

EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF ESP LEARNING AMONG INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STUDENTS

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Summary

To meet the academic and professional needs of the contemporary language learner, repositioning ESP for Diplomacy at the centre of the English programme at the Faculty of International Relations of YSU has been a significant adjustment, and to organize efficient educational process, along with developing proper educational materials, a deeper knowledge of the learner is an essential requirement.

Based on a survey conducted among II, III and IV year students, the article discusses the students' vision of the transfer from General English to ESP, the dynamics of the evolution of their ESP language awareness combined with the advance of their self-awareness and personal growth. The cognitive transition from General English to ESP requires certain time, when students gradually come to realize the specifics of the profession they have chosen. The rigorous curriculum, academic requirements, intensive educational programmes and profession-oriented student life, contribute to the dynamic development of personal growth and approaches.

Having clear orientation of their goals, motivations, learning strategies and professional outlook, students demonstrate a firm resolve to acquire Diplomatic English in the university environment, claiming that Language Centres are best at teaching General English.

Keywords: *ESP, diplomatic English, language awareness, educational goals and motivations, Language Centre.*

Introduction. Language learning is one of the key components of education for students of International relations. And it is no coincidence, that apart from English as the first foreign language, students at the Faculty of International Relation of YSU have to choose at least one more from among ten other foreign languages, for language is not merely a string of communication, but also a window into the soul of a culture, its history and its worldview [9, page 29].

The Faculty teaches ESP – English for Specific Purposes, since it is goal oriented and focused, designed for the specific learners, according to the learners' academic and professional needs [8, page 30], which in our case is English for Diplomacy or Diplomatic English. In the panorama of English language teaching, the period of 1990 to 2020 saw ESP grow to a mature discipline of global importance [7, page 24], and many scholars and practitioners today urge to reposition ESP at the centre of an English programme, thus capitalizing the full resources of a department and its staff [1, page 145].

Given the scarcity and unavailability of teaching literature for diplomatic English, and based on the Faculty curricula with distinctly designed professional perspectives, the staff of our Department of Diplomatic Service and Communication has authored around seven textbooks and manuals for different levels, which have been implemented successfully.

However, the major aspect of education, including language learning and teaching, is the learner with his/her cognitive competence, emotional constitution and concrete, practical outlook. As Howard Gardner states: 'The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all students as if they were variants of the same individual and thus to feel justified in teaching them all the same subjects the same way' [5, 41]. The levelling school attitudes have deprived many

learners of their creative, all-embracing vision of world-perception, that resonates with A. Einstein's words 'It is nothing short of a miracle that modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry' [3, page 34].

After grueling school-leaving exams, tests, and other educational musts, being trained to think and learn via frames instilled by teachers for years, teenagers find it difficult to clearly define their life and value-system vectors. That may be one of the reasons why many freshmen still urge to continue in the same pattern.

At the university, however, without the usual 'must-do' psychological support from adults, in the 'free flight', some stumble in taking up the full responsibility for their studies. Gradually an acute, increasing self-awareness and newly assessed life perception switch in with a clear realization that making viable decisions and choices is now only the prerogative of their own. And the professors are there just to open new doors and opportunities.

It is a time of serious personality growth that includes the conventional self-analyzing objectives, such as developing self-awareness and identity, gaining expert knowledge and nurturing personal potential [10, page 1].

The quicker and more flexible the student is in the acceptance of his/her new transformational status, the more efficient further education process evolves. Students develop individual fresh approaches towards the content, the process and the efficiency of their education, they set their own new guidelines, goals and plans of action. This natural process of personal growth in due time undergoes multiple changes on the road to perfection. Knowing how students identify themselves becomes interesting and incredibly useful [4, page 6].

Thus, in this mosaic of students' cognitive development and self-awareness, we are trying to trace the trends of the dynamics of students' perceptions about learning and perfecting their command of diplomatic language as ESP, following the well-known statement that the best way to improve education is to involve those who are affected by it the most – students and teachers. A better understanding of the phenomena could lead to beneficial changes or adjustments in the teaching and materials development.

Research questions. The research questions the present study pursues are grouped into three clusters that aim to track the dynamics of students' L2/ESP awareness in the course of the three years of language learning at the university, and get glimpses of how the progression need – objective – motive – goal – action operate [2, page 101].

The first set of questions pertains to students' goals, motivations, language learning strategies, achievement criteria, progress control and feedback.

The second group focuses on students' individual perceptions and judgements regarding the tandem of the evolution of personal self-awareness and the L2 learning for ESP.

The final part of the research concentrates on the students' opinions concerning the practice of ESP learning in the university/academic environment as compared to that in Language Centres.

