

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: IMPLICATION FOR TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT

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GLORIA WILSON INYANG, Ph.D  
DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH  
AKWA IBOM STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
AFAHA NSIT

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### ABSTRACT

*Foreign Language teaching for Specific Purposes has a lot in common with the teaching of foreign language as a general subject. For both, it is necessary to consider linguistic development and teaching theories, to have insights into contemporary ideas regarding their own position and role as well as the position and role of foreign language learners in education; and to face new technologies offered as aid to improve their methodology. The need to understand the requirements of other professions and willingness to adapt to these requirements differentiate the foreign language teachers for specific purposes and their colleagues teaching foreign language as subject. Foreign Language for Specific Purposes presumes teaching of foreign language regarding specific profession, subject or purpose. This paper, therefore, examined the concept of language, concept of teaching and concept of Foreign Language for Specific Purposes. It narrows to French for specific purposes (FSP), types of French for Specific Purposes, the training of teachers of French for Specific Purposes and the role of French Language for Specific Purposes to highlight that the role of French language is gradually changing from a vehicle of French culture to a vehicle of Science, Technology, Commerce and Diplomacy, with the emphasis further shifting from teaching of French as a as literary studies to what has come to be known as French for Specific Purposes (FSP) which is essentially considered as the specialist forms and usages of the French language in specific professions, disciplines, and fields of human activity. The training, thus, recognises the need to tailor the curriculum in line with the professional demands of the specialty and the industry expectations necessary for the accomplishment of professional tasks.*

**Key words:** Foreign language, French for specific purposes, teaching theories.

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### INTRODUCTION

Teaching foreign languages to non-linguist students is a difficult and challenging task. The study of Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes (FLSP) is highly students-centered, focusing on learners' professional linguistic needs, as well as teaching materials production. In general, it puts great emphasis on the practical outputs of language learning. FLSP has to deal with a number of "sub-languages", i.e. language of business, science and technology, humanities etc., and this complicates the work of outlining a methodology that would apply to all disciplines and professional activities the learners are involved in. As a result, the FLSP methodology always integrates the language learning and subject learning approaches. FLSP is closely connected with recognizing the communicative role of languages and their functional styles through which language, as a functional tool, is used to describe different categories of

disciplines and situations. This gives clarification that in every language there are specific areas and typical elements.

In the 1930s, the German linguistics introduced the concept of Fachsprachen, and in the beginning of 1950s Savory published *the Language of Science: its Growth, Character and Usage* (1953), which laid the foundations for the theory of languages for special purposes, later referred to as Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP). Since the 1970s linguists have conditioned LSP to serve the needs of individual fields of science, technology, economics, management, medicine, law, media, etc. this has, thus, boosted the study language through Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP).

With respect to English, there are different definitions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), but probably the clearest one is Hutchison's and Waters's (1987, 1994) who see ESP as an approach rather than a product. This position, however, suggests that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language or methodology. Here, the authors see the specificity in the end product the language teaching is aiming to achieve, i.e. to provide the learners with the language according to their learning context.

The changing role of French from the traditional vehicle of French culture to a vehicle of specialties has given value to French for Specific Purposes ( FSP). FSP is defined by the needs and reasons for which the student is learning French language. Therefore, the concept of French for Specific Purposes (FSP) shall always be: a) related to the content, b) based on the needs analysis and c) centered on language appropriate to particular disciplines and activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics etc. (Stevens, 1988, Robinson, 1991, Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) date the origin of the study of FSP back in 1960s when it gained a well-established position as a component of applied linguistic research. Throughout its development, similarly to LSP, it has involved a close relationship between the theory and practice and has been influenced by the developments in Education, Business, Technology, Commerce and Diplomacy.

### **The Concept of Language**

Language is an aspect of human behaviour, a system that consists development, acquisition, maintenance and use of complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>). Human language being the properties of productivity enables the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. It is this combination transforms ideas into thoughts. Henry Sweet. Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager see language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. Therefore, as a system of signs for encoding and decoding information, language refers to the cognitive faculty that enables humans to learn and use systems of complex communication.

From the above definitions, language is a system of signs, represented by speech-sounds used in communicating and written signs which are the alphabets used in writing. These signs, which are also linguistic symbols, function according to rules and conventions which govern every aspect of a language such as its grammar, syntax, phonology, etc. simply put, language is what enables us to utter distinct sounds, join them into words, and into meaningful sentences for the purpose of communicating our ideas and thoughts.

