

Incorporating Linguistics into ESP Courses

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities of teaching particular linguistic subfields within a course of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) intended for the students of political science. Unlike the majority of ESP courses, this course does not focus predominantly on the specialised lexis or on the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) in the domains related to the learners' expertise, but rather on some typical linguistic features of the language of politics. In order to be able to identify these typical features in political debates and speeches, students need to become familiar with various kinds of linguistic meanings, as well as the concepts of semantic prosody and loadedness in language. These concepts are situated on the intersection of the linguistic domains of lexical semantics, pragmatics and corpus linguistics. The present paper focuses on both the linguistic theory on which the course is based, as well as on some examples of the loaded language found in the texts analysed by the students in the course.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes, semantic prosody, loaded language, purr word, snarl word

Abstrakt: Cílem příspěvku je ukázat, že obsahem kurzu angličtiny pro specifické účely, v tomto případě kurzu určeného studentům politologie, nemusí být nutně odborná slovní zásoba nebo zvyšování kompetence studentů v poslechu, čtení, mluvení a psaní ve svém oboru. Místo toho se učitel může pokusit začlenit do kurzu výuku některých lingvistických podoborů, jako např. lexikální sémantiky, pragmatiky nebo korpusové lingvistiky. Studenti se tak naučí identifikovat a vysvětlit jevy typické pro jazyk svého studijního oboru.

1 Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), together with its subfields English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes, has developed since the 1960s as an independent field within English Language Teaching (ELT), and research in ESP makes an integral part of applied linguistic research. It has its own methodology designed to meet the specific needs of language learners, focusing predominantly on listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in the domains related to the learners' expertise, as well as on the grammatical forms typical of academic contexts and on specialised lexis.

One of the major differences between teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and teaching ESP is the role of the teacher. While an EFL teacher is considered the primary knower of the taught material, the ESP teacher is rather a "consultant who has knowledge of communication practices, but needs to 'negotiate' with the students on how best to exploit these practices to meet the objectives they have" (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

The following sections focus on the potential to break away from this traditional approach to teaching ESP. Instead, the integration of relevant linguistic theories into the syllabus of a specialised English course designed for students of political science is suggested.

From my point of view, the teacher does not necessarily have to serve only as a language consultant in the field of expertise of the student, but, on the contrary, it is possible to merge the teacher's own field of expertise, i.e. linguistics, with the field of expertise of the students. Consequently, certain aspects of linguistic sub-fields, such as lexical semantics or pragmatics can be integrated into ESP courses, teaching students to exercise critical abilities in reading, listening, viewing and thinking in order to cope with the persuasive techniques found in the language of politics.

The relation between political science and linguistics can be shown in the diagram on Fig. 1.

Linguistics

Political Science

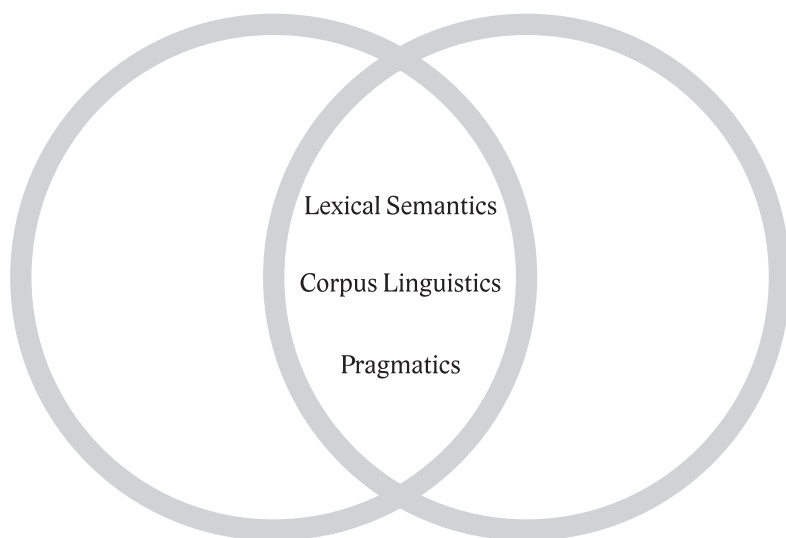


Fig. 1

2 Course Syllabus

The course is to a large extent theory-based. In the first two seminars, students are made familiar with relevant linguistic concepts, such as *denotation*, *connotation*, *collocation*, *metaphor*, *metonymy*, *euphemism*, *dysphemism*, and *jargon*. Proper

