

Teaching specialized languages: *Theoretical Insights and Practical Issues*

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Abstract: Language is the vehicle of thought and data. Without capability in a language, which is the medium of instruction in schools and colleges, a teacher cannot viably transfer his knowledge to students. Typically, this is the main the reason why many teachers are not effective in their teaching and are not able to create and maintain students' interest in their subjects. This is why language teaching has always fascinating but rather tortuous history, in which a debate on teaching strategies has evolved especially over the last hundred years. The names of many of the strategies (grammar-translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Silent way Method, etc) are recognizable. The aim of this paper is to shed light on one type of language teaching i.e. specialized languages. Specialized language is the language used in a particular field or relevant to and characteristic of an industry. Specialized language is additionally means one that differs from the general language by specialized expressions and particular terminology. The present paper falls under the descriptive paradigm using a deductive approach. In other words, it will provide a review of the existing literature related to specialized languages which will serve in return as a point of departure for future empirical investigations.

Keywords: Language, Specialized Languages, Theoretical Insights, Practical Issues, Teaching

Introduction

Human beings were created to be different from the other species. This fact is symbolized by their use of language to communicate, share knowledge and express feelings. Throughout history, researchers (linguists and educationalists) directed their efforts –each from his perspective– towards the study of that language. To this end, a clear distinction between common and specialized language was – still is– and will continue to be crucial. The aim of this paper is to offer the theoretical insights governing the areas of overlap between common and specialized languages. Besides, it highlights some practical issues related to the teaching of specialized languages.

I. Language and communication

Delimitating a topic is the first step to deal with it intelligently, and this is true with the notion of language and communication where very heated debates took place amongst researchers on the way the two concepts overlap and shape each other.

A. communication

Communication is the process of exchanging ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge. This process falls under 2 categories, 5 types, and 3 models.

1. Categories

The process of communication is- with no doubt- one of the following categories: Verbal using spoken or written language; or Non Verbal using signs, gestures, and facial expressions, i.e., Body language.

2. Types

When speaking about the different types of communication, Dance and Larson (1972) listed the followings:

- a. Extra-personal communication: a communication between a human being and a non human being (animals). For example a man with his dog, cat, or bird.
- b. Intra-personal communication: a communication between a human being and himself. It is likely to appear or happen to all of us as humans where we talk explicitly or implicitly with ourselves.
- c. Inter-personal communication: a communication between human beings despite their level of education, race, and ethnicity. In here, concepts such as formal, non formal and informal norms are of value.
- d. Organizational communication: inter-personal communication will certainly have a context or an organization. For example, a teacher with his students in a classroom, a boss with his workers in a factory or institution, etc. What should be born in mind regarding this type is the notion of organization.
- e. Mass communication: a communication between human beings across distances or beyond the boundaries of a village or country. This type makes use of technology i.e., internet, social media, TV's, Radio, etc.

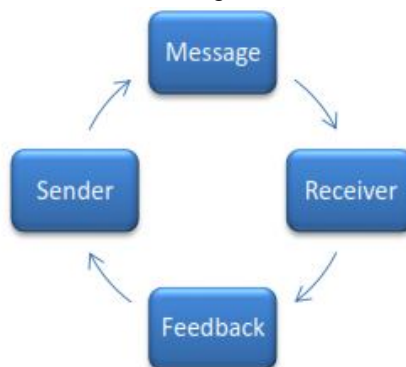
3. Models

Linguists and applied linguists join both categories and types of communication under the following models. The simplest model is represented in Figure 1:



Figure 1: the Linear Model of Communication (Adapted from Mc Cornack and Ortiz, 2017)

However, that model was criticized to miss important details concerning the process of communication. This is why; the next model (Figure 2) was seen to have clear insights.



**Figure 2: the Cycle Model of Communication
(Adapted From U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995)**

In this model the notion of Feedback was added for the simple reason that the process of communication is not only a one-way process but rather a two-way one. This means that the message encoded by the sender will be decoded by the receiver; in return, the receiver will also

encode his feedback to be decoded by the sender i.e. the positive or the negative reaction and /or interaction. The last model (Figure 3) takes the second model as a framework and adds the concept of Noise.