### **The Concept of Teaching**

Teaching is an interactive process which occurs during certain definable activities (infed.org›mobi›what-is-teaching). Imogie (2002) citing Gage, sees teaching as any interpersonal influence aimed at changing the ways in which other persons can or will behave. This, in essence, presents teaching in terms of socialization which makes it everybody's business. Giving credence to this definition, Hight (2000) says "we all teach and learn all our lives."

According to Effiong and Edo (2000), teaching acts as a rational deed performed in accordance with professional principles. In other words, it is an act which a teacher carries in congruence to certain professional rules and principles. In the view of Koshomani (2004), citing Smith, teaching is a system of actions intended to induce learning. This is in agreement to an earlier definition of teaching by Thompson (2006) which states that To him, teaching can often be defined in terms of the intention of producing learning. In essence, the notion of teaching seems to be totally dependent on learning because nothing can be characterised as teaching without the obvious intention of bringing out learning. Teaching is, therefore, an interaction designed to bring about change between the teacher and the students. This, Imogie (2002) sees teaching also as essentially a means of guiding students in securing the amount and quality of experience which will promote the optimum development of their potentials as human beings.

The word teaching can be used as postulated by Koshomani (1997) postulates the the use of the word teaching in two senses namely, the "task" and the "achievement" or "success". For instance, when I say that my teacher taught me Translation Studies, I mean that he did not only perform the task of intentionally transmitting the knowledge of the methods and techniques of Translation to me, but that he actually succeeded in causing to imbibe the art. In another sense, my teacher taught me Translation, but, I failed to learn it. Failures in most examinations these days show that the task of teaching was performed but learning did not take place.

Teaching, therefore, entails filling in the mind of the learner skills, knowledge, facts, and information needed for immediate or future use. It is a process of interaction between the teacher and students in which the students are guided and directed to learn.

### **Concept of French for Specific Purposes (FSP)**

French for Specific Purposes (FSP) is assumed to have begun in the 1960s when the purpose of learning French became the core. The basic question of FSP hinges on why the learner needs to learn a foreign language, and, French in particular. As with most disciplines in human activity, French for Specific Purposes is a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends of which we will mention three:

- the expansion of demand for French to suit specific needs of a profession
- developments in the field of linguistics (attention shifted from defining formal language features to discovering the ways in which language is used in real communication, causing the need for the development of French courses for specific group of learners).
- psychology needs of learners (learner's needs and interests have an influence on their motivation and effectiveness of their learning).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define French for Specific Purposes (FSP) as an approach rather than a product – meaning that FSP involves a particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology, depending on the specialty.

Stevens' (1988) definition of FSP makes a distinction between

- a) absolute characteristics which is concerned with language teaching as designed to meet specified needs of the learner; related in content to particular disciplines, occupation and activities; centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, text, discourse,

semantics, etc., and analysis of the discourse; designed in contrast with French as a general subject).

- b) two variable characteristics which connotes that FSP may be restricted to the language skills to be learned, e.g. reading; and not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology.

FSP is based on two criteria: 1) it is normally 'goal-directed', and 2) the courses are developed from a needs analysis which aim to specify what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of French, and a number of characteristics which explain that FSP courses are generally constrained by a limited period in which their objectives have to be achieved and are taught to adults in homogenous classes in terms of the work or specialist studies that the students are involved in (Robinson (1991).

Each of the views presented above has validity as well as weaknesses. Considering Hutchinson and Water's position, Anthony (1997) notes that it is not clear where FSP courses end and where General French courses begin because numerous non-specialist FSP instructors use FSP approach in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own specialist personal knowledge of French for real communication. Strevens' definition, by referring to content in the second absolute characteristic, may confirm the impression held by many teachers that FSP is always and necessarily related to subject content. Robinson's mention of homogenous classes as a characteristic of FSP may lead to the same conclusion. However, much of FSP work is based on the idea of a common-core of language and skills belonging to all academic disciplines or cutting across the whole activity of business, FSP teaching should always reflect the underlying concepts and activities of the discipline. Having all these on mind, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) modified Strevens' definition of FSP to highlight absolute characteristics and variable characteristics.

