

From Content-Centeredness to Learner-Centeredness in Teaching English for Specific Purposes

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Student / learner-created or student / learner-centred / generated content in the teaching of languages for specific purposes (LSP) is one of the possible ways-out of the intricate maze in which LSP lecturers often find themselves when dealing with a professional content different from their own. Lecturers of languages for specific purposes, mostly experts in linguistics or literature of a foreign language, are usually faced with professions different from theirs when they start their LSP adventure and are forced to master to a certain extent the profession whose language they intend to teach. Still, keeping abreast with the latest in a profession different from the LSP lecturers' own is a demanding and often hardly feasible task. Maritime English (ME) is used in an environment to which ME lecturers hardly have access, i.e. on board ocean-going and inland craft worldwide. The lecturer has to take a detour, insist on eliciting information from the professionals in the field and keep pace with the actual language requirements to meet. It still remains difficult to find adequate content for LSP purposes as the lecturer feels like a hurdles runner in a different profession field. Students interested in their future profession can often do better in this sense and should be engaged in the creation of course materials and their presentation in class. LSP lecturers should remain in their own field of the (language) coach, while students should actually run their race through the LSP course. Some ideas based in Maritime English are presented as an example of why and how student-created / centred content has become one of the principal approaches in the teaching / learning of Maritime English at the Faculty of Maritime Studies (FMS) in Split, Croatia and Gdynia Maritime University (GMU) in Gdynia, Poland.

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- ~ Course content
- ~ Maritime English

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is not to advocate a particular teaching/ learning theory, but to present a comparison of the experiences lived with students in different teaching / learning environments: that of a traditional lecture room with unidirectional approach against that of a constructivist, active student group creating new course content in the learning process, while the lecturer has the role of a consultant and mentor.

First, some reasons for a different approach are explained. Also, some of the theories supporting or incorporating different kinds of approach are presented. As an illustration, an example is provided from the Maritime English course as taught at the maritime universities in Split and Gdynia. The following chapters deal with the main advantages and disadvantages of the approach based on student creation of course contents. Finally, a possible future development of student-created content (SCC) is discussed and, instead of a conclusion, guidelines are provided for the implementation of SCC into ESP courses.

2. SOME FACTS ABOUT LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

Until the 1950s language learning classes were dominated by the traditional methods of rote learning of grammar principles accompanied with translation and memorization of vocabulary

followed by a massive number of examples to implant the knowledge for good (Sinhaneti and Shinawatra, 2012). This approach was widely accepted and corresponded well with the image of students in that period. They were supposed to be quiet, diligent, obedient and attentive, aware that their opinion did not matter and punished for causing disruption in class. Along with the civilizational progress, growing respect for human rights and development of international trade and tourism, linguists started to think about language teaching and class management much more flexibly and realistically¹ and the Grammar-Translation² method got in the end overshadowed with the introduction of newly devised techniques and defamed.

The 30-year-period between the 1950s and the 1980s is known as "The Age of Methods". It abounds with a number of language teaching methods that aim at teaching the productive skills by using the target language. Two new revolutionary methods made an entry simultaneously: the Situational Language Teaching in the United Kingdom and the Audio-Lingualism in the United States. These later became a breeding ground for many more alternatives known as Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia and others³.

In the 1980s, with even greater emphasis placed on humanistic aspects of learning⁴, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Walia, 2012) emerged, took the whole idea of language acquisition into a different dimension and evolved into what it is now in the so called developed countries (Nielsen, 2011). However, the success of the modern methods greatly depends on many aspects which may be difficult to achieve simultaneously unless there are enough funds and proper teaching facilities. Jeremy Harmer, in his handbook for language teachers titled *The Practice of ELT*, points out the most crucial ones: the background issues⁵, the practice⁶, and class management and planning⁷. He also presents how vulnerable these methods may be and why attempts of their implementation

may turn into a failure making them utterly counter-productive or turn against the teacher.

