ESP in the 21st Century: ESP Theory and Application Today

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Abstract
Melding the theory and application of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) will be discussed from three viewpoints. In the first section, recent research in critical genre analysis and interdiscursivity will be used to highlight some major emerging issues with implications for the integration of ESP and professional practice, on the one hand, and the academy and the world of work, on the other. The second section examines the challenges of implementing large-scale ESP programs in the context of developing a university program for science and engineering students and proposing the concept of 'general ESP' for learners from a wide range of disciplines. To enable connections with career paths after academia, the third section discusses the acquisition of systemic literacy to prepare for life-long learning experiences and the setting of realistic goals for becoming functionally communicative in relevant areas.

I. Introduction

English as the language of business, science and academia is so widespread that as Bolton (2008) states "English is now an Asian language." He does however raise questions about proficiency levels. This concern about proficiency is important in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) because the language used must effectively and efficiently receive and convey messages for work or professional purposes. For example, a businessperson may need a suitable command of English to forge relationships and finalize business contracts, while a scientist would need it to write effectively for research publication. This paper will present syntheses of theory and practice by three ESP practitioners working in Asia.

II. ESP and Professional Practices: Insights from Theory and Practice

Most of the traditional models of language education have become grossly inadequate to meet the challenges of the present-day interdisciplinary demands and practices of the academy and the world of professions. These challenges have emerged as a result of several developments, some of which include, the growing tensions between the world of work and that of the academy, the complexities of the modern multi-media encouraging creative forms of information design and presentation, the increasing interdisciplinary nature of most university academic programmes, and the overwhelming colonization and appropriation of generic resources within and across disciplines. These developments seriously question some of the models and practices prevalent in language teaching and learning, including English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which often present language as a unified single literacy in second or foreign language contexts. Recent research in genre analysis clearly favours a model of ESP which focuses on the acquisition of professional expertise, which integrates discursive competence, disciplinary knowledge and professional practice in a complex and dynamic manipulation of socio-pragmatic space within which most forms of specialized communication take place.

A. Challenges for ESP

Drawing evidence from recent research in genre analysis, I would like to identify and briefly discuss some of the main challenges for ESP practitioners, and argue for a major shift in ESP teaching models and practices, keeping in mind the significant variations in the dynamic patterns of communication in increasingly globalised professional contexts, particularly addressing the following questions.

1. How can ESP handle discursive competence to cope with the complexities (interdiscursive as well as interdisciplinary) in academic professional discourses?

2. How can ESP develop the ability to understand and participate in professional practice?

3. How is discursive competence in specialist areas acquired and how does it contribute to professional expertise?

The most significant challenge thus is to bridge the gap between the classroom and the world of work, and understand the relationship between ESP classroom discourses, professional discourses, and professional practices.

B. Evidence from genre theory

The evidence for the identification of and the resources to meet these challenges comes from recent work in critical genre theory (Bhatia 2008), in particular from the study of interdiscursivity (Bhatia, 2010) within multi-perspective genre analysis (Bhatia, 2004). Some of these studies indicate that language operates simultaneously, and hence analysed, at four overlapping and yet differentiated levels: discourse as realisation of textual knowledge, discourse as instance of genre in specialised ESP contexts, discourse as resource accomplish professional practice, and discourse as realisation of professional culture. The first three of these are centrally relevant to our discussion, and are invariably grounded in the fourth one, i.e., specific professional cultures.

Discursive competence in a professional context is the ability not only to identify construct, interpret, and use a specific repertoire of professional genres to participate in the activities of a specific professional culture, but also to exploit generic resources to create new forms, and thus claim ownership of a set of relevant genres in a professional context (Bhatia, 1999).

Recent research also indicates that although genres are conventionalised and more or less standardised communicative events (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993), they are at the same time, very versatile, and hence can be exploited to communicative 'private intentions' (Bhatia, 1993) within what has been understood as 'shared communicative purposes' (Swales, 1993) to create hybrid forms (Fairclough, 1995) illustrating 'genre-mixing', 'genre-embedding' and 'genre-bending'.

