

Section 5. Pedagogy



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STUDENT APPROACHES TO BEST ASSIMILATE AND LEARN ESP TERMS

Abstract

The challenge ESP students mostly encounter when learning specific terms is the fact that they can use them mostly in professional contexts, other than in everyday usage, and in so doing the memorization of the ESP terms is made harder and needs longer time span.

Thus a survey was carried out to find out the most successful strategies that architecture and civil engineering students use to learn the ESP terms faster and longer. The data collected show the various methods/strategies students apply to practice new vocabulary introduced during the teaching process. The results were made known to all students so they could share approaches and adopt them in their learning procedure.

The assimilation of specific terms is made easier when strategies are combined and used in proper contexts in class and elsewhere.

Keywords: approach, strategy, ESP terms, assimilation, students.

Introduction

According to Basturkmen (2010), in teaching ESP, the student is considered as a language assimilator who is engaged in academic, professional and work aspects and who uses English as a way to fulfil these commitments.

Whipple (1925) described the essential role of the lexicon by stating that: “The increase in the power of reading means the continuous enrichment and expansion of the read lexicon and the increase in the appreciation of word values”.

According to a statement by Mel’_uk (1981): “Not only every language, but every lexical term is a whole world of its own”.

Duro (2009) points out that in the terminological systems of science and technology, the specialization of word-forming tools is observed as a stressed and dominant tendency, arising from the need and requirements of the systems of different fields of science and technology for terms with structural-semantic features that respond to the categorical classification of the concepts of science and technology phenomena.

While according to DeCarrico (2001), “the lexicon has not always been considered a priority in learning a foreign language”.

As Hirvela (2013) also states, the lexicon occupies a very important place in the native language and in the second or foreign language, since even the words on the pages of books are a starting point for reading. As a result it is not a surprise to see an emphasis on vocabulary in the ESP reading literature.

Kamil and Hiebert (2005) state that vocabulary is not a skill that develops or a skill that can be considered fully mastered. Expanding, developing, refining vocabulary is something that lasts a lifetime. Individuals have different types of vocabulary that they use for different purposes. Failure to distinguish between different types of vocabularies can lead to confusion and disagreement between research findings and instructional implications.

In general, vocabulary is the knowledge of the meaning of words.

The selection of materials is of particular benefit to ESP because they play a key role in exposing students to the language of a particular discipline as it is actually used and as defined by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) materials are a source of “real language”.

According to Virginia French Allen (1983), when teaching a foreign language we seem to consider two main questions related to learning:

1. What are the words that students must learn?

(This is the stage that every teacher should think about before starting a teaching process in the auditorium).

The next question comes after the vocabulary is assumed to have been assimilated.

2. How to prove that the vocabulary the student needs has been acquired?

Material and Method

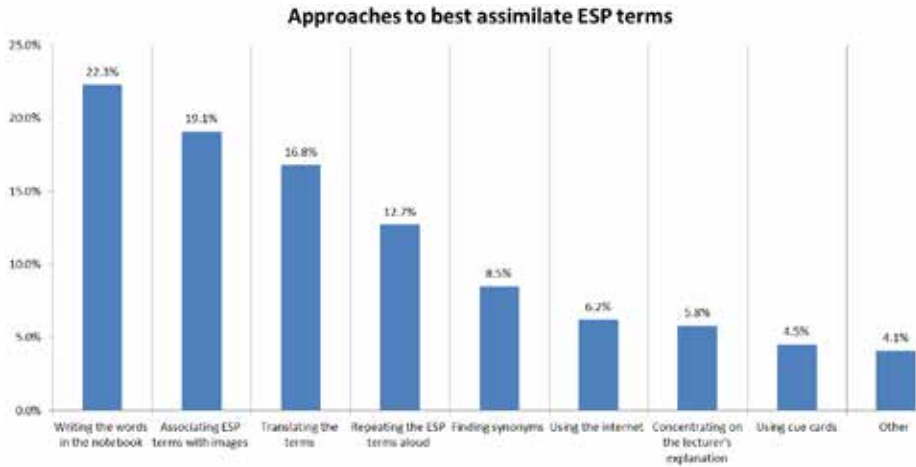
Just as teachers use strategies to help students acquire specific vocabulary, students have their own learning strategies to memorize and learn new ESP words.

