ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES AT UDINE UNIVERSITY: AN ENDS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become a major field of teaching and research in recent years. Traditionally, EAP courses have based their curricula on needs analyses to determine beforehand what specific students want to learn from them. It is, however, argued here that it is often more constructive to start from an ends analysis as this tends to encourage an experiential rather than merely technical learning process. This article focuses on the EAP courses at Udine University. In a typical module, an initial reading on a topic leads, via a variety of skill and language work, to close questioning of basic concepts and a final role play applying such ideas in practice. Feedback from students suggests that – with some fine-tuning of grammar and skills – such an approach helps them develop their own ideas while acquiring the academic skills they need on the way. EAP thus avoids being a mere technical exercise, becoming instead a lived experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

English for Academic purposes (EAP) is commonly depicted as either pragmatic or critical. On the one hand it is argued that courses should be designed to teach accepted practice in the academic world (Allison 1996), on the other to take a critical stand on such practice (Benesch 1999). The debate can also be expressed in terms of the difference between science and philosophy. Science sees a piece by piece accumulation of knowledge building up a faithful picture of the world (Bacon 1605); philosophy sees an engagement with our ideas of what

that world consists of (Steiner 1916). Although recent developments in the philosophy of science suggest that this may be an oversimplification (Feyerabend 1993), in practice, from the articles scientists are involved in writing and the methods they use in the laboratory, this difference tends to hold true to the present day.

However, it can be argued that there is in effect no conflict between these two views, but that, to achieve their reconciliation, philosophy (critical EAP) must be placed in first place and science (pragmatic EAP) second. In other words, the question 'why' is more important than the question 'what'. In a business perspective, we can imagine two companies both selling the same kind of product, for example mobile phones. Both have very similar features. However, one relates the product to a set of values, a way of life, a mission statement while the other focuses only on product quality. The first more easily wins favour with consumers as it gives them a reason for buying one product rather than another. This has arguably been the case with Apple as opposed to Blackberry phones. Apple provides a set of values behind its product and continues to thrive, while it could be argued that Blackberry did not survive just because it did not provide such values (Senek 2013).

Likewise, although not an object like a phone, an EAP course should start from a clear philosophical perspective and subsequently introduce the necessary technical knowledge in line with this philosophy. The basic question is not what to teach but why we teach it in the first place.

For an EAP course what motivates the syllabus, materials and tasks thus becomes essential. The 'why' of such a course is, arguably, to create the tools for a better comprehension of the world, ourselves and each other. How this is achieved can come later. The emphasis then should be on the ends or aims of the course rather than an initial

formal identification of needs[1]. This article introduces the EAP course at Udine University in Italy, which has been designed with the above ideas in mind. It focuses on one module as an example (the issue of de-growth in economics) and seeks to show how an experiential approach can engage students from a wide range of fields to explore a theme that may be entirely new to them and learn to see how it connects with their subjects and their lives, thus sharing their expertise with each other in the class and coming by the end of the module, to informed judgements about the topic. This is followed by a brief reflection, in a discussion of student feedback, on how successfully the course may be succeeding in its aims.

2. EAP AT UDINE

EAP at Udine originated and continues to be based in the language centre (centro linguistico e audiovisivi or CLAV) of the University. The centre provides courses in a number of European languages. Anyone at the University as well as external candidates can attend while some students, especially undergraduates, gain credits from them. In 2009, on the request of two professors, CLAV started an EAP course in its campus in Pordenone for PhD students and teachers of Scienze e Tecnologie Multimediali. The course was subsequently moved to Udine and opened to all faculties. It was then made compulsory for PhD students in 2013.

Thus, the EAP course is open to teaching staff and postgraduates of the University. Every PhD student has to attend one course, but can enrol to do more. Each candidate does a placement test which places them as intermediate (or in Cambridge terms B1: just below First Certificate) or advanced (B2 First Certificate and in a few cases C1

[1] Clearly ends and needs go hand in hand and do not preclude each other. Student needs are central to any course, but here it is argued that the identification of need should be based on a clear underlying philosophy of the ends of the course as this can more easily foster an experiential rather than technical approach to learning.

Advanced), while those under intermediate must follow a general English course so they can reach an intermediate level before joining. However, despite their being categorised as intermediate or advanced, students are effectively placed according to their disciplines because lessons take place in two separate venues: at the science complex a little way out of Udine and in the humanities building in the town centre. Each class thus consists of a range of levels from intermediate to advanced, one composed mainly of science, the other mainly of humanity students.

