

# Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

**Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John. 1998**

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English for Specific Purposes is a new area of study for many scholars, but the work of both Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John is well-known all over the world, especially among those of us working in English for Business Purposes. It is a pleasure to say, at last, that this long-awaited book is already available worldwide. It does not seem necessary to point out the quality of this book, which is simply what we have been expecting from these two widely-respected authors.

Dudley-Evans and St John state that the general aim of *Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multi-Disciplinary Approach* is to pull together the theory and practice of English for Specific Purposes, using their experience as lecturers and practitioners in this subject (p.viii). Additionally, they assume that their experience in both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) will help them to survey these extremely fascinating areas of study, trying to design an up-to-date, introductory overview. The authors have also made a special effort to include activities, extracts from ESP textbooks and academic texts, and some recommended bibliography on each of the units of this book.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of concepts and issues that will recur in subsequent chapters, introducing a general definition of ESP, a basic study on different classifications of ESP, and an analysis of the figure of the ESP practitioner under different perspectives (teacher, researcher, evaluator, course designer, and collaborator). This general introduction will help the reader to understand ESP as a multi-disciplinary activity.

Chapter 2 retraces the recent history of English for Specific Purposes and explores the basis of today's thinking. Since its origin in the 1960s, ESP has interacted closely with Applied Linguistics and ELT, and Dudley-Evans and St John has paid attention to this fact,

analysing in detail that relationship. Additionally, it is highly fascinating their study on the trends in English for Occupational Purposes. It is important to point out, as the authors confirm (p. 32), that "EST was the dominant movement for many years, but ESP today is a much broader activity in which English for Business Purposes (EBP) has become increasingly important." Due to this, the next two chapters focus on EAP and EBP.

In my opinion, the core of the book begins with Chapter 3, which discusses the four different types of orientations observed within English for Academic Purposes. It seems important to point out, as it has been previously commented by Blue (1988), that there is an important difference between English for General Academic Purposes and English for Specific Academic Purposes. Additionally, the authors accurately point out that there are different authors mixing definitions, assuming that, in certain cases, there is not a very clear distinguishing border between EAP and EOP.

Chapter 4 discusses one of the most important fields of study within ESP, namely English for Business Purposes. As the authors point out, the professional demands placed on Business English teachers may be higher than on those in other fields, as there is a clear need in order to learn the language. This is, in my opinion, the most interesting chapter of this book, as the authors analyse a number of key issues for Business English, such as the concepts of discourse community, business genres, learners' expectations and strategies, and different cross-cultural features in order to imply a communicative process. It is important to point out that the book also includes an analysis about the importance of the needs analysis in Business English (something that will be studied in further detail in chapter 7), as well as a study on the role of the teacher in these specific settings.

In the following chapter, the authors examine the different language issues in ESP, paying special attention to grammar (verbs and tenses, modality, use of articles, and connectors), vocabulary (technical, semi-technical and general), and genre analysis. In my opinion, and even understanding that many researchers have already worked on these different aspects, I would have loved to see more information and examples in this chapter.

Chapter 6 examines the different skills used in both EAP and EOP. Dudley-Evans and St John, divide the skills in five different units: reading, listening to monologue, listening and speaking, speaking, and writing. After each of these skills, they discuss the various approaches that can be followed in order to teach our students these skills. This chapter is especially interesting, as it gives us a number of clues on how to improve the overall quality of our classes.

The importance of the need analysis and the evaluation are the main topics of chapter 7. The authors define both concepts, stressing their importance in order to design our courses and, what is more important, offering an example on a pre-course information questionnaire. Nevertheless, I consider that this chapter could have been implemented with more information about different evaluation systems, which are barely mentioned. The use of examples could have improved the accessibility of this part of the book.

Chapter 8 reviews and evaluates course design. The authors stress those steps and criteria that should take part in an integrated approach to course designing. They pay attention to the different parameters to be followed (intensive or extensive courses, assessed or non-assessed, role of the teacher, broad or narrow focus, pre-experience or parallel with experience, common-core or specific material, type of students in the classroom), trying to define what can be better in every situation. After a very thorough study on the use of case studies in the classroom, the writers offer a general overview on how to design the course. This part of the book is highly motivating for those lecturers and practitioners who are currently asked to start teaching new groups, as they may be aware of all those specific features that every teaching situation may have.

In Chapter 9, the authors deal with the purpose and role of the materials to be used in the ESP classroom. Although it may seem interesting, I must say that, in my modest opinion, this is the weakest part of the book, as the authors omit some relevant information on the use of new technologies as classroom material. In fact, Dudley-Evans and St John only devote a mere paragraph to this purpose, whereas it seems that we cannot avoid observing the impact that Internet has had in recent years in order to transmit materials all over the world (Alejo et al., 1997). Fortunately, they also devote some information on the subject in the following chapter, though I found it slightly misleading, and I would have preferred to find it in this part of the book.

The following chapter deals with aspects such as class size, and all those things that can be carried out beyond the classroom. It is funny to observe, once again (Coleman, 1997; Palmer, 1999), that the concept large class is a very tricky one, as many people would consider large classes in a different way, depending on the culture they come from. As Dudley-Evans and St John (p. 197) point out, a large class "cannot, therefore, be define numerically. It is probably best thought of as a size that requires a conscious and substantial alteration to approach."

Finally, Chapter 11 deals with the need of having continuous assessment and testing in the ESP classroom. The authors also pay attention to the different examinations developed in the United Kingdom, offering the most striking

similarities and differences among these. In my opinion, I think that it is especially interesting to observe the type of ESP test questions that the authors recommend. Guidance for tasks follows.

As a conclusion, let me point out that *Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multi-Disciplinary Approach* is a useful and interesting addition to the bookshelves of practising and future ESP professionals, as it pays detailed attention to most relevant aspects for any English language practitioner. This is a book that any ESP lecturer should have.

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