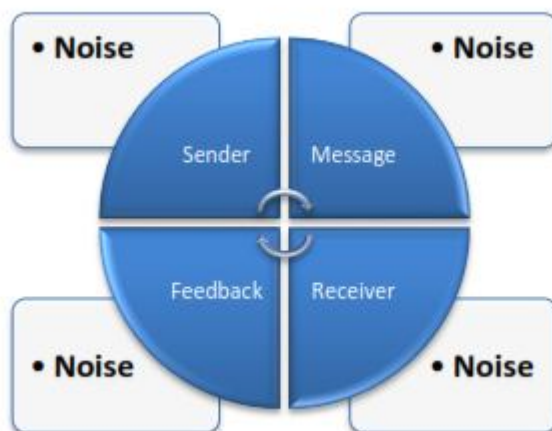


Figure 3: the Noise Model of Communication (Adapted From Littlejohn and Foss 2008)

B. Language

According to the philosophy expressed in different myths and religions all over the world, language is the source of human life and power. Consequently, many definitions do exist. In this section, some of them will be discussed to put the reader in the context. Speaking about its social attributes, Block and Trager theorise (1942), "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates" (p.5). When dealing with the structure of language, the famous linguist Chomsky hypothesizes "Language is a set of finite number of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements" (Chomsky, 1957). More recently, Halliday argues "A language is a system of meaning-a semiotic system" (Halliday, 2003)

In sum, and based on what has been stated above, one can say that language is a system of systems i.e. the levels of analysis summarized in Table 1 :

Table 1: levels of analysis

Level	Discipline
Sound	Phonetics + Phonology
Word	Morphology
Sentence	Syntax
Meaning	Semantics
Use and Usage	Pragmatics

C. Specialized Language

Before dealing with the rationale behind the notion of specialized language, it is worth mentioning to draw a distinction or a comparison between it and the so called common language. According to Coancà (2011):

Specialized languages are sub-assemblies of the common language and lexical units of the common language, too. We should emphasize that we mean by “common language” “the unmarked, unspecialized language” (the specialized language is different to the common language and the “general language” designates the whole of the language: “common language”+ “specialized language”. (p.1)

In the same line of thought, Carbé (1998) stated that

There is rather a difference of degree between the common languages and the specialized ones than a difference of nature; the peculiarity of the specialized languages is mainly relevant in use. Therefore, “common language units are used in situations that can qualify them as unmarked. (p. 112)

Back to the idea of specialized language, Cabré (1998: 118-121) provided a variety of definitions focusing on three main stages:

- The specialized languages are linguistic codes, which are different from the common language, consisting of rules and specific units. According to this aspect, a specialized language would, therefore, be an independent language; in this case, how can we perceive a clear barrier between the specialized language and the common language? We take into account that “linguistic phenomena” that differentiate the specialized language from the common one are very important to settle a barrier between them.
- If a specialized language was a genuine specific code, it would be difficult for it to be understood by a non-specialist, because he does not know this code. But this aspect is not always valid.
- The popularization of the scientific discourse, to a smaller degree of specialization, which is understood by many speakers, is very useful nowadays.

D. Language for Specific Purposes (LSP)

Language for specific purposes (LSP) can be traced as far back as the Greek and Roman empires (Dudley-Evans and ST Johns, 1998:1). In the same vein, Strevens 1977 states that the history of LSP goes back to “at least half a century”.

LSP does not have an overly long or detailed history in the literature of applied linguistics, and while we can certainly presume that LSP instruction, in some form or other, has existed for as long as language instruction itself, few direct references are made to its practice before Strevens (1977). Even then, much of the research has been solely in the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction (see Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991).

Indeed, the definition of LSP that we favour actually comes from a definition of ESP put forth by Strevens (1988). According to him,

The essential characteristics of specific purpose instruction are that it: Developing Courses in Languages for Specific Purposes 3 Consist of [teaching] which is: designed to meet specified needs of the learner; related in content (i.e., in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations, and activities; centred on the language appropriate to those activities, in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc; (Strevens 1988, pp. 1-2)

In brief, one of the major terms specialized language turns around is the concept of special language or the so called "register analysis". This concept departed from the principle that English of a specific science differs from each other in terms of its grammatical and lexical features of the registers.

