WHAT IS THE BASIC PROFILE OF THE PERSON WHO WISHES TO WORK EFFECTIVELY IN TOURISM?

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the world. English is presently the way to face globalization and to establish a bridge between peoples. A Tourism course should enable its students to become qualified professionals, to be responsible for their work, to develop self-study strategies, without ever forgetting that each one is an individual and has his/her own characteristics. That is why every ESP course should be learner-centered; the world can became a village without every place loosing its singularities. In this article I have made a brief overview of English for Specific Purposes and discussed Needs Analysis. I consider the importance of students possessing soft-skills and I have also presented the most important professional and self-promotion genres, the situational contexts, professional domains for ESP and the special software needs of students of Tourism. I also proposed some basic competences and attitudes the Tourism operator must aim for.

Key-Words: English for Specific Purposes, Tourism, Needs Analysis, soft Skills

Some people have described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that can be specified. Others, however, have been more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes. Hutchinson et al. states

> ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions
> as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning.

> Hutchinson, 1987:19

ESP's main goal is to prepare students, in a relatively short period of time, to read, understand and communicate better so they can work properly in a certain activity. The methodology we use should lead students to discover their own needs, first of all,

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and then, by using authentic materials, making them acquire what they need to develop better for their work. That is why every ESP activity is presented in context because context; situational and professional, is the central idea from which ESP derives. With a starting point in analysing students' needs, ESP develops those aspects that will allow them to function more confidently in their future professional settings.

Among the authors who have already written about the role of English for specific purposes, I share Hutchinson's (1987:157) point of view in that

> It is likely that in addition to the normal functions of a classroom teacher, the ESP teacher will have to deal with needs analysis, syllabus design, materials writing or adaptation and evaluation.
>
> Hutchinson, 1987:157

So I may say that ESP is basically language learning that has its focus on all aspects of language pertaining to a particular field of human activity. ESP has got absolute characteristics, such as:

- it is designed to meet learner's needs;
- it is centred on appropriate activities when speaking of language and discourse or genres and skills;
- it has got variable characteristics, it may be related to specific disciplines, it is usually designed for adults, with an intermediate or advanced level;
- it may use a different methodology from that of GE.

As the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) approach says, the teaching/learning process of foreign languages should be learner-centred, should emphasise the communicative ability of the student and should use authentic materials as well as authentic contexts, whenever possible. Strevens (1998) states the advantages of an ESP course: «being focused on the learner's need, (…) it is relevant (…), it is successful (…), it is (…) cost-effective».

ESP classes are highly motivating for teachers as well as for students. On the one hand, teachers feel that they are teaching what students will need in the future, it is rewarding to teach according to perceived needs of one's students, on the other hand it is motivating for students because they feel that their needs are being

fulfilled, the content is designed to fit their needs, to improve their abilities, to develop their competences, in order for them to work properly in Tourism one day.

> In order to make a success of ESP, the teachers have to view ESP as a normal, acceptable challenge; they have to understand as fully as possible the nature of the language teaching and learning process; (…) they have to possess an informed optimism and to know that success is possible.
>
> Strevens, Peter, 1988:39

The main characteristics I believe an ESP teacher, or as some authors prefer to use, a monitor, a trainer, a facilitator, a practitioner should have so that students may communicate successfully and in a manner suitable to the context they are going to find when they start working are:

- Flexibility
- Organization
- Trandisciplinary competence; the ability to use material from other subject areas
- Always assess learners' needs
- The ability to design or re-design an ESP programme
- The ability to share knowledge, teach but also learn from colleagues teaching other subjects and from the professional community for which he/she is preparing students.
- Always search for authenticity even when he/she has to create or adapt materials
- The ability to evaluate textbooks
- The ability to advise students; work as a moderator and as a mediator to some extent, as the ESP teacher works the various strands of the students' professional training into his/her classes.

And the teacher should also keep in mind Hutchinson's (1988) nine essential principles of learning: learning is development; it is a thinking and an active process; it involves making decisions; it is an emotional experience; it is not systematic; it is fundamental to assess learners' needs, in the beginning, during and/or after the course; learning a language is not just a question of linguistic knowledge; second language learners are already communicatively competent in their mother tongues(s).

From my experience the ESP teacher is usually the GE teacher who has never had specific ESP training. The difference between them is «in theory nothing, in practice a great deal» (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:53). But after being placed in a position to use ESP he/she enjoys the experience so much that he/she seldom returns to GE classes. In my particular case the students' motivation is what I like most apart from the fact that it gives me the opportunity to come into closer contact with teachers and professionals from other areas. This motivation has to be supported and developed as there is a direct relevance between what students are studying in English class and the content of other subject areas, English may be a tool for History of Art or for Marketing, and there is also a direct relevance between English and what they will do professionally as tourism operators. This direct relevance may not be so evident within other subjects.

