

PEDAGOGICAL SCIENCES

METHODOLOGY OF ESP TEACHING
IN MULTICULTURED UNIVERSITY GROUPS**Diana Dobrovolska**

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Summary

Teaching a foreign language for the specific purposes to the multicultural University students is quite challenging due to the fact that this category of learners is characterized both by numerous peculiarities of mentality, national traditions and general level of background education, nevertheless all the academic group students should fulfill the ESP programme's requirements. The mentioned factors stimulated the teachers of Odessa National I.I. Mechnikov University (Ukraine) to undertake the analytical investigation of: teaching methods and techniques used in the world, so that to estimate their value for ESP; of psychological and psycholinguistic characteristics of the students from different countries – in order to find out the possible ways of creating positive learning atmosphere which would allow every individual to develop his or her personality, as well as to equip all the students with the strategies of learning through team and group work. The primary aim was to find out which method would be the best for ESP teaching to the learners from different national background, the secondary one was to prove the hypothesis that thesaurus-thematic cycles methodology is efficient for developing linguistic and communicative skills of the students in the multicultural groups due to involving each and every individual into the common goals learning activity. The mentioned above methodology was pioneered by us, its validity having been checked during a decade. The data obtained (test and exam results) demonstrated that the methodology was valuable, one of its merits being the easiness of application both for off-line and for on-line ESP teaching which was of special importance during the COVID-19 quarantine period. The present article discusses the work done, demonstrates real tasks, forms and regimes of work at the faculties of Mathematics, Law, Biology, History, Philology, International Economic Relations and outlines the perspectives of the future investigation.

Keywords: methodology, English for Specific Purposes, multicultural group, thesaurus-thematic cycle, team work.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23856/3857>

1. Introduction

Modern society demands highly-efficient specialist specialists of all fields who are able to work individually or in small groups as well as in transnational companies. Definitely, the productivity of their work depends not only upon the knowledge and practical experience of every individual, but upon the effectiveness of communication while sharing information orally or in written. The communication is sure to be conducted (unless the specialist works in his native land) via one of the global languages: English or German, Spanish or Chinese, French or Arabic etc.

2. Multicultural Students Groups Dominate

School leavers and their parents all over the world thoroughly examine Academic Programmes, Study and Life Facilities, Career Perspectives of different Universities, Institutes and Academies to search the best among them from the point of view of cultural and academic atmosphere, the possibilities for obtaining solid theoretical knowledge and valuable practical experience.

During several decades *Odessa National I.I. Mechnikov University (Odessa, Ukraine)* -for short- *ONU-* has been constantly viewed by North and South American, Asian, European citizens as one of the decent higher educational establishments in the world. The rating made by the International Projects Centre “European Education” in 2020, ONU has been included in the “Top-20” of higher educational establishments in Ukraine (among 200 which were examined according to different criteria and standards). If in 1990-s in the University faculties there were representatives from several European countries, now the applicants from Bulgaria and Japan, Romania and Vietnam, Georgia and Kazakhstan, Argentina and Turkey, Egypt and China, Israel and India, The USA and Chile follow their wish to be enrolled in its 16 faculties and thus become our students. These multilingual students can get Bachelor’s, Master’s Degree or write and defend their Thesis at the Post-Graduate course. At the University they study a foreign language (several languages – depending upon the speciality).

3. Programme Requirements and Students Needs

On the one hand, the statistics proves the prestige of obtaining degrees from ONU. On the other hand, these multicultural groups are characterized by the lack of communication skills and habits in the new academic and country environment, by a great discrepancy in their foreign language knowledge, by various mentality and learning strategies. The mentioned above factors are challenging for the foreign language teachers and should be taken into serious consideration when choosing strategies and forms, techniques and regimes of work, as well as teacher’s aids, methods and the methodology.

The issues mentioned above have been noticed and investigated by psychologists, linguists, methodologists, specialists in cognitive and applied linguistics both in our country and abroad, the attention being paid to: a) the specific features of the material for learning (I. Berman, T. Serova, R. Lerner); b) the stages of linguistic skills development (I. Bim, Zh. Vitlin, M. West, L. Sheldon); c) the peculiarities of reading, writing, speaking, listening and the sequence of exercises to teach these kinds of speech (V. Skalkin, S. Folomkina, Z. Klychnikova, D. Nunan, B. Kumaravadivelu); d) the extrinsic and intrinsic monolingual, bilingual, multilingual learners’ motivation (J. Harmer, D. Willis, J. Willis); e) the techniques useful for academic and specific purposes foreign languages teaching (T. Hutchison, A. Waters) and so

on. No doubt, all these investigations pave the way to the proper choice and usage of teaching methods and techniques but they neither reflect the needs of concrete academic students groups, especially the multilingual ones, nor mirror the stages to reach the goals that ESP programme sets for particular faculties and specialities within the time allotted for ESP.

