АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЕ ПИСЬМО

Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Russian Universities: A Case of Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences

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Abstract. The paper discusses the impact of English for Specific Academic Purposes teaching methodology on developing in-house materials for the course of English for Social Sciences taught at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. The paper gives examples of the materials and provides results of their evaluation. The case study demonstrates efficiency of the approach to in-house materials development based on collaboration with faculty, teachers of English for Specific Academic Purposes in other disciplines, and students. The approach involves analysis of the materials designed at different stages of the educational process. Research results are assessed through the survey conducted among the students and interviews conducted with faculty members and teachers of English for Specific Academic Purposes. The efficiency of the employed approach makes it possible to use it as a model for developing in-house materials in similar academic contexts in non-linguistic universities.

Keywords: academic literacy, English for Specific Academic Purposes, English for General Academic Purposes, students' needs analysis, materials development

Introduction

To succeed in academic studies and future career, students need to develop such academic literacies as the ability to read and analyze disciplinary specific texts, listen to disciplinary specific lectures, critically evaluate and interpret received information, participate in discussions that are typical for particular academic cultures and write research articles using disciplinary specific vocabulary. The term *academic literacy* refers to "language use as something people do when they interact with one another" [1, p. 11] and includes "integrated development of metalinguistic and linguistic competencies to achieve communication goals in academic environment" [2, p. 10]. Current research [1; 2; 3] demonstrates that these literacies can be effectively developed within English for Special Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses.

The term *English for Special Academic Purposes* (ESAP) relates to English language courses in academic settings that focus on the discipline specific genres, languages, and skills [1; 3]. The need for such courses emerged from the need to concentrate on developing not the set of atomized skills but a complex of language, academic, socio-cultural skills. ESAP courses are offered at modern universities for two main reasons: firstly, to help international students realize their full academic needs and potential [4]; secondly, to expose those students to the expectations and requirements of the faculties in terms of target situation needs and academic culture [5]. These courses are different from English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) courses, which concentrate on developing skills common to all disciplines, such as listening to lectures, participating in seminars,

reading textbooks and writing essays, reports and exam papers [1]. Some researchers [6; 7] claim that it is difficult to distinguish between ESAP and EGAP courses as they both focus on developing students' language competencies relevant for academic environment. However, EGAP and ESAP differ in approaches to teaching. While EGAP methodology is based on the idea of developing study skills, the methodology of ESAP rests on the notion of academic literacy. For master programmes, ESAP is more relevant and in more demand. Students first obtain academic skills through EGAP courses, and then apply these skills to their own disciplinary discourse [8]. For this reason, ESAP courses play a special role in modern universities as they develop competences relevant not only for the 21st century, but also for their professional development in the field.

Teaching ESAP is a challenge for teachers of English because they need to develop or adapt course materials to particular academic and disciplinary contexts and specific students' needs. Despite the variety of these contexts and needs, it is possible to identify the approach that can serve as a basis for developing an effective and flexible model for designing ESAP materials.

The paper discusses the practice of teaching ESAP courses at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES), a Russian-British university with over two decades of experience in post-graduate social science education. The case study originates from the experience of the Interdisciplinary Department of English (IDE), one of the first language units in Russia that started teaching EAP in skill-specific and discipline-specific contexts. The described approach offers a flexible model for developing in-house ESAP materials.

The MSSES English for Specific Academic Purposes Programme

The Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES) offers undergraduate and postgraduate educational programmes in law, political science, sociology, practical psychology, public history, international politics, cultur-

al management and media studies. To obtain a degree in a chosen subject, students are required to perform various academic activities in English and Russian. They attend lectures, participate in seminars, take part in study visits to the University of Manchester, attend international conferences and write essays. To satisfy these academic requirements, students need advanced reading, writing, critical thinking, analytical and research skills. It is crucial that students apply these skills in English in contexts that are relevant to their discipline.