Recent work in genre theory also indicates that there is enormous evidence of appropriation of generic resources, leading to colonisation of discourses; hybridization, mixing, embedding and bending of genres, disciplinary conflicts in genres, generic conflicts within disciplines, and variation in disciplinary pedagogies.

C. Resources and responses

The best way to exploit the versatility in genres in academic and professional contexts would be to get away from the conventional way of defining ESP along disciplinary lines, and to 'negotiate' the angles of 'specificity' within the broader socio-pragmatic space of ESP in a more flexible way, keeping in mind the needs, wants, and desires of the target community in question.

Discursive practice is seen as a process of constructing, interpreting, and exploiting sets of professional genres embedded in professional cultural contexts, and can be viewed as the ability to integrate the following four aspects of language acquisition: textual competence, which is the knowledge of language system; generic competence, which is the ability to exploit this knowledge of language system to use appropriately to suit situated contexts; professional competence, which is the capacity to use genres to become be a competent member of a professional culture; and social competence, which incorporates the capacity to use language socio-critically. Professional practice, on the other hand, is characterized by all non-discursive tasks, actions, and activities the professional is engaged in to achieve disciplinary goals and objectives. Discursive and professional practices both are embedded within specific disciplinary, professional, and institutional cultures and contexts, and hence are essential to ESP practice.

So the genre-based measure of professional expertise is a function of an integration of the following three aspects: 'discursive competence', 'disciplinary knowledge' and 'professional practice', which is and should be the ultimate aim of all forms of acquisition of academic or professional expertise in any ESP context.

III. Challenges in Large-Scale ESP Program Design: Needs, Materials, and Teaching Practices

ESP methodology is based on the fundamental principle that we can identify a set of core language needs of target learners and adopt teaching materials and practices that will facilitate learners to meet those needs. In reality, however, identifying needs, developing materials, and implementing effective teaching practices pose serious challenges. In this section, we will discuss these three areas in the context of developing a large-scale ESP program for science and engineering students. We will also introduce the concept of 'general ESP' to explain how ESP methodology can be introduced even in introductory courses for learners from a wide range of disciplines.

A. ESP at the center of English program design

Traditionally, ESP has been thought of as something that exits at the fringes of an English program, dealing with often relatively high-level, mature learners (Dudley-Evans & St. John's (1998: 4). This has led to a view of so-called ESP practitioners who embody the multiple roles of teacher, collaborator, researcher, course designer, materials provider, and evaluator (Dudley-Evans & St. John's (1998: 13). In other words, traditionally, a teacher interested in the ESP approach would be expected to design the course, through collaboration with content specialists and their own research, locate (or develop) materials for the course, teach the course, and finally evaluate how well learners' have achieved the goals of the course. In reality, however, few practicing ESP practitioners have the time or experience to realize these multiple roles successfully. Practitioners are increasingly being burdened with heavy teaching loads and they also face having to teach students from many different specialist fields. Research has shown that what more commonly happens is that practitioners will select a suitable published ESP

textbook and rely on this to serve as both the course design and materials (Terauchi et al., 2010). Evaluation then becomes a matter of testing learners understanding of the textbook material. In an era when universities are increasingly relying on part-time faculty to do the bulk of teaching, this trend is likely to continue, or worse, some teachers many feel the ESP approach is unworkable and reject it completely.

To overcome the problems of implementing ESP as it is viewed above, we propose repositioning ESP at the center of an English program, thus capitalizing on the full resources of a department and its staff. In this context, there is no longer a need for a multi-tasking, multi-functioning practitioner. Rather, the work of creating and implementing ESP courses can be divided among faculty, with individuals working on smaller, easy-to-complete tasks.