According to Dudley-Evans et all (1998:121) the stages in ESP are NA, course design, teaching-learning, assessment and evaluation. In theory we have a set of stages, separate and which occur at different levels, but in practice we have a set of stages that might be together at times, separate at others, which occur in a particular order sometimes and in another at other times.

One of the difficulties of an ESP teacher is the need to establish what and how much students need to acquire while learning, because we must not forget that different target populations have different target levels. Even within the same target population we can have different target levels and different proficiency levels. Let us consider, for example, Tourism students in Viseu, they all entered higher education but they have different language levels, some attended the economy area in secondary school, others the language area, others still, the science and technology areas, but they all chose to do the Tourism Course. So usually, what I have are several different levels of English within my class, it is not easy to coordinate all the levels and it is practically impossible to establish an average desirable level. Just as the average student does not exist, average competence in English is difficult to establish.

ESP is divided into English for Academic Purposes (English for Science and Technology and English for Academic Purposes) and English for Occupational Purposes (Vocational English and Professional English), English for Tourism comes within Professional English, as a subject of Business English.

Lewis says that «Language is a means to an end» (1985:23), that is why we must find the target public's purpose in order to make them able to

communicate, to use the language for their specific ends. To be able to communicate naturally, without restraints, to develop his/her own ability to use the language is what ESP teachers' desire. And how are we able to do it? What is communication? What contributes to making a student more competent in communicating in his/her professional context? I hope to discuss some of these issues in my work and to make a modest contribution to finding some answers.

More and more companies believe that one of the best ways to gain competitive advantage it is to make sure that their employees have soft skills, besides technical skills, of course. These entail an attitude of optimism in their employees so that they know how to relate with their colleagues, clients or supervisors, that they are aware of their own attitudes towards others. Similar care should be given to both, I mean, technical and soft skills should go, preferable, hand in hand. Even when we speak of clients, good customer service is sometimes more valued then knowledge of the subject area, when speaking of customer loyalty, expertise and credentials are less valued then the willingness to help or the ability to solve problems in a short period of time. The use of soft skills may make the difference between an average company and a good one. The Tourism Work Group's opinion on the implementation of the Bologna Process underlines it when it states that one of the main systemic and conceptual competences of a tourism student is *Auto controlo e gestão do stress* (www.mctes.pt/docs/ficheiros/parecer_turismo_índice_e_grupo_trabalho.pdf).

But what do I mean by soft skills? Soft, emotional or social skills are the capacity to communicate properly in a specific situation or context; it is «the ability to fit into a particular structure» (Nieragden, G., 2000). Soft skills are non-technical skills, abilities and traits required to work in a certain profession. We begin by acquiring them as children, shaping them as young adults and development them throughout our adult lives. We may learn, acquire the technical skills quicker if we have the necessary soft skills to perform that specific task. It also makes it easier to fit into or to adapt to a certain employment environment, which, most of the time, has specific company norms or cultural practices.

Soft skills may be divided into four main categories: Communication (listening skills, presentation skills…), Interaction (attitude awareness, conflict handling…), Self-Management (time management, creativity…) and Organization (problem solving, critical thinking…). For example, a hotel receptionist has got to know a lot about tourism to perform well in his/her job, but he/she has to know, also, how to handle stress situations (complaints, obstreperous clients and keeping a serene attitude

in demanding contexts). Clients are sometimes more interested with the fact that the operator is able to solve, or just listen to their problem, then with evidence that he/she has a lot of knowledge concerning a tourism-related area.

As ESP teachers we have to prepare students for this reality, because these skills cannot be encountered in a curriculum, higher education does not stress or value these competences but employers may wish to find them during an extensive interview, for example. That is why we, as teachers, have to be the first to have, show, share these skills, so our students may then acquire them.

Soft Skills are of great help when teaching ESP; I use simulated situations to help students to deal with stressful contexts, with unpredictable events where they feel uncomfortable, where they feel they do not control the situation. Simulating situational contexts helps students to feel more secure when facing unpredictability. In chapter 4.2 on Authentic Materials, I present a chart with a variety of possible simulated situations that I often use in class.

The Goal of Needs Analysis is to collect information that can be used to develop a profile of the language needs of a group of learners in order to be able to make decisions about the goals and content of a language course.