3. SOME FACTS ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL LECTURE ROOM

The traditional⁸ lecturing requires a traditional lecture room as a common teaching/learning environment. Students most often sit in a large auditorium in which they were hardly more than a number. It was difficult to really participate in the on-going lecture. Some of them, although interested in the topic could not appropriately concentrate on it as there were others, less interested, who distracted them in the lecture room brimming with students. Some students trying to follow the lecture eventually lost concentration while some others would slowly but incessantly melt down on the desk in front of them risking falling asleep. This may not have been a frequent case, but it cannot be denied that most lecturers lecturing in oversized lecture rooms to more than a 100 students in a group (have) witnessed it during their lectures. In the traditional lecture room equipped with a black-/white-/smart-board the lecturers mostly tried to do their best to explain a certain content to students using the board to illustrate or analyze the topic. In trying to do their best, perform as highly as possible and teach their students as much as they knew, the lecturers often forgot about the students sitting in the room opposite them as they were normally concentrated on what they were writing or showing on the board. Thus, in many a case the so necessary eye contact between the lecturers and their audience was lost, leaving the audience unattended. No eliciting opinions, answers from the students often used to result, and in some universities it still does, in the students' loss of concentration and eventual loss of interest. Some lecture rooms at universities are so large to require even more than one display on the same wall so that the students in the left half of the lecture room can better see what is displayed on the left screen and those in the right half, obviously, on the right screen. It is needless to say that the lecturers are forced to use the microphone in such a large lecture room if they wish to be heard equally well by all their audiences. The larger number of aids lecturers use, the farther they get from their audiences even though the original idea was just the opposite, i.e. to make better seen and heard what the lecturer has to show or say. Still, nothing can replace direct human eye and voice contact.

Sometimes it is the students who end up hopeless because they have missed important part of the lectures and eventually cannot keep pace with the course requirements, but on some occasions it can happen even to the lecturer that he/she starts

1. It can be traced back to Hymes (1972), who proposed that knowing a language involved more than knowing a set of grammatical, lexical and phonological rules.
2. Sometimes also named as the Classical Method, this is a traditional teaching technique that was used to teach Latin and Greek were particularly popular during the 16th ct. The focus at that time was on the translation of texts, grammar and rote learning of vocabulary. There was no emphasis on the productive skills or listening comprehension because Latin and Greek were taught more as academic subjects than means of oral communication.
3. Dincay, T. (2010:42)
4. In other words, linguists started to think not only about developing language teaching itself, but about finding ways and methods to assist students to develop themselves as persons, encourage them to take charge of their own learning, as in Harmer (2001:37)
5. Reasons and motivation for learning, what the learners already know, the age of learners, what they should learn, concerns if any.
6. Teaching materials, practice load and techniques
7. How classrooms and students can be best organised and lessons prepared, time allowed and consumed for practice.

8. *Traditional* refers to the lecturer's approach, not to be understood as characteristic of a particular period in time, as different approaches (the traditional one included) are still used at present, only the ratio of the methods implemented is different from what it was in the past.

feeling not effective enough by the end of the course. This is obviously the point at which the need is felt for a change in the teaching / learning styles.

4. FEATURES OF THE MODERN TEACHING / LEARNING STYLES

Modern teaching and learning styles are definitely different from both distant and recent past ones. The style in which the teachers are seen as omniscient creatures, who should only be attentively and unquestionably listened to and their words memorized, has been superseded for some time already. The student is no longer to be perceived as a cargo carrier onto which the teacher should smoothly load the cargo of knowledge of a number of facts discovered, analysed and systematised, i.e. containerised by the lecturer at a different place for the purpose. The learner-centred teaching methods shift the focus to the learner who is expected to find out, categorize, classify, relate

and describe the items of knowledge just as the shipper and the stevedore are expected to do with the cargo, while the student's mind becomes the active processor instead of a passive carrier. This transformation of teaching and learning models has been enabled by the developments in technology and desktop and mobile devices, which are continuously bringing new knowledge to the consumer's doorstep. This should inspire students' minds for a further research and let the consumer evolve into a producer.

