

ESP in Brazil: history, new trends and challenges

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of the history of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Brazil. In order to do so, it will look retrospectively at the origins of such an approach, giving special attention to the Brazilian National ESP Project, which stands as a signpost for the tenets of the approach adopted in the country. Then, its development is addressed trying to show what the legacy of this Project for ESP in Brazil is and what impact this Project has had for English Language Teaching. It also focuses on some myths that originated from the very nature of the needs identified in this Project. It is followed by an examination of the new demands for this area due to transformations that Brazilian society and education have been undergoing. Then, an overview of recent research into the area is presented. Finally, implications and emerging questions are examined and discussed in order to reflect upon the future of ESP in the national educational context.

Key words: English Language Teaching; English for Specific Purposes; Brazilian National ESP Project; English as a Foreign Language.

1. Introduction

In Brazil, where Portuguese is the mother tongue, English language is taught as a foreign language and has a long tradition in the Brazilian national education curriculum (Costa, 1987; Leffa, 1999; Stevens and Cunha, 2003; among others). In spite of the fact that, according to the current national education policies and official documents (Brasil, 1998a; Brasil, 1998b Brasil, 1999, for example), schools are free to choose at least one among the foreign languages to be part of their curricula which will be, in turn, a compulsory subject in the elementary and secondary school curricula, English is the chosen one, and thus it is the foreign language that reaches such a status. At tertiary level, this situation changes:

English may be a compulsory or optional subject, depending on the field of specialism (e.g. hotel industry, tourism, computing; generally these specialism have it as a compulsory subject) and/or on the institution, i.e., faculties and universities in the country may or may not choose to have a foreign language in their curricula.

Definitely, as in many other countries in the globalized world, ELT plays an important role in the national education context. On the other hand, one may wonder what role English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays in Brazil? The answer is: ESP has also its place in the Brazilian educational context. It is now a well-established area in the field of language teaching and learning in the country. As already attested elsewhere (Ramos, 2005), ESP is part of the title of innumerable new textbooks that were put on the market in the last 10 years. It is part of the content indicated for the tertiary level entrance exams (named *Vestibular*) in the country. It is the name of many courses that are offered in Brazilian universities. The question is when and how has ESP started appearing in the Brazilian foreign language teaching-learning scenario?

Part of this paper is devoted to providing an answer to this question. This approach appeared in Brazil in the late 1970s and brought new knowledge and changes to the classroom practice and institutional educational sectors, as for an example, the national entrance exams (*Vestibular*) in the country. The aim of this paper is to focus on the history of the teaching and learning of ESP in Brazil, tackling issues retrospectively. It begins with the origins of this approach in the country in the 1970s, giving special attention to the National ESP Project, a signpost for the tenets of the approach adopted in the country, as well as its development trying to reflect on the characteristics of this Project and its legacy to the area. It is followed by an examination of some myths that were constructed during the implementation of the ESP Brazilian National Project, myths which originated from the very nature of the needs of the Brazilian context. Finally, it presents a current overview of the ESP teaching and learning context and research, points to new ways of investigation and the challenges that such ways generate; moves to consideration of implications of these investigations and the challenges that these changes have brought about, and attempts to indicate how the future may be constructed.

2. The History of ESP in Brazil: origins and development

It is impossible to present the history of ESP in Brazil without introducing the history of the Brazilian National ESP Project. They are inextricably linked. Therefore, in order to offer a coherent and fair portrayal of this Project, Celani et al. (1988), Celani (2005) and the author's own experience will be the sources used to describe its genesis, organization and development.

2.1. The Brazilian National ESP Project

ESP in Brazil appeared in the late 1970s as a reaction to a need. As indicated in Celani et al (1988) and Celani (2005) many factors contributed to the need of creating a center of excellence in ESP equipped to offer advice, resources and teacher education for Brazilian universities. The first of these, according to the authors, was the large number of university teachers from various parts of the country who were then doing their M.A. in Applied Linguistics at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and who showed strong interest in ESP due to the fact that they did not feel confident or even well-prepared to offer specialised English courses for the various departments of their universities. It is interesting to point out that at the time most of the English departments devoted their expertise to providing courses as part of a degree in languages and a transition to offer specialised courses in ESP seemed an insurmountable obstacle. A second factor was the way the teaching of ESP was regarded by most of the English teachers: "a less noble activity than teaching English language and literature in an English degree course" (Celani, 2005:14). Furthermore, the demands from the pure and applied sciences departments at the universities for specialised English courses started putting pressure on the English departments so that it became impossible to disregard the problem. These factors together with the number of requests for advice on the design and implementation of ESP courses from universities throughout the national territory made Professor Maria Antonieta Alba

