

# MAIN DIFFERENCES AMONG ENGLISH FOR GENERAL PURPOSES (EGP), ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP), AND ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP) THROUGH THE COMPARISON OF THREE TEACHING SAMPLES

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper compares), English for General Purposes (EGP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Definitions, characteristics, classifications of EGP, ESP and EAP; as well as differences among them will be discussed and illustrated through three course books. This paper hopes to help readers have a clearer understanding about these three concepts.

**Key words:** English for General Purposes, EGP, English for Specific Purposes, ESP, English for Academic Purposes, EAP.

## 1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has existed as an independent part of English Language Teaching (ELT) for several decades (Dudley-Evans, 2001:131), and has proved its value as well as distinction in comparison with English for General Purposes (EGP). And as a result of the development of ESP, there have been many smaller branches within this discipline, among which English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been regarded as an important sub-field. In this paper, I will discuss the major differences between EGP, ESP, and EAP with some evidences to illustrate what I have presented, followed by some suggestions for language teaching. The main content of the paper will be divided into two parts. In the first part, I will look at the definitions, characteristics and

classifications of these three areas. In the second part, I will define some main differences between them, use some teaching materials to illustrate these differences and provide some comments on the significance of these differences to teaching in these three branches of ELT.

## 2. Definitions, characteristics and classifications of EGP, ESP and EAP

In this section, I will introduce some different opinions about definitions and classifications of EGP, ESP, and EAP, before coming to a definition with typical features and classification which can be found to be suitable for the purpose of this paper.

It seems that there has not been much disagreement on the way EGP, ESP and EAP are defined and categorized. According to Jordan (1997:3-4), EGP

and ESP are both main branches of ELT. EGP can be understood as English “for no particular purposes” (Jordan, 1997:3), or “TENOR” – “the Teaching of English for No Obvious Reason” (Jordan, 1997:4). From what has been presented, it can be comprehended that EGP is taught not for a very immediate purpose. This can be proved especially through many EGP syllabuses at primary and secondary schools, aiming at school children who do not usually have an urgent need for the use of English. That does not mean that EGP has no purposes. However, the purpose here is usually a long-term one, not a short-term one. Depending on the policies on ELT and EGP of each country, this purpose may be developing a comprehensive knowledge (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and practical skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in using English, or emphasizing on one aspect but partly ignoring others. Besides being long-term, the purpose is also not specific, which is the reason why EGP has this name. EGP is just for using English better, or understanding more about it, or both, without a particular aim. It appears that Jordan’s definition is clear and simple but enough in this context to distinguish it with ESP.

So from the definition of EGP mentioned above, one may assume that ESP is for particular purposes, and this assumption can be regarded as very close to what many authors in this discipline agree. Needs can be regarded as one important factor besides others. There have been many definitions of ESP, and one of which is the definition introduced by Dudley-Evans and St John (2001:4-5). In this definition, ESP consists of absolute and variable characteristics:

### **1. Absolute characteristics**

- ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
- ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

### **2. Variable characteristics**

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume basic

knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

Among these characteristics, absolute ones are elements which must exist, and variable features are those which may exist or not, depending on particular situations. There are three absolute characteristics, and needs have been regarded as the key and defining feature of ESP. About the second characteristic, it can be understood that ESP may use some methodology and activities that EGP does not use. For example, an English for doctors coursebook may use some conversations which resemble real-life conversations between doctors and patients to teach the necessary language elements to those who are going to work as a doctor in an English-speaking environment. The third characteristic is about the focus of ESP, with the notable point that the language, skills, discourse and genres must be narrowed down to certain specific fields, depending on the natures and requirements of each subfield of ESP.

In comparison with the absolute characteristics, some of the variable ones seem to coincide a bit. The first two variable ones can be easily deduced from the absolute ones. The third is about learners’ age and the studying/working environments they may be in, which can be considered being worth paying attention to when designing a course in ESP. The last is also important for ESP course designers because that may affect the language input for ESP materials.

The definition discussed above seems rather comprehensive and can serve as a good basic definition for this paper. So when the two definitions of EGP and ESP are compared together, it can be seen that they differ from each other in needs, in methodology and activities used (though only partly), and in the language and skills taught. Further explanations will be provided in the next section.