Participants are mostly Italian but there are always some from other countries in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America or the Far East. The course lasts 40 hours and everyone must attend 70% of the lessons. There is a final exam, but this is not compulsory and is oriented to indicating how students can develop in the future rather than testing them on acquired content.

From the beginning it was considered unfair to require students to buy a text book as most of them are obliged to follow the course. In addition, existing texts often seem to target students who are unfamiliar with academic settings, while our students are quite sophisticated learners, who – given the time constraints – wish to fill in specific gaps in their knowledge and extend their repertoire rather than be given a progressive introduction to academic discourse. Given this situation, it was decided to create a 'customised' course for them.

In creating this new course, we determined to start from an ends, rather than a needs analysis. An ends analysis argues that the essence of an activity lies in the aim or end that the activity is intended to accomplish. It is 'just' if it is carried out according to its primary aim. Flutes, for example, are for playing and rightly belong to those who can, or are learning to, play them. Arguably the best flutes should be distributed to the best players (Sandel 2009). In other words, we have to determine what ends we wish to attain for the future and find the activities suited to them.

Once the ends of the course are established the needs of the specific students can be identified in an on-going and evaluative way: «It

[needs analysis] is a continuous process, since we modify our teaching as we come to learn more about our students, and in this way it actually shades into *evaluation* – the means of establishing the effectiveness of a course» (Hyland 2006). This takes into account the rights of the students themselves to decide what constitutes the best way to meet their own needs (Benesch 1999). The initial analysis of the ends thus provides a framework within which students, in dialogue with the teacher, can cater for their needs.

To clarify the aims of the EAP course – why it was being activated in the first place and what its main purposes were – we felt it important to determine how it fitted into the University as a whole and what idea of a university should animate it. This idea is clearly very controversial. The main purpose can be seen in many ways: to prepare students for society, develop research for the future, cater for the job market. However, it can be argued that fundamentally a university, rather than merely develop specific skills, should encourage an all-rounded search for the truth enabling students to stand back and appraise the value of an argument from a variety of standpoints and thus develop themselves as individuals to maximum advantage. In the words of Cardinal Newman:

> «This I conceive to be the advantage of a seat of universal learning, considered as a place of education. An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought, by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes [...] He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts … A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom» (Newman 1982: 76).

It became the underlying intent of the EAP course to develop just such 'disinterested' activity in an English academic environment.

The next step was to ask how this could best be achieved. Much has been written on the centrality of critical thinking in developing academic skills – the need, for example, to ask higher order questions and develop logical arguments (e.g. Kolb 1984; Moon 2008), but it is argued here that disinterested thinking may best be developed not via a specifically critical training but via experiential thinking processes. The former (critical) thinking calls for a systematic appraisal of the logic of a point of view. In its extreme form it is a kind of thinking that cannot determine the right or wrong of an argument, but merely review its logical consistency. Any argument of such a consistency is acceptable – so two completely conflicting ideas could be right. It in effect enhances the technicalisation of learning that serves specific interests such as the demands of the job market or the requirements of technology and big business. The latter (experiential) thinking sees itself not only in terms of developing logic – of head activity – but also of inner conviction of the heart. It requires entering into and living a situation before coming to any conclusion. Proof is in the conviction attained through the experience rather than the level of logic in an argument. The conviction may later be seen as inadequate but such continuous re-evaluation forms part of a cumulative broadening of the self and its understanding of the world. Critical thinking, on the other hand, can serve different points of view and interests, while experiential thinking, it is argued here, can lead us to draw conclusions from our experience, not merely from our own interests (Tooke 2010).

To encourage such experiential thinking, the course is organised around disciplinary areas and topics, which students are asked to enter into and experience. They are encouraged to suspend disbelief and live the ideas before making up their minds. The direction they take depends on their own dispositions, needs and interests, but they move through a variety of points of view, activities and linguistic content.