Richards, J. C., 2001:90

Needs analysis emerged in the 1960's; its use in language teaching became common once the Council of Europe's modern language project adopted it. Richterich (1972) and Chancerel (1978) were its principal supporters. Richterich points out the difference between objective and subjective needs. Objective needs appear from an analysis of the aim of the communicative situation while subjective needs are generated by the learners' lacks, not by the gathered information on that specific ESP course but by the stated necessities of the group itself.

NA allows the teacher to design a syllabus and materials based on an analysis of the students'/learners' needs and lacks. It was thanks to ESP that it was introduced to language teaching, with the growth of specialized language programmes. Within its purposes I may underline the fact that it «helps to determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students», it allows «to find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role, (…) such as tour

guide» and it helps «to determine their communicative abilities in English» (cf. Richards, J. C., 2001:52). In this specific course, English for Tourism, learners' language needs are easily determined because my students need to learn for a very specific purpose: to be able to communicate in the field of Tourism, with tourists and with employers in this area, but in other areas learners' language needs may be more difficult to determine. In any NA, what the teacher should do firstly, is to gather the available information, books on the specific subject, Internet sites, newspapers articles and so on. There the teacher may find a lot of relevant information.

> Language is fundamental in the projection and
> perception of the socialised person's identity and feelings.
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> Roberto, Mª Teresa, 1990:39

I would venture to state that it is at least as important in projecting a person's relationship with his/her work environment and job satisfaction. Students are usually taught keeping in mind the needs and practices of social institutions, not their own needs, they are taught according to «the language skills needed to survive in an English-dominant society« (Richards, J. C., 2001:55), but all students are different so it is normal that they have different kinds of needs, it is up to teachers to find them. We should not forget that actual needs are not always the same as perceived needs or wants. What students think they need is not at all times what they really need, or must have, sometimes it is just what they want, what they prefer. It is the teacher's responsibility to assess the learners' needs. Teachers may negotiate with students their preferences, not their needs, needs are what must be satisfied in order for students to work properly once they are placed as tourism operators. It can be only an informal needs analysis, an informal needs assessment, but teachers need to do it. It is also important to engage students, to involve them in the decision making process of curriculum design. The target public's opinions on what as well as on how much should be included in the ESP programme should also be taken into account.

Today we are near everything and everybody; tourism is a more competitive market than before, mainly due to this proximity, this closeness. We travel to encounter new cultures, which are different from ours, so Tourism can only survive if we are able to maintain the local characteristics of a country, of a place and if we are able to promote this singularity to potential buyers.

And where does the English language come in? English is the bridge between tourists and tourism operators. Tourists are getting more demanding, they are

better informed, they have more tourism related offers, they enjoy more holiday periods, shorter in terms of time but more in number, they give greater relevance to quality, they search for different types of holidays, they book more last minute holidays, they have more and more different motivations to go on holiday. The people who have key roles in the education and preparation of the Tourism Operators have to be prepared for these new exigencies, with a language which will help all to share knowledge, to communicate and to make tourism an even greater source of enjoyment, of cultural sharing and ultimately profitable for all concerned.

The students who come to *Escola Superior de Tecnologia de Viseu* have already ended secondary school and have passed specific exams in Portuguese, English, Geography or Economy. They came from the Central Region of Portugal and are usually aged 18/19. Most of them possess the skills we require such as the ability to learn languages, be open-minded, have communication competence, organizational skills, initiative, commercial sense and decision-making capacity.

The goals of the Tourism Course are to prepare Tourism operators to work in the Tourism sector which is of great importance in Portugal, as I have mentioned before and especially in Viseu. The most salient tourism attractions of Viseu are:

→ the remains of the gothic walls and ancient doors of the city from the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries
→ the important painting collection in the Grão Vasco Museum
→ diverse and unusual handicrafts, like Molelos black pottery
→ the specific gastronomy and wine products that characterise the Dão Region.

The school wishes to train professionals by providing them with specific training programmes in areas such as Management (Introduction to Marketing, Business, Management, Marketing for Tourism, Accounting), Tourism (Cultural Activation, Tourism Products, History of Art, Legislation in Tourism, Spa), Languages - Tourism Course, within the Bologna Process already has Spanish and French, as an option, for two semesters, Social Sciences (Sociology, Consumer Behaviour in Tourism, Public Relations) and Informatics. This course values practical and applied knowledge, acquired through study visits, seminars, and participation in regional events organized by public or private companies and projects. Through partnerships with state institutions and companies related to the Tourism sector, students are given the

possibility to come into contact, during the course, with real work situations that take place in the Portuguese tourism business sector.

