2026 *Journal of Social Science Humanities and Literature, Vol. 9, Issue 10, (Oct)*
ISSN 2277-842X
DOI: 10.66069/ojspub.22771002

Designing ESP Materials for Clothing Retail Salespersons: An Occupational Purposes Approach

Ling Xu

Huainan Normal University, Huainan 232038, Anhui, China

Abstract: ***English for Specific Purposes (ESP) constitutes a distinct domain of English as a foreign or second language, aiming to equip university students or employed learners with the vocabulary and communicative skills required in target situations (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Carter (1983) distinguishes three ESP course types: English as a Restricted Language, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes, and English with Specific Topics. The materials designed for clothing-store salespersons in this study fall within English for Occupational Purposes, as they focus on the specific communication skills required in the workplace. The assumed learners are salespersons at a fashion store in Wanda, a prominent shopping mall in China. They have a high-school education and retain only limited basic English, such as greetings and expressions of thanks. The syllabus comprises eight sections: welcoming customers politely; identifying customer preferences; describing and introducing clothing; offering sizes and options; making style and appearance suggestions; explaining prices and discounts and processing payment; explaining refund policies and seeing customers off; and course testing and feedback. The course may function as pre-service or in-service training, lasting one month, with two two-hour classes per week. The designed material corresponds to the sixth syllabus section, which teaches learners to respond to price and discount inquiries and to explain clothing materials, particularly when customers hesitate because of high prices. The study illustrates how ESP materials can be contextualized to meet occupation-specific communicative needs.***

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, English for Occupational Purposes, Materials design, Retail communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

English for specific purpose (ESP) refers to a specific discipline of English as a foreign or second language and it aims to teach university students or learners who are already employed the particular English vocabulary and skills that are needed in the target situation (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998). According to Cater (1983), ESP course is divided into three types, English as a Restricted Language, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes and English with specific topics. In my opinion, the materials I designed for salesmen in a clothing shop belongs to the area of English for occupation purposes because it focus on teaching specific communication skills which are required in their work.

The learners I assumed in my course are salesmen who are working at a fashion store, located in a famous shopping mall called Wanda in China. Their education background is high school and they only remembered some Basic English words, such as good morning, thank you. There are 8 small sections of my syllabus, including being polite and welcoming customers, discovering customers preferences, describing and introducing clothes, offering sizes and different options, making suggestions for style and look, explaining the prices or discounts and taking payment, explaining the refund policies and seeing off the customer, testing and feedback of the course. This course could be a pre-training or during-training course and lasted for one month, 2 hours for each class and twice a week. The material is related to the sixth part of my teaching contents that is to teach learners to answer the question about the price or discount, and to explain the materials of clothes especially when the customer is hesitant because of the high price.

2. NEEDS AND WANTS OF LEARNERS

It is acknowledged that needs analysis in ESP is considered as the foundation of designing a curriculum or syllabus (Belcher, 2006) and analysis of students' needs before making teaching plans is also a key feature of ESP course

(Basturkman, 2006). Thus, all teaching contents and the material were also created based on the analysis of the needs of cloth salesmen in China. From my perspective, their reasons for learning sales English are from the pressure in works and their ambitions in their future job. Broadly speaking, English is the most widely used language in the continents across the world and the most essential communication tool in the international trade. So in recent years, an increasing number of people are required to master a specific English knowledge that are related to their working areas and it will even exert an impact on their job hunting.

On the one hand, the training course for shop assistants to sell cloth is becoming more popular and necessary under the pressure of job competition. The unemployment rate of China, nowadays, is gradually increasing because of its large population, which affects workers from all walks of life. In order to acquire a job offer to support themselves, the salesmen have to make much more effort compared with shop assistants whose education background are better than them, so learning selling English tends to be a wonderful choice for them. What's more, the salesmen are working at a fashion store in a large shopping mall, which also exists many other international cloth shops. And it is absolutely normal to encounter some non-Chinese customers during their working time. Therefore, the shop manager pushes those shop assistants to learn English for sales, asks them to communicate with non-Chinese customers and sell clothes to them so that the shopkeeper can acquire more personal income. To sum up, under the pressure from job competition and the requirement of their superior, the only thing shop assistants are suggested to do is to learn how to sell cloth in English, otherwise, they might be eliminated from society or can only work in some remote regions where there are no non-Chinese customers.

