

Culture Bound ESP Language Learning

English for specific purposes (ESP) is generally known to compose a section in applied linguistics devoted to language materials, course-design and instruction for language learners (of mostly tertiary level) with specific learning goals directly related to their current or future academic, professional, or vocational life contexts in which they will be using the language.

There is a varied array of ESP areas offered throughout the world. One possible classification provided in the fourth edition of a famous book edited by M. Celce-Murcia *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (also known as the “Apple Book”) is shown in figure 1.

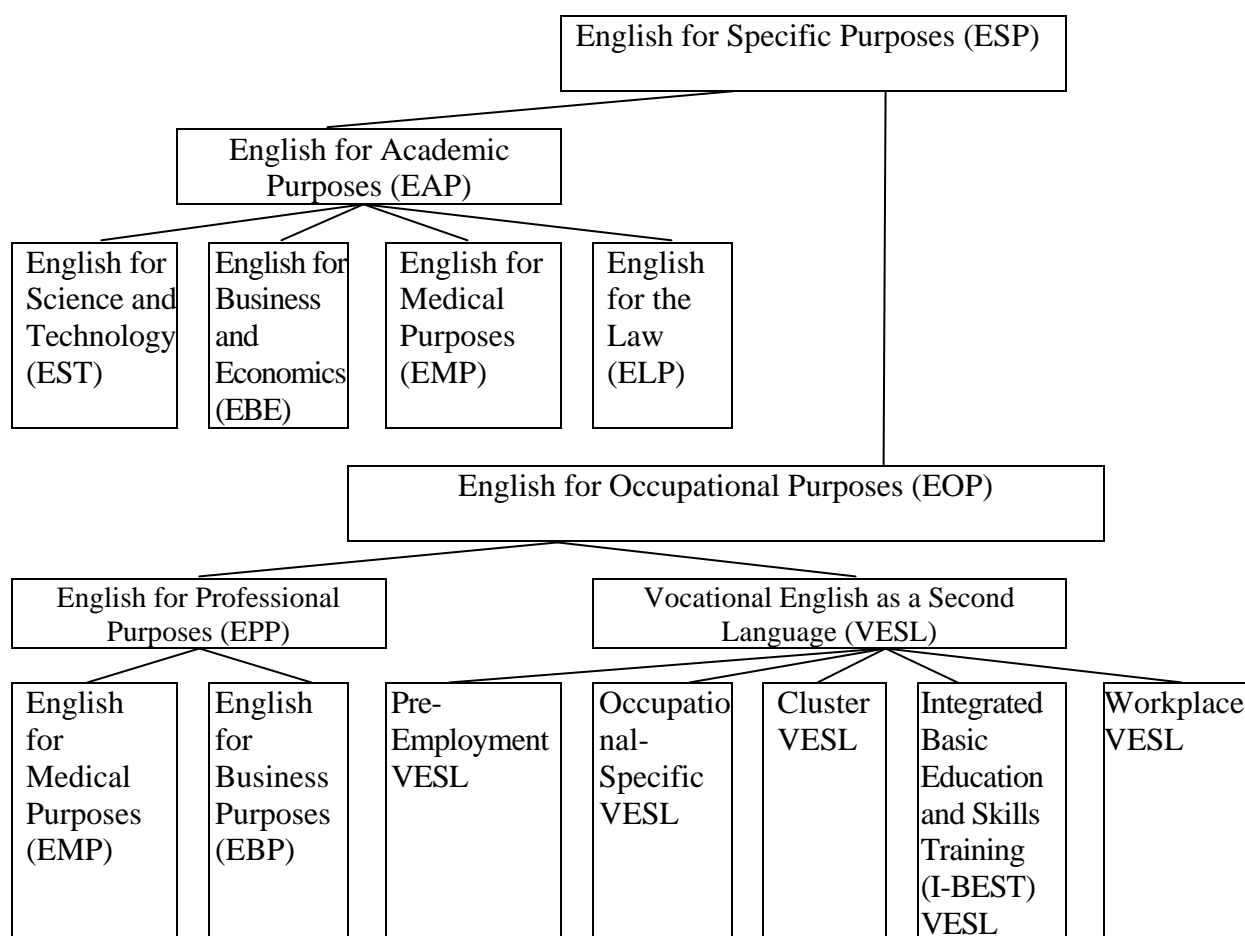


Figure 1. Classification of ESP categories by professional area

Among the most general characteristics of ESP the following are mentioned:

- 1) ESP courses should be designed to meet some specified needs and goals of a specific group of learners in a specific language learning environment;
- 2) It is related in content (themes, topics, communicative situations) to particular occupations and activities;
- 3) It is focused on the language appropriate to those occupations and activities in vocabulary, grammar, discourse.

