

English for teachers of EFL – Toward a holistic description

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Abstract

Target language competence of EFL teachers is an important aspect of EFL teaching and teacher expertise, and a case of ESP which is often not acknowledged as such. This paper presents a target language needs analysis for EFL teachers, carried out in Slovenia between 2003 and 2005. A survey of the literature shows that such studies are rare, even though there are reports from several countries of EFL teachers' insufficient target language competence. The study presented used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a model for describing the language needs of EFL teachers in and outside of their classrooms. A series of 11 interviews, 48 classroom observations, 3 case studies and 93 reports from novice teachers yielded a list of language activities and competences that EFL teachers in Slovenia specifically need to develop. The study also sheds light on the question of how target language needs differ according to the level and context of teaching. The results are of value to all those involved in developing and redesigning EFL teacher training programs, particularly their language training component, in the countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

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1. Introduction

Much of today's world is learning English as a key foreign language, and is doing so through organized instruction delivered by teachers who very often are non-native speakers of English. While historically, foreign language instruction has not always happened

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through the target language, in past decades this has increasingly been the case or at least the desired standard. Certainly, this is partly due to factors such as the central position of English speaking countries in the area of EFL methodology and materials design (Phillipson, 1992), but there is also evidence that supports the teaching of English primarily through the medium of English, with appropriate cross-linguistic support (Stern, 1992). In countries such as Slovenia, the presence of English has increased considerably over the past twenty years, as have general levels of English proficiency in the population. To a greater extent than ever before, today's EFL teachers are faced with the challenge of achieving appropriate levels of target language proficiency for carrying out their professional activities.

It has been argued that the English required by EFL teachers is a case of ESP, although not entirely comparable to some other types of ESP (Elder, 2001), and this is too often overlooked in EFL teacher training (Johnson, 1990; Richards, 1998). At the same time, the target language competence of EFL teachers is reported to be insufficient in many countries (e.g. Berry, 1990; Guntermann, 1992; Murdoch, 1994; Sadtono, 1995). This situation might be related to a lack of an ESP approach to developing English competence in future teachers. Admittedly, much EFL teacher training today, at least in Europe, is still nested within traditional language and literature studies, where the students' target language proficiency development is often marginalized as a curricular goal and conceptualized as English for General Purposes (Snell-Hornby, 1982) rather than profiled from the point of view of the graduates' future profession. In one of the first volumes of the ESP Journal, Kennedy (1983) called for an ESP approach to training EFL/ESL teachers, but an internet review of programmes of this kind around Europe reveals that courses as specific as the Finnish University of Joensuu's 'Classroom Language' are still a rarity.

Of course, target language competence is not an isolated aspect of language teacher expertise. The knowledge base of teacher education in general is broad and complex (see for example, the UK Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (Teacher Training Agency, 2005; Shulman & Shulman, 2004)). While it is clear that the teacher's mastery of the subject of teaching is one of its key components, foreign language teaching is specific in this respect as the target language is not only the subject but also the tool of the instruction process (Long, 1983). In the case of English, the teacher's mastery of the target language is also related to cultural, economic and political issues, and is thus frequently discussed in the literature dealing with the status of native versus non-native teachers (e.g. Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999). Some of the other sources dealing with the profile of a foreign language teacher do not pay much attention to the teacher's target language competence (e.g. Schrier, 1994; Tsui, 2003; Kelly et al., 2004), while some define it as a key competence, separate from the knowledge *about* the target language and cultures and other specific knowledge (e.g. Balbi, 1996; Trappes-Lomax, 2002). Richards (1998), in one of the most thorough attempts to define a knowledge base for the preparation of EFL teachers, defines 'communicative skill and target language competence' as one of the six major areas, which, although intricately interconnected in practice, can and should be separated for the purposes of research.

In terms of planning the language development component of an EFL teacher preparation program, the literature cited so far represents just a framework, a skeleton to be fleshed out. What data can be obtained to investigate this? The 1980s research on language teacher talk (Chaudron, 1988) yielded interesting but fragmented and fairly tentative

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