The real facts are as follows: the majority of academic students' groups at the faculties of Mathematics, Biology, Law, Philology, International Economic Relations and History are multicultural (Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Arabic, Israeli, Chinese, Vietnamese, Georgian, Romanian, Armenian and other nationalities study in them); the term of studying ESP does not exceed 4 semesters; the Programme presuppose for the first-year students the B-1 or B-2 foreign language level, while in reality it is not so (what was demonstrated by the placement tests conducted by English, French, German teachers of ONU in 2010–2019). Acknowledging these facts, the Foreign Language Department teachers set the hypotheses that the Communicative method could be applied for teaching ESP to multicultural groups in case the learners were provided with fresh, valuable for their speciality, interesting materials, proper strategies to develop their linguistic and communicative skills and favorable psycholinguistic conditions to participate in common goals reaching during every lesson.

4. Thesaurus-Thematic Cycle Methodology for ESP

We strongly believe that the 1-st year of studying at the University in a foreign country is crucially important for 2 reasons: those students who are lagging behind in their knowledge of English, who have not acquired the necessary level in reading, listening, writing and speaking and poorly communicate in the foreign country's environment should fill in the gap through abundant individual work and active participation in group activities during the lessons. At the same time, the learners whose English level is B-1 or B-2, should continue increasing their linguistic and communicative potential thanks to the thesaurus-thematic organization of the proficiency-oriented materials for learning.

Our 25-year teaching at the University experience has proved that the Communicative method is the best when we aim to develop linguistic and communicative skills of the students, no matter what volume of active and passive vocabulary they have, what faculty they study at, what narrow specialization of their department is. The methodology which was created by us is inseparable from the communicative method of foreign languages teaching.

The term "thesaurus-thematic cycle" and the methodology of using thesaurus-thematic cycles was introduced by us as far back as 1992 (*Dobrovol'ska L., 1992*). The term refers to the learning complex which is presented by 3 authentic texts on similar problem (aspect, device, innovation, technique, theory etc.) and a set of textually-centered tasks, gradation of linguistic and extra-linguistic difficulties is observed from one text to the next one, from one cycle to the following ones, and reading these texts that are actual, urgent, interesting, valuable from the standpoint of the learner's would-be profession, with different purposes – increases the learner's thesaurus and develops his/her skills in all kinds of speech activity. The principles of texts selection, the criteria of linguistic and extra-linguistic difficulties in them, the steps for creating the tasks in each cycle and many other relevant issues are described in detail in our Theses and do not need to be repeated within the frames of the present article.

Below some important, in our understanding, remarks from the teaching experience are given to illustrate the work in multilingual and multicultural students' groups.

It stands to reason, especially during the second week to use at the lessons those mini-presentations (3–4 minutes) which all students had been requested to make so that to introduce

themselves. One important condition for making the presentation was mentioning the most important, interesting facts about the student's country and town. Slide show was accompanied with short information on the part of the students, and even the most timid and shy individuals (from Vietnam, China, Japan, India) felt comfortable in the new learning environment and gradually could overcome the psychological barrier of speaking English in public. The students with the advanced knowledge of the language liked to make such presentations too and eagerly listened to their fellow students from different parts of the world. The atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect started to be formed.

Bearing in mind that nowadays learners often prefer various gadgets, devices and information technologies to paper books and can search the net if they need to find some verbal, pictographic or ideographic information, we welcomed usage of gadgets during English lessons long before 2020, when Ukrainian and foreign Universities had to transfer to on-line educational platforms and gadgets became absolutely necessary for every student and teacher.

The introduction of European credit-modular system standards of education allowed the ONU teachers continue of thesaurus-thematic cycles methodology as the latter answered the requirements of setting the material into theme-related units, which could easily be incorporated in the course of studying English due to their flexible character (texts were selected by the teacher from the Internet resource, publications in special scientific journals and supplied with the tasks from the "bank of tasks and exercises" which had been created by us. The English language complexes (Navigate, Keynote, Outcomes, Premium, Language Leader) used at different faculties were not neglected, but topically supplied with the current materials necessary for the needs of our students. As the textual materials differed from faculty to faculty we suppose that more vivid examples can be given in this article via the regimes and forms of work, and tasks to the texts.

