

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND PRINCIPLES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

As internationalization and globalization in higher education intensifies, there are ever increasing numbers of students who travel beyond their own country's borders to study. Thus, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a methodology which is at once growing in importance and becoming more widespread. Therefore the purpose of this article is to discuss eight pedagogical principles and approaches to the teaching of English in an academic environment, which can help to enhance both non-native students' and academics' learning of EAP. These approaches and principles reflect unique conditions and goals which are emblematic of the teaching EAP (TEAP) such as meeting students' immediate needs, the use of authentic materials or the issue of intercultural awareness.

Key words

English for Academic Purposes, approaches, principles, non-native students, non-native academics

1 Introduction

Nowadays, thanks to globalization, more and more students go and study abroad. The same is true for non-native academics who participate in foreign research or teaching mobility exchange. Moreover, they need EAP skills in order to get their research presented and published in the world's prestigious databases, such as the Web of Science. Thus, the author of this article sets out and proposes eight pedagogical principles and approaches which can contribute to the enhancement of non-native speakers' EAP skills if they are employed with respect to the conditions and goals which are typical or emblematic of TEAP. These are the conditions which are critical for TEAP but arguably less integral to, or less widespread in, other branches of English language teaching (ELT). They are as follows (cf. Frydrychová Klímová 2013):

- EAP students use English to fulfil their discipline-specific needs;
- the use of authentic materials is much more widespread in TEAP than ELT because authentic materials can show students how *real-world* tasks are understood and approached in their subject disciplines;
- EAP students need to be more autonomous more quickly than other learners of English because EAP courses tend to be short;

- EAP students have greater opportunities to use technologies than other students of English since EAP is at the forefront of using technologies for language teaching (cf. Todd 2003); and
- team-teaching is a distinctive principle of TEAP (Todd 2003), which in other ELT situations is not.

2 EAP pedagogy

On the basis of the above-mentioned characteristics and recent publications (Hyland 2006, Todd 2003, or Veselá 2012), the author of this article considers the following principles and approaches important for TEAP:

- promoting constructivism and connectivism as background philosophies;
- exploiting corpus linguistics as a resource for the teaching of specific genres;
- using task-based activities;
- exploiting authentic materials and tasks;
- promoting learner autonomy;
- using blended learning;
- integrating cooperative and collaborative learning; and
- employing team teaching.

2.1 Promoting constructivism and connectivism as background philosophies

Multiple perspectives, the ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts, authentic activities, real-world environments; these are just some of the themes that are frequently associated with the two educational philosophies or theories of constructivism and connectivism. There are many similarities between the perspectives of different researchers (cf. Jonassen 1994, McMahon 1997, Siemens 2004, Vygotsky 1978, or Wilson & Cole 1991). Although there are many characteristics of both philosophies, the author of this article sets out only those which are directly connected with TEAP. Among these are:

- multiple perspectives and representations of concepts and content are presented and encouraged;
- activities, opportunities, tools and environments are provided to encourage metacognition, self-analysis, self-regulation, self-reflection and self-awareness;
- learning situations, environments, skills, content and tasks are relevant, realistic, authentic and seek to replicate the natural complexities of the *real world*;
- knowledge construction and not reproduction is emphasized;

- knowledge construction takes place in individual contexts and through social negotiation, collaboration and experience;
- the learner's previous knowledge constructions, beliefs and attitudes are considered important to the new knowledge construction process;
- problem-solving, higher-order thinking skills and deep understanding are emphasized;
- exploration is a favoured approach in order to encourage students to seek knowledge independently and to manage the pursuit of their goals;
- knowledge complexity is reflected in an emphasis on conceptual interrelatedness and interdisciplinary learning;
- learning and knowledge reside in diversity of opinions;
- learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources;
- scaffolding is used to help students perform just beyond the limits of their ability;
- nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning; and
- the ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.

These characteristics of constructivism and connectivism represent prerequisites of successful TEAP.

2.2 Exploiting corpus linguistics as a resource for the teaching of specific genres

Corpus linguistics is extremely important in TEAP because it is the study of language by means of naturally occurring language samples, which are stored in corpora. Corpora are computerized databases created for linguistic research. Flowerdew (2012, as cited in Connor 2013) provides the most recent characteristics of a corpus:

- authentic, naturally occurring data;
- assembled according to explicit design criteria;
- representative of a particular language or genre; and
- designed for a specific linguistic or socio-pragmatic purpose.

