

THE BRAZILIAN ESP PROJECT - Achievements
in Practice and Research.

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1. HISTORICAL REVIEW

1.1 Origins of the Project:

The Catholic University of São Paulo, which I shall henceforward refer to as PUC, being one of the few Brazilian universities in the early 70s which offered postgraduate courses in Applied Linguistics, attracted a large number of practising teachers from schools and universities throughout Brazil to study on its MA programme. Among the courses offered was one entitled 'The Teaching of ESP' taught by my predecessor as British Council Visiting Professor in Applied Linguistics, Maurice Broughton. The enthusiasm with which this course was received stemmed from the fact that many English departments in Brazilian universities were being asked to provide courses in English for medicine, engineering and other departments, with little or no experience of such teaching. In view of the demand, Maria Antonieta Celani, Head of a well-esteemed English Department at PUC, and Maurice Broughton visited a number of Brazilian universities to propose a National ESP Project with the following objectives:

- 1.1.1 To improve the teaching of ESP in Brazilian universities;
- 1.1.2 To help and advise on the setting up of new ESP courses;
- 1.1.3 To guide universities in the writing of materials and to encourage the exchange of materials;
- 1.1.4 To encourage communication in general on ESP problems between the universities;
- 1.1.5 To promote research by staff in the universities and contact with research projects going on

elsewhere;

- 1.1.6 To build up a Resource Centre of materials produced within Brazilian universities, as well as books and articles on ESP for teacher-training and research purposes.

1.2 Response from the Universities and Their Needs:

The response to a project with this objectives was an overwhelming one. It was found during the course of visits to the universities, that ESP was the main type of teaching carried out in many English departments; that while there was an increasing demand at postgraduate level the largest number of courses were at undergraduate level; that in all universities the demand for English was specifically related to the reading skill. It was also noted that English teachers giving ESP courses were often those most newly recruited by the English Department and these courses were thus evidently regarded as of lower prestige than the courses in language and literature leading to a main degree in English.

1.3 Inputs of the Second Phase of the Project:

As a conclusion to this Historical Section I intend to give a brief picture of how the objectives mentioned earlier as the basis of the Project have been translated over the last two years into inputs for the Project in terms of personnel, finance and training.

1.3.1 Personnel. In the light of the enthusiastic response by some twenty Federal Universities to the Project, and the support of the Brazilian Ministry of Education, it was obvious that a Project of this type would need further personnel outside PUC. While the post occupied by Broughton at PUC was maintained, two further ESP posts were created: an ESP adviser who, while based at PUC, and in charge of setting up a

National Resource Centre there, would also be heavily involved in travelling round participant universities in the north and north-eastern areas of Brazil giving local teachers training seminars. This post has been filled by John Holmes. Furthermore, following a well-established connection between the British Council and the Federal University of Santa Catarina in Florianópolis, as well as the fact that there were number of ongoing ESP courses at this University, a third British Council specialist was appointed to be responsible again for two aspects of the Project. Firstly, he would carry out teacher training seminars in the south of the country; secondly he was, however, to spend most of his time in Florianópolis concerned with the materials writing aspects of the Project. This post is occupied by Michael Scott. The ODA have now agreed to the following termination dates for posts at:

UFSC - Materials writing Post:	Dec 1984
PUC - Research and M.A. Post:	Aug 1985
PUC - Resource Centre Post :	Dec 1985

This latter post will be replaced by a counterpart who is due to start training in the U.K. on storage and retrieval systems as from September 1984. The Project can thus now be said to have entered a transition phase ("transfer of power" to use Prof Widdowson's words, see 1.4 below), when increasing responsibility is being given to Brazilian teachers and co-ordinators.

1.3.2 Finance. The salaries of these three British Council-appointed Visiting Lecturers, Scott, Holmes and myself, represent the principal British contribution to the Project provided through the Key English Language Teaching (KELT) Scheme funded by the British Overseas Development Agency and administered by the British Council. A further financial contribution from the British side is through scholarships, some 15 per year, offered to teachers involved in the Project to attend

courses in the UK, principally the 3-months' course in Lancaster on ESP, but also a smaller number attend the 1-month's summer course offered at the University of Aston in Birmingham. We are also now sending teachers to the new three month Aston course on ESP. Our first participant will start there in January 1984. The British Council also provides book funds for the Resource Centre and the ODA finances journeys of specialist speakers for the regional seminars.

