

## THE RELEVANCE OF LEARNING APPLIED ENGLISH FOR ACADEMICS TO FOSTER PROFESSIONALISM

**Lubna Algadrie**

*Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November, Surabaya*

**Abstract:** Academics who are not competent in communication skills, particularly language skills, will develop less compared to those who are. Communication skills in general and language skills in particular will foster professionalism since professionals will spend less time doing and more time managing as experience grows. Professionalism grows from qualities that can be learned and developed as well as information learned and acquired. Negotiating skills will enable them to win deals more readily. Moreover, internet based realms of communications are mostly English speaking creations, which vary in terms of level of formality and choice of words. In this paper the writer shares her experience in materials preparations and a classroom-centered research done on a group of academics of non-English majors who came to ITS Language Centre to improve their English language competence for career development and further studies.

**Key words:** applied English, professionalism

Communication in the global era develops very rapidly and this creates problems in keeping up with the need of society and the education relevance. Lack of competence in communication skills, particularly language skills, will make people less professional in their field because they will have limited opportunities to develop and transfer their knowledge. Language and communication issues are of fundamental importance for developing the quality of human resources of a country. In the globalization era, the needs for English for educated people will be increased in a number of functional aspects such as sociological, political, educational and professional aspects (Algadrie, 1998). Moreover, Eng-

lish is also considered to be the language of specialized information for there is no adequate provision made so far for translating and publishing text-books needed into local languages in most of the non-English speaking countries where English plays a role as a foreign language.

The impact of globalization era is indicated by rapid information technology that makes competition stricken for distance between continents that becomes shorter. Professionals' main power in particular areas is really needed to fill the demand of industrial world which is moving faster and faster into automation capabilities in science and technology. This should be completed with professionalism in wider perspective such as communication management and leadership skill, because communication is a fundamental part of human existence. Speaking well in public is one of the most useful skills any professional should acquire. Professionals with good communication and language skills often become leaders in their business profession and community. On that account the language teaching profession is becoming very prospective and highly required with one condition in which the target of the language acquisition is to enhance fluency to generate comprehensible output. The desired competence will foster the professionalism of one's own for producing comprehensible output of the target language needed in one's profession.

It should be kept in mind, that an important part of professional development is the ability to analyze one's strengths and weaknesses. One should know in which area he/she needs improvement, meaning he/she should be honest to oneself. Self-development should become one's need. Needs are different for each individual but the most important is the need for recognition, acceptance and respect.

English is not only used for communication international but is also used in official communication. Professionals are expected to use English to write reports, presentations, meeting notes and e-mail. Not only that, very often reports and papers need to be presented in English for a wider range of communication. Negotiations among multilateral agencies and universities in international networks mostly use English.

Moreover, English is accepted as the language of the global economy in which people need to express themselves well in the global trade area. There are about 322 million native English speakers and approximately one billion, non-natives speak it reasonably well. In Indonesia, due to the fact that English is now given at earlier stages, more university graduates can read and understand spoken English reasonably well although their vocabulary is very limited. In ge-

neral, the use of English for daily communication would pose no serious problems but reading textbooks, writing reports, papers for international seminars and writing formal letters can be very difficult. Most of them are not yet aware of the application of 'proper' English for specific purposes. Most English teachers attempt to provide students with many opportunities to communicate in the target language but how many of them transfer thinking skills in language teaching so that learners will be able to generate ideas, elaborate to add on and generate unusual solutions which are originally from them? Themes must be learners' need-based and this is what will be called Applied English. These are closely related to the building of professionalism.

### WHAT IS APPLIED ENGLISH?

English for Specific Purposes includes English that is used in tertiary academic/vocational studies and applied in specific fields. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53) stated:

What distinguishes ESP from General English is not of the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need.

Learners of English are never aware of the need of Applied English until they come to a situation in which they are forced to master it. Somebody who can speak English reasonably well may realize that when they want to write formal letters, reports or seminar papers he/she should know the proper vocabulary to fit those specific purposes. A fresh graduate from the "Training on English for Job Interview" starts to realize the formality of a language when instead of writing:

*"I will be glad if you consider my application"*

She/he should write:

*"I would be grateful if you would like to give my application favorable consideration"*

(Data of training on this subject at ITS Language Centre showed that 78% of trainees did not apply any style in writing their application letters).

In engineering text books:

*"The project is being undertaken by the engineers"*

is used instead of:

“The engineers are doing the project”

(Notice the differences are related to choice of word as well as the form of the grammar).

The features of Applied English are related not only to the choice of words but also to the specific grammatical form and styles. Notice the specific words and grammatical forms of the following sentences:

- Frictions and wear characteristics are experienced while above it, problems of machinability may well occur (Mechanical Engineering).
- Computer programme frequently crashed, had to be debugged and then submitted, resulting in the taking up a spot at the back of the queue again (Computer Programming).
- The soft attaché case in gold leather in keeping with all Louis Vuitton creations evokes images of grand voyages (Advertisement).