understanding of these concepts is essential for the rest of the course, which is based on ten readings. These are highly sophisticated linguistic texts, covering a number of topics, ranging from Orwell's essays *Politics and the English Language* and *Principles of Newspeak*, to the text *Ten Rules of Effective Language*, whose author, Frank Luntz, is a contemporary pollster and political consultant closely cooperating with the Republican Party.

However, the majority of the texts making the core of the course focus on three closely interrelated linguistic themes – on the distinction between various types of meaning, the semantic prosody of words, and the loadedness of political language.

Students are required to have read the texts before going to class and each week two students are assigned to present one of the texts to the class. The presentation is then followed by a discussion and a short analysis of a political speech or debate.

3 Theoretical Background of the Course

This chapter offers a synopsis of the three main themes which make the core of the course – types of meaning, semantic prosody, and loaded language.

3.1 Types of Meaning

Most of the linguistic analysis taught in this course is based on the common binary distinction between *denotation* (denotative meaning) and *connotation* (connotative meaning). However, the distinction between denotation and connotation seems to be a more complex issue and, for the purposes of the analysis of political language, Leech's division into conceptual meaning (used synonymously to *denotation*) and associative meaning (which encompasses five other sub-types of meaning, namely *connotative*, *stylistic*, *affective*, *reflected* and *collocative*) appears more appropriate (c.f. Leech, 1990). These five sub-types of meaning, for which Leech uses the summary term *associative meaning*, share common features by which they are distinguished from their opposite – *conceptual meaning*. According to Leech (1990: 18), they “all have the same open-ended, variable character, and lend themselves to analysis in terms of scales of ranges, rather than in discrete either-this-or-that terms”.

A very important distinction between conceptual and associative meaning, according to Leech, is that associative meaning is less stable than conceptual meaning. While conceptual meaning is shared by users of the same language, associative meaning varies with each individual's experience (Leech 1990: 43). This may lead to situations where the associative meaning of words is used for conveying attitudes and emotions. Leech (1990: 43) mentions two such situations: 1) as associative meaning varies from one person to another, its use can cause miscommu-

nication or misunderstanding; and 2) readers/listeners may be misled by associative meaning (in this case particularly, affective meaning), which is predominant over conceptual meaning and, as a result, they may not be able to appraise the information properly.

Leech (1990: 43) claims that the second situation may be dangerous as it can be misused in order to influence people's opinions and perception of reality and favourable or unfavourable words can thus be chosen in order to manipulate people's view on certain things or issues.

3.2 *Semantic Prosody*

It is virtually impossible to discern the objective associative meanings of words. Stubbs (1996: 172) claims that the best way to determine the connotations of a word is by employing a large corpus. He asserts that the associations and connotations a word has are shown by the characteristic collocations which occur with the word.

As claimed by Stewart (2010), when given words or phrases appear frequently in the context of other words or phrases and these other words or phrases are predominantly positive or negative in their evaluative orientation, the given words consequently take on the positive or negative association and this association can be exploited by speakers to express evaluative meaning covertly. This notion has become known as semantic prosody. A concise definition of semantic prosody is given by Berber-Sardinha (2000: 93), according to whom it is "the connotation conveyed by the regular co-occurrence of lexical items".

In this context, Stubbs (1996) claims that "meaning is not regarded as a purely mental phenomenon, but is analysed distributionally on the basis of observable, objective textual evidence" (1996: 174). A large corpus can be considered as such objective textual evidence. Stubbs thus suggests looking for the "absolute frequency of each collocation, since what we are looking for is recurrent phrases which encode culturally important concepts" (1996: 174).

