SOME DIFFICULTIES OF TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH TO THE ALBANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract*: One of the aims of specialized language courses is to prepare students for professional communication with other specialists worldwide. Successful communication means not only to be able to speak about a certain problem or subject but it also means to be able to talk about various needs. When planning any ESP course, teachers of English language should consider the idea that the students' purposes and interests are too large extent uniform. As a variety of ESP, Business English implies specific terminology which might look like a daunting task both for teachers and students, when, in fact it only proves to be a matter of preparation and teaching it is not a lot more difficult than teaching general English. The present paper tackles the difficulties of teaching business specific vocabulary or terminology considering the case of the Albanian students at the University of Vlora in Albania, offering some solutions to overcome the problems that both teachers and students may encounter. The aim of this article is to summarize an innovative, task-based business English course for university students studying business.*

Keywords*: terminology, facilitate, communication, simulation, task-based.*

1. Historical Overview of (ESP) and teaching English in Albanian schools

From 1945 until 1991, Albania was ruled by the communist government which used to follow the Soviet model in all fields of the society, even in education. The policy followed by the Albanian Government was that of extreme isolation. After 1991, the social and political system of Albania was radically changed, from communism to democracy. This transition to democracy brought with it a lot of social changes. The most important thing was that people won the right of freedom, such as the right of moving from one place to another, the right of property, the right of religious belief etc.

Such radical social change had also a great impact on the Albanian education system, especially with regard to foreign languages. The most important foreign languages taught in Albania up to 1991 were: Russian, French and English. Russian was the language which was taught in the greatest number of schools in Albania. French and English became the second. After 1991 English and French were established as the most important languages taught in Albanian schools, overtaking the Russian, which had previously been compulsory at all levels. Gradually, English became the most preferable language, this because it offered people a greater variety of new employment and study possibilities. The new job opportunities required knowledge of English language to facilitate communication with the foreigners. During this time the students who learned English at schools increased.

2. The nature of the target group

After the nineties Albania underwent great changes even in the educational system. New and more practical teaching methods were introduced. Seminars and other

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activities were organized to help teachers introduce them in class. New course books suitable for particular age groups were adapted. The introduction of a new methodology of teaching and assessing students have considerably affected the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of new knowledge, by giving this process more variety and effectiveness. All these changes as a response not only to the development of our country, but also to the possibility to be as near as never before to the more developed countries (European and others

The first step in formulating a specialized course of any kind is to consider and pay attention to the nature and main features of the target group that the teacher will teach English. All the students of business at University of Vlora in Albania are Albanian-speaking students. This is the majority of them have been taught English language in the high schools. Some of them have also studied other foreign languages such as; Italian, French, Spanish, Greek and German. Most of them have been studying English for more than eight years. It is radically recognized by all layers of Albanian society that English is an important element in development as an international language of communication.

Students are greatly encouraged to talk in the foreign language by being interviewed, by being asked to introduce themselves or to talk about a particular topic, which are part of oral testing. The students should be able to express opinions, to give ideas, to write correctly in a foreign language. Students are tested not only individually but also in pairs or in groups. Pair work and group discussion are given great emphasis, because they increase the sense of shared work, of coping with the others, of doing the best to succeed. These activities increase the sense of community on the whole.

To acquire command of a foreign language, the learner should learn the basic skills of that language. From my experience of teaching business students, I have noticed that my students make common mistakes. Most of the Albanian learners' mistakes are caused by the influence of their native language, whereas some of them are caused by overgeneralization, simplification, avoidance and overproduction.

3. Some difficulties encountered by Albanian learners of English Language (ESP)

3.1. Problems related to the grammar

In morphology we can mention the case of using proper nouns without case endings, as they appear in English language. So, instead of saying: "Bill-i tha…" it is written as it is used in English language: "Bill tha….". Instead of "Sipas Bush-it…" we find it like: "Sipas Bush…"

The number of lexical borrowings is rapidly increasing in Albanian. Some of the recent borrowings used very often in Albanian are: *akses, draft, auditim, biznesmen, masmedia, impact, implementim, marketing, sensitive, lidership, minimarket, killer, input, monitoroj, partneritet, opsion, poster, staf, star, shou, sponsor, tender, spot, parking, test, terminal* etc.

The use of incorrect comparative and superlative forms of the adjectives and adverbs is another common mistake of these learners. For example: 'this is more easier/more easy than…/ the most funniest', 'drive more faster' instead of 'this is easier than…/the funniest', 'drive faster'. Influenced by Albanian language (comparative – më i lehtë/më lehtë, superlative më i lehti), students use the adverb 'more/most' before one- and two-syllable adjectives, besides the use of the comparative or superlative morpheme –er or –est. In the same vein, the learners use comparative structures as 'I prefer tea than coffee' instead of 'I prefer tea to coffee'.