Table 1: Contents for EAP course 2015-2016 (author's chart)

Module	Topic	Reading/listening	Language
One	Peace	Education for Peace	Cohesion
		Justice	The passive
		Students' own readings	Contrast
Two	Economics	Ecological economics	In-text citation
		Stephanomics	Reporting constructions
		Students' own readings	Cause and effect
Three	Media studies	Social media	Participle adjectives
		Gaming	Recommendations
		Students' own readings	Participle clauses
Four	Nursing	Nursing practice	Verbs + noun + ing
		Romanian orphans	Verbs + prepositions + ing
		Students' own readings	The passive (2)

They can choose on the way to focus on skills, grammar, functions or vocabulary. The experience is seen not so much as an incremental step by step acquisition of arguments and argumentation, but as a journey undertaken as a personal exploration on the part of the learner (Tooke 2013).

To activate such learning, the course was organised around areas and topics for discussion. Such topics had to be in a sense general academic to stimulate ideas, but also because the students come from the entire range of disciplines offered at the university.

The 40 hour course is divided into four modules each lasting three weeks to a total of twelve weeks. The lessons are of three hours. Thus, the work covers 12 weeks × 3 hours = 36 hours with 4 further hours given over to students' own presentations and a final exam, leading to 40 hours overall.

In 2015-2016 the areas covered were: peace studies, economics, media and nursing. As can be seen in table one, he topics, with accompanying readings, were education for peace (Baligadoo 2014),

de-growth (Latouche 2012), social media (Metros 2008) and cross-cultural nursing (Palese et al. 2006).

For convenience both in creating the material and adjusting to student expectations, the format in each module is the same. Each module opens with a reading (to be prepared by the students out of class beforehand), as in the references above, moving through skills work, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary (from the reading) with an emphasis on listening – both in-depth and for gist using podcasts and videos – alongside writing that enables students, if they wish, to write a full article by the end of the course.

3. EXAMPLE MODULE: DE-GROWTH

The following is an example module. Lesson one of module 2 (centred on economics) starts with general pre-task questions about the economic crisis such as: What do you think are the main causes of the present global crisis? How far are subprime mortgages and derivatives the tip of the iceberg? Was the eurozone crisis caused only by the US banking system? Where do you think the crisis is going? What do you think individuals should/can do to respond to such developments?

Students then discuss an article by Serge Latouche on de-growth (Latouche 2012), which they are supposed to have read before the lesson. Latouche argues that to create a new society based on sobriety and frugal abundance (necessary for our survival) a new kind of politics needs to emerge. The old left-wing models were too catastrophic and monolithic. De-growth calls for a multiplicity of voices. It remains on the left of the political spectrum as it questions industrialisation and critiques liberalism, echoing early socialist thinkers, seeking redistribution, denouncing the spirit of capitalism and seeing good development as a contradiction in terms.

However, de-growth is often misunderstood and seen as negative. This may be partially due to the word itself. The original word, though this is not discussed by Latouche, was the French décroissance

referring to a river that re-finds its usual level after a flood – in this way depicting growth as an unnatural period of devastation that needs to be brought back within limits[2]. The direct translation from this into English as de-growth may be seen as infelicitous first because it fits the Latinate prefix *de* to a word of Germanic origin *growth* but also because *de* is used in many words with negative connotations whether in its meaning of the lowering of a level (*degrade*, *destabilise*), increasing the intensity (*degenerate*, *denigrate*) or moving away (*decamp*, *decapitate*, *decline*, *deport*). Modern German avoids any negative connotation by using the terms *postwachstum* "post-growth", *entwachsen* "growing out of" or *wachstumsrücknahme* "withdrawal from growth".

However, the sense of negativity is also a reaction to any project attacking productivism. De-growth casts serious doubt on economic thinking and as such could be called a-growth (on the lines of atheism) as people follow economism like a religion. De-growth requires the will to take on a complete shift in perspective and embrace the idea of altruistic, co-operative, social, local, autonomous subsistence.

The discussion is guided by a set of comprehension questions and followed by an analysis of the kind of journal they think the article is from and in what ways the article itself can be defined as 'academic'. The questions include: How would you characterise the language and style of the article? Do you think it might be typical of this publication (Capitalism Nature Socialism)? What kind of subjects do you suppose this publication publishes? Look at the publication and see if you were right. How do you see Latouche as a person? (e.g. fiery, combative…). Give your reasons. What is the logic of this article? Why does he critique the left? How does Latouche see de-growth? How do people generally see de-growth? What is his answer to them? Why does *decroissance* or *decrescita* sound better?

[2] The word seems to have been used as an economic term only in the early seventies by, among others, the economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (vid. André Gorz 1977).

