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English for Specific Purposes: Redefining the State of the Art

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DESCRIPTION

International Journal of Language Studies is devoted to all areas of language and linguistics. Its aim is to present work of current interest in all areas of language study. No particular linguistic theories or scientific trends are favored: scientific quality and scholarly standing are the only criteria applied in the selection of papers accepted for publication. *IJLS* publishes papers of any length, if justified, as well as review articles surveying developments in the various fields of language study (including Language Teaching, Language Testing, TESOL, ESP, Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, (Critical) Discourse Analysis, Curriculum Development, Politeness Research, Classroom Research, Language Policy, and so on). Also, a considerable number of pages in each issue are devoted to critical book reviews. *IJLS* commenced publication 2006 for people involved in language and linguistic studies.

Parallel ESAP courses: What are they? Why do we need them?

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Educational institutions are today constantly under pressure to react to changes which are being brought about by various aspects of globalisation and technological advances. English has achieved a global language status in many social, educational and economic areas and this phenomenon has made it imperative that many non-English speaking countries develop English language proficiency in their own citizens. More and more students are travelling abroad to study, either through organised programmes such as Erasmus, or individually motivated. Canada and the US have seen large influxes and so too here in Europe, largely due to the Bologna Declaration of June 1999. The Bologna Process launched the European Higher Education Area and set in motion a series of reforms to make European higher education more competitive and attractive for European students and students from other continents. Well over 3 million individual participants have benefited from this scheme since its inception. Institutions publish their course descriptions which contain learning outcomes (i.e. what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do in the target language) and the workload (i.e. the time students typically need to achieve these outcomes). Each learning outcome is expressed in terms of university credits. The Bologna Process does not aim to harmonise national higher education systems but to provide tools to connect them: therefore higher education providers remain autonomous institutions. Universities based outside English-speaking countries began to offer courses taught in English in order to attract this flux of newly mobile students. This has led many universities all over the world to teach courses in English in order to attract as many of these fee-paying foreign students as possible. These student migrations are changing the nature of the student body in many ways and affecting institutions, impinging upon methodologies, course design and classroom activities.

Keywords: English for Specific Academic Purposes; Parallel ESAP Courses; Needs Analysis; Authentic Materials; Context-Sensitive Teaching

1. Introduction

English language teaching has always been teaching for specific purposes; however, since the 1990s the branch of English language teaching (ELT)

known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has grown, largely due to the reasons stated above, to become one of the most important areas of ELT today. However, despite its long history the ESP community has not been able to agree on what teaching ESP involves. For Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 53) the difference between ESP and general English courses is; "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal". Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) attempted to classify the events and actions which typify ESP into three stable, absolute characteristics and five variable characteristics. The three absolute characteristics are (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, pp. 4–5):

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners;
2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
3. ESP is centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Therefore, ESP practice and the linguistic content of ESP courses vary from one context to another (Benesch, 2001, p. X). Traditionally, specific content knowledge is assumed present in the students' existing knowledge and this provides them with the context they need to understand the English presented in the classroom. Learners are also assumed to be highly motivated. Therefore, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19) and these reasons for learning and the language skills necessary to successfully achieve the learners' goals are traditionally established by means of a needs analysis – a fundamental aspect of a traditional ESP approach – and the ESP syllabus and materials are created from this analysis.

2. The development of ESAP

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) emerged from ESP due in large part to this demand for courses taught in English at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and led to a notable increase in EAP courses, materials, methodologies and course books. Traditionally EAP practitioners assumed their role to be that of preparing students by focusing on the skills required for their future study needs. The expectation was that the EAP class would facilitate student understanding of the course content when taught in English. Critics of this approach argued that EAP was seen as a 'service course' to the official academic course and EAP was also criticised for placing less emphasis on research and theory and more on course planning and instruction (see McDonough, 1984). But as Benesch (2001, p. 34) points out, this focus on syllabus design, instruction and teaching materials over research and theory