When seeking the connotations of adjectives and nouns, the aim is to determine which other adjectives these words occur with, as the collocating adjectives express the quality which is typical of the adjective or noun and often appear alongside it.

A typical example is the negative semantic prosody of the word 'dictator', as shown in the Fig. 2, taken from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)*. Relevant collocates are considered adjectives which occur within the span of four words to the left or four words to the right of the keyword. For example, the most frequent collocating adjectives of the word *dictator* are *Iraqi, brutal, military, communist, Soviet, late, and ruthless*.

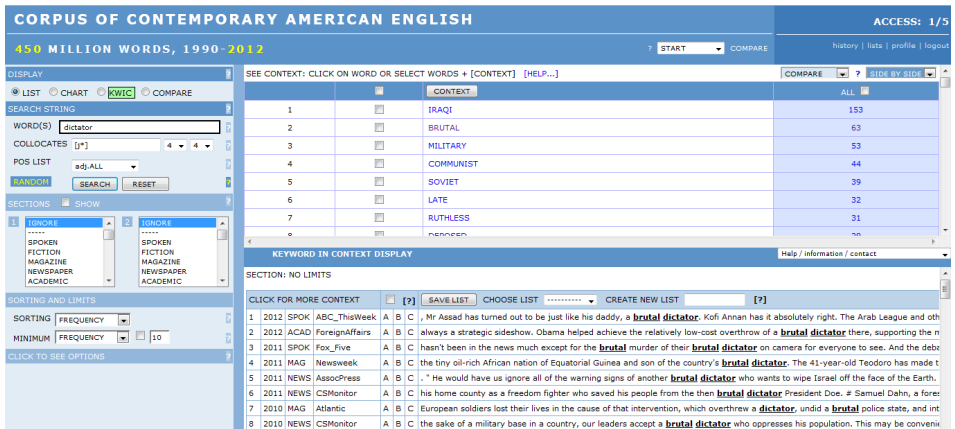


Fig. 2

3.3 Loaded Language

Words with strong positive or negative prosodies can be considered loaded. Bolinger (1980) puts *loaded* or *biased* language into contrast with *propositional* language, which, according to him, is language used for stating facts; it is the language of responsibility and is truthful and accurate (1980: 69–70).

Loaded language, on the other hand, is described by Bolinger as language whose objective is to put something in either a favourable or unfavourable way. As a result, euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions are resorted to (1980: 72–73).

According to Bolinger, one of the basic kinds of expressing something in a favourable or unfavourable manner is what he calls *hidden bias* (1980: 75). He describes biased language as language which evades responsibility and claims that there is hardly any sentence in normal speech which lacks bias, as it is very pervasive (1980: 71). He distinguishes between several kinds of bias. Apart from euphemisms and dysphemisms as such, he speaks about hidden bias in adjectives, nouns, and verbs (1980: 75–82). This means that these words imply a positive or a negative attitude; they evaluate reality in a particular way and can thus be considered loaded.

3.3.1 Purr and Snarl Words

A special type of loaded words, discussed in particular by Leech (1990: 43–44), is expressions in which the associative meaning is so strong that the conceptual meaning very often seems to be almost irrelevant. Hayakawa (1949) calls these expressions *snarl words* (e.g. *fascism* and *communism*) and *purr words* (e.g. *freedom* and *democracy*). The concept of purr words is already mentioned by George

Orwell in his essay *Politics and the English Language* when discussing meaningless words, suggesting the common abuse of political words:

The word Fascism has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies 'something not desirable'. The words 'democracy', 'socialism', 'freedom', 'patriotic', 'realistic', 'justice', have each of them several meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like 'democracy', not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of régime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning. Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different (Orwell 2007: 212–213).

