



TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: MOTIVATION AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

One of the most notable features of recent years in the field of linguistics and didactics of foreign languages is the increase of interest in languages for specific purposes. This development is driven by incoming demand from work and academic domain, with the significant need to study a foreign language for specific purposes.

The purpose of this paper is the detailed examination of the problems regarding their teaching in the university context, focusing mainly in cooperative didactics, which presents two sides: cooperation between teachers and students in the linguistic context and in the context of the specialty discipline.

We will focus on the teacher - student interaction, which sees the collaboration of two experts: the student, an expert in the specific discipline and the teacher, an expert in the language and glottodidactics, a collaboration which must be present in the entire didactic process, from its programming to its completion.

Keywords: *languages for specific purposes, interaction, cooperative didactic, continuous training.*

Introduction

The initial inspiration for choosing this topic comes from a personal experience in teaching Medical Italian in one of the University in Tirana. There were numerous challenges and uncertainties, as it involved a specific type of teaching, distinct from previous foreign language teaching experiences. Ahead of me, there were continuous questions regarding

teaching strategies, the materials used, the level of scientific knowledge I needed to possess, the relationship between grammatical and scientific knowledge of the students, the interaction with the students, valuation techniques, and so on. Often, I had to provide pragmatic solutions to various issues, in the absence of specific prior training for teaching foreign languages in the medical field. Many other teachers engaged in this type of teaching have faced similar difficulties. However, in this paper, we will try to analyze a fundamental aspect, which is based on all the questions above: the teacher-student interaction and the choice of the most effective strategies to translate this relationship into a teaching process of the highest quality. In today's complex and sectorial society, specialized languages are becoming increasingly important. The interest in teaching foreign languages for specific purposes is reflected in the global expansion of such teaching practices. We should adopt the most positive elements from worldwide practices while applying them to the teaching needs in our country.

Teacher-Student Interaction, a Crucial Process in Teaching of Foreign LSP

Teaching of foreign LSP by its nature, is considered as hetero-referential: the goals, objectives, methods, and materials are not exclusively found in schools but must be developed in relation to the world outside the school, where specialty languages are used, lived, and developed daily.

One of the challenges and difficulties faced by a foreign language teacher for specific purposes is related to their level of knowledge in a particular discipline. It is a justified concern, if placed in the context of a mono-directive teaching, where the teacher, who '*knows*' has to transmit his knowledge to a class, composed of students who '*don't know*'. The model "*the teacher teaches - what does he know - to a student who does not know*" cannot be applied in teaching of foreign languages for specific purpose. We think so for at least three reasons:

1. The teacher does not fully understand the content of the specialty discipline. The model *the teacher teaches - what does he know - to a student who does not know* is untrue, primarily because the teacher may only have a superficial understanding of the arguments in the specialty discipline.
2. Teaching specialized foreign languages is aimed at students who have limited knowledge of the foreign language, but who know well the specific arguments of the discipline. The model "*the teacher teaches what a student who knows* " is untrue in the second part.

3. The teaching of LSP, by its nature, is considered as hetero-referential: the goals, objectives, methods, and materials are not exclusively found in schools but must be developed in relation to the world outside the school, where specialty languages are used, lived, and developed daily.

Taking these statements into consideration, and moving away from the traditional teaching model, the collaborative teaching model becomes more easy to understand.

According to this model, in teaching specialized foreign languages, the didactic process sees both subjects, students and teachers, in a position of equal dignity, with equal responsibilities, tasks, and competences that complement each other. And if it is true that no teacher is obliged to know the specialized disciplines in which they are engaged in teaching a foreign language, it is equally true that no teacher should neglect the methodology of linguistic analysis and glotodidactics.

On the other hand, it should be verified whether the teacher's knowledge of the specialty discipline should be directly proportional to the level of students' preparation in the specialty field. This is because students who undergo the process of learning a foreign language for specific purposes can belong to two categories:

1. Some follow a module in a particular specialty language without possessing core conceptual competencies of the specialty discipline (first-year students)
2. Others have sufficient knowledge of the disciplinary argument and follow the module with the main goal of acquiring or improving their competence in a foreign language (non-first-year students).

