

## Current Trends in ESP Teaching in Russia (a View from Tomsk Polytechnic University)

*Inna Cheremissina, Tamara Petrashova*

*Tomsk Polytechnic University*

In August 2002 Tomsk hosted an ESP teacher-training workshop for university teachers of English from the Siberian region; the geography of the institutions whose representatives participated in it, speaks for itself –Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Omsk and Perm. The workshop has been part of the project ‘English for Professional Communication’ which was launched in December 2000, and it was jointly run by the British Council, Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Russian Federation. The project was given the name RESPONSE from the Russian Education Support Project on Specialist English. It is aimed at raising the awareness of teaching and learning problems in the ESP area at tertiary level in order to change and improve the existing situation creating opportunities for university graduates to continue to develop personally and professionally through English as a medium of communication.

The programme of the ESP seminar in Tomsk was very intensive and rich in different tasks and activities. To be enrolled in the team of the workshop participants, the candidates were to pass through a competition. In terms of professional interest and development, the workshop proved to be a real exchange of teachers’ views, opinions and ideas as well as it gave an opportunity to share experience and expertise, which will be definitely implemented by the participants in the process of teaching ESP. The team of enthusiastic members from a large community comprising ESP teachers of Siberia were led by the team of trainers and guided by experts Mike Scholey, an ESP specialist from The College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth, England and Ludmila Kuznetsova, the coordinator of the project from St Petersburg State University.

The participants were informed about the RESPONSE project management issues and concerns. One of the important items relevant to the project were the results of the Needs Analysis and the initial findings of the Baseline Study carried out by a team of ten people with Terry Bray from Lancaster University acting as the project consultant and Simon Winetroube as its manager. The participants were introduced to the Baseline Study Report “Specialist English Teaching and Learning- the State of the Art in Russia”, a book published by the British Council. The book contains the interpretation of data from several questionnaires developed by the Baseline team, namely: “Institutional Profile”, “ Employer Questionnaire”, “ Teacher Questionnaire”, “ Alumni Questionnaire”, and “Classroom Observation”. The Baseline Study involved nine regions of Russia and aimed to survey and highlight the problem areas in ESP teaching and learning. The initial analysis carried out by the team gave a lot of food for thought and helped to form the basis

for prospective research and improvement programmes that can be launched and run at a particular university. In terms of the project needs, the Baseline Study was intended to determine its goal and objectives, its activities and outputs.

The “ESP Burning Issues” was one of the sessions directly linked with areas for improvement in the world of ESP teaching and learning. In the discussion the trainees brought up issues related to everyday situation, which included lack of up-to-date teaching materials that would reflect the language level and personal interests of learners, insufficient learner motivation, lack of practice in developing language skills but with a focus on ESP, namely speaking, writing and presentation skills in typical job-related situations as well as evaluation and assessment procedure. The trainees were expected to anticipate how these problematic areas could be eased or resolved, specifying the necessary steps and activities to be considered. The presenting stage of the session was followed by a constructive feedback from M. Scholey that inspired further discussions of these issues in the course of the workshop.

One of the days was entirely devoted to practice in Materials Development, since Materials Development is commonly known to be a part of the professional life of many ESP teachers responding to the wants and lacks surrounding them. The areas that were covered included general principles of developing teaching materials, their content and structure, and challenges and issues of teamwork. The participants became involved in designing tasks and activities for their classes, which creative work was then followed by poster presentations and discussions.

The next important focus of the Tomsk workshop was Teacher Training practical sessions that were thoughtfully guided and observed by Mike Scholey, Ludmila Kuznetsova and the support team from Omsk and Perm. The Workshop participants were asked to pilot a set of training materials in teams and conduct training micro- sessions followed by a plenary discussion of the objectives achieved. Each session was supported by constructive feedback from the authors of the materials and encouraging warm response from the trainees. Lots of interesting ideas and their implementation generated new ideas, activities, and techniques to consider when planning and managing ESP classes. The participants themselves could evaluate and be evaluated, and at the same time share and, confirm or revise their beliefs with regard to the ESP teaching process.

The programme of the workshop was elaborated on the basis of learner-centred, reflective practice approach to meet the needs of the trainees, the institutions they came from and the learners whose achievements would be a sound proof of the beneficial effect of all the improvement efforts made by ESP professionals. The workshop trainers tried not only to deliver up-to-date theoretical basics of the most important aspects of teaching, but also involve the participants in the process by encouraging them to reflect on how they could practically employ the received knowledge. Eventually, the trainees were presented a well-balanced mix of the theoretical and practical, individual and group modes of teaching and learning. The authors of the article are ESP teachers of Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU), the institution that is presently involved in a unique experiment. It deals with implementing a new language policy in all its faculties.

TPU is one of the oldest technical universities with established traditions and scientific schools, updated technologies, and methods of teaching and research that are open to innovation. According to the authorized rating of the Russian Ministry of Education, TPU ranks third among 48 polytechnic institutions after Moscow State Bauman University of Technology and St. Petersburg State University of Technology.

In 1998 Tomsk Polytechnic University developed and started implementing an **Innovative Multi-level Program of Foreign Languages Training** based on learner-centred and differentiated approaches with respect to learners’ needs, aims, requirements and job-related specialization. The program embraces undergraduates, graduates, and academics with different levels of English language proficiency. The goal is to help learners to improve their communicative

and cross-cultural awareness through specific social, academic and profession-related matters and establish cooperation with culturally diverse partners.