To meet the needs of both students and faculty, the IDE works on two major programmes, *English for General Academic Purposes* and *English for Specific Academic Purposes*[1]. Both programmes are successfully used in teaching graduate and postgraduate students, but EGAP courses precede ESAP courses in teaching bachelor degree students to introduce them into the general academic discourse [9], while in teaching master degree students the two programmes are taught simultaneously due to the limited amount of time for the language programme, which takes 112 academic hours during the first semester, and also due to the level of disciplinary knowledge previously obtained by postgraduate students.

As the MSSES launched the first bachelor degree programmes in 2014, the IDE is only starting to design ESAP courses at this level; however, the 20 years of experience in designing such courses for master degree students certainly provides a good foundation for designing them. In this paper, therefore, we will refer to the IDE experience in developing course materials at the postgraduate level.

All ESAP courses for both graduate and postgraduate students are based on the three common core methodological principles:
- teaching English *for* the discipline, not *in* the discipline;
- collaborating with subject tutors, ESAP professionals and students to apply cognitive

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[1] https://www.msses.ru/about/kafedra-angliyskogo-yazyka/

practices specific for the particular discipline and students' background knowledge;

• developing students' academic literacies in an uprising evolving spiral [9; 10].

At present, the IDE offers several ESAP courses for postgraduate students:

• English for Management;
• English for Social Sciences;
• English for Applied Psychology;
• English for Law;
• English for Public Policy.

Postgraduate students attending ESAP courses have experience in their discipline and are motivated to extend their subject knowledge. The survey conducted by the IDE to identify students' needs demonstrated that they are interested in reading relevant research articles, discussing key ideas in their disciplines, and develop strategies associated with their academic and professional practices. Therefore, the aim of ESAP courses is to equip students with sound linguistic knowledge and develop academic literacies relevant for their disciplines.

It is essential to note that ESAP courses are obligatory for students whose command of academic English is lower than 6.0 on the IELTS scale (Academic Module), whereas students with good command of English have to enroll for an ESAP course, which is started if the enrollment involves a sufficient number of students.

Developing in-house materials for the ESAP course of *English for Social Sciences*

The idea to develop in-house materials emerges from the necessity to satisfy students' needs in a situation when the publishers do not provide coursebooks relevant for the particular in-disciplinary purposes. While published EGAP (generally referred to as EAP) materials are extensively published to fully satisfy the various needs of EAP teachers, indisciplinary materials rarely match the needs of particular institutional contexts, which are much more specific than cross-disciplinary.

The IDE offers the course *English for Social Sciences* for postgraduate sociology, public his-

tory and political science students. The course draws from the materials of two previously designed courses, *English for History and Politics* and *English for Sociology*. However, as the number of students with lower level of academic English in the MSSES educational programmes diminished, the courses were united, which made them partially interdisciplinary, although the urge for specificity under such conditions made the course even more difficult to design.

The process of developing in-house materials involves desk research on various approaches used in materials development; students needs' analysis; consultations with ESAP teachers and faculty; and post-course interviews with them. These steps help the teacher to identify students' deficiencies, select relevant sources for the course and evaluate the chosen approach to materials development.

The analysis of research findings in ESAP/EGAP methodology and materials development demonstrates that there are a number of approaches which can be applied to designing an ESAP course [11]. However, each of these approaches has its limitations and not all of them are suitable for developing in-house ESAP materials.

Hutchinson and Waters [12, p. 109] offered one of the first models to ESP materials' development (*fig. 1*).

According to this model, students receive the language and non-linguistic content from the input (a text, video, dialogue, etc.) and apply the knowledge to the task. "Materials should be designed, therefore, to lead towards a communicative task in which learners use the content and the language knowledge they have built up in the unit" [12, p. 109]. This model looks straightforward and teacher-friendly; however, it does not focus on the language acquisition theories and students' and teachers' use of materials.