Celani (then the coordinator of the Applied Linguistics Programme at the Catholic University of São Paulo) design a project at national level. In order to do so, a bid was put in to the Brazilian Ministry of Education for financial support in 1977.

From 1977 to 1979 efforts were made to establish the Project. Funds were granted and Professor Celani counting on the expertise in the teaching of ESP of a British Council visiting professor, Maurice Broughton, set up an initial programme of visits to twenty federal universities that, according to Celani et al. (1988), were the ones that promptly accepted the invitation to participate. These authors also pointed out that the needs analysis to be carried out should count on personal contact, essential in a country the size of Brazil and with so many regional differences. The aims of these visits were to meet as many people at different levels in the university as possible to get information about the necessities of having a national project, the resources and facilities available, teaching staff, students numbers, class size, attitudes to ESP and disciplines catered to, in each university. The results of this needs analysis showed the necessity for a national project and made apparent the paths to be followed: teacher development; materials production; the teaching of reading skills as of paramount importance for students and researchers who had to read academic literature; the setting up of a national resource centre.

As there was sufficient interest in having a national project, Professor Celani put in a bid to the British Council, for three Key English Language Teaching (KELTs) posts to be set up, two at the Catholic University of São Paulo and one at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (a state in the south part of Brazil), who would be responsible for teacher development, research and materials production. The arrival of the three specialists (John Holmes, Mike Scott and Tony Deyes) near the end of 1980 marked the development phase of the Project, with three more universities joining in, and went on with official support until the end of 1989.

The development phase started with a national seminar aiming at discussing policy and work to be done. As reported by Celani et al. (1988), this meeting brought together the national coordinating team and the coordinators of the local team in each university, who

were chosen by their peers. At this point, it is important to bring one of the principles of the Project, i.e. the national coordinating team would not interfere with the way in which local teams would choose to organise themselves. During this event it was decided that the teacher development programme would be set up in the form of seminars and local visits supplemented by scholarships (provided by the funding agencies) to UK universities whenever possible.

The year 1981 was dedicated to holding seminars in most of the participating universities. The KELTs' visits, as Celani et al. (1988) mention, besides contributing to the development of the local teams, provided the specialists with the opportunity to be acquainted with the needs of each specific local team. In subsequent years, visits went on with decreasing intensity. A further result of these initial visits was the contribution of topics (e.g. reading strategies, a minimum discourse grammar, text analysis, course design, self-access, discourse and scientific discourse, the use of cognates, the role of materials, the teacher as a researcher etc) for one of the publications of the Project, a series of Working Papers (totalling 21 numbers) that serve not only as a list of contents to be dealt with during the visits, but chiefly as a set of core ideas to set down some beliefs and guidance which could be followed up by much more in-depth and detailed work in workshops, and at the same time which interested parties could be later followed up over the years.

From 1981 to 1989 an annual seminar and three regional seminars (the country was divided in three regions) were held in different cities and states of the country. The aim of these seminars was the exchange of ideas and experiences among the participating teams, as well as the "development of a set of principles which might come to be shared by most of the teachers involved in" (Celani et al., 1988:6), as the Project coordination had taken the decision of not imposing principles from a central authority to be obeyed. Another important implication resulting from these seminars to be mentioned is that as they were open to the regional community year after year a larger number of teachers not officially connected with the Project started taking part in these meetings on regular basis. This made it possible for more teachers to become acquainted with the approach, contributing hence to the dissemination of ESP in the country.