Based on the definition of a corpus, corpus linguistics is then the study of language through computational analyses of large collections of written texts and recordings of speech. Its analyses are usually carried out with specialised software programmes. Corpus linguistics is a method to obtain and analyse data quantitatively and qualitatively rather than a theory of language. The great advantage of the corpus-linguistic method is that language researchers do not

have to rely on their own or other NS' intuitions or even on made-up examples. Rather, they can draw on a large amount of authentic, naturally occurring language data produced by a variety of speakers or writers in order to confirm or refute their own hypotheses about specific language features on the basis of an empirical foundation. As Sinclair (1991, as cited in Hyland 2006) points out, this moves the study of language away from ideas of what is correct, towards what is typical or frequent.

The corpus-linguistic approach can be used to describe language features and to test hypotheses formulated in various linguistic frameworks. To name but a few examples, corpora recording different stages of learner language (beginners, intermediate, and advanced learners) can provide information for foreign language acquisition research or by means of historical corpora it is possible to track the development of specific features in the history of English like the emergence of the modal verbs *gonna* and *wanna* (Hyland 2006).

At present, there are a number of software programmes, which serve for analyses of different corpora. For example, the *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 2012) is an integrated suite of programmes for looking at how words behave in texts. It possesses several tools for the analysis of different corpora and these tools are described below. One of the tools of the *WordSmith Tools* is the *WordList* tool, which provides a list of all the words or word-clusters in a text, set out in alphabetical or frequency order. For EAP teachers there is a specific *Academic Word List* (AWL), which was constructed by Averil Coxhead in 2000 for her MA thesis at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. AWL is useful because it contains 570 word families which students from different discipline-subjects can use in the preparation of their seminar papers, presentations or even exams.

In addition, there are a few software programmes, which can be downloaded free of charge. However, their functions are simpler in comparison with the *WordSmith Tools*. Teachers can exploit, for example, the *TextSTAT* (2012), which was developed at Freie University in Berlin. It is a simple programme for the analysis of texts. It reads plain text files (in different encodings) and HTML files (directly from the Internet) and it produces word frequency lists and concordances from these files. It is very user-friendly, which means that even teachers who are relatively unskilled or inexperienced in computer use can operate it easily. Both teachers and students can create their own corpora and analyse them afterwards. Figure 1 below demonstrates the analysis of a corpus of 60 English written conference abstracts on tourism. Students can look, for example, at the most frequent words and collocations and see them in their context.

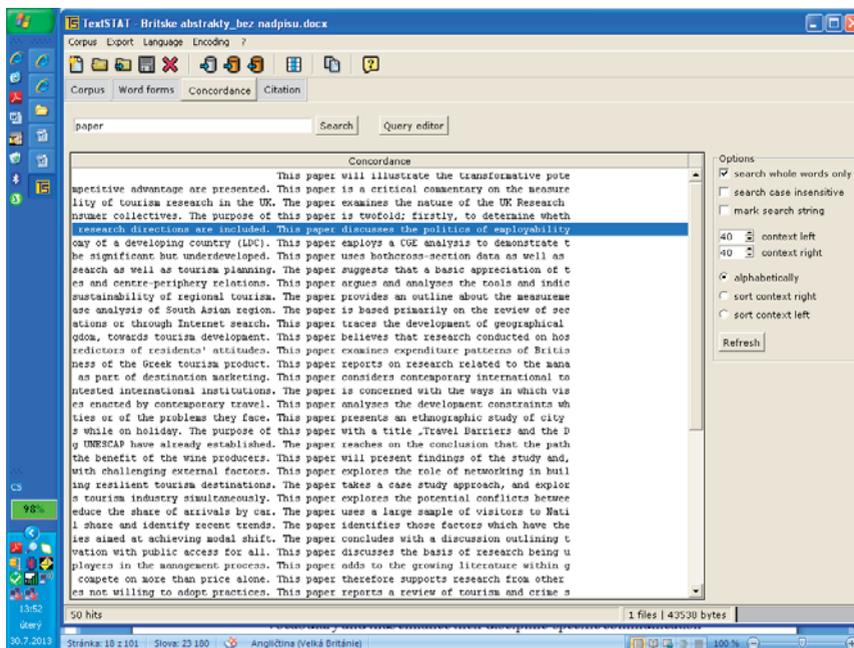


Figure 1: An example of the analysis of one's own corpus with the *TextSTAT*, showing right and left collocations of the word *paper*

As seen from different functions of the software programmes, non-native students (NNS) studying EAP can benefit from their use in the following ways:

- they can increase their linguistic proficiency by looking at grammatical (e.g. examine word order) and lexical (e.g. compare similar words) aspects of language use in their disciplines;
- they can exploit frequency wordlists to discover discipline-specific useful phrases and their collocations and thus enhance their discipline-specific communication skills; and
- they can look at some sociolinguistic markers, such as comparison of language use – NNS/NS, written/spoken, to enhance their intercultural communication competences.