To learn more about these strategies, and approaches that best help students assimilate and learn ESP terms, a survey with 207 first year FAU (Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Polytechnic University of Tirana, PUT) and FCE (Faculty of Civil Engineering, Polytechnic University of Tirana, PUT) students highlighted the strategies they use.

Students study architecture, urban planning, civil engineering, hydro-technical engineering, geodetic engineering. They learn English in their studying programme in the first year, first semester of their studies. The textbook is specific for each of the two faculties, “Architecture”, “Civil Engineering”, Career Paths. The book is divided into 3 parts, at the end of each one there is the glossary where

students can find the new words explained in details (the new terms are highlighted in bold in every lesson).

The students' feedback is listed in the graph that follows:



Graph 1. Student Approaches to best Assimilate and Learn ESP Terms

Results and discussion

From the data collected, it appears that students use a variety of strategies to memorize and learn the new ESP terms and expressions.

Most of the students (22.3%), write the words in the notebook. This is also evident in the classroom, because many of them keep a notebook for the new vocabulary, as they have been used to keeping notes from the traditional way of learning a foreign language in high school or even earlier. But from generation to generation, it is being noted that students are reluctant of writing new words or taking notes.

Interesting was the fact of memorization through visual aids, images, drawings, figures, objects, etc. (19.1%). This is also related to the fact that the surveyed students study architecture, urban planning, and engineering fields of study, and it is understood that they are prone to use the gift of drawing and sketching to memorize specific terms through figures, photos, etc.

Associating ESP terms with visual aids makes the whole process interesting, fun and useful for them.

Translation of ESP terms occupies an important place in memorizing words (16.8%). From personal experience, it must be emphasized that students often find it difficult to find the right Albanian equivalent as there is a lack of ESP dictionaries in every field of study and they can be found only in libraries due to the small amount available. Students find it time consuming going to the libraries to get access of the dictionary they need. Instead they use Google translate which in most cases gives the wrong option.

12.7% of students try to memorize terms by reading them carefully and remembering some examples for each. They also repeat them out loud. Here we can see the application of the advice and suggestions given by foreign language teachers, that reading aloud helps them not only memorizing words faster and longer, but by listening to themselves, students can check pronunciation, intonation, ensure fluency, etc.

It must be pointed out that finding synonyms for ESP terms is very difficult, even though 8.5% of students try to find another word in English or they try to explain the words with other words to give similar meaning so they can remember the new ESP terms longer.

There are also many students who use the Internet to get more information about the words and topics or get the right explanations (6.2%). But, Goggle translate is not always a reliable and accurate source for the translation of terms.

As always, the role of the teacher is essential and inevitable in the assimilation of the lesson. The explanation and the methodology used make it possible for students to assimilate new information and be active actors throughout the learning process (5.8%).

Some students use cue cards with given definitions or drawings which they stick on their books or notebooks and read them whenever they forget or confuse them (4.5%).

There are also cases when students (4.1%) find it useful to form sentences with the given ESP words, listening to tracks, reading aloud etc. When forming sentences with the new words they not only memorize the new terms but at the same time recall and keep alive the vocabulary already assimilated.

The results of the questionnaire were made known to all students. There were strategies that some students had never thought before, and they found them really useful and practical to use, for example using cue cards for new words, listening to tracks or pronounced words many times, reading aloud etc.

Conclusions

Students find it interesting and priceless sharing approaches to best assimilate and learn ESP terms. The strategies students mostly use are:

- Writing words in their vocabulary notebook;
- Associating ESP terms with images;
- Translating them;
- Repeating words aloud;
- Finding synonyms, definition, or explanation of the specific terms;
- Using internet not only for the meaning of the ESP terms, but to get more information related to the terms or the topics. In so doing they enlarge their knowledge related to other fields of study as well;
- Concentrating during the teaching and learning process. Paying attention to the lecturer's explanation and to the information and examples given in class. Doing all assignments given by the teacher, helps students practice the words and memorize them faster and longer;

- Using cue cards helps students focus more on the specific words. They can relate the terms to the topic and vice-versa.
- Forming sentences is an activity most often given by teachers, but as it is noticed, there are students that find it useful.
- Reading aloud and listening to tracks are other ways that help students pay attention to the way specific words are pronounced, the contexts they are used, other words they are associated to, intonation, pitch, and tone of the voice used in specific situations.

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