

**FROM NEEDS ANALYSIS TO COURSE DESIGN:  
TEACHING FORMATS OF ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS  
BY USING WEB-BASED TECHNIQUES –  
SERBIAN AND LIBYIAN EXPERIENCES**

Nadežda Stojković<sup>1</sup>, Basim M. Abubaker Faraj<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Electronic Engineering, University of Niš, Serbia  
Nadezda.Stojkovic@elfak.ni.ac.rs

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Al Marj, University of Benghazi, Libya  
basim.faraj@uqconnect.edu.au

**Abstract.** *Teaching English for Specific Purposes presupposes two goals: enabling students to function successfully in the future professional surrounding, and preparing them for their possible further academic career. In that sense, an ESP course comprises English for Occupational/Vocational and English for Academic Purposes. For both directions, the authors of this text, both ESP lecturers and syllabus designers, conclude from their own teaching experience that teaching formats of academic presentations is a necessity if students are to perform well both in the professional and academic setting. Furthermore, the authors claim that those formats are crucial in all ESP profiles. Importantly, the authors claim that before starting teaching formats of academic presentations, it is crucial to offer a session of academic receptive skills in order to enhance the students' comprehension ability and to enrich the academic input and exposure. This paper starts with theoretical elaborations on the rationale of teaching materials and a proposed teaching methodology for written and spoken formats of academic presentations as well as the role of receptive skills in the academic environment. The proof offered is the fact that the authors conduct such lecturing at two distinctly different faculties, namely, Faculty of Electronic Engineering, University of Niš, Serbia, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of Benghazi, Al Marj, Libya. The practical illustration of these is a web-based program designed in the very manner of the segment of the syllabus design proposed here.*

**Key words:** *formats of spoken and written academic presentations, English for Specific Purposes ESP, English for Vocational Purposes, syllabus design, Computerized Assistant Language Learning CALL.*

## 1. 1. INTRODUCTION

In English for Specific Purposes there has been given substantial emphasis onto the relevance of the needs analysis as being the primary anchor of all ESP courses (Johns, 1991; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001). One of the most renowned theoreticians of ESP, Richards, defined the needs analysis as “. . . a mechanism for collecting a wider range of input into the content, design and implementation of a language program through involving such people as learners, teachers, administration and employees in the planning process”

(Richards, 1985, p. 5). Without clearly set goals, it is virtually impossible to design an ESP course which in itself is a tailor made course (Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Munby, 1978). In the process of needs analysis there are two possible approaches, one is Target-Situation Analysis (TSA) and the other is Present-Situation Analysis (PSA), as defined and elaborated on in (Chambers, 1980; Jordan, 1997; Songhori, 2008). Much as the names suggest, in the TSA the aim is to pinpoint the linguistic requirements of the targeted future professional context needed for students' successful immersion into the competitiveness of such a surrounding. As a balance to it, there is established the Present-Situation Analysis which on the outset of the course is to determine the readiness and the possibilities of students to actually work on the needs as required for the target situation. It is in this process that ESP practitioners are able to really find the weaknesses that may and do obstruct the successful realization of the ESP course, and that therefore need to be worked upon. Needless to say, this analysis also shows the strengths of students' prior knowledge.

The authors regularly perform both types of analysis at their institutions respectively. For the authors, the similarities of the findings were a bit of a surprise as the institutions largely differ in profiles. However, in informal consultations with colleagues from faculties of yet other profiles, we have come to the same answer. These comparisons are to be substantiated by further research.

The findings of the PSA as carried out on the Faculty of Electronic Engineering, University of Niš, Serbia, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Al Marj, University of Benghazi, Libya, have shown that students in both settings have very little and very inadequate prior knowledge of formats of either written or spoken communications. Therefore, they need a thorough, in-depth instruction and practice in both written and spoken communications formats. One of the reasons for almost complete lack of such skills in our students can be found in the fact that neither Serbian nor Libyan educational systems foster or even implement trainings in such areas. Moreover, those formats are typical for the Western school of thought to which neither country truly belongs.

Also, according to the authors' recent needs analysis projects, it seems that the students in both settings lack the appropriate way of receiving information in English academically and they rather focus on literal meaning of linguistics structures "terms" and lose the general understanding of scientific content. This could be referred to the traditional way of teaching English at pre-university education where almost all teachers are still using Grammar-Translation method in English classes. Apparently, academic receptive English language skills are quite important in order to help the students acquiring the knowledge which in most cases are delivered in English.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS AND LOGIC OF TEACHING WRITTEN AND SPOKEN FORMATS

The aim is for the students to learn the structure of various kinds of communications and the appropriate style of speech needed for their future vocational or academic setting. It is due to geographical and historical contexts of both environments hereby examined that our students have no previous insight into formats that characterize both professional and academic discourse. In order to instruct them in those, the following steps are followed in the process of teaching and practicing. Each step is rationalized together with students themselves paying special attention that by comparing the structure of these formats; they fully recognize the logic of their science being reflected into the formats it is to be presented in.