A centralized ESP program is the model adopted by the Center for English Language Education in Science and Engineering (CELESE) Waseda University. CELESE's program caters for 10,000 students in 17 different science and engineering schools. As such, it is the largest ESP program in Japan (Terauchi et al., 2010). However, repositioning ESP at the center of an English program introduces many challenges in terms of needs, materials, and teaching practices. How to overcome these challenges will be the focus of the following sub-sections.

B. Needs analysis at the ESP program level

The starting point for an ESP course or program is to decide the needs of the learners. Unfortunately, in a single-practitioner model, as described above, this can be an extremely difficult task, especially when the practitioner is faced with teaching multiple classes comprised of learners from multiple disciplines, and with few resources (either financial or human) to carry out the necessary investigation. In these situations, many practitioners have relied on selecting textbooks that they assume will match their learner's needs. Although this approach can often be successful, the relatively small market for ESP textbooks means that publishers are pressured to design materials to cater for as large a market as possible. There is a clear contradiction here that has proved difficult to resolve.

When practitioners have attempted their own needs analyses, they have often relied on students' own perceptions. However, the problem here is that student surveys will usually reveal only what they 'want' to study (Anthony, 2009). Of course, a 'wants' survey is useful and important, but it is different in nature to a true needs analysis. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 19) describe, a needs analysis should be the fundamental principle on which the ESP approach itself is based.

In the Waseda University CELESE program, full-time faculty members are given the task of establishing learner needs. With more time as well as financial and human resources, they are able to survey the current literature on how students use English after graduation in both academic and workplace settings. They also work with specialist faculty and carry out both small and large-scale projects to establish potential areas of language difficulty (e.g., Anthony, 2011), and the "potential future needs" of students if and when they become fully fledged members of their discourse communities (e.g., Orr et al., 2008). Of course, full-time faculty members are also in the best position to carry out large scale surveys of the entire student population's so-called 'wants'. Such surveys are carried out each year and involve the assistance of both academic and administrative staff. In addition, CELESE carries out 'wants' of the both the full-time and part-time teaching faculty, which is an extremely important factor in program design.

The challenge faced by full-time faculty when doing these 'wants' and 'needs' analyses is changing the perception of the target audience. Students are often asked to complete surveys at the end of the teaching semester and often feel that their responses will result in few changes or improvements. So, to ensure that they answer the 'wants' surveys accurately, the entire program is made transparent with all course goals, syllabuses, and evaluation procedures made publicly available on the CELESE website. In this way, students can see immediately when their suggestions have been incorporated. Teachers are also encouraged to have open debates with students regarding course goals and materials.

Changing the perception of the target audience is also necessary in the case of 'wants' surveys on teaching conditions and practices given to part-time teaching faculty. Part-time faculty often feel that their jobs might be threatened if they offer criticism of a program and/or its materials. To counter this impression, all new part-time faculty at CELESE are asked explicitly about their ability to give possibly negative feedback on the program during their interviews. Successful applicants must show that they can do this. In short, the ability to give (negative) feedback on the program has been made one of the requirements for employment.

C. Materials at the ESP program level

A common concern of novice teachers adopting an ESP approach relates to materials selection. Many ESP practitioners are not experts in the target field of the learners, and sometimes struggle to comprehend materials that they require learners to master. In this context, materials selection is a critical concern. As above, the most common solution to this problem is for the teacher to adopt a published textbook, which in Japan is usually supported through English-Japanese translations, glossaries, and an extensive teacher guide. There are, however, two main problems with this strategy. First, as explained above, publishers are required to create textbooks for the largest possible market, and this leads to materials targeting 'super-domains', such as 'science' and 'engineering,' rather than the domains that learners consider themselves members of, such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, computer science. In other words, most textbooks only superficially deal with content matter required by students of a particular field. One noticeable exception is the *Gateway to the World of International Scientists* series by ALC Press (Hitomi, 2010, 2011) which

is designed for very narrow disciplines such as energy engineering, biotechnology, robotics, and life sciences.

