

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ESP FOR *TOURISM* IN ALBANIA

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Abstract

Students who study tourism usually bring different attitudes, interests, and levels of competence, in their orientation towards learning foreign languages than those shared by other types of students of English, even when English may only be a requirement to obtain a degree (García Laborda, 2001). While, in the future, *such* students may come to consider English as one of the most useful tools in the tourism industry (Uber, 1985), they still tend to regard it as just another subject in the curriculum during their academic study. Few will consider studying it out of school for personal interest or as a factor for future success in their careers. This presentation, is divided into five sections, discusses the characteristics and the needs of these students as well as a set of proposals to improve their attitude, interest, and possibilities to succeed in the study of the English language. In discussing the academic, student, curricular needs and the individual characteristics of students who study tourism, the paper reviews:

- 1- Students' perceived difficulties;
- 2- Students' vision of Communicative Methodologies;
- 3- Students' attitudes towards foreign language learning;
- 4- Needs-oriented classes;
- 5- Possible solutions and suggestions for the future.

This paper also deals with topics such as methodology and techniques used for *ESP tourism* classes with special attention to its impact on students' views through communicative instruction, grouping, means of optimizing classes, and exploring ideas to improve the subject.

Key words: student of tourism, English language, difficulties, useful tools

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Students' challenges in learning English for tourism purposes

A recent study held in some Albanian universities was focused on the main problems of 46 students of tourism who learn English as a compulsory subject. Many of them acknowledged their limited communicative and academic skills in the language. Indeed, English teachers found it hard to believe that students who would be negotiating in English most of their professional life

might lack a minimum standard of competence in the language, maybe the equivalent to a good 12th grader (Bachelor student). Sometimes some students might be more competent in Foreign languages than the regular student of Tourism, and the latter showed at times less interest in learning than the former. Another interesting fact the English instructors discovered was the relationship between effort and expected outcomes. For many students studying English in the universities' classroom was not nearly as significant as their out-of-school interaction in the Second Language. They seemed to want to rely too heavily on the results of daily communication routines rather than accept the importance of setting a solid formation in English. This is especially true because of their preference of the spoken language over the written one. In fact, despite the stressed fact that most communication in the business world is now done by electronic devices such as E-mail, I-net, and fax, many students minimize the importance of writing, limiting it to contracts and formal documents. From the data drawn from the study eliciting students' attitudes and perceptions towards their college learning difficulties, it is concluded that:

- 1) The students felt the need to achieve a good competence of English while in college;
- 2) there was little relationship between their previous length of time studying English and the competence level achieved in their secondary studies (also Ikeguchi, 1996);
- 3) many secondary teachers limited their teaching to curriculum goals and showed little emphasis in communication and real life needs and interests (also supported by Mayo and Pica, 2000);
- 4) The students had few expectations of their learning in college;
- 5) The students thought that six credit hours in first and second year was too little to acquire desirable competence;

- 6) The college needed special courses for those students having studied different languages other than English in High school; and
- 7) The students were concerned about the need of reinforcing English throughout-of curriculum courses.

The same study researched whether the teaching procedures and methodology known by the students were optimal for teaching English for tourism, and what elements should be emphasized in the instruction. For many, grammar rules had been the central part of their previous instruction in English in high school. Besides, most believed that private schools offered far better language instruction than the public counter part (similar results were obtained by Abadi (2001)), and that although some of the instructors in universities had some knowledge of the tourism industry, it was clear that students did not consider it as highly qualified experience. Generally speaking, their vision for *ESP tourism* textbooks was relatively positive, but they criticized the contents in the university book asserting that they were too demanding. In addition, they frequently considered speaking and writing skills to be artificial, unrealistic and generally out of context. Lecturers were informally interviewed concerning the language training of university teachers and acknowledged the importance of familiarizing themselves with the matters, issues and realities of the travel industry but criticize.

Without the specific knowledge of particular realities in their field of teaching, misunderstandings with profound effects are inevitable due to cultural and international regulations and circumstances. Overall, learners of English for tourism purposes expressed difficulties with regard to achieving certain degrees of competence due to inability of fulfillment for their specific needs, the lack of realistic context and the inadequacy of materials.

The study examining the perceptions of students who study tourism evidenced a discrepancy between the previous knowledge and real students' need for communicative activities. The study also reviewed the types of the most extensively used exercises (Ross, 1992). Of those, free conversation, dialogue promotion and pair work were the most accepted, while long grammar explanations and drilling were immediately rejected (also Rao, 2002). Students also made it clear that grammar was necessary as a way of language production, and that they believed its teaching to be necessary. Overall, students valued most the following communicative activities:

- 1) whole class presentations;
- 2) programmed role play;
- 3) pair work conversations;
- 4) oral teacher–student interaction; and
- 5) Vocabulary games.

Dialogue creation and memorization was the least liked activity. However, students feared non-programmed or spontaneous activities due to the fact that they create a great deal of anxiety, so learners hoped that these interaction activities were not as frequent as the textbook itself proposes.

Many students still seem to feel very self-conscious as English learners; some even believe that they will be able to finish other university requirements except for English. Sometimes, there may seem to be a broad gap between what they believe they should be taught and what they really received through their classroom instruction. If motivation for English learning is a must, repeating students may be easily deceived by the fact that no matter what they do (extra classes, language schools and academies, intensive courses, and the like), there is no chance that they might be able to catch up with the course material. They feel that their classes tend to be an intense teacher-centered monologue or uncorrected group work in pairs. At this point, it is necessary to state that students believe that they should be taught the following in their classes:

- 1) Simple grammar structures (may be reinforcement of some knowledge supposedly acquired in high school);
- 2) Extensive vocabulary lists on the travel industry;
- 3) Pre-fabricated patterns for common use;
- 4) Certain training in cross - cultural understanding;
- 5) Learning strategies;
- 6) Communication strategies;
- 7) Behavioral strategies;
- 8) Shorter but more contextualized listening activities (many textbooks have listening exercises up to 10 minutes long, which are very demanding and, generally speaking, monotonous and boring);

- 9) Realistic texts for reading from authentic travel industry literature; and
- 10) Training in English language by using the World Wide Web and E-mail interaction.

It is clear that beliefs about foreign language learning, language learning strategies, and language classroom anxiety modify the extent, interest and degree of the learning process. This analysis of results reveals overt discrepancies between professors' and students' views regarding foreign language instruction. Most learners stated that only a few needs were fulfilled by their classes and learning materials. Consequently, their anxiety due to the gap between their ideal situation and their class utility was significantly controlled by this context.

Possible solutions and suggestions for the future

As a conclusion, the students offered recommendations for methodology and for the design of the English for Tourism classes. Apart from the previous conclusions, students who had taken French in high school suggested remedial non-credit classes on Business / Tourism English, forty hours of basic language training prior to the academic year (first two weeks in September) and more adapted and simple materials. The average students included these suggestions: two modules on business training during the first year, less demanding materials, more training on internet research, more programmed speaking activities, and adapted sets of guiding notes with a balance of language and specific tourism training; e-mail interchange opportunities with other institutions; separation by proficiency level; and formative activities in English. Their recommendations urged the discontinuation of the following: non-motivating activities and materials; the English-only rule in class (that is to say more use of L1); artificial materials; heterogeneous grouping; large discussion classes; teachers without knowledge or experience of the Tourism industry.

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