

The Challenge of Teaching EAP to Lower Level Students
UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
20th February, 2009

EAP from Day 1?
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Introduction

In my presentation, I asked whether we can teach EAP from the beginning, whether we should teach EAP from the beginning and how we teach EAP from the beginning.

If we do not teach EAP from the beginning, what do we teach? The usual answer would be General English. So I tried to address such comments and questions as:

"You've got to teach General English first."

"You can't teach EAP at low levels."

"What IELTS level can you teach EAP from?"

"EAP is only for advanced students."

"How do you prepare people for EAP?"

General English

In order to deal with these points we need to agree on what we mean by General English. I suggested that it could mean the following:

- Everything – all English.
- A simplified version of everything.
- The grammar of English
- Tourism English
- Functional – daily language
- Conversational English
- Teaching general English meant using a general English coursebook.
- English vocabulary – most common 2000 words
- The common core

These seem to divide into 2 main groups:

1. Survival/functional English.
2. Some kind of common core of English that all students need.

Low level EAP

I divided the talk into 4 sections that dealt with:

1. Needs - do students need survival/everyday conversational English?
2. Language - do students need general English to build on?
3. Reasons not to teach General English.
4. Learning needs.

1. Needs

Do students need survival/everyday conversational English? This is what some people mean when they say General English. Students may need this. It depends on who they are, where they are learning English and why they are learning English. Not all EAP students are in English-speaking countries. Not all EAP students need all 4 skills.

2. Language

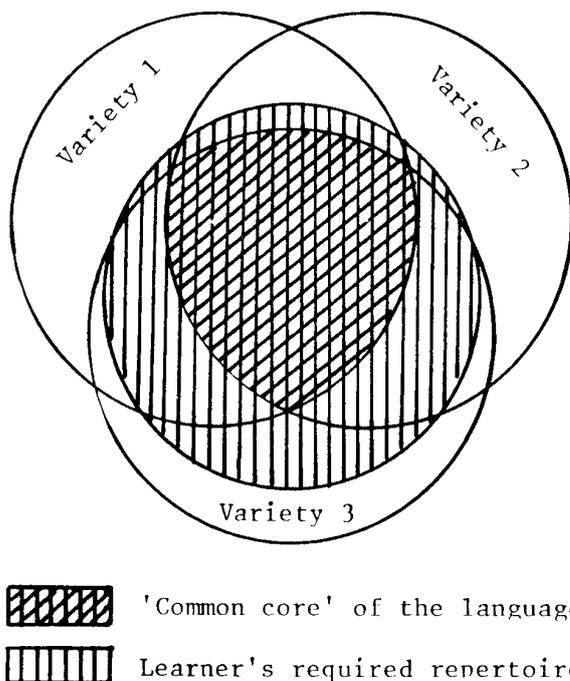
Do students need general English to build on? This seems to be what most people mean when they say “General English”, the idea being that students need a grounding in the basics of the language before they can go further.

“Attempts to teach a 'restricted' language ('English for Engineers') too often ignore the danger in so doing of trying to climb a ladder which is sinking in the mud; it is no use trying to approach a point on the upper rungs if there is no foundation” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik, 1985, p. 29).

This introduces the idea of the common core.

“A COMMON CORE or nucleus is present in all the varieties so that, however esoteric a variety may be, it has running through it a set of grammatical and other characteristics that are present in all the others” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985, p. 16).

This idea is shown clearly in diagrammatic form by Corder (1973, p. 66):



However, as pointed out by Bloor and Bloor (1986), if the common core is shared by all varieties of English, it is part of EAP.

“No common core of language pre - exists to varieties. The core is, rather, an essential part of any one of the innumerable varieties of the language.”

Therefore there is no reason to teach the common core before EAP – it is part of EAP.

3. Reasons not teach General English.

There may be practical – timetabling – reasons why we cannot teach relevant ESAP from the beginning. So does it hurt to teach General English? There are two reasons why we might not want to not teach GE:

- i. It may be misleading
- ii. It may not be a good use of time

There are many examples from the study of language why teaching General English might be misleading. For example, Swales (1981) looks at definitions. The typical structure of a definition that we often teach is:

“Metaproteins are the group of substances which are produced by the action of acids on alkalis or proteins. “

However Swales points out that this is not how definitions are often used in law:

"A person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it; and ‘thief’ and ‘steal’ shall be construed accordingly.”

