

ESP – the natural step forward to improve the vocabulary skills of Deaf and hard of hearing postgraduate students

ESP – angielski specjalistyczny – naturalny krok
w kierunku rozwijania i wzbogacania słownictwa
studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących
studiów drugiego stopnia

Abstract: The author of this article faces the challenge of teaching Deaf and hard of hearing students English for specific purposes (ESP). The action research aims to discover the strategies used for vocabulary development for the hearing impaired. The class atmosphere, meaningful context, repetitions lead from unknown through acquainted to established vocabulary. Direct as well as indirect vocabulary instructions are implemented in order to study and revise high frequency words that appear in students' textbooks and more complex concepts that are unknown to them and not connected with their everyday life experiences. Lessons become creatively organised practice sessions to use vocabulary in a variety of activities. The expanded Frayer Model, multiple meanings defining, recognition of figures of speech (idiomatic expressions), word and mind maps, songs, films, video clips with subtitles, songs in sign language, underlying important words in the text, word games and puzzles, are only a few of them. Depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge increases students' ability to communicate, to understand what they read, to succeed academically as well as in their future career.

Keywords: *ESP, teacher development, Deaf and hard of hearing students, vocabulary*

Abstrakt: Autorka tego artykułu podjęła się wyzwania nauczania języka angielskiego specjalistycznego (ESP) studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach. Prowadzone przez nią badania w działaniu mają na celu odkrycie strategii wykorzystywanych w procesie rozwoju i wzbogacania słownictwa studentów z dysfunkcją narządu słuchu. Atmosfera panująca na zajęciach, stworzenie istotnego kontekstu, liczne powtórzenia prowadzą od "nieznanego" poprzez "oswojone"

aż do “ugruntowanego” słownictwa. Polecenia bezpośrednie i pośrednie są wprowadzane w celu uczenia się, powtarzania słów najczęściej stosowanych, które występują w podręcznikach do nauki języka obcego ogólnego (EGP), do bardziej złożonych, które są studentom nieznane i nie przypominają im zwrotów, ani nie wiążą się z ich codziennymi doświadczeniami życiowymi. To bogactwo nowych, obszarów “leksykalnego odkrycia”. Lekcje są twórczo projektowane tworząc sesje, w których słownictwo jest aktywnie wykorzystywane podczas rozmaitych zadań. Rozszerzony Frayer Model, polisemia, rozpoznawanie różnych figur gramatycznych, wyrażeni idiomatycznych, mapy myśli, mapy słów, filmy, video-klipy z napisami, piosenki także w języku migowym, podkreślanie ważnych słów kluczowych w tekstach naukowych, gry słowne, puzzle to tylko przykładowe zadania wprowadzane podczas tego specjalistycznego lektoratu. “Głębokość i szerokość” słownictwa czyli jego zakres i bogactwo pozwala na zwiększenie zdolności porozumiewania się, rozumienia czytanych tekstów staje się podstawą sukcesu na poziomie akademickim a także przyszłej karierze zawodowej naszych studentów.

Słowa kluczowe: *ESP, angielski specjalistyczny, rozwój nauczyciela, studenci niesłyszący i słabosłyszący, słownictwo*

Introduction

The Polish education system recognizes the importance of English as a lingua Franca and has determined that studying English is a mandatory requirement for all students from the age of 6 including university students. For many years this requirement did not include Deaf students. They were seen as unable to learn foreign languages and were exempt from attending those classes. However in 2001, the Ministry of Education introduced a decree that stated that all the Deaf and hard of hearing pupils should be taught a foreign language. It was formally recognized that Deaf students need to know a foreign language to advance their careers, just like any other student in the country. Unfortunately, Deaf individuals do not learn foreign languages in the same manner their hearing peers do. Eyes do not replace ears and hearing aids are not like glasses, in that they are unable to completely compensate for a hearing loss. Therefore, it is necessary to have strategies exclusively designed for such people.

Teaching vocabulary to Deaf and hard of hearing students is a very challenging task. As Marschark [2002] stated “many deaf students graduating from high school today are still reading at levels comparable to hearing students who are five to nine years younger”. In my work with the Deaf, I feel the same. This is because whatever semantic field we touch, it shows how limited the students’ vocabulary is, how scarce it is. It results in inability

of using regular textbooks in class, because whatever text one begins reading, requires a great deal of preparation in order to enable the students understand it completely. Some teachers in the educational system who teach using text books have hard of hearing students in their classes, students who can communicate with other people and who come from, what we can safely assume, mainstream school settings (and even not integrative classes). I base these observations on the fact that when I encounter people who teach Deaf and hard of hearing students, who have never met a sign-language interpreter leave alone work with them, it seems clear that their students have slight or minor hearing losses, which give them an upper hand over students with major or complete hearing loss.