However, the expression purr word itself, together with its opposite – snarl word – was coined by Orwell's contemporary, the linguist Samuel I. Hayakawa in 1949. They are described as words which are 'direct expressions of approval or disapproval, judgments in their simplest form' and Hayakawa suggests that they 'may be said to be human equivalents of snarling and purring' (1949: 45).

A clear definition of snarl words is given by Leech (1990). He defines snarl words as

words whose conceptual meaning becomes irrelevant because whoever is using them is simply capitalizing on their unfavourable connotations in order to give forceful expression to his own hostility. Terms for extreme political views, such as communist or fascist, are particularly prone to degenerate into snarl words (1990: 44).

The same definition could be used for purr words, only 'unfavourable' would be substituted by 'favourable' and 'hostility' would be substituted by 'amity'.

Leech (1990: 45) explains the share of conceptual and associative meanings, or, in other words, how denotation and connotation varies from word to word. In some words, it is irrelevant; in others, it can take up to 100% of the total meaning of the word. In such cases, the message conveyed is strongly affected.

As can be seen in the diagram on Fig. 3, the conceptual meaning of expressions that can be considered neutral outweighs the associative meaning. In the case of both positively and negatively loaded words, both conceptual and associative meanings are important, so that it depends especially on the context in which the particular expression is used. At the end of the scale, there are purr and snarl words, where the conceptual meaning has almost completely lost its importance, and the use of these words is based on their associations in order to evoke either positive or negative feelings.

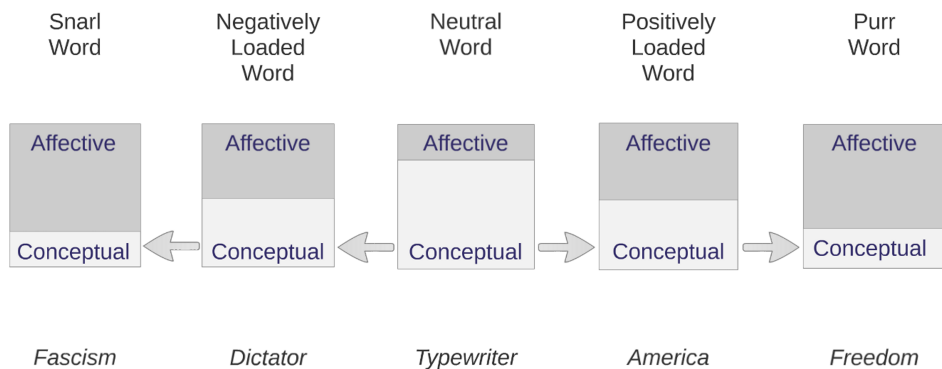


Fig. 3: Adapted from Leech (1990)

4 Practical Application in the Course

The above explained theories are subsequently consolidated by way of simple linguistic analyses of various types of political texts, which include e.g. the first of the three presidential debates in 2004 between George W. Bush and John Kerry from September 30, 2004, and President Obama's Speech on the Death of Osama bin Laden from May 1, 2011.

Students are required to identify examples of strong positive and negative connotations, positively and negatively loaded expressions, and purr and snarl words, based on the theories described in the preceding chapter.

There is a number of recurring expressions, which have been used throughout the last decade by both Republican and Democratic politicians and can be found in the materials analysed by the students in the course. A substantial number of these expressions is connected to the War on Terror, this term itself being very loaded.

4.1 Examples of Loaded Words in the Texts Analysed in the Course

The presidential candidates in 2004 use various negatively loaded nouns when speaking about their enemies, in particular about Saddam Hussein, but also about Osama bin Laden, and in general about terrorists. Both George W. Bush and John Kerry call Saddam Hussein a *threat*, with President Bush also speaking about him as a *risk*. President Bush also speaks about the *ideology of hate* or *ideology of hatred* in relation to terrorists, and Senator Kerry speaks about Osama bin Laden as the greatest *criminal and terrorist*.