Jolly and Bolitho [11, p. 106] suggest another model for materials development:

1. Identification of need for materials;
2. Exploration of need;
3. Contextual realisation of materials;
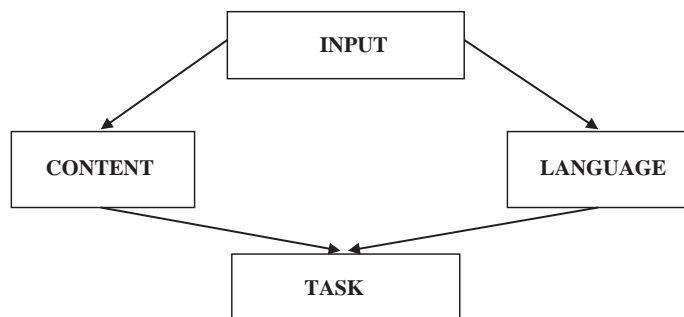4. Pedagogical realisation of materials;

Fig. 1. ESP materials development model

5. Production of materials;

6. Student use of materials;

7. Evaluation of materials against agreed objectives.

This model is helpful in terms of going through the process of materials development, however, it does not concentrate on materials' content, and it was not specifically developed for designing ESAP materials.

As the above models have their strengths and weaknesses, it seems logical to employ both of them. This idea provides an opportunity to not only choose the content of disciplinary materials and their relevance for students, but also properly apply them in the classroom. This approach to ESAP materials development by combining the two models allows for the development of effective and flexible materials, which was confirmed by the survey conducted among students, ESAP teachers and faculty.

The role of authentic sources in ESAP in-house materials development

One typical concern for ESAP courses in-house materials is to identify the right sources for students which are relevant, authentic and contain target vocabulary. This challenge has been responded by consulting all the stakeholders of the educational process, including students, ESAP teachers and faculty. These consultations revealed that the required sources should involve authentic articles from research journals, online lectures from the leading universities and the latest news. What is more crucial is that the suggested activities based on these

sources should be in the format similar to the students' main activities in their discipline (for example, seminar discussions or data presentation). These findings were used to develop the *English for Social Sciences* course materials.

The paper "Hobbes commitment to society as a product of sovereignty: A basis for Hobbesian sociology" [13] is an example of such an authentic source: the paper was suggested by students and faculty, and it is obviously relevant for them. Students were supposed to read the paper at home and prepare to discuss it in class. The tasks accompanying the text included reading, discussion, vocabulary and language in use activities (Appendix 1). A few listening activities were added to activate students' schemata. All these tasks were aimed at developing students' academic literacies and enhancing their subject awareness. Vocabulary and language in use tasks helped students acquire the knowledge on discourse features typical for research articles in social sciences. This correlates with current research on EAP and ESAP [8; 9; 14] concerning the essentiality to use authentic and disciplinary specific texts to help students effectively function in their academic communities.

Materials evaluation

To confirm efficiency of the chosen approach to materials development, we conducted a survey with the key stakeholders. The survey was carried out during and after classes. Its purpose was to identify whether the proposed materials were useful and effec-
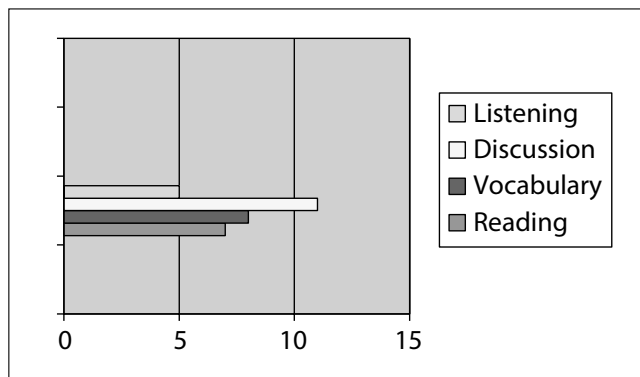
Fig. 2. Distribution of the students' answers: the most useful parts of the materials

tive for the students. This research methodology was designed by IDE in collaboration with the experts from Norwich Institute for Language Education[2].

Questionnaires (Appendix 2) distributed to students after classes demonstrate that discussion and vocabulary parts were the most useful parts of the materials.

The interviews with students reveal that ESAP materials help them:

1. practice their speaking skills in a subject-specific context;

2. work with the sources they can use for their academic purposes;

3. share ideas on their research with peers.