has allowed EAP to "become increasingly responsive to the complexities of institutions, teaching, and learning in local contexts". However, for many researchers and practitioners, EAP is still a contested field and Carkin (2005) identifies two sub-divisions of EAP; English for General Academic Purposes, EGAP, sometimes referred to as a common-core approach, and English for Specific Academic Purposes, ESAP, sometimes referred to as a subject-specific approach. Put simply, EGAP involves the acquisition of general academic language, as well as study skills including strategies for reading, writing, speaking and listening effectively, which are deemed transferable across different academic disciplines. These skills are seen as a "key component of EAP" (Jordan, 1989, p. 88); however, Hyland questions whether there are any linguistic skills and features of language which are transferable across different academic disciplines and asks whether we should focus on the specific texts, skills and language forms appropriate to distinct disciplines and their particular discourse communities (Hyland, 2006, pp. 9–12). ESAP therefore is a subject-specific approach which focuses the learners on language skills specific to a particular subject of study (see Jordan, 1997, p. 5). "ESAP emphasises higher order skills, student development, and authentic text and features while working within specific epistemological traditions associated with different disciplines" (Enongene, 2013, p. 59). For Hyland this aspect of specificity is a determining factor in ESAP course design and content (Hyland, 2006, pp. 9–12).

As we have seen above, the traditional approaches to ESAP have relied on a number of pillars of pedagogical beliefs and actions. The following are the traditional pillars of an ESAP approach:

1. ESAP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners.
2. It makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves.
3. It is centred on the language appropriate to specific contexts, in terms of the appropriate grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.
4. ESP courses cater for learners who are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills or to perform particular job-related functions.
5. ESAP practice and the linguistic content of ESAP courses vary from one context to another.
6. Specific content knowledge is assumed present in the students' existing knowledge and this provides them with the context they need to understand the English presented in the classroom.

7. Learners are also assumed to be highly motivated; therefore, all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning.
8. The reasons for learning and the communicative needs of the students for their specific academic context are established by means of a situated needs analysis. The ESAP teaching approach and the syllabus and materials are then created from this needs analysis.

3. Why is a Parallel Course necessary?

This paper intends to challenge the feasibility and practicability of many of these pedagogical beliefs and practices which underpin ESAP today and argue for Parallel ESAP Courses as a realistic pedagogic alternative. The paper is based on years of experience in the Italian university system in a number of different institutions, but the author feels that this paper's proposals are applicable to universities and higher education institutions worldwide.

The fundamental pedagogical action underpinning an ESAP course is the situated needs analysis. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 19) point out, "all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning". However, in most tertiary education situations this is practically impossible to carry out. Despite the fact that many papers on ESAP relate collaborations between the discipline specialists and the ESAP practitioner in establishing students' needs, in reality this is rarely possible, no doubt, as Hyland points out, for reasons of time and opportunity rather than volition (Hyland, 2006, pp. 11–12). In most higher education institutions the language courses are separated from the academic discipline in that there is little or no collaboration between content and language specialists. In Italy, as in many countries, the academic subject is very often not taught in English and the ESAP course remains even more separated, an 'extra', non-essential part, not an integral part of the discipline.

In many non-language departments, such as Economics Faculties, foreign language teaching has undergone a downgrading in status or importance. This may well be a consequence of universities having to respond to government public spending cuts, or unilateral policy decisions at university or faculty level. This downgrading manifests itself in many ways, such as the reduction in the number of university credits allocated to foreign languages and consequently a reduction in the number of classroom contact hours. As we have stated previously, in many cases the course subjects are not taught in English and the ESAP course is a module, with an allotted number of university credits, the value of the ESAP course is therefore linked to the acquisition of university credits and the successful completion of a course of academic study. As a brief example, to complete a degree course in Economics

and Business in one Italian higher education institution students need to acquire 180 university credits, 12 of which are allotted to two foreign languages. Each university credit constitutes seven hours of classroom time, making a total of 42 hours for each language in a three-year degree course. In many cases this downgrading has resulted in the outsourcing of English language teaching. Below is a recent example from my university; this is part of the offer from the private language school (emphasis added):

> Al fine di consentire ai laureati e ai laureandi Bicocca interessati a presentare la propria candidatura per la laurea magistrale in Scienze dell'Economia un *rapido conseguimento* della certificazione richiesta, XXXXX XXXXX Group offre alla Dipartimento di Economia, Metodi Quantitativi e Strategia di Impresa i seguenti servizi (…)[1]

The downgrading of ESAP in tertiary education may also be due to what Turner calls a "short-cut mentality", where the idea that 'time is money, takes precedence over the belief that time is an intellectual investment (Turner, 2004, p. 96). This attitude seems set to prevail as universities struggle to function with increasingly limited financial resources. However, this short-cut approach radically underestimates the time it takes to really achieve proficiency in a second language and provides our practitioner with enormous challenges. There is also a widely accepted opinion that ESAP is simply a mapping of English onto already existing cognitive structures, a notion which has been rigorously challenged, notably by Robinson (1980) and Swales (1988).

