

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP): LIBRARIANSHIP AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Librarianship and Information Science belong to a group of degrees that have developed independently only in recent times. Due to the global network of information spread all over the world and the increasing demand for huge amounts of data for all kinds of intellectual activities, the importance of a good command of the English language for the students of these degrees is self-evident.

The relatively short independent life of these sciences is the main reason for the non-existence of specific textbooks joining the always necessary review of the English grammar, with the vocabulary needs, text practice, cataloguing methods and specific reading and writing activities the students of these subjects require. The present paper will deal with numerous different possibilities for exercises the English teacher may propose in a class of first year students in Librarianship and Information Science, all of them based on my personal experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Librarianship and Information Science might not be very well known degrees among some people, but they have become extremely popular among students, and they are now essential from the point of view of modern sciences and communication technology. Nowadays, our society is surrounded by information. Information seems to be the only important thing in the world and everybody wants to be informed constantly of everything. It is in this modern context that the professionals of this field acquire a new dimension and relevance.

The students of these degrees are taught mainly how to get on with the different ways of compiling, organising, and retrieving information from any possible source. Their task will be the deep knowledge of the ways of dealing with information, and their help in retrieving this information so that other people can have access to it. The main big source of information they study is the working of libraries, where huge amounts of data are stored and must be easy to consult. Furthermore, the modern computer technology is an essential part of their formation, for the Internet, the library catalogues, etc. all require certain knowledge in this field.

How could all this be possible in our days without a good command of the English language? English is not only the language of science and technology, but also the language of part of the material Spanish librarians will have to deal with in their working life. The English language is essential for the communication among people whose respective languages are not English. Librarians should be able to effectively communicate in English, as well in oral as in written contexts, for every library is in contact with numerous other libraries, publishing companies, editors, writers, foreign official institutions, etc. In this paper we are going to highlight the aspect of Librarianship, because it is the aspect our students are trained in with greater care and because teaching materials for Information Science are much easier to locate.

2. TEACHING MATERIAL

The importance of the English language stated, we have to point out now that the relatively short life of Librarianship as a science might be the reason for the non-existence of specific English textbooks for these students, as there are for Natural Science students, or Computer Science students. This ideal textbook should include not only all the regular grammar points that are always taught in EFL (English as a Foreign Language), but also specific activities related to the subject of Librarianship: specific vocabulary activities, cataloguing methods, fast-reading techniques, text analysis, and specific writing assignments. As there is no such textbook in the market, the English teacher has to provide all this material by himself. A textbook and a grammar book are also used, apart from the specific material.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is one possible way of teaching English. The fact is that English is still the predominant factor, the main and the first part of the nominal group. The main goal here is the teaching of the English language in all its aspects, so that the students achieve a good command of it. The aspects related to the specific purpose, Librarianship here, are in this case the means rather than the aim. We think that it is more important for the students to learn English properly, than to get information exclusively about Librarianship, for all the other subjects they learn deal with that topic.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the specific purpose for which we are teaching English may be left out. We have to find the exact point of interference where both lines join together. Even though we have to teach the English language, there is a great amount of specific material available to achieve this aim. A clear example of this is the teaching of tenses. Texts about books usually are in the present tense. Nevertheless, texts about the history of famous libraries may contain all possible past tenses and future tenses. To sum up, it is quite easy to have access to the appropriate material. All the teacher has to do is find it, because there is no textbook providing all this.

This paper will deal with six different parts in the teaching of English for Librarianship: one devoted to the grammar teaching strategies; four dedicated to the traditional four skills in FLT (Foreign Language Teaching), that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing; and one devoted to cataloguing methods.

3. GRAMMAR

All the traditional grammar points that are always taught in an English class for non-native speakers are present in our syllabus too. It is necessary to make the students aware of the importance of having a good command of conditional sentences, modal verbs, passive sentences, indirect speech, relative clauses, etc. The most appropriate way of doing this in an ESP class is by providing the students with texts of their own field containing some of these grammatical features and insisting on them. The students may be given photocopies with selected texts directly, or they may write down a certain text as a dictation and work on it later on.