First, students are explained that learning the principles of written and spoken presentations in English is done with the ultimate purpose of better communicating scientific and professional knowledge to other professionals but also nonspecialists. The principles of presentation considered are based on *the scientific method of research*. If those are consistently applied, the scientific content that is presented will be better comprehended, analyzed and critically examined.

The scientific method is a process by which scientists endeavor to construct an accurate representation of the world. In order to achieve that, it is a must to avoid all possible personal and cultural influences in the interpretation of the phenomena in question. That is done by the use of standard procedures and criteria in developing a theory or an explanation. The same idea applies to both written and spoken presentations of those findings. The use of standard presentation structures ensures clarity, obvious rationale for the thesis, and is highly persuasive in the sense that the audience gets a strong impression that the author is a knowledgeable person, an expert.

Then the students are to learn that there is a broad and general distinction among three types of this communication: science, scientific, and technical, depending on the level of precision and depth of information presented. Special attention is paid for the students to understand that scientific and professional presentation communicates specific information about a specific subject to a specific audience for a specific purpose. Generally speaking, scientific and technical presentation often focuses on resolving some problem or delivery of information. The audience element is crucial for successful presentation. The speaker needs to make a precise judgment about who they write for or talk to, and according to that adapt their presentation to the audience's needs, expectations, levels of understanding, background. The purpose of a professional presentation may be to inform and/or persuade the audience that the speaker's method of resolving a problem is effective and efficient. The achievement of the preset purpose proves the validity of the presentation.

For this to be fully successful, the lecturer finds it necessary for the students to fully comprehend that academic and professional communication skills are more important than ever in today's competitive world, and that for most professionals, writing reports, letters, memos, or speaking to various kinds of audience and in various situations, will nearly be an everyday occurrence. But first of all, getting a job is often a difficult task, as they are aware. An effective resume should promote them well enough. Once they get a job, they will soon realize that professionals are communicators. After performing an analysis or a design, the practicing professional must somehow communicate the results of their work to others. These 'others' might be a supervisor, a fellow colleague, a client, a government agency, or general public. According to the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Academic and professional communication involves analyzing and distributing scientific and technical information efficiently and accurately for specific audiences. Students will learn how to choose an appropriate topic, create effective visuals, and design a speech opening (Reinhart 2002).

Designing effective presentation requires insightful and well-trained thinking strategies that can produce clarity in communication without oversimplifying scientific issues. The results are substantive, not merely cosmetic: improving the quality of presentation actually improves the quality of thought and vice versa. This is the crucial point in teaching this course, the profound rationale for its existence in this form. The fundamental purpose of scientific discourse is not mere presentation of information and thought, but rather its actual communication.

The content that the authors want to convey is inseparable from the form they employ. With that as an aim students need always to bear in mind that readers do not simply read, but interpret. Information is interpreted more easily and more uniformly if placed where most readers expect to find it. These needs and expectations of readers affect the interpretation not only of tables and illustrations but also of prose itself. Readers have relatively fixed expectations about where in the structure of prose they will encounter particular items. If students can become consciously aware of these locations, they can better control the degrees of recognition and emphasis a reader will give to the various pieces of information being presented. For that reason, teaching principles of academic and professional presentation focuses on teaching the structure of various types of presentation.

### **2.1. The content of “*Receptive skills*”**

The aim of this section is to help students comprehend the formal written and spoken discourses during the academic experience by focusing on different transitional signals (discourse markers) which are used to link the information and to signal the important ideas. At the same time, it is expected that students need to take notes on what they listen and what they read following those signals to show their understanding of the entire text. Significantly, *cohesion and coherence* skills must be highly recognized and developed by this activity.

As a matter of fact, these skills develop the discourse competence on the part of students which is known as the ability of interpreting the larger context in order to construct longer stretches of language (Savignon, 1997). More specifically, by focusing on these techniques, the students will be aware of how words, phrases and sentences are organized together to create an extended text.