When evaluating the students' initial knowledge of English we noticed that the majority of them lack the habits of reading authentic texts, skills of finding in any text, even the adapted one, the answers to the so-called "prognostic questions". To overcome this drawback, during the lesson the teacher projected one of the authentic texts from the thesaurus-thematic cycle on the screen in such a way, that not the whole article (text) would appear, but its part – some paragraphs. The students could see after the part of the text 3 variants of the prognostic answers. After the discussion – what choice was correct- the continuation of the text was shown. Here are some examples: It is implied in the passage that Which of the following is implied in the next paragraph of the text are given)?; The paragraph N... preceding the passage most probably discussed; The consequence of the information from the paragraph may be as follows (answers are given); Which of the mentioned above is most likely the topic of the following paragraph (variants of answers are given)?

Some more items from our work:

The article found by the teacher was divided into 5–8 parts. Each student from the group got (by mail or Viber) only one part for reading at home. At the lesson the students had to work in small groups so that to share the information with everybody from his or her group. Only English was allowed to be used, but students could prove or affirm their utterances with the notes they had made while reading the text at home. After discussing the material the group wrote the gist of the whole text. The gists were read and the best one chosen.

What students liked to do was their own surfing the net so that to find the article on a particular topic of the module and send it to all the students (and the teacher) from the group. The tasks to the article were sent by the teacher, they were identical for everybody, but required students' cooperation before the next lesson on this topic:

– copy out the most important facts/information. Share the most important, in your opinion, passages with your fellow students (email or send by Viber). Get ready for discussing the article at the lesson.

– read the article, make the plan for retelling. Send the plan to 2 or 3 of your fellow students. Ask them to make the same and send their plans back to you. Compare the plans and choose the best one. Be ready to speak according to the best plan.

– rearrange the textual information in the form of short sentences. Underline in each sentence the terms and write your own sentences with these terms on the topic of the article. Be ready to retell the article using your own sentences.

The other task, which especially the students from Ukraine, China, Japan, Vietnam, Egypt were fond of, are given below:

– make a presentation for the group on the topic of the article (additional materials in English are welcome). Try to incorporate visual aids (pictures, graphs, charts etc.) to facilitate the students' comprehension of the material. Be ready to answer the questions after your presentation.

– make a list of the terms used in the article. Share the terms with your fellow students. Be ready to give the derivatives of the words, using suffixes and prefixes. Write the derivatives and their translation in Ukrainian and your mother tongue, memorize them. Retell the article using as many derivatives as possible.

When doing such tasks all the students felt their responsibility before the group and valued the chance to participate in a common work. In the long run, different tasks, regimes of work, cooperative efforts at the lessons and in on-line work consolidated the students' groups and helped every student to be accommodated in the team of mutually minded individuals, who were sharing the atmosphere of joy while acquiring learning strategies and polishing their English.

For the completion of the thesaurus-thematic cycle we practiced giving the multiple choice tests, their vocabulary and grammar coinciding with the ones that had been learned in the module. The tests were made on the textual material. The students had to read the text and do the tasks in written during 15–20 minutes. Some examples are below (every question had 3 variants of the answer):

- 1) Which of the following is the best title of the text?
- 2) In line... the expression "...” is closest in the meaning to
- 3) The paragraph preceding line... is mainly about
- 4) The next paragraph discusses the consequences of
- 5) What is the main idea of the text?
- 6) Choose the best answer to the following question
- 7) The author's main point is that
- 8) It is not mentioned in the text if / when / how
- 9) What type of information is included in the paragraph N (variants are: a definition, an opinion, an argument)?
- 10) The article might be used in the course of studying the following discipline...

From time to time at the lessons we used tests "Close", certainly composed on the authentic material in the specialization field of the students.

5. Conclusions

Our investigation confirmed the hypotheses that teaching ESP in multicultural students groups is efficient within the Communicative method of teaching in case the Credit-Modular

System is grounded on Thesaurus-Thematic Cycle methodology. It turned out to be beneficial from the psychological point of view as the students were equal “subjects”, not “objects” of education, upbringing and development; they eagerly learned English through sharing knowledge and cooperation.

When it was compulsory to transfer to on-line studying, we found it easy due to the mentioned above methodology too. We worked during the last academic year on-line, either on the platform ZOOM or Viber, or via email, widely using Google Forms for testing the knowledge of the material learned by the students of the faculties of Mathematics, Biology, Law, Philology, International Economic Relations and History. Many forms of individual, team and group work were interesting- by themselves- for the learners, because the latter managed at the lessons of English to develop their professional thesaurus, acquire new learning strategies which could be applied not only at the University, but in their future profession as well. The motivation of learning in the atmosphere of mutual understanding, respect and support increased, and the results of the sessions (during 2010–2020) were very good.

The perspectives of our investigation we see in creating the course of English for post-graduate foreign students.

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