On the other hand, teachers such as Naomi Epstein [2002], who teach students with significant hearing losses, have simply written their own text book. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that in order to teach, it would be best to create a special vocabulary practice program for my own students.

Teaching and research material

STAGE 1-EGP vocabulary development for Deaf and hard of hearing students

I started with groups of fifteen students, then I worked with a support teacher and I ended up with two groups of five students, and a face-to-face “group” with one student and two individual organisation study students who I met with occasionally. Students attending these language courses, come with different levels of English language skills and are pursuing different study courses. Hence, I have to combine different tasks for different students and divide the time between them.

In the beginning we had regular English classes and I performed as EGP teacher (English for general purposes) but for this unique group of students. For me the challenge of teaching English to Deaf and hard of hearing students started in 2004, at Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities [Gulati, 2013]. From that perspective I can call this period as action research even though I began it as an experiment. I started teaching Deaf and hard of hearing students with the help of a voluntary support teacher (STEP I). There were almost 15 students in one group then. All with different levels of English language skills ranging from A1 to B2 and different levels of hearing loss. Some of them were PJM (Polish Sign Language) users,

some could speak while others could not. Therefore the help of the support teacher was irreplaceable. Then, I introduced the use of an Interactive Board. At that time it was a novelty in Poland (STEP II). To make lessons more attractive and to check the students' knowledge in practice I invited Native Speakers to our classes (STEP III). They were people from the USA, England, Scotland, India and even Cameroon. Those lessons were a great success as the students interacted eagerly and stated that they would love to have many more meetings of that kind. The next IV STEP was Power Point Presentations prepared by students. According to visualizing methods, the PPTs are one of the best ideas which allows students to share their interests, socialize with others. At this stage peer support and peer correction also play an important role. All four skills: listening (listening by watching and "listening" to hand shapes and fingerspelling), speaking in English or signing, writing and reading are covered [Gulati 2013]. STEP V involved cooperation with other teachers of English such as Daniela Jankova from Czech Republic, Ewa Domagała-Zyśk from Poland, Elana Ochse from Italy and Naomi Epstein from Israel. At present I am the member of the International Research Group: English as a foreign language for Deaf and hard of hearing persons (EFL DHH) at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland. I have been attending ESSE (European Society for Study of English) conferences for eight years now in order to expand my knowledge and share the idea of teaching English to students with special educational needs. Step VI was an evaluation period of "what works" ideas and development of visualizing ideas. It formed "the bridge" to English for specific purposes classes.

STAGE 2-ESP vocabulary development for Deaf and hard of hearing students

Four years ago our university introduced ESP classes (English for specific purposes) for students studying towards their Master's Degree. Regular students study 30 hours of English and my Deaf and hard of hearing students are allocated 45 hours. It became a challenge for me to explore specific vocabulary with them. I meet students with whom I have already worked so I am able to see their progress in life, their confidence in what they are doing. Following characteristic of ESP given by Dudley-Evans [2001], the specific needs of the learners are met during the classes of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline (e.g. biology). The focus lies on the language skills, discourses and genres appropriate to these activities. Another

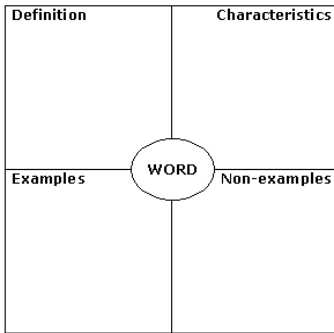
important characteristic of ESP is to answer to the changing political, economic and social trends and this flexibility requires its permanent adaptation to different contexts. ESP courses can have either a 'narrow' or a 'wide' approach: the former focuses exclusively on specific subject area content, e.g. the language learnt/used by air controllers, while the latter covers a larger range of language skills [Ochse, 2013].

First of all, we look for specific vocabulary connected with the field of their studies. This year I have two students who are majoring in Marketing and Management, one in Informatics Technology, one in Biology and one person in what is called here Pedagogics (Education). All of them are studying in one group, so I try to give them tasks related to their fields. Hutchinson and Waters mention the importance of "awareness of the need" of particular students [1987, p. 53]. At the beginning I ask them to think of 10 words without which they would be unable to communicate in their chosen field of study. It's a kind of direct and indirect instruction of vocabulary. The next step is to work on these vocabulary items by expanding these words. It is my task to show them that we can deepen our understanding of these words. It is a kind of introduction to vocabulary practice with printed dictionaries and E – Dictionaries. While preparing for my lessons I came upon a website http://insidestoryflashcards.com/printable_flashcards/index.php which has appropriate tasks. Students are encouraged to work on their own at home. Therefore, I attempt to choose the suitable level for them. For example, my students were at a pre-intermediate level (A2) so their task was to work with advanced level vocabulary items. One of the authors underlines that working with dictionaries is of great value as "an independent vocabulary acquisition strategy". Students usually come to the language classroom without these study skills, so it is helpful to expose them to a variety of ways to practice words and their definitions and let them choose the manner which is comfortable for them [Zahra, 2011].