The scientific and technical competences offered by the course allow students to find work placements in Hotels, Travel Agencies, Transport Companies, Restaurants, Casinos, Spas, Golf Courses, Camping Parks, Theme Parks, Rural Tourism, Tourist Information Centres, City Halls, Rent-a-Car Agencies, Tourism Promotion Agencies, Consultation Companies, Socio-cultural and Professional Associations, Equestrian Centres, International Relations Offices, and several other entities.

Teaching in an ESP course always has to be learner-centred. Why? Because each learner has his/her own specific needs, his/her previous individual experience, each student is different and has his/her own beliefs, knowledge, way of thinking, interacting and socializing with others. That should be respected; we should take advantage of those differences and take them into class, explore them. We all can gain with the difference; it brings cultural variety to school, critical thinking and self-reflection. These differences and similarities are what make us human and what makes teaching interesting. Everyone has different skills and talents, it is important to remember that diversity is strength. It is this holistic understanding that we should bring to ESP.

Teachers should not only repeat, give information, we must be our students guiders, to allow them to discuss, to question, we should not be only mere «satisfiers», but mainly «motivators» (cf. Nieragden, G., 2000):

> The crucial difference between satisfiers and motivators as determining factors of people's job performance: satisfiers, as guards of average potential, concern the working conditions and environment, the wages, the benefits, and the degree of job security; whereas motivators, as stimulators of high potential, comprise challenging and creative tasks, recognition by peers and seniors, personal responsibility, possibilities for promotion, and the subjective feeling of forming part of corporate cultures.

Nieragden, G.,
http://www.eltnewsletter.com/back/september2000 (10/10/2006)

Students need to learn any language the most natural way they can, by communicating and not by learning a set of rules; they have learnt their mother tongue by means of using it, of communication motivated by the need to do things with language.

The Portuguese Government has established as the main goal of higher education the qualification of Portuguese people in Europe, according to the *Bologna Process*, between 2005/09, a unique opportunity to lead students to attend institutions of higher education, improve the quality and relevance of the qualifications, student mobility and the internationalisation of Portuguese qualifications. Law nr 48/2005, which changed the Basic Law of the Educational System, stated that «more than a system based on the transmission of knowledge, we need a system based on the development of competences» such as the communicative competence. But how are these two indications going to bear upon my teaching? In the way my students are going to study, to start with.

What is the basic profile of the person who wishes to work effectively in Tourism? First of all he/she needs to know GE, the core structures and vocabulary, how to greet, to introduce himself/herself, to know the numbers, the forms of address, information on countries and nationalities, general geography, dates, asking the way, how to use familiar everyday expressions, can communicate in simple routine tasks, can use expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance or need, can describe himself/herself, can describe his/her background, and he/she also needs to have a certain attitudes, to be punctual, to be communicative, reliable, to have some notions of etiquette, politeness, body language and eye contact. In sum, we can say that the perfect student would enter higher education in B1 level (for further discussion please see the *Common European Framework of Reference* levels), which means he/she would have a solid knowledge of English, he/she would be considered an *Independent User*, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEF) level for languages, developed by the Council of Europe

Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes &

ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Common European Framework of Reference, 2006

This is not always accomplished by the student, sometimes the student who attends the Tourism Course is not an average user of English, sometimes he/she has had English only for a couple of years or had schooling in the science area. Or, because they had schooling in the Humanistic area, they may have a more advanced level of the language and have already developed competences in English quite well.

I teach my students language in the field of Tourism but also language in the field of Marketing, Spas, History of the Art, Golf or Gastronomy and even Geography. Next I present the charts of the professional and self-promotion genres, situational contexts, professional domains for ESP in Tourism as well as the Special Software Needs of Students of Tourism.

Professional Genres
Advertisement
Booking form
Letter of confirmation
Feedback questionnaire
Memo
Fax
Complaining letter
Brochure / leaflet
Menu
Bill
E-Mail
Telephone
Dialogue;
      - to solve complaints
      - to give instructions to taxi drivers.
      - to take the guests personal details
      - to give suggestions on places to eat/to visit

Self Promotion Genres

Curriculum Vitae

Covering letter

Letter of recommendation

Situational Contexts

Job interviews / recruiting / formal and informal language

Tourism industry / business

Travel agencies and tour operators

Telephone (taking reservations / messages)

Hotel facilities / boards / accommodation types

Conferences / meetings

Promotional materials (advertisements / flyers / brochures)

Dealing with complaints

Describing museums, monuments, sights, and cities.