One model of transforming the *ex cathedra* lectures into a more active form, allowing increased student participation is to make students inquire, search for content, present their findings, prepare comprehension questions for the rest of the group, compare their reports if more than one group have focused on the same topic and, eventually, prepare the exercises to test what they have learned. Even the 1st-year-students will most often gladly participate in the activities. On the other hand, a graduate student's presentation, questions and exercises will certainly be more elaborate. His peers will also be more capable of following

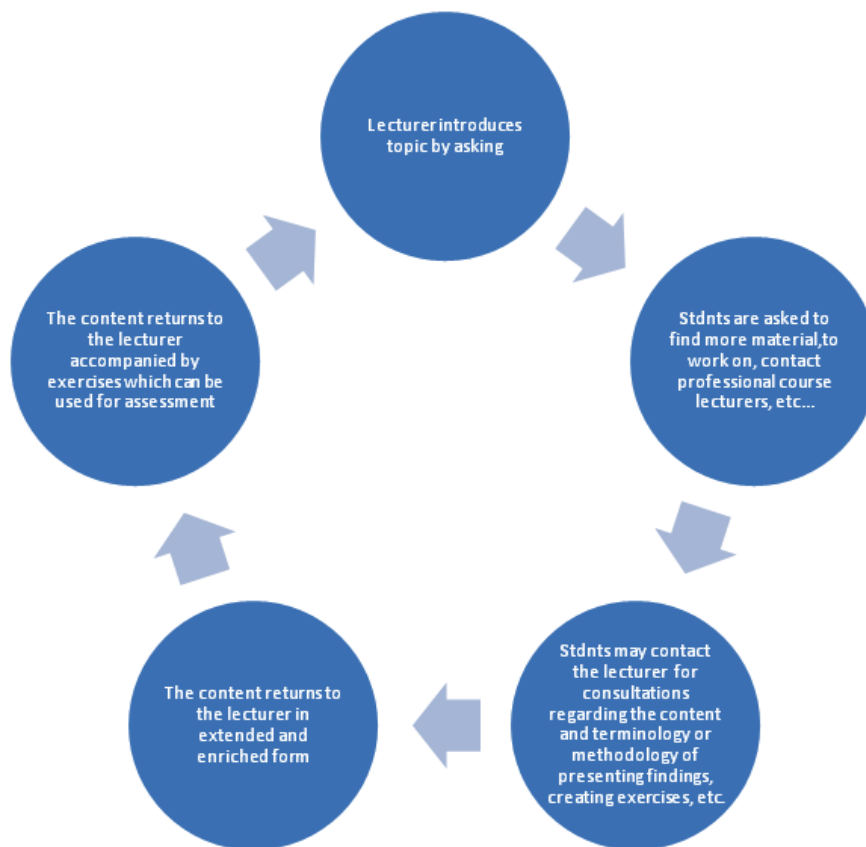


Figure 1.
The circular teaching / learning process (author: Čulić-Viskota, A.).

the presentation and doing the related exercises. Thus, the teaching / learning process gains a circular shape in which the lecturer introduces the topic by first asking the students about it, what they already know about it (because somebody usually has some knowledge which makes a good starting point). Students are more likely to get involved if they feel they already have some mastery of the topic; they are more keen to develop something they are already, even if vaguely, familiar with. Next, students are asked to find more material to work on and are encouraged to consult the professional course lecturers. Students may contact the lecturer for consultations regarding the content and terminology or methodology of presenting findings, creating exercises, and alike. In this way the content returns to the lecturer in an extended and enriched way. In case the students are capable and interested it can return to the lecturer accompanied by exercises which can also be used for the final assessment.

4.1 Learner-Centred Methodology: Example (1) from Maritime English Course at FMS in Split, Croatia

In the recent times there has been much talk about sustainability and raising awareness of the environment we live in that it inspired the organizers of G.A.M.E. 2016, Maritime English seminar for Maritime English lecturers worldwide, to elicit the participating lecturers' views on the content and methods to use when dealing with the theme.

Along this line, an example was presented from the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Split participating lecturer of eliciting active student participation in the sustainability project. The project was conducted with the 1st-year students of the nautical department. Obviously, not all 96 1st-year students could participate in the creation of the course material covering the topic. Still, all of them were active in some phase of the project.

When the lecturer introduced the sustainability theme and asked about any specific ways in which they thought it would best be dealt with, one of the students came up with the idea of visiting the local shipyard to see how and to what extent their activities meet sustainability requirements.

The students were taken to the shipyard in two groups and readily participated in the visit, listened to the hosts' presentation of the institution and asked questions to make the presenters come right to the point they were interested in. The students also appreciated being part of the lively working atmosphere in the shipyard; they readily put on helmets and followed the host from one workshop to another, from one object to another.

