

DEVELOPING A NEW SYLLABUS FOR TOURISM ENGLISH

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Today Tourism English has become a well-established field within English for Special Purposes and such ESP courses are offered increasingly for university BA English students. However, course books are designed for Tourism major students, and not for those who come from other disciplinary fields. English Language and Literature BA students' English language level is higher than that of the average tourism students' but they need an introduction to the basics of tourism theory and the typical genres in the field. Moreover, these genres currently involve a confident use of ICT (info-communication technology), a feature also lacking from modern course books. To fill this niche, a new experimental blended learning course syllabus was devised using the Moodle e-learning platform, with special emphasis on incorporating technical advances into studying features of digital and traditional genres typical of tourism. As evaluation, students were asked to compile a digital portfolio. At the end of the course a feedback was administered, the result of which indicated that students were satisfied with both content and methodology. Future developments should take towards this direction to further students' employability. The present paper describes the content and methodology of the course and summarizes the findings of the student feedback questionnaire.

Keywords: ESP, Tourism English, blended learning, ICT, Moodle, genre analysis, digital portfolio, higher education

In 2011, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) introduced Tourism English, a new ESP course for English Language and Literature BA students. The course was advertised as a 4-credit elective seminar with enrollment limited to 19 students. As in the case of every new course, several issues of syllabus design emerged concerning content and methodology, some of which will be dealt with in this paper. A general dilemma of all university ESP seminars is, for example, how to determine the level of professional knowledge necessary for students to benefit optimally from a particular course. It was especially problematic for English BA students of ELTE, because they required some theoretical grounding on the topics in order to be able to make sense of the specialist terminology. Besides theoretical grounding, competence building in tourism discourse was also established as an objective for the course. On the other hand, points of grammar or basic academic skills did not have to be covered, as their general language skills

were higher than those of typical Tourism students', since they passed a C1 level proficiency test as a prerequisite of attending the course.

In the present paper, I will describe the preparation process preceding the syllabus design, followed by detailing the major dilemmas concerning content and methodology. The article will conclude by reporting the results of the satisfaction survey in order to legitimize the decisions behind the syllabus by analyzing students' feedback data.

Preparations for a new Tourism ESP syllabus Needs analysis

According to major theorists of ESP (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), needs analysis is a crucial element of any ESP course. A well-structured needs analysis enables the course designer and the ESP teacher to make the right decisions about content and methodology alike. In ESP teaching, there are some comfortable situations, when the stakeholders of the course are easily identified, the target situations, where the specialist language will be used, are already described. These ESP courses can heavily rely on the working knowledge of the students, who require a facilitator's role from the teacher. In the case of university English BA students, however, it was difficult to collect data on their needs for a Tourism English course, since Tourism was not their major subject. Informal interviews showed that they were only vaguely familiar with tourism jobs, originating from their own memories as tourists.

Potential employers, however, were able to disclose valuable information on what type of jobs are generally offered to English major students in the tourism industry. Therefore, expert informants were identified and interviews were carried out before the syllabus design started. The detailed description of these interviews is beyond the scope of the present paper, but a summary is given to highlight some of the major findings.

According to the interview with an employment center official, multinational companies, as well as small national enterprises are constantly looking for employees with exceptional language skills and follow a strategy of in-house training. At large companies, employees are responsible for a narrow scope of tasks, while at small businesses English majors are asked to perform a wide variety of tasks. In the latter case, many digital and traditional, oral and written genres are involved in the job, including interpreting and translations in formal and informal contexts.

Small enterprises find it hard to cope with university students' lack of job experience and general unfamiliarity with working contexts, which is the result of an insufficient socialization into the working culture. It seems that employers refer to the swalesian 'discourse community' (Swales, 1990) and feel that this aspect of socialization is neglected in university teaching.

Based on the findings of the needs analysis, it was concluded that the new course had to center around competencies necessary in a general work environment, involving various tasks and familiarizing students with a wide varieties of genres, enabling students to work both for small and large tourism businesses and discarding the usual situational/functional syllabus provided for tourism students. The only question remained whether there was a course book available to suit these complex requirements.

Evaluation of existing course books

In the Hungarian university context, international textbooks and Hungarian supplementary materials, as well as exam preparation books are used extensively. As anecdotal evidence suggests, ESP teachers are rather dissatisfied with existing core materials, but still use them as the basis of their courses, creating and updating supplementary materials.

During the preparation for the course, I was not able to find textbooks suitable for the above described special group of students, for several reasons. The main reason was that the language level of international course books was too low for English BA students, and the materials concentrated too much on work specific everyday target situations, such as for example, replying to a complaint at the front office in a hotel.