A second problem is the dearth of published materials aimed at freshman and sophomore students. There are, of course, some textbooks aimed at this audience, but a closer inspection shows that most are simply traditional reading/comprehension textbooks with a 'specialist' theme, such as global warming. One reason for this lack of suitable materials is perhaps the traditional positioning of ESP courses on the fringes of general ESP program, as mentioned earlier.

Therefore, one of the greatest challenges faced by any ESP program designer intending on implementing a faculty- or university-wide ESP program is to design materials for freshman and sophomore students. These need to take learners from a high-school English level, with its focus on complex grammar and rarely used vocabulary items (Browne, 2011) to a junior and senior university level that requires higher-level skills, such as technical reading, writing, and presentation. The key to overcoming this challenge, however, is to understand that ESP materials do not need to be narrowly defined and completely distinct from general English materials. Rather, ESP materials should be seen on a cline as shown in Figure 1.
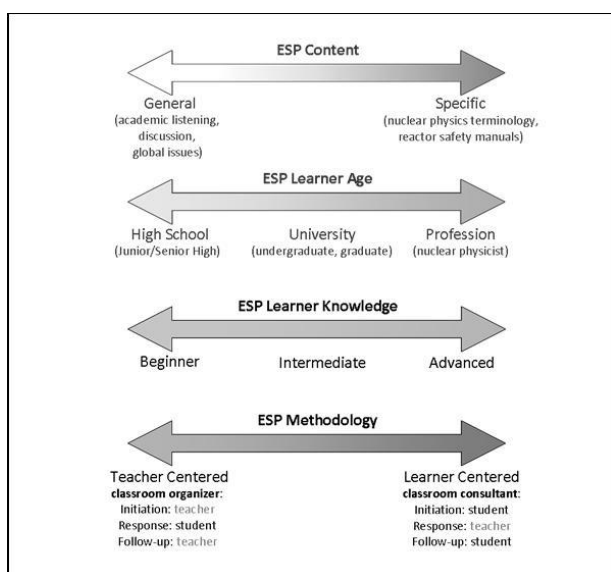

Figure 1. The ESP Specificity Continuum.

Freshman/sophomore materials, for example, should focus on more general skills that target learners require regardless of their field (but usually unique to their 'super-domain'). This type of ESP could be considered 'general ESP', and in science and engineering might focus on skills such as listening to lectures, taking notes, understanding common structures of argumentation, supporting opinions with evidence, and representing abstract concepts visually using figures and tables. Junior/senior materials, on the other hand, would be in the realm of traditional ESP, focusing on more narrowly-defined skills associated with a particular field, such as physics or

chemistry. Examples of junior/senior materials in science and engineering might focus on technical reading, writing, and presentation skills.

In the Waseda University CELESE program, full-time faculty are given the task of creating core materials for all courses. Freshman core materials include both published textbooks and specially designed in-house materials. In fact, some of these materials have now been repackaged and are available for the general market (e.g., Anthony et al., 2010; Rose & Anthony, 2010). These focus on core study skills such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph. In contrast, junior- and senior-level materials are all created in-house by faculty with extensive knowledge of EFL principles and field-specific concepts (e.g., Anthony, 2011). In other institutions, similar materials can be developed through collaborative projects involving both English and specialist faculty. A recent example of such a project culminated in the impressive *Write like a Chemist* textbook (Robinson et al., 2008).

One question that remains is what to do if there are students of many different disciplines in the same classroom. In these cases, it may be possible for program designers to consult with administrative staff and redesign the institution's timetable so that only students of one discipline study together in the English classroom. However, this is usually an impossible proposition, especially at the advanced level where there is pressure to create a limited number of elective English classes that any student on campus can take.

