

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **English for Specific Purposes for Overseas Sales and Marketing Workers in Information Technology**

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#### **1 Introduction**

This proposal is a description of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for business purposes in Korea. As a subset of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), the aim of ESP is to prepare students to function effectively in their second or foreign language in relation to a specific target situation (Belcher, 2006; Zhang, 2007). This project is to develop a LSP course to help learners working in Korean businesses to improve their job performance in situations where they are required to use and know English for business purposes. The primary goal of this project is to identify learners' practical needs for studying English in a way that is similar to the needs required for success in the workplace.

Many Korean business workers have been learning English since their elementary school days, regardless of whether English is needed in their job. The purpose of learning English might

vary depending on the context the workers are in, but a prevailing perception in Korean society is that English competence is the first and the foremost way to equip people to survive in a competitive society (Piller & Cho, 2013). In response to this dominant perception, English learning in businesses have been significantly improved and inundated with learning materials and a variety of courses provided by private institutions. Online learning, in particular, has been rapidly increasing in the business English market over the last three years, offering programs tailored to specific business contexts. There are questions, however, about whether these programs reflect the learners' practical needs in terms of the course objectives and materials, and to what extent these programs have contributed to learners' real job performance. In addition, there are uncertainties about how programs such as individual online speaking courses can improve learners' communication skills in dealing with their job in the real world. Therefore, this project, motivated from this landscape of business English in Korea, will start from English language learners themselves, their needs as related to job tasks on a daily basis, and will focus on learners' specific needs for English to try to find more practical ways in which the learners can apply their learning to their job performance. To this end, this ESP program will target learners working in overseas sales and marketing department in Information Technology (IT) businesses that may demand a considerable amount of English communication both written and orally.

## **1.1 Institutional Background**

Because the context of this course is as an in-house program for businesses, there is no direct institutional background or even a specific, identified company for this course as of yet. Instead, this course will be contextualized within the broader scope of Korean IT businesses. The

ratio of IT businesses in Korean economies is around 12.13%, the biggest portion in Korean economy and further the ratio of export and import is relatively high in IT business (NIPA, 2012).

This ESP course will be designed as an in-house program, consisting of two two-hour classes a week offered at night. Some key features of this ESP program are as follows: (a) a focus on three key underlying competences, including linguistic skills, workplace content and knowledge skills, and pragmatic skills; (b) content that is learner-driven; (c) authentic tasks; (d) genre-based writing; (e) hybrid style (i.e., online and face-to-face) classes; and (f) task-based performance assessment. These components will be described in further detail below.

## **2 Needs Analysis**

According to Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) types of needs, the needs analysis of this program will be conducted from the perspectives of both objective and subjective needs. Objective needs, here, refers to identifying the job categories, job tasks, and specific situations in which the use of English is required in the target department, and the needs of both learners and the target department. Subjective needs refer to the information on (a) the learners' specific needs of learning English in relation to their real job tasks, (b) learners' strengths and weaknesses in dealing with their job in English at the workplace, and (c) their learning history. To this end, objective needs and subjective needs will be collected through focus group interviews, a survey, existing documents such as job related materials, and any materials used for English education in the company or individually. This entire process, including the use of a diagnostic test prior to the start of the course, will be conducted and orchestrated by both a

TESOL/TEFL expert, who has experience teaching and designing ESP courses, and a relevant business expert. This two-tier needs analysis will help to reinforce the reliability of the data collected.

## **2.1 Data Gathering**

Firstly, in order to identify job categories and job tasks—including what medium to use, frequency of the job tasks, and jobs usually requiring English—and both objective and subjective needs for learning English, interviews with junior and senior managers and executives in the target department and Human Resources (HR) personnel will be conducted. The interview questionnaires will be provided to interviewees before the interview so that they can have enough time to respond to the questions, and interview sessions will also be audio-recorded with permission. Interviews are expected to provide not only information anticipated from the questions, but also the interviewees' anecdotal experiences on English-mediated jobs and challenges faced in real business settings. In addition, these can provide curriculum developers with information about expected job tasks and situations as sources for potential learning activities in the class.

