

LILIANA IVIĆ

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, University of Rijeka, Croatia

TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES TO ELEMENTARY LEARNERS

UDC 371.3:811.111

Received: 07.09.2004

Subject review

The aim of this paper is to give a few suggestions on the methods of teaching the adult elementary learners of English in order to achieve basic communication skills. Very important is the selection of the most essential grammatical structures as well as the most appropriate vocabulary. The final result should be to enable the Elementary learner to acquire the basic knowledge of Business English.

Key words: Business English, English for Specific Purposes, Elementary learners, Basic communication needs.

INTRODUCTION

On entering the university most students already possess the ability to speak English fluently, and therefore consider their English good enough to be used for business communication. But is that really so? Many of them will soon realize that the general English they have been speaking differs in some aspects from the specific language called Business English or English for Specific Purposes. Since they already speak English and are acquainted with its main features, they only have to continue building up the language and expanding it with new vocabulary and expressions dealing with a particular sphere of business.

There is another group of adult learners, those who have very little or none at all, knowledge of English. Many of such Elementary learners find themselves in the situation to have a real and immediate communication need. What they are usually offered is the course in General English, which enables them to learn the basic structure and functions of the language, but the essential needs of low-level business language learners are mostly ignored.

Many English teachers have no experience in business, so they consider Business English to be difficult. However, it is now widely accepted that although Business English is in many ways different, it is by no means more difficult than General English. The vocabulary is different as well as the situations selected for

practice or role-play. But there are remarkable similarities between their functions and structures. The teaching and learning techniques are also pretty much the same, so the dividing line between general and business language is becoming less visible. Therefore it wouldn't be surprising if we soon faced the appearance of «New English» for working people which would be the combination of General and Business English.

1. ELEMENTARY LEARNERS' REAL NEEDS

Elementary learners of English must be aware of the fact that their knowledge of English will not immediately enable them to lead a negotiation or a business meeting. However, we know that doing business concentrates on building up new contacts, and even the basic knowledge of English can be of great assistance in establishing such contacts. This is particularly true when the relations are with other non-native speakers, who are more sympathetic with the problems of communicating in a foreign language. There are numerous managers who are able to communicate successfully on a skeleton diet of the same 200 work-related words and a few most common social expressions, without making much progress in the use of their English. One of the reasons for this stagnation in language competence lies in their age, older people don't find it necessary to improve their level of communication. But their lack of advancement is probably also due to the fact that they actually don't need to improve it: they have already acquired what little English they need to fulfill their professional role. Therefore, all Elementary learners, young and old, should be inspired by the idea that even their basic English can be of immediate value in their work.

2. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR ELEMENTARY LEARNERS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

The field of tourism and hospitality management is one of the fields where specific language is extremely important. Elementary learners should be taught how to cope with various situations within their language competence, taking care that the language they use is appropriate to their sphere of work. They should be enabled to express themselves correctly in the following situations:

- Welcoming visitors/business partners to your company/hotel and showing them around
- Talking about job/sphere of business/company or hotel's products and services provided
- Talking about objectives/interest of a company/hotel/tour operator
- Making simple phone calls, sending fax or e-mail messages
- Writing simple business letters (reservations, cancellations, circular letters, etc.)
- Dealing with business travel situations (hotel, airport, asking way etc.)

These are all the situations that anyone who has a job in tourism and hospitality industry will experience, therefore it is of great use to know how and when to use the most convenient phrases.

3. A BUSINESS COURSE AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

If we want our students to become capable of producing language in real life and work situations, they have to be given the elements which are essential to them. In terms of grammar, the most frequently used structures must be chosen, which are not too difficult conceptually, and above all the most appropriate ones to the communication needs mentioned above. The following would be the minimum requirement:

- Present Simple Tense
- Present Continuous Tense (to express present and future)
- Present Perfect Tense
- Past Tense
- «Shall» to express suggestions and offers
- «Can / could / may» to express requests
- «Will» to express predictions and decisions
- «Would like» to express offers, invitations and requests
- «How / what about» to express suggestions
- Comparatives and superlatives.

All grammatical structures have to be accompanied by the appropriate vocabulary dealing with the particular sphere of business. In case of Elementary learners in tourism and hospitality management, the following areas should be covered:

- Types of company (hotels, tour operators, travel agencies)
- Company/hotel infrastructure (various departments)
- Jobs in tourism and hospitality industry
- Types of company documents (invoice, memo, circular letters)
- Common expressions (negotiate, contract, allotment)
- Countries and nationalities
- Sports and leisure activities
- Expressing dates (numerals, days of the week, months)
- Telling the time
- Hotel /travel/restaurant vocabulary.

3.1. Methods of Teaching Elementary Learners

In order to achieve best results the course needs to be designed according to the capabilities of its learners. We must show them clearly the way in which the teaching will develop. This implies grading the language they are taught and expected to understand whenever possible.

In developing the reading skills the text should be simplified. If the authentic text seems to be too complicated, the tasks must not be too demanding or require too detailed understanding. For listening practice the extracts spoken at a reasonable pace should be chosen. It would also be a good idea to choose the extracts spoken by both native and non-native speakers. In such a way the learners will build up their confidence and will be motivated for further learning. So much business communication in the world takes place among non-native speakers, so the learners may realize that the real life communication is not much harder than the classroom models. Besides it may help them to get used to various accents and pronunciation.