But viewing ESP only through the lens of the English language as a communication tool can lead a language user to becoming “a fluent fool”. The term suggested by Milton J. Bennett (1993) describes someone who speaks a foreign language well but doesn’t understand the social or philosophical (and we can add – cultural) content of that language. Such people are likely to get into all sorts of trouble because of misunderstandings arising of socio-cultural ignorance.

So, in the pursuit of today’s world’s needs for developing intercultural awareness of people, knowledge of the society and culture of the other communities becomes an aspect of sufficient importance to the ESP learner.

All mentioned above areas of using ESP for academic, professional, or vocational aims presupposes a wide range of international and intercultural contacts and collaboration. Intercultural conditions of language use set a task of developing socio-cultural and socio-linguistic competences that will positively affect communication between representatives of different cultures, especially in cases when the outcomes of such communication are measured in terms of business, finance, professional contacts and career possibilities. For professional or business success in culturally different environments, intercultural competency becomes crucial.

The intercultural dimension of using English for Specific Purposes calls for abilities to understand the cultural context of written and aural messages; to establish relations; to communicate with minimal loss or distortion of meanings; to achieve compliance among those involved in communication.

The structural components of socio-cultural competency for ESP language learners may be described in the following way: general background knowledge; specific knowledge of national culture, cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, ways of life; socio-linguistic knowledge; socio-linguistic skills; communicative behaviour patterns (verbal, non-verbal).

Cultural dimension should become an integral element of different ESP communicative activities: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In reading and listening tasks the learners may have opportunities to analyse the socio-cultural context, and practise skills of critical thinking in interpreting texts. For oral communicative practice, role-playing, simulations, case studies and cultural critical incidents' analysis can be useful.

Developing socio-cultural competences may be built on a “culture-contrast” approach, including the following:

- provide learners with specific knowledge of their own culture and focus their attention on how basic values, beliefs, attitudes are manifested in their native culture;
- compare native culture patterns to those of the target language culture and look especially for concepts and social practices that differ from or do not exist in the native culture;
- assess differences not just in terms of vocabulary and grammar but also in terms of pragmatic dimension of culturally appropriate social behaviour and decision-making, and conveying meanings both verbally and non-verbally.

Implementation of an intercultural perspective within an ESP course can be made explicit by using activities that focus on culture-related themes and culture-biased materials. The thing to be remembered is that the English language plays today a very special role as a world lingua franca and, thus, as an “intercultural mediator” (Nizegorodcew 2011). It helps millions of speakers of other languages to understand each other and to familiarize each other with one's own culture. As such, it shouldn't be treated exclusively as the language of the countries it is native to (e.g. Great Britain or the USA), but needs to be identified as a language of international communication, i.e. the culture-bound activities and materials are meant to

demonstrate how English may be used by speakers of other languages to communicate with each other.

In this connection, it is important to stress that the problem of most domestic ESP course-books is that they teach communication from monocultural perspective, i.e. they suggest situations for interaction between monocultural speakers (a Ukrainian culture native and an English culture native), although the reality of today's world proves the fact that the language user's culture may be different from those focused on in the textbook. Nowadays, more and more course designers try to shake the concept of the monolithic language speaker (cf. Cook 2002, Block 2003, Nizegorodcew 2011). Instead, a model of a multilingual English language learner is promoted according to which the learner acquires through this language some access to other cultures and can promote his/her own culture among other both native and non-native users of English.

Cultural instruction may be either integrated into the ESP course or taught separately as "Intercultural Communication" classes. In any case, intercultural sensitivity should be developed for studying, working, or staying in an intercultural environment.

We can identify broad areas where teaching culture within as ESP contexts would make a productive contribution into. They are:

- increasing employability;
- facilitating international mobility (academic, professional, personal);
- learning to interpret the behaviors, actions, and communication patterns of individuals from another culture in a specific setting in a meaningful way;
- developing practical strategies for more effective bridging cross-cultural differences in an organization or community with international collaboration.