Another important decision taken by the Project members, according to Celani et al. (1988), was that of not having a “Project textbook”. This decision was derived from several factors: differences in the levels of teacher development; the variety of different academic disciplines to be catered for, and the different levels (first year undergraduate through to postgraduates). As Celani et al. (1988:6) states:

“The major factor, however, was the belief that teacher involvement is essential in the production and continued use of ESP materials in the classroom. It would not be coherent with the Project philosophy (...), to produce materials and then train teachers to use them. Instead, teachers should be helped to produce their own materials, however uneven the products thus created might be, and however much “re-inventing the wheel” might go on. This is consistent with a process as opposed to product orientation.”

In spite of this philosophy, however, sample materials were produced: Resource Packages (totalling 5) to illustrate not only the set core of ideas that the Project was adopting considering the teaching and learning of reading, but also how teachers could deal with the following topics: the exploration of authentic texts with beginners; the use of reading strategies; the teaching of grammar; vocabulary acquisition and reading strategies; and testing reading comprehension. Also self-access materials and a reading “standard exercise” were developed on experimental basis at the University of Santa Catarina (Scott, 1984) and then used by the participating universities. I myself in the mid 1980s used the “standard exercise” both as an activity in the classroom (but modified later), and as the basis for designing the ESP reading course which has been offered at Catholic University of São Paulo as an extra-mural studies course. Incidentally, this course is still offered at the university every semester but today it has been adapted to academic reading with a genre-based syllabus. It is also worth noting that the “standard exercise” became so popular that the original version or adaptations of it is still in use as part of the current reading materials spread across the national territory. In 2006, the original version was part of the materials which were included in the creation of a software package that aims at helping public school teachers to create reading materials for secondary students.

Given that reading skill had been identified as a priority, an immediate need of understanding and practicing an approach based more on the use of effective reading strategies than on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary was required. Most of the work was developed in workshops and seminars. Participants were exposed to the use of materials and classroom procedures which for many of them were a novelty or else appeared to conflict with current approaches and methodologies: mono-skill teaching, the use of authentic texts, the use of nonsense texts, the use of spoken Portuguese in the classroom, the use of discourse grammar, etc. Thus, teacher development and materials production ran together.

This integration is one of the outstanding tenets and contributions of this Project to both the way ESP developed in the country and English teaching and learning in general, since it helped to change the way teacher education was understood, i.e. not as a finished process, but a long-term process, a tenet close to the view of teacher education theory prevalent nowadays (Schön, 1983; 1987; Smyth, 1989; Zeicher and Liston, 1996; among others).

The other path to be followed was to organise a national resource centre. It was designed to be an active centre, collecting and disseminating materials throughout the country, helping teachers in materials writing and giving them feedback. Also it was meant to serve as a channel of communication for teachers who were separated by immense geographical distances. It is necessary to remember that in the early 1980's communication was quite different from now. The place chosen for the establishment of such a centre was the Catholic University of São Paulo that provided support in the form of secretarial staff and a full-time coordinator (the author of this paper). The principles underlying the setting up of the Resource Centre - CEPRIL (an acronym in Portuguese for Centre for Research and Information on Reading) are described in Holmes (1985). CEPRIL was also responsible for the research element of the Project that was reported in the following publications: the Working Papers, the Resource Packages and the journal the ESPecialist. CEPRIL is still functioning but on a different basis now.

From 1985 to 1989, an evaluation of the work done in the period 1980-1986 was conducted (see Celani et al.,1988) and the Project turned to the Federal Technical Schools and jointly worked until 1992 when an evaluation was also conducted.

From 1990 on, with the end of the official support and the departure of the KELTs, quite a large cadre of local active participants assured the sustainability of the Project. These teachers together with the Project coordinator, CEPRIL coordinator and staff have been helping to organise an annual ESP seminar until the present day that functions as a catalyst in terms of exchange of ideas, research, materials production and developments. At the same time, CEPRIL, where the national coordinator, the resource center coordinator and assistant staff are based, has been working as a pole for ESP practitioners and new comers, providing information, feedback, consultancies, and developing courses in ESP methodology for teachers from all parts of the national territory.

At this point it is worth commenting on some other characteristics of the Project. As Celani et al.(1988) indicate, it is possible that the participatory quality of this Project, deriving from joint collaborative efforts and the preservation of specific local features, may have contributed to creation, among the participants, of an atmosphere of “a consensus tempered with variety” (ibid:9), and the sense that “the Project is a loose federation of interested parties, not a rigid structure imposed by a Ministry or an outside agency” (ibid:7), giving participants a feeling of ownership in relation to the Project and the work that has been developed, as well as a feeling of identity as ESP practitioners. These main features make participating teachers and those not officially engaged in the Project to feel as if they belong to a community making it possible for them to go on working and developing a tradition of classroom research in the area (see for example the papers being published in the ESPEcialist journal).