Secondly, a large-scale survey will be conducted with the target employees. The survey will be designed to collect three categories of information: (a) a description of jobs, tasks, and situations in which they feel or encounter a challenge in communication in English; (b) specific needs for learning English; and (c) learners' personal learning history, attitude towards, and perception of learning English, and self-evaluation on their language competences. A diagnostic test, which will be designed to identify overall English language competencies, such as

vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking and writing proficiency, will also be administered to the prospective learners. All data obtained from these channels will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and examined with junior/senior managers, executives in the target department, and HR personnel to check if there is something to be revised. Afterwards, the final result will be reported to the decision makers along with the managers, executives at the target department, and HR personnel in the form of a presentation. As Belcher (2009) argues that the heart of ESP is identifying learner needs and designing ways of meeting these needs, the final report will ensure that learners' actual needs are meeting the needs of the company or department.

## **2.2 Potential Issues**

For the needs analysis to be successfully conducted, some obstacles and limitations should be taken into consideration. First of all, this project will only be launched when there is a clear impetus by a company attempting to introduce an in-house English course for their employees. An exhaustive and thorough preliminary preparation for needs analysis will be essential for helping companies make this kind of decision. Second, in the process of collecting data, there are likely to be constraints regarding the confidentiality of company information, despite seemingly general information of job tasks. Interviews may have to be more widely conducted in different departments to account for this. Thirdly, the attitude of participants for the interviews and survey will be an important factor that may influence the quality of the data, so attractive points such as incentives or strong consensus among participants on the needs of the program might be necessary to consider before doing interviews and distributing surveys to encourage the participants to faithfully respond to the questions. Additionally, to what extent the needs analysis should reflect the follow-up process of dealing with decision makers might also be an issue.

Analyzing and finding common needs for both learners and the company should be prioritized. Lastly, it might also be difficult to recruit personnel with experience working with ESP program in business settings to be involved in the process of designing the program, from needs analysis to actual instruction.

### **3 Students Learning Outcomes**

As many long-time English learners commonly express that they learn English with little real incentive to actually use the language, and that scoring well on business English exams like the TOEIC have little direct link to job performance, it is crucial to provide learners with a clear rationale for the ESP course up front. The primary goal of this program is to help learners see that learning English in their context is helping them improve their job performance and gain confidence from it by building essential competencies for succeeding in their job in English. To this end, and as described in the key features of the program, this ESP program will focus on improving learners' competence to perform their job tasks based on job-related content or knowledge, job-related situations and tasks, and job-related linguistic knowledge.

Bhatia (1993), in her article, suggests three components to be considered for teaching business English: (a) subject knowledge; (b) business practice; and (c) language skills, arguing that they should be integrated in teaching. In a similar vein, this ESP program will cover these three components and set the learning goals to achieve three competencies, namely, (a) linguistic competence, (b) task content and knowledge competence, and (c) pragmatic competence, rather than the broad term of communicative competences. All of these competencies should be

integrated into the process of learning and contribute to practically helping the learners' job performance.

Linguistic competence will focus on lexis commonly used in formal and informal business settings. The study of Cho and Yoon's (2013) comparative corpus analysis of Korean and English native speakers' choice of words shows that Korean speakers tend to overuse, underuse, or misuse some specific words or phrases compared to English native speakers, and sometimes their choice of inappropriate words in the view of English native speakers can lead to confusion. Although the study was conducted in the financial business area, this may help identify similar lexical themes or targets useful in target business situations.

For task content and knowledge competence, learners need to know a range of knowledge encompassing their job or business related content to general industry knowledge or timely issues. This kind of content and knowledge not only helps with understanding their job tasks, but it also may provide insightful or knowledgeable perspectives in performing their job tasks, consequently leading to beneficial outcomes. In addition, knowledge of specific business discourse and foreign and local culture might contribute to building a good relationship with business partners.

