

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**Volume 7, Issue 5, May 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

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### Precision in communication through English for Specific Purposes

#### Abstract

Starting from the literature of English to the developments of language in the form of ways to enhance the four skills of communication, research has been manifold and touched upon various problems which directly meet the needs of people. One such trend which is ongoing since the 1960's and accelerating its pace since the start of the 21st century is the English for specific purposes or ESP. ESP provides the need of the hour where ornamental, fancy and artistic writing have been replaced with precise, methodical and meticulous writing. The present paper deals with ESP; Its past, present and where is it likely to stand in the coming years. A special reference to the use of English in professions like engineering and management for better understanding and comprehension is also taken into account.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, personality development, grooming, ESP practitioner

## Introduction

Starting from the 1960's, English for Specific Purposes has made a prominent feature in asserting its dominance in the field of language study. It meets the need to communicate and provide job opportunities through language delivery and employment awareness. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) used the terms, the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics and focus on the learner. This indicates that there is a shift from the traditional literature or language learning for a more need based, job oriented language learning. However, the concept has never been able to make it to a real standpoint as its basis still depends on the common English learnt or the English for General Purposes (EGP).

During earlier times many scientists had published their works in their native language. However, such works were limited to a small audience. It had been observed that for scientists to have a wider acclaim, their works had to be published in English. Recent reports indicate a rise in the use of English as the primary language of education in non-English speaking countries. This is mostly due to the fact that students preparing for a more sought after career in science, technology and management programmes have to be familiar with the English language partially because certain scientific or technological terms do not exist in their native language. For these students, it is best to learn science and technology in English for an in depth knowledge and understanding.

Robinson (1989) States "ESP first arose, and has continued to develop, in response to a need: the need of non-native speakers of the language to use it for some clearly defined practical purpose. As purposes change, so must ESP." This is truly an apt statement. It is a concept which can be said to be directly related to the Indian context. According to the

website, 'fundoodata', it states that in the year 2016 there were about 4576 Multi-national companies (MNC's) in India. Therefore, it should be understandable that they would definitely provide a substantial opportunity for a white collared job which everyone seeks for as opposed to manual labour.

India is a developing country and there is a magnitude of work opportunities dealing with the English language. People have started venturing out of the so called "seeking government jobs" and have settled on the innovations and prospective of the private firms. With the uprising of the private firms, the government of India has also placed stringent rules on the firms that they may not be able to ill treat their employees. The government's regulation has provided a sense of security for its citizens and therefore many settle for private jobs.

However, it may be seen that in today's generation, to get even a pink collared job, a person also needs skills which ESP may be able to provide with a course content of language specific coupled with personality development and grooming lessons. This is where the conflict of interest amongst ESP practitioners sets in, Anthony (1998) states "Some described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified. Others, however, were more precise describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies, or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes." In our research we provide an insight into the practices which are more prominent and applicable in students pursuing an engineering and management degree.

In India, the basic criteria for admission into science, technology and management courses in institutes, colleges and universities are mathematics, science and general awareness. Students from a vernacular background are also admitted in this manner. These students have minimum exposure to the English language. The initial difficulty is observed when such students are unable to comprehend their lessons which are being taught in English.

Then another constraint which arises later is the employability factor because recruiters now demand professionals with good communication skills who can at least interact in an international domain.

## 2. Imparting ESP

A question which has been asked by many, however, is who is a qualified ESP practitioner. Many colleges of science, technology and management offer a course in English or Professional Communication wherein teachers specializing in English Language Education are preferred. The contribution of such teachers towards the subject would have a more practical approach rather than theoretical as the subjects are mostly applied. A typical syllabus of an engineering or management college would look into aspects of language that can be applied to the technical learning process. Hutchinson (1987) comments to a question on ESP and general English saying “in theory nothing, in practice a great deal” to reflect that a practical approach is much necessary than a theoretical perspective. Hence, there should be a balance between subject competence and linguistic competence.

Barun Mitra (2012) states that, “Science is knowledge arranged methodically or systemized knowledge. Its progress is marked by the emergence of the scientific method, which rests on the rational, accurate, and clear exposition of facts”. Due to this, the language that is used to express scientific facts and clear and concise data will have certain features that can best express it. These features come in a methodological way which if given a clear cut framework would provide a very good stance for the upcoming graduates.

As academicians and researchers, one has to constantly reflect upon what the students need for their successful and bright career in their respective field. There are many books and resources about ESP for the many Job- oriented careers. It is up to the ESP practitioner to decide which method best suits the present class of students. NAGY (2014) states “Researchers discovered, among the most striking characteristics of EST (English for Science

and Technology), for instance, the extensive use of Present Tense Simple, of passive constructions and of noun compounds. In what Business English was concerned, the focus was on the rules of writing business letters, rules that stated the use of a set format, formulaic expressions, a limited set of vocabulary and conjunctions.” The present study has narrowed down a few features which have been applied in the academic domain and seemed to have been a success with the undergraduate students of Science and Management.