Moreover, EAP teachers can apply corpus linguistics in three main areas in their teaching (cf. Barlow 2002):

- *syllabus design* (to meet students' needs, teachers use a corpus to try to determine what language items should be incorporated into the course syllabus);

- *materials development* (with the help of a corpus teachers can create exercises based on real examples which provide students with an opportunity to discover features of actual language use); and
- *classroom activities* (students themselves can discover during their language classes how a concordancing programme works and draw their own conclusions about language use; this in turn will promote learner autonomy).

2.3 Using task-based activities

Task-based language learning (TBLL) approach is quite widespread in the teaching and learning of EAP since NNS have to solve and research *real-world* academic issues in order to succeed in their studies abroad. A lesson usually has the following stages: pre-task activity, task, planning, report, analysis, and practice (cf. Willis & Willis 2007).¹

On the one hand, this approach has indisputably many advantages for TEAP, such as:

- students can cooperate in groups and thus develop cooperative learning in solving different tasks, for example, in the preparation of joint subject-specific presentations;
- TBLL can encourage students' deeper understanding of the subject through, for example, their research work of the subject, which is an inseparable part of their academic studies;
- a TBLL approach develops students' metacognitive skills, such as the skills of critical thinking and reflection, which are indispensable for conducting research (Vermillion 1997); and a TBLL approach exposes students to varied language structures and collocations, e.g. while they are reading a professional text in order to complete the task.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that TBLL has been criticized as lacking in sensitivity to the social and cultural dimensions of language learning (Ortega 2007). Furthermore, with specific regard to TEAP, which aims to teach language efficiently, the naturalistic bias of TBLL has been deemed inefficient for teaching basic grammar and vocabulary for the beginning level (Swan 2005). Ortega (2012) has responded to this by suggesting the use of input-providing tasks at lower levels. However, her other suggestions can also be exploited in TEAP, such as guided planning when attention is given to the grammar component of the task and task repetition when after drawing attention to form, the task is done for a second time. This can be further usefully supplemented by the example given by Hall and Kenny (1988, as cited in Hyland 2006). They describe the EAP TalkBase programme at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, which

provides a model of task-based and autonomous learning in an EAP course at tertiary level where teachers act as coordinators and facilitators; they participate in activities whose content is provided by students through group interaction and whose outcomes are not determined beforehand.

2.4 Exploiting authentic materials and tasks

In TEAP there has always been a tendency towards prioritising authentic texts, such as the use of case studies in TEAP for business, law, medicine and engineering (cf. Dudley-Evans & St John 1998). According to Todd (2003), in TEAP authentic materials are *de rigueur*.

At the same time, it should be noted that there are some pedagogical situations where authors, such as Jordan (1997) or Ellis (1999, as cited in Hyland 2006), think that non-authentic/contrived materials better serve pedagogical purposes. According to Ellis (1999), contrived texts can enrich students' input with more examples of the target structure, while authentic texts (e.g. cf. Section 2.2 on corpus linguistics) can provide meaningful exposure to the language.

It is also worth mentioning that EAP students do not always find using authentic, discipline-specific materials in EAP classes attractive since they say that they are having to read these kinds of texts all the time in their subject classes and they would rather prefer other authentic materials while learning EAP (cf. Plews 2010). A solution is videos of authentic materials from the Deutsche Welle website exploited by Frydrychová Klímová and Kacetl (2012) in their EAP/ESP classes. In each lesson students are exposed to current topics from various fields (e.g. politics, sports, environment, or culture). Using these as a springboard, they run discussions and do various tasks. Moreover, such materials link students with the outside world and thus they are more involved in their learning.

