

THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AT NON-PHILOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

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Abstrakt: Požiadavky na ovládanie cudzích jazykov sa na celom svete výrazne zvyšujú. Týka sa to najmä osvojovania odbornej slovné zásoby, ktorej dôležitosť je zdôraznená neustálym vývojom prebiehajúcim takmer vo všetkých oblastiach ľudskej činnosti. Miera osvojovania cudzojazyčnej terminológie je často ovplyvnená rôznymi vonkajšími faktormi a problémami (napr. nedostatok príležitostí na komunikáciu a precvičovanie jazyka v reálnych životných situáciách), ako aj individuálnymi rozdielmi, akými sú osobnosť, postoje a motivácia študentov. Predkladaný príspevok sa zameriava na zistenie najčastejších problémov, s ktorými sa študenti stretávajú pri osvojení si obchodnej angličtiny. Hlavným výskumným nástrojom bol dotazník, ktorý bol distribuovaný online formou študentom Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre. Na základe výsledkov dotazníka sú prezentované návrhy na implementáciu vyučovacích metód a techník, ktoré, ako veríme, pomôžu študentom prekonať prekážky a uľahčia proces osvojovania odbornej slovné zásoby v anglickom jazyku.

Kľúčové slová: študent, odborný anglický jazyk, odborná slovná zásoba, problémy pri osvojení odbornej slovné zásoby, vysoké školy nefilologického zamerania

Abstract: The requirements to master foreign languages are increasing significantly throughout the entire world. This relates especially to the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary, the importance of which is proved by the continuous development in almost all the fields of human activity. Its acquisition is often influenced by different external problems (e.g. insufficient exposure to and practice of language in real life situations) as

well as by various individual differences such as personality, attitudes and motivation of students. The present paper makes remarks on the most common difficulties students face when acquiring Business English. The main research tool was a questionnaire, which was distributed online to students studying at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia. Based on the results of the questionnaire, there are presented teaching methods and techniques which, we believe, would help students to overcome obstacles and facilitate the process of the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary in English.

Keywords: students, English for Specific Purposes, subject-specific vocabulary, difficulties in the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary, non-philological universities

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades a foreign language teaching and learning has reached a greater importance. This is the result of socio-economic development marked by the needs of international communication and cooperation, mutual exchange of information among professionals and specialists from different fields of science and technology as well as by the demands of labour market as professionals, who are able to communicate and process the information in both the mother tongue and foreign languages, are highly required by companies. As a consequence of this situation, the interest in the study of Foreign Language for Specific Purposes increases significantly and the activity of teachers in its teaching is becoming more complex and specialized.

Vidal and Cabre (2004, 897) state that the objective of teaching and learning process of Language for Specific Purposes is that a particular individual or a group acquires a certain knowledge of the functioning of specific aspects of the languages related to different areas of expertise. Moreover, they learn to act and express themselves appropriately in specific situations and improve their knowledge of a particular field of science and technology.

In the teaching and learning process of Language for Specific Purposes, teachers must correctly define what lexical content should be the subject of teaching, since general communication should be facilitated while achieving a specific communicative competence that improves productive and receptive skills necessary to perform in a specific professional field (Alcazar 2000, 42-44).

Subject-specific vocabulary is one of the essential components of any course on LSP. It is used to provide oral or written communication within a particular field of science and technology, and is always accompanied by an accuracy and precision, which are characteristics of the scientific, technical and professional fields it refers to (Gomez Molina 2003, 86). To acquire it effectively, it is

necessary to use several teaching methods and be familiar with students' needs, preferences as well as difficulties they usually face when learning Language for Specific Purposes.

Overall, the effectivity of the teaching and learning process depends on the correct setting of objectives and syllabus as well as on the ways used to achieve these objectives, i.e. on an appropriate choice of teaching methods, organizational form and material means available to the teacher.

In terms of the main factors and conditions of the teaching process, the teaching method can be defined as an organized system of teaching activities provided by teachers and learning activities of students aiming at achieving set educational goals (Manak and Svec 2003, 23).

In the real teaching process, different teaching methods are applied simultaneously and are mutually interconnected, i.e. they are not separated from each other. Teaching methods can be changed and replaced several times during the lesson. It is important that their choice is thoughtful and not accidental.

To sum up, the effective acquisition of a subject-specific vocabulary depends on the following factors: the level of students' knowledge, students' needs and preferences, determination of students' problems and the implementation of appropriate teaching methods.

The paper presents the results of the questionnaire, the objective of which was to determine the most common problems students face when acquiring Business English in order to select the most appropriate teaching methods, which would facilitate the process of the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary in English and would meet the objectives of teaching and learning process of Language for Specific Purposes at non-philological universities.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The survey on determining the most common problems students face within the acquisition of Business English was conducted at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA) in April – June 2022. The main research tool used for collecting all the data was an anonymous questionnaire, which was sent online to students who studied Business English at the Centre of Languages of the SUA in Nitra. The research sample consisted of 215 students (157 females and 58 males) who submitted their answers. The majority of them were first year (87) and second year students (119) as Business English was one of their compulsory subjects. There were very few responses from third year (5) and fourth year students (4) who had chosen Business English as an optional subject.