From the Brazilian side there are three main sources of funds. Firstly, the Brazilian Ministry of Education granted funds for the implementation of the Project in September 1978. These funds covered the travelling costs of the Project team visiting local and regional seminars, as well as the costs of producing the first publications of the Project, our bulletin entitled 'The ESpecialist' and the 'Working Papers'. A second bid was placed with the Federal Ministry for renewal of these funds in March 1982. If it is surprising that the first contribution lasted so long, this was due to the enormous generosity of the Federal Universities who, in many cases, themselves paid the travel and accomodation of the teacher-trainer, and thus became a valuable further source of funding on the Brazilian side. Although universities continue to contribute very generously costs have risen so enormously in recent months that a new bid is now in preparation for further Federal funds.

The third source of Brazilian funding has been from PUC and the Federal University of Santa Catarina, who have met the ODA salary contributions for the three specialists with a contribution equivalent to a proportion of their salary had they been employed directly by the respective institutions. Nor should the valuable commodities of software, secretarial services and space be forgotten.

1.4 Training

I have already mentioned the training received in the UK through British Council and ODA scholarships. It is hoped that by 1984 all the university coordinators will have received UK training of this type as well as others involved in the grass-roots of the Project. In-country training is carried out through seminars both local and national.

The first national seminar was held in the early days of the Project (February 1978) immediately following the initial visits, and brought together the local coordinators of that time for explanatory work on materials writing. The second national seminar in November 1980 followed the arrival of the three new British Council appointees and may be said to mark the beginning of the second phase of the Project. It provided an opportunity for the coordinators and the specialists to explore a number of contemporary issues in ESP and devise broad policy lines for the teaching of ESP within the Brazilian context. These were that the Project should concentrate on developing students' reading strategies, which would enable them to cope with texts on their speciality at levels of comprehension appropriate to their needs. Teaching would usually be done in Portuguese.

The third national seminar was held in São Paulo between the 25th and 29th April 1983. On this occasion the Project was honoured by a visit from Prof. H. Widdowson as guest-speaker. Besides giving three full afternoon talks, Prof. Widdowson also evaluated the success of the Project, seen through the reports he had read, and through workshops and presentations he attended during the Seminar. His evaluation was that the bases were now strong enough to "transfer power" to the Brazilian teachers and coordinators.

The local seminars started immediately after the second national seminar in December 1980, and presented these

general lines to the ESP teachers for discussion and implementation. Most of the local seminars lasted five days, though one or two exceeded this period. Sessions were given under such headings as 'What is ESP?', 'Levels of Comprehension', 'Text Analysis of Academic Texts'. The local seminars also included workshop sessions devoted to producing exercises or evaluating and modifying materials already prepared by the participant universities. In the second round of visits to local seminars, universities chose from a "menu" of topics.* Those aspects of ESP that they wished to see were dealt with in their particular seminar. These topics form the subjects for current and forthcoming Working Papers, so that new teachers to the Project can bring themselves up to date on such topics as well as discuss them with their local teams. Present local seminars are particularly oriented towards improving materials now prepared under the methodological principles of the second phase (see Section 2). It is noteworthy that universities are now much more willing to show and discuss their materials.

A third type of seminar, the regional seminars, came at a time when all the participant universities had received at least one visit, and functioned as a sort of stocktaking activity in which the teachers from all the universities in each of the three regions came together and discussed common problems and participated in workshops. These have now become an annual feature of the Project, when we invite a well known specialist in ESP from a British University to give talks and advice to those participating. Noteworthy contributors to these events have been :

*'What is ESP?', 'Different Types of Reading', 'Coping', 'Materials Analysis', 'Choosing and Using a Text', 'Materials Writing', 'Exercises Types', 'Testing', 'Classroom Management', 'Needs analysis', 'Notions and Functions', 'Structure', 'Vocabulary', 'Course Design', 'Classroom Techniques', 'Psychology and Sociology of Reading', 'Lesson Observation', 'Demonstration Lesson'.

Frank Frankel (Manchester), Tim Johns (Birmingham), Chris Kennedy (Birmingham), Ray Williams (Aston), Malcolm Coulthard (Birmingham), Charles Alderson (Lancaster). It is planned that Regional Seminars should continue after the KELT withdrawal in 1985, and we hope to maintain close relationships with the three latter universities mentioned above, for this purpose. A regular feature of Regional Seminars now are workshops organised by the Brazilian co-ordinators.

As it is in these last two types of seminars, the local and the regional ones, that classroom practice and methodology have been worked out, it is to these aspects of the Project that I will now turn. My final section will then deal with research.

2. METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE SECOND PHASE

It is not an objective of the Brazilian ESP Project to produce a monolithic Brazilian ESP methodology, nor incidentally do we aim at producing a Brazilian ESP textbook like those which emerged from similar Projects in Malaysia and Colombia. This is not of course in any way to disparage these materials. We use them extensively in our teaching-training work, and they are used in some of the participant universities. The point is that ESP is being taught at so many varied academic levels in Brazil and in such varying conditions that it seems to the KELT team that we can at best hope to give the 180 odd teachers at present involved in the Project some firm principles, on the basis of which they can select, evaluate and write materials suitable to their needs. I would like to present our thinking on three of these principles.

2.1 Text Selection

As a corrective to a predominant notion of ESP that existed in Brazil and possibly worldwide at the beginning of the 70s, and also for the practical reasons of materials production and interchange, we have tended to look for

similarities between academic texts from a variety of disciplines rather than differences. We admit, of course, that there may be differences at a higher level of abstraction such as between arts and science texts, and we also recognise that for reasons of face-validity specialized texts may form part of a course, but our main focus has been on the reading of academic texts with the following criteria for text selection paramount.

2.1.1 Texts should be written in academic English and found in the types of journals our students have to, or might be expected to, consult.

2.1.2 They should not be simplified in any way, since our course duration does not allow time for the sort of gradation that Widdowson, for example, has advocated. To present simplified texts would, in our view, be giving our students false security, and not strengthening the latent capacities that we wish to demonstrate are already present for dealing with texts in English.

2.1.3 The texts should be unadapted in terms of ideas, but might, in the initial stages of the course, reflect clearly the generally accepted argument structure of scientific writing. In this respect we have generally found the Hoey (1979) structure of situation, problem, solution, evaluation a satisfactory model, or alternatively texts which have development sections marked with subtitles.

2.2 Levels of Comprehension

One of the central policies of the Project has been to emphasise to students that there is more than one way of reading a text. Students in Brazil, as elsewhere, have a tendency to read any text at an intensive word for word level of comprehension, and feel that they haven't read the text 'properly' unless they have understood every word. We emphasise three levels of comprehension: general comprehension, by which the student reads the text for the main gist; main points comprehension, which, as the

name suggests, requires the student to identify the writer's principal points or arguments and identify their development; and detailed comprehension, where we concentrate on the meaning of the component sentences and lexical items from the text. Teachers are made aware of these comprehension techniques through a "Reading Awareness Workshop" devised by Holmes and Scott, in which they are asked to reflect on their own academic reading prompted by a series of questions. We emphasise also that the three levels of comprehension are not to be regarded as a progression, but are to be applied according to different purposes in reading texts. While it is true that the student will need to apply general comprehension to most texts he reads in order to know whether he needs to read them further or in greater detail, he also needs to develop what can only be described as an "easy conscience" about deciding not to read further when it is not relevant to his needs. This therefore reflects some educational value in our ESP courses, since students are being helped to reflect on the selection of bibliographical material related to their needs. Main points comprehension is usually linked in our teaching with note-taking skills, and therefore also has educational value beyond the ESP class itself. In detailed comprehension we attempt to discourage over-use of the dictionary. In the early stages of the course we emphasise intelligent guessing and inferencing as a means of solving comprehension problems, as well as the use of the student's own previous knowledge of the subject. It is a strange fact that students entering an ESP class in order to understand better texts in English on their own subject tend to leave their knowledge of that subject outside the class. To illustrate how this knowledge can be useful we have made use of a text written in Albanian about coffee exports from Brazil. Students are able to answer the questions following the text by drawing on the cognate items in the text, non-

linear information in the forms of graphs and tables, as well as their knowledge of graphic conventions and the actual situation described. This hopefully serves to illustrate that comprehension is as much what the student brings to the text as what the text itself says.

2.3 Exercises Types

As regards exercises on the passages selected, particularly those concerning sub-skills such as scanning, identifying cognates, forming hypothesis, predicting and so on, tentative criteria for exercise evaluation have been worked out in a series of workshops on exercise typology conducted by Scott. In Scott's own words

"The purpose of this typology is to provide a practical tool. This tool operates in some ways like an alphabet does on speech. It reduces a complex reality to a set of options like the 26 letters of the alphabet and their combinations. It cannot do this perfectly and without failing to reveal some of the characteristics of the complex reality. It is only with this sort of tool that we can systematically generate a new complex reality, new exercise types."