Next, the students were asked to form groups and select a project they saw in the shipyard to describe in terms of where the sustainability of the project could be seen.

The following step was to produce comprehension questions and presentation-based exercises for the rest of the groups. In this phase the lecturer's support is vital. Each group

dealt successfully with the task, some groups obviously more extensively and in detail than the rest, but they all showed interest in the project from the very beginning to the end.

The students were invited to present their work in the project at one of the sessions of G.A.M.E. 2016 Summer Seminar for Maritime English lecturers in Split earlier this year⁹. The presentation inspired the lecturers to discuss several points among which are the following:

1. Student-created content is primarily the matter of content, not methodology. Still, methodology has to be decided on at the very beginning. This is where the lecturer enters the scene and must be there to provide necessary assistance.

2. This meta-communication¹⁰ about the theme to be investigated by the students increases their motivation. Most students like to present their own suggestions about where, when, how a topic can be approached. They also like to be asked for details about what they found out and presented to their peers as well as to clarify the ideas expressed. The latter, in particular, helps raise their self-consciousness.

3. Increased student participation can also be adopted in the creation of assessment questions, search for the contents to best reach the learning outcomes or, ultimately, even in the determination of learning outcomes, which is more easily applicable with the higher-year students for obvious reasons.

4.2 Learner-Centred Methodology: Example (2) from Maritime English Classes at GMU in Gdynia, Poland

The recent trends in language teaching are intended to teach the language as lingua franca for real-life communication. Thus, a contemporary offer should not only include mastering what is required for a successful monologue or English comprehension only, but put an emphasis on how to act and what to say when difficulties arise, without damaging effects, being able to meet differing views, opinions, values, attitudes behaviour, being able to defend verbally if necessary, avoiding judgemental utterances, avoiding domination to allow others to speak in order to sustain meaningful conversation and enable development of a trustful relationship or a fruitful cooperation.

Students at maritime universities are often not inborn orators, especially males are not masters at sustaining communication and this is why providing them with the above mentioned skills is challenging most of the time. It is said that nobody can learn to play an instrument only by listening to it being played by another person: one must try to play it

9. G.A.M.E. Summer Seminar for Maritime English lecturers (from 2017 G.A.M.E. Summer Workshop) takes place once in two years to gather Maritime English lecturers from around the world to practically deal with new topics in shipping to be incorporated into Maritime English courses

10. For more details about the concept of meta-communication, see: Baltzersen, Rolf K. (2013)

oneself. To achieve the goal, a variety of guided role-plays for maritime purposes have successfully been used as means to maximize students' interaction in class and minimize anxiety while speaking¹¹. Another form of activating students that works well is bringing a controversial issue to the class to put it under discussion.

One of the issues that deserves a closer look and a thorough discussion within the circles of people related to maritime industry and maritime trade and economy is sustainable development¹² and, inscribed in that, sustainable shipping. The process of popularization of the idea of sustainability along with the changes required to be introduced are multi-dimensionally conditioned. Its success is largely dependent on the human factor, which requires a transformation of consciousness and reframing ethical values to look at a number of processes related to the common good, finances, politics or consumption from an utterly different perspective. The issues for which there has been consent e.g. controversial waste disposal, overexploitation of human resources, selective partnerships, excessive resource consumption, modern slavery, child labour, etc. remain at odds with this idea. Thus, the activities of shipping and port operations having an influence on the condition of global waters and coastal areas as well as the conditions of employment of seafarers should be revisited according to the intentions of the Sustainable Shipping Initiative (SSI). This includes improvement of shipyard operations for more sustainable building and disposal of ships, implementation of new environment-friendly and low-energy technology for ship operations, implementation of good shipping practice, supporting and financing companies promoting sustainable shipping and, last but not least, supporting countries which lack the requisite resources, experience or skills to implement IMO treaties through an Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme (ITCP)¹³.

Shipping seems to be one of those branches of industry where future looks brighter than dimmer. The interdependent shipbuilding and seaborne transportation do not lose much of their popularity although many companies are undergoing challenging times and may not survive in the nearest future. It is widely discussed in an article by Katsioloudis, P.J. (Katsioloudis, 2009). The industry employs people of different origin, religion, skin colour, and people coming from diverse cultural environments. Reconciling these multiple elements is

a challenge and obviously requires an open mind for accepting otherness. However, this is not the only key to open the door of understanding and cooperation. The other key is a sufficient command of Maritime English. This heightens the importance of the above mentioned skills.