2.2. 1 The Legacy of the Brazilian National ESP Project

From what has been presented so far it is possible to identify some of the legacies of this Project in the way ESP has been developed in the country or what Celani (2005:17) called “a specifically Brazilian approach to ESP”.

The first relates to the weight given to the knowledge teachers and students brought to the classroom that generated a crucial change in their roles: teacher and students became co-collaborators, responsible for their own development. As a consequence, this view also came to affect, in succeeding years, how the roles of teacher and learners are to be understood in English teaching and learning in general.

The second relates to the use of Portuguese as the classroom language. At that time this use was considered heretical by most teachers. Today it has become a well-established procedure applied in the classroom by both ESP teachers and General English teachers.

A third legacy was the creation of a “local” (Canagarajah, 2002) methodology for the teaching and learning of reading in the country. This methodology emphasised the use of authentic texts, the teaching and learning of reading strategies together with awareness of reading processes aiming at enabling students to cope with English written texts in a short period of time, since most of the courses were offered in one or two semesters. Therefore, at that time this Project provided conditions to optimise the teaching and learning of reading in a foreign language for students who needed to develop such a skill not only in English but also in Portuguese, as it was found afterwards. For this reason, the methodology developed by the Project brought as a contribution to English teaching and learning a course in which using authentic texts is organized to proceed from general comprehension to detailed comprehension, strongly emphasizing “conscientização” (Scott, 1986) of the reading process, the use of reading strategies, the teaching of a minimum discourse grammar (Deyes, 1981). After almost thirty years this is still the preferred reading course throughout the country. A proof of this is that now they are the “ESP” courses seen in many current textbooks lately published in Brazil. Besides some of the sample materials compiled in the Resource Packages are still used due to the evident usefulness they offer to the teacher who wants to argue in favour of strategies as a

preliminary requirement for the teaching of reading. In this case, thus, it is not restricted to the area of ESP but English teaching and learning in general.

Another merit of the Project was materials production. At the time when materials used in the classroom meant a textbook, and a textbook that generally emphasised vocabulary (or specific vocabulary), decontextualised sentences and sometimes non-authentic texts, it seems quite a victory to change from this perspective to a strategy-skill based one. This perspective guided the production of materials and the participating teachers were better prepared to produce their own materials. If it was not the case, they had to learn how to evaluate and adapt materials in order to customise them to their specific group of students. This component contributed to their development making them able to design their courses independently of having a textbook, generally used as the guide or the backbone for the planning of a course.

These contributions, on the other hand, helped to create during these decades some myths that originated from the very nature of the needs identified in this Project. Therefore, one of the challenges to be faced by ESP practitioners in Brazil is the deconstruction of these myths.

3. The ESP Myths in Brazil

The most prevailing myth associated to ESP in Brazil, and created because of the Brazilian ESP Project, is that “ESP is reading”. As already showed here, reading was the only skill that deserved special attention in the Project. Thus, on one hand, ESP is to be understood as synonymous with reading and, on the other hand, any reading course is to be understood as ESP. As a consequence of this current myth another one comes together: “ESP is mono-skill” as any teaching action that is related to its design and implementation is devoted exclusively to one ability. However, the point to stress here is that this myth may be deconstructed easily when the reasons why the Brazilian Project concentrated on reading are made apparent: this was the paramount ability identified during the needs analysis

conducted in the late 1970's as needed by most target groups. Therefore, these aspects are consistent with two main features of the approach: the concept of "needs" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) and the so-called "corner stone of ESP" (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998:122) - needs analysis. These should be recognizable arguments for teaching reading comprehension and, thus, making of this course a truly ESP course. Unfortunately, there are still many professionals in Brazil who still think that if you need to teach any other skill or more than one skill you are not teaching ESP.