Methodology. From the onset it was planned that the present research is to be a small-scale study. The idea behind the methodology was to offer the II, III and IV- year students a questionnaire to fill in on the spot, without any preliminary hint or preparation.

At the Faculty the students of every year are split into seven groups of 17-20, each with a different professor. Classes are conducted simultaneously. Due to this fact the survey was organized in all the seven groups at the same time, thanks to the support and good will of my colleagues.

After the distribution of the questionnaires, a time limit of 20 minutes was set (another condition of the survey). This did not allow the students to have any common space or time for the discussion of the questionnaire with their peers. The tactics used secured individual, original and non-biased responses, which initially was the goal of the applied research method.

The completion of the questionnaire was voluntary, and the final yield of the numbers of participants was as follows: II year – 31 respondents; III year – 33 respondents; IV year – 31 respondents, a total of 95.

To get a better picture of the outcome, a reference to the students' workload of ESP should be made. Our Department takes up the L2/ESP teaching starting from the II year of the Bachelor's program. But students begin studying ESP from the very beginning of the course: they have 120 academic hours of English in the I year.

The distribution of ESP academic hours at our Department is as follows: II year – 180 h., III year – 150 h., IV year – 90 hours. This substantial number of hours allocated to the teaching of diplomatic English aims at attaining the B2-C1 level by the end of the Bachelor's programme and is incorporated into such courses as "Diplomatic Intercourse" (II yr.), "Insights into Diplomatic Protocol" (III yr.), "Diplomatic Correspondence" (III yr.) and "Translation and Interpretation" (IV yr.).

Despite the limited arsenal of research tools implemented in the study – the questionnaire and the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the acquired data, it has generated interesting findings.

Findings

The comprehension of ESP acquisition. As mentioned above, six out of the ten questions of the Questionnaire inquire into students' goals, motivations and achievement criteria in reference to foreign language learning, as well as the strategies and ways of progress control they apply.

The discussion of the outcome by topical issues renders most appropriate, as the study has revealed both common and diverse features in the dynamics of L2 awareness among students of different years.

Thus, the perception and interpretation of the *purpose* of L2/ESP learning clearly vary among II, III and IV year students.

The second year students define it in a rather generic manner, describing in common generalized wordings, such as 'you can't be a diplomat without knowing English' (15 reps), 'to learn the professional terminology and vocabulary of English' (9 ans), 'to have a better command of the language' (5 ans), 'to present my country internationally' (15 ans).

While the III year students see their goals quite clearly: 'to be fluent and free in the profession and be a successful specialist' (19 reps), 'to be able to analyze data' (1 rep), 'to avoid problems born of language incompetence' (2 reps) or 'for professional growth' (6 reps). This difference in estimates shows that in a span of one year students start to acknowledge what particularly they need to learn a specialized language for. An advanced answer 'for the participation in negotiations' (1-III yr., 2-IV yr.), already draws a concrete language implementation framework.

Still, only the fourth year students, apart from the already said, specify that one of the objectives of ESP study is 'to fully comprehend the literature and different materials on the profession' (5 ans). In the final year of the BA programme we can see a comprehensive, well-rounded approach to the goals of the professional language, aiming to dig deeper into the craft of their choice.

The figures indicate the natural flow of the dynamics of ESP language awareness from general, vaguely defined characteristics to a more specific, professionally oriented approach.

Similar dynamics is traced in the students' responses on the *motivation* of ESP learning, from more generic to more specific ones, describing the acquisition of communication skills as the primary stimuli, including intercultural communication skills, speaking fluency, understanding the speech of the interlocutor, then passing to effective communication in international forums and the ability to duly represent one's home country in an international setting. The choice of the priorities is equally distributed among all the three years: II year – 14 responses, III year – 14 responses, IV year – 12 responses.

Among the evenly distributed motivation points are also 'the love for the language' and the urge 'to reveal for themselves new cultures as well as the politics of the country speaking that language' (13 ans), as understanding another language leads to the understanding of another culture, another way of experiencing the world, which is just another motivation point for ESP learning students. This is also complemented by the desire to be able to travel on one's own freely.

However, with the III and IV year students we can see a more specific, professionally patterned approach to the motivational grounds of ESP learning, which distinctly connects it with 'further work and educational opportunities' (21 ans). Most students consider that a proper L2/ESP command is a means that helps to shape 'quality specialists', secure 'a job overseas', 'brings success in international forums of debates and discussions' (13 ans) and will favour 'a chance for one's further life-long education by taking courses abroad or participating in different international programmes' (19 ans).

