky.
No, it isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die;
No need for greed or hunger;
No oppressions, a brotherhood of man

I have a dream that people won't spend the precious time asking "Why isn't the world a better place?" The question to ask is "How can I make it better?" To that there is an answer.

I have a dream: to promote peace in the relations between states, because "Peace is not something you wish for; It's something you make, something you do, something you are, and something you give away."

Writing and delivering their own speeches develops in students language abilities and competences, as well as their civic attitude to current issues that predominate in the local or world community. I must say that I tremendously enjoy listening to them.

The success of integrating content and language in ESP instruction primarily

depends on the wise planning of the instructor in which he/she should include the topics to be taught by carefully selecting the minimal needed terminological vocabulary and incorporate it with language content adequate to the proficiency level and the needs of the given group of learners.

Concluding, I would like to point out that when we teach in an ESP setting we should remember that language is a medium for learning content and content is a resource for mastering the language. Our task is to select authentic texts and create tasks for classroom use that will incite the interest of the learners in such a way that they will wish to excel in their endeavor of conquering new linguistic knowledge and professional competence.

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