The questionnaire consisted of 5 parts and students had a possibility to choose 1 and/or more items in different parts of the questionnaire. We were interested in the following pieces of information:

- students' opinion on the importance and difficulty of learning Business English vocabulary;
- ways of learning Business English vocabulary;
- problems students face when using Business English vocabulary;
- possibilities to facilitate the acquisition of Business English vocabulary.

The obtained data were further processed quantitatively and qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the collected and processed data, we obtained the following results related to individual parts of the questionnaire:

The first and the second parts of the questionnaire were aimed at finding out students' opinion on the importance (Table 1) and difficulty (Table 2) of learning Business English.

Table 1 *Students' opinion on the importance of learning Business English vocabulary*

Part 1 <i>I consider learning / mastering Business English vocabulary to be:</i>	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
unnecessary, but I have to learn it	14	7%
beneficial	111	52%
very beneficial	90	42%

Source: Author's own results (2022)

The results presented in Table 1 prove without any doubt the need and interest of students in acquiring Business English vocabulary as the vast majority of them consider learning Business English to be beneficial (111 students; 52%), or even very beneficial (90 students; 42%). Therefore, we support strongly the idea that the subject on English for Specific Purposes should be offered as a compulsory or optional subject for all study programmes offered at different faculties of the SUA in Nitra.

Table 2 *Students' opinion on the difficulty of learning Business English vocabulary*

Part 2 <i>Studying Business English vocabulary:</i>	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
is very easy for me	11	5%
is easy for me	44	20%
causes me minor problems	98	46%
is challenging for me	45	21%
is very challenging for me	17	8%

Source: Author's own results (2022)

Concerning the difficulty of acquiring Business English (Table 2), a considerable smaller group of respondents find it demanding (45 students; 21%) or very demanding (17 students; 8%). On the other hand, 98 respondents (46%) have small or minor problems when learning Business English vocabulary. We consider it to be natural as there usually arise some problems when new knowledge is acquired. In general, it can be assumed that students have an appropriate level of General English to be able to learn a subject-specific vocabulary.

Table 3 *Ways of learning Business English vocabulary*

Part 3 <i>I usually learn Business English vocabulary:</i>	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
by heart	107	50%
by reading professional texts (literature) when preparing for lectures / seminars within my field of study	69	32%
by reading professional texts within the seminar on English language	93	43%
when communicating with classmates and / or teachers within the seminar on English language	53	25%
also in my free time (e.g. watching news, videos, documentaries, listening to podcasts, but also communicating on specific professional topics etc.)	112	52%
also in my work (e.g. communication with customers, colleagues / superiors, writing e-mails and telephoning etc.)	18	8%
with the help of a dictionary	44	20%

Source: Author's own results (2022)

The items in the third part of the questionnaire (Table 3) are related to different ways students use when learning Business English. Students could indicate more options in order to determine more precisely particular activities they do when acquiring new vocabulary. Except of learning Business English vocabulary on seminars, 112 students (52%) study Business English o in their free time. Based on a personal communication with students on seminars, we do not consider this finding to be objective as they usually watch ordinary films or series (e.g. on Netflix, HBO etc.) and listen to their favourite music, i.e. they practice and improve their level of General English and not the level of Business English. Therefore, we assume they did not read properly, or they confused a given item related to learning Business English vocabulary with learning General English in their free time.

It is very positive that students apply Business English when preparing for lectures / seminars within their field of study (69 students; 32%). It is a very good way of widening their knowledge of Business English vocabulary as well as improving their ability and skills of using foreign language sources. On the other hand, we are worried to find out that 107 respondents (50%) learn Business English vocabulary by heart and only 44 students (20%) learn new vocabulary with the help of the dictionary. These findings may be one of the reasons why students have problems when using Business English vocabulary (Table 4).

Table 4 *Problems students face when using Business English vocabulary*

Part 4 <i>When using Business English vocabulary, I have got problems with:</i>	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
pronunciation	73	34%
grammar	65	30%
reading comprehension of a professional text - therefore I cannot comment on it	72	33%
comprehension of the professional text being listened to - therefore I cannot comment on it	82	38%
the ability to express correctly my thoughts / opinions on a given topic	116	54%
I have no major problems using Business English vocabulary	36	17%

Source: Author's own results (2022)

The items in Table 4 determine problems in the acquisition of Business English. The students could indicate more options as, in general, there are more problematic areas they usually deal with when learning new vocabulary. This is also supported by obtained results as only 36 students (17%) state not having major problems using Business English vocabulary.

Concerning the results presented in Table 3, only 20% of students learn new vocabulary with the help of the dictionary. We assume that this may be a reason why a considerable number of respondents (73; 34%) have problems with the pronunciation when using Business English. The pronunciation is usually introduced in dictionaries, so, the more often they use them, the less problems with pronunciation they should have.