Lastly, Cho and Yoon's (2013) corpus analysis also reveals findings congruent with pragmatic competences. In the study of earning calls in Korea, the Korean representative's inappropriate choice of words, rather direct expression, and misunderstanding of English native speakers' intentions led the counterparts to respond in an unexpected way. Jung's (2005)

research into Korean business text also reveals that business letters and emails have a strong tendency to place the bad news at the beginning and most requests towards the end of the text, which is obviously different in the way that English native speakers place the bad news in the business emails. That is, the different features of written and spoken discourse may attribute to a lack of knowledge of certain discourse, genre, and pragmatic competence (Cho & Yoon, 2013). Pragmatic components (e.g., politeness, refusal, complain, apology, and implicature) delineated in the book of Kasper and Rose (2001) may be an essential competence required in a business context where people deal with very crucial business matters and jobs that take careful and effective strategies to make them successful. Those pragmatic components may play a key role in the success of business deals in certain situations. Furthermore, Kasper and Rose (2002) suggest that pragmatic competence may be counted as explicit instructions in L2 learning context.

Using the above three competencies as goals for the ESP program, projected student learning outcomes can be described in terms of students being able to do the following by the end of the program:

- Appropriately produce language commonly used in business contexts in both written and orally formats
- Comprehend the features of spoken discourse and pragmatic abilities and demonstrate them in business communication contexts (e.g., business meetings, conference calls, and presentations)
- Comprehend the features of business discourse and genre and formulate typical business writings such as job reports, business emails or letters, and business plans

- Demonstrate content and knowledge relevant to their job and industry and timely issues in spoken and written communication
- Gain confidence in dealing with their real job tasks in English

#### **4 Materials and Curriculum**

As a key function of LSP is its provision of instruction carefully tailored to meet the particular needs of the learners (Lafford, 2012), materials development and adoption should ideally come directly out of the earlier needs analysis. Even though there are useful ready-made materials to be applied for the identified language and pragmatic competences above, the information obtained from the needs analysis and job tasks survey will be a more representative match of both the needs of the learners and the objectives of the course, and can supplement learning materials greatly.

In terms of job content and industry knowledge materials, relevant materials such as company brochures, newsletters, press releases, newspapers (both L1 and English), industry magazines, and audio/video clips for general or business issues can be used as class materials to provide learners with various topics and resources for learning activities (e.g., discussions, role plays, writing of business emails). In order to improve linguistic competence there are lots of useful textbooks focusing on business contexts, however, materials tailored to target learners' needs and learning goals in the specific context will also be necessary. For example, thinking about the linguistic features of different business discourse and genres, pragma-linguistic aspects in certain situations, and business writing using a genre-approach may be very useful in developing and selecting materials. To do so, specific job descriptions from the needs analysis

should provide guidelines for selecting or creating supplementary materials. In addition, corpus analysis may enrich learners' lexical repertoire with authentic, contemporary business language.

For the pragmatic component, while this is relatively hard to teach explicitly, a book designed to guide pragmatic development in the language classroom by providing classroom tasks and activities to develop specific pragmatic abilities (e.g., Yule, 1996) can be used as guidelines for designing class materials for cultivating general pragmatic competence. Apart from those references, learners' individual experience in certain situations may also reinforce the learning and learning materials.

In summary, teaching and learning materials will not only exploit ready-made business-focus textbooks but also be supplemented by the needs-driven tailored materials, corpus data, and learners their own experiences. The syllabus, therefore, will be designed in a multi-layered format reflecting the competences required in performing learners' job tasks, comprised of task, content/knowledge, lexical, syntax, and genre. Pragmatic components will be subcomponents addressed in both the lexical and task syllabus structure.

