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the language tutor must have a "thorough understanding of at least some of the scientific concepts in the context of a task" (Wilson 1980). Ultimately, the last alternative is the only workable course of action.

Language for Academic Purposes at the Syrian universities has been always reduced to the rituals of language: teaching grammar. LAP has never addressed the necessary skills surveyed above. It is high time ritualization were discontinued in favour of a skill-based, need-bound and content-geared approach. After all, it is not language for the non-specialists, as it is misleadingly called, but for specific purposes, as globally ratified.

necessitates relating data to the existing corpus of knowledge (Benson 1991). This is the major concern of the contemporary focus on Critical Language Awareness. Nothing in the text is supposed to be wasted on the reader: what is narrated, non-narrated and disnarrated".

This requires two activities "word attack strategies and text attack strategies (Nuttall 1982)". As far as the first are concerned, researchers confirm that the subject specialism vocabulary is not problematic at all. It is the bridging lexicon that causes trouble to the learners. By this is meant the general diction that expresses relationships and is central to formal writing, such as "repertoire" "tenets", "quintessentially", "engender" and 'ensuing" (Parry 1991). Moreover, instead of the traditional approach to the teaching of words, tutors are advised to switch to the modern techniques which give the major role to students. Inferring the meaning from the context, the form of the word, the syntactical function and using the dictionary; all replace teaching with self-teaching.

The text attack strategies consist of two categories. Some are about content as such. Others are about the structuring of discourse, its cohesion and the value system that frames writing. These also target the projection of identity, the position taken ty the addresser, the manner the speaker relates to the addressee and what kind of position the latter is called upon to take. It is worth mentioning here that Waters and Waters make a crucial distinction between study skills and study competence (1992). The first term refers to some techniques like note taking, skimming and scanning. The second concept comprises the abilities needed for evaluation, independent thinking, self-monitoring, self-teaching management and conceptualizing data by putting them in a meaningful framework. These can be catered for by team-teaching according to which the language tutor and the subject specialist teach together. Others, quite rightly, argue that team teaching is not always possible. Therefore,

and less aggressive. This is the crux of academic discourse, yet researchers have, by and large, skated over it. As Greg Myres explains, addressers will do well if they avoid Face Threatening Acts . The speaker or writer had better not undermine the position of others. The best approach tends to be collaborative not dismissive. Students should be trained on the art of giving the impression that they are joining a discussion and applying for membership in the community, not discontinuing tradition or dismantling the collective achievement. Politeness strategies guarantee a responsive readership and a sympathetic audience. Furthermore, they make it easier for the newcomer to secure an academic space. The others, when acknowledged and appreciated, will tolerate the new voice. Greg Myres lists a number of techniques which reassure the readership at large. For instance, if the speakers quote themselves, they should do it in the third person. They should not refer to each other on the first name basis, no matter how close they may be to each other. Moreover, it will be less threatening if the addresser can assume the point of view of those under attack. Finally, the writer must always demonstrate concern for the reader's interests and so on (Myers 1989).

This assimilative approach does not entail turning a blind eye to the question at issue. On the contrary, students must learn never to take anything uncritically. This is the case of reading. As most researchers point out, reading does not mean the passive verbalization of the written text. It involves the scrutiny of the text, the subtext and the ideology that informs the whole product. As M.J. Benson explains, reading means the understanding of the author's underlying value system, the awareness of the sources of authority and the knowledge of the textual strategies, description, argument or exposition) which are manipulated by the writer. Moreover, reading is not limited to the acquisition of facts, for it

The necessity of training the international assistants on the art of lecturing and the paraphernalia of discourse has been highlighted by A. Tylor (1992). The study comprises a lecture given by a native assistant to a native audience, and another lecture by a foreign assistant delivered to foreign students. The transcripts of the lectures were redelivered by a native lecturer to a different audience. The students now have no idea that the lecture is originally prepared by a non-native. However, they have felt that the text is too difficult to follow; the discourse markers are misused; and the diction lacks the necessary lexical specificity. By contrast, the text of the native assistant's lecture sounded to the new audience cohesive and understandable.

Training the assistants to improve their speaking skills puts into perspective the students' communicative competence. Their performance is not limited to writing and reading, for they have to communicate with others especially during the seminars. Accordingly, they must internalize the speaking strategies which facilitate establishing good work relationships: co-ordinating turn exchange, obtaining a turn, behaviour within the turn, and cooperation in interaction (Michaeu and Billmyer 1987). The strategies also comprise evaluating and selecting information for a specific purpose, synthesizing data from different sources and applying acquired knowledge to new situations (Jacobson 1986). Without proper training, students will continue to violate turn taking, respond too late and take an excessively long turn. Worse still, they might continue to speak very formally in informal seminars, and might not be able to articulate themselves meaningfully. It is clear that students need, in addition to the academic language, a course in general English which gives them access to the paraphernalia of proper communication.

