

EOP VOCABULARY TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TOURISM PROFESSIONALS AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS VISITING NAYARIT

Carlota Alcántar Díaz
Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit
alcantardiaz2005@hotmail.com

Abstract

Lexical Knowledge is essential to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language. Vocabulary and lexical expressions can sustain a great deal of basic communication without much support from other aspects of the language (Schmitt, 2000). The use of the appropriate vocabulary in the context where is used facilitates communication. However, in spite of the importance of vocabulary knowledge in communication, very little attention is paid to this language feature in MA TESOL programs (Schmitt, 2000). The present research reports an EOP vocabulary study based on the construction of a Special corpus, with the purpose of obtaining the most frequent words in texts in the field of tourism. We surveyed the English reading needs of tourism workers in Mexico, constructed a small representative corpus of the sort of material they read, and extracted a list of 421 words and phrases that are distinctively frequent in occupational tourism English compared with general English. The relevance of the present research is that its results have practical and pedagogical implications.

Resumen:

El conocimiento de léxico es esencial para competencia comunicativa y la adquisición de una segunda lengua. El vocabulario y las expresiones léxicas pueden sostener una gran proporción de la comunicación básica sin mucho apoyo en otros aspectos del lenguaje (Schmitt, 2000). El uso de vocabulario apropiado en el contexto donde se usa facilita la comunicación, no obstante a pesar de la importancia del conocimiento de vocabulario en la comunicación, se le ha puesto muy poca atención a éste aspecto del lenguaje en programas de Enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua (TESOL) (Schmitt, 2000). La presente investigación reporta un estudio de Inglés para propósitos específicos (EOP) basado en la construcción de un corpus especializado, con el propósito de obtener las palabras más frecuentes en el área de turismo. Se indagaron las necesidades de lectura de trabajadores de la industria del turismo en México, se construyó un pequeño pero representativo corpus del tipo de material que los informantes leen, y se extrajo una lista de 421 palabras y frases en Inglés que son frecuentes en la ocupación de turismo en comparación con Inglés general. La relevancia de éste estudio es que sus resultados tienen implicaciones prácticas y pedagógicas.

Key words: vocabulary, tourism, corpus, communication.

1. Introduction

The focus of the present study is EOP, which refers to English that is not for academic purposes; it includes professional purposes in different fields such as administration, medicine, law and business, as well as vocational purposes for non-professionals in work or pre-work situations (Kim 2008). It is variously called EOP/EVP/VESL (English for Occupational Purposes/English for Vocational Purposes/ Vocational English as a Second Language), that is, the kind of English required for work or training.

Traditionally, ESP has been divided into two main areas: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP); however, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) there is no clear-cut distinction between them; this is claimed

because 1) people can work and study simultaneously, and 2) in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the graduates take up a job. Like the subjects of the present study, they might be graduates who on some occasions in their workplace read material that contains academic English and who make use of the English language learnt for their Bachelor degree when performing workplace activities.

Although most of the learners around the world are motivated to learn English because they think it is helpful for their careers, there are surprisingly few ESP/EOP courses that provide them with skills to manage more specific activities in a specific domain: most take EGP courses. In the case of Tourism Studies, 'Virtually every general English textbook recognises the importance on tourism, with significant sections to travel, hotels and restaurants. However, the professional literature has not adequately defined or addressed the topic of ESP in the tourism industry, nor have many English language programs and materials been created specifically for this area' (Magennis 2002). While there are several textbooks on tourism, they are designed to teach general English and therefore lack exercises to deal with the language used in the tourism industry.

1.1. Development of EOP

In the 1960s and 1970s, EOP courses were focused on written language, and the product approach followed in those years was certainly based on the linguistic system, so there was an emphasis on specialised vocabulary practices. At this stage learners were expected to deal with language forms. This is important because the present research considers specialised vocabulary as one of the main factors for improving reading.

From the mid-1970s to the 1980s the focus of language learning was on spoken interaction, which was first based on grammatical features and then on functions such as Greetings, Apologising and so on; by the mid-1980s the needs of learners with work experience provoked the appearance of new material mainly based on business communication situations.

By the 1990s the focus was still on business, but behavioural skills were also explored, with more courses tackling basic skills and management training (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998).

