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Professional and Academic English

Journal of the English for Specific Purposes Special Interest Group

EDITORIAL

Welcome

Welcome

Welcome to Issue 46 of *Professional and Academic English.*

I am excited to introduce you to the Winter–Spring issue of the journal. As in the previous issues, the articles in this issue include different dimensions of ESP and EAP. Dietmar Tatzl, Annette Casey and Adrian Millward-Sadler write from Austria about adapting and developing English for Specific Purposes activities in accordance with students' multiple intelligences profiles. This is followed by Elena Velikaya who writes from Russia about how to achieve accuracy in oral speech in an EAP environment. Next are two rarities – one from Africa and the other from Latin America. From Africa (Nigeria), Sani Yantandu Uba writes about an Accounting Academic Word List and from Latin America (Cuba), Gilberto Diaz-Santos writes about an ESP project in leisure.

These contributions are then followed by reports and book reviews. As a whole, this issue serves to push the frontiers of knowledge in EAP/ESP by augmenting the work of the practitioners in the field with that of the students.

It is my hope that you will enjoy reading this issue and that you will feel inspired to contribute your research to this journal. If you would like to submit an article to the journal, please visit http://espsig. iatefl.org/ for further information (also see this issue). Finally, we are grateful to our colleagues at Garnet Education for their continuous support in publishing this journal.

Bernard Nchindila, University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, RSA

Message from the Joint Coordinators

Dear Colleagues,

It gives us great pleasure to present Issue 46 of *Professional and Academic English* to you. This issue contains a wide range of articles showcasing ESP research and practices from around the world. We would like to thank the Editorial team, particularly Mark Krzanowski (Editor-in-Chief) and Bernard Nchindila (the editor of the current issue), for their excellent work.

Every year, we aim to organize more events, either jointly with other SIGs or professional organizations, or on our own. We hope to see you at these additional events. For more information, please visit our website and the ESP SIG Facebook page. If you wish to organize a local event, please contact us for any support we can offer.

We are grateful to our valued members for their constant support. We look forward to seeing many of you in Birmingham at the 50th IATEFL conference in April 2016.

Finally, we would like to thank Garnet Education for their continuous support with our journal and book publications.

Aysen Guven and **Prithvi Shrestha**
Joint Coordinators, IATEFL ESP SIG

Index

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How to achieve accuracy in oral speech in an EAP environment

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Abstract

Oral speech in a university academic environment involves different skills: giving presentations and mini-presentations in lessons, participating in class discussions on various issues, exchanging opinions, pair work and many other activities. From this list, the most effective and, at the same time, the most difficult to obtain are presentation skills. Methods of teaching how to give presentations as well as how to assess them at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE) in Moscow, Russia, were analysed in the author's previous publications (Velikaya, 2012, 2014). This article focuses on other aspects of presentations, such as pronunciation and intonation, grammatical accuracy and vocabulary, and second-year students' errors that were made in the final exam. Certain techniques that involve the explanation of the basics of pronunciation and intonation, grammar rules and grammar structures and teaching fluency are paid attention to. The experiment conducted by the author summarises students' mistakes in all of the listed areas. The results show that students, despite quite an intensive input, continue making grammar and pronunciation mistakes. The number of mistakes varies in four different groups of second-year students. The author examines all kinds of student errors and makes deductions about possible ways of achieving accuracy in this skill of oral speech.

Keywords: EAP, accuracy, pronunciation, intonation, grammar, vocabulary.