Except the reasons I mentioned in previous paragraph, another reason why they want to learn English for sales is their ambitions for future career. To be more specific, they want to have a better sales performance and to gain a higher salary as well, so they decide to improve themselves constantly. The improvement is not only an improvement in their work capacity, but also includes the discovering of new customers, like foreign customers. However, the basis of achieving this is to understand what customers are talking about and to communicate with them during cloth selling. Besides, no one is willing to be a salesman in their whole life, learning English, especially the English for selling cloth could provide more opportunities for them to get a work promotion or they can even be their own boss in the future.

After analyzing why they learn English for sales and what their exact needs are, I divided my teaching contents into eight parts, each of part is closely linked together and mainly focus on spoken English, salesmen can learn a complete course and get most of what they want or need in their target work. To take the sixth part as an example, the situation I set is at the last part of shopping and the aim is to teach salesmen how to say prices and explain the discount and materials of the cloth when they are encountering a potential problem (bargaining) in the process of payment.

3. LANGUAGE CHOICE

When it comes to the language features and skills in English for selling cloth or some other relevant sales industries, a great number of details need to be noted by salesmen because having a good speaking skill enhances them to communicate efficiently with customers and discover their preferences quickly so as to satisfy the needs of customers and achieve a win-win result. Thus, learning and accumulating English language skills of clothing sales is a daily work of every salesman. Each of my teaching section will analyze features of sales English and teach them specific language skills as well. Specifically, the first lesson is to be polite and welcome customers, the language features might be greet in a completely gentle and enthusiastic way with a pleasant smile, such as "welcome to the store, can I help you?" to make customers will feel pleased. It can also give them a good impression on the fashion store and the salesman, they might have willingness to provide more chances for the shop assistant to introduce clothes to them. The second lesson refers to discover customer preferences, which is how to ask them what they want or look for politely and naturally. The language skills required are to enable customers communicate with the salesmen and treat them as a friend. The examples could be "Hi, dear, what are you looking for? Do you need my help? I can do anything for you."

The third lesson shows how to describe and introduce clothes, more descriptive and accurate language should be presented in this section because salesmen need to explain styles, colors, or materials of clothes. When shop assistants are required to offer an appropriate size or some other choices for customers, there are a higher frequency use of "questions", like "Is the size/color/cloth OK for you？ would you like to try another one? "and they should be familiar with words like large, medium, small. In the section of making suggestions for the style and looks, the language features should be some positive and persuasive words, such as "the dress fits you very well, it belongs

to you, dear!" The last part is to teach how to explain the refund policies and seeing off customers, the language are very limited so they merely need to remember some rules.

The materials and activities are relevant to the section of telling prices and one way of explaining why the cloth is expensive. The basic language skills that salesmen should master is to practice numbers and say prices correctly and quickly when hearing such kind of questions. The answers are direct and short, such as "it is 100 yuan, I am sure you can afford it". For example, activity A is to review different types of clothes, to listen many short sentences and write down the prices, and then to know how much discount for each item. It aims to train learners' sensitive to numbers and learn to express the discount from the listen materials. Moreover, there might have a situation when customers know the prices and argue it is not worth to buy because of its high price. In this case, shop assistants could use more complimentary and interpretive words to persuade customers to buy them. In activity C, I designed some vocabulary related to the materials of clothes so as to explain what the cloth is made of when they are encountering the issue. Speaking of the grammar part, singulars and plurals will become the key points because some clothes like jeans, pants are plurals or customers may buy more than one cloth, so learners should know how to express correctly, examples can be seen in activity B.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIFIC SKILLS