Another example is from Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan (1999, p. 461). In an extensive series of graphs, they show how different verb forms are used differently in different varieties of English.

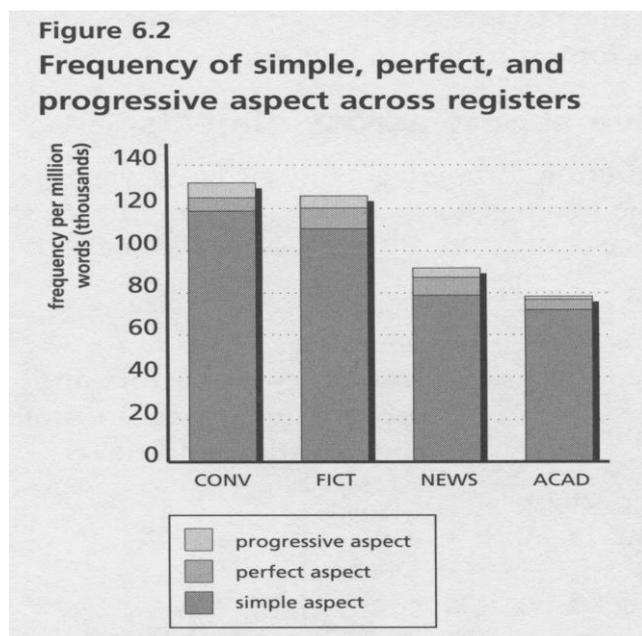


Figure 6.2 shows how rarely the progressive aspect of the verb is used in academic texts. So basing our syllabus on studies of General English would be misleading.

4. Learning needs!

Simply from a linguistic point of view, there is no need to teach General English before EAP. However, there may be learning and teaching needs where how we teach influences what we need to teach in our classes.

For example, if our teaching methods are primarily oral and involve a lot of group and pair work, then we will need to teach aspects of what is often called General English. For example,

it might be necessary to teach questions forms early on, even though they may not be needed in the type of EAP we are teaching.

Secondly, if we allow use of translation or the first language in the classroom, it will influence what we can teach at low levels.

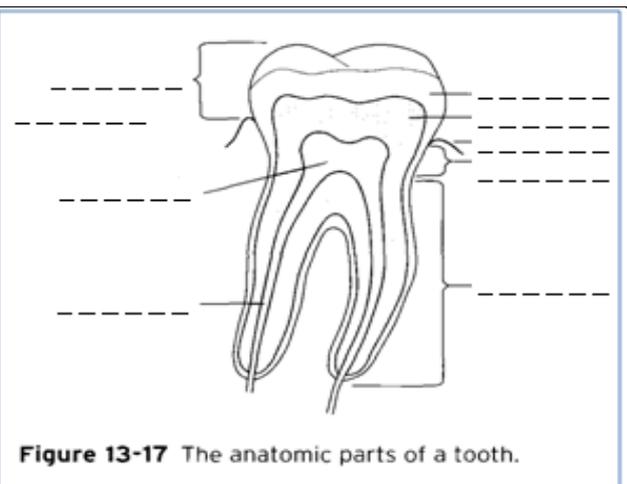
Example of teaching EAP at low level.

This is an example of something that can be done at a very low level with students who know something about biology.

Reading & Labelling

Each tooth has three parts: the crown, the root and the pulp cavity [see Figure 13 - 17).

The crown is the exposed part of the tooth, which is outside the gum. It is covered with a hard substance called enamel. The ivory - coloured internal part of the crown below the enamel is the dentin. The root of a tooth is embedded in the jaw and covered by a bony tissue called cementum. The pulp cavity in the centre of the tooth contains the blood vessels and nerves.



Grammar Focus

Each tooth has three parts: the crown, the root and the pulp cavity.

The crown is outside the gum.

It is covered with a hard substance called enamel.

The root of a tooth is embedded in the jaw.

The root is covered by a bony tissue called cementum.

Conclusion

Four issues were raised and answers given:

1. Students might need survival/everyday conversational General English.
2. It is not necessary to teach General English (Common Core) so that EAP can build on it.
3. It may be a waste of time teaching general English.
4. There may be learning needs that require General English.

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