The evolution of the outlook for the motivation of ESP learning. The way the students recognize the need or desire to better their English [11, page 14] is obvious: we see a markedly traceable shift from sophomores to undergraduates, another evidence of how quick and dynamic the process of the insight into professional maturity evolves at young age given the proper environment (in our case – the university life). The process of spiritual growth and changes in the attitudes to achieve one's full potential [10, page 2] occurs rather swiftly.

The motivational goals of students align with the *achievements criteria* that they envisage. Only 4.3% of the respondents have chosen university grades and professors' assessment as achievement criteria (II yr. – 4 students, III yr. – 1 student).

For a significant part of students, the ultimate and realistic achievement criteria for ESP learning is 'the mastery of the professional language', the ability to conduct 'uninhibited, fluent communication, both written and oral, during discussions, debates, presentations on professional issues, or negotiations', as well as the enhancement of their own 'competitiveness in international academic scholarship programs' (30.4%).

Another criterion marked by students as a language command indicator is their 'proficiency of fluent communication with foreigners at work', plus their 'illegibility for overseas jobs' (20.8%). Whereas, 5 of the III year students and 2 II-years believe that the acquisition of skills *of a translator and interpreter* is an important factor in the language command assessment.

It is noteworthy that the III year students have demonstrated a more comprehensive approach to the issue, treating it as a complex unity of interrelated and mutually conditioned set of objectives.

Another detail not to overlook is the fact that further education-related criteria dominate with the III year students (15 ans), while job-related responses are definitely the choice of the IV year students (14 ans).

The picture of the dynamics of attitudes is clear and anticipated: the statistics demonstrates a strong real-life vision of factual correlation of different ESP learning motivation criteria.

The Questionnaire also asked the students to reflect on the *strategies, resources and time management issues* during the L2/ESP acquisition.

The number of the responses from the III and IV year students is considerably low, 32 in total, 1/3 of the respondents. Whereas the II year students are quite active with 37 varying responses.

Judging by the average results, the accumulative learning strategies are aimed at organizing the language learning process so that it encompasses a high percentage of oral practice, multiple language application opportunities in the forms of contacts, discussions, active encounters, participation in different events, such as meetings with professional diplomats, and the like.

Mainly IV yr. (17) and III yr. students (5) value such strategies as reading large volumes of professional literature, conducting individual research and being tuned in to current news through English-speaking media channels.

But the responses of the IV year students make up a special niche on this issue. They bear distinct language-specific characteristics. Undergraduates/The IV years welcome university/academic lectures in English, the practice of holding seminars and debates in English, attending additional sessions in English, in order to grasp the multi-vector contents that embrace advanced grammar and more versatile topical pick on contemporary global issues complemented with slideshows and other visual aids. That is – they anticipate a comprehensive language teaching

and learning process with the implementation of all available means. They also look forward to the application of more interactive and enjoyable methodology, to meet the demands for subject specific ESP [6, page 167]. They believe that modern educators are expected to be proficient in the use of technology and digital tools to enhance the learning experience. They should also create an inclusive learning environment to foster creativity, collaboration and critical thinking.

The third year students also specify the role of the professors as *the best support and motivation*, highly appreciate their academic help and advice in the choice of professional literature and materials, and wish them to be even more demanding (7 ans).

An intriguing fact is that in the responses of the II year students we find not a single indication concerning the above-said. This cannot be explained by a special attitude towards an individual professor, as the Questionnaire was distributed among 7 different groups with 7 different professors.

From this zero result we may assume that a certain attitude or tendency towards the need of reading and studying special literature on their profession in English has not been formulated yet, and students look at L2/ESP learning simply as a continuation of General English studies to which they have been used from school. Though, judging by the III year students' responses demonstrate, all of these will change rather quickly.

The same logical trend is tracked down in the answers of the II year students to the question "What do I do/What steps do I take to attain my goals?"

The II year students rely heavily on what the university provides (22 reps) and complement that take predominantly with such facilitating means of language learning like films, hobbies and pastimes – all within the framework of emotional, pleasure-generating medium (20 reps).

If videos and films are quite intensively discussed by the II year students (13), only 6 III year students have mentioned them, and almost none from among the IV year students. Most likely, the undergraduates see these strategies as an indispensable part of their ESP learning that have become mundane, common and natural.

Whereas the III and IV year students emphasize *the great importance of daily, regular studies and voracious reading*. The number of the responses with reliance solely on the university curricula diminishes from 11 (III years) to 6 (IV years). The dynamics towards self-regulation and self-determination is evident.