The current focus of EOP teaching is similar to that of the previous decades; however, it integrates all the characteristics of each decade. In a recent study Kim (2008: 76) found that the focus of EOP today is still on the purpose and need of learning. Based on the analysis of some interviews with informants (employees of various companies in Korea), he describes some of the characteristics of EOP today:

- EOP has a clear objective and purpose, such as business English, English presentation skills, business letters, etc.
- EOP is designed to meet proficiency needs as determined by the needs of the workplace
- EOP equals education on demand
- EOP assists occupational learners in improving their language skills for business purposes
- In theory, EOP is based on each workplace's specific needs. Learners should be taught the relevant vocabulary and expressions related to their workplace. Therefore, some research has to be carried out to find the specific vocabulary for every occupation prior to the design of EOP courses (in much the same way as the present study, which aims to find the vocabulary needed by tourism professionals)
- EOP is more suited to immediate needs and serves more practical purposes in the workplace than EGP.

In summary, then, the emphasis of EOP teaching today remains on the needs and purpose of using the language, and this is the centre of curricular and instructional development. However, as well as a detailed analysis of learners' needs (that in this case are workers in various different areas), some research is required into the language features used in different occupations (for instance, in terms of vocabulary), in order to teach more targeted and meaningful language appropriate to the people performing different occupations. Concerns about this issue motivated the present study. The findings of this research are expected to be useful for improving the reading comprehension of occupational tourism texts as well as oral communication between native speakers of English and tourism professionals.

2. Methodology

2.1. Corpus design

The present study followed the guiding principles suggested by various people working in the field of linguistic corpora, however, it does not duplicate any particular methodology. It is important to mention that this is one of the few studies that have consulted experts to make an appropriate selection of texts for a corpus. According to Scholfield (1994), Gledhill (1996) and Hyland (1998), the researcher needs to consult the opinion of some experts or specialist informants in order to include the most representative texts of a particular domain.

2.2. Subjects

Twelve graduates with similar characteristics (Morrison, 1993:117) were selected as informants from the Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit (UAN) School of Tourism. The informants were a stratified selection of the graduates previously identified from different workplaces that were divided into five groups; these workplaces appear to be constant across the cohorts analyzed. They are: 1) tourism offices, 2) language schools, 3) travel agencies, 4) hotels/restaurants, 5) other work related to the graduates' degree skills.

2.3. Instruments

Interview

The interview for this purpose was semi-structured. This type of interview suited the purpose best, since semi-structured interviews give the interviewers a lot of flexibility. The interview questions were designed in advance (see appendix A). The interview aimed to obtain information about the texts that Tourism graduates read at work: the questions asked lead informants to give answers that shed light on this aspect.

The first section of the interview had two sets of questions.

- a. The first set of questions (see appendix A, questions 1–4) aimed to elicit the addresses and telephone numbers of the informants in case there was a need for a second interview.
- b. The second set of questions (see appendix A, questions 5–10) was designed to obtain general information about the graduates' activities at work; these questions allowed me to become familiarised with the nature of the job and the activities graduates perform at work.

The second section:

This set of questions (see appendix A, questions 11–18) aimed to find the texts graduates are more likely to read in English at work. This information was of paramount importance for the collection of texts to be compiled in the corpus. From this section some follow-up questions were also asked in order to clarify information introduced by the informant (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

2.4. Procedure

Once the informants were selected, and the interview questions were designed, we made contact with the graduates and a schedule for the interviews was planned. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were recorded in order to be transcribed for later analysis.

The information was classified and all the informants were asked to provide hard copies of the different texts they read more often; for instance, if they mostly read magazines and brochures, they were asked to provide hard copies of the magazines they read the most and the different brochures they read more frequently to develop their activities at work. The informants were also asked to provide lists of references of the books they read more often for developing their activities at work, and a list of website addresses they used more frequently to develop their activities.

We endeavoured to reflect the proportions of readers of the different text types, for instance, we compiled more texts from the World Wide Web because 50 per cent of the informants read texts from it.

After organising the different files according to the text type, and counting the words for each file, all the files were saved together as a single file in MS Word. Next, this file was transformed into a plain text file, since that is the usual format in which texts are analysed by the different programs currently available for performing corpus data analysis.

The texts were saved in different files corresponding to the text type; for instance, all the scanned hard copies of magazines/brochures and similar texts were saved as a single file. The files according to text types were: tourism manuals,¹ forms for travel agencies, glossaries for travel agencies, tourism magazines and home-made brochures (brochures made by the tourism offices in Nayarit state), textbooks in English for tourism, glossaries from textbooks in English for tourism, e-mails, and pages from the World Wide Web.

Although the number of words in each sub-area was not exactly the same; in order to balance the content of the texts, the texts compiled were of different lengths: short, medium and long (Coxhead 2000).