More recent approaches demonstrated that "skills" are always applied into specific contexts and communities and form part of sets of social practices (Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S. 2014). Listening, speaking, reading and writing are considered as the four basic language skills no matter in English for academic purposes (EAP) or English for occupation purposes (EOP). Listening and reading belong to receptive language skills because the learners is in an input process, while speaking and writing are categorized into productive language skills since the students produce an output. The purpose of using needs assessment in an ESP course design is also to analyze what language skills do learners need. From my perspective, the needs of language skills vary from person to person, but in most service or sales industries, learners typically need ESP to understand what people are referring to and how to give responses and communicate with them, so learners are expected to developing the listening skills and speaking skills.

According to the background of the learners I selected and the purposes of my teaching contents, the language needs of the shop assistants in a cloth store, in fact, are almost bound up with the skills of listening and speaking, it is because that during their working situation, listening and understanding are the foundation and prerequisite for communication with foreign customers, while speaking is the most necessary and inevitable process for salesmen to express themselves and to sell clothes. So that is the reason why all my teaching contents and one of my detailed material focus mainly on cultivating speaking and listening skills. However, nobody is born with the abilities of listening and speaking, especially for those Chinese learners who are learning English as a second or foreign language, these skills should be learned and mastered after a training course. Even listening, a language skills seems to be inborn capability, still have to be learned. And one of the common and useful teaching method is task-based approach Harmer (2001).

Because of knowing this, I designed the activity A2, A3, B2, and D1 as a listening task for partly practicing their listening. For instance, the direct ways of practice listening are showed in the Activity A2 and A3 to require students to write prices of clothes and figure out how much discount of each item, based on the materials they listened. Actually, the original purposes of this activity are to train learners' sensitive to numbers and know how to explain the discount when faced with a bargain so that they can produce in a real context, but as for me, it is also an approach to help students to understand the information, a few sentences or the correct way of saying prices, which might be used in their future selling process. Nevertheless, it seems to be more difficult and more unachievable for learners to produce a sales English because speaking refers to the sound, pronunciation, vocabulary and some other aspects as well, so it means learners have to understand the messages that customers convey and then give them response immediately, which should be relevant to the questions. Based on Harmer (2001), the basic methodology of teaching speaking is to prepare and encourage them for speaking through introducing the topic of discussion rather than leave students and demotivate them. Therefore, I planed the activity B2, C2 and D1 that are attached a few examples for salesmen to practice speaking and the topics are very narrow and limited to their target areas. Meanwhile, there are some activities like B2 and D1 are interlinked in both listening and speaking, these two activities aim to enable students to acquire input and produce output from the conversations and interactions (Nunan, 2001).

5. FEASIBILITY AND OPERATION IN TESP CONTEXT.

Evaluating materials is a crucial and vital skill for ESP teachers, which is always ignored by them (Anthony 1997b). It is also the responsibility of ESP practitioners to evaluate whether ESP courses or materials are appropriate and suitable to participants who come from a different background context or discourse community (Dudley-Evans, T. and St John, M. 1998). The purposes of the assessment of materials are to check its usefulness or deficiencies and to evaluate whether learning has been maximized, such as how successful the materials are or which materials help students to achieve learning goals (Dudley-Evans, T. and St John, M. 1998). To sum up, evaluations help ESP practitioners gain more experience in ESP teaching or course design and make a more flexible and suitable materials in their following teaching. Now, I will analyze the feasibility and possible issues of the overall syllabus and a detailed material for one lesson respectively.