1 Introduction

It is every student's dream to develop good skills in a foreign language, and every teacher at the NRU HSE aims to teach these skills as well as possible. Each faculty and teacher employs various teaching methods in students' groups depending on the group language level and students' motivation. The International College of Economics and Finance (ICEF) faculty at the HSE, where both teachers and students understand that effective speaking skills require the ability to use the English language in different social and cultural interactions. The English Language programme is designed so that it covers many essential topics, such as work, food, language, health, environment, education, culture, and globalisation. The programme also involves teaching segmental issues concerned with individual sounds, and suprasegmental issues dealing with 'larger units of connected speech: syllables, words, phrases, and texts' (Sokolova, Gintovt, Tikhonova & Tikhonova, 1996, p. 17), grammar rules and useful language resources for speech fluency. Students realise that they may not be able to achieve native-like proficiency in oral communication, but they still aim to achieve this skill. Therefore, in order to

provide guidance on developing competent speakers of English, ICEF teachers plan their teaching activities with the purpose of achieving the programme implementation and speaking effectiveness.

This paper aims to analyse teaching methods in academic speaking and student errors made when giving academic presentations, and the possible ways of eliminating them in a university EAP setting.

2 Teaching methodology

2.1 Course description

In the ICEF, the teaching of oral communication is implemented in accordance with the English Language syllabus that is approved by the University of London International Academic Committee and the Methodological Committee of the ICEF. According to this document, the second-year course is aimed at 'developing students' discursive skills … with a strong oral component to the course through discussion of students' work in the classroom and a final conference at the end of the course when they present their work' (Syllabus for English Language (Third and fourth semesters) (n.d.)). The main course books are: 'Passport to Academic Presentations' by D. Bell, 'Dynamic Presentations' by M. Powell, and 'Study speaking. A course in spoken English for academic purposes' by K. Anderson, J. Maclean and T. Lynch (Bell, 2008, Powell, 2011, Anderson, Maclean, & Lynch, 2006). All three books have been chosen to develop students' good presentation skills and their ability to organise points in a logical, interesting and engaging way and to be able to keep the audience listening.

2.2 Teaching pronunciation and intonation

In some schools and cultures, teaching languages is reduced to teaching written models (reading classical literature, for example) and translating written texts. Very often this model of teaching is supplemented with discussions of what students have read. The result of such teaching is the production of literary-correct texts based on written patterns. In pedagogical universities and Philological faculties in Russia much attention is given to the development of all aspects of language learning, but teaching pronunciation and intonation with the emphasis on correctness and native-like pronunciation forces students to spend time in language labs listening to pronunciation models and imitating them. This approach is still widespread in many universities in Russia. The difference is that, instead of literary texts, real and authentic conversations, lectures, and broadcasts are used as models.

How important are pronunciation and intonation in academic discourse? Both teachers and students agree that they are very important. But what model should be used in teaching

pronunciation to Economics students who are studying on a double-degree programme at the University of London: native-like, following 'received pronunciation' (RP), without emphasis on any regional pronunciation?

Since ICEF students are university students the oral texts they produce must be correct. But the degree of correctness in terms of pronunciation will vary from faculty to faculty and the final goal of the programme. Students of Economics understand that with no special focus on a highly polished accent they will never sound native-speaker-like and will speak English with a Russian accent. The majority of them do not know what RP is and what it sounds like. Many students make errors in the articulation of /θ/ and /ð/ sounds and produce them as /s/ and /z/ instead; they mix up /w/ and /v/ and are not aware of this because the difference in articulation was not explained to them. With many students the /l/ sound is apical-dental as it is in Russian, but not apical-alveolar as it is in English, pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge (Sokolova, Gintovt, & Kanter, 1997, p. 55).

With a lack of time devoted to pronunciation skills development, a teacher must design a set of strategies that will help students to improve their performance. In terms of pronunciation, this involves explanation of the articulation of sounds and basic intonation patterns. This can be done comparing and contrasting the pronunciation of similar Russian sounds. Other strategies are included in Table 1.