The exercises are evaluated along seven parameters as follows: first of all, the parameter of topic: what is to be practised, and this includes aspects such as the three levels of comprehension I've mentioned as well as rhetorical functions, coping strategies, processing strategies, using cognates, guessing, predicting and thinking skills. The second parameter is authenticity, which asks how far an exercise is like to real sorts of activities we are likely to carry out with the text. Other parameters are mental operations that are required in an exercise, such as synthesizing, analysing, transforming; what sort of physical activity does the exercise involve; what depth of comprehension is requires? (this is not synonymous with the levels of comprehension we have already referred to, but refers to how far we are merely asked to extract

information or how far we have to respond to the text and think about what the writer says). The last two parameters are, freedom - how far does the exercise allow the student freedom in his response, and justification - is the student required to justify his response? In another paper I have proposed that it may be possible to combine exercises on textual features with reading strategies practice, for example, asking students to scan a text for references to a particular object. This would activate their awareness of reference items such as pronouns, lexical cohesion, etc while they were involved in the scanning process. While such an exercise may lack authenticity, given the short duration of some of our courses (on average between 60 and 100 hours) it may make use of time more productively. One further type of exercise that is now being produced is in connection with the self-access Project at present being piloted at the University of Santa Catarina. I shall have more to say about this Project in the research section.

2.4 Summary of Section 2.

If I may just sum up the present section, classroom practice in the National ESP Project have focused on three aspects of ESP methodology: text selection, levels of comprehension and exercise types. In each case what we try to put over in our teacher training is that it is possible to systematize each of these complex areas, and by doing so evaluate existing materials and identify gaps in our course designs.

3. RESEARCH

I shall conclude this paper with some brief reports of the research within the Project both of an individual and collective nature.

3.1 Individual Research

Most of the individual research undertaken by the Project teachers is done as part of their requirements for

MA or doctorate dissertations. In 1982 Baltra presented a doctoral dissertation which examined extensively the top-down and bottom-up theories of the reading process and drew some important conclusions from both strategies for the design of ESP reading comprehension courses. The ESP materials which form an appendix to the dissertation aim at making the student aware of these two possibilities and leading him to proficiency in reading L2.

Some of the Master's theses completed or in preparation have particular courses in mind and suggest theoretically based inputs for course design in such areas as library science (Harbich, 1982), law (Ullman, 1981), psychology (Santos Lima, 1983) and journalism (Limonje, forthcoming). On the purely linguistic side Maciel (1980) examined errors made in translations required from ESP students at the University of Rio Grande do Sul. Although translation is a different skill from reading, Maciel concluded from her data that errors may reflect a deficiency in reading strategies, since students apparently decode word by word without making use of syntactic or contextual clues. This confirms what was said earlier about students proceeding on a word to word basis when faced with a text for comprehension. Smaller studies have repeated Maciel's tests (e.g. Santos, 1982, Paulino, 1983) and reached similar conclusions. Gomes (1981) examined one of the principal contrastive difficulties in the linear process of English texts for speakers of Portuguese, the structure of the nominal groups. After examining a corpus of complex noun groups in social science texts, however, she was unable to identify any systematic correspondence between the pre-nominal ordering of modifiers in the English texts with their post-modifying equivalents in Portuguese. Despite this apparently negative result, she demonstrated that the commonly accepted reversal rule, i.e. that the Portuguese noun group is a mirror image of its English

counterpart, is a misleading over-simplification. Within other dissertations in preparation include an analysis of Sinclair's (1981) hypothesis that written texts differ from spoken texts in the relative predominance of retrospective and prospective features respectively. These differences in "directionality" and their exponent features might influence text-selection and course-design. Another thesis looks at Widdowson's (1978) suggestion of relating English teaching in schools to other subjects of the curriculum, enquiring particularly into motivational factors. This particular enquiry is indicative of how some aspects of the ESP Project are "trickling down" into the school and further-education systems. Its central concern with reading skills is in particular, regarded as a more realistic approach to language needs in Brazil. The findings of this particular piece of research (Trew, forthcoming) are that Widdowson's proposal has not worked in the particular environment in which it was applied.

More general research on the topic of reading has been Cavalcanti (1983, PhD Lancaster) who used introspective techniques to examine why readers pause, Boxwell (1981), one of the earliest theses in the Project, advocating a reading approach to ESP, and Fachin (1983) who looks at the general questions of teaching reading strategies.

3.2 Informal Research

Informal research, that is not necessarily leading to formal qualifications but more probably to publications or presentation of papers, includes Mike Scott's work on text preferences reported in The ESPecialist n° 4. Tony Deyes is at present concerned with an analysis of Cloze tests in an attempt to find out how it might be possible to devise Cloze-type tests more related to discourse features that are likely to affect reading comprehension (forthcoming). There is, at present, an active group in Florianópolis working on reading; one of the papers at a recent Regional Seminar (Carioni, 1983) came from this

group and reported on a version of the Clark and Havitland (1977) experiments on information structure repeated with Brazilian speakers of English to investigate relationships between Portuguese and English cohesive features. It was gratifying to see informal research written up in the first Working Paper produced by Brazilian participants (Maciel et al 1983) and another investigating the influence of reading aloud on silent reading (Bork, forthcoming) will be appearing shortly. John Holmes and his Resource Centre assistants are also doing valuable work on text and exercise classification, which should be to the benefit of the whole Project (see this volume, Holmes' article).