Another recurrent myth is: "ESP is technical English". One of the reasons that may explain such a misconception may have stemmed from the 1970's and early 1980's when many materials on the market focusing on the language of sciences, a well-established idea among ESP practitioners in many parts of the world, were produced. The very early publication of Ewer and Latorre's (1969) *Course in Basic Scientific English* is an example of breaking the strong tradition of having materials concentrating on language. In addition to that, many efforts were made to characterize the language of science, and for a long time, this was broken down into domains: the language of chemistry, the language of medicine, etc. A comment at this point is necessary: there were and still are many books and courses with titles that encapsulated (and encapsulate) this tradition like *The English for Telecommunication*, for example. Turning back to the argument, such domain-specific breakdown materials may have contributed to an understanding that these specific Englishes were sufficiently different for a course to be based on them, with specific vocabulary being one of the chief features, and consequently creating such a misconception. Another explanation but this time rooted in "local" reasons may be found in the fact that subject matters of students' disciplines were (and still are in some places) brought to compose part of the syllabuses of many ESP courses. Third, the fact that the Technical Schools, now upgraded as Technological Centres for Higher Education (CEFETs), joined the Brazilian ESP Project in the mid-eighties may have strongly contributed to this association.

Other current myths aligned with ESP Reading Courses due to the adopted methodology and the specific contents that were developed during the implementation of the ESP Project

in the country are: “ the use of the dictionary is not allowed”, “grammar is not taught”, and “Portuguese has to be used in the classroom”. In order to better understand these misconceptions it is necessary to briefly explain the underlying principles adopted to teach reading . Some of the procedures put into work in the classroom were based on the belief that cognitive and linguistic difficulties should be eased and/or balanced during the learning process by making up the most of students’ previous knowledge. So, the use of the dictionary during the initial classes was avoided to make students explore other areas of knowledge and resources rather than those, which were believed to be very familiar (the dictionary, translation of word by word, for example). The same applies to the teaching of grammar: strategies were emphasized over grammar at the beginning of the course and the teaching of grammar, in turn, concentrated on discourse grammar rather than traditional (structural) teaching of grammar. The same underlying principle was attributed to the use of Portuguese by teacher and students in the classroom, as well as in the written instructions of activities. These decisions, thus, were transformed into dogmas in ESP Reading courses and in order to oppose them the following are thrown into questions: Is it possible to learn a foreign language in formal contexts without considering the dictionary as a resource? Besides that, is there language learning without a grammar? This being the case, it is also necessary to ask: what grammar are we talking about?.

Another myth not exactly derived from the methodology developed by the ESP Project, but from the teaching and learning views and language views that many professionals had and still have is: “the teaching of ESP is possible only after the students master ‘basic English’” (here meaning a structuralist language conception of learning). This is a view incompatible with the roots underlying theoretical assumptions in which ESP is grounded. According to the principles of the approach, what is ‘basic’ will depend on the student’s needs. In other words, what may be considered ‘basic’ for a waiter may not be for a pilot, a receptionist and so forth. Interesting to comment at this point is that this myth does not derive from the ESP tenets in Brazil but from the language and learning views the professional adopts.

An examination of these myths in the light of the characteristics of the ESP approach and its history in the country seems to be sufficient to deconstruct such myths. However, it

seems desirable to consider changes that have been going on in the English language teaching and learning as well as in ESP resulting from historical and social demands in the hope that they may add up arguments and influence the way in which professionals understand ESP.

4. Changes , Trends and Demands from the 1990's on

A brief examination on the academic world may reveal several changes that have been going on (see Holmes, Celani, Ramos and Scott, 1993). If before students were taught to read (the way it used to be done in the 1980's) using texts extracted from various sources (newspapers, magazines, books, etc), today students request other "types" of texts (genres) to read, for example: academic and research articles, academic textbooks, dissertations and thesis, reviews, abstracts. Also they need to develop reading skills to search for support materials on the Internet and even to read texts to be used in their academic field. Consequently, differently from what teachers have been doing in their ESP reading courses, now they have to think about these needs and probably design and implement courses that concentrate on them. In other words, it means a change in their reading courses, i.e. from "general ESP reading courses" to "academic reading courses".

