IMPACT: An English for Occupational Purposes model designed for workplace language training in Costa Rica
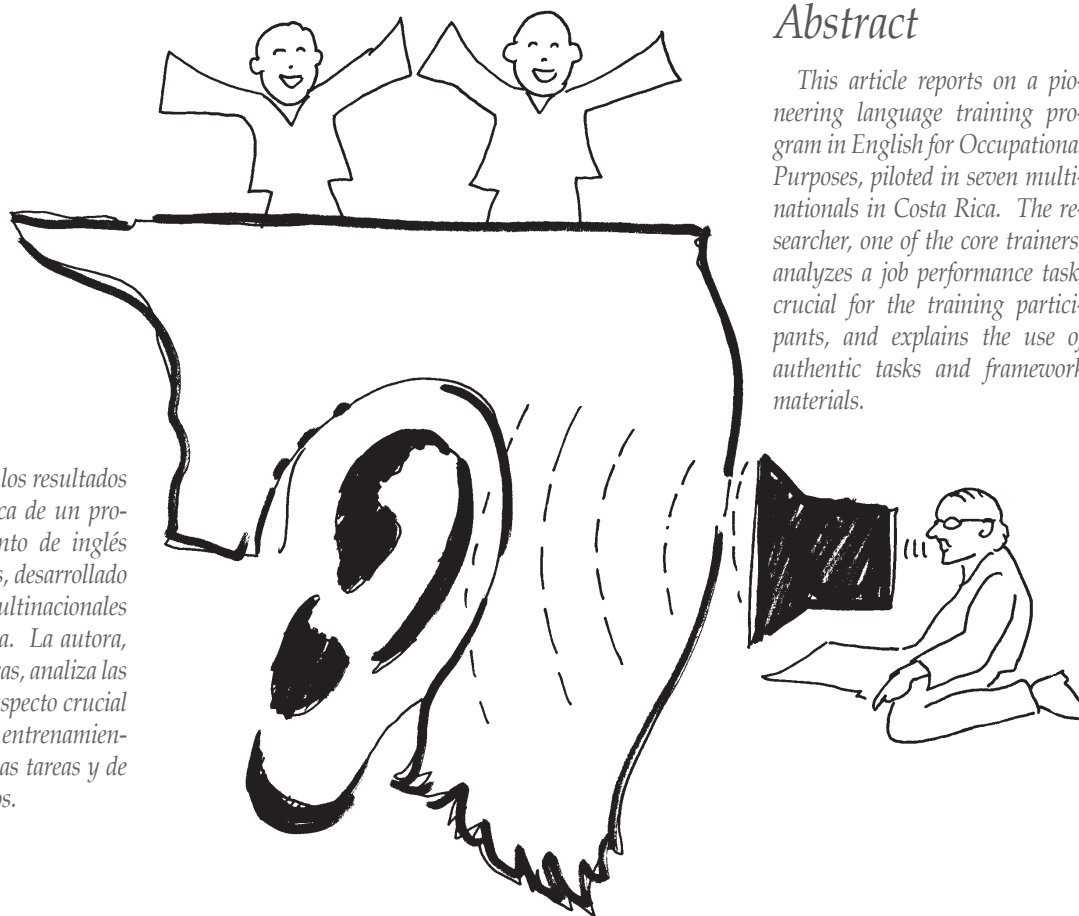
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Abstract

   This article reports on a pioneering language training program in English for Occupational Purposes, piloted in seven multinationals in Costa Rica. The researcher, one of the core trainers, analyzes a job performance task, crucial for the training participants, and explains the use of authentic tasks and framework materials.

Resumen

   El artículo presenta los resultados de la puesta en práctica de un programa de entrenamiento de inglés con fines ocupacionales, desarrollado en siete empresas multinacionales ubicadas en Costa Rica. La autora, una de las investigadoras, analiza las actividades laborales, aspecto crucial de los participantes del entrenamiento y explica el uso de las tareas y de los materiales diseñados.

The teaching of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) has emerged in Costa Rica during the last two decades in response to a growing need for an English-proficient workforce. This new emphasis has become part of the efforts the country has made to meet the demands of globalization, together with, for example, the incorporation of English instruction in elementary schools since the 1990s and the adherence to communicative methodologies in public secondary schools (MEP, 2005). In spite of these efforts, the demands of a bilingual workforce have proved to be more challenging than expected.

Multinational companies with large investments in Costa Rica have faced problems due to the inadequate English language skills of many of their employees. For several years these companies expressed their concerns to the American Chamber of Commerce and to the Embassy of the United States regarding the difficulty of finding employees in Costa Rica who are proficient enough to handle demanding job-performance tasks in English (Brown & Smith, 2003; Brown, B., Prior, S., Rodríguez, X, & Smith, H., 2005; Brown, B., Rodríguez, X., & Smith, H., 2005). For this reason, the Embassy of the United States and the American Chamber of Commerce decided to coordinate efforts to attend to the language needs of nine U.S.-affiliated businesses in Costa Rica by sponsoring an English for occupational purposes program that would serve as a pioneering model for workplace training in Costa Rica.