Absolute characteristics implies that FSP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner and it makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves. It is centered on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to the desired activities. For variable characteristics, FSP is related to or designed for specific disciplines and may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general French. It is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. The use for learners at secondary school level and beginners is not ruled out since it is generally designed for beginners, intermediate or advanced learners. The courses are, however, designed to assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

### **Types of French for Specific Purposes (FSP)**

French for Specific Purposes (FSP) is traditionally divided into two main areas namely:

- i. French for Academic Purposes (FAP) involving pre-experience, simultaneous/in-service and post-experience courses. FAP involves French for (Academic) Science and Technology (FST), French for (Academic) Medical Purposes (FMP), French for (Academic) Legal Purposes (FLP), French for (Academic) Vocational Purposes (FVP), and French for Management, Finance and Economics (FMFE).
- ii. French for Occupational Purposes (FOP) which is for specific disciplines (pre-study, in-study, and post-study) or as a school subject (independent or integrated). Pre-experience or pre-study course will omit any specific work related to the actual discipline or work as students will not yet have the needed familiarity with the content. The opportunity for specific or integrated work will be provided in the course of study. FOP also refers to French

for professional purposes in administration, diplomacy, medicine, law, business, and vocational purposes for non-professionals in work (language of training for specific trades or occupations) or pre-work situations (concerned with finding a job and interview skills).

The classification of FSP courses as done above, creates the mediating language and terminologies between the mediating language between the technicalities of particular business, profession or area of specialization and the language of the general public (Pickett, 1989), and this distinguishes between French for General Purposes (FGP) and French for Specific Purposes (FSP).

### **French for Specific Purposes: the Roles the Teacher**

The teacher of French for Specific Purposes (FSP) functions through several roles.

The FSP teacher as a Practitioner: Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) use the term “practitioner” rather than “teacher” to emphasise that work of FSP teachers involves much more than teaching. FSP is a practical discipline with the most important objective of helping students to learn. However, the teacher is not the primary knower of the carrier content of the material. The students, especially where the course is specifically oriented towards the subject content or work the students are engaged in, may know more about the content than the teacher. The teacher has the opportunity to draw on students’ knowledge of the content in order to generate communication in the classroom. When the teaching is a specific course on, for example, how to translate a legal document, it is vital that the teacher adopts the position of a consultant who has the knowledge of legal practices but needs to “negotiate” on how best to explore the subject matter to meet the objective set. The relationship is much more of a partnership. In some situations the role of FSP teacher extends to giving one-to-one advice to students. FSP teachers need to have considerable flexibility, be willing to listen to learners, take interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in, and to take some risks in their teaching.

- ◆ The FSP teacher as course designer and material provider: Since it is rarely possible to use a particular textbook without the need for supplementary material, really suitable published material are, sometimes, non-existent to cater for identified needs. The FSP teacher often has to provide the materials for the course. This involves selection of relevant published materials, adapting suitable materials, and or improvising them. There is, also, the need to assess the effectiveness of the teaching material used whether published or self-produced.
- ◆ The FSP teacher as researcher: Research has been particularly strong in genre analysis. There is a growing interest in investigating the genres, the language and the skills involved in the different specialties. Teachers of FSP need to be active in research analysis, designing a course, or writing teaching materials so as to be capable of incorporating the findings of the research. Likewise those working in specific FSP situations need to be confident that they know what skills are involved in the processes.
- ◆ The FSP teacher as collaborator: Work done in specific subject area is often best approached through collaboration with subject specialist. This may involve cooperation in which FSP teacher marries the subject syllabus in an academic context with the tasks that students have to carry out in a practical situation. Or it may involve specific collaboration so that there is some integration between specialist studies or activities and the language. It might involve the language teacher specifically preparing learners for lectures or presentations. Furthermore, there is the possibility of a specialist in the field checking and commenting on

the content of teaching materials that the FSP teacher has prepared. The fullest collaboration in FSP is where a subject expert teacher and a language teacher **team-teach** the students. Such activity will help properly direct the comprehension of subject lectures and, also help build appropriate skills and language in the learners.

- ◆ The FSP teacher as evaluator: The FSP practitioner is involved in various types of evaluation (testing) of students, evaluation of courses and teaching materials. Tests are conducted for the under-listed purposes:
  - a. To determine whether students have the necessary language and skills to undertake a particular academic course or career.
  - b. To assess the level of their achievement or gain by learners.
  - c. To appraise the level of students through the course: at the beginning, during and at the end of the lesson.
  - d. To ascertain whether the learners have been able to make use of what they learned.
  - e. To find out what learners were not prepared for.
  - f. To adapt the syllabus.