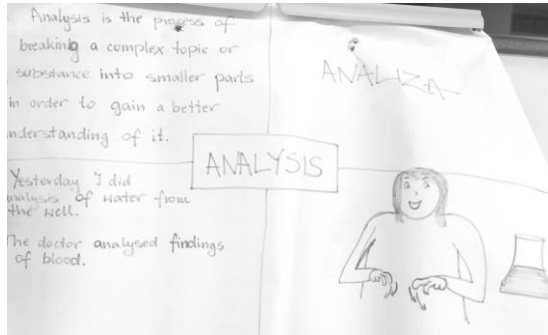
Next, students were asked to choose one word and began working on Frayer's Model, it usually has four or five different sections. The written word appears in the middle, then there is a definition, an example (how the words are used in several sample sentences), then there is a non-example and usually a picture of the word. Instead of the picture of the word we use the appropriate sign in Polish Sign Language.

This has the added benefit of helping students who are not proficient sign language users, get closer to their signing peers. Everyone then presents

his or her module in the form of a poster. We read definitions, examples of using words in sentences. The most challenging aspect for them is: non-examples. Students often misunderstand the meaning of the word “definition” and give an example in the section calling for a definition, or use a synonym in the section calling for a sample sentence including the word.



Pic.1. Frayer Model



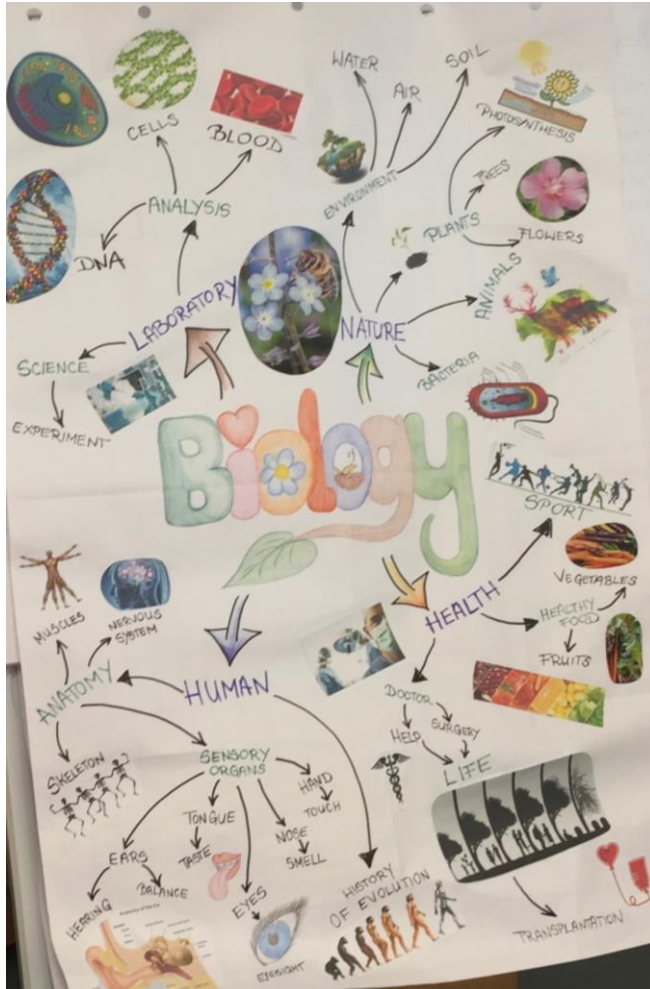
Pic. 2. Frayer Model with PJM sign

Therefore, I decided to go deeper into this issue and found a handout which requires the students to choose words once again, but it is called “My Own Definition”. In this task students use synonyms and antonyms but write their own definition. Their personal definitions are then compared to the dictionary definition. The students check to see what can be added. This is the stage when students realise that a word can have several meanings, not just one. They become aware of this and then begin looking for multiple meanings of words. They are used to looking for one meaning, a direct meaning, but since I encourage them to look deeper, they discover collocations that cannot be learnt by knowing the isolated word meanings. They have difficulty in understanding the collocation as a whole. For example: “run a business” is hardly understood as my students associate the word “run” with physical exercise first. Concerning the ESP activities it is necessary to keep in mind that the context should be consistent with studying subject matter [Bracaj, 2014]. The collocations often serve as the key words in a text, without which it cannot be understood.