Other books, whose language level would have been suitable, were written for college students of tourism and researchers of tourism theory, containing facts almost entirely unnecessary for the students in question: providing detailed hospitality-related information on government regulations, not only creating a 'sterile' theoretical environment, but also remaining knowledge providers, paying little or no attention to promoting higher order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Neither did these course books attempt to familiarize students with a real working environment, nor gave they room to explore local culture and customs or intercultural aspects. Unfortunately, the topics of Hungarian materials were not engaging, which would have been a real obstacle to raise motivation and student involvement.

Authentic materials, when used in course books, had the function of illustration, instead of being the basis of discourse and/or register analysis, which again was a major drawback to using these books. The books described, however, missed one or the other.

The materials written for the state examinations (vocational and language exams alike), although described competencies necessary for jobs in tourism, contained no clear guidelines on their implementation or methodological considerations on how best these skills were to be conveyed to students, leaving it to the discretion of the teacher. As most university ESP teachers are not experts in tourism, what happens in reality is that, instead of giving practice in real work situations, such tasks are left out of the syllabus, substituted by giving information on how to perform them, based on course books. For example, as very few English teachers have ever calculated the budget for a real package holiday, perhaps they tend to use a(n outdated) course book example and discuss it as a model, but do not ask students to create their own calculation, as they would be unable to evaluate the results in a business-like manner.

In summary, all existing materials pointed towards a rather traditional syllabus, lacking certain key elements mentioned by employers in the needs analysis. After concluding that a new syllabus would be necessary, complemented by new course materials, the next consideration became whether the book format would be right for a modern course involving digital genres, or some other, computer-based platform would be more suitable for the described objectives.

With these aims in mind, I decided to design a syllabus with specialized content and methodology, based around the following research questions:

1. Which content and methodology-related features need to be incorporated into the syllabus so as to optimally develop students' professional competence in the field of tourism?
2. How should students be familiarized with new digital genres?

3. Which would be the most appropriate modes of evaluation to reflect the experimental nature of the course, yet to reflect both the process and product approaches?

Designing the syllabus

General considerations

Based on the results of the needs analysis and the requirements of the state exam, the aims of the course were defined as follows.

The principal aim of the course should be the initiation of students into the discourse community involved in tourism discourse.

The topics should be organized in such a way that gradually introduces students to the basics of tourism, starting by easily accessible topics, while more theoretical or specific topics should be taught towards the end of the course. As a consequence, first materials should contain general and sub-technical vocabulary items, found mainly in texts written for the general public, such as promotional materials (advertisements, brochures), while formal written text types and oral communication of experts with a large amount of technical vocabulary should come later.

Exposing students to the target genre(s) is essential to acquire knowledge of the code and conventions (Bhatia, 1993). Therefore, typical genres need to be shown, analyzed, practiced and produced by the students involving also new genres such as travelogues, in-flight magazines, video blogs (vlogs), podcasts, thus enabling students to have an up-to-date knowledge of communication within the tourism industry.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:4) argue that “*ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves*”. This principle, as well as the claims of small enterprise employers about students’ lacking skills, made it certain that the methodology of the course should reflect the processes in the working environment. As students were not familiar with this context, experimenting, draft writing, cooperative work had to be in focus, involving also myself, the teacher as role-shifter from expert to facilitator, even to student. The above mentioned approach, however, is contrary to university course requirements, where courses should have a gradable outcome. With this in mind, the methodology to follow was that a process approach should be used during the term, while draft pieces of work are criticized, then collecting all corrected work into a portfolio, the final version of which to be evaluated after the course. Thus combining both process and product approaches.

As modern genres in tourism involve the media, a digital portfolio appeared to be the most suitable collection of finished materials. This consideration was further underlined by the fact that students nowadays feel safe and spend most of their time collecting information from the internet. They are also familiar with the various multimedia genres, and willing to do home assignments in this environment. A course should follow students methods of learning preferences, therefore in line with *Hutchinson and Waters’* (1987) learning-centered approach, a multimedia based blended learning format seemed the most suitable.

In order to find a safe and familiar environment for storing students’ work and facilitate cooperation, Moodle, the university e-learning management framework was chosen.

Content

Each session was based around a sub-field within tourism (e.g. Active Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Cultural Tourism, and Business Tourism). During the first seminars, text types addressing the general public, such as advertisements, newspaper articles and news videos were used. Students watched several 3-minute videos at home or read short authentic texts to familiarize themselves with new concepts, typical genres and certain tasks the tourism job in question would involve. Excerpts from books and professional journals, alongside authentic materials from the Internet were extensively used. My featured internet sources contained amusing, emotional or even controversial issues, as well as 21st century concepts (e.g. satiation, minimoon, couch surfing, capsule hotels, British clubbers in Ibiza). These provoked discussion and provided ground for deeper student involvement. As the course progressed, the students were introduced to an increasing amount of tourism-specific terminology and theoretical concepts, which appeared in texts written by and for experts (e.g. *tourism segments*, *destination marketing*, and *Maslow's pyramid*). As tourism is an interdisciplinary field, its vocabulary draws on other disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology, therefore at the final stage of the course period a wide range of vocabulary was acquired intensively. Table 1 below indicates the basic topic areas of the 12-week semester.

