

Alexey Bakulev

Candidate of Philological Sciences

Southern Federal University

Faculty of Sciences and Humanities

bakulev@sfedu.ru

Maxim Bondarev

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences

Southern Federal University

Faculty of Sciences and Humanities

mgbondarev@sfedu.ru

Speaking Training within "English for Specific Purposes" Blended Learning Model¹

Abstract

The article describes the key features of monologue and dialogue speaking skills development within the course of English for specific purposes (ESP) in higher educational institutions of engineering implemented on the basis of blended learning. According to the latest Federal state educational standards of higher professional education the share of students' self-study increases. Thus it is vital to work out a system of exercises including preparatory and communicative assignments as well as Speaking Guide which is a special unit of speaking exercise tips and comments. Such a set of exercises being used in an ESP blended learning model, Speaking skills are formed and developed in a more efficient way.

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются особенности обучения устной речи студентов инженерно-технических вузов в курсе "Английский язык для специальных целей" на основе технологии смешанного обучения. В силу того, что в соответствии с новыми Федеральными образовательными стандартами доля самостоятельной работы увеличивается, необходимо разработать систему подготовительных и коммуникативных упражнений, а также специальный раздел Speaking Guide, включающий советы и рекомендации по подготовке устных высказываний. Подобный набор упражнений, по

¹ The research is sponsored by the Russian Foundation for Humanities, project No 12-36-01237.

мнению авторов, позволит повысить эффективность обучения устной речи студентов-инженеров.

Key words: ESP, higher educational engineering institution, blended learning, preparatory exercises, communicative exercises.

Ключевые слова: английский язык для специальных целей, инженерно-технический вуз, смешанное обучение, подготовительные упражнения, коммуникативные упражнения.

Today speaking English at the level sufficient to effectively participate in professional communication is viewed as an inseparable part of a future engineer's competence. Therefore the relevance of the course "English for Special Purposes" at higher educational engineering institutions is in no way subject to doubt.

According to the Federal Educational Standards one of the key tasks of the modernisation of the language training at engineering institutes and universities is the design and application of new electronic educational resources alongside a reasonable combination of students' work in the brick-and-mortar environment and self-study. This all is determined by the fact that the share of students' self study work has increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is clear that under such circumstances the ESP course is to be taught using most productive teaching methods and techniques. In order to achieve this, an innovative concept of language training on the basis of e-learning involving students' effective self-study work under the teacher's supervision is to be developed and put into practice.

One of the most productive ESP teaching methods is blended learning. Blended learning occurs any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace (Staker, Horn, 2012).

Teaching ESP using an e-textbook as the course core component together with relevant extra materials within professional groups and communities in open and close educational social networks can be more effective if the so-called rotation model is applied. The common feature in the rotation model is that, within a given course, students rotate on a fixed schedule between learning online in a one-to-one, self-paced environment and sitting in a classroom with a traditional face-to-face teacher. It is the model most in between the traditional face-to-face classroom and online learning because it involves a split between the two and, in some cases, between remote and onsite (Staker, 2011).

Delivering the ESP course under the current conditions of higher educational engineering institutions on the basis of the rotation model of blended learning the following algorithm of the work within a unit seems adequate [Bondarev, 2012, 41-48]:

1. Introducing the topic, activating students' background knowledge, links to courses of specialization, defining key concepts and possible difficulties, adapting the material, focusing on productive skills (group brick-and-mortar lessons).

2. Practising language skills within the unit topic (language and pre-communicative preparatory exercises), studying the fact material (professionally oriented texts, videos, audios), focusing on receptive skills (distance learning, coordination via social networks and educational portals).

3. Consolidation and application of the acquired information via pre-communicative and communicative exercises including presentations, descriptions of devices, processes, technologies, preparing manuals, role-plays, holding conferences, focusing on productive skills (group brick-and-mortar lessons).

It is worth mentioning that the most important skill in the ESP course is Reading as it is the most available way of accessing the professionally relevant information. Yet the significance of other skills including speaking can never be denied and is to be considered within the structure of the course exercise sets.

However, in fact, numerous ESP textbooks do not have a developed system of exercises for training productive skills, namely speaking, the latter, as is mentioned above, being one of the most important counterparts of professional communication.

The aim of training speaking skills in the ESP course is the formation and development of professionally oriented foreign language communicative competence which presupposes discussing professional issues on the basis of various input materials.

According to the ESP course requirements, a future engineer is to be able to produce monological and dialogical utterances in situations of professional communication.

Teaching the monologue speaking skills aims at forming the skills of creating monologues of various genres: raising relevant questions, giving a talk, presenting a report, extended utterances in the course of discussions. As regards the dialogue, such skills presuppose the ability to converse within the framework of professional discourse in order to establish productive and efficient information exchange while participating in discussions, presentations, conferences etc. [Matukhin, 2011, 121-129].

