

Preparing Students for Job Interviews¹

Introduction

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English for Specific Purposes (ESP) holds a predominant position in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Very notably is the plethora of business English textbooks, a sub-category of ESP, which occupy the largest number of ESP publications (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). The teaching unit to prepare students for the job on the following pages is part of this popular segment of ESP.

One of the major precursors responsible for ESP's origins, according to Hutchinson and Waters (2009), was an unparalleled growth of scientific, technical, and economic activities on an international scale occurring after World War II. The lingua franca of English was critically needed to perpetuate this prosperous expansion, so cost-effective ESP courses were developed with the guiding premise: "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need" (p. 8). With the Communicative Language Teaching approach's capacity to heighten the language users' communicative skills, Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Nation and Newton (2009), and Lightbown and Spada (2006) advised language instructors and curriculum developers to design lessons that include both meaning- and structure-driven instruction. Meaning-based instruction builds communicative competence, while structure-driven methods can enable and clarify the intended meaning of the writer or speaker. However, communication and language rests on a major tenet: meaning drives structure, because without meaning-based instruction, learners are stymied with the incapacity to communicate through speaking and writing. The teaching of business English has changed greatly with the adoption of the Communicative Language Teaching approach and this

teaching unit is an example. Rather than presenting activities focusing on structures prior to activities focusing on meaning, the lessons in this unit reflect the 'meaning-drives-structure' principle by having the activities in a reversed order. For instance, Lesson 1's Opening and Meaning Activity begins with a YouTube video entitled "How to Make an Appointment," before an ensuing activity entitled "Language Focus: Vocabulary and Business Expressions." This organization provides a meaningful context of authentic negotiation skills required of a request for an appointment followed by instruction featuring vocabulary and frequently expressed business phrases which are derived from this video's conversation. However, this lesson does not end with a focus of grammatical and lexical features. Instead, it is followed by student-centered activities consisting of students who engage in role plays about changing an interview appointment to facilitate the creation of their own role plays for the activity entitled "Performance." In sum, a meaning-focused activity begins the lesson to provide a model of authentic conversational communication; this activity is followed by a focus of the vocabulary and phrases drawn from this meaning activity to ensure how input, output, and negotiation of language-specific items can ensure accurate production and reception between the interlocutors. The culminating student-centered activity is the "Performance," an activity of meaning which allows the students to create their role plays so that they, as well as the instructor, can gauge the proficiency of communication.

Integral to ESP instruction in business English is the training of pragmatic norms, the social rules governing language use. The four lessons in this teaching unit include



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sociopragmatic instruction of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors accompanying language production, especially critical in business contexts that place a premium on acceptable behaviors to sustain mutually respectful internal and external relationships. To develop teaching activities to train students for acceptable social behaviors in business interactions, materials developers need conduct research to locate authentic business interactions, then use the variables of social power and distance drawn from these authentic conversations to build a repertoire of BE speaking and writing interactions. In the case of this teaching unit, the authors interviewed human resource directors to seek advice on the specific interactions needed to request a change of appointment for an interview as well as the validity of reasons to make this request. Also, they surveyed online to locate samples of authentic interactions correlating with the specific topics of their lessons, e.g., interactions between an employer and an applicant related to an

interview. Sociopragmatic instruction is very important since second language learners may not have experienced the socialization practices embedded in the target context of language use; more crucially, the faux pas or transgression of a social rule of language behavior is tantamount to failure, specifically, the social catastrophe of executing inappropriate language production before or during the interview. Therefore, an instructional example of a sociopragmatic violation which could be catastrophic is reflected Lesson 1's activity entitled "Business Etiquette" where the instruction reveals acceptable and unacceptable language to request an interview appointment change, and its instruction reveals acceptable and unacceptable phrases requesting an appointment change for an interview.

We hope that the readers will find this teaching unit useful when it comes to training students for job interviews.

Note

¹An earlier version of this teaching unit was presented at the 2013 Hawaii TESOL Conference (University of Hawaii at Hilo, February 16) and was awarded Best Conference Presentation.

References

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