Other factors which are affected by the downgrading of ESAP courses include available facilities, classroom space, timetabling and the relationship of the language course to its immediate, discipline-specific environment, all of which will impinge upon and limit the practitioner's choice of objectives, course content, methods of instruction and his/her ability to assess and accommodate learners' needs (see Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, and Hutchison & Waters, 1987).

Another important element is the students themselves. In tertiary education, the groups of learners are often large in number, are typically composed of students with differences in linguistic capabilities, general and discipline-specific knowledge, age, personal motivation, attendance levels, differences in self-perceived needs and both long-term and short-term objectives. The students are also likely to come from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds, including visiting students on international exchanges, study programmes, students from overseas benefitting from tertiary courses not available in their home countries, or second or third generation members of immigrant communities, thereby providing a learning environment which is

culturally, socially and linguistically diverse. The author agrees with Gatehouse when she says that the variations in language proficiency levels, previous education and work experience can only be accommodated for to some extent (see Gatehouse, 2001).

4. How does needs analysis work on a Parallel Course?

The fundamental principle of ESAP courses being created from the application of a situational needs analysis in such circumstances seems to the author to be highly unrealisable. So what does the ESAP practitioner do without "the cornerstone" (Dudley-Evans & St. Johns, 1998, p. 122), or "the starting point" (Jordan, 1997, p. 22) of course design? Are we in "unchartered land" (Hutchison & Waters, 1987, p. 158)? Some researchers question the motives behind institutionalised needs analyses, stating that the needs' assessments carried out and the subsequent courses offered have less to do with teaching and learning and more to do with institutional issues such as time, numbers of students, timetabling and rooms and money, obtaining the "maximum throughput of students with minimum attainment levels in the language in the shortest possible time" (Turner, 2004, p. 96). Linguists also agree that the definition of the term 'need' itself would vary depending on who was making the judgements; teachers, learners or administrators. Therefore, the cornerstone of a 'Parallel Course' is that the Parallel Course Tutor (PCT) accepts that learners' needs are "the central element of EAP course design" (Hyland, 2006, p. 73), but the responsibility for this assessment lies with the PCT. He/she makes an initial assessment of what these needs are likely to be based on his/her knowledge of the institutional context, the learners and their learning objectives, the learning environment and likely learning outcomes, limitations on course aspects such as classroom time and student numbers. He or she must also reflect on and allow for his/her own level of subject-specific content knowledge. This assessment is constantly revisited and changes as the course evolves. Classroom practices and pedagogic decisions are validated through a constant process of reflection and evaluation by the PCT (see Nunan, 1987, p. 13).

5. What about content on a Parallel Course?

Examples found in the EAP literature of collaborative projects involving the EAP practitioner and the subject specialist are mainly context-specific and not necessarily transferable to other situations. As Benesch (2001, p. 133) points out, "I do not think the results of my experiments are transferable to other settings". Therefore the PCT needs to select and combine compatible teaching procedures and materials for the local institutional context (see Hyland, 2006). In the absence of collaboration with the subject specialist the PCT is required to become familiar with the discipline's knowledge and discourses,

although as Spack (1988, p. 100) points out, "It seems that only the rare individual teacher can learn another discipline". Realistically, then, the PCT is not likely to become a specialist in the target discipline, or indeed is unlikely to be regarded as such by colleagues teaching the discipline or by the students were he or she to develop some degree of specialisation.

It is sometimes the case that "ESAP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time" (Johns, 1990, p. 91); or produce a course that is expected to match the expectations and/or needs of the institution and that this positions the ESAP practitioner in a subservient or 'anti-intellectual role' (Benesch, 2001, p. 79). But more often than not, the ESAP practitioner is free from such restrictions. On a Parallel Course the ESAP practitioner positions him/herself as an active intellectual with clear curricular goals which "extend beyond merely propping up content courses" (Benesch, 2001, p. 84). PCTs use their abilities and knowledge to "explore academic worlds: their language; their genres; their values, and their literacies, remembering at all times that these worlds are complex and evolving, conflicted and messy" (Johns, 1997, p. 154). Specialist language teaching needs to have language as its centrality, "especially in written form" (Turner, 2004, p. 95): the PCT therefore needs to research the discipline's discourses until he/she finds a source which is;

- suitable in the light of the constraints of the instructional context
- readily available for both teachers and students
- an authentic example of one of the discipline's genres, in order to provide repeated exposure to real language and its use in its specific community (see Widdowson, 1990).