Some features of scientific study or discourse which can be used in science and management programs include:

#### 2.1 Use of impersonal language and passive constructions:

The best example of this is the use of impersonal and passive constructions. In ESP, one also avoids the use of personal pronouns to make the language more objective.

*Example:*

*Active:* We can change a solid into a liquid by heating

*Passive:* A solid can be changed into a liquid by heating.

*Personal:* It's so obvious that people were given jobs just because they were male or female. I don't think that is an acceptable approach and is even against the law.

*Impersonal:* It appears that in a number of instances jobs were assigned on the basis of gender. Given the current anti-discrimination laws, this raises serious concerns.

#### 2.2 Use of direct language:

To avoid confusion and for better clarity the use of direct language is preferred. Direct language allows no scope for artificial or ornamented language.

*Example:*

*Ornamented Language:* It was a great day in history when Russia launched Sputnik1 into orbit and this date October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957 marked the commencement of the Space Age.

*Direct Language:* The Space age began on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957 when Russia launched Sputnik1 into orbit.

### 2.3 Use of precision techniques:

For language to be precise, statements should not be repeated and wherever necessary technical terms should be used. In order to achieve precision, the essential points should be separated from the non-essential ones.

*Example:*

*Repeated statements:* Data can become corrupt when a virus enters a system. Viruses can corrupt any type of data in a system.

### 2.4 Organizing data logically:

The composition should be well organised and logically structured. It makes the writing purposive. There has to be some form of unity in the composition wherein there should be one single idea or one theme. All other points should dwell upon this single idea and bring about unity within the paragraph. To maintain logic in the composition, points can move from specific to general or from general to specific depending on the importance of the points. It could also be from more important to less important or vice versa.

### 2.5 Achieving Clarity:

Mike Markel (1998) states that, “An important characteristic of effective technical communication is clarity”. Hence, in any form of technical writing, there has to be both clarity of thought and expression.

## 3. Present and future trend of ESP

Recent surveys and studies indicate that the number of unemployed engineers is almost above 50%. These studies attribute lack of spoken English as a major cause. According to The Times of India (Feb 7, 2014), “The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has pointed out that only a small percentage of

engineering graduates who pass out of state colleges make it big in the job market. The percentage of students who remain unemployed even after getting a B.Tech or BE degree is over 50%". A similar study conducted by Aspiring Minds in The Hindustan Times (Aug 8, 2015) showed that 51% of the engineers are not employable based on their spoken English scores. This study took into account almost 30,000 students across 500 engineering colleges in the country.

To resolve this issue, the government has focused in a big way on skill development. Skill Development Centres have been set up to impart both technical and soft skills for better employability of the youth. Likewise, in colleges and universities which have a similar centre focus is given on making the syllabus comprehensive and practical. Apart from teaching students of science and technology written technical communication there is stress on oral and presentation skills. Written technical communication assists students in writing their technical articles, reports, proposals etc. Students are encouraged to participate in Dossier activities which may include making or creating technical brochures, technical videos. They also hone their presentation skills by making poster presentations on technical topics, lab presentations etc. These activities can be conducted individually, in pairs or in groups. This depends totally on the discretion of the teacher who takes into account the comfort level of the students.

In addition, students are encouraged to use the language lab, read materials in English which are of interest to them, watch movies in English and more importantly communicate with each other in English preferably at all times. Lastly, to prepare them for the job market, teachers conduct group discussions and mock interviews as often as possible to increase their confidence.

#### 4. Scope of the Paper

Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters have developed a 'Tree of ELT' whereby ESP is broken down into EST (English for Science and Technology), EBE (English for Business and Economics) and ESS (English for Social Studies). A development of the branches is a much needed approach in the academic field. This will help students achieve what they aspire while they pursue their core subjects of science and management courses.

#### Conclusion

The paper has provided an insight on why ESP is needed in the present scenario and has provides a possible solution which the present generation of students need to be equipped with in order to achieve precision in their work field and do away with barriers which distorts a healthy communication practice. Taking the 'Tree of ELT' into consideration, one has to keep in mind certain features and requirements which are applicable to most of its branches. Relevant materials, objectives of learning, tailor made courses, needs analysis, etc. have to be taken into account prior to the commencement of a course. During the course, continuous feedback has to be provided and formative evaluation conducted wherever necessary. The goal is to turn a learner into a user of the English Language irrespective of any purpose of learning.

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