A wide range of activities and practices carried out all over the world dealing with teaching listening and reading. The authors can suggest an activity which is divided into three parts:

1. Pre-task activity: in which students are given a set of language either spoken or written used in the discourse with brief explanation. Students are expected to discuss their experiences.
2. In-task activity: in which students listen or read a part of real text such as a lecture or a book (authentic materials). Taking notes of the main ideas and most important information.
3. Post-task activity: in which students are expected to make groups to compare their notes and discuss the text. Then they should use their notes together to write an extended text about the text or to answer comprehension questions to ensure their understanding to the academic discourse.

### **2.2. The content of the communications format segment of an ESP course**

The actual work on communications format comprises two parts: written and spoken (Stojković, 2005). Through the work on written formats students are made aware that many of the principles employed in writing is of equal relevance to speaking formats. Hereby, we shall present the content of the formats segment; however, our ESP courses do have the segments that deal with registers, appropriate lexis, stylistics, all related to those formats.

The hedging we make here is that the purpose of this paper is to present mere content, with only some methodological aspects involved.

### 2.2.1. *Written formats*

The work on scientific presentations structures should begin with the lecture on *titles*. That is the first instance when students become aware of what is meant by precision in science, and why it is crucial to bear in mind the expectations of the audience, that is to control the flow of their understanding. The title contains the topic and a clearly defined angle from which it is being presented. It needs to be emphasized that this is the case when dealing with highly scientific or professional topics, not those written for general public. The next step in the analysis of structures is a *paragraph*, the smallest, nucleus logical piece of every presentation. On the example of a paragraph students should comprehend the 'ruling' model of scientific argumentation. The three, most common parts of a paragraph are: topic sentence, supporting sentences, and closing one. Depending on the type of paragraph, the topic sentence can be a definition, an expression of the author's personal viewpoint, etc. Supporting sentences explain, describe or develop the thesis and provide examples that illustrate it properly. Concluding sentence sums up the idea of the entire paragraph. In all more complex structures of presentation this nucleus of the logic of scientific argumentation is only further developed and/or multiplied. According to the content, paragraphs can be classified as following: definition, classification, description, compare and contrast, sequence, choice, explanation, and evaluation paragraphs. This, however, is not the only possible classification. The classes may differ according to various criteria employed.

Once the principles of structuring a paragraph are mastered, as well as its various kinds, it is easy to move on to teaching the principles of structuring an *essay*, since it follows the already presented logic of organization. For the beginning it is recommended that students write essays within the frame of a five paragraph essay. Seemingly a limitation, this only helps students acquire higher precision when numerous pieces of information are to be presented on a limited space. The most often types of essays in scientific/professional literature are: process analysis, exploratory, argumentative, cause and effect, compare and contrast, classification, definition, narrative. Yet, the types are not clearly delineated but mutually intertwined. The concrete types of written communications are argumentative essays, laboratory reports, feasibility studies, memos, correspondence. Each type is presented with appropriate structure that again students are to deduce from the examples they are presented with. Not only do they abstract the structure of the organization of text, but the style, target audience, register used. Afterwards, they are asked to produce their own pieces of writing. This work should be the preparation for writing professional documents such as *writing reports, journal articles, and theses*. But before that, students should be taught the special relevance of *proper documentation of sources, referencing and quoting*, that being a very important stance in our teaching process.

### 2.2.2. *Spoken formats*

*Spoken presentation* means public speaking. Spoken presentations practiced at our classes are simulations of future job specific situations like delivery of a scientific finding in front of an audience that may be academic, business, of governmental, presentations for a general audience, speaking to students, high school pupils, etc.

The fact insisted on is that spoken presentations are much more than a simple delivery of one's scientific or professional knowledge. The preconditions of an effective, but most importantly good spoken presentations are many. Sole mastery of the required knowledge is insufficient in this case. The success largely depends on judging all the specifics of the situation and responding to those properly, and the impression one gives as a person. Spoken presentation should never be a monologue, but an active dialogue in which verbal communication is not the only constituent. The facts that need students' close attention are:

- To identify the audience as precisely as possible. It is not always an easy task, but is necessary. Different audiences require and are prepared for different amounts and depths of information. The success of a presentation depends on knowing those in advance.
- The presentation can have one of these aims: to inform, persuade, teach, and is variously shaped accordingly.
- Students should gain the mastery of organizing and selecting their arguments or pieces of information so as to respect the time allotted. Also, for the sake of their assertiveness they should familiarize themselves with the physical space for their presentation and visualize their movements within.
- When designing a visual, students should consider its effect on the audience. Visual aids function as "cue cards" clarifying the message and allowing the audience to remember the main points.
- The introduction must draw the audience's attention, identify the topic, and create expectations in the audience that the presenter will satisfy in the course of the presentation.
- The audience needs to be presented with the aim, content, and structure of presentation in the introduction part.