At the same time, when speaking with a native speaker, the Elementary learners will find themselves in the position to concentrate on listening and responding to questions, and not on initiating and developing a conversation. Therefore their language competence must focus on appropriate expressions such as polite responses to requests, offers, invitations, suggestions, thanks and apologies. In the area of discussion skills they should know how to agree and disagree, ask for opinion, ask for repetition or clarification and, above all, how to slow down a native speaker to be able to follow and understand him clearly.

Besides the specific language of business, the Elementary learners should also have a chance for freer discussion, not strictly linked with their jobs. Topics for discussion may vary from the personal ones (family and friends, free time, hobbies, planning a holiday or a report on a holiday or trip they have made), or small talk and simple discussions about the most recent national or international news. This will enable them to use their English in «real world», so even the mistakes they make will be acceptable. It is important to encourage them to talk and to express themselves the best way possible.

3.2. Learning from „Real-Life“ Sources

A lot of material which can be used in Elementary learners' teaching can be found around us, in the «real world». A newspaper article dealing with a subject of tourism or hospitality industry can be used, but care has to be taken that it may be rather complicated, so we need to present it properly to the students. We have to acknowledge that the new language is best assimilated through a variety of different tasks, across the four skills: reading, speaking, listening and writing. The teaching based on such an article should start with a short discussion on the subject and it is necessary to pre-teach some essential vocabulary. If an article is a longer one it can be split into different paragraphs with topic sentences which the learners will have to match with the corresponding paragraphs. This will be an indicator of how much they

have understood the text. Part of the text can even be recorded on a tape and students will have to listen to it without pre-reading. Later on, they will be given the entire version of the text. Finally, the students fill in the gapped summary of the text, where they should concentrate on supplying the missing words (possibly the expressions from the language specific for their job).

The learners can also find interesting and accessible material about real-life companies, products and business people, which can be a useful tool for learning about business practice. Besides, it will be much more stimulating than reading a text about a fictitious company which doesn't fit into the learner's own work experience. Various publications can be used (newspaper and magazine advertisements, holiday brochures by tour operators and travel agencies, hotel leaflets, etc.), which are all valuable sources of vocabulary. Besides, all such editions usually don't use too complicated language and will, therefore, enable the learners to understand it. On the other hand, they are visually attractive since they all contain a lot of photographs which can be used in descriptions of a resort, hotel, accommodation and similar.

Another valuable source of information nowadays is Internet. Most big companies have websites which make it easy to get all the information one needs. Just by typing in a key word one can have a rich source of similar products and services and the vocabulary related to them. The students can, for example, search for a tour operator's holiday advertisement and then try to book one for themselves. In such a way they will have to use the specific language of tourism. Besides in any e-mail the student will have to write clearly and use correct grammar in order to be understood.

CONCLUSION

When a child starts learning a foreign language his vocabulary and grammatical structures are adjusted to the world that surrounds him: his family, school, friends, games. Besides he has plenty of time ahead. But when an adult starts learning a foreign language, his reasons lie mostly in business communication needs. He needs to learn fast and has clear objectives on the sort of language he has to learn.

Therefore, teaching Business English to Elementary learners must concentrate on specific language of a certain sphere of human activity to enable him to make his way in the world of business, both within native and non-native speakers. The coursebooks, especially the ones designed for global market are not sufficient. This is where the teacher can provide the essential extra input based on his knowledge as well as on understanding the learners' needs and difficulties. It demands a lot of thought and extra preparation, but it is well worth the effort.

REFERENCES

1. Lewis, M.(1993). The Lexical Approach. Hove, England: LTP.
2. Lewis, M.(1997). Implementing the lexical approach: Putting theory into practice. Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications
3. Pawley, A. / Syder, F.H. (1983). In Richards, J. and Schmidt, R. (eds) Language and Communication. London: Longman.
4. Porto, M.(1998). Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching. English Teaching Forum, Vol 36.No. 3.
5. Searle, John R.(1969):Speech Acts. Cambridge: University Press

Sažetak

PODUČAVANJE POČETNIKA ENGLSKOM JEZIKU KAO JEZIKU STRUKE

Nastavnici engleskog jezika često se u svom radu susreću sa osobama koje ne vladaju engleskim jezikom, a našli su se u poziciji da ga moraju koristiti u svom poslu. Takve osobe najčešće nemaju dovoljno vremena da započnu sa sistematskim učenjem engleskog jezika koji pokriva sva područja komunikacije, već se moraju koncentrirati na usvajanju osnovnih komunikacijskih vještina vezanih uz određenu djelatnost. Ovaj rad sugerira neke metode podučavanja početnika engleskom jeziku kao jeziku struke hotelijerstva i turizma. Vrlo je važno odabrati najbitnije gramatičke strukture i vokabular koji će početniku omogućiti da ovlada osnovnim komunikacijskim vještinama tj. da ostvari osnovnu poslovnu komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku. Konačni rezultat takvog učenja trebao bi biti nesmetana komunikacija učenika – početnika unutar određene djelatnosti, bilo da se radi o komunikaciji s izvornim govornikom ili ne.

Ključne riječi: engleski jezik kao poslovni jezik, engleski kao jezik struke, učenici – početnici, osnovne komunikacijske potrebe.