The author agrees with Jones when he says that ESP course books do not really exist (see Jones, 1990) and the Parallel Course allows the tutor to choose materials which reflect and follow the discipline-specific course content, and design tasks which focus on the lexico-grammatical and textual features typically found in the subjects' discourses, in order to help students process subject-specific texts. The PCT therefore needs to research the discipline as much as is reasonable to expect – to become a 'knower' of at least some of the discipline's knowledge sources.

For a Masters Course in Tourism, for example, there is an abundance of articles on the internet which can be used to focus on the lexico-grammatical features of the subject-specific texts. In this way the Parallel Course provides exposure to the discourse features typically employed in communicating the disciplines knowledge and values, what Swales (1990, p. 215) refers to as "prototypical examples of relevant genres". Here is an example:

TOURISM TODAY

Now read the text and match the words underlined with their synonyms below.

There has been an **upmarket** trend in the tourism over the last few decades, especially in Europe, where international travel for short **breaks** is common. Tourists have high levels of <u>**disposable income**</u>, considerable leisure time, are well educated, and have sophisticated tastes. There is now a demand for better quality products, which has resulted in a **fragmenting** of the mass market. People want more specialised versions, quieter resorts, family-oriented holidays or **niche market-targeted** <u>destination hotels</u>.

The <u>World Tourism Organization</u> (UNWTO) **forecasts** that international tourism will continue to grow at the average annual rate of 4%. With the advent of <u>e-commerce</u>, tourism products have become one of the most **traded** items on the internet. The developments in technology and transport infrastructure, such as <u>jumbo jets</u>, <u>low-cost airlines</u> and more accessible <u>airports</u> have made many types of tourism more **affordable**. WHO estimates that up to 500,000 people are on planes at any time. There have also been changes in lifestyle, such as retired people who sustain **year-round** tourism. This is facilitated by <u>internet sales</u> of tourism products. Some sites have now started to offer <u>dynamic packaging</u>, in which an inclusive price is quoted for a **tailor-made package** requested by the customer upon impulse.

There have been a few **setbacks** in tourism, such as the <u>September 11 attacks</u> and <u>terrorist threats</u> to tourist destinations, such as in <u>Bali</u> and several European cities. Also, on <u>December 26, 2004</u>, a tsunami, caused by the <u>2004 Indian Ocean earthquake</u>, **hit** the <u>Asian countries</u> on the <u>Indian Ocean</u>, including the <u>Maldives</u>. Thousands of lives were lost and many tourists died. This, together with the **vast** <u>clean-up</u> operation which is still going on, has stopped or severely **hampered** tourism to the area.

Table 1

designed for a specific purpose/person		breaking into different sections
spare cash		appealing to people with a lot of money
aimed at a small specific group		financially available
holidays		struck
obstructed		problems
all year		bought and sold
enormous		predicts

Adapted from: http://serenitytravelweb.wikidot.com/

Authentic texts are an essential aspect of an ESAP course having a central role as "genre models" (Hyland, 2006, p. 97). Guariento & Morley (2001, p. 347) state that for students, extracting real information from authentic texts in a new/different language can be extremely motivating. As the PCT becomes

more familiar with the sources of the target subject texts, he/she is then able to be more selective in order to provide appropriate, interesting and challenging materials and activities. As Callahan (2005, p. 306) points out "Exposure to domain-specific language facilitates content-area understanding". It is widely agreed that the most effective means of teaching language learners with academic needs is through content-based instruction (see Grabe, 2009). So the burden of selection of texts and design of classroom activities for the Parallel Course falls upon the PCT. PCTs act unilaterally when it comes to materials choice and design: as Benesch (2001, p. 80) points out, "EAP teachers have institutional, social, and pedagogical perspectives, allowing them to make considered curricular judgements".

