

"ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES"

Edited by Susan Holden
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"English for Specific Purposes" is the first special issue of "Modern English Teacher" which is "a magazine of practical ideas for classroom teaching... and comes out four times during the academic year".

This special issue consists of 27 articles by a wide range of well-known people working in ESP. The articles are followed by profiles of each of the authors and then by an appendix entitled "Work in Progress". This consists of three short presentations of materials currently being used at university level in both science and art faculties in different parts of the world. And finally, there is a "Selected Bibliography" of some of the ESP material which has been available since Autumn 1977.

As pointed out in the preface of the book, some of the articles, obviously, overlap and some contradict each other. But what is important is that they all relate, in some way, practical work being done in different places for different reasons. The book thus contains a wealth of suggestions offered by teachers looking for solutions, or at least partial solutions, to situations many of us will be familiar with.

The articles range over needs analysis, course design and testing as well as discussions of what study skills are required by which students, the desirability of "authentic" material over "contrived" material, etc.

The book starts off with a description of current developments in the teaching of English as a foreign language, in which David Wilkins argues that there is no one-to-one relationship between forms of language and meaning and that we could start by looking at meanings first and forms second, which would obviously give a very different orientation to language teaching. However, he maintains that, although language teaching has, to a certain extent, been functionalized, there hasn't been a total

revolution in this approach, and he warns of the dangers of a fully notional approach. He stresses that he is not suggesting that the learner can do without the grammar of a language, "that there is no way one can 'know' a language without knowing its grammatical basis".

Robert O'Neil in his article reinforces this argument by trying to strike a balance between the needs of communication and the problems of learning the system behind the language. He argues for some kind of paradigmatic, measured approach, arrived at through experience with different groups and he also suggests "that it cannot be and never will be our job to cater to the needs of each individual learner inside the classroom itself". This viewpoint is later contrasted by that of Gareth Hughes and Margaret Knight who suggest that one-to-one courses can, in fact, be devised by experienced teachers, since they maintain that ultimately ESP is English for the individual and his requirements.

Several of the articles deal with how these requirements can and should be determined. Joan and Richard Allwright place great emphasis on a specially devised needs analysis questionnaire whose purpose is two-fold. One, it tells the course designer how the prospective students perceive their own needs and two, "it... serves to suggest to the prospective student that, for once, a teacher is interested in their particular needs, and is prepared to go to some trouble to find out about them in advance".

Several other authors in the book stress that needs will be expressed in terms of what use the student has to make of English in his studies "-in lectures, textbooks, locations and retrieval of information, discussion and all types of written work..." (Alan Waters). Practical suggestions for dealing with many of these areas are found in several of the articles. For example, Keith Johnson in "Teaching Virtuous Writing" offers a range of different exercise types through which "writing virtues" (using the language appropriately, writing coherently, etc.) can be taught. Marion Geddes describes a system of self-access workcards designed to help students develop the reference skills needed to select books or texts in a library, looking up references in an index, etc.

Several of the articles deal with the problem of preparing students, who will be taking courses at British universities, to not only understand lectures but also to be able to take coherent

notes. Just how to prepare students leads us into the ever-present problem of whether or not to use "authentic" material. Keith Morrow warns against placing too much emphasis on using "authentic" material and even maintains that he had decided that "ultimately there can be no such thing as an 'authentic text' in language teaching". For, he suggests, "the language we present as 'authentic' is authentic only to the very particular situation in which it was first used. By using it in a classroom for teaching purposes, we are destroying this authenticity..." J.B. Heaton and Gill Sturtridge, however, have practical suggestions for simulating "real" situations and tell us how these can be implemented in the classroom through different phases. Alan Fortune suggests that "if we neglect to expose the students to authentic or semi-authentic reading and listening material, we run the risk of sending them to establishments of further education ill-equipped to cope with the demands made on them".

These are just a handful of the topics covered by the 27 articles in this short, concise book, which serves as an excellent introduction for anyone interested in ESP. It stresses the joys of the field and warns of the pitfalls. It can be highly recommended as an introduction to those interested in starting ESP courses, and as a "refresher" to those already deeply involved, placing in perspective some of the areas which are often overlooked.

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