Language needs analysis of future non-linguistic teachers

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Introduction

When considering the demands of modern society, there is no doubt about the importance of acquiring a foreign language for personal and work life. Foreign languages are taught at all levels of formal education, from primary schools to universities. This article is aimed at analysing and describing foreign language (specifically English) teaching at the tertiary level, specifically at the faculties of education.

After gathering the information about the particular language centres responsible for preparing non-linguistic students in the Faculties of Education in the Czech Republic, I have found out that most students being prepared at present for the career of future teachers are obliged to study a foreign language within their curriculum at their faculty of education. Those students who do not major in any foreign language can be called non-linguists. In the Faculty of Education of Palacky University the majority of them choose English (as it is considered the lingua franca of the modern world) over other foreign languages and the lessons typically cover general English.

Although the non-linguists are specialized in other subjects, they are supposed to teach in their future professions and it is probable that they will need the English language as part of their working duties. The first crucial question is: what are the students' expectations concerning their use of English for their profession and do these expectations correspond with the genuine needs of teachers at lower secondary schools?

1   General English versus ESP

In order to cover the topic and answer the question more precisely we need to define "the kinds" of English that need to be taken into consideration. From the content and syllabus point of view, one can differentiate between general English and English for specific purposes (ESP). While general English is included in the curriculum of most faculties, ESP has its specific features. As Day and Krzanowski point out "for teachers of general English, a key question is finding materials and methodologies which are effective for a particular class (e.g. 'Is the approach or method I'm using appropriate for learners of this age, culture, level, first language(s) etc.?'). This question is also relevant for ESP and one other factor

should also be considered: the subject specific knowledge (of legal procedures, of engineering methods, of software programming, etc.)." (Day&Krzanowski, 2011, p. 7). When asking what the difference between general English and ESP is, Tom Hutchinson, who has dealt with this issue for a long time, answers briefly but reasonably – "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal" (Hutchinson&Waters, 1987, p. 53).

By means of this sentence the author denies the assertion that the needs of general English learners are not specifiable. It is always possible to identify a need of some sort, even if it is only the need to pass an exam at the end of the academic year. "What distinguishes ESP from general English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need" (Hutchinson&Waters, 1987, p. 53). It would therefore seem to be inevitable to implement a needs analysis which specifies the language requirements for particular job-related functions and students' awareness of these requirements. Before a more detailed study of this partial issue is carried out, it is reasonable to define or determine the features of those ESP is intended for.

Schleppegrell and Bowman (1986) emphasize that ESP students are mostly "adults who already have some familiarity with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions" (Schleppegrell&Bowman, 1986). As mentioned above, the sample group analysed are students at the Faculty of Education who are preparing for the profession of future teachers at lower secondary schools with specific skills and functions of their professional duties. All of them have already had some experience with learning English at previous years of schooling. Their characteristics consequently match the characteristics of ESP students. Returning to the needs analysis, however, there is still a need to determine what specific areas or functions of the English language are needed and useful for teachers at lower secondary schools.

2 ESP for future lower secondary school teachers

Since the beginning of ESP as a relevant part of English as a second language methodology in the 1960s, there have been many areas which ESP syllabi have been designed for (e.g. business, medicine, tourism, IT, engineering, etc.). After examining available sources, there are in fact not many of them (if any) dealing with ESP for future teachers or education a. Due to a lack of theoretical information, 3 areas have been defined which can be relevant for future lower secondary teachers:

1. English for information technology
2. Teaching terminology in English

3. Subject-specific English

These areas have been chosen on purpose to reflect teachers' work and its specifics. In the following paragraphs there will be an attempt to explain the reasons for this choice.

Information technology is an unavoidable part of almost all professions. Not only is the Internet an infinite source of information and teaching materials, there are more and more new applications for education and teaching tools which may help teachers prepare lessons in a more effective and interesting way. Since English has become a means of communication and the language of IT, one should assume that knowledge of it is significant for using information technology in teaching.