The present study reports on the experiences of IMPACT, a 200-hour intensive training program in English for Occupational Purposes (Costa Rican EOP IMPACT), piloted in seven multinational companies in Costa Rica in the year 2003. The acronym IMPACT, which stands for "Innovative, Multinational Pilot for Pro-Active Communication Tools," was selected to reflect the innovative nature of the project and the high standards of achievement expected from all the stakeholders: participants, trainers, companies, and the entire EOP IMPACT team. The researcher reports her experience in this project as one of the five core trainers responsible for course designing and teaching. The study describes the needs-analysis process and the tasks and the materials used for empowering participants through strategic competence-building.

BACKGROUND OF THE COSTA RICAN EOP IMPACT PROJECT

The purpose of the IMPACT project was to make Costa Rican workforce more competitive to face the challenges of foreign direct investment (FDI) made by multinational companies. Based on the 2004 Offshore Location Attractiveness Index, conducted by the management consulting firm A.T. Kearney, Costa Rica ranked number 16 among the 25 top countries in the world to establish offshore operations (Kearney, 2005, p. 3). According to A.T. Kearney, *"Costa Rica offers competitive costs, the best English-language proficiency among the countries surveyed [Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Argentina] and a relatively friendly business environment"* (p. 20).

The Costa Rican EOP IMPACT project was funded by CR-USA, Costa Rica-United States of America Foundation for Cooperation, a private, non-profit organization whose goal is to establish links between the two countries by supporting, among others, projects in capacity building (CR-USA, 2003). The project was sponsored by The Embassy of the United States of America, who contacted E.S.P. English for Specific Purposes, a language training and consultancy company, with more than 20 years of experience teaching specialized language courses in Costa Rica. This company was in charge of the needs analysis, the design of the model, the hiring of international consultants and teachers, and the selection of participants. E.S.P. also organized a professional development seminar for the teachers to understand the demands of the pilot and supervised and evaluated the entire project, including a ground-breaking return on investment (ROI)[1] study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Situating EOP

In the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is traditionally seen as the counterpart of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Based on Hutchinson and Waters' classification (1987), EOP and EAP stemmed from three major ESP areas: English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), and English for Social Sciences (ESS). Another taxonomy placed EOP and EAP as direct branches derived from ESP: (a) English for Occupation Purposes with courses for professional, vocational, and pre-work purposes and (b) English for Academic Purposes with courses in study programs mainly for the areas of Science and Technology, Law, Medicine, and Business (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Brown (2001) listed EAP and ESP as two separate *"types of curricula"*, the former as a broad term for courses in pre-academic programs and the latter limited to courses in *"professional fields of study"* (pp. 122-123).

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) contended, however, that a classification missed the overlapping that often exists *"between 'common core' EAP or EBP [English for Business Purposes] and general English"* (p. 8). Therefore, they suggest a five-point continuum of English language teaching that goes from general to specific purposes courses. Along the continuum, the first two points on the left are general English for diverse proficiency levels; the middle point combines *"common-core language and skills"* used in English for general academic or general business purposes; and the last two points represent the highest degrees of specific-

ity. The fourth position is occupied by courses for different disciplines within a study program and the last one by entirely tailored-made courses (p. 9).

The rationale behind this continuum agrees with Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) claim that general English courses usually precede specific ones. Learners need a good foundation before attempting to accomplish demanding job tasks in a foreign language. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) maintain that, although EOP can be taught to beginners, the norm is to wait until they have acquired a basic command of the language if specific work-related goals are to be attained. Furthermore, the strong demands on the learner in an EOP course may add some stress to the heavy workloads training participants usually have to carry; therefore, it is advisable to begin training at the low-to-high intermediate levels.

The participant as a resource in an EOP course

Learner job-specific needs are at the core of EOP teaching. EOP courses are designed based on clearly definable needs that aim at meeting the participants' job-specific goals (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Friedenberg et al., 2003; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Belcher (2004) stated that tailor-made courses make us resist the tendency toward *"being overly teacher-centered"* (p. 351). Because we are expected to consult with the learners on an ongoing basis

to achieve the course goals, we have to learn to view the language training participants as resources (Heidi Smith & Bonnie Brown, personal communication, EOP IMPACT Professional Development Seminar, January 28-February 07, 2003). Although it is true that we lack the participants' specialist knowledge (Belcher, 2004; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), this apparent drawback turns into an advantage. EOP frees teachers from having the sole responsibility over goals, content, activities, and materials and invites us to share the course design task with the training participants, whose specialist knowledge will combine with our expertise in language teaching. This approach leads to learner-centeredness, an essential characteristic in EOP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The participants in workplace language training need to have the degree of control over the learning experience that Brown (2001) identified for learner-centered instruction. According to Brown, this learner-centered environment is achieved through collaborative work, continuous consultation with students, and opportunities for learners to contribute their input and creativity. Friedenberg et al. (2003) added that in EOP the *"learners contribute to the curriculum by bringing communication challenges they have encountered in the workplace to class for discussion"* (p. ix).