In fact the kind of English needed in these particular areas have some general characteristics, such as the use of specialized vocabulary (laser, alibi, fusion,) the use of abbreviations (H<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, Mn O<sub>2</sub>), passivation, functional shifts, semantic variations, special compounds (break-even point, pig iron, etc.).

Academic/vocational courses in English known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or Applied English also often have words and phrases which are rarely used in spoken language and the writing usually uses longer and more complex sentences that employ complex embedding, nominalization and other syntactical devices.

### **WHY ACADEMICS NEED TO KNOW APPLIED ENGLISH?**

In order to be professional in the era of globalizations, academics' needs of English cover a number of functional aspects:

- Social function (socializing with friends, colleagues, business counterparts).
- Educational function (further studies, participating in International conference, seminar).
- Professional function (appropriacy of position level as professional).
- Political function (public talk, campaign, etc).

This is due to the fact that English has become a language of a specialized information. Some criteria for assessing academics' performance in oral interaction (social function) are:

- Accuracy in terms of grammar.
- Appropriacy in terms of functions (who is speaking and to whom).
- Range of terms for specific items (proper vocabulary used in specific context).

Relating to educational functions, academics are expected to be able to read textbooks in English and to write papers, reports and other formal writings. The criteria of assessment are:

- Size : ability to demonstrate their ability.
- Complexity : ability to understand the details and awareness of themes and links.
- Interpretations : ability to interpret implied statements.
- Independence : do not refer to the dictionary on many occasions.
- Accuracy : awareness of English grammatical system.
- Appropriacy : able to produce a range of styles, choose proper vocabulary.

When it comes to professional and political functions, academics are expected to be aware of the application of some English terms, grammatical features and styles used particularly in spoken English and in listening situations. The criteria of assessment are:

- Accuracy and appropriacy.
- Awareness of the differences between general and specific information.
- Flexibility: awareness of clear changes of topics, settings and objects of speaking.

### **WHY IS ENGLISH RELEVANT TO THE JOB AREAS OF ACADEMICS?**

There is more evidence that academics need to know English in their jobs or careers because:

- More textbooks are written in English.
- English is now used for official internal communication.
- Business meetings and e-mail are almost entirely in English.
- Documents originally written in local language need to be transferred into international level reports.
- Informative documents to support negotiations are mostly in English.
- Fresh university graduates should sit for interviews conducted in English.
- More professional services like translating English Laws, Regulations and other formal documents are required.
- English is already accepted as the language of science, technology, religion and global economy.
- English is used in most Internet trading because it is mostly cross-border, so a common language is needed.
- There are more people in the world studying English. Even in the European Union's Non-English speaking countries, 90% of the students study English.
- Business around the world needs to present their messages in English.
- English is used as the language of instruction in most universities in the world.
- English has become a window of better opportunity for further education and career path.

### **HOW TO FOSTER PROFESSIONALISM IN LANGUAGE TEACHING?**

Any language teaching approaches that are learner-centered can be very advantageous in areas where learner's language practice is derived from learners' offered material. Researchers and teachers mostly agree that learning strategies play a major role in learning because most learners usually focus on the message rather than the grammatical details. On that account learning strategies should place the learner as central in the process of learning and provide the learners with the input in order to make them develop. A number of research studies show correlation between strategy use and improved language learning performance. The research proved that the effectiveness of particular strategies is influenced by many factors, such as:

- level of proficiency

- tasks
- teaching materials
- language modality
- background knowledge
- context of learning
- target language
- learners' profile

### **Level of Proficiency**

Language proficiency is often defined as an external standard from which learners' behavior in expressing ideas in the language is compared and the level is indicated by result of scores in the task-based test link to specific areas. In fact it is very difficult to specify relative degree of mastery (or proficiency) of particular skills precisely and clearly between levels but in fact levels should be created to distinguish level of proficiency and degree of success in the teaching context.

In conscious language learning, proficiency means knowing about the language-explicit, formal linguistic knowledge of the language (Krashen, 1981). Another hypothesis introduced by Krashen stated that (1) low anxiety situations are more conducive to language acquisition than high anxiety situations and that people with high self-confidence and self-esteem acquire faster than those without these characteristics and (2) natural language acquisition is ability of having acquisition opportunities in comprehensible input.

There are some indicators resulting from a research made for the purpose that show good proficiency of a learner, namely:

- shows confidence
- is less hesitant in speaking
- has courage to ask questions
- gains better test result
- is capable of getting main ideas in reading
- more coherent in writing
- speaks with good pronunciation
- has good listening competence

- has language style (appropriateness in terms of functions: who is speaking and to whom)

### **Tasks**

Tasks, which involve dynamic relationships, are more difficult than static tasks, but repeated practice in information transferring skills may enable the learners to improve their performance and may be a pleasant and motivating experience.