Table 1: Pronunciation strategies (Tikhonova, Freydina, Sokolova, Kovaleva, & Shishkova, 2009, pp. 12–346)

Sounds:
Vowels
Diphthongs, diphthongoids
Consonants (aspiration, assimilation)
Intonation:
Basic intonation patterns:
1. The Low (Medium)-Fall
2. The High Fall
3. The Rise-Fall
4. The Low-Rise
5. The High (Medium)-Rise
6. The Fall-Rise
7. The Rise-Fall-Rise
8. The Mid-Level tone
Phonetic notation (in the text and on the staves)

2.3 Teaching grammar

The role of grammar in an academic environment is rather significant. Traditionally, in universities (even technical), grammar accuracy was the focus of teaching a foreign language for many years. The result was that after formal education was over many graduates could recollect previously memorised rules of reading, types of syllable, and tenses, but were hardly able to use this knowledge in practice. With the arrival of communicative grammar, there occurred a shift to communicative competence as the ability to not only to know grammar points, but also to be able to use them in real communication, no matter how short or extended it was.

In contrast, teaching pronunciation in secondary schools in Russia is not the priority; teaching grammar is the main method used to explain articles and tenses, and grammar exercises are done both in class and given as home assignments. Swan claims that 'grammar looks tidy and relatively teachable … Grammar can be presented as a limited series of tidy things which students can learn, apply in exercise, and tick off one by one. Learning grammar is a lot simpler than learning a language' (Swan, 2013, p. 149).

The university level requires that students should sound educated, this is why they need a higher level of grammatical correctness than at a secondary school. The selected points of grammar which are taught to second-year ICEF students are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Grammar strategies

Articles (with countable and uncountable nouns)
Verb forms
Modal verbs
Tenses: • simple   • perfect   • sequence of tenses
Questions: • general questions   • special questions   • tag questions

2.4 Teaching vocabulary

Main students' activities in seminars are short or extended talks (presentations) on topics covered in the course or in their studies and research. Price (1978) proposed five stages in the presentation of a topic:
general introduction
statement of intention
information in detail
conclusion
invitation to discuss
(cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 201).

The course described in 'The structure of oral presentations' by H. Nesi and J. Skelton (1997) organises a presentation in the following logical way:

'1.   Introduction
        State: What you will do (current)
                How you will do it (procedure)
2.   Body
        List of points
        Frame and focus of each point
3.   Conclusion
        Summarise
        Visual material'
(cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 202).

In order to successfully complete these stages it is important to give students the appropriate language resources. Lexically, any academic presentation is based on the use of signalling devices and highlighting phrases, which help students to organise what they say and helps the audience to follow.

Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency. Laufer states that 'knowing a minimum of about 3,000 words was required for effective reading at the university level, whereas knowing 5,000 words indicated likely academic success' (cited in Richards & Renandya, 2013, pp. 259–260). No matter how big the vocabulary of second-year students is after completing one year of academic skill development at the ICEF and through IELTS exam preparation, the purpose of the second-year programme is to enlarge it, and certain vocabulary is taught to the students through class practice of *reading texts and discussing various issues*. By using the 'Study Speaking Course Book' by Anderson, Maclean and Lynch (2006), students cover not only topics of work, food, language, health, environment, education, culture, and globalisation, they also read and discuss texts in small and larger groups. Another kind of vocabulary input for students is *discussion skills vocabulary*: how to give your opinion, how to agree and disagree, how to explain, clarify and make suggestions, how to interrupt politely, ask questions and deal with questions, and how to report ideas of other people. The third layer of vocabulary knowledge for ICEF students is *verbalising data*. Students of Economics, unlike students of Linguistics and Humanities, deal with data but they need help with verbalising equations, formulae, cardinal and ordinal numerals, fractions, percentages, decimals, and analysis of information in graphs, tables, histograms, flow charts, and maps in order to make good presentations. The fourth area is *vocabulary of presentation skills* which involves *signposts* and *language signals* (e.g., *first, … then, … finally, … I will focus on …, now let us turn to …, on this slide …, let us move to the next slide …, in conclusion*, etc.) and *linking ideas words and phrases* (*but, … whereas, … while, … in spite of the fact that, … because of, … since, … as …*, etc.) and other useful phrases to make students' presentations and class discussions more academic.