5.1. What about classroom activities on a Parallel Course?

Having chosen the subject-specific text and analysed it for the typically recurring lexico-grammatical and textual discourse features employed in the genre, the PCT needs to design exercises and tasks on and around the text in order to highlight and provide practice in these linguistic features and how they are employed to communicate the discipline's knowledge, ideas and values. The "teaching of rhetoric cannot be divorced from the teaching of content" (Spack, 1988, p. 103) and the chosen texts not only allow the PCT to help students become familiar with the subgenre's typically recurring discourse features, but they also help to develop and reinforce content knowledge. The challenging nature of the texts is essential, as "the focus on language is more committed when the content is intellectually stimulating" (Turner, 2004, p. 105). The discipline-specific texts provide an opportunity for the PCT and students to participate in a rich and challenging dialogue. In this way, instead of transferring knowledge statically, as a fixed possession of the teacher, PCT and students are involved in "the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study" (Shor & Friere, 1987, p. 10). By presenting students with intellectually challenging language/content work PCTs are providing a relevant and intellectually stimulating content background on which the lexico-grammatical and textual features of the discipline's genres can be foregrounded. These paper-based materials will provide the bulk of the language input to the course, and because the course outcomes depend significantly on these materials they need to relate as closely as possible to the perceived needs of the learners and the subject-specific course objectives. However, as Nuttall (2005, p. 177) warns, "students often complain about the boredom with an unrelieved diet of texts in a single field (e.g., physics) even when it is their professional interest". Therefore, it will perhaps be necessary to source more than one subgenre of the discipline's discourses. Below is an example of material taken from an undergraduate Parallel Course in English for Economics (Anderson, 2014, p. 135).

AN INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMICS[2]

It is difficult to precisely define economics, but essentially, economics is the study of the ways in which people provide for their material well-being.

MICRO AND MACROECONOMICS

Economics can be divided into microeconomics and macroeconomics.

Microeconomics is the study of individual markets. A market is an arrangement which links buyers and sellers; for instance, an economist might study the market for mobile phones. This involves looking at the decisions and behaviour of people who buy mobile phones, the firms that sell them and any other factors which influence the price and availability of this product. Macroeconomics is the study of the whole economy; it includes looking at unemployment, international trade and government policy.

WANTS AND NEEDS

Economics, both macro and micro, is about the satisfaction of people's material wants, because it is people's wants rather than their needs which provide the motive for economic activity. We go to work in order to obtain an income which will buy us the things we want rather than the things we need. We can't quantify the need for any particular quantity of a commodity because this would imply that a certain level of consumption is correct for an individual and economists usually avoid this kind of value judgement.

SCARCITY

Resources are scarce when they are not enough to satisfy people's wants. Scarcity relates to how far people are able to satisfy their wants. These wants and people's ability to produce the goods and services to satisfy those wants, are always changing. Most countries' productive capacity is increasing but so is the appetite of their citizens for material goods and services. So scarcity is a feature of all societies from the poorest to the richest.

Read the sentences and decide if they are true or false according to the text.

1   It is easy to explain what we mean by economics.

2   If we are studying the impact of the recession on car sales in Italy, then we are involved with microeconomics.

3   Economics is about providing the basic human needs of people.

4   It is not possible to say how much or many of a product or service a consumer needs.

5   Scarcity relates to whether services or products are available to satisfy what consumers want.

5.2. Why use authentic texts on a Parallel Course?

The assumption that language skills can be gained easily and quickly has in part been created and maintained by years of commercial activity aimed at selling language courses, methods, materials and exams. It is perhaps pertinent that today the fastest growing area for commercial language proficiency tests is in ESP. There is therefore a growing demand for easily measurable and easily processed language tests. In the tertiary system, these tests are often mapped onto existing university criteria as prerequisites for entry to university courses (as we saw above), or as equivalents to university credits in a second language, thereby substituting or competing with internal university tests and exams which were previously part of the professional domain of the institution and the ESAP practitioner. ESAP courses are typified by having a focus on subject-specific language skills (Hyland, 2006, pp. 9–12). However, external exams, with the commercial need to be as widely applicable as possible, *underspecify* the complexity of language skills and the variety and range of vocabulary typically present in subject-specific texts and fail to give students a sense of what Johns calls a "socio-literate perspective", a perspective that emphasises the specific social purposes of texts, writer and reader roles, and contexts (Johns, 1997, p. 14). As Turner (2004, p. 97) points out, "this failure to see that language grows with content leads to the insidious perception that measured language proficiency is all there is to the role of language on a degree course" and can distort students' perceptions of what is entailed in really knowing a language and the discourses of a specific academic discipline. This "essentialist view of language in which language is understood to be a decontextualised skill that can be taught in isolation from the production of meaning" (Zamel, 1998, p. 253) is one reason why ESAP often finds itself as a poor partner to the target subject course and is a strengthening of the argument for a need for a Parallel Course with its emphasis on how language is used to communicate the ideas and values of a specific academic discipline.