In fact, EAP is only a branch of ESP. According to Jordan (1997:3), ESP can be divided into two sub-fields: English for Occupational/Vocational/Professional Purposes (EOP/EVP/EPP) and EAP. EOP/EVP/EPP are for those who need to know how to use English in practical situations to do their jobs, and this type of English has many special features in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and genres that EGP can not sufficiently provide learners with. EAP is for those who need English with special features for studying specific fields, not for working. Jordan (1997:3) also furthered this division by dividing EAP into English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP). The former is English for those who study in particular fields, and

the latter is “general English” for those studying in an academic environment and not related to a specific field such as law or medicine. Dudley-Evans and St John (2001: 5-7) and Kennedy and Bolitho (1984:3-6) also adopted a similar division with few differences in details. Therefore, Jordan’s classification can be regarded as a basis in this paper.

From what has been discussed above, it can be deduced that EAP has ESP’s features, with the focus on helping people in their academic study. Hyland (2006:1) also defines EAP as “teaching English with the aim of assisting learners’ study or research in that language”. It seems that Hyland’s definition can be considered a good basis for further discussion in this paper.

So until now it is clear what EGP, ESP and EAP are, and some features of them have been discussed. However, in order to understand the differences between them, more information is needed, which will be presented in the next part.

### 3. Main differences between EGP, ESP and EAP

Based on the definitions of EGP, ESP and EAP which have been presented above and regarded as the basis for this paper, I will look at main differences between EGP, ESP and EAP, use three teaching materials as examples to illustrate my points, and offer some suggestions for teaching in these areas. The teaching materials are Academic Writing for Graduate Students by Swales, M.J. & Feak, C.B. (which can serve as a self-study document or a teaching material), Flightpath – Student’s Book by Shawcross, P., and New English File: Pre-Intermediate – Student’s Book by Oxeden, C., Latham-Koenig, C. and Seligson, P. More details about these books can be found in the Reference section. For the convenience of discussing them, in the rest of this paper they will be referred to as T1, T2 and T3 respectively.

For these main differences, I will consider them in two groups: languages and skills, on the basis of the absolute characteristics of ESP. The importance of needs for ESP and EAP is in fact reflected in many aspects of these two branches of ELT, so it is not necessary to discuss it separately. Methodology is an important factor, but it is impossible to fully exemplify it only through teaching materials, because it is also directly related to the way teachers teach in real-life conditions. Thus, it will not be discussed in this paper.

#### 3.1. Differences in language.

##### 3.1.1. Grammatical differences through teaching materials and implication for teaching.

In Unit 1 – An Approach to Academic Writing

– of T1, Swales and Feak (2004:22-24) introduces many special grammatical rules which are considered as “formal grammar style”, such as “1. Generally avoid contractions”, “3. Limit the use of “run-on” expressions, such as and so forth and etc.”. Logical connectors which are usually used in EAP are also introduced in this unit (p. 27), with a table showing useful linking words and phrases in academic writing, divided by the linking function (subordinators for introducing a dependent clause which will go with a complete sentence, sentence connectors for introducing a complete sentence, and phrase linkers for introducing a noun phrase), and the function of showing meaning relationships, such as addition, cause and effect, clarification, contrast, and adversativity. Some of these logical connectors are although (subordinator - adversativity), because of (phrase linker – cause and effect), in contrast (sentence connector - contrast).

Another notable grammatical point of EAP presented in this book is the case of inversion (Swales and Feak, 2004: 208). They note that in EAP, the “negative” inversion is not usually used, such as “In no case do the authors provide any statistical information about their results”. In fact, this kind of inversion may appear in advanced-level textbooks and grammar books, but it is not common in EAP ones. Only another kind of inversion is usually used in EAP for the purpose of emphasizing, such as “Particularly important was the discovery that many computer viruses have no known source”.

So from some examples drawn from T1, it seems that the grammar in EAP, which is a part of ESP, has some rather strict rules with special emphasis on certain aspects of English grammar. This is different from the grammar in T3 – an EGP coursebook. In this book, common grammatical phenomena at pre-intermediate levels are presented with no special restriction in use, such as present simple (p. 6), so, because, but, although (p. 22), comparatives (p.44), verb + -ing (p.54).

From what has been discussed and illustrated about the differences between EGP and ESP, EAP, it seems that teachers should take more caution in teaching ESP and EAP than in teaching EGP. In EGP, common grammatical phenomena and rules are taught without much restriction. However, in ESP and EAP, the range is much more limited, especially in EAP with grammatical aspects and rules that do not apply in EGP and many grammatical features which should not be used. Therefore, teachers seem to have to be more careful, be aware of these differences and

prepare more before teaching grammar in ESP, EAP, which is not a great problem when teaching EGP.