It is obvious that in the course of academic oral speech development more attention is given to vocabulary development and less to pronunciation, intonation and grammar. The former is practised throughout the semester (six classes) and the latter are explained, and this explanation is integrated, into regular classes. For example, all pronunciation and intonation issues are analysed in the lesson devoted to language problems, and grammar errors are usually corrected by the teacher, who relies entirely on students' knowledge obtained in a secondary school and in the first-year course. This is probably not very fair to weaker students, but fairer to stronger students who intend to succeed in what they do.

3 Data collection

In order to see how effective the teaching methods used in ICEF are, a study was conducted which involved four groups of students. There were 15 to 20 students in each group. During the final exam, for each group, students' errors in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary were recorded and summarised. Feedback was provided after the final exams, which took place on April 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 28th, 2015.

Table 3: First group of students (April 21st, 2015) (20 students)

Pronunciation errors	Grammar errors	Vocabulary errors
athletes /æ/ – pr.	on my 2nd year – prep.	'pick' instead of 'pick out'
re'latively – w. stress	it is also exist – gr.	'so to say' instead of 'so to speak'
'effect – w. stress	on the place – prep.	'economical' instead of 'economic'
'hotels – w. stress	French economist – no art.	
kilo'metres – w. stress	why is it so important – wo	
contri'bute – w. stress	reason of – prep.	
poverty – /ʌ/ – pr.	when he will lose – T	
flood – /ʊ/ – pr.	Sudan – art.	
equity – /ɪ/ – pr.	Netherlands – art.	
a de'crease – w. stress	If he will lose – T	
engine – /ɪ/ – pr.	decreased on around 10% - prep.	
lower – /aʊ/ – pr.	If Greece will do it – T	
va'ries – /ɑɪə/ – w. stress, pr.	more deep – gr.	
'Sudan, 'Japan – w-stress	If you will have – T	
Malta – /æ/ – pr.	They not feel free – gr.	
con'sequently – w. stress	emphasise on – prep.	
'consumer – w. stress	amount of buyers – ww	
barrel – /ɑː/ – pr.	to influence on – prep.	
to 'import – w. stress		
to pur'chase – w. stress		
geopolitical –/ɡ/ – pr.		

Table 4: Second group of students (April 22nd, 2015) (17 students)

Pronunciation errors	Grammar errors	Vocabulary errors
socio-'economic – w. stress	less resources – ww	'in more details' instead of 'in more detail'
Adi'das – w. stress	In the end of – prep.	'sheets on roads' for 'billboards'
intervene – /e/ – pr.	In this slide – prep.	
company – /ɒ/ –pr.	USA – art.	
Caucasus /kɔːkəsəs/ – pr.	An answer for a question – prep.	
entrepreneurs – pr.	Russian Government – art.	
consti'tute – w. stress	If there would be – T	
hurt /hɜːt/ – pr.	Data shows – v. form	
co'mments – w. stress	They should to determine – gr.	
model – /əʊ/ – pr.	on the 5th place – prep.	
penalised – /ɪ/ – pr.	550 mln of people – prep.	
logistics – /g/ – pr.	are such a people – gr.	
'objectives – w. stress	If this would be – T	
Mexico – /h/ – pr.	Nepal (adj.) – w. form	
to 'transport – w. stress	If we will – T	
'already – w. stress	Look on the graph – prep.	
visitors /w/ – pr.	another cities – ww	
to 'export – w. stress	on this picture – prep.	
legislation – /g/ – pr.	occupided – v. form	
'quartal' instead of 'quarter' – pr.	money – they (gr.)	
Lehman – /e/ – pr.		

Table 5: Third group of students (April 23rd, 2015) (15 students)

Pronunciation errors	Grammar errors	Vocabulary errors
Eu'ropean – w. stress	In 2008 has failed – T	
e'poch – w. stress	at the centre – prep.	
re'flex – w. stress	There is too many people – gr.	
experiment – /ɪ/ – pr.	something others – ww	
'adults – w. stress	The USA are – C	
Re'nault – w. stress	woman (pl.) – w. form	
Ni'ssan – w. stress		
to compare – /ɪə/– pr.		
fron'tier – w. stress		
crisis /ɪ/ – pr.		
'per cent – w. stress		
'percentage – w. stress		
register – /ʤ/ – pr.		