Table 1. *The content of the course*

Week	Topic	Features
1	Introduction Basic terms of tourism	Tourist attractions / segments Analyzing brochures
2	Commercial enterprises	Disneyland, Salzburg, Ireland Thailand
3	Ecotourism	National Parks, eco-weekends Sustainable tourism
4	Travelling	Online booking
5	Accommodation	Jobs at a hotel, A Japanese inn
6	Cultural, educational tours	Museums on the net, The Eden Project
7	Business tourism	Tourism management
8	Active tourism	
9	The dark side of tourism	Terror and catastrophe tourism
10	Hungary – Budapest, Balaton	A tour guide
11	Hungary – festivals /food	'Hungarikum'
12	Test	

Skills development: Oral skills

An important result of the needs analysis was that the future jobs would involve both oral and written tasks. However, speaking does not get enough attention during classes at universities. Evaluation also mostly takes place in writing. In order to compensate for this, oral assignments were included. To become confident in planned and spontaneous oral production, various in-class tasks and home assignments were necessary to practice oral skills. With the help of modern technical devices, students' samples of spontaneous oral production were recorded about certain tourism topics, e.g. choosing a teambuilding activity, describing it and recording their own voices. Recording students' voices was a crucial element, for several reasons. From the teacher's point of view, each student got an equal opportunity to be heard, several times, if necessary. It could also be kept as a record of production, and it was possible to give individual feedback. If performance was not satisfactory, students were asked to practice this skill and send more speaking samples. A practical consideration was to limit the time of the recording to 2 minutes.

Students found the task useful; they recorded the same speech samples several times, and gradually became more relaxed while speaking. They had a chance to analyze their production and re-record themselves until they were satisfied with the result, as they wrote comments on this by email.

Skills development: Writing skills

In order for students to be able to work alone on home assignments, genre and register analysis was accomplished during classes. Analyzing the best examples of the certain genre and using them as models raised awareness of features which made that text effective for the receiver. General features of advertisements, 'compulsory' elements were observed, before constructing a text with a similar function.

Written assignments comprised of tasks, such as translating and creating advertisements, preparing an executive summary, designing a satisfaction questionnaire for public transport companies, writing a formal speech on the importance of cultural heritage, creating SWOT analyses and designing a package holiday for a selected tourism market segment.

As new forms of communication involve simultaneously more than one channels (auditive and visual, connected to oral or written production), new digital genres have appeared in tourism where non-verbal elements also play an important role as information content. Enabling students to work within these genres, they were asked to illustrate their written products with pictures, downloaded or self-recorded videos or animations.

Methodology of teaching and the use of ICT

As needs analysis interviews revealed, employees in tourism industry work in a multimedia-driven environment. Most of the communicative situations, written and oral genres contained some technological features. Therefore, incorporating an ICT syllabus within the course seemed essential.

The Moodle e-learning framework is offered automatically by the university for each new course. Students were familiar with its various features, and were able to confidently use it during collecting information for home assignments, collaborating, sharing documents in different format, testing their knowledge with quizzes, etc. A useful option of this framework

for the teacher is that the system records an automatic activity log report of each learner. Thus, teachers can check not only when the learners handed in an assignment, but it is also possible to track how much time they spent on a task or a quiz (Brandl, 2005).

Students prepared for each lesson by watching several 2-3 minute videos, some of which dealt with controversial issues or trends. With the help of applications downloaded from the internet, they incorporated parts of these videos into the seminars for summaries, debates, tourist guide speeches or simulations of real working environments. *Ellis and Johnson* (1994) also list simulations as an important tool for practicing working behavior. Instead of real field trips students were able to use the internet websites to simulate tourism tasks. They simulated online hotel and air ticket bookings and conference organizations.