Globalization in engineering education and research is a reality nowadays; so the future engineers and university academics should be able to effectively communicate in a non-native speaking medium with an aim to further innovative technologies and international engineering interaction by means of English, in particular.

The launch of the Innovative Multi-Level Program of Foreign Languages Training is one of the strategies worked out by the university to integrate into the global educational community and provide the opportunity to share the expertise and establish communication networks with engineering institutions worldwide. This will eventually lead to academic mobility of the technical university staff and future engineers, which plays a crucial role in their career promotion, upgrading teaching qualification, increasing amount and efficiency of academic and research work, expanding personal and field-related links.

A new foreign language policy entails revision, changing and updating of goals, context, structure, technologies, equipment and materials to match the worldwide-recognized international standards in English as a Second Language (ESL). The goals set by the university have logically led to the necessity of establishing a Department of Languages and Communication in 1997, which in 2000 upgraded its status and became the Institute of Languages and Communication.

The Innovative Multi-level Program of Foreign Languages Training includes courses in General English, English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which in this case is called *English for Engineering*, intended for undergraduates and graduates, a refresher course in English designed for the university academics which embraces courses in General English, English for Academic Purposes, English for Engineering and a Presentation Skills Course.

The courses developed are interconnected and adjusted to cover a wide range of settings and train learners to be able to handle communicative strategies in a non-native language medium. On the one hand, they may be regarded as in-house tailor-made pilot courses designed to meet specific purposes of the university education policy. And on the other hand, the syllabi developed may be transferred and piloted in network universities in a medium with English as a second/foreign language.

The structure and content of General English are adjusted to the standards established by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). Thus, the English language skills will meet the requirements of the standards in second language acquisition and learners will be prepared to pass worldwide-recognized international certificate examinations organized by UCLES.

As to English for Engineering, there exists an obvious gap on the international educational market that needs bridging. The structure and content of the new curricula and course syllabi must anticipate and meet the requirements of the on-going changes in modern-day life, on the one hand, and prove being reliable and valid, on the other. The research done within the program of Foreign Language Training is of inter-disciplinary nature that involves linguists and specialists in engineering fields, and in so doing will directly lead to cooperative team-teaching of English and professional communicative skills relevant for engineers in their future career.

Today, Tomsk Polytechnic University offers a unique Foreign Language Training programme with increased number of contact hours for undergraduates and graduates, and for TPU academics with different levels of English language proficiency. To mould a concept for life long learning applied to languages answers immediate tasks facing the university. These embrace developing complete sets of curricula and syllabi for TPU majoring degree programmes in English, packs of teaching and learning materials, methods and technologies to organize courses of study for

international students in TPU and its branches abroad.

Thus, one of the Innovative Multi-level Foreign Languages Training Program modules is a refresher course in English intended for TPU academics participating in organization and management of international educational programs in engineering. These include Bachelor's and Master's programmes in Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Computer Science, Chemistry & Chemical Engineering, Environmental Protection, Physics, Thermal Engineering, and Applied Geology. Global Alliance for Transnational Education (USA) awarded certification to 5 transnational educational programs provided by the university for 2000-2005. To cope with challenges, TPU academics involved in the programs are improving their teaching and English language skills.

A lot has been achieved since 1998 when the programme was first introduced. The facilities at the disposal of English teachers and learners include nine language-learning centers equipped with up-to-date audio-, video- and multi-media materials, authentic alongside in-house developed ones which are intended to meet the demands for quality standards in teaching modern languages. And there still exists a lot of room for improvement, the area of great concern being ESP teaching. This is the reason why an opportunity to be involved with the ESP project was not only important for TPU but also vital.

The issues of testing and assessment are given plenty of time and consideration within the framework of Innovative Multi-level Foreign Languages Training Program activities. A five – level system of international Cambridge examinations has been taken as a testing standard at TPU. The Cambridge examinations have been the subject of much study and have been found to reflect current approaches to testing. There are some features of this examination that are relevant for in-house test development. General English skills are now to be tested according to the new examination formats PET (Preliminarily English Test) and FCE (First Certificate in English).

As a result of TPU cooperation with the British Council, which is an authorized representative of the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate, the engineering students are now given an opportunity to take international examinations and get world-wide recognized certificates in Tomsk. The British Council has held three examination sessions as yet. In 2000 TPU started organizing examination sessions in English for the university academics involved in international educational programmes. The format of these examinations is adjusted according to the standards of ALTE and UCLES. The in-house developed multi-level system aims to assess the English language proficiency of the university academics with respect to their capability to organize and conduct academic and research activities in the international educational community.

Nowadays, the ESP area proves to be in great demand for a global community of people speaking different languages, where efficient command of English can help to contribute to professional as well as personal development of each individual learner. Thus, the launch of the ESP project jointly run by the British Council, Open Society Institute and Russian Ministry of Education will meet urgent needs of undergraduates, graduates, university staff, educators and employers and as such, hopefully, bring beneficial and long-awaited outcomes.

#### *References:*

1. Specialist English Teaching and Learning – The State of the Art in Russia (Baseline Study Report) The British Council – Publishing House “Petropolis”, 2002.–184 P.
2. The Development Programme on the Improving Language Training at the Tomsk Polytechnic University for the period of 1998-2005 (in Russian). Tomsk, Russia, 1998. 39 P.

Google™

jñ Web jñ esp-world.info