

COLLEGE ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THEORY AND APPLICATION

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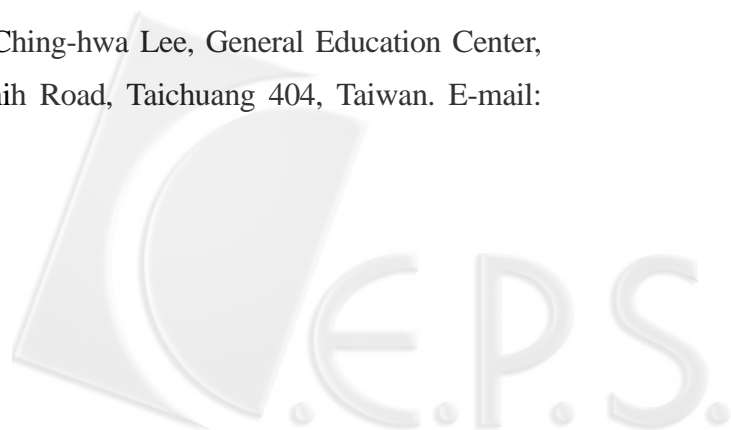
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Abstract

During recent years, with the expansion of the global village, English has increasingly become a medium for advanced studies and research. The dominant role of English is particularly marked in scientific, technological and medical fields. In Taiwan, we rely to a great extent on textbooks written in English at the university level. However, students newly admitted to colleges, more often than not, are not well equipped with English reading strategies and language skills to cope with their academic studies for mainstreaming. To remedy the given problem, the present study is intended to delve into the approach “English for Academic Purposes” by providing a helpful overview of its historical perspective and application principles.

Keywords: English for Academic Purposes, English for Science and Technology,
English for Specific Purposes, Communicative Language Teaching,
Content-Based Instruction

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Introduction

With the profound effect of globalization, English language assumes a more and more important role in every academic discipline. As a natural consequence, in the higher education institution in Taiwan, there is an increasing tendency for the educators to adopt English-written textbooks or articles as teaching materials. However, students who just step out of high schools are, more often than not, overwhelmed by anxiety, or even frustration, when confronting such an intimidating task. To bridge the gap between the learner's language proficiency and the mainstream class, the researcher intends to review the historical perspective on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and to present its key application principles, in the hope of providing an effective alternative approach to local college English teachers.

A Historical Perspective

As Sarah Benesch (2002, 5) noted, "The early history of EAP spans the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, being with the emergence of English for science and technology (EST)." The goal of EAP was to dispel the fundamental philosophy supported by the proponents of the Grammar-Translation Method, that is, the purpose of foreign language study was to read literature in the target language or to benefit from the discipline and intellectual development as a result (Richards & Rodgers 2002, 5). In this regard, EAP educators intend to address the specific needs and purposes of the learners. They propose that students could gain advantages from the deliberate match of the subject content and language skills in the EAP course.

To sketch the development background of EAP, the researcher first explores the interplay between EAP, Communicative Language Teaching, Content-Based Instruction and some other entangled labels such as English for Vocational Purposes, and then provides an overview of the historical trends of EAP.

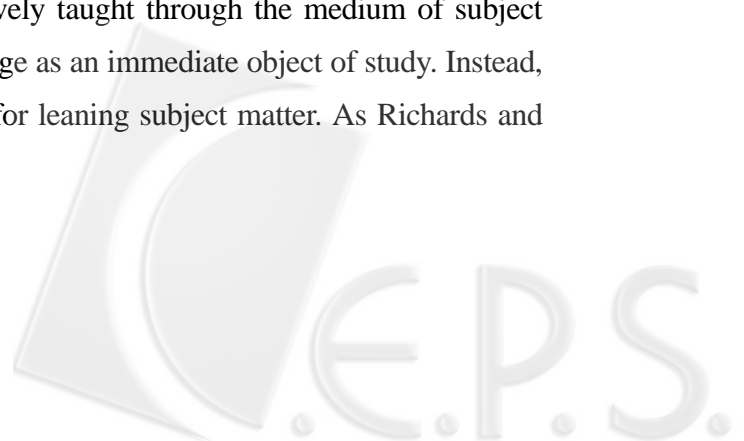
The Links between EAP, CLT and CBI

The emergence of EAP is facilitated by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI). CLT is a response to the criticisms of the well-known American linguist Noam Chomsky, who posits that structural theories of language fail to account for one of the most important characteristics of human language—the creativity and uniqueness of sentences (Steinberg 1998, 96-8; Richard and Rodgers 2002, 153). Although Chomsky’s “rule-governed creativity” appropriately describes a child’s mushrooming grammar at the age of three or four, it does not account sufficiently for the social and functional rules of language (Brown 2000, 246). As a consequence, British applied linguists put focus on another essential dimension of language—communicative proficiency, which is defined by Dell Hymes as that aspect of the competence that enables people to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts (Brown 2000, 246).

