



## ENGLISH FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

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### ABSTRACT

The paper is concerned with the central framework component of “English for Research Purposes” course development, namely, conceptualization of instruction content. Language of science, research discourse and performance in scientific setting have been categorized as the most adequate, basic content elements. Their further structuring and detailed description are proposed.

### INTRODUCTION

The problems of conceptualization and organization of instruction content are referred to basic issues in both native and foreign language teaching methodology. The process of conceptualizing content is the process of figuring out which aspects of language and language learning are chosen and integrated in the course. It should be noted that specialists in English language teaching have no unanimous opinion on what should be included in the instruction content. In the narrow sense the content is limited to the choice of language material (grammatical structures and vocabulary) which should be acquired by learners and the sequence of its acquisition.

In a broader sense the content includes language functions and notions, topics, communicative situations, language skills, tasks, competencies, learning strategies and culture issues. Which of the above stated categories make sense for designing “English for Research Purposes” course? The way this problem is solved at the department of foreign languages teaching of Tambov State Technical University is featured in the present paper. Recent achievements in the fields of applied linguistics, language didactics and pedagogy as well as proliferation of methods of language teaching and diversification of English language learners have provided a course designer with plenty of options to consider in deciding what will be the essence of his course [2, 4, 7 – 9].

Now the choices a course designer makes are much more context-based and so involve a number of factors such as who the learners are, their goals and expectations in learning English, the teacher’s own conception of the nature of language and language learning and teaching [3, 10]. Though some literature is available on methodology of formulating content in

designing general English courses, no work has been done on categorizing content for teaching such a specific group of learners as scientific workers at the stage of their postgraduate language education. So the aim of this paper is to describe the process of conceptualizing and organizing the content in designing an “English for Research Purposes” course. The results of this study can be useful to university English language teachers who are charged with responsibility of designing specialized courses for postgraduates and young scientists.

It seems reasonable to start with the assertion that instruction content is a constantly changing and developing category, rather than a static one. Changes in instruction content throughout history have reflected changes in approaches and methods of foreign language teaching. To describe and outline possible categories used by teachers for conceptualizing content K. Graves suggested a graphic way in the form of a syllabus grid (Fig. 1). The fact which is noteworthy is that the boundaries between the categories are permeable; they overlap conceptually and are not exclusive of each other. For example, pronunciation is an important part of speaking skills, while vocabulary is a part of notions and topics. The teacher’s challenge is to select which ones are appropriate for her/his course and how she/he will integrate them [10].

Let’s consider the grid starting from the bottom. The traditional way of specifying content which many course designers have experienced is grammar structures, phonological units and vocabulary. These aspects of content correspond to the structural view of language according to which language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning.

The communicative movement to language teaching which subscribes to the functional view of language (i.e. language as a vehicle for expressing functional meaning) resulted in adding some more categories:

- 1) language functions such as requests, apologies, description, conveying information, etc.;
- 2) notions ranging from general concepts such as time, space, quantity to specific topic-related notions, e.g. inflation, industrialization, economic growth, etc.;
- 3) communicative situations ( buying stamps at the postoffice, visiting a doctor, opening a bank account, finding accommodation).

The proficiency movement led to a four-skills-based approach to content categorizing. In such a skills-based syllabus the sub-skills or micro-skills are often highlighted. For example, reading being a macro-skill may be subdivided into micro-skills, e.g. skimming, scanning, reading for gist. Proficiency in writing implies mastering such sub-skills as structuring paragraphs, using cohesive devices, editing techniques, etc. The focus on communicative competence brought about such content categories as tasks and activities. These are activities in which learners need to use language to produce something. Tasks may be either real-world or pedagogic ones. The notion of competence thought broadly as a unity of subject, performer and development competencies brought about the category of competencies [5], which can be added to the grid. The fact that social culture is not just a fifth skill or even an aspect of communicative competence but the underlying dimension of all one knows and does resulted in adding cultural component into instruction content.

The learning of language through or in conjunction with the subject matter can be the focus of

a language course. Such courses have been called content-based. They may teach the subject matter (e.g. computer technology, economics, history) directly or use subject matter as the basis for language-learning lessons. Thus the target language can be both a means for and a by-product of learning the subject matter [1].

The advent of learner-centered approach to teaching emphasized the importance of improving learning skills. Thus the category of learning strategies, such as self-monitoring, problem identification, note taking was added to content specifications. Sometimes enabling students to participate in determining the content of their course so that what they do in class gives them the tools to cope with and change what they will encounter outside of the classroom becomes the focus of the course. To sum it up, the process of specifying instruction content is the process of making choices. Course designers have to decide which categories make sense to them for a given course.

This is equally true for English for Specific Purposes courses. According to the recent theory of specialism-oriented English language teaching at tertiary school, content should encompass two basic components – subject matter and language. The former is defined through topics (themes) and communicative situations, the latter – through text types, discourse types, skills and strategies of reception and production, language functions, grammar and vocabulary [9]. With this in mind let's proceed to formulate the content for the course under consideration.

It is an accepted practice to start specification of the content for the course with needs analysis. In our case information about needs was provided by engineering postgraduates as well as various people connected to the course, such as English language teachers, ESP researchers and practitioners, University administration, scientific advisors, University professors, ex-postgraduates, colleagues.

The results of needs analysis presented in [6] showed that instruction content for an “English for Research Purposes” course is likely to be the combination of the following three categories – language of science, research discourse and performance in scientific setting (Fig. 2). Let's consider what is meant by each of the components in more detail.

## CONCLUSION

The article has discussed the problems of conceptualizing instruction content in the English language course designed for science researchers at the level of their postgraduate language education. There are different ways of content categorizing in professionally-oriented language teaching. The article provides suggestions for one further way in which language of science, research discourse and performance in scientific setting are figured out as basic components of instruction content. They are thought as a basis for developing linguistic, discourse, strategic and sociocultural competences in research context.

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