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TEACHING READING AND WRITING COMPONENTS IN ESP

The article deals with the study of the main elements that constitute the reading and writing skills and the various approaches to the teaching of reading and writing.

Key words: reading, writing, skill, product approach, process approach, social-constructionist approach.

The article will be started by looking at definitions of ESP found in the literature. Hutchinson and Waters [1] see ESP as an *approach* rather than a *product*, by which they mean that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material and methodology. Streven's [2] definition of ESP makes a distinction between four *absolute characteristics* and two *variable characteristics*. Robinsons [3] accepts the primacy of needs analysis in defining ESP. Her definition is based on two key defining criteria and a number of characteristics that are generally found to be true of ESP. Her key criteria are that ESP is "normally goal-directed", and that ESP courses develop from a needs analysis, which "aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English" [3, p.3]. We tend to accept the definition of Dudley-Evans and St. John [4]. They believe that a definition of ESP should reflect the fact that much ESP teaching, especially where it is specifically linked to a particular profession or discipline, makes use of a methodology that differs from that used in General Purpose English teaching. By methodology they refer to the nature of the interaction between the ESP teacher and the learners. In more general ESP classes the interaction may be similar to that in a General Purpose English class: in the more specific ESP classes, however, the teacher sometimes becomes more like a language consultant, enjoying equal status with the learners who have their own expertise in the subject matter.

One of the most important contributions to the approach to reading in ESP was the shift from *Text As a Linguistic Object* (TALO) to *Text As a Vehicle of Information* (TAVI) [5]. Johns and Davies encapsulated the key principles that, for ESP learners, extracting information accurately and quickly is more significant than language details; that understanding the macrostructure comes before language study; and that application of the information in the text is of paramount importance. The reader first processes the language and then links the ideas to what is already known.

The reading component of an ESP course requires a balance between skills and language development. According to Alderson [6, p. 98] some of the key skills to be learnt or transferred into the new language are:

- selecting what is relevant for the current purpose;
- using all the features of the text such as headings, layout, typeface;
- skimming for content and meaning;
- scanning for specifics;
- identifying organizational patterns;
- understanding relations within a sentence and between sentences;
- using cohesive and discourse markers;
- predicting, inferring and guessing;
- identifying main ideas, supporting ideas and examples;

- transferring or using the information while or after reading;

Most of these skills are composed of several processes. Dudley-Evans and St. John [4, p.98] believe that it has been a misconception in some interpretations of ESP that skimming and scanning are **the** key skills. Skimming and scanning are useful first stages for determining whether to read a document or which parts to read carefully. Once a document has been identified as relevant, then ESP readers need to read carefully, extract meaning and consider the author's attitude. Author's attitude is particularly important; it is another misconception that scientific discourse is attitude free.

Where the balance between skills and language development lies in a reading course depends on the *present situation analysis* of the learners. The reading material will:
(1) be used for a given purpose – preferably some application or transfer of information;
(2) be designed to encourage the use (or teaching) of good skills;
(3) have follow-up language work that concentrates on what is transferable.

First of all, there must be a suitable text to process.

Traditionally, texts have mainly been chosen by institutions and teachers; by institutions through the textbooks available on the market; by teachers through the textbooks in their resource centre and any supplementary material they provide. However, learners and subject specialists also have an important role to play in selecting texts for reading. The texts they supply can become part of a regular course or be used just once.

Learners may bring texts that they need to understand or texts they think would be interesting and valuable. The advantage here is that learners "own" the texts and are involved and committed to them. These texts may be allotted class time or self-study time according to whether they represent group or individual needs and interests.

The *criteria* used for selecting texts will relate to key features of both carrier and real content. The conceptual level of the carrier content must be neither trivial nor distractingly high and there must be real content and interest to it. However it is insufficient to satisfy carrier content criteria; real purpose is with real content and the chosen texts must clearly exemplify this. Key criteria for selecting each text can be summarized in the following way:

1) *carrier content* – conceptual level, novelty, value, interest;
2) *real content* – significance, relation to objectives, exploitability, clarity, accessibility.

In addition to the criteria that each individual text should meet, there are other *factors* to consider across a whole reading component [7]: a range of sources, the full range of topic types, full range of purposes, non-verbal information, dating, varied text length.