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The form of adverbs is also confused with those of adjectives. As in Albanian the same form can be used as an adjective (është i keq – is bad) and as an adverb (e trajton keq – treats him badly), the learners use an adjective form 'She treated him so bad' for an adverb one 'She treated him so badly'. Incorrect use of elliptic structures: 'A: Did you visit your friend yesterday? B: Yes, I visited' instead of 'Yes, I did'; that is because in such Albanian sentences it is used the verb itself, not the auxiliary verb. Based on these findings, it should be noted that most of the Albanian learners' mistakes are caused by the influence of their native language, whereas some of them are caused by overgeneralization, simplification, avoidance and overproduction.

A number of English words are used in Albanian language with the same orthography as they are used in English, for example: *internet, email, weekend, fast-food, top-show, thriller, live, task-force, hit, top, voice* etc.

3.2. Problems related to the phonemes.

Pronunciation is not an optional extra for the language learner, any more than grammar, vocabulary or any other aspect of language is. If a learner's general aim is to talk intelligibly to others in another language, a reasonable pronunciation is important. While learning the pronunciation of a foreign language, the learner often confronts different phonetic and phonological problems that obviously hinder his/her learning and ultimately prevent him/her from acquiring expected general proficiency in the oral and auditory skills of the target language. This phenomenon is also evident in the learning of pronunciation of English as a foreign language (EFL) by the Albanian speaking learner.

Phonological differences between foreign languages and English include differences in articulation, rhythm, and intonation. With respect to articulation, we determine which vowels and consonants do not exist in the first language and which ones are simply pronounced differently. Examining the vowels of English and Standard Albanian, we learn that English lacks the Albanian vowel phoneme [y] as in the Albanian word "ylli".

Both as a learner and a teacher-researcher of EFL, I have had practical experience of and the opportunity to observe the difficulties that the Albanian speaking learners usually face in learning English pronunciation. English is a non-phonetic language since there exists no one-to-one correspondence between the graphemes (the letters of the alphabet) and the sounds actually pronounced and perceived. Albanian is a phonetic language so the Albanian speaking EFL learners, especially the elementary ones try so hard to learn by heart the pronunciations of the words by looking at their spellings, so that sometimes they learn mispronunciations of many of them. for example: in the words "knee", "know" they pronounce even the first phoneme [k] which should not be pronounced; they say [know] instead of [now]. From the phonetic and phonological standpoint, the Albanian speaking EFL learners usually face difficulties in, firstly, 'speech production' encompassing which articulator(s) to use how to pronounce which speech sound and how to pattern speech sounds to convey meaning and, secondly, in 'speech perception' including how to receive which speech sound(s) to perceive meaning. The difficulties certainly have seriously negative impact on their acquiring the speaking and listening skills of EFL.

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3.3. Problems related to the vowels and consonants

The English language has twelve monophthongs or pure vowels. They are classified into two main groups: long vowels (five long ones) and short vowels (seven ones). The Albanian language has got seven vowels: [i, u, a, e, ë, o, y]. They have got the same length. The Albanian -speaking EFL learners, usually, find the long monophthongs of the English language difficult and problematic, for example, in the words "sheep" [ʃ i: p] and "ship" [ʃ i p], the Albanian learners confuse the long [i:] with the short [i] and this results in misunderstanding.

The Albanian learners, also, find it difficult to make the difference between the open vowels and the close ones; for example they confuse the English [æ] with [e] which results in confusing singular with plural in the irregular nouns, for example "man" [mæn] and "men" [men]. The English contrastive monophthongs sometimes cause substantial problems in the learners' articulation as well as perception of utterances because the difference between them is not that much exercised in the Albanian language. This is because, differently from the English language, vowel length in the Albanian language is neither a phonetic aspect, nor a phonological one.

To emphasize an issue or express different attitudes and emotional effects, Albanian vowels are sometimes lengthened to some degree. Standard Albanian has got 27 consonants. The main division of the Albanian consonants is: voiced consonants and voiceless ones. Like the English language they are divided into: stops (sounds which are made by interfering with the airstream passing through the mouth by closing the oral passage), fricatives which are quite similar to the English consonants, affricates (which are formed by closing the air passage as for a stop and releasing it through a narrow space as for a fricative). In Albanian the apical affricates "c" and "x" (like English "ts" and "dz", respectively) are not very frequent, but unlike their English counterparts, they may appear at the beginning of syllables as well as at the end.

Another problem encountered by the Albanian learners is the pronunciation of the phoneme [w]. Neither the letter "w" nor the phoneme [w] exist in the alphabet of the Albanian language. It is rather difficult for the Albanian learners to distinguish the pronunciation of [w] from [u], they pronounce them almost in the same way. The Albanian linguists "are faced with the problem to find a solution for a new letter to be added to the Albanian alphabet."[1]

3.4. Problems related to the syllable division

Languages differ in the way they divide the stream of speech into syllables and in the structure or makeup of their syllables. Languages react in various ways when two or more of their speech sounds come together.