Types of travel, airport (check-in /schedules)

Planning itineraries / guided tours / holidays / advising clients

Tourist Information Centres (TIC)

Food and Drink / restaurants

Money (how to explain a bill, hotel prices, payment procedures)

Car hire / rental / negotiations

Professional Domains for ESP in Tourism

Marketing (Marketing Mix, client survey, target public, public relations, consumer behaviour…)

History of Art (Artistic Styles, artefacts, cultural tourism, ethnography, heritage…)

Tourism Products (Swot Analysis, wine tourism, the circle of life of a tourism product, booking process, accommodation, travel agencies…)

Spas (description of Thermal Hotels, types of treatments, thermal spas in Portugal, thermal demand…)

Geography and Tourist Itinerary (GDS)

Portuguese Language and Culture (Baroque, Portuguese Renaissance, Manuelino)

The Special Software Needs of Students of Tourism

. Global Distribution System (GDS)

In the late 1950s, several airlines created their own proprietary automated reservation systems to manage the increasing volume and complexity of booking air travel. By the 1970s some airlines, like *Delta Airlines Datas II* system or *American Airlines' Sabre* system or *United Airlines' Apollo* system merged and become more and more popular. In the early 80s the airlines expanded their systems to provide services to multiple airlines and began installing their reservation systems directly in travel agent offices to allow for more convenient and efficient access for travel agents. This expansion gave birth to a new industry, the interactive services industry.

GDS is a computer reservations system, which is programmed to store and retrieve information and conduct transactions related to travel. Today the four major systems are Sabre (market share 30,8%), Amadeus (market share 27,7%), Galileo (market share 26,4%) and Worldspan (market share 15,1%).

Sabre is the world's largest electronic travel reservation system. It was developed in order to help American Airlines, who were facing some problems back in 1950s as their system for booking flights was entirely manual. American Airlines and All Nippon Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, China Airlines and Singapore Airlines created it and Air Malta, US Airways and Malaysia Airlines, among others, also use it. In 1976 Sabre was expanded to travel agents and it has never stopped growing ever since.

Air France, Austrian, Iberia, SAS and Lufthansa created Amadeus, in 1987 and it is also used by British Airways, South African Airways and Continental, among others. By 2000 Amadeus received quality certification from the International Organization for Standardisation (ISO), the first GDS company to do so. Today it has an established global presence. It has 75 national marketing companies that are located in over 215 markets worldwide. Amadeus employs 6 500 employees worldwide and their workforce is comprised of people from over 100 nationalities.

Galileo is a global technology leader. Its core business is providing electronic global distribution services for the travel industry through its computerized reservation systems, leading-edge products and innovative internet-based solutions. It employs 5 000 people in more than 110 countries, serving more than 47 000 travel agencies and over 51 000 hotels. Galileo was created in 1993 by Aer Lingus, Air Canada, Alitalia, British Airways and KLM.

Worldspan is a leader in travel technology services for suppliers, travel agencies, e-commerce sites and corporations worldwide. It provides comprehensive electronic data services linking approximately 800 travel suppliers around the world to a global customer base. Worldspan was only created in 1990, by Delta and Northwest but is also used by Expedia, Orbitz, Hotwire and Priceline. It enables travel suppliers, distributors and corporations to reduce costs and increase productivity with its technology.

Nowadays a GDS in operation can be found in more than 10 000 airline sales offices, in over 67 000 travel agency locations and in up to 240 markets worldwide. It is available and accessible 99,9% of the time, it processes up to 17 000 messages per second during peak times and enjoys response times of a fraction of a second. Like an employer said in questionnaire 4 « [Students need to be capable of working] *Nos sistemas de reservas de bilhetes…*». That is why vocabulary on currency conversion, taxes, ticketing, air fares or language on itineraries, journey types (one way trip, return trip…) or classes are not optional items in my subject, on the contrary, they are obligatory things to discuss, to learn about, to share, to simulate. With regards to GDS, English is the only available key to work in Tourism.

GDS has got a lot of advantages both for tourism operators as well as for clients, which are summarized in the following list (Cf. Interactive Travel Services Association in www.interactivetravel.org/media.cfm)

▪ Developed lowest fare search capability and best-price comparisons for consumer travel values.
▪ Developed the ability to integrate and simultaneously display published, negotiated, consolidator and web fares for travel agents.
▪ Provide extraordinary service to customers, save time and money and it even sends brochures electronically.
▪ Developed the first graphical interfaces for airline seat selection, it can access more than 750 airlines, as well as more than 50 000 hotels and nearly 30 000 car rental locations, cruises, travel insurance, limousines, bus and rail tickets, events, dining reservations, cellular phone rentals, sightseeing, theme parks, golf courses and other suppliers.

▪ Deliver a worldwide distribution network and pioneered electronic ticketing and travel and offer sophisticated tools to help today's modern travel agency operate efficiently.

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