The other crucial part of the spoken presentations is *expert argumentation*. Situations in which professionals find themselves needing to argue in favour or against a certain concept vary from most informal, a chat after a conference session, for example, to the most formal, like presenting a research paper and having a formal discussion with the audience afterwards. Whatever the occasion, to prove your expertise education and culture, you need to tailor your speech, the flow of your argumentation according to the logic rules inherent in the very nature of science. The formality/informality of the actual words and phrases you employ will vastly depend on the situation. When having a discussion of a pro and contra type, in order to present and defend your viewpoint you will need to *build a case*. This means your delivery should have the following segments: introduction, credentials, clarifying the background of the problem, stating the personal professional stance, presenting arguments that support one's stance and the conclusion.

### 3. USE OF WEB-BASED TECHNIQUE IN ESP TEACHING

In recent years, language teachers have been more concerned about the use of technology in their teaching. In fact, the most challenging skill for them is how to design a new program to suit their own context. Accordingly, it becomes highly required for language teachers to understand clearly what procedures should be adopted in the design process, and what tools should be chosen in order to satisfy their educational goals. In this section, a CALL project has been developed to be presented in both Serbian and Libyan

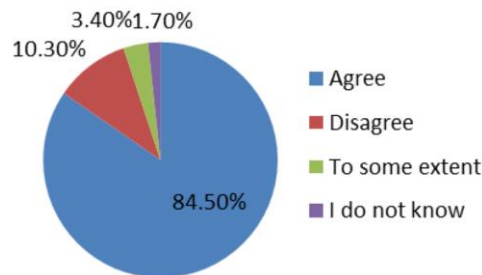
university student bearing in mind that both contexts have some basic features in common. In fact, it is assumed that the first consideration that the designer should take into account is the target audience by whom that program will be used. In this regard, Levy & Stockwell (2006) claim that "...an understanding of the learners' background, role, and perspective is crucial in design." (p. 35). Therefore, a brief description of both contexts in terms of students' background and institutions' profiles will be stated first. Then, the main purpose of the program will be reported, and finally some details about how it works will be offered.

### 3.1. The rationale for using web-based technique in current project.

According to a study which has been conducted in the faculty of Arts and Sciences of Al Marj, University of Benghazi, Libya, the findings have shown that the majority of students are in agreement of using web-based language learning programs for ESP. Apparently, the Internet increases the motivation on the part of students and reduce the stresses of in-class language sessions (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006). Also, it enhances different language skills by practicing in a real environment, and accessing various authentic materials which help in learning process.

Using technology in learning English as perceived by university students

No	statement	Agree	Disagree	To some extent	I do not know
19	Do you think that using technology such as computers may assist in learning English for medical studies?	84.5%	10.3%	3.4%	1.7%



Based on these findings, almost all the participants were in agreement regarding the use of technology in English language teaching and considering that as quite helpful (Faraj, 2011). Many studies in the field of ESP suggested using the Internet in particular to enhance university students' English language proficiency in many ways (Chen, Belkada, & Okamoto, 2004; Kimball, 1998; Tarnopolsky, 2009). Other needs analysis studies revealed that the students prefer using Internet in their English learning as in (Tasçi, 2007) while some others revealed that students also prefer using TV, CDs and DVDs e.g. (Hwang & Lin, 2010).

### 3.2. Program

The general course into which this simplified project is proposed to be integrated is an intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course as a preliminary stage of the wider course of ESP. The EAP course will be offered every year for the new coming university students. The organization principle of the course curriculum is skills oriented. All skills are academic and each one is covered with a number of activities which reflect the real situation that students will encounter in their academic life. The major language skills included in this course curriculum are: research and academic reading, listening to lectures and taking notes, presentation skills, and academic writing.

It is clear that all of what have been mentioned regarding the audience and the context as well as the main course curriculum have been highly considered in selecting the educational materials and designing of this web-based program. Additionally, the program has been based on the target students' needs analysis process which reflects the actual performance of this group of learners. As a matter of fact, this program is aiming to enhance and support the in-class teaching materials. Students can use it at anytime of the day to revise what they have learnt in the class.

"... learners' needs should be analyzed in order to select language components that match what students require to succeed in their academic studies." (Kimball, 1998, p. 411)

Importantly, this web-based program could be regarded as a simple presentation of using technology; namely the Internet, in language education. Our purpose is to show colleagues in the field of ESP that; firstly, using new techniques in teaching could be quite helpful for our students; particularly, when we design programs ourselves. Secondly, the process of designing such programs is quite easy, flexible and does not need professional work at all.