This moves later on to a reflective task on de-growth where the students answer questions such as outlined in table two.

Table 2: Reflective task (author's chart)

Reflective task
What do you understand by a radical critique of liberalism?
Are you sympathetic towards Latouche's argument?
Would you favour a radical or a reformist response to the crisis?
Elsewhere Latouche talks of a «decolonisation of the imaginary». What do you think he means by that?
Do you see capitalism in the same way as de-growth experts?
How far do you see 'broader coalitions' (trade unions, precarious workers, environmental justice movements…) as a feasible means of opposition in the next few years?

The listening is an interview with one of Latouche's followers who outlines practical activities to do in order to further a de-growth project (Liegey 2012). Students are asked to create a mind map of the ideas expressed by the speaker as they listen and then discuss them in a post listening activity, picking out any items they particularly like. Throughout the lesson the argument is punctuated by an analysis of academic style (formal versus academic language) (Swales and Feak 2008), vocabulary from the text (strong, flavourful language reflecting the voice in the text), as in the table below, and ways of citing other authors.

Table 3: Vocabulary task (author's chart)

Vocabulary
Put in the correct word in the blanks from the list below. You may have to change the form of the word.
1. [Exiting from a growth society] implies abandoning the well-

_____ paths of critical thought.

2. [We need] to find a way out of the _____ of politicking.
3. [There might be] a possibility of a direct passage to socialism …_____ the capitalist stage.
4. Modernisation has _____ the past to the ground.
5. Toleration of plurality has been no more than a_____ tactic, a _____ concession against a background of intolerance.
6. De-growth meets with _____ and _____ resistance.
7. The capitalist mode of production … always _____ more inequalities.
8. [There have been many] _____ figures like Jacques Ellul.
9. The allergic reaction to de-growth stems from a _____ refusal to give up productivism.
10. [We do not need] a better _____ of state regulation.

raze	rose	vociferous	impasse
bypass	visceral	recur	engender
temporise	tread	provisional	inspire

Now answer these questions.

What **well trodden paths** are important for you?

Have you ever **reached an impasse** in your professional life? What did you do?

Do you use **temporizing tactics**? When?

Have you come across **vociferous resistance**? Where?

Name an **inspirational figure** in your life

When do you feel a **visceral refusal** to doing something?

Add one or two questions of your own using the vocabulary in the exercise above.

The second lesson opens with a quick review of the previous one, leading into a radio discussion programme on the meaning of the good life (BBC podcast, 2012). As a pre-listening they discuss their own ideas of the good life (especially as far as money and material goods are concerned) followed by some decoding exercises before the listening proper. The three guests on the programme argue their idea: one regarding the market as the central factor, one seeing wealth as only a means not as an end and the third calling for restrictions on growth in the name of the environment and planetary survival.

This leads on – further in the lesson – to a reflection on the market and how market language has entered our everyday conversation inducing us to think in economic terms. Again the argument is spaced out by work on linking sounds (Hancock 2005) vocabulary and verbal constructions (Hewings 2009).

The third lesson requires students to bring in their own articles to present to each other in informal groups to give a break from economics, practise talking about their subject in English and enable them to use what they are learning in the lessons.

They then look at biopics – how they might present themselves in writing for conference or journal papers, a review of the language of cause and effect, linking words in pronunciation and again a review of vocabulary.

The argument, however, is carried through by watching a video of Aziza Chaouni (2014), who designed a restructuring of the river running though Fez in Morocco creating urban spaces along the river for shops and recreation. Here, students are asked to assess how far such a project is compatible with de-growth politics and whether they think it should be compatible. Finally, students are asked to design a project for Udine – using the language they have looked at on the way.

4. REFLECTION

The success of this approach, focussed on an ends rather than a needs analysis, depends on three factors: teachers and students have to agree first to take a broader view of the content of a module and then focus on group and finally individual needs after. Feedback suggests this works well in the context of this course. The quotes in the following section are from feedback in three classes ending respectively in February 2013 (2013a), May 2013 (2013b), and February 2016, chosen from others only on the grounds that they were more comprehensive than other years.