### 3.1.2. *Lexical differences through teaching materials and implication for teaching.*

According to what Dudley-Evans and St John (2001: 82-83) have written about vocabulary in ESP which have been presented above, technical and semi-technical are the most noticeable features for ESP/EAP in terms of vocabulary. Technical terms are especially important in EOP. For example, in T2, some special words and phrases are only used in English for aviation, such as AIRPROX (the situation in which two aircrafts come dangerously close), MSA (the altitude below which aircrafts must not descend in the terminal area) (Shawcross, 2011:13). There are also other semi-technical words and phrases, such as “say again”, which sometimes means a request for clarification, not for repetition (Shawcross, 2011:10), or the word “taxi” in the sentence “Request taxi for departure to Montreal.” (Shawcross, 2011:8), which refers to the movement of an aircraft on its own power on the ground before taking off or after landing, not a car taking passenger to earn money as in everyday language. In EAP, people also tend to employ a certain range of words. For example, academic writers tend to use single words rather than phrasal verbs or prepositional verbs (Swales & Feak, 2004:18-19), such as “cause” rather than “bring on”, “investigate” rather than “look into”, “constitute” rather than “make up”.

On the contrary, such specifications and limitations are not usually found in EGP, and T3 is an example. For instance, vocabulary is introduced according to topics, such as “The body” (p. 147) with words like “head”, “face”, “hair”, “Holidays” (p.148) with phrases with go, such as “go swimming/sailing”, “go abroad”, “go to the beach”. In another word, vocabulary in EGP is usually for common, daily life and general purposes, but vocabulary for ESP/EAP is for restricted disciplines, and it is very clear that vocabulary in ESP/EAP can cause more difficulties for teachers than vocabulary in EGP, which is more familiar to them. The implication for teaching in this case is that a grasp of such terminologies is necessary. Some may argue that teaching technical vocabulary is not the job of ESP teachers, and thus the appearance of team teaching. However, personally, I still think that whatever the method may be, teachers should still try their best to learn and understand every technical and semi-technical words which will occur in their lessons. This means a lot of preparation and cooperation with subject specialists and maybe

students as well, especially in the case of some natural sciences like chemistry or physics.

### 3.1.3. *Discourse pattern and genre differences through teaching materials and implication for teaching.*

These types of differences seem to be the clearest in the field of EAP. For instance, Swales and Feak (2004:85) introduce a popular discourse pattern in EAP, which is the structure of a problem-solution text. There are four parts in this pattern: stating the situation, introducing the problem, providing the solution, and offering evaluation on the solution. This pattern is useful for students who need to write academic texts to show arguments and evaluation on certain problems. Another type of writing which seems to be difficult to be called “discourse pattern” or “subgenre” is data commentary. Academic students usually have to use this type of writing when they discuss data. According to Swales and Feak (2004:116), data commentaries usually have four parts: “1. Location elements and/or summary statements”, “2. Highlighting statements”, “3. Discussions of implications, problems, exceptions, recommendations, etc.” Besides introducing these three steps, they also provide some examples and tasks to illustrate their points (Swales and Feak, 2004:116-118). Apart from discourse patterns, many types of genres are also introduced in T1, such as parts of a research paper (Swales and Feak, 2004:221), which include title, abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, acknowledgements, and references.

For EGP, it can be said that discourse patterns and genres also exist, but they are different from those in ESP and EAP. For instance, in T3, discourse patterns and genres are usually introduced in the “Practical English” and “Writing” sections of each unit. The former is usually about conversational patterns in common daily life situations, and the latter is usually about popular and simple genres that people may have to use in everyday life. An example of that is the Practical English section of Unit 1 (p.12), in which a dialogue between a passenger and an immigration officer at the airport is introduced, and from that, teachers may teach students some practical patterns in conversation in similar cases. In the Writing section of the same unit (p.13), an email of introducing oneself is presented, and from that email, with the help of teachers, students can learn how to write an email to introduce themselves and make friend.

So it can be said that EGP and ESP/EAP focus on different discourse patterns and genres, which may mean that for the part of teachers, mastering such patterns and genres is the first requirement. Another

element which should be

paid attention to is the cultural factor, because different cultures may adopt similar genres and discourse patterns with identical functions, but the smaller steps or parts of such patterns of genres and their order as well as the way they operate is totally different. The discourse patterns and genres in EGP and ESP/EAP are Anglo-American, while some other oriental cultures, like the Chinese culture, may have different ideas about the right way to use such patterns and genres. Therefore, being aware of students' general cultural background may help teachers decide what they should do to help their students overcome this cultural gap and use the new discourse patterns and genres effectively.