We come across a similar picture when students indicate *the time span of their daily work on ESP*: Nine IV year students and eight III year students mention 2-3 hours daily, and we find only 1 response from among the II year students about the same time span of the daily work. The rest allocate much less time to their ESP studies.

The last part of this section deals with the students' interpretation of the interrelation of *progress control and feedback* in ESP learning.

If, while discussing the achievement criteria, we stated that only 4.3% of the respondents regard university grades and professors' assessments as indicators of achievement, in case of progress control and feedback the picture cardinally changes. 41.8% of the students (46 studs) consider that the university tradition of assessing one's achievements through *exams, tests and teacher feedback* still remains the main criteria of progress control.

In this domain *practice* in all its forms and shapes comes second (27.2% -30).

Students' Self-Assessment. As stated in the section of Research Questions, apart from an external look at the components of ESP acquisition, students, quite openly and realistically discuss their individual cognitive and emotional correlation to the process.

Firstly, 2/3 of the respondents acknowledge that it is them and only them who should take the responsibility for the quality of their ESP language learning (62studs).

21 students – 22.3% believe that the responsibility is to be shared between them and the professor of the university, the state and those responsible for the academic curricula – a statement that needs further discussion, which is out of the scope of the present research.

Meanwhile, 11 students transfer all the responsibility for their own language learning to the university, professors, and the surrounding people - a comfortable standpoint for those seeking ease.

Besides speaking of their responsibility for their language learning, students also emphasize their urge to *raise their responsibility level*. They wish to be able to compare their present self with their past achievements, to state their progress.

Students also make reference to the review of their own mistakes. Some speak about the continuous, non-stop perfection process of their own, and need to hold regular self-checks. Considerations on the last two points are especially frequent with II and IV year students. The gap of the III years makes itself notable later, in the IV year. We may assume that self-reflection, self-check and awareness are always there, even if for some reason they subside to the background (IV – 15 studs, - 13.6%).

As to *the timeline of ESP acquisition*, student evaluations widely differ, though the mean assessment is that 3.5-4 years of language studies at the university are sufficient to attain a respectable level of professional language command, especially if additional 1.5 years of Master's course is added.

The main results, with different responses of similar content, are the following: II yr. – 30 studs, III yr. – 10 students, IV yr. – 32. This demonstrates students' belief that it is practically possible to reach a formidable standard of ESP command with the university language education.

Still, 16% of III and IV year students find that professional language learning and perfection is an incessant process that stretches through the vast span of a person's life.

However, there is a group of 18% of respondents who believe that to gain a fluent mastery of the professional language requires some 0.5 to 2 years of hard work. Not surprisingly these are II year students, who will, certainly, change their minds, after a closer encounter with the world of the ESP for IR.

The Language Centres. The last set of questions of the Questionnaire probe the relevance, suitability and efficiency of Language Centres in teaching ESP for Diplomacy.

87% (81 studs) of respondents believe that it is the university, the special professional environment with different interrelated departments and programs that ensure the proper acquisition of professional L2/ESP. They also emphasize the factor of highly qualified professors that the university provides.

49.3% (41) of the respondents detail that the diplomatic language of ESP should be studied at the university and not in a Language Centre, for the latter does not provide the required professional level and the depth of the specific knowledge and the appropriate environment for it.

Students specify that Language Centres provide good knowledge of General English and ensure corresponding language platforms for IELTS and TOEFL exams, that expect a high level of proficiency in General English (13% - 11 studs).

14.4% (12 studs) have wishful thinking about combining professional ESP studies at the university with additional classes at the Language Centre, which would then bring to a higher standard of language competency. However, they do not fail to mention that it might be possible only if extra time and finances were available.

6 respondents (7.2%) are rather brisk, discarding Language Centre classes as a waste of time and money.

But if we draw an average line in the students' collective judgement on Language Centres as institutions where high level of diplomatic English can be attained, it is far from positive. Students see their making as professionals within the university walls at its Bachelor's and Master's programmes.

Concluding remarks

Thus, the findings of the research can be summarized as follows:

- The university education of future diplomats and specialists of international relations should furnish students with a strong and comprehensive basis of diplomatic language which is a type of ESP with its aspects and peculiarities.

- The period of full and dynamic acquisition of ESP for diplomacy falls to III and IV years of university studies connected with the development of students' self-awareness, personal growth and ESP language awareness.

- The cognitive transition from General English to ESP requires certain time, from one to two years, while students gradually realize the specifics of the profession they have chosen. The rigorous curriculum, academic requirements, intensive educational programmes and profession-oriented student life, contribute to the dynamic development of personal growth and approaches.

- The ESP language awareness matured through university years has shaped students' attitude towards the Language Centre option. They firmly believe that diplomatic language should be studied at the university in the professional environment, something that Language Centres do not provide.

