Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes
by Helen Basturkmen

Reviewed by Bianca Bretan

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English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is now well established as a distinctive and important part of English Language Teaching. It refers to the teaching and learning of English with the particular goal of the learners to use the language acquired in a specific domain. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) ESP is an approach to language learning which is based on learner's needs. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:4-5) define ESP in terms of absolute and variable characteristics. In their opinion the absolute characteristics should apply to all ESP courses as they mention general facts: ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner; it makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves; it is centered on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities. The variable characteristics are often, but not always, present.

Helen Basturkmen is an Associate Professor at the University of Auckland, New Zeeland, in the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics. Prior to this she worked as a lecturer and a teacher educator in the UK, Turkey and the Middle East. Among her fields of interest and research are: discourse analysis, language education, and investigating postgraduate EAL student's difficulties in structuring and writing theses.

First published in 2010 *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes* is one of her most recent publications. The target audience is revealed on the book's back cover as students of TESOL and prospective and practicing teachers of ESP.

The aim of the book is, as stated by the author (p. X), to make the topic of ESP course development as accessible as possible to a wide audience and to show how ideas about course development in the literature can be related to practice.

The book is divided in two major sections, Part I (Main considerations in ESP course development) and Part II (Case studies in ESP course development). Each chapter in Part I is organized in the same way: an introduction followed by the presentation of theoretical framework, a summary and some discussion questions that invite the reader to reflection and offer guidelines for further reading.

In the Introduction the author prefaces the book with different writers' definitions of ESP including statements from prominent authors in the field such as David Nunan, Dudley-Evans and St John, Holm, Bernard and Zemach. It also includes a description of different areas in ESP and a discussion on the demands and effectiveness of teaching specialized languages.

Part I (with chapters 2, 3 and 4) familiarizes the reader with three important areas of ESP course design: needs analysis, investigation of specialist knowledge and curriculum planning.

Needs analysis is a crucial instrument in course development as it pinpoints the language and skills that the learners will use in their target professional or vocational workplace relating it to the present state of knowledge of the learners, their perceptions of their needs and the practical possibilities and constraints of the teaching context (p. 19). Chapter 2 provides the reader with essential information about needs analysis, its importance, the way it can be used not only in course

design but also on course assessment, types of techniques that could be employed in data collection (interviews, questionnaires, and observations).

Chapter 3 deals with descriptions of specialist discourse as the backbone of ESP course design. Though investigation of specialist discourse is time consuming it represents a crucial step for any specialized language teaching attempt. Basturkmen suggests and describes three approaches to provide the necessary information: ethnography, genre analysis and corpus analysis.

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research that has been described as study of phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln: 2000, p.3). Genre analysis is a research tool that aims to identify patterns underlying specific genres and how particular social groups (called discourse communities) use them in order to accomplish their aims. Corpus analysis is a collection of authentic written texts or spoken texts available electronically that can be accessed with computer software for teaching purposes.

In chapter four the author outlines four areas of curriculum development: focusing the course, determining the course content, developing the materials and evaluating courses and materials. In the first section, wide-and narrow-angled courses are presented as two ends of a continuum. The first is described as a course designed for a more general group of learners and the latter as a course for a very specific group of learners (e.g. Business English vs. English for Financial Auditors at Co). In the second section, a distinction is drawn between real and carrier content; the first denotes pedagogical aims such as the features of the language to be mastered while the latter denotes the means of delivering the real content such as the use of texts or activities (Dudley-Evans and St John: 1998; Belcher: 2006). The third section mentions the place and importance of using authentic texts and tasks that are written for purposes other than teaching and learning. In the final section is discussed the place of course revision based on teachers' and learners' evaluation of its effectiveness.

The second part of the book includes 4 chapters, each presenting a case study of a different ESP course. Each case study chapter follows the same organization: they

first describe the context in which the course emerged and then go to focus on the decisions taken by the course developers with regard to the three areas of ESP course design namely, needs analysis, investigating specialist discourse and shaping the curriculum.

Chapter 5 relates to English for the police in a private language school. The chapter describes how the course was set in order to address officers' individual needs and the tools used in measuring its efficiency.

Chapter 6 offers an insight of a course constructed around the needs of an oversea-trained doctors' group that had difficulties in conducting medical consultations. After careful examination of the needs some criteria were listed including establishing rapport, understanding the patients' perspectives and offering options. The techniques used for gathering information and detecting key features of the discourse were: observations of the role-plays, observation of authentic medical consultations and filmed materials.

Chapter 7 examines the development of a course in the area of English for Visual Art Studies. The reason for developing the course was the obvious difficulty that those students had to enter the bachelor's degree program. The result of needs analysis revealed the lack of connection between teaching academic writing and disciplinary content. Consequently, students' prior textual experiences and subject knowledge and exploring genres to foster students' understanding of socio-historic practices and beliefs were two major principles which were incorporated into the design of the course.

Chapter 8 describes the context of English for Thesis Writing course development. Its purpose was derived from a problem noticed by the postgraduate center of a university related to formulating the literature chapter (or literature review, usually the longest chapter in a thesis). In an effort to understand needs, the teacher drew on a number of sources due to the diversity of members. In the development of the workshop, discussions with the colleagues and student, research literature and designers' own experiences helped to improve the course sessions.

Chapter 9 concludes the book with an invitation to reflection on the three main elements that shape an ESP course: needs analysis, investigating specialist knowledge and determining the curriculum. The chapter considers

what can be learned from the four case studies in the three key areas and identifies trends in the field.

The author's purpose is to enable teachers and prospective teachers to design and build up an efficient ESP course by providing relevant knowledge on this domain and by developing practical skills. In her endeavor Helen Basturkmen uses a step-to-step approach in guiding the reader through the necessary theoretical background up to practice provided by a number of relevant case studies. It can be concluded that the author's initial aim is achieved, and her book *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes* is a valuable volume for any teacher or course designer who wishes to work in the ESP field.

Reviewed by
Lecturer Ph.D. Bianca Bretan
bianca.bretan@ubbcluj.ro