### ***3.2. Differences in skills with teaching materials as examples and implication for teaching.***

Skills are an area which shows great differences between EGP and ESP. For EGP, it is common knowledge for English teachers that four basic language skills in English are listening, speaking, reading and writing. In EGP, these skills may be taught separately or integratedly, and each skill may consist of smaller sub-skills, such as skimming and scanning in reading, listening for details and listening for gist in listening.

However, in ESP and EAP, things are not the same, and an EGP teacher might encounter some difficulties in teaching these fields without certain knowledge about skills in ESP/EAP. Dudley-Evans and St John (2001: 95-120) provide a comprehensive discussion about skills in EAP and EOP. There are five macro-skills: "reading, listening (to monologue), listening and speaking, speaking (a monologue), and writing" (Dudley-Evans and St John, 2001: 95). Listening to monologue, such as listening to a business discussion, is different from listening and speaking, like in seminar where the listener can contribute ideas as a speaker, and making a presentation can be regarded as a case of speaking a monologue. This way of classification tends to be closer to the practical situations in ESP. For the writing skills, these two authors comment that such skills consist of other micro-skills, such as the skills of planning, drafting, and revising, so that the product can serve the purpose of writing and suitable for the intended readers (Dudley-Evans and St John, 2001: 115). Nevertheless, what they have presented can provide a general overview, but it is not detailed enough. Jordan (1997: 5-18) in his book about EAP presented very clearly the skills needed in EAP and he called them "study skills". For example, during lectures and academic talks, the necessary skills

are listening and understanding, note-taking, and asking questions for: repetition, clarification, and information. For academic writing, general skills needed are introducing, concluding, summarising, paraphrasing, and other sub-skills, and specific skills are describing, defining, exemplifying, hypothesising, and many other small skills like that.

The differences in skills taught in EGP and ESP/EAP can be illustrated through some related teaching materials. For example, in Unit 3 (p. 28 - 39) of T3, all the four basic skills of EGP are taught, such as listening (p. 29, 31), speaking (p. 29, 31), reading (p. 32), writing (p. 37). These skills are very general, and the content of language is related to everyday life. In contrast, the skills taught in ESP/EAP are more limited and directly related to situations which only exist in specific disciplines. T1 is an example. The purpose of this book is to teach students skills in academic writing, and this can be shown in many parts of the book, such as writing a general statement (p. 47), writing a definition (p. 49), writing a summary (p. 148 - 149). These subskills are only related to academic writing activities in academic fields, such as writing papers and dissertations.

From what has been discussed and exemplified about differences in skills between EGP and ESP/EAP, it seems that teaching necessary skills in EAP especially require great preparation and caution because of the complexities of such academic skills, and similar to what have been mentioned in the section about discourse pattern and genre differences, Anglo-Western academic skills may sometimes cause difficulties for students coming from another different culture, who may have been used to different academic skills. Therefore, EAP teachers should also be aware of that.

### **4. Conclusion.**

The origin of the differences between EGP and ESP, EAP is needs, which lead to differences in language (lexis, grammar, discourse patterns and genres), skills and methodology. These differences reflect dissimilarities in needs, and they have been illustrated through the analysis of some examples taken from three teaching materials in EGP, EOP and EAP, except the difference in methodology, because it seems to be impossible to fully exemplify it only through teaching materials. In summary, the implications for teaching in these three areas are: (1) teachers should be aware of students' needs and cultural/academic background in order to maximize the effectiveness of their teaching and satisfy students' needs; (2) teachers should ensure

they know and can effectively use and realize all the language, skills and methodology in their teaching; learning from students in class, especially in the case of ESP, can only be regarded as acceptable

when they have tried their best in their preparation for lessons, because if they do too much explicit learning from students in class, they no longer perform their teaching roles as expected■

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## **NHỮNG KHÁC BIỆT CHÍNH GIỮA TIẾNG ANH CƠ BẢN, TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH VÀ TIẾNG ANH HỌC THUẬT QUA VIỆC SO SÁNH 3 TÀI LIỆU GIẢNG DẠY**

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### **TÓM TẮT:**

Nghiên cứu này sẽ đưa ra sự so sánh giữa Tiếng Anh cơ bản (EGP), Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành (ESP) và Tiếng Anh học thuật (EAP). Tác giả sẽ bàn về định nghĩa, đặc điểm, phân loại và những sự khác biệt chính giữa 3 loại tiếng Anh này, đồng thời có sự minh họa thông qua ba giáo trình. Nghiên cứu này hy vọng có thể giúp độc giả hiểu biết thêm về 3 khái niệm tiếng Anh này.

**Từ khóa:** Tiếng Anh cơ bản, EGP, Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, ESP, Tiếng Anh học thuật, EAP.