Once good texts have been selected, then activities can be written. These will relate to the overall purpose of reading the text and so the process begins from using the information gathered. Although this may be the final step in the process of reading a text, it is the one from which the design of activities begins. Knowing what students would really do with a text, and why, is necessary for setting the task that will guide the reading process and determine all the other activities.

The first stage for the ESP teacher is to know what kind of tasks and processing would be associated with particular texts or information. Can general principles be deduced, data analyzed, situations appraised or problems solved? How would the expert set about understanding the text? What information would be extracted and in what format?

With a short document, highlighting the relevant information on the actual text may be an appropriate strategy. With longer or more complex documents extracting the information and reorganizing it and fitting it in with existing knowledge is necessary. Visual representations can

such as maps, plans, pictures and different kinds of graphs. Which type is appropriate depends on the type of information.

Having determined the overall task, the individual activities are designed to help the learner to process the language and relate the new information to existing schemata. These activities are not presented randomly but sequenced. A learner may decide just to do the main task, in their own way. If the learner carries out the other activities these should be building on each other so that at the end the main task has either been completed or is now easy to complete.

Moving to the writing component we should stress that knowledge of genre is a key element in all communication and especially significant in writing academic or professional texts. Knowledge of genre involves an understanding of the expectations of the discourse community that reads the text and of the conventions that have developed over time about the structure, the language and the rhetoric of the genre. It also involves an awareness of the fact that genres evolve with time and change in accordance with changes in the communities that use them.

Developing writing skills also involves other skills, notably the skills of planning, drafting and revising so that the end product is appropriate both to the purpose of the writing and the intended readership.

Successful writers are those who are able to persuade readers of the validity of their arguments by using or adapting the conventions of the genre they are using while showing an awareness of the needs of the readership.

The term "product approach" has generally been used to refer to concentration on the features of the actual text – the end-product – that writers have to produce. The product approach to writing usually involves the presentation of a model text, which is analyzed and then forms the basis of a task that leads to the writing of an exactly similar or a parallel text. Robinson [3, p. 9] summarizes the method in the following way:

Model Text – Comprehension/Analysis/Manipulation – New Input – Parallel Text

The use of a product approach often led to simplistic copying of the model text by merely changing certain words from the original text to produce a new text. This was a mechanical task which involved no real thought about the purpose of the writing, the readership or the expectations of the discourse.

The use of models for text analysis and as a basis for thinking about the purposes and readership of a text can have an important role to play in teaching writing. This is especially true where the teaching of writing is integrated with the teaching of reading.

The process approach began as a reaction to the model-based approach which focused only on the end product. The process approach has emphasized the idea of writing as problem-solving, with a focus on thinking and process. The *thinking stage* involves identifying the rhetorical problem, planning a solution or series of solutions to the problem and finally reaching an appropriate conclusion. The process stage involves translating the plan into paragraphs and sentences, reviewing the first draft and then revising the text to produce a number of subsequent drafts. The first stage in the process approach is the thinking stage, which follows the sequence below.

Generate Ideas – Select Ideas – Group the Ideas – Order the Ideas

Robinson [3, p.104] characterizes the subsequent writing stages in the following way:

Writing Task – Draft 1 – Feedback – Revision – Input – Draft 2 – Feedback – Revision – Draft 3.

We should mention that the process approach takes account of individual writers and readers. It does not take into account the broader context of the writing process. Writing is a

express ideas. We favor the approach to the teaching of writing in which writers are shown how to take on board the expectations and norms of the community to which they belong or which they wish to join and how these expectations shape the established practices of writing within a given community. These communities are seen as discourse communities and successful writing within a discourse community involves having an awareness of the community's values and expectations of text and an ability to resolve the tension between writer's creative needs and the norms for writing generated by the consensus within the community.

The approach based on these principles is generally referred to as the *social-constructionist approach* to the teaching of writing and is closely associated with the development of genre analysis. Work on various genres (academic article, business letters, and reports) show how the establishment of a number of moves can capture the regularities of writer's communicative purposes in certain genres. The social-constructionist approach does much more than teach these moves; it encourages writers to consider their role as members of a discourse community and what this implies in terms of the style and stance that they should adopt.

Writing *style* goes beyond *correctness*. Although a document that contains many grammatical, mechanical or usage errors could hardly be considered effective, a document that contains no such errors might still be ineffective because it lacks style. Style involves choosing the right words, writing effective sentences, developing logical paragraphs, and setting an appropriate overall tone.