In the first case, it implies that the teacher must have knowledge of the argument or at least of the concepts present in the text.

Even if the teacher's knowledge of specific issues in the discipline may be rudimentary, he will still be in a better and more favorable position compared to students, since he possesses linguistic competencies and skills that allow him to deduce concepts still unknown from the texts to be analyzed.

In general, the texts used in foreign languages for specific purposes are designed to assist foreign language teachers, who is not a specialist in the field, through figures, diagrams, paraphrases, term explanations, and examples.

Another pedagogical solution we propose is as follows: during a lesson, the student can ask the teacher to explain a specific concept. In this case, the teacher can direct the question to other students who will try to provide the required information in the foreign language. In

case two or three different versions are given, the teacher can use this situation in the pedagogical direction, encouraging a discussion in a foreign language, or giving to the class a text to read with the required explanation.

Through these techniques, the teacher affects the interaction, not only between him and the students, but also between the students themselves or between them and the text, increasing motivation and participation and at the same time expanding his knowledge in the specialty subject.

It is important that both actors of the didactic action (the teacher and the student) act actively, in an interactive process, in which the transfer of information in the specific field from the student to the teacher should not necessarily be interpreted as a weakness of the teacher, but as an enrichment of knowledge, where the teacher is also placed in the role of a potential student.

In this sense, the foreign language teacher, not being required to have a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter, should not feel bad if he will not be able to answer the students' questions about a specific detail of the specialty discipline. On the contrary, with his methodological preparation and teaching experience, he will know how to transform this situation into a didactic activity of a communicative character, where students will be encouraged to find answers to their questions, through the analysis of texts and the exchange of information in the foreign language

Teaching a foreign language is, therefore, a pedagogical and didactic activity that involves the teacher entirely, in order to achieve a balance between factors such as student motivation, teacher-student relationship, didactic activities, and teaching methods.

The teacher of foreign language for specific purposes must enter into communication with his inner world, understand inclinations and sensitivity, until teaching becomes a response to a need, not only cognitive but also socio-affective. In this way, the needs of both the teacher and the student are satisfied, according to the dichotomic notion of teaching-learning, in which the educational process is integrated.

Obtaining the minimum baggage of concepts of a certain discipline, required to properly teach a language for specific purpose, is not an impossible process, nor too difficult.

Knowing the studied discipline is the starting point for a deeper examination of the existing materials and allows the teacher a more efficient selection of the parts that will be presented or analyzed in class, intervening competently and in the right way in the analysis of concepts.

The teaching reality has brought examples of many teachers who, in response to the necessity of acquiring a specialty language, have managed to gain mastery of the relevant concepts even within a short period of time, through research, personal readings, or update courses for this purpose. Their knowledge has not remained static but has been enriched over time during teaching.

We believe that a good language teacher for specific purpose, should have at least general knowledge of the main concepts of the discipline. He should be able to apply these concepts to specialized texts, focusing on the different levels of communication in the language of the specialty, from the lexical one to the morpho-syntactic one. This approach is fundamental if the teacher on his part, is to provide the students with competence the appropriate approach with the text.

A teacher of a language for specific purposes is graduate in a foreign language, but also with specific knowledge, related to the field in which he is engaged in teaching.

This is how Paolo Balboni (2004) summarised the figure of the language teacher for specific purposes, expressed in mathematical terms, according to the following formula:

$$\mathbf{AS + FL + FLSP + MDfL + MDfLSP}$$

where the sign (+) indicates the presence of different competencies, (kompetwns)

- AS expresses a "specific argument",
- FL expresses "Knowledge of the foreign language",
- FLSP expresses "Knowledge of the foreign language for specific purpose",
- MDfL to indicate a "*teaching preparation and updates in didactic methodologies of foreign languages*",
- MDfLSP is used to express "*teaching preparation and updates in didactic methodologies of foreign languages for specific purpose*."

Of course, it would be ideal for such a figure to include both competencies, meaning a teacher with a degree in foreign languages and a degree in a specialty discipline, but this is not always possible. However, the most acceptable choice, we think, would be a teacher with a degree in foreign languages, with competencies that, due to experience and didactic maturity in this direction, will continue to be consolidated.