6. What is the teacher's role on a Parallel Course?

We have stated above that the PCT is informed by an understanding of the learning/teaching context and, as Widdowson (1990) points out, in adopting a specific approach the practitioner will also be assigning him/herself a role. The PCT therefore needs to reappraise his/her role in the creation of realistic course aims and objectives. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, pp. 4–5) identify five key roles for the ESP practitioner; teacher, evaluator, collaborator, researcher and course designer and materials provider. An important role for a teacher in any teaching/learning situation is to address motivation, encouraging learners to participate in the classroom activities which are deemed useful for successful learning. Often teachers rely on their

interpersonal skills and their relationship with the group in order to do this. This role is not often available due to limiting factors such as the amount of classroom time allocated, frequency of contact, the physical teaching environment and the large number of students. On a Parallel Course pedagogical decisions are made transparent; students are engaged in a 'visible pedagogy', where the pedagogic rationale for texts and classroom activities is made clear to them and tasks are seen to link clearly to the overarching aim of developing the necessary lexis and reading skills to process discipline-specific texts. The theoretical underpinning of this aspect of a Parallel Course is Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the interactive collaboration between teacher and student with the teacher taking the authoritative role to "scaffold" or support learners as they move towards their potential level of performance.

Ellis (1987, p. 212) suggests that one of the three major roles for a teacher is that of 'onlooker', where the teacher withdraws from the scene in favour of student-student activity, or student-task activity in a role which is available and which serves as an opportunity for the PCT to monitor students as they interact with the text and activities and as they interact with one another. In this way it is possible to receive feedback on course materials and activities and this allows the PCT to reflect on his/her practices enabling him/her to better plan the progress of the Parallel Course. PCTs need the opportunity 'looking on' provides in order to reflect on students' language learning preferences and the different ways learners acquire and retain information. The role of onlooker/monitor will also allow for the possibility of tutor intervention in order to provide individual feedback and guidance. This, we believe, is part of what Boomer (1992:6) calls the "demystification of learning", included in which is the encouragement of students to ask questions and to speak up when they do not understand. Boomer goes on to say that this is a way of making students feel that they are not novices in the linguistic practices of the academic discourses, but "active members" (ibid., p. 6).

7. When creating a Parallel Course what considerations are necessary with regards to the students?

In the absence of a detailed needs analysis, and with a layperson's grounding in the content of the target-discipline and often without prior knowledge of what has been covered on the target-discipline course, or perhaps what is involved in detail in that course programme, the PCT is often in the dark about what students do or need to know. As we have said, the Parallel Course is based on texts taken from one of the discipline's discourse sources and these materials need to relate as closely as possible to the perceived needs of the learners and the course objectives. As making sense of a text is an act of

interpretation which "depends as much on what we as readers bring to a text as what the author puts into it" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 27), the Parallel Course needs to provide opportunities for students to develop and extend areas of background knowledge; their linguistic schemata (their prior linguistic knowledge), formal schemata (their prior knowledge of different text genres and their typical lexico-grammatical and textual discourse features) and content schemata (their subject-specific knowledge). Content schemata allow readers to have a context from which they can process and understand a text (Carrell, 2006). PCTs cannot "assume students' previous learning experiences will provide the appropriate schemata and skills to meet course demands" (Hyland, 2006, p. 17). In fact, we agree that "few assumptions can be made about students' scientific knowledge or their language proficiency" (Starfield, 1990, p. 87). Therefore, students' lack of appropriate content schemata can be a major factor in their inability to process subject-specific texts in English and will affect the quality of students' involvement in classroom tasks (see Allison & Tauroza, 1995). The PCT needs therefore to make initial assumptions about how much of the discourse's linguistic, formal and content schemata are present in the learners' background knowledge. These assumptions are, as we have said, reflected on and revised throughout the progress of the Parallel Course. Materials and activities are therefore designed to activate and develop these schemata. For example, discipline-specific texts are typified by a high density of technical lexis (see Swales, 1990, pp. 24–26), therefore a substantial part of course and materials' design will focus on learning and developing subject-specific lexis. Recent studies suggest that focused vocabulary instruction can have a positive effect on vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension of language students in academic settings (Grabe, 2009). This is an example of an exercise which I designed to introduce and develop lexis on a legal English course.