Communication, be it oral or written, will suffer if it is not based on politeness strategies: the techniques which make writing assmilative

only nexus among words. They cluster in paradigms or families. When the lecturer focuses on a certain topic, such as beauty or war, s/he is bound to use most of the words that refer to the two themes. If students are self-conscious about lexical fields, they will find listening easier. They can immediately deploy relevant vocabulary.

Like the written text, the oral discourse is structured upon a plethora of strategies without which it will lack cohesion and coherence. This is why training in this area should not be limited to the students. Teacher assistants and newly appointed tutors need to be aware of the mechanism of signposting, the function of discourse markers, and the wisdom of outlining (Chaudron and Richards 1986). The more mapping out is done, the more output there might be. The student is not supposed to follow but to gallop knowingly ahead. It is as if s/he has already scanned or skimmed the text of the lecture and now s/he has come to listen to the lecturer. This metaphor can be literalized and used as one of the major techniques of predictability.

Researchers have investigated the tutors' performance. Some have focused on the strategies used by the successful assistant so that they may be generalized as a teaching manual. Others have tried to find out the differences between native tutors and international ones. The results confirm that the efficiency of the students' listening hinges on the lecturer's speaking proficiency. The successful assistant avoids haphazard points of silence, verbalizes the symbolic representation, underlines the functional connections, deploys repetition for more cohesion, organizes the discourse by means of information chunking, uses a persuasive style and relies on the dual-function conclusion (Rounds 1987). These devices are crucial for tutors, especially the non-natives. These are not supposed to give any lecture without planning, at the heart of which is the use of discourse markers (Williams 1992).

can turn note taking into a resourceful strategy (P. Dunkel and S. Davy 1989).

Another listening skill which has not been thoroughly debated is predictability or expectancy. A good listener is supposed to be ahead of the speaker. If students are always lagging behind the lecturer and having no clue whatsover about the following word(s), they will not be able to catch up. A number of techniques can be employed for intensifying this anticipatory potential so that the addressee will be playing the addresser as well.

One of the possible strategies is just to train the learners to anticipate by reading a text to them, stopping at certain intervals, and asking them to foretell what the next complement might be. It is possible also to make them reflect on their reading. This meta-performance will help the student theorize, systematize and abstract the content and the structural schemata. Proleptic training can also be syntactic, in the sense that the addressee, hearing a part of a structure can tell the rest which is expected to follow. The conditionals are a very good example. The perfect and the progressive tenses lend themselves usefully to the activity.

The major area where predictability should be targeted is, of course, vocabulary. Idioms, if internalized properly, will always put the listener ahead of the speaker. The fact that languages are naturally idiomatic gives weight to such a technique. Similarly, collocation is central for expectancy. This arises from the fact that words are not used at random. Certain words are always used with certain other words: academic discipline, dramatic play, tragic death, dirty tricks and creative imagination.By becoming aware of the logic of collocability, the learners might always anticipate the second word of every phrase. Another strategy can be the use of the field theory (the paradigmatic clustering or what is sometimes referred to as the superordinates). Contiguity is not the

(ST). In HSS, critical discourse, problem solving, and analysis seem to dominate. These tend to be text-based and reference-bound. By contrast, ST scholars prioritize problem solving and rely heavily on the modes of describing, defining and planniny. It is worth mentioning that most of the findings related to writing confirm that the native students may have problems with the macro-text (above the sentence level), such as cohesion, coherence and content schemata. By contrast, the major difficulties for international scholars are related to the micro-text: the word and the sentence, such as collocation and syntax.

The feedback of the projects above can engender a real breakthrough. For the first time, the forms of academic writing are listed. Study skills and thinking modes are charted. The Syrian LAP designers can use this corpus as a frame of reference for their enterprise. Indeed, it is a fact that LAP in Syria does not address any of the above writing needs. The focus is still on language as an object not as a medium. Therefore, tutors spend most of the time on the rituals of language, not on its functions. Grammar, generally decontextualized, is prioritized as the major objective of LAP, as in Arabic for the Non-Specialists (Books I and II). No wonder, the students feel alienated by the courses, which are paradigmatic of any irrelevancy.

The same argument applies to the students' listening needs. The central issue here is note taking. What students write down during the lecture might determine their achievements later on. Poor note taking can engender poor results and vice versa. Studies revealed that those who transcribe almost everything might lose much. By contrast, those who limit themselves to the content words tend to have good results. As a matter of fact, this crucial skill has never been addressed by language tutors. It is left for the students themselves. Some of them, feeling that the lecturer is too fast, have given up notetaking completely. Proper training

however, writing is understandably prioritized.