Involving learners in course and task design becomes, then, a crucial as-

pect for the success of an EOP course. Belcher (2004) explained that ESP classes should encourage *"communities of inquiry"* in which both instructors and students have opportunities to learn (p. 352). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) argued that bi-directionality should be a trait of teacher-learner relationships in many ESP situations, as opposed to vertical relationships that allow little negotiation of goals, content, and tasks. Uvin (1996), for instance, reported on an EOP course which failed in its initial stages, in spite of the needs analysis and detailed planning, because the students' participation in course design was absent. Success was achieved after the students contributed their input regarding expectations and cultural differences. At this point, *"classes were more responsive to the personal, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive needs of the learners"* (pp. 52-53).

Materials in EOP

Materials in EOP can be teacher-generated or learner-generated. Although it is true that we may adapt available material, language trainers also have to become materials designers. Tailor-made materials are a source of motivation for participants. However, the challenge of specificity may lead the novice EOP trainer to uncertainty about the materials and course design tasks (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Normally reliant on the EFL situation's wide textbook selection, the novice workplace trainer may see the materials design as over-

whelming. This concern is certainly valid because it has a direct connection with the "what" and "how" to teach and with the responsibility of keeping learners fully engaged in the course. In this respect, Graves (1996) maintained that *"for some teachers, the lack of materials is a challenge; for others it is an opportunity"* (p. 27). Therefore, novice trainers have to learn to view course and materials design as an important constituent of their new role in ESP teaching.

Case studies about workplace language training have shed light about the importance of tailored materials and tasks. Garcia (2002) reported that, in spite of the lack of suitable materials in the market for her union members program, the teachers in this project *"found that customized materials provided the best practice"* (p. 170). The participants' workplace is, in fact, the main source for instructors to find materials to analyze and adapt for classroom tasks. The teachers in Garcia's study used *"company newsletters, work forms, paycheck stubs, training manuals, tools, parts, and safety equipment"* (p. 170) as essential input for classroom tasks (see also Eggly, 2002). Gordon (2002) gave an account of the CD-ROM materials designed (in English and Spanish) for manufacturing workers to build listening and reading comprehension skills.

These materials were identified as one of success features of their program. In Uvin's study (1996), materials were a success fac-

tor because *"they stemmed from the workplace or were generated by learners"* (p. 53). Success in EOP courses, then, largely depends on the open communication channels among trainers, participants, and their companies for a suitable course design. Authentic materials contributed by participants are a key element for trainers to develop appropriate classroom tasks, and consequently, they become an essential factor for learner empowerment. The next section describes the participants in the EOP IMPACT project.

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EOP IMPACT PROJECT

From the original nine U.S.-affiliated companies, seven ultimately participated. Four of these companies belonged to the service and technology industry and were located in Forum, Santa Ana, while the other three operated in manufacturing in Heredia and Cartago. All of them were headquartered in the United States and set up in Costa Rica for various periods of time, some relatively new, at the time of the pilot, and others as long as 20 years. A total of 32 participants, distributed in four groups, took the 200-hour training course after a six-month needs analysis and selection process. During the project, the learners were informed they were going to be considered training *participants*, as opposed to *students* in traditional EFL courses. As crucial stakeholders in the process, they were accountable for the goals to be achieved, and they were considered key

resources in the class for the provision of content, materials, language, skills, and feedback. The screening process involved close work with the Human Resources departments, the initial testing of approximately 80 candidates, the interviewing of nearly 100 key people in the companies, and the coordination with the potential candidates' supervisors (Brown & Smith, 2003). The candidates selected went from top-level managers to high-potential younger staff members. Approximately 75 percent of the 32 subjects were in the 25-35 age range. They were expected to apply the contents of the course to improve their job performance on critical tasks requiring English.

The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) minimum English entry level of low intermediate because of the short-term results expected, (b) serious commitment to the company and course goals, (c) availability to attend the 200 hours, and (d) a high potential to make an immediate impact on their jobs. The candidates were given the Business English Skills Test (BEST), a task-based performance test designed by E.S.P., which evaluates the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing in business contexts. The speaking and writing tests were independently scored by three evaluators. Their performance was tested during common job tasks that would more closely reflect their level, based on Dudlley-Evans and St. John (1998), Friedenberg et al.

(2003), and Hutchinson and Waters (1987).

According to Brown and Smith (2002), *"candidate profiles [were] reported in terms of level of performance and thus the test provide[d] essential diagnostic information to determine which candidates' English abilities [were] below the level required for their job-related responsibilities"* (p. 13). The level of the candidates selected for the training course ranged, in speaking, from a consolidated low intermediate level to a high intermediate, and in writing, from a base-line low intermediate to a high intermediate level (Brown & Smith, 2002).