Another important change that comes along with transformations in the means of communication and the new social relationships and economic demands are the pressures for courses in English for Academic Purposes. Nowadays many undergraduate and chiefly postgraduate students need to write abstracts, present papers orally, give lectures, attend lectures and deliver oral presentations in English etc. If these are the new demands in this context, one has to ask him/herself if the courses that were taught in the 1980's and that are still taught by many English teachers and, worse, that are in textbooks sold on the market, are still able to fulfil the new demands.

Another change derived from the development of the Brazilian ESP Project in the country is related to the involvement of primary and secondary schools: they started to attend

seminars and courses trying to get help to develop expertise in the teaching of reading skills, due to the compulsory university entrance exams (reading skills are compulsorily tested). This necessity grew stronger with the publication in 1998 of the National Curricular Parameters of Foreign Languages, (Brasil, 1998a) which stresses reading as the most important skill to be worked with. However, the defining principle of the ESP approach - Needs Analysis – was abandoned. People carried ideas of a reading course planned to specific people, in a specific target situation in the 1980s to be used with people who belong to and live in the 21st century. For the sake of illustration, while a reader in the 80s was used to reading printed material, the reader today is exposed to many modalities of language (written, visual, etc). These groups (higher education students and secondary students) present tremendous differences in terms of target and learning needs that were unfortunately put aside. Besides that, another aspect to consider is the fact that courses that had been planned for a target group whose age was twenty or more was transported the way it was to be used with students who were ten or fifteen years old. In other words, these teachers do not make use of the tenets of the approach, but simply made use of a methodology developed in the 1980s (the planning of reading courses for specific purposes and people) that was planned for a completely different target group. Certainly these courses do not follow the principles pointed out so far in this article. Besides, it is worth mentioning that these courses have a complete different demand in terms of needs and wants. This is one of the new challenges for ESP practitioners in Brazil involved in ESP reading courses to face: are these reading courses to be considered ESP?

In relation to the workplace, demands are much stronger. In graduate courses throughout the country such as Hotel Industry, Tourism, International Relations, the students themselves who have already started working in the area normally request the English teacher to prepare a course in English that gives priority to the tasks that they have to perform in their workplace situations. This, for many teachers, is totally unknown and brings about uncertainties and puts the teacher of English at risk. *Vis-à-vis English for Business and English for Business Purposes* (Dudley- Evans and St John, 1998) a boom was felt in the last decade. At the same time, requests for occupational courses (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) such as those to contemplate the needs of taxi drivers, international

company operators, receptionists, also increased. Another urgent demand will come from the aviation sector: English tests (produced and offered now on an official basis) are compulsory for pilots and traffic air controllers. This measure will make teachers of English research into the areas in order first to identify the many situations these people experience and second the language used in these target situations that may not be at all clear to teachers in order to provide adequate ESP courses to these students. Unfortunately, all these areas were and are the ones that have hardly received much attention in the country.

Last but not least, another area that deserves to be mentioned is the digital world, a new world which is especially difficult for teachers to 'conquer'. It is no longer desirable or possible to ignore digital technology. On one hand, because it is part of the new century – its everywhere and in the daily life of Brazilian citizens, especially those who live in big cities there is no turn back, particularly for educators. On the other hand, official institutional sectors make pressure on the public and private institutions to design and develop distance education courses. Digital technology these days is a condition sine qua non in Brazilian education curricula. Therefore, efforts need to be made in this direction because they will contribute to the construction of the future of ESP in Brazil.

This brief presentation of changes and trends in ESP in Brazil is a glimpse of the many avenues of inquiry that are open to ESP practitioners and indicate the challenges they will face in order to cope with the new demands in the area. Consequently, a question may be posed : how can we advance this future then?

5. Directions to the Future

Many steps towards the construction of the ESP future in Brazil have been taken, specially in the research area. Given the extension of the subject and the country it would be very pretentious to say that this paper will present a state of the art review of the ESP research in the country. Effectively, this cannot be much more than a brief consideration of what has been done in the areas and subject matters that circulate in the work environment of this

author, and most notably the research developed in the Post Graduate Applied Linguistics Programme at Pontifical University of São Paulo. Nevertheless, the issues, which will be addressed here, certainly reflect the problems that have been of concern to Brazilian ESP practitioners throughout the country, and this is why they merit further investigation.