Under the conditions of the ESP blended learning, the significance of self-study within the framework of the described algorithm being taken into consideration it is important to

arrange the guided speaking self-study work implemented via the core textbook/e-book as well as additional electronic resources.

Speaking exercises enable the teacher to simulate the relevant situations of professional discourse which is of great value in the light of the anthropocentric and axiological approaches because, though in simulated situations, students have an opportunity to apply the professionally relevant knowledge. These exercises are designed for teaching prepared, partially prepared and unprepared/off-hand speaking. Off-hand speaking is taught via the module *Lead-in* of an e-textbook unit. Lead-in is practised at the start of the unit when students get familiarized with the topic thus building the foundation for the successful work throughout the whole unit.

The *Lead-in* key task is to consolidate the students' background knowledge about the topic to be studied. The module is an effective tool for developing interdisciplinary connections and stimulating students' cognitive interest and motivation to study the course as a whole and specific topic in particular. Besides, Lead-in serves as a basis for students to learn new professionally relevant facts presented in the language studied [Bondarev, Bakulev, 2011, 77-82]. To illustrate the Lead-in tasks we shall provide an example from the unit *Optical Electronics* of the textbook "*Electronic Engineering*" [Bondarev, Bakulev, Trach, Osadchaya, 2013, 28], developed at the Department of Foreign Languages of the Faculty of Sciences and Humanities of Southern Federal University: *With your partner try to define what optical electronics is (the study of..., a field/branch of ..., represent(s)..., is/are used..., encompass/cover..., that use..., such as..., which..., etc.). What spheres of optical electronics application apart from computing, consumer electronics and communications could you name? Try to point out the spheres where optical electronics is not, but could be used. Give reasons for your ideas.*

Exercises aiming at training partially prepared and unprepared/off-hand speaking skills are included into the modules *Speaking/Problem solving*. These exercises are meant for students to prepare presentations, group projects, conferences, round-table talks and discussions. To perform the assignments successfully all the acquired professional and linguistic is to be consolidated. The *Speaking/Problem solving* exercises for the monologue/dialogue speaking skills development can be classified into two categories - pre-communicative preparatory exercises and communicative exercises.

Pre-communicative preparatory exercises are designed to activate the language units helping students to express their thoughts naturally and authentically. These exercises are to be done as self-study assignments via the e-textbook. The assignments may be as follows: *Fill in the table with the given phrases according to their functions to use them while discussing..., add more expressions to the table; Drag and drop the discourse markers to complete the texts; then*

check your answers; Look at the sentences and tick the positive/negative ones expressing an opinion...; Read the conversation (text) and fill in the blanks... with a suitable word or word combination...; Join the sentences using... the right linking words; Match the questions and the answers and continue...; Read the responses and underline the topical vocabulary (or irrelevant terms); Find ... mistakes in the sentences (summary), rewrite them/it so that they/it accurately describes...the...; Listen to the talk and write down/tick linkers/key terms/discourse markers.

It should be borne in mind that the *Speaking/Problem solving* communicative exercises are to have clear instructions and the utterance time and quantitative requirements together with the links to auxiliary resources (*vocabulary, grammar, discourse and fluency markers to be used*) determined by the unit topic.

It is worth mentioning that while training speaking skills in the ESP course it is of paramount importance to design integrated exercises for co-training skills of at least two types - Speaking and Reading, Speaking and Listening, Speaking and Writing etc. Here is an assignment that can serve as an example of an integrated exercise [Bondarev, Bakulev, Trach, Osadchaya, 2013, 57]:

Imagine that you are representatives of a company producing biomedical equipment. You have signed a contract with a local hospital according to which you are to develop, test and maintain new medical devices for the hospital. You are at work. Choose a biomedical device (real or that could be created) and write a specification booklet/manual for it. Make sure your paper contains: general description and application spheres/functions; detailed counterparts and controls description; description of the materials used; working principles and maintenance guidelines. Make sure you apply modern techniques and materials. After your paper has been prepared, with your partner(s), get ready for a public speaking at a conference of New Biomedical Products, presenting the device (technology) produced by your enterprise and described in your paper.

Taking into account the importance of teaching the dialogue skills, we think it appropriate to use such exercises as discussing in pairs the advantages and disadvantages of a certain device/technology, asking and answering problem questions, role-play, interview, information-gap activities.

The efficiency of the speaking self-study work may be increased via the module *Speaking Guide*. The role of the module is to provide guidance for students to prepare (singling out key words and collocations, taking notes etc.), plan (making an utterance outline/detailed plan) and produce a monologue or a dialogue. *Speaking Guide* is a module which is, on the one hand, a representative of preparatory exercises and, on the other hand, is a strategic aid for students to produce utterances.