Scot Ober [8, p. 168] suggests the following 16 principles that will help students communicate their ideas clearly and effectively:

1. *Write clearly.* Be accurate and complete; use familiar words; avoid dangling expressions and unnecessary jargon.
2. *Prefer short, simple words.* They are less likely to be misused by the writer and more likely to be understood by the reader.
3. *Write with vigor.* Use specific, concrete language; avoid clichés, slang, and buzz words.
4. *Write concisely.* Avoid redundancy, wordy expressions, and hidden subjects and verbs.
5. *Prefer positive language.* Stress what you can do or what is true rather than what you cannot do or what is not true.
6. *Use a variety of sentence types.* Use simple sentences for emphasis and variety, compound sentences for coordinate relationships, and complex sentences for subordinate relationships. Most sentences should range from 16 to 22 words.
7. *Use active and passive voice appropriately.* Use active voice in general and to emphasize the doer of the action; use passive voice to emphasize the receiver.
8. *Keep paragraphs unified and coherent.* Develop a single idea consistently and logically; use transitional words, pronouns, and repetition.
9. *Use parallel structure.* Match adjectives with adjectives, nouns with nouns, infinitives with infinitives, and so on.
10. *Control paragraph length.* Use a variety of lengths, although most paragraphs should range from 60 to 80 words.
11. *Write confidently.* Avoid sounding self-conscious (by overusing such phrases as "I think" and "I hope"), but also avoid sound arrogant or presumptuous.
12. *Use a courteous and sincere tone.* Avoid platitudes, exaggeration, obvious flattery, and expressions of surprise or disbelief.

14. *Use nondiscriminatory language.* When communicating, avoid bias about gender, race, ethnic background, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disabilities.

15. *Stress the "you" attitude.* Emphasize what the receiver wants to know and how the receiver will be affected by the message; stress reader benefits.

16. *Design your documents for readability.* Write at an appropriate level of difficulty so that your readers can understand the passage and design your documents so that they are attractive and easy to comprehend.

These principles provide a solid foundation for the higher-order writing skills. At first, they may find it somewhat difficult and time-consuming to constantly assess their writing according to these criteria. Their importance, however, merits the effort. Soon students will find that they are applying these principles automatically as they compose and revise messages. We would like to pay special attention to some of these principles.

Individual words are our basic units of writing, the bricks with which we build meaningful messages. All writers have access to the same words. The care with which we select and combine words can make the difference between a message that achieves its objective and one that does not.

The basic guideline for writing, the one that must be present for the other principles to have meaning, is to write clearly – to write messages the reader can understand, depend on, and act on. You can achieve clarity by making your message accurate and complete, by using familiar words, and by avoiding dangling expressions and unnecessary jargon.

Accuracy can take many forms. The most basic is the truthful presentation of facts and figures. The accuracy of a message also depends on what is said, how it is said, and what is left unsaid. Competent writers assess the ethical dimensions of their writing and use integrity, fairness, and good judgment to make sure their communication is ethical.

Closely related to accuracy is completeness. A message is complete when it contains all the information the reader needs – no more and no less – to react appropriately. As a start, students should answer the five Ws: tell the reader *who, what, when, where,* and *why.* Moreover, any message must be understood before someone can act on it. So a writer must use words that are both familiar to him/her and familiar to readers.

A dangling expression is any part of a sentence that doesn't logically fit in with the rest of the sentence. Its relationship with the other parts of the sentence is unclear; it dangles. The two most common types of dangling expressions are misplaced modifiers and unclear antecedents. To correct dangling expressions, (1) make the subject of the sentence the doer of the action expressed in the introductory clause; (2) move the expression closer to the word that it modifies; (3) make sure that the specific word to which a pronoun refers (its antecedent) is clear; or (4) otherwise revise the sentence, e.g. Robin explained the proposal to Joy, but she was not happy with it. (Who was not happy – Robin or Joy?) The revised sentence is: Robin explained the proposal to Joy, but Joy was not happy with it.

You can ask your students to revise some other dangling expressions:

– Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address while traveling to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope.
– I had been driving for about 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had an accident.
– Two cars were reported stolen by the Groveton police yesterday. (Examples are taken from [8, p.121]).

the same field. But problems arise when jargon is used to communicate with someone who does not understand it. For example, to a banker the term CD means a "certificate of deposit," but to a computer user it means a "compact disc". Even familiar words can be confusing when given a specialized meaning. Competent writers use specialized vocabulary to communicate with specialists who understand it. And they avoid using it when their readers are not specialists.