Addressing themselves to the academic writing and its formal actualization, Bridgeman and Carlson have listed ten topics (1983). They are the personal essay, sequential description, the spatial/functional description, comparison and contrast, extrapolation, argumentation, description and interpretation of a graph or a chart, summary, analysis and assessment. D.M. Horowitz has come out with seven categories (1986). They are summary or reaction to reading, annotated bibliography, report on experience, connection of theory of data, case study, synthesis of multiple sources and the research project. Horowitz also addresses the tasks required from the students in the exams. They are the display of familiarity with a concept, awareness of the conjunctions between different concepts, knowledge of a process, and the understanding of argumentation. The focus on writing continues to be the case with Conseco and Byrd, who reiterate almost the same (1989). They have found out that there are seven types of academic writing required at university level. They are examinations, assignments, projects, papers, case studies, reports and miscellaneous tasks.

Research has not been limited to the academic genres of the iuniversity. Researchers have tried to systematize the modes of thinking and the categories of style that students are supposed to be mastering. K. James, for instance, believes that students must be aware of the characteristics of the language of research. These functions are stating (aims, views and findings), describing (procedures and events), defining (briefly or in detail), evaluating (comparatively or critically), reasoning (speculatively or definitely) and signposting (between small or large chunks) (James, 1983). Casanave and Hubbard (1992) have focused on this aspect as well. Their conclusions reveal a distinction between the Humanities and the Social Sciences (HSS), and Science and Technology

can learn the mechanisms, modes and media of thinking. The irony is that such academic necessities are left rather redundant, which confirms the urgency of remedying the situation.

The delineation of language for academic purposes depends on two complementary projects. The first is the local research which is a kind of collaboration between the language specialists and the subject specialism tutors. Both teams work together to map out the students' study problems and the academic expectations of the specialist faculty. A number of techniques can be used in this research, such as interviews, questionaires and analysis of the students' writing. The subject specialism tutors are the authority on both the discourse and the written tasks required in their domain. For instance, the teaching of the literary language is futile if the expected mode is supposed to be objective and expository. In short, the language module should address only the real needs of the students as basically seen by the students themselves and by their subject specialism tutors (Wilson 1980). Such an approach makes the language courses meaningfully relevant and, consequently, motivating to the learners.

This kind of necessary research has not been carried out at the Syrian universities although it has been globally deployed for a long time. Indeed, the international studies, as will be seen, can be a frame of reference for the Syrian future project, both in terms of ntheir paraphernalia and their results. For researchers have not limited their work to students of their own nationalities. They have addressed thenselves to international scholars, including Arabs. S.E. Osler, to begin with, has found out that the basic needs for the university students are reading textbooks, taking notes, asking questions, writing reports, making critiques and presenting research proposals (1980). These activities clearly signal the four skills, but the focus each is given hinges, as will be demonstrated, on the specific needs of the students. At university level,

and where neither students nor staff can turn up.

The general impression so far might be that languages are not central to the syllabus at the Syrian academia. The fact, however, is the opposite. The language module has the same weight as any other. More importantly, Arabic is the medium of instruction. Students must have a good command of it to understand the lectures, read the books, take the exams and write their projects. English and French have almost the same function. It is true that they are not, like Arabic, subject medium courses, but they are not object languages either. They are subsidiary subject medium modules, in the sense that the students of the humanities cannot perform their inevitable comparative studies without the foreign languages. Similarly, writing graduation projects, at other faculties, is almost impossible without some command of either English or French.

These functions form the starting point. They should be listed, researched and clearly defined so that they might give a sense of direction to the curriculum. All agree to the fact that the student coming from the secondary school to the university is confronted with a categorically different situation. The modes of teaching, the styles of learning and the assessment tasks are novelties. The student, for instance, knows almost nothing about the lecturing system, seminars, self-access study, term papers or academic reports, all of which require special study skills. The requirements, and this is the crux of argument, are the domain of the language courses. The listening skills, which help the students make the best of the lectures, should be taught and developed by the slanguage tutor. The communicative strategies, which boost self articulation can be catered for only by the language tutor. The 'text-attack" techniques which maximize reading comprehension, and the academic conventions, which marketize the written product, are by definition part and parcel of the language modules. In short, it is in the language sessions that the student

compiled, specifically for the Syrian students, let alone the disciplinary specificity. All the textbooks have been published for other contexts: different learners with completely different needs. These "selected" materials have not even been modified so that they might pertain to the Syrian register. The students' nationality, age, subject specialisms, and desires are completely skated over. In the case of Arabic, the problem is not mitigated. It is true that the books have been "compiled" by the Syrians, but these compilations are not informed by any research. They do not service the kind of Arabic needed by the students. They are not based on the study skills required by the academic competence the learners are supposed to achieve. Worse still, they do not feed into the genre specificity and the discourse community which will be part and parcel of the student's academic identity. No wonder, the same textbook is used for different faculties: crossing the disciplinary boundaries and generalizing away crucially specific issues.