THE EOP IMPACT TRAINING TEAM

The IMPACT Project brought together two international consultants, standard setters in EOP, Anne Lomperis and William Martin with ESP, an experienced local company. Together they conceived the project and incorporated a return on investment (ROI) study to prove to international companies the cost-benefits of investing in language training (Lomperis & Martin, 2002). The teaching staff consisted of 12 instructors from the University of Costa Rica (UCR), the Costa Rican Institute of Technology (ITCR), the Costa Rica-North American Binational Center (CCCN), and the consultant group, English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Furthermore, two instructors from the United States, with experience in workplace language training, joined the

team. There were a total of five core trainers and seven guest trainers or support staff members (see Figure 1). The concept of 'trainers' was used during all classes and throughout the project to differentiate their role as instructors/materials designers in the workplace from that of the general English teacher. The trainers shared accountability with the training participants in terms of the short-term results, reflected in improved job performance and a positive return on investment, expected after the training. The guest trainers participated by creating professional-development projects which they implemented in an assigned group to enhance the learning experience. Immersing the guest trainers in the teacher development seminar and in the actual teaching experience had the purpose of preparing a selected group of individuals with the potential to benefit their institutions from this innovative project. Their projects were related to videoconferencing/telephoning and sports-related idioms in business, among other topics.

The project directors and core trainers held master's degrees in TESOL or related fields from universities in the United States and had an average of eight years of experience in workplace language training. Figure 1 shows the names of the members of the entire team and the institutions they represented at the time of the study. The five core trainers, in two teams, taught the course under the modality of team teaching: three of these trainers taught

IMPACT Directors:

Heidi Smith and Bonnie Brown, English for Specific Purposes

International Consultants:

Ann Lomperis, Language Training Designs, Washington, D.C.

William Martin, Coordinator Business English Language Programs, University of Pennsylvania

Core Trainers:

John Butcher, Bilingual and Multicultural Education Specialist (visiting trainer from the USA)

Elda Elizondo (CCCN), Sherry Prior (ESP), and Xinia Rodríguez (ESP/UCR)

Ivy Silverman, Human Resources Specialist (visiting trainer from the USA)

Guest Trainers (support team):

Alonso Canales and Harry Morales (ESP/UCR), Ileana Mora and Rocío Murillo (ITCR), Luciana Pavez and Eugenia Rojas (ESP), and Carlos Vargas (CCCN)

Figure 1. The EOP IMPACT team

at two of the sites on alternate days and the other two taught at the third site. Team teaching meant that only one teacher was in charge of a group on a given day, but the team made joint decisions about lesson planning, materials design, and evaluation, together with the project directors. Planning sessions were extensive including weekly team and cross-team meetings to coordinate the overall project.

COURSE DESIGN IN EOP IMPACT: GOAL, METHODOLOGY, COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS, THEMES, AND TASK-BASED LEARNING

This section describes the major features of the IMPACT model, from the main goal to a sample job performance task. EOP IMPACT fit the fifth highest level of specificity described by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) in their *"continuum of ELT course types"* (p. 9) because the training program was designed to meet the specific on-the-job language needs of a group of professionals. The primary goal defined for this training was to improve oral language and strategic competence with a direct and measurable impact on job performance. The learners were expected to become *strategic speakers* (Grabe, 2004), able to make appropriate language choices given the context and purposes of a task (Bathia, 2000).

The specificity of the course meant a very particular methodology. Different from the traditional presentation, practice, and production (PPP) methodology that still dominates many ESL/EFL lessons (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), the methodology of an EOP training program is based on the activities that the participants' critical job performance tasks require (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Friedenberg et al., 2003; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). For this reason, the training sessions in EOP IMPACT reflected the type of activities the participants were engaged in at the workplace, such as communicating on the phone, writing emails, participating in videoconferences, and other activities.

The needs analysis revealed the communication problems that participants had during these critical job performance tasks. Communicating by phone with their counterparts in US headquarters was identified as critical for participants from both industries. Therefore, this paper focuses, for illustrative purposes, on issues related to telephoning. Table 1 presents some of the causes and consequences of communication breakdowns on the phone at the manufacturing sites.

TABLE 1
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS ON THE TELEPHONE: MANUFACTURING

Communication breakdowns	
Causes	**Consequences**
Misperceptions due to cultural differences Lack of strategy application Pronunciation problems with key vocabulary	Delays in production Costly production breakdowns Misunderstandings

TABLE 2
NEEDS-BASED THEMATIC MATRIX: MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Theme	Tasks	Context(s)	Parties	Problems
The Production Process	Reporting on production schedules and procedures	Telephone	Engineers from HQ or sister plants in US	Vocabulary limitations (others talk for them)
	Explaining a line breakdown or similar production problem			Need for conciseness and clarity when reporting exact nature of a problem

Based on the analysis of critical job performance tasks, the course was planned according to themes: the production process and compliance issues at the manufacturing sites and customer satisfaction and information transfer at the service and technology site, with problem-solving as an underlying theme in both industries (see Boyd, 2002 for a sample ESP program based on thematic units). The directors and trainers worked on problem-solving almost throughout the course to help the participants identify and analyze the communication problems encountered. To provide detailed information about the participants' needs, the project directors analyzed each of the above themes at two levels: a general analysis per site and a specific analysis per student. Table 2 shows the analysis of a theme from the manufacturing sites.