### **Teaching Materials**

Designing material for English for professionals needs sensitivity and great energy. Usually these materials are taken from the authentic registers and should be based on material evaluating criteria such as attractive, interesting, motivating, relevant, appropriate (to the learners' level, occupation, educational background, age and status) and last but not least should be generative (give space for thinking skill). The content of the material should be designed to be useful in the context of learning process, give enough freedom for the learners to adapt it in the real practice and has aim.

### **Language Modality**

Successful learners do not necessarily use recommended strategies in learning because they often use non-recommended strategies. The important thing is that they are aware of the strategies they adapt and the success of the learning process.

### **Background Knowledge**

Professionals who still need help in improving their language competence are usually come from different educational background and more specifically each of them has different background knowledge even though they come from the same educational background. Learners who are successful are those who are autonomous, which means that they have learning preference and learning style.



### **Context of Learning**

Professionals who still have language/communication difficulties are not usually willing to learn about the language but more focus on how to use the language for their own purpose to support their professionalism.

### **Target Language**

Language learning process is closely related to the background know-ledge of the learners in their mother tongue. The target language can be considered more complicated for learners who are not ‘really’ good in their language use in their mother tongue. If the use of the target language they desire is oriented to sociological/political, educational and professional aspects, while their mastery of their mother tongue is not applied in those aspects, surely, they will have more problems in their target language learning process.

### **Learners’ Profile**

Some variables of learners can be made in the contexts of:

- ethnic group
- age group
- level of previous education
- experience in language target speaking country
- speaking proficiency level
- type of strategy adapted

Ethnic group is relevant to be taken into account in relation to the kinds of errors made in their language learning process as well as other variables.

### **HOW DOES APPLIED ENGLISH FOSTER PROFESSIONALISM?**

In connection with the learners need to master the language for professional purpose, it is not enough to understand the code and to be able to use it accurately. Professionals are demanded to be sensitive to different levels of usage, able to communicate the intended message in a way appropriate to the social context.

Even topics of information to be communicated are mostly occupationally-oriented. By learning vocabulary (particularly vocabulary in context), learners

learn how to make association and to use their imaginations. The learning process in Applied English is helpful in fostering target culture awareness which ultimately create global understanding of who, what, where they are. Moreover mental activity in learning a language has a powerful effect on memory-tight relationship between cognitive depth and retention (Carter and McCarthy, 1988:65).

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE PRINCIPLES KNOWN IN LANGUAGE TEACHING COURSE MATERIAL FOR PROFESSIONALS?**

In many occasions, professional course participants who are mostly professionals in their own fields are mostly interested in taking an English course which focuses on communication skills, in spite of the fact that their overall basic skills are still very low. In the teaching of communication skills a teacher will find that once an activity gets boring, the element of speed and unpredictability further to underline the spontaneity, creativeness and dynamism of oral interaction suffers.

In the material course design there are many factors, such as environment analysis, need analysis, and application of principles, which need to be taken into consideration. Environment analysis is a ranked list a situational factors like, what is the subject area, frequency of using the language whom to speak, motivation, reason of taking the course and the group size. Need analysis should cover skill needed, level of proficiency and target of taking the course, while application of principles should cover consideration of important high frequency vocabulary and structure, appropriate choice of topics and themes.

A model of material design for professionals of engineering studies

Participant	: ITS graduates
Skill needed	: Academic writing
Subject area	: Industrial technology
Frequency of English use	: Very rare
Whom to communicate	: Business friends, supervisors, guest-speakers
Motivation	: High
Background competence	: Intermediate level
Group course	: Peers of the same level
Group size	: 10 persons

Kind of English	: Academic English
Priority	: Able to write technical reports
Duration	: 10 meetings (20 hours)

Topics of Course Material

You and your company  
What a report is  
The purpose of the report  
To whom the report is written  
Organizing the information  
Meetings  
Editing the report  
Presenting a report

## CONCLUSION

The concept of Applied English has its own consequences and the design of material is learner-centered. Learners' profile should surely be taken into consideration. An academics' language competence will positively foster his/her professionalism because appropriate styles of writing and speaking according to the power of the paradigm of the formal interaction indicate the degree of perceived affiliations between speakers and listeners. If these strategies are used successfully, good atmosphere of social transactions will be created.

## REFERENCES

- Algadrie, L. 1998. *The Language Teaching Profession to Foster Professionalism*. Unpublished paper. TEFLIN International Conference, Surabaya.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. 1988. *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. 1987. *English for Specific Purpose: A Learning-Centred Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krashen, S. 1981. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.