Using the internet was an approach to accommodate the four 'I's': *involvement, interaction, individualization* and *independence* (terminology from Dudley-Evans & St John 1998:200). ICT knowledge guidance necessary for sts: Although it is a commonly held belief that students are part of the digital revolution (digital natives, as described by Prensky, 2001), experience revealed that they needed guidance and advice in certain issues, such as

- how to send large files, the importance of file names, sending 2nd, 3rd drafts,
- saving and sending ppt files to include voice add-ons
- dubbing a video: how to be synchronized with the original
- various video file formats and how to handle them

Evaluation

Students' final grade was based on two sources. They wrote a 45-minute test during the last session, and they created a digital portfolio with recordings of their voices, short video interviews and animations. They were not assessed during the portfolio building phase, which meant that course participants had the freedom to experiment with new ideas and technology without the pressure of knowing that their output would be evaluated and therefore would count into their final grades. The final, corrected version, however, was evaluated based scores on content, structure, variety of materials (audio, video, oral, written text types), and aesthetic considerations. The portfolio was uploaded online and shared with the other students.

Student feedback: Pedagogical implications

At the end of the course students filled in an online survey to express their opinion about the Tourism English course. The results, which were collected after the in-class test, were overwhelmingly positive. The students described the content as modern and entertaining, the blended learning methodology as *inspirational*, and the digital portfolio they created for assessment as useful for their future careers. The following are students' statements about content and methodology to answer the question what they found the most useful during the course. (The expressions about content are underlined; the ones about methodology are in italics.) What did you find the most useful about the course?

- ⇒ The *new type of sports*, I didn't know most of them before.
- ⇒ The *Hotel industry course materials*, because now I can fully understand the *different rates and terms*.
- ⇒ *Cultural tourism*, because finally, I could get to know Bp. and other parts of the country (thanks to the *short presentations in class*) a little bit better. To be honest, I had no idea what e.g. the Millennium Monument symbolizes... But now I do. :)
- ⇒ *tourism translations*, hotel terminology
- ⇒ *translating and producing* advertising texts/materials
- ⇒ *ppt-s* with many-many good links and videos, I just loved them!
- ⇒ *Translating technical texts, the diverse activities (e.g. doing slideshows, voice recording, etc.)*
- ⇒ *Ppts* and vocabulary lists.
- ⇒ *Presentations* and articles about the topic discussed.
- ⇒ Actually I found *all materials useful* as they greatly added to my knowledge about tourism, but if I had to highlight one as the most useful, I'd choose the *hotel industry topic*, and as for the most enjoyable, the *Disney topics*. But really, I did like and *enjoy all of our topics!*
- ⇒ I found the most useful the one called: "*James Chicago Forditasi gyakorlat.pptx*", because it *showed the most common translation problems and their solutions*.

It is clear from these answers that students found very different things useful. Three students gave long answers concerning some methodology issues, which are summarized below:

- ✓ They found the discussions of translations very useful, which evaluated the quality of the translated piece from the point of view of the employer, with special emphasis on formal and aesthetic elements, as well. Students also appreciated the reflections shared on the decision making processes of a practicing translator, from how to look for and where to find background information before translating, as well as considerations on which words to choose or discard in formal or informal written genres. The positive feedback indicated that ESP teachers are truly capable of bridging the gap between work and university.
- ✓ Students found using info communicational devices practical, because they felt that they had very much to learn in this field.
- ✓ They liked the system of evaluation which allowed for experimenting and creativity.

In summary, it can be concluded that students had a good opinion of all three aspects of the course which had been meant to provide them with the skills necessary in the world of work. The positive opinion they expressed seem to be validated by other sources. One is the statistical data from the log-files in the Moodle e-learning framework. The number of visits during the course, in other words: student activity was exceptionally high. The website was looked at, and files were downloaded more than 2000 times. The frequent visits indicated how relevant the content was for the students. Their involvement and contribution was even higher if we consider home assignments which contained such big audio and video files that they had to be uploaded via common file share sites (e.g. zippishare.com, toldacuccot.hu), and not on Moodle due to file size limitations.

The best proof of perceived usefulness of the digital portfolios and the acquired skills, however, is the fact that several students attached their work to their CVs and job application forms. Some of them reported that they were offered part-time and summer jobs in the field of tourism, while two students went to work for a media and advertising agency, where they were asked to perform creative tasks similar to those they practiced during the course. Three students also indicated that they would like to continue their studies within the domain of tourism and hospitality.

Conclusions

Based on the feedback results, it can be concluded that the course objectives were realized, as students acquired the competencies necessary to work in the field of tourism. They did not only learn the basic technical vocabulary and typical genres related to various jobs in hospitality, but with the emphasis of a working context, students were also able to try themselves out as employees. The 'additional value' of the course originated from the systematic use of multimedia devices and the complexity of methods within tasks that students had to perform.

Further research is necessary into the needs of various stakeholders, such as present and future employers, and other representatives of the tourism industry to gain deeper insight into what their requirements are towards ESP teachers, with a possible cooperation in mind between expert informants and the university. This would improve the relevance of materials and methods used in ESP tourism courses, and could also be the basis of a new blended learning syllabus.

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