Faculty members also confirmed that additional discussions of specific topics enhanced students' subject awareness and helped them produce more creative ideas in their academic essays. They also noticed that the course *English for Social Sciences* brought together historians, sociologists and political science students, which enhanced cross-disciplinary discussions useful for the students' research work.

ESP researchers [6, p. 12; 7, p. 325] state that the effectiveness of teaching materials should be measured in terms of how the goals of the course are achieved through meeting students' needs. The results of the survey conducted among students, English teachers and faculty demonstrate that the chosen approach to ESAP materials development is effective as it sa-

tisfies not only the needs of the students, but also the needs of the faculty and ESAP teachers.

The research also shows that the efficiency of ESAP in-house materials depends on the following factors:

• relevance of the topic and the source of the topic;

• relevance of the class activities;

• authenticity of the input (texts, videos, audios);

• authenticity of the tasks;

• adequacy of the language level;

• students' engagement in the learning process;

• engagement of the key stakeholders of educational process in materials development (e.g. discussion of the content of the materials, sources of the materials, and pedagogical realisation of the materials).

Conclusion

ESAP is a rapidly developing area of research, and researchers should keep an eye on new ideas and concepts which emerge in it. Only exploring and experimenting with these ideas make it possible to offer innovative and effective ESAP materials. Students' needs analysis plays a central role in developing ESAP materials. Furthermore, students, English teachers and faculty should be involved in the process of creating materials to choose the most relevant sources for them.

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[2] https://www.nile-elt.com/

The practice of teaching ESAP courses at the MSSES demonstrates that applying several models to materials development helps create effective and flexible ESAP courses. It also confirms that the materials from authentic sources contribute to the development of students' academic literacies in particular disciplinary discourses, thus contributing to their professional development and socialization in the global academic and disciplinary communities.

Appendix 1

1. Warming up
A. Discuss in pairs
What do you know about Hobbes?
What is his role in developing philosophy, sociology?
B. Listen to the talk on the Thomas Hobbes's biography and correct some factual mistakes in this summary.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = 9i4jb5XBX5s

Thomas Hobbes was a 17th century French philosopher. His thinking is inseparable from one major event that began when he was 46. This event was the English civil war. It raged across England for almost 12 years and deeply influenced Hobbes's thinking which was reflected in his works. Leviathan is one of them, although not the most important. Hobbes's main theory was that people should obey their rulers and he strongly supported "the divine rights of kings' theory" as he found it persuasive. In Leviathan Hobbes put forward an ingenious argument and tried to marry "the social contract theory" with the defense of total obedience.

2. Reading and discussion activities
Task 1
Discuss in pairs
What is the purpose of the paper?
Who is the intended reader of this article?
Task 2
Discuss in pairs
What is the structure of the paper?
What paragraph contains the key arguments of the author?
What paragraph includes the summary of the article?
What paragraph discusses Hobbes's description of the society?
Task 3
Discuss in groups
What is the purpose of the abstract?
What is the structure of the abstract?
Task 4
Discuss in groups
What is the purpose of the information in brackets?
In reference *a*, what does *1998* refer to, what does it mean?
In reference *b*, what does *20* refer to?
Who is the author of the reference *c*?
What is the publisher of the source from the reference *b*?

a) These micro branches include, at least, symbolic interactionism (for example, Sacks, 1992; Silverman, 1998).

b) By this account, the higher reasoning selves always try to assert their superiority over the lower sensuous selves (Hunter, 2001: 20).

c) Not only does *Leviathan*, especially the Third and Fourth Parts (1845b: 359–700), amply demonstrate Hobbes's intricate knowledge of Christian scriptures, it also demonstrates both his commitment to the notion that God could not have a direct role in earthly rule.

Task 5
Discuss in groups
1. Why are Hobbes's ideas neglected by sociologists?
2. How can sociologists benefit from exploring Hobbes's ideas?

3. What are the key Hobbes's arguments in the section "Hobbes's opposition to the scholastic idea of the dominance of reason in nature"?