## **5 Assessment and Evaluation**

A diagnostic assessment will be administered to identify learners' current linguistic competence including lexis, reading comprehension, listening, speaking, and writing. Tests will be used to evaluate learners' progress in relation to the stated objectives. These will be in the form of mostly task-based activities elicited from learners' real job tasks, so that learners may have many chances to simulate dealing with their job throughout the course. For example,

learners will be asked to have a business meeting about a certain agenda with a potential customer. This task will be designed to evaluate how much the learners know about the customer's needs, how well they pitch their own company's products or service, and how successfully the learner can create more room for a follow-up meeting or a positive response from the potential customer. To make it a success, learners should employ all language skills, their knowledge of both the agenda and their customer, and their pragmatic approach to change the situation to their favor. The tasks will be evaluated by the instructor and fellow learners based on a task-dependent analytical rubric (Brown, 2012b). Brown claims that, "task-dependent rubrics use real-world criteria to estimate the degree to which a student's performance on a single task will be replicable in the real world" (2012b, p. 36). In addition, Ellis (2003) argues that task should result in language use that resembles the real world, and task-dependent rubrics may be judged on both the practical result and the language used. A task-dependent analytical rubric will be employed not only to provide feedback on each aspect of competences (e.g., language skill, understanding of a task, pragmatic or task operational skill), but also to monitor the whole procedure of the task, including the outcome. In addition, both learners and the instructor share will their own opinion and feedback to set or reinforce the next stage to move on. For instance, if learners could not deal with some embarrassing situations in the meeting or appropriately respond to the customer casting a doubt on their discussion, this will be reflected in the following lessons and covered in more detail.

At the end of the course, an achievement final exam test will be administered with a task-based performance test but in this case task performance (e.g., task completion) will gain more weight over other traits in the rubric in the sense that this is purported to represent a real job task

instead of a rehearsal. Thus, while most assessments will play a role in providing the instructor more instructional information to following lessons and feedback to the learners, the final assessment will function to evaluate to what extent the learners have gained the expected competencies and perform the task successfully employing those competencies as they are related to the course objectives.

## **6 Conclusion**

As this ESP proposal is not drawn from empirical research or specific preliminary data, it is expected to undergo several revisions and refinements once a specific context has been identified. Apart from that inherent limitations in this program, the most probable limitations and constraints for this ESP program are in relation to potential discrepancies between what is identified as needed and what is possible in reality. For instance, ESP programs centering on and starting from learners needs might sound too ideal or impractical to some stakeholders, as well as learners themselves. In the view of stakeholders, despite a high demand of the use of English in the workplace by employees, scarce empirical research into ESP in business settings in Korea may not provide a strong belief in employing a new approach. Thus, an exhaustive and thorough needs analysis should be provided to reach consensus on the focus and implementation of the program with the stakeholders.

In the view of learners, a new approach and application to English education (e.g., task based interactional learning and feedback from their colleagues) might be uncomfortable for the learners given the common perception of learning they are accustomed to, and they may call into question the effectiveness of the approach given the limited time of instruction. To address

these expected challenges, teaching materials and the instructor's quality should be given a high degree of consideration prior to the course as a way of ensuring a change in the learners' perceptions.

In addition, to what extent the job task information can be exposed and shared may be another challenge to face. Although this may be conducted under a nondisclosure agreement, confidentiality issues officially or covertly included in documents and information about the company and its job tasks can demarcate the range of the information that is able to be gathered or implemented in materials. To address this issue, in addition to a nondisclosure agreement, people involved in designing the ESP program should try to establish a trustworthy relationship with the company from the beginning stage.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the ESP program aforementioned, as long as it is well refined in terms of the above key considerations, designed to meet the learners' needs, and implemented in the real work context, it may be a valuable approach to learning as it can shed light on learners' needs and practical components required in dealing with job tasks in the business world, and further serve as a reference for other businesses planning to introduce in-house ESP programs for their employees. Additionally, this in-house ESP program will benefit the learners, but also the company in that the knowledge and experiences gained through its design, implementation, and outcomes can be shared and reinforced among coworkers, thus contributing to their job performance.