Basically, the website is created by using the "**WIX website builder**" which is available online for public with no charge for basic features; it provides an ideal way of constructing websites with a plenty of simple and enjoyable devices to be used by even unprofessional IT people. There are also a number of usable templates each for specific function. Indeed, ESP Teachers could easily go through this application and simply choose whatever suits their students' educational needs from a various range of gadgets, tools and programs. What required is only the criterion through which we can choose the most appropriate programs and activities. Our simple web-based program consists of a number of sections which are representing the major academic language skills mentioned earlier. Each section has additional materials and exercises for students to enhance that skill. For the purpose of this paper, the skills presented in here are: Firstly, ***listening and taking notes***, this skill in particular should be given a priority. Understanding the academic presentations is a challenging task among the tertiary students in EFL context where English is used as a medium of instruction. Significantly, this "receptive" skill should be dealt with in advance because it can be used as the source of language "input" on which any other skill should be based. Secondly, ***academic writing***, this is a representation of the written communication format which is mentioned earlier. Our purpose here is to offer some practical aspects of academic writing to support what the students have learnt in the class. Admittedly, all the sections, activities, audio-visual tasks, and exercises included in the program have been taken from different sources in the Internet. That is because the virtual world is full of materials which can be used by



everyone keeping in mind that OUR major task is how & what should we choose for our own context.

The materials included in both sections of the website can be summarized as follow:

1. Presentation of some interesting notes to be read by students in order to enhance their understanding of different academic skills. For the purpose of providing extra information, there are hyperlinks to other WebPages including some theoretical facts as well as a number of videos giving more details about the two skills.

2. Practicing note-taking by listening to an academic lecture which indeed reflects the real situation that the students will experience. During this activity, the students need to listen and take notes; then, they need to compare these notes with a typical sample provided on another version of the same video. The tool utilized for this activity is YouTube program where the lecture is published online.

3. A number of exercises on listening comprehension, taking notes, and academic writing are presented to the students with answers to ensure that they get the maximum benefits of the program. Besides, there is an optional test to be completed and emailed to the teacher for evaluation.

4. For the purpose of increasing the interactivity, there is a link to “comments” page which enables students to add any suggestions to be read by other users. Also, the contact button which is linked to the teachers’ email for enquiries and assignments. Additionally, there is a link to a number of useful resources for students including online dictionaries.

In fact, the website is designed mainly as an off-class learning tool which aims to support the in-class lessons by providing extra materials and activities to be practiced by the students in a motivational and practical way. Hence, it is expected that learners work on their own time after they finish the class whether in the university where there are a lot of accessible facilities or at home in a completely self-governing environment. Importantly, such a learning strategy can be beneficial in developing the students’ independence and autonomy. Hence, the role of teachers is to choose the most suitable materials for the target learners from the Internet, explain the related issues in the classroom. Then, managing the class discussion afterwards and giving feedback on the students’ performance.

In conclusion, it is clear that both the potential users and the learning context attributes are essential in designing a CALL program, and teachers should be aware of such considerations to get the maximum benefits of their designs.

“...while these technological innovations facilitate computer-based learning activities....., they are ultimately tools in the hands of course authors who must use them creatively to maximize the students’ language learning experience.” (Chen, et al., 2004)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to elaborate on the relevance on teaching formats of written and spoken presentations within ESP courses. We have presented theoretical rationale and methodological basis for including this lecture and practice work into the syllabi of the ESP courses. Today, ESP as a form of English language teaching gains immensely on its relevance as it directly prepares students for the linguistic requirements they will encounter at their future professional positions which are similar, if not uniform

throughout the professional, market economy, modern world. To prove that we have given practical illustrations of our theoretical foundations for teaching spoken and written formats on the examples of two faculties of different profiles, from two countries of significantly different cultures. We have showed and proved that the same rationale is the core of two ESP courses, one held at the Faculty of Electronic Engineering, University of Niš, Serbia, the other at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of Benghazi, Al Marj, Libya. Also, the authors proposed a web-based template for delivering such formats in order to facilitate the process of ESP education in two completely different environments yet with quite similar educational needs. This template or format could be used by any ESP instructor for any specific needs; also, specific materials can be added for certain contexts where needed. Action research on real use of such a program in both contexts is actually what the authors are looking for currently as to what extent that can replace the traditional way of ESP education in order to increase the autonomy as well as the creativity in the part of ESP learners.

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