Assimilation takes place if one of the sounds changes to become similar to its adjacent sound. Elision may occur when two or more sounds come together. Languages vary in the way they link together or separate words and phrases.

Syllables in English are of two types: opened syllables which end in a long vowel or diphthong and closed syllables which end in consonants. The closed syllable is the most common spelling unit in English; it accounts for just under 50 percent of the syllables in running text. When the vowel of a syllable is short, the syllable will be closed off by one or more consonants. Therefore, if a closed syllable is connected to another syllable that begins with a consonant, two consonant letters will come between

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the syllables (com-mon, but-ter). If a syllable is open, it will end with a long vowel sound spelled with one vowel letter; there will be no consonant to close it and protect the vowel (to-tal, ri-val, bi-ble, mo-tor).

Therefore, when syllables are combined, there will be no doubled consonant between an open syllable and one that follows. A few single-syllable words in English are also open syllables. They include me, she, he and no, so, go. A special kind of syllables in English is that syllable which is formed with sonorants, for example: peo-ple [pi:-pl]. In Albanian language the syllables are mainly open syllables, i.e. the border is after the vowel, for example: fsha-ti, qy-te-ti etc.

3.5. Problems related to the stress and intonation

English is a stress-timed language possessing a speech rhythm in which the stressed syllables recur at equal intervals of time. In Albanian the main stress falls on the last word of a phrase, on the last stem of a compound word, and on the last syllable of a polysyllabic word.

English stress placement varies according to grammatical categories, for example, 'abstract', 'conduct', 'contract', 'contrast', 'import', 'incline', 'insult', 'perfect', 'present', 'produce', 'rebel', and so forth as verbs receiving stress on the second syllables and as nouns on the first that's why the Albanian learners confront some problems in putting the word stress in the appropriate place.

English language has got words with two stresses, primary and secondary stress. There are also compound words and phrasal verbs which have got two primary stresses for example, "arm-chair", "look after", etc. Words such as 'introduce', 'photographic', 'examination', excavation', responsibility', receive both primary and secondary stress and are difficult to be pronounced by the Albanian learners who are used to the Albanian words which have got only one word stress.

3.6. Problems related to the rhythm

English, with an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, is obviously stress-timed, while Albanian is a language with the prominence and strength on the peninsula or last syllables. These two languages, therefore, are very different in rhythm. Unfortunately, many Albanian students seem not to be aware of this striking difference. As a consequence, they tend to apply the rhythm of Albanian when speaking English. They do not even know that their English speech rhythm is affected by the rhythm of Albanian, nor do they know that this improper rhythm makes their English speech unnatural and hard to be understood.

4. Resources we use to teach Business English to Albanian students

As in the general English classroom, learners will expect you to bring materials to class. There are lots of books and online resources available, but it's important to choose materials that create 'authentic' situations in the classroom. Probably the most important resource is the learners themselves. They can provide you with real materials from their working lives - the things they need to read and understand, or perhaps even create and present. These could be leaflets, emails, PowerPoint presentations or reports. Learners will probably expect you to take some of these resources and create your own worksheets from them.

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Learners of business English are often attracted to company websites that are popular and established. These websites not only provide authentic materials, but also furnish the learners with up-to-date statistics as most corporate websites publish their company details and annual reports on the World Wide Web. In particular, company websites give details about company history, marketing strategies, product information, and advertising methods and so on. In order to create an authentic learning context, the teachers can bring real companies into the classroom. For instance, the learners could be asked to compare and contrast two organizations (KFC and Mc Donald's) that belong to the same industry. The books, that provide specific information about particular companies, are hard to come by or none. Therefore, internet is a great source of information for the learners of business English.

Authentic materials from a particular source type, such as *The Economist*, tend to work in consistent areas of language, so after a while, students who practice reading The Economist will become experts, not only in reading *The Economist* but also other materials in English language.

5. Conclusion

Business English is a variety of ESP and shares characteristics with General English, differing in point of content. We are living in a global world and developing a global economy and business which need a global business language, that is Business English. There are certain difficulties encountered by Albanian students in the process of learning ESP. The above analysis, interpretation and exemplification have clearly revealed that the Albanian speaking EFL learner encounters diverse problems resulting from three basic causes. (a) the differences between the mother tongue and the target language, (b) mother tongue interference and (c) the faulty and inadequate teaching of EFL pronunciation. We presented some of them in order to facilitate the work of the English instructors to help students improve their speaking, listening, writing and vocabulary memorizing skills. Using authentic materials in teaching English makes it easier for the students to overcome difficulties caused because of native language influences But, as the saying goes, "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink".

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