

PREFACE

Who is this book for and what are its cognitive and metacognitive goals?

The goal of this book is to provide tuition and guidance for professionals, professionals-to-be and other interested parties regarding the correct way to express themselves in English in the professional world. In order to make the most of it and do so in a comfortable way, the starting level of English knowledge should be at least B1 (intermediate).

These materials are intended, firstly, to support learning within and outside the classroom and, secondly, to enable the student to acquire his/her own the strategies and techniques necessary both to understand and produce a wide range of formal English texts and documents, and also interact in a number of communicative situations at work.

What is professional English? A bit of context...

The demand for English tuition is changing greatly. Firstly, the old clichés of trying to imitate the native English spoken in a certain influential or neighboring country (specifically, the sub-variant believed to be superior or most prestigious; e.g., UK's BBC English), are giving way to a more realistic and non-prescriptive view of the language, where the emphasis is placed on intelligibility and interaction with heterogeneous types of speakers (rather than on native-like accuracy). Furthermore, there is a growing cross-cultural awareness, i.e., sensitivity for the extralinguistic and intralinguistic peculiarities that intervene in the communication and the relationships between speakers of different communities. Examples of such features are religious taboos and the impact of a country's native language and other influential languages spoken in the region on non-native national variants of English.

Secondly, the demand for English tuition these days is not only for the language spoken in the street, but also for the language used in working environments. In the 1980s and 1990s, business English attracted a considerable part of the demand for specialized English. Some fifteen years ago in the UK alone, over a hundred language schools offered business English courses; there were more than 150 business English titles on UK publishers' lists; and the Business English Special Interest Group (SIG; it is part of the International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) had over 1500 members from all around the world. Today, apart from the highly specialized tailor-made courses (e.g., <http://www.englishmedialab.com/coursedesign.html>, <http://www.homeenglishcourses.com.ar/home.html>), often expensive and only apt for customer companies, courses are often required that teach general or social English, and there is also a strong demand for specialized English for professional or occupational purposes (banking, computing, contract law, report writing, etc.). Such specialized knowledge can hardly be acquired on general English courses, and divergences from general English can be so great that there are specialized courses offered both to natives and non-natives alike (e.g., <http://www.odlqc.org.uk/cw-77.htm>).

The increasing demand for tuition of general or social English, and specialized English for common occupational purposes (banking, computing, contract law, report writing, etc.) has just been mentioned. This hybrid field is referred to here as *professional English*, and it is argued that the offer of courses that comprise both variants is currently very limited. The domain of professional English can be defined as the (international) variant of the English language covering the most common communicative situations and text/discourse types in modern working, social, and personal environments.

In the field of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), professional English (also referred to in the literature as English for Occupational Purposes or English for Work) is traditionally seen as the counterpart of English for Academic Purposes (henceforth, EAP). Both professional English and EAP have their origin in the three major ESP areas, namely: English for Science and Technology, English for Business, and English for Social Sciences. Conventional EAP covers the areas of Science and Technology, Law and Administration, Medicine and Health Sciences and Business and Economics. Professional English and EAP are sometimes listed as “two separate types of curricula”, one aimed at professional fields of study and the other at (pre-)academic programs.

Professional English is usually presented in a very fragmented way, and usually based on the written forms of language: formal correspondence, CV, business reports, journal articles, graphics, etc., although there have also been analyses on the language of presentations, meetings and phone calls (e.g., <http://www.waylink.co.uk/direct/occupational-english.asp> and <http://www.businessenglishuk.org.uk>). The authors of this book consider, however, that there is a continuum of EFL teaching that goes from general to (highly) specific courses, and professional English lies between both extremes. In any case, since professionals are also social beings, it is better to adopt a versatile perspective (after all, an accountant may also need to ask for a coffee at some point!).