Richard and Rodgers (2002, 172) claim that CLT should be considered as an approach. In other words, its theories concerning the nature of language as well as language learning can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures. Among the principles characterizing CLT, the following are some of the most significant ones (Larsen-Freeman 2001, 125-35):

- ✓ The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication.
- ✓ Contextualization is a basic premise.
- ✓ The teacher acts as a facilitator in motivating the learner.
- ✓ The use of authentic materials is strongly advocated.

Based on the principles of CLT, Content-Based Instruction operates on the assumption that language can be effectively taught through the medium of subject matter. CBI does not regard target language as an immediate object of study. Instead, second language is viewed as a vehicle for leaning subject matter. As Richards and Rodgers (2002, 204-5) noted,

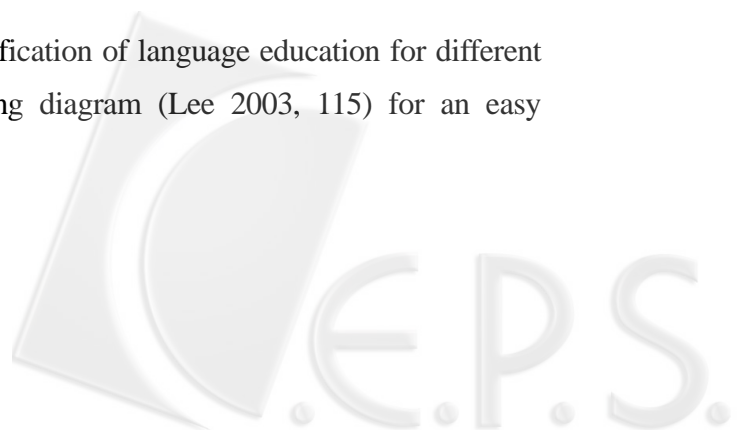


“...an ideal situation for second language learning would be one where the subject matter of language teaching was not grammar or functions or some other language-based unit of organization, but content, that is, subject matter from outside the domain of language. The language that is being taught could be used to present subject matter, and the students would learn the language as a by-product of learning about real-world content.”