3. Findings

3.1. The tourism Corpus

The texts compiled constitute what we called the 'Tourism Corpus'. The Tourism Corpus contains 37,795 tokens (running words) of written texts in the field of tourism: 1,683 families and 6,291 word types. The texts compiled are those that UAN Tourism graduates are more likely to read at work. The sub-areas are: government tourism offices, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and language institutes. The different types of reading texts compiled in the corpus are outlined in table 3.1 below.

3.2. Table 3.1 Texts compiled in the tourism corpus

NO. OF TEXTS	TEXT TYPE		NUMBER OF WORDS
1	TOURISM MANUAL	IATA Manual	2,381
17	FORMS FOR TRAVEL AGENCIES		1,817
1	GLOSSARY FOR TRAVEL AGENTS		196
7	TEXTS FROM TOURISM MAGAZINES AND HOME-MADE BROCHURES	Vallarta Adventure Vallarta Style	4, 109
18	TEXTS FROM ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR TOURISM GLOSSARIES FROM ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS	'First Class: English for Tourism' 'High Season: English for the	4,501

¹ Manuals/guides for travel agents.

3	FOR TOURISM	Hotel and Tourist Industry' 'Welcome! English for the Travel and Tourism Industry' 'English for International Tourism'	139
11	E-MAILS (ASKING FOR INFORMATION, INVITATIONS FOR TOURS, COMPLAINTS ETC.)		3,036
79	PAGES FROM THE WORLD WIDE WEB	www.fonatur.com www.driverguide.com www.weather.com www.mexicotravel.club.com www.expedia.com www.tsa.gov www.continental.com	21,616
<i>T=137</i>			37,795

The Tourism Corpus compiled is important for the present research since it is the source from which the most distinctively frequent items/words in the field of tourism were extracted.

3.3. The most frequent words in the tourism field

From the Tourism Corpus, by comparison with the non-tourism written portion of the British National Corpus, using the Z test, a list of 69 sequences of two and three words was obtained and a list of 352 single words; a total of 421 most distinctively frequent items in the field of EOP in Mexico in the context of reading tourism texts (see a list of 15 items in appendix B).

In an analysis made using the Compleat Lexical Tutor of the 421 items (treated as separate words), 36.98 per cent pertain to the 1000 most frequent words in general English, 17.89 per cent are between the 1001 and 2000 most frequent words, 15.51 per cent are in the Academic Word List and 29.62 per cent are in the off-list words. This shows that the majority of the most distinctively frequent items extracted from the Tourism Corpus pertain either to the most frequent words of general English or to the off-list words according to the profile obtained.

4. Pedagogical implications of the study

The findings of the present research should be of interest to those involved in the teaching-learning process in Mexico, that is, teachers and students. The results of the present research could be used by teachers to target their efforts in vocabulary that is more relevant to the field of tourism in Mexico. The most distinctively frequent words of the field of tourism could be used for designing EOP reading programs in Mexico. They will also be useful for teachers who may not be familiar with vocabulary in this field.

This list of words can be used to make vocabulary teaching more meaningful to students of tourism at university level in Mexico. However, this will involve persuading EGP teachers of the importance of having students learn words they will need in their future as tourism professionals.

Another pedagogical implication arises from the different uses that the Tourism Corpus may have, since the compilation of texts in the field of tourism belongs to four important areas of tourism in Mexico. Teachers can use the texts from the Tourism Corpus to design vocabulary exercises. They can also use the texts from the corpus for improving vocabulary teaching since they can be used in a variety of ways that will save the teachers' time and facilitate the preparation of materials.

Due to the nature of the texts compiled in the Tourism Corpus, and the different areas that the texts cover, they can be used in a reading comprehension course directed at Tourism students in Mexico. That is to say, they can be useful on an EOP reading course that aims to promote an acceptable reading comprehension level for students who will work as graduates in tourism. Such students can target the 421 most distinctively frequent words in the field of tourism when learning vocabulary; this will provide them with a range of words that are more specific to tourism which in turn will improve communication between native speakers of English visiting Nayarit and tourism professionals.

5. Conclusions

The concern of the present study was to find a list of words that were used in the field of tourism for improving the abilities of reading, writing, and speaking of the tourism professionals in Nayarit. The present research collected a number of texts in a specialized corpus in order to obtain specialized vocabulary that permit professionals of tourism fields to be part of a community in which all members develop similar occupational activities. The present investigation attained two important findings:

- a. A tourism corpus that will be useful for pedagogical practices in EOP courses for tourism students as well as for professionals involved in the tourism industry.
- b. A list 421 words extracted from the Tourism Corpus that will be an aid for those involved in the tourism industry. The most frequent words and phrases obtained in this study will enhance the communication between those tourists who are native speakers of English and the tourism professionals. This will be reflected in the improvement of the services given to international tourists visiting Nayarit.