Register analyses in ESP was tailored for the pedagogic purpose, i.e. making the ESP course more relevant to learners' needs, not intended for the purpose to discuss the nature of registers of English per se. The main purpose of an ESP course was to produce a syllabus which gave a high priority to the language forms students would meet in their field and in turn would give low priority to forms they would not meet. Register analysis revealed that there was very little that was distinctive in the sentence grammar of scientific English beyond a tendency to favour particular forms such as the present simple tense, the passive voice and nominal compound.

E. Teaching Specialized Languages

Making education, in general and teaching in particular, more enjoyable is the key for academic success. In this respect a great deal is done to update the approaches, methods, and techniques teachers may use to fulfil the mentioned purpose.

1. Theoretical Insights

In the vein of specialized languages, according to Popova (2015) teachers should have the following prerequisites. First, a fluency in the general or common language is a must. This means that excellent language skills mastery by teachers will help a lot if they want to take up such a responsible task as the teaching of specialized language.

Second, good command of the specialized language to build solid skills in the general language allows further training in a specialized language. This is not easily achieved, and takes a long time. When preparing for this new task the teacher has to read a large volume of specialized literature both in their mother tongue and in the relevant foreign language in order to get familiar with the nature and specifics of the specialized terminology of the respective field. It takes time and requires serious reflection on unfamiliar subjects.

Third, it requires some serious ambition if the teacher wants to be well-versed and competent in this new field. However, all efforts are worthwhile, if the teacher wants to establish himself/herself as a specialist at the necessary level. This is truly a great challenge! The teacher's extensive knowledge in the respective field is crucial to the selection and preparation of educational materials and to the teaching itself. These constitute the solid ground for the teacher to step on.

Fourth, a consultation with specialists is seen crucial for the simple reason that teachers of a specialized language can hardly be the greatest specialists in the specific field. Therefore it is

often advisable to consult professionals who could help them understand and make sense of the scientific literature they have read. Teachers are not experts (economists); they usually have a degree in philology! However, they make great efforts to master all the intricacies and peculiarities of the specialized terminology before coming to the lecture hall to teach it.

To conclude this part, a common core between all researchers is that the high proficiency of teachers in general and specialized foreign language and the consultations with experts in the respective field can ensure the successful overcoming of all difficulties related to their immediate work.

2. Practical Issues

A direct methodological implication for the teaching of specialized languages imposes the following issues:

- The identification of the contextual setting in order to know who we are teaching, or our student profile, and for what precise reason
- The teacher has to keep in mind the fact that linguistic aspects cannot be totally separated from their referential and conceptual reality.
- Authenticity of use requires both authentic materials and subject-matter orientation in learning and teaching contexts, even if the ultimate learning goal is purely a linguistic one.
- Both knowledge and language are of an inter-subjective nature, reflecting their social construction; thereby specialized language needs to be substantiated with all talk-types if it is to be fully internalized (Lankiewicz 2014; 2013a).
- A minimal level of subject-matter expertise is to be expected from the specialized language teacher if we are to produce a recognizable, authentic and authoritarian voice, which does not necessarily mean that the teacher should instruct the actual content itself (Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998).

In conclusion, this is the direction specialized language teaching and teacher education in this area needs to follow if we are to ensure the fulfilment of our learners' needs from both a linguistic and cognitive perspective.

Conclusion

A specialized language does not mean necessarily the use of jargons, symbols, acronyms; but it can be easily reached by a large number of people. Nevertheless, the degree of specialization can be different from one context to another. In other words, every specialized language can be updated at different levels of specialization. The peak of the pyramid corresponds to the communication process between specialists; however, its ground corresponds to communication between the general public. The choice of the context governs the specialized language and a text does not cease to be a specialized text, as long as it aims at vulgarization, its level of specialization being simply smaller.

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