In the CELESE program, this problem is averted by the ingenuitive design of materials that gradually shift from requiring a teacher-centered methodology in the freshman and sophomore years to a learner-centered approach in junior and senior years (see Fig. 3). This design means that the contents of materials in advanced courses are in many ways determined by the learners themselves, and thus can be applied in classes comprising a broad range of disciplines. For example, in the technical writing classroom, materials are designed to teach students the principles of corpus-based analyses. Then, learners apply these skills in a student-centered analysis of research articles that they choose from the highest ranking journals in their fields. (The strategies needed to locate the highest ranking journals would be taught using materials in a teacher-centered way). Such skills are extremely valuable to specialists who may move from one department to another in a company. In fact, these analytic skills can be considered life-long skills that will benefit learners throughout their science and engineering careers.

D. Teaching practices at the ESP program level

The final aspect of the ESP approach to be discussed is the teaching practices of teachers. In a single-practitioner approach, teaching practices are, by definition, decided by the practitioners themselves. There is also a huge body of literature in journals such as the *English for Specific Purposes Journal* (Elsevier) on ESP teaching practices in this context. On the other hand, ESP program designers face a difficult challenge creating a system in which teachers are

able to capitalize on their individual teaching experiences and talents, while ensuring that learners develop a core set of skills as determined by a centralized needs (and 'wants') analysis.

In the CELESE program, teachers are generally given freedom to teach courses in the manner that they see fit, provided that they teach to the goals of the course. However, there is a need to ensure that all teachers understand what those goals are. Thus, each year teachers are invited to workshops in which the goals of courses are explained, common teaching strategies are demonstrated, and discussion amongst teaching faculty is encouraged. In addition, each course has a full-time faculty member serving as a course coordinator. The coordinator's role includes sending out course information and responding to questions on course content and teaching practices from part-time faculty. In addition, one full-time faculty member serves as a dedicated part-time liaison officer, asking questions that course coordinators are unable to deal with.

One aspect of teaching practice that deserves special attention is the issue of testing. When ESP is adopted at the program level, all teachers need to both teach and test a core set of goals. This can be particularly difficult if the teacher is less experienced. Therefore, CELESE full-time faculty take a central role in determining testing procedures and content. Where possible, students all take a centralized, standardized test. In other cases, teachers are given sample test questions, materials, and grading rubrics. The result is a program in which few students question their class placement, teacher assignment, homework reports, or final grades.

E. Summary

Implementing ESP at the program level is a quite new concept, and there are few reports on the challenges that might be faced by both course designers and teachers. This section discussed three areas where potential difficulties might arise, i.e., needs analysis, materials design, and teaching practices. We also suggested strategies for overcoming these challenges in the context of a science and engineering ESP program. Some readers may argue that the Waseda University CELESE ESP program described here is a special case and that implementing a similar program at another institution would be difficult. We are confident, however, to argue that this is not the case. Already, several Japanese institutions have adopted aspects of this program with promising results. Thus, we hope that more institutions will attempt to implement ESP beyond the fringes of their English programs. In short, ESP can work when given a central position, providing the foundation for all program decisions.

IV. ESP as a Portal to Systemic Literacy: The Keys to Life-Long Learning

Putting ESP at the center of English language programs, as suggested in the previous section might indeed be the solution to Japan's well-known lack of success with its English language education, lamented by Martin (2004) as partially being due to the "katakana effect." Martin (2004:

50) notes that despite the time, effort and money spent in studying English, "it is rare to find a Japanese student who, after six years of English, is able to engage in even a marginal dialogue with a speaker of English." The need to initiate change was recognized by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which announced an Action Plan 'Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities"' in 2002. The official recognition of a need for change has led to a shift toward more focused English teaching at universities. By 2010, Noguchi (2010) pointed out that 60% of the job notices on the JACET website in the autumn were for positions related specifically to the teaching of EAP skills, rather than general English , reading or "English communication." This certainly is a movement in the right direction but the question arises of whether this is enough to really "cultivate Japanese with English abilities." EAP skills do not necessarily form a direct bridge to career skills. To realize a successful transition from an academic environment to a real-life environment, we need to equip our students with an awareness of systemic literacy (Brown, 2008; Noguchi, 2010) and recognition of the viability of ESP bilingualism (Noguchi, 2009).