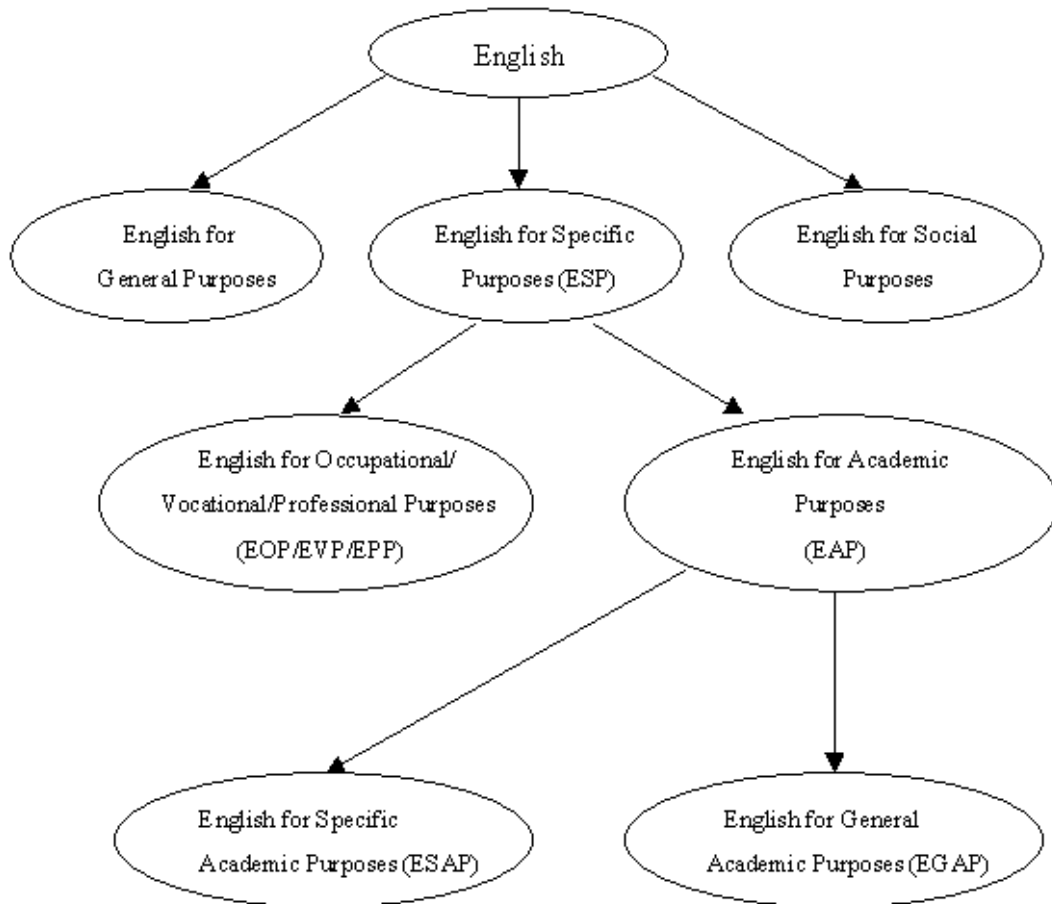
CBI has been widely used in a variety of different settings since the 1980s. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is one of its earliest applications (Richards and Rogers 2002, 219). It is perhaps the best known and most documented of the content-based language models. ESP courses generally involve pragmatic, experience-based instruction and are intended to prepare learners for real world demands. This type of language program has been most notably developed in Britain and commonly applied at the university level and in occupational settings (Brinton et al. 1989, 6-7). Therefore, ESP has been traditionally been divided into two main areas: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 5). For example, studying the language and discourse of medicine designed for medical students is EAP; on the other hand, studying designed for practicing doctors is EOP.

To complicate the situation, two hyponyms are again subordinated to the superordinate “EAP.” They are English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). As Dudley-Evans and St John noted (2002, 41), “EGAP refers to the teaching of the skills and language that are common to all disciplines; ESAP refers to the teaching of the features that distinguish one discipline from others.... EGAP isolates the skills such as reading textbooks and writing essays.... ESAP integrates the skills work of EGAP with help for students in their actual subject tasks.”

To have a clear picture of the classification of language education for different purposes, we may look at the following diagram (Lee 2003, 115) for an easy reference.

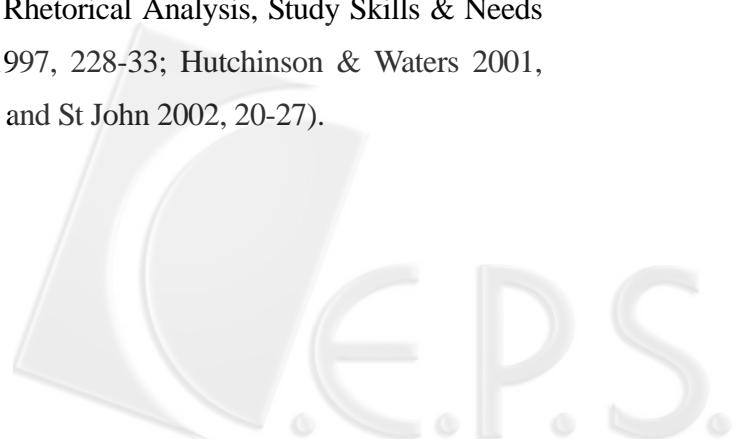


Categories of English for Different Purposes



Historical Trends of EAP

The following retrospective reveals how EAP arrived at its current acknowledgement of the centrality of context as it moved through various historical stages, which include Register Analysis, Rhetorical Analysis, Study Skills & Needs Analysis, and Genre Analysis (Jordan 1997, 228-33; Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 9-15; Benesch 2001, 3-23; Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 20-27).