Regardless of what subjects the teachers are qualified to teach, they all need the up-to-date knowledge of pedagogical trends, methods and approaches. Although Czech or Slovak pedagogical sources reflect the latest knowledge and information, it is still incomparable to the amount of foreign ones and their theoretical relevancy. Thus, those teachers who are able to read and understand them are more advanced than those who do not have these skills.

Last but not least, the fact that all teachers are specialized in certain subjects which they teach cannot be avoided. To find information in a specific field demands a certain level of language skills and a specific range of vocabulary. As for the previous two areas, it is also true for this one that information sources are much more comprehensive when searching among originally English written ones.

It is understandably incorrect to state without a doubt that only these areas cover all possible needs and that no other can be taken into consideration. This paper attempts to define the content and language framework that may improve and better target lower secondary teachers' needs for English profession-oriented use.

The above-mentioned information provides the theoretical background for an analysis of students' language needs and required competences. As stated at the beginning, after making a survey of language centres in the Faculties of education, most faculties preparing future teachers involve a foreign language as a compulsory subject in their curriculum.

3   English for non-linguists at the Faculty of Education, UP

The following part will attempt to describe the situation concerning English for non-linguists in a particular faculty, this being the Faculty of Education at Palacky University in Olomouc. This will be followed by a presentation of the idea of a research project that aims at specifying students' language and some results from its first phase.

All undergraduate students are obliged to choose from three foreign languages (English, German or Russian). Approximately 80% of the students decide for English. The content of the lessons primarily covers general English with an emphasis on practising basic language skills. The particular topics of the basic coursebooks also reflect everyday situations and are not professionally oriented. The final test is also designed to assess knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension; speaking or listening skills are not included.

As stated before in this article, a project proposal will also be presented which may help improve and better target English courses for student needs concerning their future professions.

4   The idea of the proposed project

The first phase is designed to determine student opinions of the language competencies they may need as future lower secondary school teachers. The assumed research method in this first phase is a standardized questionnaire (which means it respects the standards of pedagogical research) and the descriptive statistics in which I've attempted to summarize the data gained from the obtained information. It aims at collecting students' opinions on the demands of English, they think they will have to meet in their future profession. There is a focus on their preference for general English or English for Specific Purposes. The "kinds" of ESP, taken into consideration, have been specified in the previous paragraphs. The graphs are designed in Excel application and include the proportion of students' responses to particular questions.

The second phase compares students' opinions with the opinions and experience of practicing teachers and answer the question: What is the difference between the expectations of the students at the faculty of education and the experience of practicing teachers?

The last phase is based on the previous language needs analysis and recommends relevant study material (course book, set of handouts. etc.) which may help to target and modify the curriculum of the English language courses for non-linguists in order to better fulfil student needs in their future jobs.

5   Questionnaire – partial results

As mentioned above, the first phase includes a standardized questionnaire distributed among the first year students at the Faculty of Education, Palacky University in Olomouc. All of them prepare for the profession of future lower secondary school teachers studying various combinations of subjects excluding a foreign language, and all of them attend an English language course for non-linguists as a B-subject. The respondents (in total 92) were asked to answer the items

dealing with the analysed topic. We have chosen the items considered crucial in this phase:

Item n. 7

Knowledge of English language is important for my future profession as a lower secondary school teacher. Do you agree with this statement?
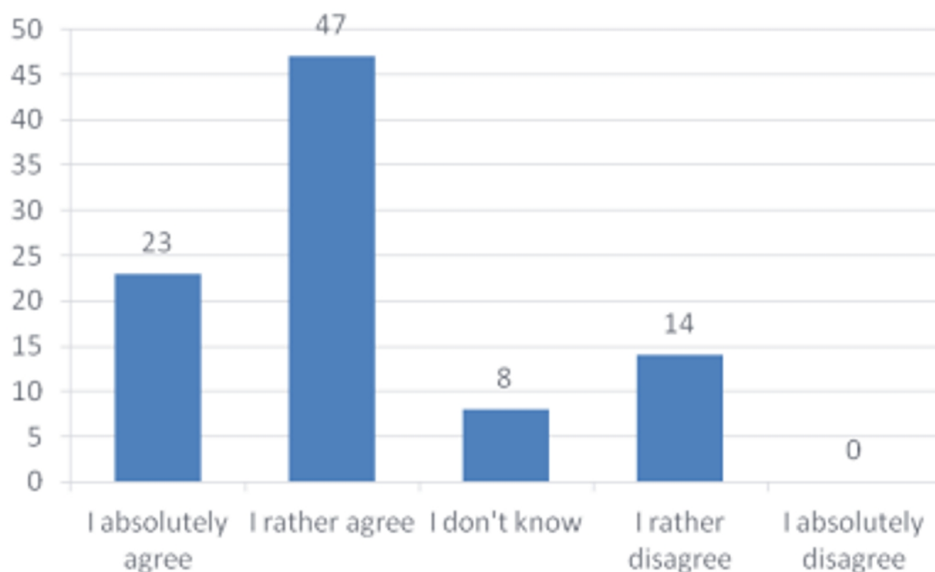