> Read the introductory text and then use the words in bold to complete the sentences that follow.
>
> **<u>Guilty or not guilty</u>**
>
> When defendants are accused of or charged with a crime and are asked to **plead guilty** or **not guilty:** to say if they committed the offences they are charged with or not. Guilty and not guilty are **pleas. Plea bargaining** is a system where prosecutors agree to bring less serious charges, or a reduction in the sentence, in return for a **guilty plea.** Defendants can **be released on bail**, which means that a sum of money is guaranteed that they will be present at a future trial.
>
> 1.   *Judge Staple has argued for the introduction of a formal system of ……………………… on the American model, allowing potential defendants to co-operate with the prosecuting authorities.*

   2.   The counsel for the defence entered a ………………………. and obtained a reduction in the sentence.

   3.   The three journalists pleaded ………………………. and are being released ………………………. of £10,000.

   4.   She ………………………. guilty to manslaughter, but not guilty to the ………………………. of murder.

   5.   He ………………………. murder and remanded in custody to await his trial.

1. **Witnesses and their testimony**

   The prosecution and defence lawyers **call witnesses.** They require people who know about the alleged crime to **give evidence / testimony** or to **testify:** to say what they know in court. Defendants and witnesses **appear in court** during a trial.

   1.   Only 16 cases of looting have reached court, despite the fact that there have been many witnesses prepared to ……………………….

   2.   *Mr Enrile was due to ………………………. today along with two other defendants on charges connected with last month's coup attempt.*

   3.   *Mr Spence did not ………………………. any ………………………. as he said the prosecution had failed to prove its case.*

8. Conclusion

Hyland (2006, p. 89) points out that "principled teaching is not about pre-packaged methodological products". The PCT needs to reclaim his/her role in setting objectives and designing course content and be wary and sceptical of 'short cut' pre-packaged methods and activities. As we have seen, the constraints of the local context on the course lead to a pragmatic orientation to ESAP teaching (see Halliday, 1994) and curricular decisions are "underpinned by a sensitivity to the contexts of teaching" (Hyland, 2006, p. 30). There is therefore a great need for pragmatism on the part of the PCT and a keen awareness of the limits the local context set upon the effective teaching and learning processes. We agree with Benesch (2001, p. 130) when she points out that "developing an ethics of EAP requires reckoning with how the field positions itself vis-à-vis institutions, programs, funding agencies, academic classes and students". She is not optimistic about change as she would like to see happen, citing financial restraints on especially public-funded institutions, growing class sizes, the growth in standardised language testing, and what she calls 'the speeded-up climate of the information age', all of which, she says, limit the possibility of dialogue and depth of presentation and investigation of language and content (Benesch, 2001, p. 133). The PCT must be aware that "self-criticism is a crucial element" in ESAP teaching, involving "constant questioning about the types of knowledge, theory and

practice, or praxis they operate with" (Pennycook, 1999, p. 345). We believe that a Parallel Course goes a long way to addressing some of these concerns about pedagogical beliefs and practices. The Parallel Course also reflects the original conception of ESP in that it concentrates on texts, language and activities appropriate to particular disciplines (Halliday *et al.*, 1964). A Parallel Course does not presume to teach content in the same way that the discipline specialist would do; it uses discipline-specific texts and designs classroom tasks where language is foregrounded but content remains. Parallel Courses are a place for intellectual endeavour where, as Turner points out, the language/content dichotomy is no longer seen as language being subordinate to content, but language as constitutive of content (Turner, 2004, p. 95). The emphasis is on creating an intellectually challenging and stimulating learning environment where students never lose sight of the purpose of the texts and activities presented on the Parallel Course, namely to activate and develop the linguistic skills and content knowledge successfully enough to allow them to better process subject-specific texts.

Notes:

1. In order to enable graduates and undergraduates from the University of Milan-Bicocca to submit an application for the MSc in Economic Sciences, the XXXXX XXXXX Group (the name of the company is deliberately left blank) offers a quick route to the language certification required and provides the Department of Economics, Quantitative Methods and Strategy the following services (...)

2. Adapted from 'Introductory Economics' by G. F. Stanlake & S. J. Grant.

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