4. What is Hobbes's account of society?

5. What are main arguments against Hobbes's ideas?

6. What are key arguments in support of Hobbes's theory?

7. Would you agree with the author or challenge his ideas? Why?

3. Vocabulary tasks

Task 1

Work individually. Read the abstract and explain the meaning of the following words:

a) to argue...

b) to draw on...

c) to apply...

d) to forge...

e) account of...

f) domain of...

g) normative...

Discuss your answers with your group.

Task 2

Work individually. Match the words with their definitions. Discuss your answers with your group.

1. to assert	to think or suppose something
2. to attempt	to look at a book, map, piece of paper etc. for information
3. to oppose	to state firmly that something is true
4. to refer	to emphasize a statement, fact, or idea
5. to stress	to try to do something
6. to reckon	to disagree with something such as a plan or idea

4. Language in Use

Work individually. Read the abstract from the article and answer the questions. Discuss your answers with your group.

Hobbes does not approach the topic of humans living in society in the same way as does modern sociology. He is not, for example, directly attempting to do what those branches of the discipline which specialize in the intricacies of human interaction attempt to do – to show what a difficult and fragile achievement successful interaction, and hence society, can be. Such branches include not just those at sociology's boundary with anthropology, which employ ethnography to build detailed pictures of particular societies, especially societies exotic to the sociologists studying them, but also branches dedicated to the 'micro' study of interactions within 'home' societies of those doing the studying. These micro branches include, at least, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis.

While Hobbes would not disagree that society is a difficult and fragile achievement, **as will be demonstrated later,** it would be inadvisable to attempt to draw links between his account of society and any of **these branches of sociology,** *for* it would not allow a full appreciation of what he is doing when he paints the detailed picture of human behaviour that serves as the basis both for his opposition to the scholastic idea of the dominance of reason in nature and for his arguments in favour of his account of society as a product of sovereignty.

1. What will be demonstrated later?

2. What are "these branches of sociology"?

3. What is the function of "*while*" in this phrase?

4. What is the function of "*for*" in the sentence?

Appendix 2

Questionnaire (students)

Please answer these questions. There is no need to put your name.

1. Was the text relevant to you?

Yes ☐   Somewhat ☐   No ☐

2. In general, do reading texts like this help you to improve your reading?

Yes ☐　　　Somewhat ☐　　　No ☐

3. Was listening relevant to you?

Yes ☐　　　Somewhat ☐　　　No ☐

4. In general, does listening to this excerpt from a lecture help you to improve your listening?

Yes ☐　　　Somewhat ☐　　　No ☐

5. Did the lesson materials stimulate you to participate in discussions?

Yes ☐　　　Somewhat ☐　　　No ☐

6. Do you find the vocabulary tasks useful?

Yes ☐　　　Somewhat ☐　　　No ☐

7. What was the most useful part of the lesson (Reading, Listening, Vocabulary, Discussion)? Why? _____

8. What was the least useful part of the lesson (Reading, Listening, Vocabulary, Discussion)? Why? _____

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Преподавание английского языка для специальных целей: опыт Московской школы социальных и экономических наук

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Аннотация. В статье представлены возможности междисциплинарного подхода к обучению английскому языку для специальных академических целей (ESAP), используемого межфакультетской кафедрой английского языка Московской высшей школы социальных и экономических наук в различных дисциплинарных контекстах, на примере разработки учебных материалов курса «Английский язык для общественных наук». Данный кейс демонстрирует эффективность этого подхода при соблюдении необходимых условий его применения: тесного сотрудничества с преподавателями дисциплин, с преподавателями английского языка, ведущими аналогичные разработки для других образовательных программ, и со студентами как активными участниками учебного процесса. Важным методологическим условием является также анализ учебных материалов на различных стадиях образовательного процесса. Результаты исследования подтверждаются анкетированием студентов и интервью с преподавателями английского языка и общественных дисциплин, которые позволили оценить эффективность используемого подхода. Этот подход может быть использован как модель для разработки учебных материалов в аналогичных академических контекстах нелингвистических вузов.

Ключевые слова: академическая грамотность, английский для специальных академических целей, английский для общих академических целей, анализ потребностей студентов, разработка учебных материалов