ՀԱՏՈՒԿ ՆՊԱՍԱԿՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՄԱՐ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆԻ (ESP) ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՌՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԴԻՆԱՄԻԿԱՆ ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՖԱԿՈՒԼՏԵՏԻ ՈՒՍԱՆՈՂՆԵՐԻ ՇՐՋԱՆՈՒՄ

Բաբայան Ամալյա

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Ամփոփում

Ժամանակակից սովորողի ակադեմիական և մասնագիտական կարիքները բավարարելու նպատակով ԵՊՀ միջազգային հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետի անգլերենի դասավանդման ծրագրում զգալի փոփոխություններ են արվել՝ շեշտադրելով անգլերենը դիվանագիտության համար (ESP for Diplomacy) գիտակարգի դասավանդումը: Ինչպես գիտենք, արդյունավետ կրթական գործընթաց կազմակերպելու գրավականը, համապատասխան կրթական նյութերի մշակմանը զուգընթաց, օտար լեզու սովորողին ավելի խորը և բազմակողմանի ճանաչելն է:

Խնդրից ելնելով II, III և IV կուրսերի ուսանողների շրջանում անցկացված հարցման հիման վրա սույն հոդվածը քննության է առնում ընդհանուր անգլերենն ուսումնասիրելուց ESP-ին անցնելու գործընթացի վերաբերյալ ուսանողների տեսլականը, նրանց ESP լեզվական իրազեկության էվոլյուցիայի դինամիկան՝ զուգորդված նրանց ինքնագիտակցության աճի ու անհատականության զարգացմամբ: Ընդհանուր անգլերենից ESP-ին անցնելու գիտակցական ըմբռնումը որոշակի ժամանակ պահանջող գործընթաց է, երբ ուսանողները սկսում են աստիճանաբար պարզորոշ գիտակցել իրենց ընտրած մասնագիտության առանձնահատկությունները: Բազմաշերտ ու հարուստ ուսումնական ծրագիրը, ակադեմիական առաջադրված պահանջները, կրթական ինտենսիվ նախաձեռնությունները և մասնագիտական կողմնորոշմամբ ուսանողական կյանքը նպաստում են անհատական աճի և մոտեցումների դինամիկ զարգացմանը:

Ունենալով հստակ կողմնորոշում իրենց նպատակների, ուսման դրդապատճառների, սովորելու ընտրած ռազմավարության և մասնագիտական մոտեցումների վերաբերյալ՝ ուսանողները հաստատական վճռականություն են ցուցաբերում դիվանագիտական անգլերենի իրենց գիտելիքները համալսարանական միջավայրում ձեռք բերելու հարցում՝ պնդելով, որ լեզվի կենտրոնները լավագույնն են սոսկ ընդհանուր անգլերեն սովորելու համար:

Բանալի բառեր՝ ESP, դիվանագիտական անգլերեն, լեզվի գիտակցական ըմբռնում, կրթական նպատակներ և դրդապատճառներ, լեզվի կենտրոն:

ДИНАМИКА ОБУЧЕНИЯ ESP (АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ДЛЯ ОСОБЫХ ЦЕЛЕЙ) У СТУДЕНТОВ ФАКУЛЬТЕТА МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

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Аннотация

Чтобы удовлетворить академические и профессиональные потребности современного студента, в программу преподавания английского языка на факультете международных отношений ЕГУ были внесены существенные изменения, где особое внимание уделяется преподаванию ESP для дипломатов. Как известно, залогом организации эффективного образовательного процесса, наряду с разработкой соответствующих учебных материалов, является более глубокое и всестороннее понимание изучающего иностранный язык.

В статье на основе анализа опроса, проведенного среди студентов II, III и IV курсов, рассматривается мнение студентов о переходе от общего английского к ESP, динамика развития их языковой компетенции ESP в сочетании с личностным ростом. Когнитивный переход от общего английского к ESP требует определенного времени, когда студенты постепенно приходят к осознанию специфики выбранной ими профессии. Строгий учебный план, академические требования, интенсивные образовательные программы и профессионально-ориентированная жизнь студента способствуют динамичному развитию личностного роста и подходов.

Четко ориентируясь в своих целях, мотивах, стратегиях обучения и профессиональных перспективах, студенты демонстрируют твердое намерение овладеть дипломатическим английским во время учебы в университете, утверждая, что языковые центры дают навыки общего владения английским языком.

Ключевые слова: ESP, дипломатический английский, языковая осведомленность, образовательные цели и мотивы, языковой центр.

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