The different thematic matrixes and the participants' major communication problems were discussed at the teacher development seminar. During one of these sessions, the three core trainers in the manufacturing team (in which the researcher participated) also designed a chart that helped visualize the components involved in a job performance task in ESP (see Figure 2). The idea of designing this chart was inspired by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's pie chart (1999) on how to teach grammar in a general English class, based on the components of form, meaning, and use, as well as by Nunan's (1989) framework for ana-

lyzing communicative tasks based on *"goals, input, activities, teacher role, learner role, and settings"* (p. 11). Most of the tasks designed were *"real world"* as opposed to *"pedagogic"* tasks (Nunan, 1989, p. 40), as dictated by the needs analysis. The use of meaningful authentic tasks promoted purposeful communication and learner involvement (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; see also Nunan, 1989).

To illustrate the use of this framework, let us analyze the job performance task of telephoning. The task of telephoning comprised:

- Person to call: name, position, relationship with the participant, native language

- Purpose of the call: to inform about production processes

- Frequency of the call and degree of urgency: weekly / urgent to avoid delays

- Formality: as dictated by the position, situation, and business relationship

- Telephoning language: stating purpose, confirming information, closing call, etc.

- Vocabulary: key job-specific or company-specific

words to be used during the call

- Strategies: being direct, being concise, confirming, asking for clarification

- Cultural differences: steps to follow when receiving complaints or apologizing.

Once the specific job performance tasks were identified, the core trainers and their coordinator, worked on the *"reasonable understanding"* of these tasks that Dudley-Evan and St. John (1998, p. 13) discussed. As ESP teachers, the core trainers needed to understand what was involved in the
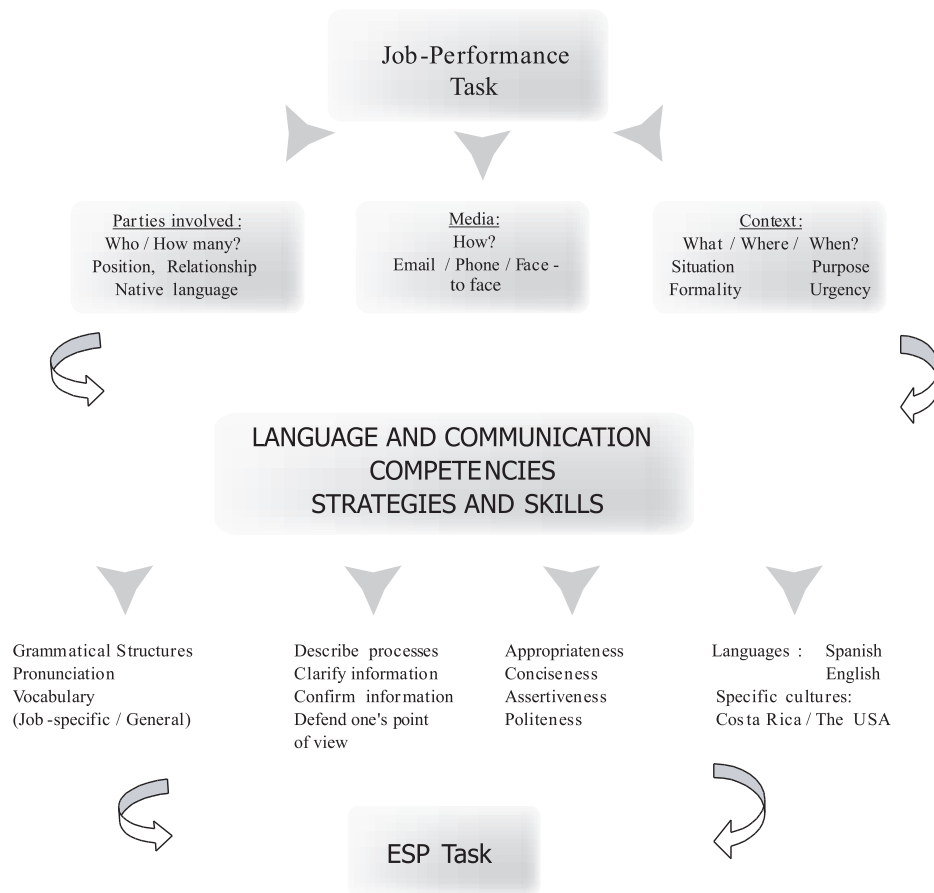
Figure 2. A framework for analyzing a job-performance task in ESP. Created by the EOP IMPACT team, 2003

performance of a particular task in order to break it up into teachable chunks. Thus, two sample objectives for the telephoning task were:

• Apply appropriate telephone language in a conference call when reporting production schedules and procedures.

