THE ROLE OF ELECTRONIC LITERACY APPROACH TO CORPORATE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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RESUMO

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo descrever o cenário do ensino de inglês em ambientes corporativos, lidando basicamente com três aspectos que julgamos essenciais para Cursos de Inglês Comercial (ESP): o professor, o aprendiz e a nova possibilidade de introduzir o Letramento Digital no ensino de língua inglesa para executivos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ensino, ESP, Letramento, Digital, executivos

ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to picture the Corporate Language Teaching scenario, as regard basically three aspects we see as essential for the Business ESP Programs: the teacher, the apprentice and the new possibility to introduce electronic literacy in the teaching of business people.

KEY-WORDS: teaching, ESP, Digital, Literacy, executives

I. THE BUSINESS ESP

English for *S*pecific Purpose programs have first arisen in the 60s, along with the advent of technology and commerce taking international proportions, creating natural demand for an international language. From that moment on, people effectively interested in the English Language started to come into scene due to their needs of seeking technological and commercial knowledge at a worldwide range. Therefore, this new mass of people interested in learning English comprised apprentices knowing precisely what they wanted and needed from their language programs. Such learners, thus, represented distinguished students whose inherent learning needs circumstances established, on the one hand, a student-centered approach and, on the other, a program that could meet the development of their communicative competence in specific fields.

Among all of those learners we find the business people, whose necessities when learning English are highly clear and distinct. To mention some, we may list the learning of: negotiation skills and how to make effective presentations, how to write an accurate report; how to join and contribute in a board meeting; social-linguistic strategies for oral communication in and out of the office.

Despite that fairly considerable list of specific needs, the demands are continuously growing, as corporate environments are constantly searching for new ways of making their business more and more competitive to survive in the current open market. Hence, business people are inevitably inserted in that picture, and it is precisely for them that we may generate customized language programs.

II. THE BUSINESS ESP TEACHER

If the needs of learners are to be met, it is also perfectly feasible to say that, as much specific as the knowledge area herein discussed should be the teacher education in order to work within that market of the teaching business.

From ours and other teachers' work experience in business ESP, more important than mastering that unknown universe - which actually is quite difficult, unless that teacher himself has had a personal previous experience in business workplace - is being able to understand executives' reality. To do so, it may be relevant for teachers to experiment establishing a sharing relationship with apprentices, so as to exchange knowledge and experiences with them: as we learn from them about their professional world and its peculiarities, they will learn from us about the subtleties of language communication .

For that to be so, and confirmed by a research conducted by Ribeiro (2002), it could be realized and documented that it would be extremely useful for ESP teachers be aware of some Sociolinguistics principles. Such research also showed that learners actually prefer a Portuguese-speaker teacher, so he/she may be able to understand their transfers, for one thing. Other quite relevant aspects to assist an ESP teacher-to-be refer to having Communicative and Discourse Competence, understandimg Needs Analysis and Course Design processes. In addition to all that, we might attach Professional Competence, up-to-date knowledge of current events, and striving constantly to improve our critical standard before general issues (politics, economics, social matters. and so on). Last but not least, we must place Digital Literacy where it belongs within the Corporate Language Programs.

Based on that, we would like to point out the extreme relevance of Teacher Education Programs for the ESP niche. If we refer to the Brazilian Legislation on the Parâmetros Curriculares Brasileiros, we may be able to notice the non-existence of disciplines that prepare teachers-to-be to perform professionally as ESP teachers, not to mention the absolute lack of emphasis on Digital Literacy

teaching, having in view that they themselves need to become digitally literate.

Nonetheless, once the teacher has combined the different competencies to perform ESP teaching, he will now perceive the undeniable demand for incorporating a Digital Literacy approach to his professional exercise. We wish, in this paper to highlight the fact that the Digital Literacy indeed requires that the teachers-to-be, and current teaching practicioners, seek for continuous refreshment for their education, so as to enhance the several skills they may already offer their apprentices.