As for the contents of a professional English course like this one, it would be necessary to establish three characteristics that all such courses (particularly those to be undertaken in a distance learning context) must consider. Firstly, a professional English course must necessarily cover several subdomains (in this order):

- An occupational sub-domain, which deals with communicative situations in specialized working environments, including the basics of accounting, banking and finances, administration and contract law, computer science and Internet, and business management.
- A public sub-domain, which deals with general social interactions.
- A personal/private sub-domain, which deals with informal communication.

Secondly, the language of each sub-domain shows clear lexical and syntactic differences with respect to the others. The more specialized the communicative context, the more accurate the way in which lexical (and terminological) items and structures are used. In such contexts, expressive richness or variety is not a common style feature. There is a few-to-one/one-to-one relationship between words and concepts (cf. the words that refer to the concepts of *joy* and *bank cheque*). Accordingly, lexical ambiguity is considerably reduced in comparison to standard language, there are regular word co-occurrence patterns, and lexical relations (e.g., hyponymy, hyperonymy) and paraphrases tend to be avoided (e.g., *All rights reserved*). As for syntax, it could be said in general terms that it is simpler in specialized communicative formal contexts in comparison to, for example, creative and popular writing, partly to prevent it from interfering with the (usually complex) content of the text/discourse and the speaker’s communicative intent or purpose. Furthermore, there is a tendency to use overt syntactic markers to avoid ambiguous interpretations and certain structures over others, depending on the type of utterance.

Thirdly and finally, another feature of fields like professional English is the existence of deviations from standard language. For example, *overhead* is an adverb in standard English and a preposition in the professional jargon of airline pilots, as in *Our route tonight takes us overhead Paris*; and in medical diagnoses, an additional transitivity pattern is present for the verb *to present* as in *The patient presented with the following symptoms*. Within jargons and sublanguages, specialized text-types (commercial correspondence, presentations, reports, informal e-mail, general speeches, etc.) make very distinct uses of language forms and structures. Some of the linguistic norms and habits in a given text-type will not apply in others, resulting in stylistically inferior (e.g., writing small numbers in digits) or unacceptable language (e.g., article omission). The application of a standard grammar convention to a particular text-type can result in an inappropriate sentence for that text-type and vice versa (e.g., direct object omission in transitive verbs is not possible in standard French but common in French cooking recipes; in Spanish job adverts any word can be capitalized in order to stand out visually). In professional English, the occupational sub-domain covers short notes taken in telegraphic style, whose sentential units are sometimes shortened to such an extent that they would not form acceptable utterances in, for example, legal contracts (due to multiple determiner, auxiliary and main verbal ellipses).

Macrostructure and microstructure of this book and how to use it

This book is divided into six units, covering the following fields:

- Different jobs, different destinations (on the professional environment).
- From the factory to the client (on the whole manufacturing process).
- Worldwide relations (on travelling and international communication).
- Stay and eat (on accommodation and catering).
- Green business (on economic and environmental sustainability).
- Free time (on privacy and leisure).

After this preface and the table of contents, the student will find a chart with the following information about each unit: the main topics it covers, the topic of the project proposed, and its specific topics in relation to the development of the following competences, skills, etc. in relation to the English language:

- Oral interaction and mediation.
- Listening comprehension.
- Oral production, prosody and pronunciation.
- Communicative functions.
- Vocabulary.
- Grammar.
- Reading comprehension.
- Writing.
- Culture.

Each unit consists of some thirty activities and audio tracks (so the student can train his ear to different accents and variants). Some of the activities are receptive (and, therefore, consist of reading and studying) and others are also productive (and the student is required to do some work: answer questions, research on a particular topic, etc.). The process of reading the texts and dialogues should be active, that is to say, notes must be taken and all unfamiliar content must be identified (by highlighting or underlining them) for subsequent study. Personalized study is an essential part of any language course. Productive activities may be completely open, in which case no keys are provided. However, most of them are only partially open (i.e., the range of possible answers is considerably reduced). The student must be able to discern real errors from acceptable divergences little by little in content and style, due to the flexibility which characterizes all human languages. The semi-open nature of these activities is explicitly indicated so that the student realizes that the answer provided is to be taken as a valid sample, but not the only alternative. Closed activities only allow one possible answer.