### **Training of French Teachers for Specific Purposes Teachers**

Most teacher training courses contain four basic elements:

Not every teacher would be an adequate language teacher. Each teacher has continuing responsibility throughout a career which makes it essential that potentially ineffective individuals should be discouraged from entering the profession by adequate pre-training or post-training selection procedures: initial, during and terminal. This calls for continuing personal education to keep the FSP teacher updated and in line with best practices in the relevant aspects of the specialty and the recommended methodology of foreign language teaching.

The FSP teacher must, first of all, have had general professional training as an educator and teacher. This element involves what all teachers need to know regardless of which subject they teach. The components are as follows:

- a) Educational psychology as it concerns the principles of educational thought which is intended to lead the trainee to understanding of the nature of education.
- b) An outline of the organization of education in a particular country, especially in the Francophone countries. – the teacher should be aware of the different kinds of schools, of normal and unusual pathways through educational network, of responsibility, control and finance, of sources of reform and change, of the main features of history of education.
- c) An awareness of the moral and rhetorical function of the teacher: the building of standards, character, enthusiasm.
- d) Knowledge of, and skill in, class management, discipline and handling of various groups of students.
- e) knowledge of, and skill in, basic instructional techniques, and understanding teacher-learner interaction.
- f) Acceptance of the fundamental need for the preparation of lessons.
- g) understanding the role of curriculum, syllabus and teaching materials
- h) a teacher should be committed to keeping in touch with the teaching profession.

The FSP teacher requires special training in French methods as a teacher of French as a foreign or second language. The complexity of this training which constitutes the core of most teacher training courses can be made simpler if the distinction is to be made between three aspects of it: **skills, information** and **theory**.

**1. The Skill Component:** Three different skills are required by the teacher as follows: a) good grasp of French language: to ensure that teacher's command of foreign language is adequate for class purposes; b) competence in teaching techniques and classroom activities This is the major part of teacher training towards assimilating a great body of effective techniques; c) effective management of learning as a crucial part of teacher's classroom skills to learn how to assess, from moment to moment, the progress of each individual in the class and how to manage the classroom activities so that most able learners are not frustrated by being held back, and the slowest are not depressed by being left behind. The **skills** component requires practical training for learners to be able to perform the skills themselves.

**2. The information component:** The needed body of information can be divided into three parts: a) information about education which takes into account different approaches to the task of teaching a language; b) information about the syllabus and materials the teacher will be using since the syllabus, the prescribed textbooks, other teaching materials and aids make up the tools of the teacher's profession; and c) the right information about language because when the teacher enters his course of training, his understanding of the nature of language is likely to be scanty and so he requires a good knowledge of literacy and education, notions of the 'correctness' and social judgments on language, language variety, language and thought, and many more. The information content can be learned from reading or from lectures.

**3.** The theory component is about how the language teaching profession makes connection with theoretical studies in several disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, social theory, education. The theoretical studies are likely to find a place when the trainee has attained a sufficient level of personal education and when he is preparing to teach high-level learners. Theory can be included in teacher training as the interdisciplinary approach of applied linguistics which integrates appropriate parts of the disciplines most relevant to language teaching. Thus, the theory component can be assimilated from discussion, practice in solving problems, tutorial explanations and time to absorb new ways of thinking.

## **Conclusion**

Using skills as a framework of French for Specific Purposes (FSP), FSP teachers are provided with the necessary knowledge and tools to deal with their own students' specializations. It should be noted that teacher of French for Specific Purposes are not specialists in the field, but they teach the French terminologies and lexicons of the profession but not the profession itself. They help specialised students to develop the essential skills in understanding, using, and/or presenting authentic information in their professions.

French for Specific Purposes (FSP) relates to the content being based on the needs analysis of the learners and centered on language appropriate to particular disciplines and activities in syntax, lexis, discourse and semantics towards providing the learners with the language according to their learning context.

### **Recommendations**

A professional teacher of FSP must be able to function effectively in the pedagogy of the relevant the professional fields by simply applying the necessary tools, frameworks, and principles of course design where needed. The content should be provided by the teachers or experts in the subject and should always be authentic since the main purpose of teaching skills is to enable students to deal with authentic information despite their level of French, up-to-date the informational exchange which is growing more intensely and remains relevant for the students' specializations. Learners ought to be given the information for their target language use situation.

The necessary FSP network should, therefore, be provided because there is hardly any branch of foreign language where students would not need the right cognitive baggage for understanding of professional texts and where they would do without the skills to communicate effectively in the tasks connected with their study or work situations.

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