In the occupational/professional contexts there have been several recent researches into the areas of Tourism (Sprengr, 1997; Belmonte; 2003) Hotel Tourism (Cardoso, 2003, Gomes,2003), Bilingual Executive Secretary courses (Araújo, 1999; Pinto, 2002) International Commerce (Gomes, 1998); Technology (Vaccari, 2004) Publicity (Quaresma, 2005). The main focus of these investigations was Needs Analysis involving graduate students taking these courses, teachers, coordinators, heads of departments, as well as the market to map the target and learning needs of these different target groups and situations so that the results could serve as guidelines for the design and implementation of ESP courses.

In relation to the business context some relevant studies may be mentioned. Vian Jr (2003), for example, presented the design of a course for a major Brazilian bank focusing on the identified students' communicative needs based on genre. Weyersbach (2002), on the other hand, reports on the experience of offering an online business course tackling the issue of an ongoing negotiated syllabus. Acosta; (2000), Costa (2002) Damigo (2003) investigated representations that professionals have in their workplace about the role of English and the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Other studies dealt with business discourse (Ramos, 1994a; 1994b; 1997; Santos, 1996; 2002). The topics investigated were related to the construction and projection of image of international companies, language aspects of organizational culture, and identification of electronic and printed documents that are circulated in different companies. These researches can greatly contribute in a number of ways. They provide empirical data that can be of great assistance for ESP practitioners to design courses that may mirror the kind of tasks required of students in their future professional contexts. Also these data provide different types of knowledge about different target situations and authentic documents that may be used to produce appropriate materials and more realistic activities to be performed in the classroom.

In the academic context, two studies (Serafini, 2003; Carvalho, 2003) in the area of medicine investigated listening comprehension of research articles in presentations in order to develop courses and materials in listening and writing in this area. There are two other researches (Pinto, in progress; Carvalho, in progress) investigating the ways of creating and/or reformulating the curriculum of a Bilingual Executive Secretary course and a Language Course, respectively.

Alongside a growing interest in genre, there has been further research into academic genre descriptions and surveys. Carvalho (2003) described oral presentations in English in the medical specialty of pneumology in order to identify differences and similarities regarding the rhetorical organization (Swales, 1990) of those oral presentations in comparison with research articles in the medical area. Ramos, Lima-Lopes and Gazotti-Vallim (2004) conducted a needs analysis with postgraduate students in a university in the city of São Paulo to find out the genres mostly needed by these students in their areas of specialism in order to design more appropriate academic reading courses to these groups of students. Also a pedagogical proposal for the use of genres in ESP courses (Ramos, 2000; 2004) was put forward and several studies that explore this idea in classroom activities (Fischer et al, 2001; Ventura and Farias, 2002; Vigia-Dias and Bonamin, 2002) were conducted. A recent doctoral study that illustrates a concern with genre and technology is that of Damião (2006). In this research, the author conducted a longitudinal study on an ongoing needs analysis basis and introduced computer mediated communication activities so that at the end she was able to design a task and a genre- based syllabus that best suited the needs of this specific group of students.

In the pedagogical context, there have been some experiments. One is a reading course based on the Brazilian ESP methodology described above in secondary schools, and another a course devoted to the development of oral skills (clerks, receptionists waiters) offered to young adults on an experimental basis to a poor community in the city of São Paulo (Ramos and Iurif, 2003).

In the online context, some courses have been emerging: an ESP course for the reading of academic texts and digital journal abstracts for medicine professionals have recently started been offered at the Catholic University of São Paulo as extra-mural studies courses. More recently the ESP research group that belongs to the Post Graduate Applied Linguistics Programme at Catholic University of São Paulo designed and developed a ESP Teacher Development Project. This project (coordinated by the author of this paper) was funded by Vitae, an international agency operating in Brazil, and the Catholic University of São Paulo. Also the local British Council took part and offered a grant-in-aid for a project evaluation consultant (Chris Tribble). The project was developed in six Brazilian Federal Technological Centers (CEFETs) located in the various regions of Brazil aiming at providing technological knowledge, digital literacy and knowledge of the ESP approach for the English local team to be able to offer consultancy in ESP as well as offering online ESP teacher development courses for other centers in their regions (Ramos et al., 2006).

All of these studies, experiments and efforts begin to delineate the new paths to be followed by those who work with ESP in Brazil.