Speaking Guide fosters students' academic autonomy which in its turn enables them to increase the efficiency of their self-study work regarding foreign language competence and further self education in the professional sphere.

The following tips and comments for doing the speaking tasks can be used to design the *Speaking Guide*: *While doing Speaking/Problem solving exercises, be ready to say... what happens/is happening... what you can see...; use these questions to help you think of ideas...; make sure you can...; try to give some more information...; avoid using complicated constructions and phrases – try to say it in plain English, but don't forget to use the key terms and phrases; ask your partners' opinion; plan your answer, give your bullet points; read the questions and rephrase them; be sure you can spell the complicated terms you use; do give your opinion on the subject; do ask your partner; if you don't agree with your partner be ready to give reasons for your disagreement.*

Communicative tasks of the ESP course are to maximally match the future engineer's sphere of activity. However, this requirement can hardly be met due to quite a wide area of the engineers' professional activity as well as the limited time allotted for the course. So there should be a variety of such tasks regarding both the content and the formal parameters. In this respect students are to be ready for versatile communication which requires designing special communicative assignment meant to develop the future engineers' imagination, non-standard thinking and behaviour skills, break thinking inertia and stereotypes as well as possible fear of new situations demanding non-standard behaviour.

Obviously, imagination plays a leading role in teaching ESP because a future engineer often has to imagine objects, tools, technological processes which they have never seen or observed. Besides, a situation of professional communication is never fully predictable and speaking is always characterized by a certain degree of spontaneity. Well-developed imagination has a number of affective components providing students' personalized emotional attitude to the course of study. Together with high motivation linked to professionally oriented ESP teaching this creates a powerful impulse to study and apply ESP [Bondarev, Lyashuk, 2010, 49-55].

Techniques for stimulating imagination used within the framework of speaking exercises aim at activating students' speech by activating their creative work, teaching to generate original ideas and new images, developing independence in forming judgements.

Here are examples of the modules *Lead-in (A)* and *Speaking/Problem solving (B)* of the unit *Nanoelectronics* from the textbook “*Electronic Engineering*” [Bondarev, Bakulev, Trach, Osadchaya, 2013, 18, 27]:

A: There is a nanobot prototype (the image of a nanobot is shown) that is going to be created. List as many imaginative uses for it as you can think of, justify your ideas.

B: Group work. Invent and describe a new (universal) nanodevice using the following words (scale, performance, nanotube, application, efficient, portable, ultradense, develop, deal with, operate, consist of). Try to explain its features, functions and operation principles. Characterize the device using one or several superlative adjectives.

Imagination development tasks are easily incorporated into sets of speaking exercises enabling students to practise vocabulary and grammar comprehensively and apply them systematically while training productive skills analyzing and synthesizing speech patterns.

To sum it all up, it is necessary to emphasize that a set of exercises to train both receptive and productive skills is to be incorporated into an ESP textbook/e-textbook within the framework of blended learning. As far as productive (speaking) skills exercises are concerned, we are convinced that it is a must to apply a two-component set of tasks encompassing pre-communicative preparatory exercises and communicative exercises proper with a special Speaking Guide module. In such a way the key goal of teaching speaking within the framework of the ESP course which is generating a monologue and/or a dialogue utterance on the basis of the studied material in various spheres of professional communication is successfully solved.

References

1. **Staker, H** and **Horn, M.B.** 2012. *Classifying K-12 Blended Learning*. URL: www.innosightinstitute.org. (3.05.2012).
2. **Staker, H.** 2011. *The Rise of K-12 Blended Learning. Profiles of Emerging Models*. Mountain View, CA: Innosight Institute.
3. **Bondarev, M.G.** 2012. *LSP Blended Learning Model within Technological Institute Electronic Educational Environment in Izvestiya SFedU. Engineering Sciences. Special Issue "Pedagogy and Psychology"* 10: 41-48.
4. **Matukhin, D.L.** 2011. *Professionally-oriented Teaching Foreign Language to Students of Non-Linguistic Specialities in Language and Culture* 2: 121-129.
5. **Bondarev, M.G.** and **Bakulev, A.V.** 2011. *Lead-in as a Structure Component of an LSP Electronic Textbook Educational Module in Izvestiya SFedU. Engineering Sciences. Special Issue "Humanities in Engineering Education of XXI Century"*. 10: 77-82.
6. **Bondarev, M.G., Bakulev, A.V., Trach, A.S.** and **Osadchaya, O.V.** 2013. *Electronic Engineering: Textbook*. SFedu Publishers.
7. **Bondarev, M.G.** and **Lyashuk, A.V.** 2010. *Technical Higher School Students Imagination Development within the English for Special Purposes Course Framework in Izvestiya SFedU. Engineering Sciences. Special Issue "Humanities in Engineering Education of XXI Century"*. 10: 49-55.