Fig. 1: *Item 7 – Importance of EL*

It is apparent that most students consider English an important part of their knowledge in order to be well prepared for their future job even though they do not teach it. Approximately of all respondents absolutely agree or rather agree with the statement. This result is quite predictable as foreign language competencies are required in all qualified professions these days.

Item. n. 12

English lessons at the faculty of education should cover ESP. Do you agree with this statement?

Yes – No

As mentioned above, teaching English for non-linguists only deals with general English. This item explores if students consider this model sufficient for their fu-
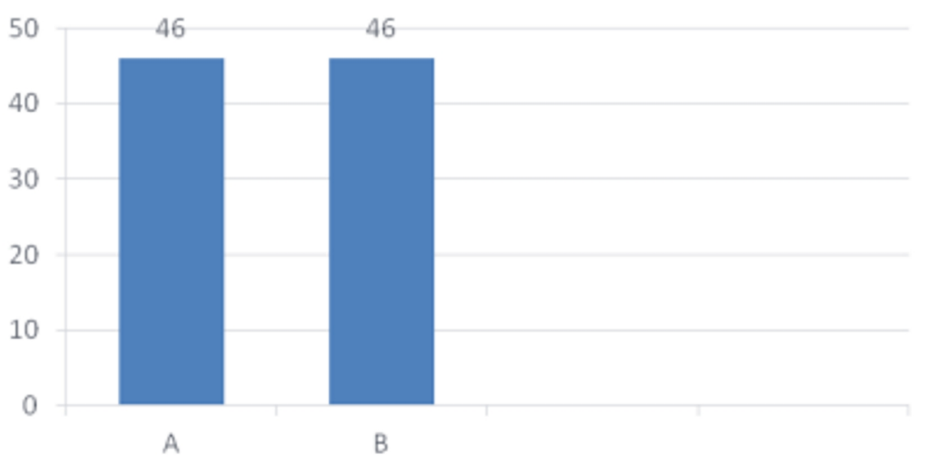
Fig. 2: *Item 12 – ESP in EL courses*

ture profession. As seen from the graph, 50% of the respondents would appreciate ESP within their curriculum. Even though the result is not definite in this case, it demonstrates that not all students are completely satisfied with the content of their lessons and that considerations should be made concerning modifying the teaching of English in faculties of education.

Item n. 8

Which of these statements do you agree with? Tick only one.

a) For my future profession as a lower secondary teacher I only need knowledge of general English.
b) For my future profession as a lower secondary teacher I only need knowledge of English for specific purposes.
c) For my future profession as a lower secondary teacher I need knowledge of general English and English for specific purposes.