1. Register Analysis

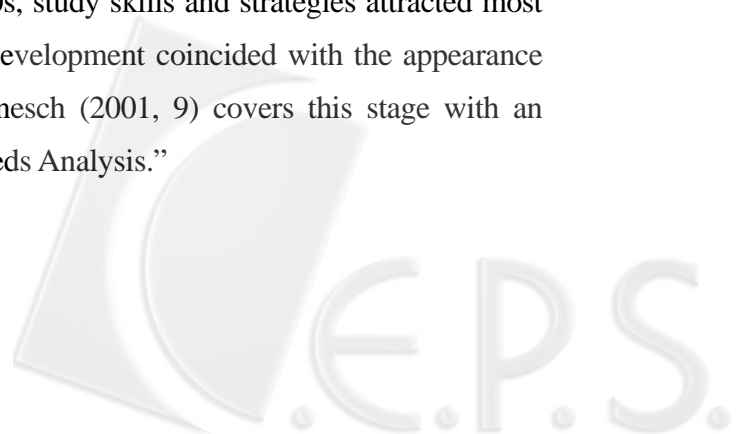
The stage took place mainly in the 1960s and early 1970s and was usually associated with the names of Peter Strevens, Jack Ewer and John Swales (Jordan 1997, 228; Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 9). Based on the assumption that certain grammatical and lexical factors are used much more frequently in scientific and technical writing than in general English, the register is aimed to identify these linguistic features and to apply them as teaching materials in the educator's syllabus (Jordan 1997, 229-30; Benesch 2001, 6-9; Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 9-10; Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 21)

2. Rhetorical Analysis

During the 1970s, the second stage of EAP was more rhetorical in focus. Register analysis had concentrated on sentence grammar and vocabulary, but now attention was shifted to understanding how sentences were combined in discourse to produce meaning to facilitate language use and communication. The given analysis is concerned with structures larger than sentences, such as conversation, paragraphs, or complex texts. It also looks at the relationship between utterances, for example, aspects of cohesion, and discourse markers or cohesive devices (Jordan 1997, 229; Benesch 2001, 6-10; Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 10-12; Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 22-25).

3. Study Skills & Needs Analysis

In spite of the fact that Register Analysis and Rhetorical Analysis have different focuses (one on the sentence level; the other beyond it), they share a common interest, i.e., the language forms. In contrast with the central contents of the first two stages of EAP, by the late 1980s, study skills and strategies attracted most attention of EAP specialists. This development coincided with the appearance of needs analysis. As a result, Benesch (2001, 9) covers this stage with an umbrella term "Study Skills and Needs Analysis."



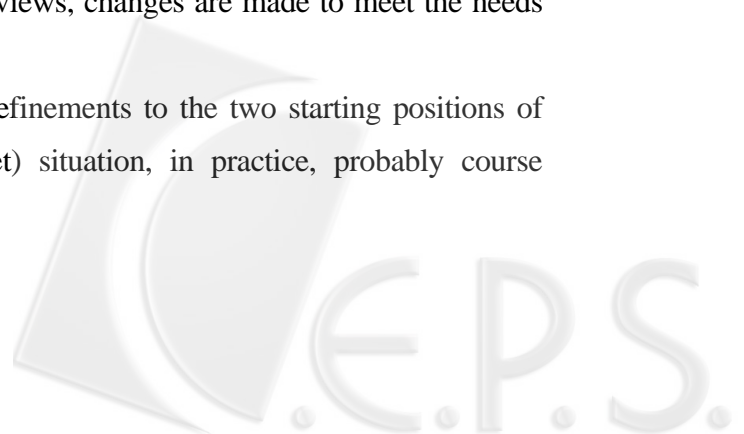
As Hutchinson & Waters (2001, 12) noted,

“Given that the purpose of an ESP course is to enable learners to function adequately in a target situation, that is, the situation in which the learners will use the language they are learning, then the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation. The identified features will form the syllabus of the ESP course. This process is usually known as need analysis.”

Jordan (1997, 23-25) subdivides need analysis into Target-situation Analysis (TSA) and Present-situation Analysis (PSA). The best-known framework for TSA is the model set up by John Munby, which produces a detailed profile of the learners’ needs with regard to communication purposes, communicative setting, the means of communication, language skills, functions, structures, etc. In other words, his approach focuses on the target-level performance which students are supposed to be equipped with in order to cope with future academic classes.