Moving on from isolated words, the students are required to prepare a power point presentation about a person they admire related to the field they are majoring in. It can be someone who is alive. For example, one of our students chose a professor from our university who is also a “celebrity”. Other students chose pedagogues or IT specialists such as Steve Jobs or the

creator of the LINUX program. I also prepared my presentation about the person I admired. By doing that I encourage students, which serves as an example and involves sharing mutual interests.

Returning to the topic of words and word games. Students prepare mind maps or word maps. They present the completed map to the group and then there are games involved with those words.



Pic. 3. Mind Map prepared by Karolina (student of Biology)

Idioms have always been a challenging topic to teach. Students have difficulties in finding the appropriate usage of such expressions. Once again

they prepare idioms related to their field of study. I decided to experiment and undertook to sign a song related to Education in Polish Sign Language with the students and the first task was to just watch the video. They then made a list of the words related to education that appear in the song, then completed a task, and spoke and wrote about a related topic using words from the word list. I then summarized the whole set of activities. I always have in mind methods of retelling and reviewing the material, revising the words that have been introduced. I use games such as bingo related to computers, engineering, etc. They choose a letter from the alphabet by finger-spelling the appropriate letter. Later, I introduced some games which I learnt from other teachers, such as using dice with unusual numbers. This led to numerical related vocabulary. Another example that students enjoyed is a grammar/vocabulary self-check activity. Students use a pencil going through (or not) holes in a card to check their answers. They are required to choose the missing part of speech or the sentence in the correct tense. When working on vocabulary I never forget grammar and using appropriate tenses. Next we prepared our game based on this self-check activity for the tenses we were working on, which were Past Simple, Past Continuous, Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous.

The next step, after the students became accustomed to their words, was examining formal and informal ways of communication, written and spoken form. I prepared a few tasks connected to this. There is a presentation about idioms which are chosen by students. Then we work on short articles. First, I prepare the articles for my students along with reading comprehension exercises and vocabulary practice. After that, I choose articles and send them to students via email. Their task is to read the articles and choose five key words related to the text, along with a short summary given in their own words. They may use simple, basic vocabulary; the activity is designed to show that they understood the article and to share it with their peers. This is followed by the students looking for articles related to their Master's Thesis on their own and reporting on it in writing, including key words. This is very good practice for them as they are obligated to write a summary of an article in English as part of the requirements of their Master's program. Finally the students must present the chosen topic of their thesis, orally and in written form before the class. They must strive to make the presentations interesting and show how the information they are presenting is connected to their field of study.

During my classes visualizing is always important. I employ different methods such as flashcards, the Frayer's Model, word maps, PowerPoint presentations, bingo, written "how to" instructions, diagrams and more. New vocabulary is displayed all over the classroom. I communicate with the students by exchanging mails and texting in English. In addition to that I create a special plan for the entire course and for every single lesson, using short presentations. The purpose of this is to familiarize the students with what needs to be done and the topics that will be covered in our classes. It is a kind of logical structure, what could be called a "pre-presentation" to help prepare the students for the work ahead. I also include words which are known to them (and can be easily read) and new words. I show these new words to the students in written form, I finger-spell them, I read them aloud and I show pronunciation on my hand. I show the movements on my lips. All this is done in order to make the connection between the written form, the sound, the right pronunciation and the movements of my lips. When I use videos I use captions. But reading videos are also a challenge for students with limited vocabularies. As Naomi Epstein suggests it is valid to emphasize HOTS (higher order thinking skills) in reading comprehension questions. To enable students to understand questions and their forms, we need to separate questions from the text which can be achieved by reading videos without dialogues. This allows the student to learn how to identify the right information for each type of questions and moreover how to construct the answers. This is achieved by constructing questions for suitable video clip [Epstein, 2016].

Summary

Any learning process has two paths of development, for the teachers and students: the planned progress path and the natural progress path. The above article has given a glimpse of both. The author has shown how planned path of vocabulary learning was materialized in the undergraduate studies level and how that naturally resulted in the second stage (postgraduate studies) of specialized vocabulary teaching and learning. It also shows how this vocabulary acquiring process helps students of this special group to grow up in confidence, especially for their future careers. This naturally brings us to the point where we should analyze how successful this process has been by studying the effect of the acquired skills in the post college life which will help in developing new and better methods of teaching.

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