The results depicted in this graph relate to the previous one in which half of the students state that English lessons at their Faculty of Education should cover ESP. In this item about 48% of the respondents find knowledge of ESP an important and useful job-related skill. Both graphs indicate that students are in their opinions divided into two proportionally similar groups.
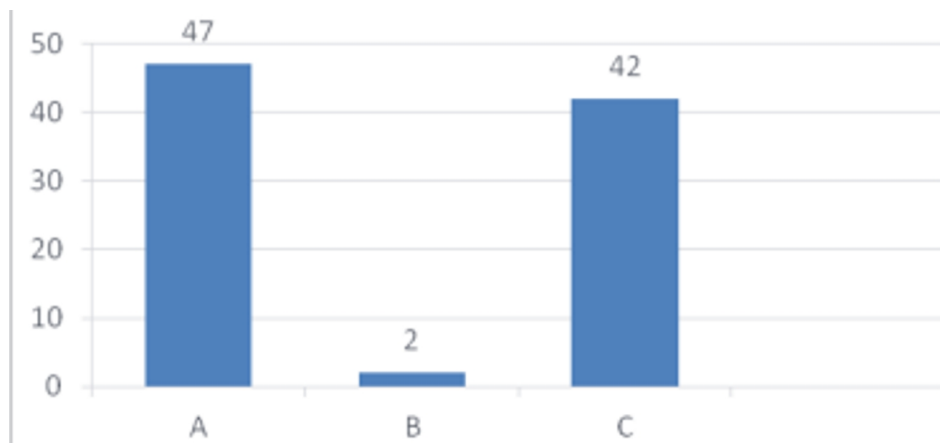
Fig. 3: *Item 8 – General English versus ESP*

Item n. 9

If you ticked B or C, which specific knowledge do you need in ESP? Tick one or more options.

a) information technologies
b) teaching terminology in English
c) subject-specific English
d) other _____

This item aimed at specifying more concretely which area or areas of ESP respondents regard as crucial within their EL competencies. Most students have chosen IT as relevant followed by subject-specific English and teaching terminology in English. The predominance of IT is quite obvious since this competency is currently necessary in all fields and it is closely related to the use of the English language.

Conclusion

After examining literary and online sources, it is obvious that language needs and competencies for non-linguists is an area which has not been properly analysed in available sources and literature. Due to the novelty of this issue, there seems to be a need to carry out certain steps in order to determine its specifics and enhance language teaching for this target group. As the results show, majority of the respondents realize the importance of the English language no matter what their specialization is. On the other hand, the students included in the survey do not reach an agreement what the curriculum of English language course should
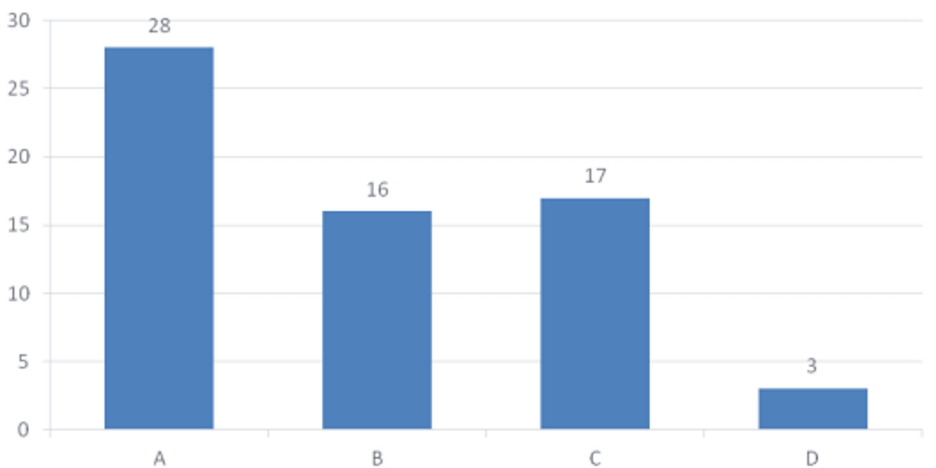
Fig. 4: *Item 9 – ESP focus*

focus on and if ESP is needed to be covered by the course, therefore they will use the specific knowledge within their future professional duties. Nevertheless, most respondents consider IT related ESP as the most relevant one followed by subject-specific English and teaching terminology in English.

Although the first step has been carried out, more groups need to be included in order to obtain truly reliable results. The following tasks will include analysing the language needs of practising teachers in order to determine where they share the same opinions with students and where they differ with one other. Only after this detailed analysis can one suggest or plan possible changes in teaching plans or design material which would better satisfy the actual needs of future lower secondary school teachers and improve their qualifications in this area.

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