In terms of the teaching contents of this training course, the advantages and disadvantages of are as follows:

Initially, the purpose of this training course primarily focus on fostering the learners' speaking and listening in English for sales. In another words, it is to help salesmen acquire the specific English knowledge for selling cloth and to communicate with non-Chinese customers correctly in their workplace. From this aspect, my syllabus is partly successful because the eight sections are designed for achieving this teaching objective and each part is closely connected and organized, instead of separate sections so that teachers are easier to prepare and students can understand and master English as much as possible. Besides, the teaching contents are designed in a very detailed way, teaching English from the part of welcome to seeing off customers and even having the test to check what learners have learned, each lesson is mostly based on the analysis of learner's real needs and wants. But the disadvantages are that it is merely focus on speaking and listening skills, which are difficult to achieve in a one month lesson, but neglects the importance of the body language of salesmen. In fact, sometimes, the body language or some facial expressions are even more useful than speaking in the process of selling clothes, especially for the salesmen whose English are at the very basic level.

Speaking of the merits and demerits of the material for the sixth lesson, numerous aspects should be discussed. The material focus on explaining the information about prices, discount and materials of clothes. According to the knowledge I obtained from ESP module, the purposes of material are to set a source of language that provides and maximizes exposure to the target language, make learners to get involved in the lesson and use the language they acquired. So the activities attempt to enable participants to take part in and develop their communication skills. For instance, the language for asking prices and answering questions such as "How much is the T-shirt? It is 99 yuan." is demonstrated in the activities directly and learners just need to practice. Thus, it seems to be much easier for the salesmen with high school education background and to motivate them to keep learning. However, the drawbacks of the material are that firstly, the dialogues and sentences that are presented in the activities are the most common English, which can be also categorized into general English as well. Moreover, the activities only require learners to make conversations and dialogues by following the examples, it tends to be a mechanical and limited exercise, which lacks of creativity and flexibility. And the material is authentic and merely designed based on my shopping experiences, so it is subjective and not appropriate to use in real ESP course.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclusion, although materials design is considered as a highly sophisticated pedagogical reasoning skill (Harwood 2010), particularly in ESP course design because it is very restricted and narrow and is established in accordance to the needs and wants of individual learners. People still have many potential reasons and motivations to continually explore and create more valuable materials for later ESP teachers, which is really attractive and inspiring. After trying to design an authentic material for the salesmen, many deficiencies are found in my course, such as it is too subjective and is not designed based on a real analysis of those salesmen in a fashion store, or it is a more traditional and mechanical material without many creative activities inside, and may be not available to use in a realistic situation, but I think it is still a precious experience for any students who are going to be a general English teacher or ESP teacher in the future. In addition, in my opinion, because of the globalization of the economy, an increasing number of people are facing to cooperate with non-Chinese in their workplaces, so the demands of ESP course is definitely rising in the Chinese market, including the people who are doing a career related to sales. Thus, I should keep learning from other ESP practitioners and do more practices in order to take a bit advantages of others in the future job hunting.

REFERENCES

[1] Anthony, L. (1997b). ESP: What does it mean? Why is it different? On Cue. http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/abstracts/ESParticle.html
[2] Basturkman, H. (2010), Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
[3] Belcher, D., Johns A. and Paltridge, B. (2011) New Directions in English for Specific Purposes Research. USA: Michigan University Press.
[4] Carter, D. (1983), "Some Propositions about ESP", The ESP Journal, 2:131- 137.
[5] Dudley-Evans, T. and St John, M. (1998), Developments in English for Specific Purposes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[6] Harmer, J. (2001). The practice of English language teaching. London: Pearson Longman.
[7] Harwood, N. (2010), English Language Teaching Materials. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[8] Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S. (2014) The handbook of English for specific purposes. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons 1:31-113
[9] Nunan, D. (2001) Designing Class for the communication classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[10] https://www.myenglishteacher.eu/blog/shopping-vocabulary/

Teaching content:

English for Salesmen in a Chinese Fashion Store			
Week 1	**Week 2**	**Week 3**	**Week 4**
1. Being polite and welcoming customers	3. Describing and introducing clothes	5. Making suggestions for style and look,	7. Explaining the refund policies and seeing off the customer,
2. Discovering customers preferences	4. Offering sizes and different options	6. Explaining the prices and discount and taking payment	8. Testing and feedback of the course.