Table 6: Fourth group of students (April 28th, 2015) (17 students)

Pronunciation errors	Grammar errors	Vocabulary errors
gender /g/ – pr.	rised – v. form	
pros'perous – w. stress	the Henry Ford – art.	
per ca'pita – w. stress	the Keynes – art.	
debt –/b/– pr.	expenditures – w. form	
a'ccess – w. stress	every children – ww	
'canal – w. stress	labour forces – w. form	
e'diting – w. stress	2 per cents – w. form	
'deposits – w. stress	look on – prep.	
key – /keɪ/– pr.	the Greece – art.	

also – /æ/ – pr.	at 2008 – prep.	
'allowed – w. stress	advices – w. form	
currency – /ʊ/ – pr.	3 bn of dollars – prep.	
	gentlemens – w. form	
	on Russian – prep.	
	was happened – v. form	
	are happened – v. form	
	look to – prep.	
	more wealthier – gr.	
	helps to the Government – prep.	
	more easier – gr.	
	5 hundred millions – w. form	
	people which – ww	
	sell on price – prep.	

4 Analysis and discussion

As can be seen from Tables 3–6, only a few vocabulary errors were made by students, and these errors were only made by students from the first and second groups. Some students continue mixing up 'economic' and 'economical' even though it is in the first-year vocabulary; they do not know some set-expressions and phrasal verbs. Faults in intonation weren't significant, which is why they are not shown in the tables. Errors in pronunciation in Groups 1 and 2 (around 20) outnumbered errors in pronunciation in Groups 3 and 4 (around 12); grammar mistakes varied from 6 in Group 3 to 18, 20 and 23 in Groups 1, 2 and 4 respectively. This can be clearly seen in Figure 1.