On the other hand, some EAP specialists, such as John A. M., believe it is difficult for needs analysis to predict the demands that students will encounter in academic discourses, mainly because of idiosyncrasies of courses and educators. As a result, TSA is regarded as an inadequate tool for EAP curricular development (Benesch 2001, 13). PSA therefore puts emphasis on the variables of the learner and the educator, for instance, student reactions to assignments and the process they go through their instruction, or faculty reactions to student participations and performance (Jordan 1997, 24-25; Benesch 2001, 7-14) On the basis of the present educational situation analysis which was gained through surveys, questionnaires or/and interviews, changes are made to meet the needs which are previously undetected.

Although TSA and PSA are refinements to the two starting positions of present situation and future (target) situation, in practice, probably course



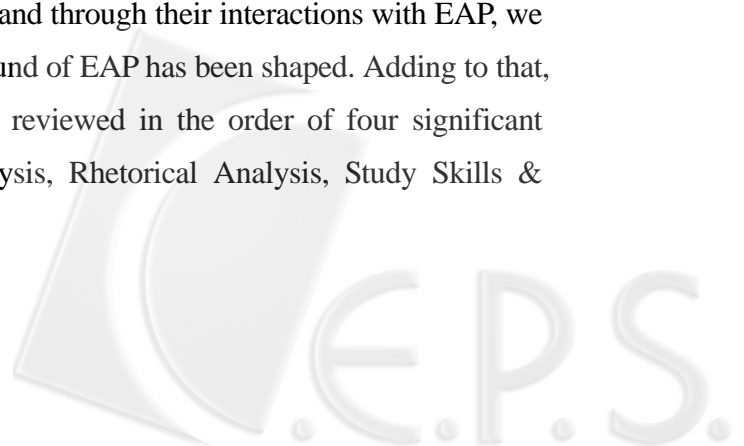
practitioners need information concerning both TSA and PSA (Jordan 1997, 24-25).

4. Genre Analysis

One productive area of research in the 1980s, continuing into the 1990s, is Genre Analysis. According to Benesch (2001, 18), “genres go beyond text to take social purposes into account, including ways members of discourse communities are guided by shared rhetorical purposes when they speak and write.” In a nutshell, Genre Analysis is the study of how language is used within a particular setting. According to Jordan’s viewpoint, Genre Analysis is basically an equivalent of English for Specific Academic Purposes (Jordan 1997, 231). To take Benesch’s example (2001, 18), given that members of the English-language teaching community follow certain conventions on conference talks or article writing, when people taking part in these social acts, they solidify their bonds in the community by shared attitudes, beliefs and expectations. The implication here is that Genre Analysis involves a study of institutional culture.

This 30-year overview of EAP history reveals how the definition of “context” of EAP has been continually revised to respond to the historical development of linguistics and to related second language pedagogy. The development, in short, moves from the applied structural view to the functional view, and then again heads toward the interactional view (Brown 2000, 245; Lee 2003, 23)

In conclusion, the preceding section mainly revolves around the rough profile of EAP, which is outlined from two different perspectives. First, we present EAP against the background of CLT and CBI, and through their interactions with EAP, we give insights into how the theoretical ground of EAP has been shaped. Adding to that, the historical trends of EAP are briefly reviewed in the order of four significant development stages, i.e., Register Analysis, Rhetorical Analysis, Study Skills &



Needs Analysis, and Genre Analysis.

Although EAP has arrived at a reconciliation of form, cognitive process and institutional practices, how that integration will manifest in research and teaching to well prepare students for institutional and faculty expectations is an ongoing question which requires more pragmatic attempts to offer the key. Therefore, in the following section, we will shift our discussion to the essential methodological principles that lead to successful EAP courses.

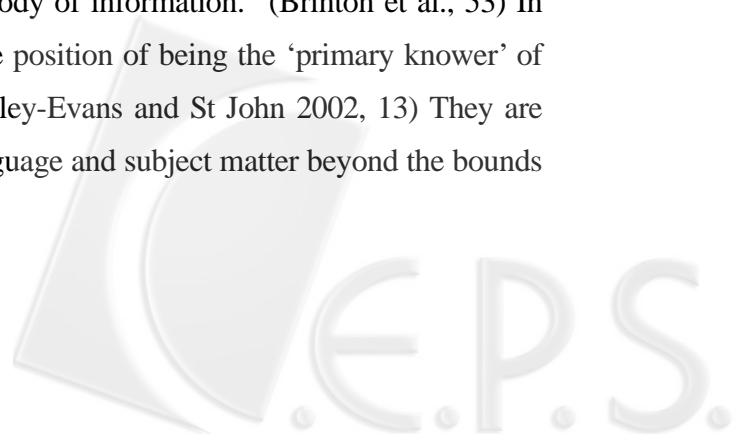
Pragmatic Application Principles

The methodology appropriate to EAP, in general, relies heavily on that of ESP from which EAP branches out (Jordan 1997, 109). As it is not possible to exhaust all the related methodological principles, we choose to address the pragmatic issues in regard to teacher roles, instructional materials and practice models.