• Apply assertiveness and conciseness strategies in a telephone call while explaining a line breakdown or any other production problem.

It is important to point out that, in spite of the extensive needs analysis conducted prior to the beginning of the course, a complete understanding of the themes and tasks to be covered during the 200 hours was not possible. Workplace training programs are negotiated with the learners along the way and require teachers who can tolerate a high level of ambiguity about the course organization and contents (Graves, 1996; Nunan, 1988). In fact, the high level of specificity of the course demanded an on-going needs-analysis. As Graves (1996) put it, there is no set of procedures for course design that will provide the answers to all questions. Trainers and participants have to work on finding the answers together. Thus, when the participants in EOP IMPACT became acquainted with the type of activities planned for the initial weeks, they gained further knowledge about the course expectations, shape, and goals. In this way, they were able to provide detailed information about their job-

specific tasks and materials used at work. Sample materials included: audio tapes of authentic telephone conversations, meetings and even a plant tour that one of the participants was in charge of; tapes of authentic video-conferences; emails and letters to US headquarters; and company documents, which helped plan ESP-focused activities. The following section provides examples of some of the materials used in the EOP IMPACT model.

THE EOP IMPACT COURSE: FRAMEWORK MATERIAL

Frameworks were very effective in EOP IMPACT to organize a particular job task into different stages, each one with specific teaching content, as recommended in Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). In most instances,

EOP IMPACT frameworks contained stages for getting prepared for the task, practicing the task, and evaluating results through peer and teacher feedback. In terms of developing telephoning skills, the most successful frameworks were those used to address the problem of telephone phobia, which affected the participants in a variety of ways: some participants used e-mail to avoid making telephone calls and others lacked appropriate telephone/video conference strategies. Three frameworks used in EOP IMPACT to work on this problem are shown and explained below.

The framework in Figure 3 was created to analyze authentic telephone calls, recorded by some participants for EOP IMPACT, who brought in their on-the job

recordings, and the group listened to analyze the calls. As a first step in the framework, the participants concentrated on the telephone language used by both parties. This analysis in addition to being excellent listening practice helped identify the need to teach formulas and fixed language expressions, such as:

• I will get back to you as soon as I have the information

• I'm afraid I don't have this information with me now, but I will email it to you today

During a second listening, they listed the communication strategies that were used and the ones that should have been used. The strategy most often missing was
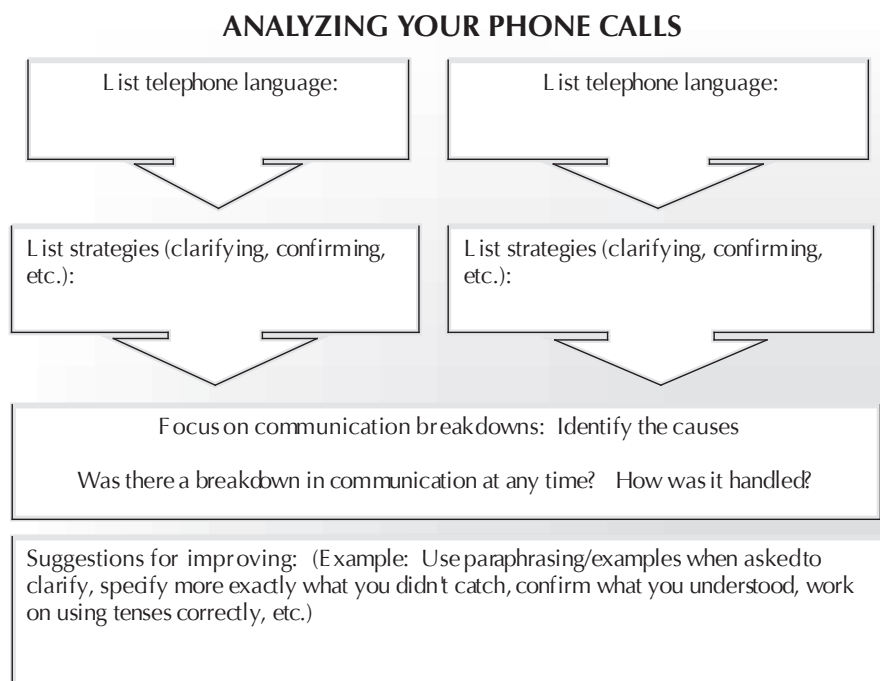
ANALYZING YOUR PHONE CALLS

Figure 3. Framework for analyzing telephone calls. Created by the EOP IMPACT team, 2003

confirmation. In fact, the participants did not confirm agreements reached or instructions received and, as a result, they often missed or misunderstood key information. The consequence of this lack of application of strategies was the wasting of valuable time and later having to make up for this.