The outcome is a negative reaction by the students. The student who is specializing in medicine or engineering, for example, cannot tolerate being called non-specialist. Moreover, seeing that the subject has no relation whatsoever with the subject specialism, the student is bound to pass the necessary judgement that the course must be a waste of time. This attitude is ironically given credibility by the performance of the untrained tutors, Teachers are ideally supposed not only to convince the students, but to transform the unmotivated learner into a highly committed one. A good tutor, after all, can accomplish this by making the best even of the worst textbook and can inject the irrelevant course with relevance and significance. The lack of the necessary training adds to the ngativity of situation. The irony is that when tutors happen to be willing and capable, they are handicapped by the fact that the language hours are relegated, temporally and spatially, to the margins of the timetable - when

The teaching of languages at the Syrian universities is based on a strange paradox. The core courses allocated to Arabic, English and French are officially called *"Languages for the Non-Specialists"*. The assumption is that the only "specialists", as far as languages are concerned, are the students at the Faculty of Arts. This concept is not only terribly flawed, but it is consequentially damaging. Indeed, it is the major cause of the deterioration of the syllabus, the learning and the teaching of languages. The only way out of this problem is a positive perspective: to rethink the teaching situation, redefine the whole project and join the international community in working for languages for *specific purposes*. If such an enterprise is embarked on, the immediate impact will most likely be a motivation of the learners, a justification for the specialist members of staff to invest their efforts in the reivival and, most importantly, a production of the teaching material which is based on the proper needs analysis and the latest contributions of the ESP/EAP theories.

The negative formulation of the term, "non-specialists", has undermined the positive potential of language teaching, and engendered a plethora of negative consequences. It has made the language specialists distance themselves from this (non)scheme. It is a task below their academic standard and not worthy of their expertise. Language teachers have not addressed themselves to the problem at all. Little wonder, they refuse to take part in the actual teaching. Thus this sophisticated task is left to part-timers (with a B.A. only and without any training in Language for Academic Purposes – LAP). In short, it is the non-specialists, in the full sense of the word, teaching the "non-specialists" in the wrong sense of the word.

This situation is made worse by the teaching materials. As far as English and French are concerned, no textbook has been written, or even

اللغات في الجامعات :
لغير المختصين أم لأغراض خاصة

الدكتور أحمد العيسى*

□ الملخص □

يقوم تعليم اللغات في الجامعات السورية على مفارقة غريبة. إذ تعتبر العربية والإنكليزية والفرنسية لغات لغير المختصين وكأن الاختصاص في هذا المجال يقتصر على كليات الآداب. ليس هذا المفهوم مغلوطاً فقط بل له عواقب سلبية عديدة. من أهمها تغريب المنهاج وتعطيل التعلم وإجهاض التعليم. لذلك لابد من إعادة التفكير في هذه الإشكالية من منظور إيجابي ينسجم والمتعارف عليه عالمياً وهو تدريس اللغات لأغراض خاصة أو لأهداف أكاديمية. عندما تعاد صياغة المشروع اللغوي المنشود سيحصل نهوض حقيقي ليس في دوافع المتعلمين فقط بل في خصوصية المنهاج وهوية القائمين على التدريس. والأهم من ذلك سيتم الخلاص من الراهن التعليمي الذي أقل ما يقال في تشخيصه إنه عدد من غير المختصين بالمعنى الدقيق للكلمة يقومون على "تعليم" عدد من غير المختصين ولكن بالمعنى الخاطئ للمصطلح.

* مدرس في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية – كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية – جامعة تشرين – اللاذقية – سورية.

Languages at the Universities:
For Non-Specialists or Specific Purposes?

Dr. Ahmad AL-ISSA*

☐ ABSTRACT ☐

The teaching of languages at the Syrian universities is based on a strange paradox. The core courses allocated to Arabic, English and French are officially called "Languages for the Non-Specialists." The assumption is that the only "specialists", as far as languages are concerned, are the students at the Faculty of Arts. This concept is not only terribly flawed but consequentially damaging. Indeed, it is the major cause of the alienation of the syllabus and the inertia of both teaching and learning. The only way out of this quagmire is to embark on a positive perspective: to rethink the teaching situation, redefine the whole project and to join the international community in working for languages for specific or academic purposes. The immediate impact or feedback will be a motivation of the learners, a revival of interest by the academics, and more importantly, a production of the proper teaching materials that are based on needs analysis, and the latest contributions of ESP and EAP. It is high time the present teaching situation came to an end. For it is nothing but the non-specialists, in the full sense of the word, teaching the non-specialists, in the wrong sense of the word.

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