Teacher Roles

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (2002, 13-17) there are five key roles that the EAP practitioner should play: teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. Similarly, Brinton et al. (1989, 53) suggests the language teacher in the CBI context “must function as facilitator, consultant to the professor, tutor, and friend.” Although the roles played by the EAP practitioner may vary from one case to another, there are some common traits taking priority than others.

First and foremost, the teacher must “shift from the traditional second language classroom in which the teacher controls the situation, is viewed as an expert, and has the task of presenting a predetermined body of information.” (Brinton et al., 53) In other words, “the teachers are not in the position of being the ‘primary knower’ of the carrier content of the material.” (Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 13) They are very likely to be struggling to master language and subject matter beyond the bounds



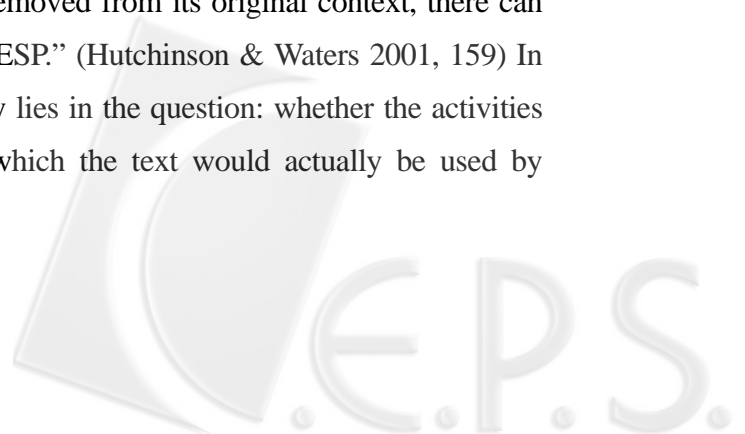
of their previous experience (Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 160).

To adjust to the new role, EAP teachers need to possess a great deal of flexibility, an interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in, the willingness to take risks (Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 14; Flowerdew and Peacock 2001, 181). There is no easy access for them to ready-made, straightforward answers to the teaching problems that they will encounter. Rather, they have to be open-minded, curious and skeptical enough to distill and synthesize those options that best suit the particular circumstances (Jordan 1997, 122-3; Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 160). Adding to that, they need to be armed with a sound knowledge of both theoretical and practical developments in English language teaching in order to make good decisions to lead to success of EAP education (Hutchinson and Waters 2001, 160).

Instructional Materials

Authenticity, accompanied with a great deal of controversy, is one of the most fundamental issues concerning the EAP instructional materials (Brinton et al. 1989, 90; Jordan 1997, 122-3; 113-4; Dudley-Evans and St John 1998, 27-8; 122-3; Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 158-60; Flowerdew and Peacock 2001, 181; Richards and Rodgers 2002, 215-6).

As Jordan (1997, 113) defines, “In the most straightforward interpretation, one can say that an authentic text will be that which is normally used in the students’ specialist subject area: written by specialists for specialists. It is not written for language teaching purposes.” In terms of Hutchinson & Waters (2001, 159), authenticity is a trait of a text in a particular context. They claim, “A text can only be truly authentic, in other words, in the context for which it was originally written. Since in ESP any text is automatically removed from its original context, there can be no such thing as an authentic text in ESP.” (Hutchinson & Waters 2001, 159) In this regard, the key aspect of authenticity lies in the question: whether the activities based on the text reflect the ways in which the text would actually be used by



students in their course work (Dudley-Evans and St John 2002, 28). To be more specific, the nature of authenticity depends on the interaction between the reader (or hearer) and the text instead of the simple facts such as the use of tourist guides or restaurant menus. In a nutshell, the success of applying authentic text lies in appropriate selection and use in the proper context (Flowerdew and Peacock 2001, 182)

Practice Models

At the university level, there are several different approaches based on CBI, of which EAP is a branch. Major models that have been used include theme-based language instruction, sheltered content instruction, and adjunct language instruction (Vrinton et al. 1989, 14-25; 73-74; Larsen-Freeman 2001, 141-2; Richards and Rodgers 2002, 216-7).