A. Systemic literacy

ESP has always been grounded in the environment in which it is used. This is especially clear from Belcher's 2004 review article which traces the development of ESP along sociodiscoursal, sociocultural and sociopolitical tracks. In other words, ESP is always concerned with the "socio" or the society in which the language is functioning. Belcher recognizes the complexity of ESP research which would ultimately need to identify and deal with the complex networks underlying the surface texts that applied linguists and English instructors are trying to teach. She concludes by stating "I would characterize the goals as aimed at a multidimensional knowledge of where discourses and their communities, as well as the ESP professionals committed to understanding and teaching them, are situated in the world at large" (Belcher, 2004:178).

This connection of language and community is described as "systemic literacy" by Brown (2008), and Noguchi (2009) has borrowed this term to suggest that this is what ESP practitioners are aiming for when they talk about acquiring the disciplinary knowledge necessary to, for example, *Write like a Chemist* (Robinson et al., 2008). Brown (2008: xi) points out that what an educated public needs in this complex and globally interconnected world is "a new, systemic literacy. This new literacy requires an understanding of different kinds of feedback systems, exponential processes, the unintended consequences inherent in evolving social systems, etcetera." Why is it necessary to add still another concept to an already verbose field? The answer is because the term "systemic" forces us to realize that we are not dealing with isolated language features but items that are part of one or possibly several complex systems. Those who teach ESP often become entrapped in

the technical vocabulary and grammatical structures or sometimes in the disciplinary topics themselves (leading to textbooks that are merely essays or encyclopedic articles on concepts in a science field and not genre texts), thus losing sight of the overall systems in which genre texts must function.

The original idea of "genre" arises from Miller's work (1984), as acknowledged by Swales (1981). Noguchi (2006: 40-41) has used this to develop a heuristic definition of a genre text as including the essential elements of the action (impact on the community in which the text is to function), the substance (knowledge, information the text carries) and the form (the rhetorical, grammatical and technical elements of the text itself). Without any of these elements, a text would not be a "genre" text, as noted by Miller (1984).

This would imply that at the tertiary level, where students should have already acquired the basics of English, they would need to be made aware of this systemic genre quality of the texts that they are or will be dealing with for their professions. For example, if they are to learn how to read and write a research article for publication in their disciplinary field, they should not only be taught the vocabulary, collocations, discourse signals and frameworks used for such texts, but also be made aware of the reasons underlying these features. Noguchi (2003) proposes an 'OCHA' approach in which the students are guided to observing (O) the genre text features, classifying (C) them, hypothesizing (H) on their usage and applying (A) what they have learned to their own reading and writing. Repeating this cycle for various types of texts is expected to raise a systemic literacy awareness in students that should stand them in good stead when they enter the working world and will be encountering various genres for the first time. This is particularly important in Japan where students often enter jobs that are not directly connected with their major field, for example, a pharmacy student who goes to work for a securities firm or a law student who goes to work in a general trading firm.

B. ESP bilingualism

The other important key to success with language learning as a life-long endeavor is a realistic view of a viable goal. The Japanese tendency to aim for perfection can create insurmountable obstacles if the goal is native-speaker-like phonology and grammatical perfection for English as a whole. There are two problems with this. One is the aim of mastering all forms of English and the other is the very definition of native-speaker-like English.

With respect to the first, Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964:174-175) stated almost a half a century ago that "There is no reason why the student of a foreign language should be required to study 'the whole language', which, in any case, is an aim impossible of achievement…nor why he should study certain registers (such as the language of literature) if his need is for quite other ones." For example, a scientist may need to publish his/her research in an international journal but does not necessarily need to read classic literature. Of course, the complaint is often made that

Japanese scientists cannot chat at conference receptions or respond to questions after their presentations. This is often used to suggest that rather than focus on ESP, there should be more teaching of general English first. Before responding to this, we need to examine the second point on native-speaker-like language.