The first of them is the urgency of making new surveys and implementing needs analyses that focus mainly on the new performance contexts that involve the use of other skills rather than exclusively reading. Another path is related to the production of materials to these new groups, since even if we may have materials available on the market for many of the areas mentioned above (Tourism or Business, for example) it is known that they can not attend specificities and peculiarities of certain groups. An example needs to be mentioned: if we think of a group who studies Tourism to work in one of the cities located in the Northeast of Brazil and one that will work in the central part of the country, the Pantanal, for example. These courses for sure will share many features but there will be linguistic components of the syllabuses that will be quite different. Besides, it will also be necessary to think of materials production for situations that require computer-mediated communication, without mentioning online courses that will have some new peculiarities for those who are not familiar with production of materials to be used in online courses.

As can be seen the future is promising but before finishing this article some issues should be taken for further reflection on the ESP approach in the country.

6. Final Remarks

The first reflection is on the current Brazilian ESP reading courses. It will be necessary to think if what is wanted is a general course, (which has been offered until the present day) or one that focuses on more closely specific purposes. Besides that, some consideration for a course that prioritises the teaching of strategies or genres, or both is also needed. If one is to consider the changes and transformations that society and the area have been undergoing, courses that put emphasis on specific genres will be desirable. At the same time, such courses will force designers to plan courses for specific audiences, too.

A second reflection concerns the concept of needs. If we take into account the academic, professional, school and digital contexts and if needs are indeed the basis of courses for these different contexts it is necessary first to ask: which course is not ESP? Next, who needs what from whose point of view? That is, the needs belong to whom? Whose needs are we talking about? Those of students? Or those of the institutions? Or the ones prescribed in the Brazilian official documents? In this case, it is necessary that we think about the school context. It is impossible not to consider the educational recommendations made in these documents, because they form the basis of the annual school planning of disciplines. It is worth noting that these recommendations are in a sense general in scope as they emphasise mainly the education of the individual as a citizen. Another question to be thought over is planning: what is it to be considered as content? Specific needs, subject matter, skills or specific activities? Moreover, if we are supposed to plan an online course, will this course be based on a needs analysis conducted with the students who will take this course or will it be done based on skills and activities that the designer judges as necessary to be used in their target situations? In this case, is it an ESP course or not?

To conclude, here is an issue related to the scope of the expression “for specific purposes”. For example, a course for traffic air controllers could be easily identified as a very specific course, as it deals with highly specific content (e.g. the use of phraseology) for a highly specialised audience. On the other hand, could a course on business international transactions or a typical Brazilian reading course be considered to be “for specific purposes” like the first one mentioned? This is still a question to be discussed among the ESP community. However, to advance some solution to this “Hamletian dilemma” (i.e. ESP or not ESP) it would be interesting to examine Dudley Evans and St John’s (1998) proposal as a possibility of offering an additional perspective to the common hierarchical classification system (Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Robinson, 1980; 1991). The authors propose a continuum to place courses “that run from clearly definable General English courses through to very specific ESP courses” (ibid:9).

Also still considering the “Hamletian dilemma”, in January 2007, there was a discussion running on the TESOL English for Specific Purposes IS E-list about ESP. Mary Ellen Kerans, from Barcelona, Spain, after coming from a conference in the Canary Islands (PPRISEAL) wrote the following comment:

“ Now here’s my (hopefully provocative) point: ESP per se wasn’t mentioned once in my presence in 3 days even though John Swales was the first ‘plenary’ and reports of “normal science” activities in genre and corpus analysis and descriptions of EAP courses were all about us – in presentations and posters. Has the term ESP become so large an umbrella that it no longer has much meaning? Have the predictions of early critics of ESP come true – that in the end all learners have specific needs and all situations are specific, so singling out a corner for “ESP” per se is unnecessary? Are we looking for ever-more-specific communities of practice or regional communities and does this explain the silence on this forum?”

These pending questions are presented here in the hope that the international ESP community may devote thorough thoughts to them. Furthermore, it is hoped that this brief report of the state of art of ESP in Brazil, I may have offered a contribution to other ESP practitioners in the world so that they to appreciate what has happened and has been happening in a country like Brazil when the subject is ESP.

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