Since there is no indication that Maritime English will be dethroned in favour of any other language as on-board means of communication, the Maritime English lecturers at Gdynia Maritime University normally make current trends and requirements in the maritime industry part of their constantly updated course contents. The students are urged to take a closer look at the topics presented and to study them in an integrative approach. In this way, they acquire both the ability to form a critical opinion and develop speaking skill through subsequent role-plays, debates and discussions in class. The widely discussed sustainable shipping is an example of such a topic.

4.3 Further Advantages of SCC

SCC is not limited in the sense of time or space; it can easily be posted among students' learning materials. It is not delivered by the lecturers at a certain place (their lecture rooms) at a certain time (specific lecture).

SCC enables students to control their course contents allowing in this way the content to be created by students for students; in other words, the learning process remains with the learner for as long and wherever he likes.

Students also learn about a topic by reporting on other students', their peers' work. This also helps develop their meta-cognitive skills as they are asked to evaluate their peers' contributions. They can also evaluate how much they have learnt or how useful to them a contribution has been.

With SCC students and lecturers can learn from one another to the benefit of each person in the teaching / learning process.

4.4 Disadvantages of SCC

SCC is obviously about students; still, this does not mean that all students participate in the creation of all content to an equal extent or degree. It is always the case in whatever learning / teaching approach is applied. Students are different individuals with different abilities, interests, possibilities, etc. The important criterion to stipulate is the lower contribution level, i.e. the one from all students' achievements through their contributions are evaluated or, in Maritime English terms, the chart datum.

Furthermore, before letting the students set out to explore new contents on their own, it is important to try to determine the standards of the web contents they will take into consideration. Not all web content is appropriate for inclusion in course contents. This refers to the lecturers' part of the work, their role in the creation of SCC.

11. Denc, M. (2009)

12. As in Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development or Brundtland Report (1987:27): "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs."

13. <http://www.climateactionprogramme.org/climate-leader-papers>

The lecturer's role is definitely different from the role he/she has in the traditional lecture room. Teaching methodology is different with SCC: initially, the course has to be elaborated differently from the single-lecturer's course. There may be requirements for specific types of software, which again is the lecturer's task to ensure.

Finally, a constant requirement for the lecturer's mentoring, support (both technical and psychological), which is far more demanding than in the one-directional *ex cathedra* teaching method, is indispensable. Still, if properly performed, it is also more rewarding.

5. INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF SCC

The future development of SCC will certainly depend on particular lecturers and the groups of students they work with. Since SCC is an individual and group tailor-made approach, it will certainly require both an engaged lecturer and students. The students' willingness to work and their knowledge and skills will determine their involvement in the generation of content and, accordingly, their attitude to their achievements. On the other hand, it will depend on the lecturers' skills, knowledge and diligence whether they will successfully guide the students to an outcome they will all be proud of. The lecturers will also have to think of the ways of adjusting their assessment to the students' activities in SCC as it must be significantly different from the assessment in other forms of learning / teaching. Smart lecturers should assess the group before deciding on the ratio of SCC to the other forms of learning / teaching in their courses. Different students perform differently with different forms of learning/teaching. Finally, there is also the lecturer factor to be taken into consideration as some lecturers will definitely hardly wish to give the traditional omniscient character, while others will readily adapt to their new role as coaches or facilitators.

Changes usually take time, especially if radical. Courses are considered to be best designed if they ensure the appropriate ratio of content delivery and active learning to suit the particular group of students. As Duda and Garrett (2008: 1055) note "*if we care about learning, we need to pay attention to students' attitudes*" (Duda and Garrett, 2008).

With different possibilities of e-learning currently available at higher institutions, lecturers can easily assist in accumulating and updating a body of specific course materials which, opposite to what it seems in advance, will end up more extensive than expected. Still, the most important of all achievements in SCC is definitely a closer student engagement and more intensive collaboration resulting in getting to know and mastering team work practices, so important in their future professional life.

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