The third stage in the framework was to analyze communication breakdowns and their causes. Typical breakdowns were caused by a lack of key vocabulary for the task, pronunciation problems, and incorrect use of verb tenses, as reported by trainers during the meetings.

The last stage was for peer feedback and suggestions for improvement. The provision of constructive feedback to peers was extremely successful for the participants to become autonomous learners (Nunan, 1989; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In sum, the most important result of the framework for analyzing phone calls, as reported by the participants, was the opportunity to examine a real task that had direct application to their jobs.

The second example is a framework used to analyze e-mails that could be turned into telephone calls. The use of lengthy e-mails to avoid the telephone affected efficiency and implied further costs due to delays waiting for a reply. In many cases, these delays extended for days when an issue required several rounds of e-mails as reported by participants' bosses and supervisors who were aware of this tele-

phone phobia. To address the problem of telephone phobia, the trainers created a framework (see Figure 4) based on samples of authentic emails sent by the participants. The framework consisted of two preparation stages, a practice stage, and the simulation of the phone call. First, the participants had to analyze the purpose of the e-mail and work on specific telephone language and communication strategies to organize the information for a telephone call. Then, to practice the phone call and focus on listening skills, they sat back to back. For the simulation, two rooms with two speaker phones were used and the participants took turns practicing and recording the phone calls.

Someone was in charge of timing the call to determine if the information was conveyed clearly and efficiently. The next step was to listen to the recording to provide constructive feedback. Finally, the simulation stage was repeated to concentrate on improvements in efficiency and language clarity. During this stage, the participants focused on self-monitoring and self-evaluation — learning-to-learn skills —which are essential components of a task (Nunan, 1989).

Working with this framework, the participants improved in the following areas:

• Affective filter: lower anxiety when using the telephone

• Communication strategies: use of strategies for confirmation and clarification

• Language: for opening, closing and stating purpose; concise, clear message.

The last example is a framework developed to analyze videoconferences (see Figure 5). It was created after a diagnostic videoconference in which one of the trainers discovered that the participants needed better preparation before this type of activity. The form has 3 stages: pre-conference, during the conference, and post-conference. During the preparation stage, the participants filled in the purpose, time limits, primary participants, language/strat-

Help me turn this e-mail into a phone call, please!

1. In pairs, analyze your email: Purpose, content, and expected response

2. Organize your information for the phone call: Prioritize information; select effective telephone language and communication strategies you may need

3. Practice: Phone your partner (work back-to-back for best results):
   Focus on effective strategies for opening, explaining the purpose, and closing

MAKE THE CALL!

1. Call your partner and time the call!
2. Analyze your phone call: Provide constructive feedback.
3. Call your partner again: Focus on achieving even better results this time.
4. Listen for improvements: Did you save time? Was the language clearer? Were you more effective? What still needs work?
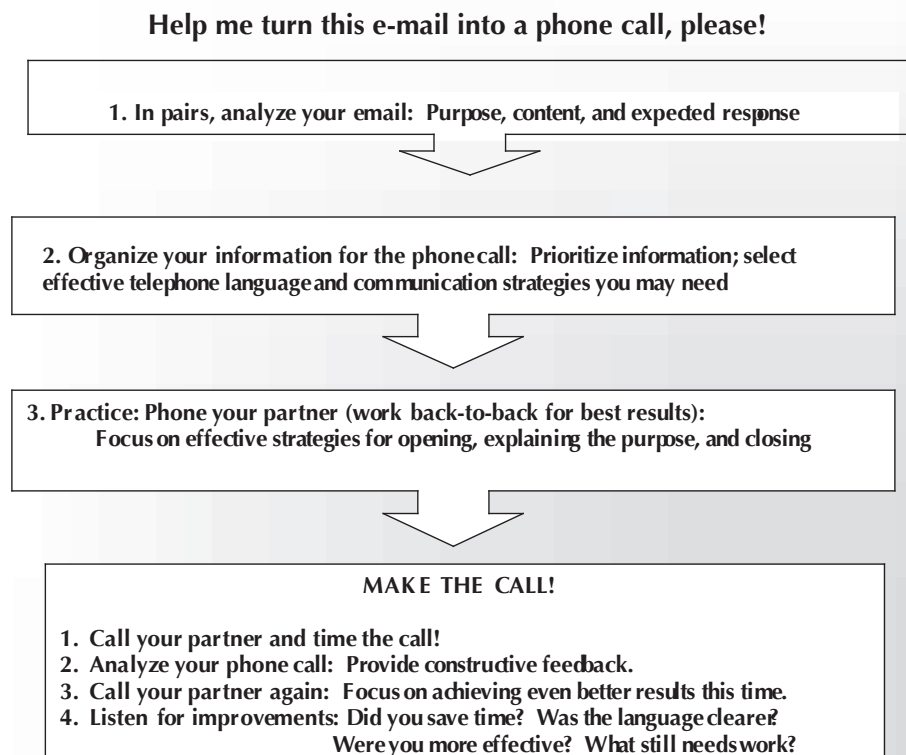
Figure 4. Framework for turning an e-mail into a phone call. Created by the EOP IMPACT team, 2003

egy monitors, communication strategies, ground rules to follow, body language to watch for, and key words and structures to focus on. The participants used this framework for several videoconference tasks, including a real videoconference by service and technology participants who needed to convince headquarters of a business opportunity with the Costa Rican government. In all cases, the participants received peer and trainer feedback.