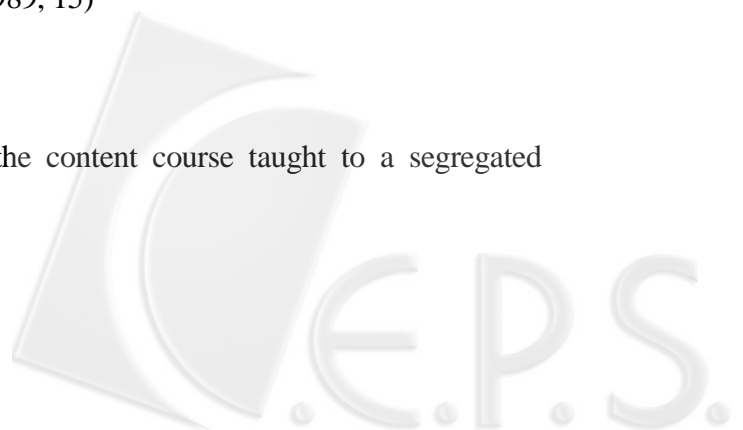
1. Theme-based Language Instruction

According to Richard and Rodgers (2002, 216; Brinton et al. 1989, 14-5), theme-based language instruction refers to a language course in which the syllabus is structured around themes or topics, with the topics forming the backbone of the course curriculum. The theme-based course is a departure from the traditional language course in that the EAP teachers usually generate or adapt materials from outside sources instead of adopting a fixed course textbook (Brinton et al. 1989, 15).

The theme-based language course is the most widespread of the three models under discussion since the given course “can be implemented within virtually any existing institution setting, and topics can be selected to match students’ interests.” (Brinton et al. 1989, 15)

2. Sheltered Content Instruction

The second model refers to the content course taught to a segregated

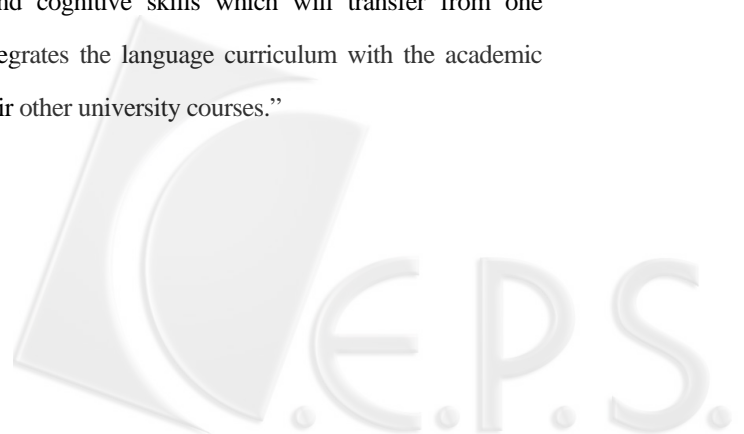


non-native speakers of the target language who enroll the course to develop their second language proficiency (Brinton et al. 1989, 15-16; Larsen-Freeman 2001, 141-2; Richards and Rodgers 2002, 216). The sheltered-language instructor is a content area specialist, such as a university professor, who is a native speaker of the target language and is required to facilitate the learning process by presenting the content in a way which is comprehensible to the students and tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty (Brinton et al. 1989, 15-16; Larsen-Freeman 2001, 141-2; Richards and Rodgers 2002, 216). As believed, benefiting from the use of the adjustments and simplifications, the second language learners who are separated or “sheltered” from native-speaking students do not have to postpone their academic study until their language control reaches an adequate level and therefore are highly motivated in the second language acquisition process because the leaning content is relevant to the requirements of the academic programs in which they are involved (Brinton et al. 1989, 15-16; Larsen-Freeman 2001, 141-2; Richards and Rodgers 2002, 216).

3. Adjunct Language Instruction

In this model, students take two linked courses—a language course and a content course—with both courses sharing the same content base and complementing each other in terms of mutually coordinated assignments. Both native and non-native speakers attend the same lecture. Brinton et al. (1989, 17) noted,

“The rationale behind this shared focus on modes is that the linked courses will assist students in developing academic coping strategies and cognitive skills which will transfer from one discipline to another. Thus, this model integrates the language curriculum with the academic language demands placed on students in their other university courses.”