In the Albanian academic context of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes, teachers typically are graduates in foreign languages.

From the analysis of the methodological approach outlined above, a new figure of the foreign language teacher emerges, which breaks away from the traditional function of imparting knowledge by taking on the function of motivated learning, to learn from students and along with them, the understanding of various specific concepts and the operation of technical procedures, which are commonly used in the specialty discipline. Taking on this new role does not mean for the teacher a reduction in the typical image of his profession, that is, that of the foreign language learning expert. On the contrary, this situation affects the strengthening of didactic teacher-student communication. In this way, what is called cooperative didactics student-teacher, is considered the key to success.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Unlike the canonical model applied to the teaching-learning of a foreign language, where the relationship between the teacher (who knows the language) and the student (who has to learn it) is asymmetrical, in the didactics of foreign languages for specific purposes, the perspective and the relationship change. The relationship is no longer asymmetrical, but balanced, complementary and cooperative. This division of roles pushes both the teacher and the student towards the forms of what is called cooperative didactic.

In the following, we are bringing some suggestions and recommendations for a more efficient teaching/learning of foreign languages for specific purposes, which are laid out for discussion, or even for further processing. These may be subject to critical analysis, but nevertheless constructive and beneficial to the process.

- The foreign language for specific purpose must be preceded by the basic knowledge of the subject of the specialty. This helps the student, who, after knowing the basic concepts of the discipline, finds it easier to understand and use them in a foreign language, but also the teacher, in the context of cooperative didactics.
- The student's level before he starts learning the foreign language specific purpose must be at a B2 level, since he need master the main morpho-syntactic concepts of the basic foreing language.
- Didactic materials used in teaching foreign languages for specific purposes should be characterized by simplicity and avoid overloading with technical terms or long texts.

They should be rich in illustrations or images that help in understanding and deciphering a text in a foreign specialty language.

- Teachers of foreign languages for SP should hold a degree in a foreign language general knowledge in the specialty discipline.
- The foreign language teacher for specific purpose must be detached from the traditional function of giving knowledge, taking on the function of motivated learning, to learn from students and with them understanding different specific concepts. This new role doesn't diminish the typical figure of their profession but enhances the didactic communication between teacher and student.
- Assuming this new role does not diminish the teacher's typical professional identity, but instead, it promotes the establishment of sustainable collaboration with the student and reinforces didactic communication, where everyone contributes their insights, respecting different roles and the irreplaceable roles of all actors in the teaching process.
- Continuous professional development of teachers in Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes (FLSP) through specifically organized training sessions or seminars is a necessity in today's teaching environment. The defined objectives should be closely aligned with the real needs of the teachers.
- In addition to training and qualifications to enhance their professional development, teachers of foreign languages for specific purposes should:
 - Collaborate consistently with colleagues or field specialists.
 - Stay updated on changes in the scientific and professional world, both in terms of epistemological and cultural dimensions.
 - Study scientific and professional communication according to analysis models.
 - Understand rapid changes in scientific and professional directions brought about by the globalization of communication tools (the internet, written or visual media, radio discussions, online communication with foreign educators).
 - Efficiently use new technologies, which serve as a resource for didactic materials for teaching.

- The basis of didactics for foreign languages for specific purposes is the analysis of the needs of students, teachers, and the language of the specialty.
- The definition of 'need' should be of a real and dynamic nature, meaning communicative needs cannot be isolated from operational ones.
- Teachers of foreign languages for specific purposes should perform a productive and reliable needs analysis, encompassing not only terminology and communicative acts but also the dimension of cross-cultural language use in the specialty.
- The selection of materials should be based on students' objectives and needs.
- General teaching should be replaced with individualized teaching that respects individual learning rhythms. This is the only way to genuinely analyze the evolving needs of students, which are dynamic and require continuous review.
- The texts in foreign languages for the specialty should present various situations that encourage communication. Alongside specialized content, they should introduce elements of the culture of the country or the discipline in the language in which the subject is taught.
- The used methodologies should be in line with the objectives that need to be achieved.
- A methodology should be used to promote the acquisition of reading strategies that facilitate access to even complex texts, efficient use of vocabulary, structured note-taking, and the preparation of a written and oral report.

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