The obtained results also prove the need to develop both receptive and productive communication skills during seminars on Business English: 72 students (33%) have problems with reading comprehension of the professional texts, 82 of them (38%) face difficulties when listening to the professional texts and 116 students (54%) have problems expressing themselves when dealing with a given topic. Therefore, appropriate teaching methods developing these skills should be definitely implemented in every seminar on Business English. In this way, the objectives of the teaching and learning process would be met as well as students would face fewer difficulties when acquiring Business English vocabulary.

Table 5 Possibilities to facilitate the acquisition of Business English vocabulary

Q5 <i>When acquiring Business English vocabulary, it would help me:</i>	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
to have more seminars on English language in a week	41	19%
to have more possibilities to communicate with classmates / teacher during seminars on English language	58	27%
to devote more time to listening and subsequent communication on the topic during seminars on English language	86	40%
to make more use of the possibility of personal consultations with the teacher	32	15%
to spend more time learning Business English vocabulary in my free time	122	57%

Source: Author's own results (2022)

The findings in Table 4 correspond with the students' suggestions on possibilities, which would make it easier for them to learn Business English vocabulary. As we can see, 86 students (40%) would prefer to spend more time practising listening and speaking during the seminars and 58 of them (27%) would like to communicate more with classmates. Therefore, methods such as the communicative approach, Task-based learning and making oral presentations are a must to be used regularly during seminars on Business English. In addition, an important finding is that students are aware of the necessity to devote more of their free time to the acquisition of Business English (122 students; 57%). This could also increase their motivation and interest in participating actively on seminars, which would highly increase the effectivity of implemented teaching methods.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the questionnaire we suggest the following teaching methods that can help students in the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary, particularly Business English:

The communicative approach is the most widely used and most widely accepted approach to classroom-based foreign language teaching, and in many ways, is a culmination of those approaches and methodologies that appeared before. It emphasizes the learner's ability to communicate various functions, such as asking and answering questions, making requests, describing, narrating and comparing. Task assignment and problem solving, two key components of critical thinking, are the means through which the communicative approach operates. (Richards 2006, 2).

Task-based learning (TBL) or Task-based language teaching (TBLT), a refinement of the communicative approach, focuses on the completion of specific tasks through which language is taught and learned. Language learners use the language that they know to complete a variety of assignments, acquiring new structures, forms and vocabulary as necessary. Little error correction is provided. In this type of learning environment, three- to four-week segments are devoted to a specific topic: ecology, security, medicine, religion, youth culture, etc. Students learn about a specific topic, step-by-step, using a variety of resources, with each unit culminating in a final project such as a written report or presentation (British Council, n.d.).

In a task-based approach, learners learn by doing. Task activities are usually rich in language, involving a wide variety of language areas, as well as all the skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking. By definition, a task must involve

the processing of information, and some kind of communication or interaction. And a task can be something that you do alone, or that you do with someone else or in a group (Net languages 2017).

Making oral presentations is one of the important components of an English course as it develops students' oral presentation and public speaking skills. Asking students to give presentations gives the following benefits: it gives the presenting student a good opportunity to practise unaided speaking; it gives the other students good listening practice; it increases the presenting student's confidence when using English language; it can be a good diagnostic and assessment device; it can be good practice for the real situation when students may actually need to give presentations in English in their professional lives and it is an excellent generator of spontaneous discussion and/or essay topics. University students will need the skills of presenting information and conducting briefings in their future work. Therefore, they should be taught to give instructive and demonstration speeches and presentations followed by discussions. Moreover, these are the basic types of presentations to teach to students at non-philological universities, since they are simple and their more immediate structures lend themselves for use even to the students with the language knowledge of pre-intermediate or intermediate levels (EU Commission 2011).

The use of mass media to teach language in authentic context represents a double challenge for language teachers. Media give learners access to authentic language utilized in real life. Media can connect students to an authentic audience. If students never get to actually use their language skills, they can quickly lose their motivation to learn. Language media like authentic videos or audio apps can open up an audience of native speakers with whom they can communicate (Clark, 2013). This experience gives much more credibility to the value of language learning than relying solely on the somewhat artificial conversations that take place in a classroom.

Concerning the teaching and learning process of the subject-specific vocabulary, it is necessary to consider the development of language skills related to the level of the speaker; make integration of language content and communication skills as well as to take into account the real and specific needs of the student. This last aspect is one of the most significant in the planning of foreign language classes.

The teacher of Foreign Language for Specific Purposes must provide students with the acquisition of lexical competence that allows them to improve their communicative expectations. This objective is fulfilled more easily when students' learning preferences and strategies are known and the difficulties they face are determined. This contributes to an effective acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary by students and, at the same time, it facilitates the

teacher's selection of appropriate methods for the teaching of subject-specific vocabulary. Using a variety of teaching methods, the teacher will make learning more enjoyable, interesting and entertaining both for students and themselves, and will significantly contribute to the improvement of the quality of foreign language teaching and learning.

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