2.5 Promoting learner autonomy

Autonomous learning is much more common in EAP teaching practices because EAP students are more mature, more self-directed and motivated than students of English for General Purposes (EGP), (cf. Todd 2003, Waters & Waters 1992, 1993). Moreover, learner autonomy involves learners being aware of their own ways of learning, so as to utilize their strengths and work on their weaknesses (van Lier 1996). Intrinsic and social motivation plays a central role in learner autonomy.

In comparison with other learners of English, EAP students have to do a lot of additional self-access language learning (SALL)² in order to succeed in their EAP studies within a short time span. In order to help them with their SALL, EAP teachers should encourage them in their studies by providing them with banks

of self-access materials with keys, ideally uploaded in a supporting/reference online course, and also personal projects, assignments or optional consultations with a tutor. For example, Blue (1988, as cited in Jordan 1997) describes an example of essay writing when students are assigned the title of an essay by, or in cooperation with, their discipline-specific departments.

The author of this article considers autonomous learning the basic constituent of TEAP, in which a learner is ready to realize his/her self and needs, s/he is determined to take on responsibilities, exploit his/her cognitive skills, seek for knowledge and information independently, and s/he is willing to cooperate and communicate with others and show empathy to other people. This can be achieved by being trained to use metacognitive, cognitive, communicative and social strategies (cf. Frydrychová Klímová 2012).

2.6 Using blended learning

Technologies in TEAP play a far more important role than in any other branch of ELT since TEAP situations are generally better resourced than other situations of ELT (Todd 2003) and because EAP course objectives may include technology-oriented goals as EAP students need to do a lot of SALL. Furthermore, Frydrychová Klímová (2010) claims that blended learning³ (BL) in particular is an ideal solution to SALL. As Graham (2005) summarizes, learners and teachers work together to improve the quality of learning and teaching, the ultimate aim of BL being to provide realistic practical opportunities for learners and teachers to make learning independent, useful, sustainable and ever growing.

Thus, the main reasons why blended learning should be employed in TEAP are as follows:

- it contributes to EAP pedagogy because it supports more interactive strategies, not only face-to-face teaching (Graham et al. 2003);
- it thus encourages collaborative learning; students or educators can work together on academic projects from anywhere and at any time (Bruffee 1993);
- it deepens intercultural awareness since it puts together researchers, educators, and students from anywhere in the world;
- it reduces costs of teaching and learning since students do not have to undertake so many frequent travels to complete their education (Graham et al. 2003); and
- it might match student's learning style although there is no clear consensus on this issue (Coffield 2004, Hubáčková & Semrádová 2013).

However, there are also drawbacks of blended learning (cf. e.g. Čech & Klímová 2003). Blended learning is time-consuming and demanding in terms

of creating materials and preparation and evaluation. Furthermore, both students and teachers sometimes have limited knowledge regarding the use of technology, and technical glitches are liable to happen at any moment. Finally, students' study skills are often not sufficiently developed to enable them to benefit maximally from blended learning.

A classic example of using the BL approach is a course of English as a second language where the instructor decides that all audio-based activities (listening comprehension and oral comprehension) will take place in the classroom while all written text-based activities will take place online (reading comprehension and essay writing). Frydrychová Klímová (2012) provides an example of an EAP blended course on *Academic Writing* taught at the Faculty of Informatics and Management (FIM) in Hradec Králové where all written assignments, such as essays, are submitted via the online course and similarly, self-study of further reference reading are done online. In the follow-up face-to-face class the teacher and the students discuss particular difficulties or goals connected with their online work and the teacher also clarifies any errors students may have made in their assignments.

2.7 Integrating cooperative and collaborative learning

Another approach to TEAP is collaborative and cooperative learning⁴. These approaches are again more typical of TEAP than of any other ELT situations since EAP students do more project work and case studies in their specific subjects (cf. Jordan 1997).

The names collaborative and cooperative learning are sometimes used interchangeably because both favour small-group active student participation. However, collaborative learning can take place any time students work together towards a goal while in cooperative learning students work together in the same place on a structurally defined task/project. Nevertheless, both methods are used in TEAP; collaborative learning can enable students to develop their writing skills while working together, for example on an article for *Wikipedia*. In addition, collaborative learning on an EAP course can be a valuable solution for students of different cultural backgrounds. Students from some cultural backgrounds (e.g. Asian) may be reluctant to speak a lot in front of other classmates, but are comfortable to discuss things online (cf. Warschauer 2002, as cited in Hyland 2006).

An example of cooperative learning can be peer editing in writing classes at school.