Not only is the denotative meaning itself of these words very negative, but so too is their semantic prosody, which contributes to the audience's biased percep-

tion of these people. The conceptual meanings of the following words are taken from the Oxford dictionary (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>), while semantic prosody is based on the most common collocates in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

Threat

The expression *threat* can be considered quite unique, as both of the 2004 presidential candidates concur that Saddam Hussein is a *threat*. It is thus used in a very similar way by both candidates. Nevertheless, the discussion degenerates into an argument of how to deal with such a threat.

Ex.: *After 9/11, we had to recognize that when we saw a **threat**, we must take it seriously before it comes to hurt us.* (George W. Bush)

Ex.: *It was a **threat**. That's not the issue. The issue is what you do about it.* (John Kerry)

conceptual meaning	semantic prosody
a person or thing likely to cause damage or danger	serious, real, potential, terrorist

When somebody is a *threat*, it is justified to send the army to destroy him. The word *threat* is thus used in order to explain, in a very simplified way, why American troops were being sent to Iraq and why, for George W. Bush, invading Iraq is a logical direct consequence of the fact that its leader is a *threat*. He wants the American public to understand it in the same way.

Ideology of hate/hatred

George W. Bush claims that the American enemy has an *ideology of hate* or, its variant, *ideology of hatred*.

Ex.: *This Nation of ours has got a solemn duty to defeat this **ideology of hate**, and that's what they are.* (George W. Bush)

conceptual meaning	semantic prosody
hate; hatred: intense dislike	racial, ethnic, religious, intense

We should probably hate and show no mercy to those who hate us. Thanks to the use of this negative appellation of the enemy, it is not necessary to explain what their ideology actually is, and the plan to destroy them is perfectly justified.

Risk

The word *risk* is used by George W. Bush when speaking about Saddam Hussein.

Ex.: *Saddam Hussein was a **risk** to our country, ma'am.* (George W. Bush)

conceptual meaning	semantic prosody
1. a situation involving exposure to danger	high, increased, greater, higher
a) a person or thing regarded as a threat or likely source of danger	

The word *risk* is used here in exactly the same way as the more frequent word *threat*; they can be considered synonyms in this context. The fact that Hussein was a *risk* justifies George W. Bush's actions in Iraq.

Criminal and terrorist

John Kerry calls Osama bin Laden the world's number one *criminal and terrorist*. The word *terrorist* is also used by Barack Obama in his speech on Osama bin Laden's death.

Ex.: *And when we had Osama bin Laden cornered in the mountains of Tora Bora, 1,000 of his cohorts with him in those mountains, with the American military forces nearby and in the field, we didn't use the best trained troops in the world to go kill the world's number one **criminal and terrorist**.* (John Kerry)

Ex.: *Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a **terrorist** who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.* (Barack Obama)

conceptual meaning	semantic prosody
criminal: person who has committed a crime	international, violent
terrorist: a person who uses terrorism in the pursuit of political aims	international

John Kerry's statement that Osama bin Laden is the world's number one *criminal and terrorist* implies that it is not Saddam Hussein. As President Bush focused on destroying Hussein, this is actually a reproach to Bush's politics. If bin Laden is the biggest *criminal and terrorist*, it means that Hussein is not. And Bush was mistaken.

As for President Obama's opening sentence of his speech, it is interesting to notice the contrast between the negatively loaded words *terrorist* and *murder*, and the positively loaded expression *innocent men, women, and children*.

4.2 Examples of Purr Words in the Texts Analysed in the Course

The most typical purr word regularly appearing in the analysed texts with a very high frequency is the word *freedom*. Other examples of purr words, whose occurrence, however, is rather sporadic compared to *freedom*, include the words *democracy*, *peace*, *unity*, *equality*, *liberty*, *justice*, etc.