As we have already mentioned above, texts about the history of famous libraries are especially suitable for teaching verbal tenses. On the other hand, the user information on the leaflets of all British or American libraries always contains an important number of modal verbs, as well as conditional sentences. Any academic text on Librarianship will be full of examples of the passive voice, and other interesting grammatical aspects. And, finally, there are lots of well-known novels that devote one or sometimes more paragraphs to the discussion of topics having to do with books. I can mention here E. Brönte's *Wuthering Heights*, or M. Ondaatje's *The English Patient*.

These texts are fiction and thus are more attractive to the student. These are only a few examples of where the teacher may look for the appropriate texts he might use in class to teach grammar.

Once the chosen structure is identified in the text and explained, it is necessary to train the student with exercises. These exercises can be taken from any textbook on English grammar from the enormous offer there is on the market. It is not necessary that the exercises deal with Librarianship. In fact, it is much better to use other material so that the students get to work with a greater variety of vocabulary and do not get bored of dealing only with their subject.

4. LISTENING SKILLS

There are several different listening activities the teacher may design specifically for Librarianship students. First of all, English is the only language used in the classroom. Therefore, the students are constantly exposed to that language spoken by the teacher and their own classmates. Dictations are very useful activities that could be included in any section, among them as a listening exercise. The teacher may dictate texts on Librarianship, or he may choose somebody in class to dictate to his classmates. One activity students always enjoy is the playing of videotapes in class. There is a lot of material available for students of this type of degree, for any news programme on any English-speaking channel is of interest to them. Documentaries on any interesting subject that may raise a debate later in class, the latest news of international politics, etc. are all useful listening activities in this field. Finally, the textbook used in class also includes certain listening activities on a great variety of topics. The tapes are played in class several times and the students answer the comprehension questions in their books. There may be true/false questions, fill-in and multiple choice exercises, matching tests or simply direct questions.

5. SPEAKING SKILLS

Speaking activities are often closely related to listening activities for obvious reasons. Students are always encouraged to use the English language as the only means of communication in class when speaking to the teacher as well as when speaking to their classmates. Spanish is only used under two circumstances: when translating from English into Spanish, and when explaining certain difficult aspects of grammar if the case requires the use of the students' native language.

All the written texts dealt with in class are read aloud by the students. This includes specific purpose texts, general topic texts and the texts contained in the exercises. After the playing of videotapes or cassettes it is very easy for the teacher to establish a feed-back interaction with the students in the form of direct questions and answers. This activity is very easy to carry out and natural, because it involves the use of everyday conversation. The teacher may also propose specific speaking activities dealing with one particular topic talked about in class before. The students get into small groups of two to three people and are asked to comment on that specific topic. This activity is very helpful for the development of the students' awareness towards his own command of the spoken language, for they are expected to understand the message uttered by their classmates and to produce a message the others will understand, too.

Speaking and listening as skills are then tested at the end of the year by means of an oral examination, and the students will then be asked to do what they have practised in class: reading aloud, and following a spontaneous conversation on certain topics started by the teacher.

6. READING SKILLS

Reading and writing are the two central skills developed in our course. In their future working life, our students will be much more often exposed to written English than to spoken English. Therefore, the requirements in this aspect are much higher, too.

The teacher may provide the students with texts of two very different sorts: specific texts dealing with some aspect of Librarianship, or any other kind of text on any other topic. However, the exercises that can be done with these two types of texts are very similar.

- The text can be given to the students by means of a dictation, or on photocopies, if it is too long to dictate.
- There may be texts from newspapers, magazines, fiction books, textbooks, etc.
- Students have to be taught how to divide texts into the different parts they present. It is very useful here to begin with short and easy texts where every paragraph is a clearly defined section. After reading the text, the students should be able to extract the main ideas, usually one idea per paragraph.
- It is important in this particular case to teach future librarians how to scan and how to skim a text. Fast-reading techniques will be very helpful for them in their profession and save them time and effort. This can be achieved by letting them less and less time to go through a text before extracting the main ideas.
- Reading-comprehension exercises are essential here again, especially in those texts that are not specifically devoted to Librarianship. There may be very different types of exercises here: true/false, fill-in, multiple choice, direct question, locating synonyms, etc. These exercises will considerably increase the students' vocabulary and improve their understanding ability.
- Texts about Librarianship have to be dealt with differently with reference to reading-comprehension. These texts are in general dense and much more complicated than texts on general topics. It is important for the students to understand exactly what the text says, so no fast-reading techniques should be applied here. There are two main exercises we can do with these texts: vocabulary exercises (synonyms, antonyms, definitions, etc.), and translation into Spanish.
- Apart from all the texts of a relatively short length dealt with in class, there are also two compulsory readings in our syllabus. These readings are changed every year and they usually include educational edition books of around 100 pages of the advanced level. Most of these readings correspond to well-known novels or films they students are already familiar with, which makes the task much more enjoyable. The students are expected to read those books at home, and hand in a summary and certain comprehension exercises provided by the teacher. They have 3 to 4 months for every long reading.

