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Challenges in Teaching English for Tourism

The present paper aims at giving an overview of the particular challenges of teaching English to students in tourism, a field which has seen a considerable development over the recent period. The paper is divided into four parts: the first part offers an introduction to the importance of English for tourism specialty students; the second part focuses on the appropriate syllabus development framed with foreign language activities; the third part makes reference to the teaching materials to be used with a view to enhancing students' language proficiency; the last part presents some possible challenges language teachers and their students have to cope with to successfully accomplish the learning objectives.

Peculiarities of Teaching English for Specific Purposes.

Nowadays, English has become one of the most widespread languages around the world. Due to its growing use, a tendency for designing specialized courses for the English classroom that target more specific outcomes and industries is observed. By addressing specific audiences and catering for specific needs English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a sample of this category. In this paper, emphasis is placed on English for Tourism and the teaching strategies that are utilized in order to adjust the course to learners' needs [4].

In order the course to be successful the teacher has to design an appropriate syllabus, which will include activities that would be in accordance with the learners' needs. It depends on the learners of what kind of tourism jobs they are interested. The teacher should prepare materials that would interest and benefit the learners. The teacher's knowledge about tourism and the appropriate materials for this course are what make the intended goal achieved. If the teacher uses only the textbooks for tourism, then that course will be the same as studying English in general. These activities will help learners broaden their vocabulary and knowledge related to tourism and will facilitate teachers to create an appropriate and enjoyable environment for the learners when teaching English for tourism [3].

Activities Applied in the Learning Process.

- *Posters and fly swatter* - by using these activities students learn all the vocabulary words that have to do with planning and managing accommodation. The appropriate materials for this activity are *booking forms*.
- *Video clips* - by watching video clips that have to do with meeting and greeting customers, the learners get to know how to behave with customers.
- *Role play - learners practice conversations*, by playing the role as the hotel manager and the other one as a customer, also they practice different ways for introducing products to customers, by making them offers. In this activity the learners can use *objects*.

- *Teacher presentation* - by using the *computer*, the teacher presents to the students how to plan work schedules for the employee.
- *Interview* - one student takes the role as the hotel manager and the other one as the candidate that needs to be employed in the hotel, and the hotel manager interviews the candidate to see his/her skills. This activity helps the learners how to communicate best face-to-face.
- *Group work* - the learners will be able to organize and conduct tours, by practicing in the classroom. For example, from each group of the class, a volunteer would be the tourist guide and give information to visitors (students) for different places. *Magazines* and *pictures* are used as materials for this activity.
- *Debate* - by using debates the learners of tourism will be able to communicate with diverse groups of people.
- *Corpora- students* need to search materials and be prepared, because they have to give information to visitors about history, art, architecture, etc. The students work in pairs, because they learn from one another. Corpora also help learners for organizing and managing different activities. It is appropriate to use *authentic materials* and *the internet*.
- *Giving advice* - by using this activity the learners become responsible for solving problems. They work in pairs. One student has the problem card and the other one need to find a solution about the particular problem. The materials used for this activity are *problem cards*.
- *Dialogues* - help the learner practice of how to welcome customers, how to behave with them and what to offer them. *Handouts* are useful for this activity [3].

English for Tourism Project.

The British Council in partnership with the Centre for Secondary and Specialised Education have launched the English for Tourism project. The project aims to improve the English language level of graduates from 11 tourism colleges to enable them to meet the modern requirements of employers in the tourism sector. As part of the project a contemporary English language course for students of tourism colleges has been developed. The course is based on the British Council "Learn English for Tourism" it was supplemented with extension activities designed by a team of local experts together with a UK consultant to tailor the materials for Uzbekistan context. The course focuses on listening, speaking and writing skills and also includes material on team working, communication and e-mail skills. The piloting of the new course started in February 2014. The project also provides teacher training opportunities for English language teachers in tourism college [1].

Resources in the Field of English for Tourism and Hospitality.

The book market in the field of English for tourism and hospitality has lately been enriched by the publication of a lot of textbooks which comply with these principles, the best known being the *English for International Tourism* series (Pearson Education Longman), the *Oxford*

English for Careers: Tourism series, the *English for Tourism and Hospitality in Higher Education* series (Garnet Education), *Test Your Professional English: Hotel and Catering* (Pearson Education), *English for the Travel and Tourism Industry* (CUP). They are all English courses for tourism, generally speaking, without focusing on particular branches, visually appealing, sometimes accompanied by additional

materials such as workbook, teacher's book or even test booklets, which make them extremely attractive for students and convenient for teachers, had it not been for their sometimes prohibitive prices. Apart from these books issued by publishing houses of international repute, there are also extremely valuable and useful materials published in our country: *English for Tourism and Hospitality Industry* (authored by experienced teachers in the University of Bucharest, C. Prelipceanu et al., 2005), *Lucrul în străinătate: hoteluri, baruri, restaurante, vase de croazieră* (Editura Aula, Braşov, 2007), *English for Tourism Professionals and Staff* (Adriana Iacov, Casa de Editură Irecson, 2003), *English for Tourism Managers* (G. Raţă, Editura Mirton, Timișoara, 2004) [2].

Nevertheless, despite their quality, most of these materials can only rarely be used in class as such. This happens because, first of all, they cover many teaching hours, generally around one hundred, which means that it would take more than three semesters to cover one level. This means that, most of the times, the teacher should adapt these materials for class use, skipping certain activities or, if necessary, expanding on others [2].

Consequently, the solution to really meet students' needs lies in the customization of these materials. First of all, according to the students' needs, they can be combined with Internet resources, which are very generous, with dedicated web sites, which provide very useful and diverse exercises: alison.com/learn/English-for-Tourism, learnenglishfeelgood.com, esl-lab.com, englishformyjob.com, englishclub.com, business-english.com, bbcenglish.com, onestopenglish.com [2].

Conclusions.

At the end of the paper, instead of a conclusion, we consider it worth mentioning a few challenges that both English teachers and their tourism students have to cope with to accomplish the learning objective.

First of all, reference should be made to the need for improvement at institutional level, because, despite the European plea for harmonization within higher education, there is actually no coherent policy related to language teaching and learning in higher education, including here the field of economics.

Another problematic area is that of the lack of a genuine needs analysis among students, which should actually correlate students' self-perceived language level with their high school reports for English and results at diagnostic tests, on the one hand, and with subsequent investigations regarding learning styles, adaptation difficulties and other individual variables, on the other hand [2].

Another problem that teachers may face, especially with 2nd year students, when more specialized language is introduced, is that students do not always have the background content knowledge to get involved in communicative activities. That is why interdisciplinary cooperation could be a solution in this respect.

Then, the size of the groups very often limits teachers in their pursuit for applying modern teaching methods, a fact which reduces the efficiency of certain activities and encourages social loafing.

The last challenge to be mentioned here is connected to the teacher, who has to be willing to be a lifelong trainee, to have insight into the field of tourism, in which he/she is not a specialist, as well to permanently update and adapt teaching materials.

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