As a rule, the participants in charge of monitoring language and strategies showed an improved ability to provide constructive feedback. Participant comments, regarding language/strategy use, matched those of the trainers in the majority of the cases, showing participants had developed the ability to evaluate their performance. In general, the team agreed there was an improved participant performance, especially in showing assertiveness, both verbally and non-verbally, effective language use through concise key vocabulary, organized turn-taking, clear explanation of the purpose of the conference, and effective use of other communication strategies. The most serious weaknesses observed were in grammar (i.e. wrong preposition, wrong use of complex verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and wrong verb forms). Pronunciation (e.g. omission of final consonant clusters) and vocabulary issues (word choice)_did not affect the quality of the message significantly. Because of the effective application

VIDEOCONFERENCE GUIDE

PRE -CONFERENCE

Date: Time Limits:

Topic/Purpose:

Sites Involved:
Initiating Site:

Moderators:

Primary Participants:

Monitors:

Target strategies:

Target language:

DURING THE CONFERENCE

Ground Rules:

POST-CONFERENCE DEBRIEFING

Strategies Observed :

Organization and Clarity Issues :

Pronunciation Issues :

Grammar Issues :

Vocabulary Usage Issues :

Body Language an d Voice Issues :

Overall Impressions / Recommendations:

Figure 5. Framework for analyzing videoconferences. Created by the EOP IMPACT team, 2003

of strategies, accuracy became part, but not the only requirement for a successful performance (Boyd, 2002). Through the framework, the participants were able to organize information, language, and turn-taking to adequately convey the purpose of the teleconference. Besides, they were able to

identify communication strategies they might need and the specific expressions needed to apply them.

To conclude, frameworks, as used in this project, fulfill the purposes of ESP materials recommended by several authors, namely:

1. Frameworks allow learners to use real tasks, regardless of variations in language proficiency. A framework can be used successfully by learners with different proficiency levels and even different professional backgrounds. Frameworks are a tool that fits in well within a learner-centered

approach (Dudley-Evans & St. John's, 1998).

2. Real materials engage and motivate learners. Authenticity helps to increase motivation and involvement because the students can recognize the direct application of tasks to their jobs (Friedenberg et al., 2003).

3. *"Materials help organize the teaching-learning process"* (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 107). Materials for an ESP course should help teachers make sense of the content, given the potential complexity of the students' job tasks.

4. ESP materials stimulate learning through interesting activities that rely on the learners' background knowledge (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Conclusions

The EOP IMPACT pilot proved to be a successful model for English language training. Both the workplace training and the teacher development projects produced very positive results as revealed by the participants' improved performance, and the teaching staff's ability to meet the demands of a complex on-going needs analysis and course design and an intensive teaching situation. The components which account for the success of the model can be summarized as follows:

(a)   A comprehensive needs analysis involving as many stakeholders as possible, among learners, supervisors, general managers, and US counterparts;

(b)   The breaking of paradigms in terms of traditional instructor and learner roles, with an increased accountability and a high level of involvement of everyone, participants and trainers, in goal-setting and course/task design;

(c)   A return-on-investment (ROI) study that kept everyone focused on the goals to be achieved;

(d)   Continuous feedback and evaluation to refocus course design as needed to meet the language training goals;

(e)   The use of critical job performance tasks as the basis for thematic units and job-based classroom tasks, which kept the participants highly involved, motivated, and focused on improving their performance; and

(f) The team-building spirit that was encouraged throughout the project and allowed for the development of considerable peer-correction skills in an encouraging classroom atmosphere.

The challenge now resides in the sustainability of the efforts through the replication of this project, on a smaller scale, and with the companies' own funding. However, for EOP IMPACT to continue a bigger challenge arises: the need to establish a certification program to prepare qualified teachers for workplace English language training in Costa Rica. At the moment of the current study, Costa Rica lacks an ESP certification program. We have a successful model and a growing demand for English language teaching. Forecasts for the immediate future, as revealed during the First English Language National Forum (Comisión de Recursos Humanos, 2005) confirm the importance of a bilingual work force for Costa Rica's economic development and global competitiveness. To increase its competitiveness, Costa Rica has to continue to work on the strengthening of its public bilingual education and on the preparation of a large number of ESP professionals.

Citation

The EOP IMPACT project had a return on investment (ROI) component that required "an analysis of the direct and indirect financial gains resulting from workplace language training, taking into consideration the costs for the training" (Friedenberg et al., 2003, p. 105).

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