Short and simple words are more likely to be understood, less likely to be misused, and less likely to distract the reader. Literary authors often write to impress; they select words to achieve a specific reader reaction, such as amusement, excitement, anger. Business writers, on the other hand, write to express; they want to achieve comprehension. They want their readers to focus on their information, not on how to convey their information. Using short, simple words helps achieve this goal.

Here are some examples of needlessly long words with their preferred shorter substitutes shown in parentheses:

ascertain (learn)	modification (change)
endeavor (try)	recapitulate (review)
enumerate (list)	substantial (large)
indispensable (vital)	termination (end)

Students should understand that they need not strike these long words totally from their written or spoken vocabulary: any of these words, used in a clear sentence, would be acceptable. The problem is that a student may tend to fill his or her writing with very long words when simpler ones could be used. Long words should be used in moderation. Heed the following advice from Richard Lederer [9, p. 157]: "Short words are bright, like sparks that glow in the night; sharp like the blade of a knife; hot, like salt tears that scald the cheek; quick, like moths that flit from flame to flame; and terse, like the dart and sting of a bee.

If a long word says just what you want, do not fear to use it. But know that our tongue is rich in crisp, brisk, swift, short words. Make them the spine and the heart of what you speak and write. Like fast friends, they will not let you down."

Vigorous language is specific and concrete. Limp language is filled with clichés, slang, and buzz words. Vigorous writing holds your reader's interest. The second reason for writing with vigor has to do with language itself. Vigorous writing tends to lend vigor to the ideas presented. Students should avoid slang in most writing, for several reasons. First, it is informal, and much business writing, although not formal, is still businesslike and calls for standard word usage. Second, slang is short-lived. A slang phrase used today may not be in use in three years. Third, slang is identified with a specific group of people, and others in the general population may not understand the intended meaning.

Nondiscriminatory language treats everyone equally, making no unwarranted assumptions about any group of people. Using nondiscriminatory language is smart business because (a) it is the ethical thing to do and (b) we risk offending others if we do otherwise. Competent communicators make sure that their writing is free of sexist language and free of bias based on such factors as race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disability. To avoid sexism in their writing, students should follow these strategies:

1. Use neutral job titles that do not imply that a job is held by only men or only women, e.g.:

Instead of	Use
chairman	chair, chairperson
salesman	sales representative

2. Avoid words and phrases that unnecessarily imply gender.

Instead of	Use
best man for the job	best person for the job
executives and their wives	executives and their spouses
manmade	artificial, manufactured
manpower	human resources, personnel

3. Avoid demeaning or stereotypical terms.

Instead of	Use
My girl will handle it.	My assistant will handle it.
Housewives like our long hours.	Our customers like our long hours.

4. Use parallel language.

Instead of	Use
Joe, a broker, and his wife, a beautiful Brunette	Joe, a broker, and his wife, Mary, a lawyer

5. Use appropriate personal titles and salutations.

- If a woman has a professional title, use it.
- Follow a woman's preference in being addressed as Miss, Mrs., or Ms.
- If a woman's preference is unknown, use Ms.
- If you do not know the reader's gender, use a nonsexist salutation (Dear Customer, Dear Policyholder). Alternatively, use the full name in the salutation (Dear Terry Brooks).

Competent communicators strive to use language impartially so that readers can focus their attention on *what* is written without being offended by *how* it is written.

Dudley-Evans and St John [4, p. 119] believe that the writing class differs in a number of respects from other skills classes. Firstly we should recognize that learners are unlikely to want to spend the whole class actually writing. Writing is a difficult and tiring activity and usually needs time for reflection and revision, plus a peaceful environment. However, the converse is also true: learners do not want all the writing practice as out-of-class work. They want help and ideas while writing, not only afterwards. A further distinction is that the teacher will have certain knowledge about the conventions of writing in business or academia that learners expect to be taught. So the teacher of writing needs to seek a balance between talking about writing and setting up tasks where students actually write, singly, or in pairs or groups, while in class.

Making a **conclusion** it is important to mention that there are strong reasons for integrating the teaching of all the skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing), or at least two or three related skills. Using one skill generally involves at least one or more of the other skills. Another reason is that skills are generally learnt more effectively when taught with other skills in an integrated manner.

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