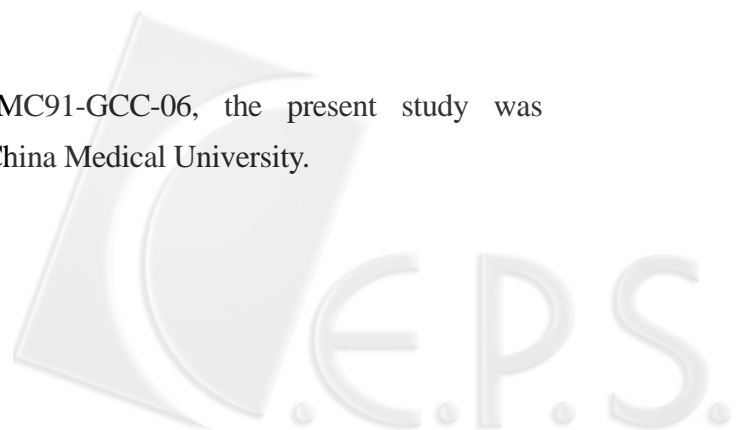
However, there is no denying that such a program is an ambitious undertaking, which requires a large amount of coordination and modifications to ensure that the two interlocking courses complement each other.

Although these three models distinguish one from another according to certain criteria such as their applicability to different settings and proficiency levels, Brinton et al. (1989, 22-23) suggest that it is helpful to regard them as different points on a content-based continuum, with one end as the typical language class and the other the mainstream class. From this perspective, the three alternatives on the continuum have a common trait, i.e., learning both specific content and related language skills with variety reflected by the placement proximity to the two types of classroom situation (Brinton et al. 1989, 23; Larsen-Freeman 2001, 142).

Conclusion

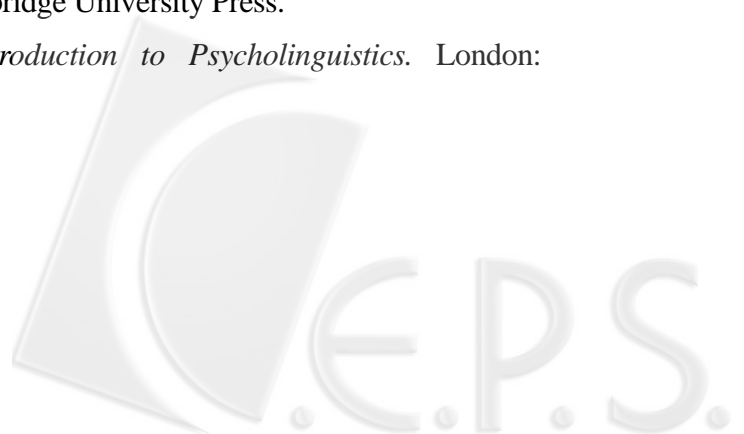
Intending to provide university English teachers with a new alternative, the researcher first explores the interplay between EAP, Communicative Language Teaching, and Content-Based Instruction. In addition, she elaborates a 30-year overview of the historical trends of EAP involving Register Analysis, Rhetorical Analysis, Study Skills & Needs Analysis, and Genre Analysis. Furthermore, the pragmatic issues of EAP in regard to the teacher roles, instructional materials and practice models are presented in details. Theme-based Language Instruction, Sheltered Content Instruction and Adjunct Language Instruction are discussed in terms of their developmental background as well as pedagogical strengths and weaknesses. The researcher hopes to involve more college English teachers' dedication to EAP programs to shed light on the development of this promising approach in Taiwan.

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大學學術英語：理論與應用概述

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論文摘要

隨著地球村的擴展，英文在高等教育與研究的角色日趨重要；在科技、醫學等領域，英文更富主導之工具性地位。因之，台灣大學校園向來倚重原文書作為授課材料；然而大一新生，往往因為閱讀策略或語言技巧不足，在解讀專業教材時遭遇困難。針對此現象，本研究建議採行學術英語教學法，文中探討該教學法之歷史背景、應用模式、教師角色轉換以及教材特色。

關鍵詞：學術英文、科技英語、專用英語、學科性輔導、交際法語言教學