Unit 6 Explaining the Prices, Discount and Taking Payment

ACTIVITY A: Names & Numbers

A1: Look at the pictures and do you remember what are they?







_____ _____ _____






_____ _____ _____ _____






_____ _____ _____ _____

A2. Listen and write the prices under each picture.

A3. Listen again and write down the discount of the clothes.

ACTIVITY B: Grammar

B1. Please categorize the clothes in A1 into singular and plural.

singular:	E.g.: T-shirt
2. Plural:	E.g.: jeans

B2. Communicate with your partners by using the following sentences and be careful about the grammar.
For example:
-How much is the T-shirt? / How much does the T-shirt cost?
-The T-shirt is￥99 (ninety-nine yuan)./ it costs￥99 (ninety-nine yuan).

-How much are the jeans? / How much do the jeans cost?
-The jeans are ￥185 (one hundred and eighty-five yuan)./it cost ￥185 (one hundred and eighty-five yuan).

-Can you give me some discount? / Any discount?
-Yes, it is 10% off. / Sorry, there is no any discount today.

ACTIVITY C: New vocabulary

C1: When customers are hesitant to buy because of a high price, what should you do?

C2. Match the words in the box to the definitions below.

Linen	**cotton**	**leather**	**wool**
Nylon	**silk**	**polyester**	

An artificial substance used especially to make clothes, ropes, and brushes.
a delicate, soft type of cloth made from a thread produced by silkworms, or the thread itself.
Thread or cloth made from the fibers of the cotton plant.
Strong cloth made from the fibers of the flax plant.
Animal skin treated in order to preserve it and used to make shoes, bags, clothes, equipment, etc.
A cloth made from artificial substances.
The soft, thick hair that grows on the bodies of sheep and some other animals.

C2. Using the words in the C1 to explain the materials of the clothes in A1.
e.g.:
-What materials is the dress made of? / Why this dress is so expensive, any discount?
- It is made of 99% silk, so it is a bit expensive. / I am so sorry, we have no discount on this dress because it is made of silk and it has a high quality.

ACTIVITY D: Role play

D1. Design a role play with others based on the situation of a non-Chinese woman in your store and you are her shopping guide. (The conversation should be at least 5 minutes).





Some common words you can use:

How much	material	be made of	try on	fit	on sale
Discount	bargaining	changing room/fitting room			cash
Credit card	receipt	large size	medium	small	

Possible answer:
Adapted from: https://www.myenglishteacher.eu/blog/shopping-vocabulary/
A: Hi, can I help you with anything?
B: Yes please, I'm looking for a T-shirt and a dress.
A: What size are you?
B: I'm a medium.
A: What color would you like?
B: Maybe a blue or green one or whatever.

A: OK, wait me a minute, How about these?
B: Thank you. Can I try them on anywhere?
A: Certainly, the changing room is over there.
B: Thank you.
A: How do they fit?
B: They're both fantastic. I really like them.
A: I think the blue T-shirt and the white dress look nice on you, it really brings out your skin color.
B: Thank you. How much are they?
A: They are totally one thousand and seven hundred.
B: Oh, it is a bit expensive, what materials are they made of?
A: the T-shirt is 100% cotton and the dress is made of silk, so it is more expensive.
B: OK, do you have any discount if I buy these together?
A: If you really want them, maybe we can give you a membership discount.
B: OK, I'll take these two?
A: How would you like to pay?
B: Do you take credit cards?
A: Yes, we do.
B: Okay, here's my credit card.
A: Enter your pin number into the machine please.
B: Okay, done.
A: Thank you. Shall I put your receipt in the bag?
B: Yes please.
A: Here you go. Have a nice day!
B: Thank you, goodbye!