Of course, there are many other activities than can be developed by using texts, however, we will leave them for the following section, for they are closely related to writing activities, too.

7. WRITING SKILLS

There are several activities that can be done to develop the students' writing skills. The most important ones are summary writing, letter writing, composition writing, and translating. As we are dealing here with text production, we cannot deny the great importance of grammar. No text can be correctly written if the grammatical rules are not correctly applied. Nevertheless, at this stage of the learners' level of English, style becomes more and more important.

- Summary writing is one of the most important aspects in our course. The ability of extracting the main ideas from a certain text - reading-comprehension - has to be combined with the ability of writing down those ideas in a coherent summary. Our students will often be confronted with summaries and abstracts in their future professional life, so it is important to teach them how to produce brief, clear and complete summaries in the shortest time possible.
- Students will also have to write certain texts as librarians and it is important that they learn to organise ideas correctly, divide their texts into separate paragraphs, and make them easily understandable. It is important to practise letter writing, for that will be essential in their future. Short formal letters addressed to libraries or other official institutions have to be practised in class as well as at home. Apart from the importance of correct grammar, correct formulaic expressions, the formal way of presenting a letter, dates, headings, addressing formulae, closing formulae, etc. are essential issues students have to get acquainted with, and should practise regularly.
- Students are asked to produce compositions of different lengths on a variety of topics throughout the course. The grammatical aspects are very important here again, for it is the basis on which they have to build up their compositions. However, style becomes more and more important. Our students receive writing tips and other guidelines at the beginning of the course and are asked to produce essays following closely the instructions given. Drafting is one of the methods employed by students to improve their style when writing. They do not only have to write correct English, but develop coherent, organised and well-formed arguments and texts.
- Translation from English into Spanish is included under the heading of writing, but it is also closely related to reading, especially to reading-comprehension. Our students are exclusively tested in translation from English into Spanish, which is their native language, because that is the skill they have to be most familiar with. The English test in any exam to apply for a professional activity as a librarian is limited to the writing of a summary and a translation into Spanish. It is very easy for the teacher to determine whether the student has correctly understood the text by checking the translation. Translating is one of the most effective reading-comprehension evaluation methods one can think of. The frequent practice of translation not only improves the students' ability to decipher English grammar, but it also has a positive effect on their writing in their own language. The specific translation activities are limited to texts on Librarianship. However, an important number of other texts and sentences appearing in the textbook and in the exercises are also translated and serve thus as added practical work.

8. CATALOGUING PRACTICE

Students in Librarianship have special subjects devoted exclusively to cataloguing methods and practice. However, it may be very interesting and useful for them to do some cataloguing of English books, newspapers or magazines that must be provided by the teacher. On the one hand, they have a direct contact with these texts in English, which gives them time to browse through them, read the back cover, and try to read a few lines on their own. There are pictures, and headlines that may be commented upon, thus allowing also speaking activities to develop. Students are also encouraged to bring their own books in English to produce their own cards. On the other hand, the explanation of the layout of library cards following the Library of Congress cataloguing method, which is the most common method employed in British and American libraries,

helps them in learning important vocabulary they may eventually come across again in specific texts or translation exercises. Words like *call number*, *collation*, *index*, *file*, *ISBN*, etc. are best understood when seen and then written by the students themselves.

9. CONCLUSION

To sum up, even though our main aim is still the teaching of the English language, there are a huge number of activities we may base on topics directly related to the specific purpose of Librarianship. The means, i.e. the texts about Librarianship, may not be very easy to locate, but there are a series of easy accessible documents such as library leaflets, Internet texts, paragraphs from certain fiction books, newspaper and magazine texts, etc. that are easily available and very useful.

Once the teacher has found the proper balance between the specific means he is using and the final aim of the teaching of the English language, he has fulfilled his function of conveying all the necessary information to his students.

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