As noted above, Bolton (2008) points out that while the proficiency of Asian speakers of varieties of English may be called into question, he also states that the very concept of "native speaker" is in need of ontological examination. This questioning of the native speaker model was proposed much earlier by Cook (1999). Of course, the use of English as a global language was noted by Crystal in 1985, as he reviews in his 2008 paper and predicts that the non-native English speakers creating these "new Englishes," varieties of World Englishes such as Indian English, are a force that will likely change the very character of the language itself. How can these concepts offer suggestions for classroom teaching?

One is that offered by Alptekin (2010) who points out that those who use English as a lingua franca (ELF) possess multicompetences because of their awareness of two or more languages and cultures. He goes so far as to call ELF "a language variety without a culture or native speakers." This concept of valuing multicompetence comes from Cook's (1992:557) statement that "Language teaching should try to produce multicompetent individuals not ersatz native speakers."

For the present discussion, we can see that the "native-speaker" model does not seem to be the optimal goal. However, if we intend to communicate within our professional discourse communities, then we need to have some rules or we would end up in a Tower of Babel with so many varieties that true communication would not be possible. This is where the ESP genre concepts discussed above can serve as sure guides. The language teachers may no longer be "native English" speakers but the genre texts (both oral and written) themselves. This would mean that learners would need to know how to grasp the features of the genres that they encounter, and the OCHA training described above could help.

Another important point is that the learners should have a sense of confidence in their multicompetences. They should be made aware of the fact their knowledge of another language and culture can feed alternative viewpoints into a professional discussion. This confidence is not a sense of hubris but an awareness of what they can offer to enrich the discussion. In order to make this possible, Japanese students need to be given confidence in what they can do rather than be denigrated for what they cannot do, as is so often the case when the focus is on 'perfect' pronunciation and fluent 'native-like' grammatically correct speech and writing.

As for the complaint of Japanese scientists not being able to chat at receptions and respond to questions after their presentations, it would be easy to devise ESP-style lessons to train them in listening and speaking skills relevant to these tasks. This would be much more efficient and cost-effective than having them go through an entire English for general purposes course to learn "conversation."

The aim of ESP bilingualism would be to be able to use English as an ELF speaker, guided by discourse community and genre constraints. Successful communication should contribute to self-confidence that, in turn, would feed motivation to continue learning. Adding an awareness of multicompetence can encourage contributions from an alternate viewpoint, which can be valuable in an internationally based professional discourse community.

C.   Summary

This section has discussed concepts of systemic literary and ESP bilingualism to suggest how the basic ESP concepts of genre and discourse community can be used for effective and efficient teaching strategies. One aim is to equip learners with an awareness of the genre features of texts and the skills and tools to grasp them. The other aim is to help learners set realistic goals with the realization of their multicompetences so that they can continue their language learning journey, fueled by the motivation to actively participate in their discourse communities.

V.   Concluding remarks

Language education today is a daunting enterprise in the face of the increasing complexity and dynamism of globally connected professional communities. The first section of this paper pointed to major challenges to ESP practitioners and argued for a shift in teaching models and practices to bridge the gap between the classroom and the professions. To raise professional expertise, more attention needs to be directed toward the integration of discursive competence, disciplinary knowledge and professional practice. The second section described the issues faced in designing a large-scale program for a university setting. Positioning ESP at the very center of the curriculum is recommended to guide fundamental program decisions along an ESP Specificity Continuum. The final section discussed the concepts of systemic literacy and ESP bilingualism. Systemic literacy can guide the development of educational materials and methods to raise genre awareness in the learner. Aiming for ESP bilingualism is suggested after questioning the role of the native-speaker model and proposing the cultivation of ELF speakers, or multicompetent professionals who can base their language learning on genre texts. As active ESP practitioners, we are well aware of the challenges involved in melding theory and application, but hope that the concepts discussed in this paper will offer insights to guide the development of ESP in the 21st century.

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