Faults in pronunciation basically related to mistakes in sounds and word-stress. In fact, out of 22 mistakes in Group 1, 11 were in words which constitute students' professional vocabulary, 15 out of 21 in Group 2, 12 out of 13 in Group 3, and 6 out of 12 in Group 4. Apart from these, there were errors in names of countries, big companies and famous people, which could have been looked up in the dictionary or on the internet. Grammar errors included those of tenses (11), articles (9), prepositions (22), word forms (13), word order and other types of errors.
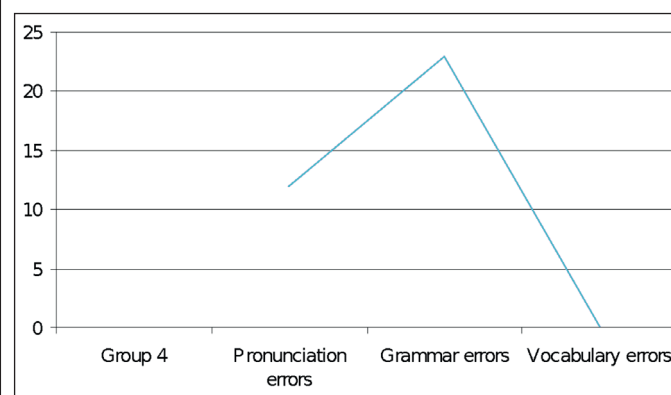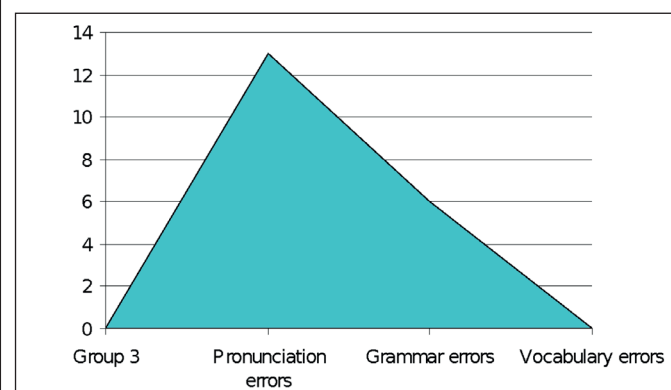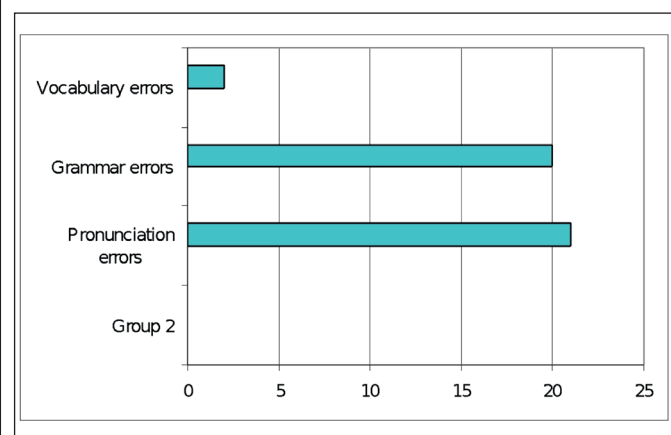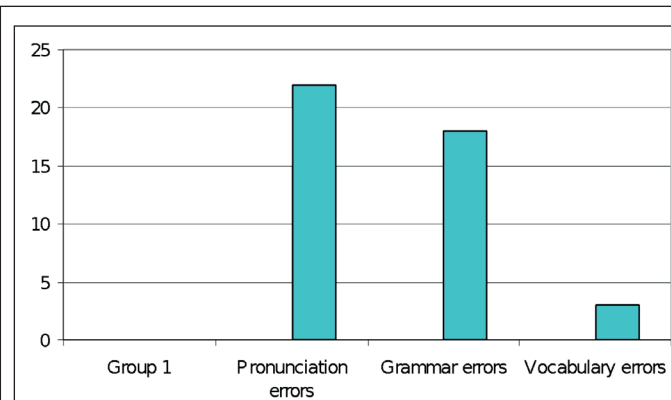

Figure 1: Correlation between different types of mistakes in Groups 1–4

Since exam groups were formed randomly and did not represent either high-level or low-level groups, any correlation between the results in these groups would be irrelevant. What is more important is that all students agree that grammar cannot be ignored and that without a good knowledge of grammar they will not be able to develop professionally and succeed in their careers. This is also true for pronunciation. Students feel awkward being corrected and never object, but they seldom take these comments seriously. The reason for this is the fact that English is important to students of Economics but not as much as Microeconomics and Macroeconomics, Calculus and Econometrics, and, in order to succeed in these subjects, they have to sacrifice time devoted to English. Under these circumstances, any increase in input would not have the desired effect. The only way to improve students' performance is to intensify class work during the academic year with a focus on the listed problems and their solutions.

5 Conclusion

No matter how extended the input in teaching is, students make errors. This study has shown that these errors occur in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. It is hard for teachers who are keen on teaching pronunciation to hear students making pronunciation and word-stress errors. On the other hand, in the development of fluency and self-expression, pronunciation errors do not impede understanding – students still sound intelligible. Grammar is 'more fundamental to all language learning' (Jordan, 1997, p. 173). It needs more training, more explanation of common difficulties and more practice during seminars and mini-presentations. This is also true for vocabulary development and for professional lexis (Economics, Banking, Sociology), which is treated as a responsibility of subject teachers, but it is language teachers that have to prepare students for reading specialised texts and taking part in professional discussions.

These findings have been obtained from only one experiment; therefore, the conclusions made are preliminary. Next, students' performance and progress needs to be monitored, to develop strategies for intensive training in professional vocabulary with a focus on pronunciation and to extend teaching grammar through more focus on common errors.

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