Ex.: *And tonight, let us think back to the sense of **unity** that prevailed on 9/11. I know that it has, at times, frayed. Yet today's achievement is a testament to the **greatness** of our country and the determination of the American people.*

*The cause of securing our country is not complete. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of **prosperity** for our people, or the struggle for **equality** for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place.*

*Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with **liberty** and **justice** for all.* (Barack Obama)

Freedom and free

As already stated above, the most popular purr word is the word *freedom*. Webb (2006: 47) claims that "unless the context is imprisonment or some grim totalitarian regime, the word *freedom* on the lips of a politician is often a bludgeon to stun us into not thinking precisely".

Poole (2006: 191) claims that the expression *war on terror* is too negative, as it is a war against something and that's why a positive aspect was added to the war – *war for freedom*. Poole then brings to mind George W. Bush's catchphrase 'freedom is on the march' related to the situation in the Middle East.

The concept of *freedom*, used as a noun, is presented as something necessary to fight for and those who make the effort to achieve freedom are good. It is interesting to note the relationship of American freedom to freedom in other parts of the world. The logic is imposed that we (Americans) have to fight for freedom somewhere else in order to have freedom in the United States. But this connection is never explained and it is taken for granted that people will accept this logic.

Ex.: *And we'll continue to spread **freedom**. I believe in the transformational power of **liberty**. I believe that a **free** Iraq is in this Nation's interests. I believe a **free** Afghanistan*

*is in this Nation's interests, and I believe both a **free** Afghanistan and a **free** Iraq will serve as a powerful example for millions who plead in silence for **liberty** in the broader Middle East.* (George W. Bush)

In this example, the word *freedom* is used interchangeably with the word *liberty*, which, in this context, has the same meaning and can be considered its synonym. The repetition of the words *freedom*, *free*, and *liberty* in this quote corresponds to Rank's inclusion of repetition among the three most common techniques used in order to intensify various parts of information communicated, the other two techniques being association and composition (1976: 7). According to Rank, however, repetition concerns in particular slogans, signs, symbols, logos and brand names. These are often repeated in order to intensify. The more often you hear or read something, the more you are likely to remember it. Much more common than random repetition is repetition with some kind of patterning in time or space (Rank, 1976: 9).

The adjective *free* was one of the favourite catchwords of former president George W. Bush. Bush would employ this expression when speaking about *free Iraq* and *Iraqis*, *free Afghanistan*, *free nations*, *free society*, *free Muslims*, and also about *free elections*.

The reason for the overabundant use of the adjective *free* was to justify American military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, and was supposed to help George W. Bush to disprove the claims of the Democrats that attacking Iraq had been a bad decision for the Republican administration. George W. Bush's aim was a *free world*, which is defined by Wasserman and Hausrath (2006: 68) as "a hackneyed political slogan for that group of nations whose sympathies are allied to American interests, whether their citizens enjoy freedom or are ruled by despots".

5 Concluding Remarks

The aim of the above-described approach to ESP teaching is to broaden the students' horizons by enabling them to see their own field of study from a different perspective. They are taught relevant linguistic theories of the specialized discourse of their field of study, in this particular case political discourse, and apply this newly acquired knowledge in a simple linguistic analysis of political texts.

A substantial part of political language is loaded, and it is important that students of political science are able to identify the loaded vocabulary and explain its hidden meaning. The above-explained knowledge of some basic concepts of lexical semantics, pragmatics and corpus linguistics can be very helpful in this respect. It is possible to analyse political debates, comparing the strategies of the opponents in the debate, as well as political speeches of individual politicians, focusing on the typical features of the person's language. For this purpose, applicable State of

the Union Addresses, Inaugural Addresses, Weekly Addresses, or Press Briefings can be selected by the teacher according to the topic discussed.

The course thus merges the teacher's field of expertise – linguistics – with the field of expertise of the students, i.e. political science. Consequently, the teacher breaks away from being only a consultant, who knows the communication practices, but has no knowledge whatsoever of the carrier content of the material.

On the other hand, thanks to the necessity to read extensive excerpts of texts, listen to authentic recordings, and discuss highly-sophisticated issues in class, the students' reading, listening and speaking skills, as well as advanced vocabulary knowledge, can be systematically developed in the course.

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