The main challenge then, from the teacher's point of view, is to ensure that most (if not all) students accept the philosophy and aims of the course. These are clearly set out in the first lesson and are generally endorsed by the students from the outset. Student attentiveness and participation during the course indicate that they learn to further appreciate the philosophy as they experience it: «working with other colleagues is probably the most rewarding part of the course. The informal atmosphere facilitates our learning and eliminates the fear of public speaking, to meet each other and to make mistakes. In my opinion it was very interesting and stimulating to meet colleagues who deal with matters very different from mine, and I must confess that I have learned a lot of unexpected things» (Alessandro 2013b).

However, they do occasionally feel discouraged by being asked to cover topics that are not closely related to their own. They can feel that they do not have any in-depth insight and thus not enough information to give their own opinion (Sonia 2016). Their reaction usually requires on the spot encouragement from the teacher to help them see the positive learning opportunities and to acknowledge that, as highly specialised topics cannot be an organising tactic in such a general course, they can listen to others and glean at least some information about the topic. They will then have time every three

weeks to talk about their own subject in groups and one occasion to give a presentation about it, if they so wish.

In the end, there is usually one topic at least that attracts a student from the four that are offered in the syllabus. This preference is quite personal and the teacher can bring out and exploit students' interest as they move through the modules.

This having been said, students generally seem to appreciate the approach: «the course was well-structured and organized, incorporating readings, discussion, listening, grammar and vocabulary» (Monica 2016). The skill they generally want to practise the most is speaking; «In particular I like the speaking activities: speaking is the main problem for me, because often I don't have anyone to talk to in English so I can't improve the language without a specific course like your [sic]» (Paola 2016). However, the final role plays are sometimes thought to be too demanding: «The only thing that I don't like too much is the part 'role play' because it takes time and sometimes it is difficult to speak about a general topic even if this activity gives you the possibility to improve English» (Annamaria 2013b). Although this comment seems to question the approach, it may well be that the student saw role play as taking time away from more 'useful' quick exercises and practice.

Students also tend to ask for more listening, which in effect they usually find difficult: «I found some problems with listening, perhaps, as we said in class, (it) would help (if we had) the subtitles in the second listening [i.e. the short video listening]» (Federica 2016). Again they have opportunities to practise listening skills in every lesson (an element built in because of student feedback in past years).

Another frequent request from some is for more grammar and writing: «I would just propose adding or modifying somehow some grammar modules. What I mean is when I did the grammar exercise during the lessons with the grammar rules in front of me everything seemed quite easy, but during the exam I had some doubts» (Anastasia 2013a). Grammar is addressed but at quite a high level. For those who feel they have gaps in their grammar competence, homework

exercises on the various tenses, modals, participles as well as other issues can be set, as required by individual classes, and checked in the following lesson.

The writing has been addressed in the most recent course by offering work on writing introductions, constructing an argument, making recommendations and drawing conclusions. This, however, does not usually lead to much writing as students always claim to have little time outside class to do homework. One suggestion from the students themselves has been to write about the topics (a summary, argument or comments) for ten to twenty minutes in a free writing exercise in the last class of each module. This can be trialled in further courses.

Students always bring their own individual needs to the class. For example, Saida (2013b) had hoped for more grammar, especially First Certificate type exercises, as she wanted to take the Cambridge exam. Despite this her formal feedback was positive: «Attending these lessons I've kept on exercising my English. Thanks for all». She subsequently opted to follow a Cambridge preparation course at the language centre in the University.

This feedback thus does not seem to question the approach, but rather underlines its efficacy. The collegial work around specific topics allowing space for reflection and language work is always well regarded. The problems tend to revolve around how much time to give to grammar and writing or other linguistic aspect/skill. The consensus then is that the course, even though it can undoubtedly be developed, works.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, in conclusion, the EAP course sought to establish the ends of the course first and analyse student needs as they arose. The ends were established as the development of the ability to discuss a variety of topics from different viewpoints in an academic way through the use

of a sharing/experiential rather than technical approach to learning. The course was divided into four modules each centred on one topic. These topics (in the example above: de-growth), are developed from a variety of viewpoints via a reading, listening and reflective tasks, allowing students to see and experience the subject from different angles. In the meanwhile students touch on aspects of English and finally draw their own conclusions via a role play or discussion on the topic. This enables skills to be developed in a context, avoids making the learning technical and dry and activates informed ideas rather than mere opinion. It seeks what we have called a disinterested search for the truth bringing both truth and life to the learning process, which from the comments fed back to us is generally appreciated by the students themselves.

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