III. THE DIGITAL LITERACY APPROACH TO BUSINESS ESP TEACHING

First of all, if we think about the typical work circumstances involving executives, we may identify the following: usually, due to a quite busy daily routine, executive people have increasingly less time available to devote to face-to-face classes. In fact, they frequently cancel their classes due to meetings or appointments at the last minute.

On the other hand, the demand for communicative competence at work is unavoidable, and thus learners just have to find a tiny slot in their schedule to squeeze their classes in, either at work, or outside, at schools for instance. Considered that, the new technologies may set a new scene to that, somehow releasing learners from struggling between having the classes and improving their English, or feeling pressured by the current demands at work pushing them to keep thinking about their extra class duties.

Nonetheless, indisputable presence in the current workplace set, technologies are everywhere at executives disposal. Even though they might not account it for, business ESP students already make use of new technologies at work. The idea now is to apply those same resources in corporate language teaching. Obviously not all learners will present the same intimacy with Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), but we do believe that they might not be completely unfamiliar with that (7.5 million Brazilians were online just in March 2003, from home PCs, according to statistics released by cyberatlas.internet.com).

It would be useful then to grasp some conceptual definition of the so called technologies we here intend to refer to. Among the important digital tools we may apply in teaching are the Network-based Communication means (video-phone calls, e-mails, chats, forum lists, listen/read and watch/see at the same time). It is important though to remember that communication does not only concern oral competence, but also and equally important, written competence.

At that point we touch the Digital (or Electronic) Literacy itself. According to Shetzer and Waschauer (2000), electronic literacy essentially involves three premises: (1) becoming literate *is not just a matter of* learning how to use letter and words so as to have them printed at the end, but yet mastering the processes

considered valuable for particular societies, cultures and contexts; (2) electronic literacy is not a self content issue, but a multi level literacy (dependable on contexts, purposes, and medium); finally, (3) electronic literacy is not only a matter of operatingthe computer, but commanding abilities ranging from cognitive activities combined with interpretation, selection criteria, critical standard before data, the finding, organization and use of information, in this particular case, theoretically and practically diverse from doing so on print medium.

In fact, when we present our students to the infinite possibilities offered by the Internet to specifically study of English, we mostly bring them authenticity in all aspects of communicative competencies they may be able to develop. Finally, based on Warschauer´s work (2001), some elements may be suggested to be incorporated in different types of projects: online research; comparative investigation; simulations and online publication.

From that authenticity further requirements naturally come, such as learning how to interact and therefore negotiate meaning in communication, how to sort and research for information, how to read hypertexts, and how to critically evaluate and interpret what is found, and so forth.

Not a simple task, digital literacy involves way much more than just being able to sit in front of a computer screen and push a few buttons, or make a few clicks with the mouse. Beyond all of that, digital literacy presents an absolutely new world of cognitive strategies to be applied, also new mechanisms of dealing with what you are looking for/at as well. Learning how to interact with information and people via computer involves a great deal of interaction and collaboration exercises, which basically comes with practice.

Many techniques might be used by teachers of ESP in order to design computer mediated communication projects. Many experiences have shown that simulations, for instance, are very effective in teaching business ESP (Gordon, 1999 and Stansberry, 1998). Now, it is perfectly possible to apply that though the Internet.

At last, resuming what we have previously discussed, in establishing a growing and sharing relationship with learners (and here we particularly keep in mind business people), both, teacher and learner, may profit greatly from that. Teachers may always have new information to learn from their students such as (a) what the beliefs of a particular company are; (b) how people rationalize the modern business world; (c) how such a corporation deals with its customers; (d) what the company favorite management styles are, if any; (e) what experiences students have had so far working for a multinational company and having, for instance, to effectively join a meeting carried out in English, in which both native and non-native English speakers are participating. Information that will not only enrich teacher´s repertoire but also help him/her develop activities that are better suited to the ESP context. There are plenty of extraordinary issues and matters to be found out by an ESP teacher, while, on the students stand, there are

endless features of the English language to be integrated in the students´ ever-improving communicative competence.

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