In addition, there are further, more general, benefits of using a collaborative and cooperative approach in TEAP:

- students raise their intercultural awareness while working together with other NNS and NS on task completion;
- they develop interpersonal social skills, such as mediation skills, the skills of reaching compromises;
- they develop the skills of team work;
- both approaches promote a more active approach to learning, where each member of the group has opportunities to contribute;
- they enhance their cognitive and metacognitive skills;

It should be noted, however, that some critics have raised concerns that where students are in mixed-ability groups, more gifted students may become discouraged or bored because teachers try to meet the needs of the majority of students and prepare tasks suited to their proficiency. Such tasks are also likely to call for mainly lower thinking skills to be deployed (cf. Radencich & Mckay 1995, Randall 1999).

2.8 Employing team teaching

Team-teaching is an approach that is particularly characteristic of, and suited to, the nature of TEAP (cf. Dudley-Evans 2001). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) distinguish three levels of cooperation between the EAP teacher and subject teacher, each with an increasing level of interaction:

- *cooperation*, which involves information gathering from the subject department about syllabi, tasks and other information useful for EAP course design;
- *collaboration*, which involves the EAP teacher and the subject teacher working together in order to develop the EAP course in support of the subject course; and
- *team-teaching*.

The author of this article agrees with Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) that in practice team-teaching happens more rarely than the EAP literature suggests and that most of any cooperation that takes place ends up at the collaboration level for the simple reason that subject teachers tend not to be keen on collaborating with their EAP peers. The reasons for this unwillingness concern both interested parties, i.e. both EAP teachers and subject specialists:

- participants may be suspicious and critical of each other;
- EAP teachers might find subject teachers inadequately responsive to L2 learners;
- EAP teachers might feel that their professionalism is underestimated by the subject tutors;

- subject tutors might feel that EAP teachers know little about disciplinary communication and so should teach only general English skills; and
- sometimes subject teachers feel superior and decline any kind of negotiating with EAP teachers (cf. Barron 2003).

Harker and Koutsantoni (2004) for a specific example of a web-based mediated EAP course in which two language specialists worked together in order to improve their students EAP skills. Furthermore, the author of this article suggests a possible solution provided that the subject teachers are willing to take on extra duties. It is envisioned that both EAP and subject teachers will agree to be equal partners in team-teaching. Both the subject teacher and his/her EAP counterpart would be present in class. While the subject teacher is giving lectures and solving case studies with students, his/her EAP counterpart would be observing and marking down students' language difficulties. In the adjunct class the language teacher would discuss and practise language issues with students.⁵ Both teachers would jointly mark their assignments according to their roles in the course. In fact, this is the model that FIM will try to introduce in the summer semester of 2014 within the study programme of Management of Tourism when the teacher of geotourism will run lectures in class and supply the material into an online course and the language specialist will work with students on their language difficulties while working on their assignments given to them by the subject specialist. Both teachers will also be supporting students online with relevant materials, advice, feedback on their assignments and will jointly encourage them in their studies.

3 Conclusion

Although the eight listed methodological principles and approaches could be applicable in other branches of ELT, the nature of TEAP, focused as it is on meeting students' discipline-specific needs, requires them. In fact, some of them, such as task-based learning (Herbolich 1979), the use of authentic materials or team-teaching (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998) originated in the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. BL is the latest development to become an integral part of EAP teaching.

In conclusion, it should be also noted that the various TEAP approaches outlined above are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they complement each other: for example, teachers of EAP should be mindful to use technologies to solve tasks such as case studies in ways that are likely to promote collaborative learning.

Endnotes

- ¹ TBLL originated in the 1980s and became quite popular in the 1990s. Its main characteristics are given, for example, by Ellis (2003) or Ortega (2012).
- ² It means that students have access to resources ranging from photocopied exercises with answer keys to computer software for language learning.
- ³ Although there are a number of competing definitions of blended learning (cf. Driscoll 2002, or Whitelock & Jelfs 2003), this article follows the definition of Littlejohn and Pegler (2007): i.e. *blended learning* is perceived as an integration of face-to-face teaching and learning methods with on-line approaches.
- ⁴ For further information cf. Educational Broadcasting Corporation 2004, Cooper & Robinson 1997, Panitz 1996, Rockwood 1995, or Smith & MacGregor 1992.
- ⁵ This approach is called Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in which courses combine input on both language and subject content.

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