3.3 Collective Project Research

One of the values of a Project of the Brazilian type is that the sum of people involved can achieve far more than individuals. Collective research is thus highly desirable as we are in a better position to do this than any single institution or smaller Project. There are four Brazil-wide Projects at the moment:

3.3.1 Project Evaluation. Any Project widespread as the Brazilian National ESP Project must of course monitor and evaluate itself. In 1981, through an initiative by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, questionnaires were sent out to all participant universities to be answered by both teachers and students receiving ESP courses, and enquiring into such factors as what was considered the most appropriate moment for a specialist English course, what was the optimal length of courses, what previous knowledge of general English was desirable, and so on. The results were analysed by computer and matched with such variables as age, academic level of the students, course length and so on. A report of the findings appeared in The ESPecialist n^o 6. Figures such as the fact that 68% of the students feel that English is necessary to their studies, that more books on their

bibliography occur in English than in other foreign languages, and that students generally feel that ESP courses meet their needs more satisfactorily than general English courses, all show what seems to be a favourable assessment. In the same issue of *The ESpecialist* a course evaluation was reported on by the ESP team from UFES under Neise Rodrigues. These models for evaluation are informative and useful, and it is hoped to extend this sort of self-questioning (see also 3.4).

3.3.2 Minimal Discourse Grammar. A further research Project involving all the participant universities is an analysis of texts used in specialist courses in order to establish a "Minimal Discourse Grammar". This will not only be based on criteria of frequency or contrastiveness but will focus particularly on aspects of text grammar and discourse that could be considered helpful in the reading process such as argument structure, related lexical cohesion, modal verbs reflecting the speculative or hypothetical nature of science and so on. A third source of data about what language items to include in courses will also be statements from Brazilian readers about points of difficulty encountered while reading academic texts (miscues). "Minimal Discourse Grammar" is more fully described in Working Paper n^o 3 (Tony Deyes, 1982).

3.3.3 The Self-Access Materials Project. A Project to which I have already referred and which arises from the methodological problems created by heterogeneous groups both from the point of view of language level, educational level and specialism is the self-access materials Project now being applied in various ESP classes at UFSC and whose "Model Exercise" is in use elsewhere (e.g. UFU). The materials consist of a wide range of texts accompanied by the "Model Exercise", whose main purpose is to develop awareness of different levels of comprehension. The Self-Access Project is reported on more fully in this volume and a report is to appear by Scott (forthcoming).

3.3.4 The Resource Centre at PUC. Also reported on more fully elsewhere (Holmes, this volume) is the work of the Resource Centre at PUC. It deserves mention as collective research, however, since John Holmes and his team will be relying extensively on Project universities for feedback and details of successful classifications or bids for materials.

3.3.5 Action/Classroom Research. This is an area where not much has been done yet, but where a great deal can be achieved, and where each Project member involved in classroom teaching can contribute significantly to a greater understanding of what goes on in the classroom, in our students' heads, or how successful we are being. This type of research was greatly stimulated by talks from Chris Kennedy (Central Region Seminar, Vitória 1982) and continued in the same region in 1983 by Charles Alderson. Furthermore, one of the workshops offered in the 1983 National and Regional Seminars was concerned with drawing up a list of suggestions for classroom-type research relevant to the Brazilian ESP Project. This list of some 40 topics is to be published shortly.

3.4 Conclusion to Section 3.

These 40 research topics in some way represent the coherent research policy mentioned in the earlier version (1982) of this paper. While action research is something all Project participants can get fully involved in, it is to be hoped that the discussion of more abstract principles and hypotheses will continue to be related to our courses through dissertations, publications and materials.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have reviewed the Brazilian National ESP Project, first of all from the historical point of view, examining the origins of the Project and the inputs following an enthusiastic response from the participant universities. I then went on to describe the methodological

input over the last three years, and our focus on text selection policies, levels of comprehension and exercise typology with the aim of systematizing these complex areas, so that teachers may feel that their courses are more coherent, both from the theoretical and the design point of view. In my final section I described some of the research Projects that are presently being undertaken by teachers and members of the Project team and the emergence of a research policy oriented in particular towards action research in the classroom.

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