After each unit, there is an extra activity focused on the development of a single competence (as per the Council of Europe's 2001 *Common European Framework of Reference of Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*). Then, there is a cumulative multiple choice test about what has been previously studied. This allows the student to test his own progress and keep control of his learning process. Extra activities and review tests have their respective keys included at the end of the book. If the student really wants to learn this subject he should obviously not peep at the answers until the test is finished!

Given the great importance of document writing, their degree of expressive inflexibility and the existence of cross-linguistic divergences, there are two major writing activities: one in the middle of the text and one at the end. They focus on what are considered to be the two major types of text in the professional scenario: CVs and reports.

The book closes with a blank atlas to help the student learn and practise his knowledge of geographical terms in English, a rather exhaustive list of irregular verbs and a glossary of professional terms that the student can look up at any time during his study.

The assessment of the open and semi-open activities should consider the following criteria:

- The linguistic register, the terminology and grammar used should follow the text type in question.
- The length of each text is also important. Things need to be said succinctly and accurately in all languages and domains, but most of all in professional English. While quality is not always indicated by quantity, texts of adequate length should be presented, neither too long nor too short. A text should be just long enough to carry the desired ideas in a clear and concise fashion, but no longer! This practice is essential in the real world as well. If a letter is being sent to a busy manager offering some kind of service, a text of four pages which says what could have been said on one page will probably find itself in the bin, unread!
- A correct use of punctuation is expected. It should be noted that one big difference between English and Spanish texts is the average length of the sentences. English is noted for being a succinct language. Long winding sentences which leave the reader confused are discouraged.
- Spelling mistakes cannot be allowed. An important point to note here is that, while both American and British spelling are acceptable, they should not be mixed in the same text.
- Texts should be completely coherent from a semantic perspective, that is to say, they must not be illogical or absurd.
- The letters will also be assessed in terms of their authenticity. If the text were *really* to be read by, for example, a bank manager, would he realize that it was only an exercise? Above all, texts should be relevant and reflect the real world situation. For example, a letter could be drafted to a bank manager requesting information about house loans. A reference made to the current economic situation and its possible effects on interest rates would demonstrate a good understanding of the problem in hand, and gain extra marks.

Each unit contains the following sections:

- A list of things the student will be able to do in English by the end of its study.
- Warm up.
- Table of contents.
- Dialogues for listening to, paying attention to both expression and interaction strategies.
- Oral comprehension.
- Practicing oral interaction, with special attention to intonation and pronunciation.
- Practicing oral mediation, paraphrasing what somebody else has said.
- Contrastive pronunciation of close pairs of phonemes.
- Intonation patterns and other prosodic features.
- Vocabulary: lexical fields, specialized terms, borrowings from other languages, etc.
- Communicative functions that are of particular relevance in professional environments.
- Expressing or talking about significant topics in the working world.
- Reading comprehension of authentic (not adapted) texts.
- A review of a selection of grammatical key points.
- Writing specialized text types.
- Culture about English speaking countries and their people.
- Metacognition: developing learning skills and linguistic awareness and building one's own personal portfolio.
- A practical project.

- Self-assessment about one's knowledge of English in general.
- Self-assessment about one's assimilation of the unit studied.
- Expanding one's knowledge on the web.

As you can see, it is a rather complete list, which describes the tasks that everybody carries out in order to progress in the main linguistic and communicative aspects in parallel for any given language.

Enjoy your study of professional English while you become a confident and proficient English speaking professional. I am sure you will succeed if you employ yourself to it.

If you want to share any comments on this book or would like information on UNED courses on professional English, please contact me at: mbarcena@flog.uned.es. I'll do my best to reply.

Elena Bárcena
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