The knowledge of vocabulary specific to the tourism industry will also contribute to the professionalization of people involved in the tourism industry in Nayarit; this will benefit the services given to tourist and businessman who wish to invest in tourism projects or enterprises in Nayarit. The results of the present investigation will have an impact in the economy of Nayarit since a better service provided in the tourism industry will generate satisfaction for foreign tourists and investors who will be happy to visit and/or invest in Nayarit. This will bring revenues to the tourism industry in Nayarit.

References:

- COXHEAD, A. (2000). 'A new academic word list', *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 213-238.
- DUDLEY-EVANS, T. and M. St Johns (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GLEDHILL, C. (1996). 'Science as a Collocation: Phraseology in Cancer Research Articles', in S. Botley et al. (eds), *Proceedings of Teaching and Language Corpora 1996*. Lancaster University, 108-126.
- HUTCHINSON, T. and A. Waters (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learner-centred Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- KIM, D. (2008). *English for Occupational Purposes: one language*. London: Continuum.
- MAGENNIS, S. (2002). 'An ESP program for students of tourism' in T. Orr (ed.), *English for Specific Purposes*, Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 57-69.
- MORRISON, K. (1993). *Planning and Accomplishing School-centred Evaluation*. Norfolk: Peter Francis.
- RUBIN, H. and I. Rubin (2005). *Qualitative Interviewing. The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- SCHMITT, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. ¿Cómo te llamas? (What is your name?)
2. ¿Cuál es tu ocupación? (What do you do?)
3. ¿Cuál es tu dirección? (What is your address?)
4. ¿Cuál es tu teléfono? (What is your telephone number?)
5. ¿Dónde trabajas? ¿En qué institución/compañía? (Where do you work? What institution/company you work for?)
6. ¿Cuál es el puesto que desempeñas? ¿Qué trabajo haces? (What's your job? What kind of work do you do?)
7. ¿Cuál es el objetivo de tu trabajo? (What is the main objective of your job?)
8. ¿Cuánto tiempo has trabajado aquí? (How long have you been working here?)
9. ¿Cuál es tu horario de trabajo? (How many hours do you work?)
10. ¿Puedes mencionar algunas de las actividades sustantivas de tu trabajo? (Can you mention some of the most important activities of your post/job?).

SECTION 2

11. ¿Tienes que leer para desempeñar tu puesto? ¿Qué textos: libros, periódicos, documentos, revistas, páginas de Internet, oficios, etc.? (Do you have to read in order to perform your job? What texts: books, newspapers, documents, magazines, internet material, letters ...?)
12. ¿En qué idioma están los textos que lees? (What language are the texts you have to read?)
13. ¿Alguna vez lees textos en inglés? (Do you ever read texts in English?)
14. ¿Qué tipo de textos: libros, periódicos, documentos, revistas, páginas de internet, oficios, etc.? (What kind: books, newspapers, documents, magazines, internet material, letters ...?)
15. ¿En qué usas la información que obtienes de: libros, periódicos, documentos, revistas, páginas de Internet, oficios, etc.? ¿para qué? (How do you use the information obtained from: books, newspapers, documents, magazines, internet material, letters ...? / What for?)
16. ¿Consideras que puedes leer en inglés y entender (libros, periódicos, documentos, revistas, páginas de Internet, oficios, etc.) bien? (Can you read [books, newspapers, documents, magazines, internet pages, letters] in English and understand them fairly well?)
17. ¿Te gustaría entenderlos mejor? (Would you like to understand them better?)
18. ¿Crees que la lectura de textos en inglés es importante dentro de tu desempeño profesional? ¿Por qué? (Do you consider that reading in English is an important activity for your development as a professional? Why/why not?)

Thanks a lot.

APPENDIX B**15 MOST DISTINCTIVELY FREQUENT ITEMS IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM**

N0.	WORD/ITEM
1	AIR-INCLUSIVE
2	AIRLINE CODE
3	AIRLINE DATA
4	BAGGAGE CHECK
5	CARRIER FARE
6	E-MAIL ADDRESS
7	E-TICKETING
8	FARE BASIS
9	GREAT DEAL
10	INCLUDED CITY TOUR
11	INCREASE WITHOUT NOTICE
12	KIDS WELCOME
13	PLACE OF ISSUE
14	PRIVACY POLICY
15	SINGLE ROOMS SUPPLEMENTS