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TEACHING ENGLISH FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY: VOCABULARY BUILDING STRATEGIES

Olha Krichker, candidate of historical sciences

Cherkasy Institute of Fire Safety named after Chornobyl Heroes of National University of Civil Defense of Ukraine

The development of science and technology worldwide has made it necessary to learn a language that can unite the scientific community and facilitate communication and idea-sharing among its multinational members. Therefore, knowledge of the English language is now an essential part of the soft skills required for specialists in occupational health and safety engineering, even though engineering is generally a technical, hands-on profession.

Nowadays English is considered the “lingua franca” of science and technology as far as all major scientific journals are published in English which is strong evidence of its position in the scientific world, the fact that in its turn manifests the need for teaching and learning English for specific uses.

The researchers T. Hutchinson, A. Waters, T. Dudley-Evans, and M. St. Jones contributed to the emergence of English for specific purposes (ESP) back in the 1960s. They mostly agreed on the idea that vocabulary plays a key role in a specialized discourse.

Sarre and Whyte defined ESP as “the branch of English language studies which concerns the language, discourse, and culture of English-language professional communities and specialized groups, as well as the learning and teaching of this object from a didactic perspective” [1, 150].

The list of characteristics of ESP by Strevens is considered the maximum. According to the researcher, the ESP courses should be:

- designed to meet the specific needs of the learner;
- related in content to particular disciplines or occupations;
- centered on language specific to those disciplines or occupations [2].

Thus, the ESP curriculum should be derived from a needs analysis of a target group (learners), be goal-oriented, and concentrate on employment-related needs.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) engineering has extensive and specific terminology. The goal of teaching English for OHS specialists is to provide them with professional communicative competence which means to help them acquire the level of knowledge to be able to communicate in English according to the situation, purpose, and specific roles of the interlocutors.

The duties of OHS specialists (engineers, representatives, etc.) vary from company to company, but the foundational ones include developing broad safety programs, studying the equipment, procedures, and records of accidents in the company, pointing out hazards and

finding security solutions, drawing up plans for the regular maintenance of machinery, teaching safety work habits to the management and the staff, i.e. developing educational, technical, and promotional materials and conducting risk management and safety training for employees; responding to employee concerns of health and safety issues. Thus, a good command of both General and Engineering English in a multinational company is a must for an occupational health and safety (OHS) specialist.

Students and postgraduates specializing in OHS engineering can start by getting acquainted with the available resources of professionally related word lists that will help them understand the scope of the vocabulary they need to improve their knowledge of the subject, i.e. they should be trained to comprehend basic vocabulary and terminology, most typical collocations and grammar constructions not to get lost amidst complicated professional documentation, laws and regulations on Health and safety.

The OHS specialists who work in international companies worldwide should work with specialized texts on technical topics in English. To fully understand the demands of his or her job, an OHS Engineer or specialist in an international environment needs to recognize and understand various language forms in the engineering discourse. OHS students focus on language forms of scientific texts - compound nouns, passives, conditionals, modal verbs, technical terms, and functional structures.

The knowledge of the following language forms and structures and abilities are needed to comprehend safety engineering discourse:

- ability to read and comprehend manuals, guides, and reports;
- language to describe warnings and health and safety requirements (e.g. modal verbs, imperative statements);
- verbs to explain safety engineers' actions (e.g. check, measure, monitor, assess, evaluate, etc.), operation, and work of machines and devices (e.g. break down, design, run, etc.);
- abbreviations and acronyms (e.g. EPA - Environmental Protection Agency, OSHA - Occupational Safety and Health Administration, ISO - International Standard Organization);
- giving presentations;
- words which have different general and technical meanings such as sub-technical vocabulary (e.g. run, power, work), etc. [3, 110].

The OHS specialist vocabulary is represented by three main layers:

- technical,
- sub-technical (semi-technical),
- general vocabulary.

Each layer contains terms needed to discuss matters related to OHS issues.

General English vocabulary is traditionally acquired at school and consists of the most frequent everyday English words, while semi-technical or sub-technical vocabulary should be acquired intently as far as it comprises the words with polysemic meaning, i.e. these words have their original and specific meaning.

ESP curriculum is aimed at learning technical words or technical vocabulary associated with a specific subject area of study. Sometimes it may pose a real problem because it is used only by the specialists in this field, i.e. it can't be acquired outside of the professional framework environment.

Technical vocabulary on health, environmental, and occupational safety engineering comprises specialized words related to environmental engineering, environmental controls and occupational health, safety management, insurance, new laws on HS, loss prevention, medicine, planning, equipment, etc. It's a good idea for a

lecturer in English for OHS students to get them acquainted with glossaries of terms on professional issues.

Moreover, OHS vocabulary is constantly developing due to the evolution of the legislation on health and safety at the national and European levels.

Understanding engineering language can empower learners to identify as engineers.

So, what can be done to help students acquire the needed level of knowledge? First and foremost, students can rapidly enhance their use of engineering vocabulary when presented with a challenge and provided with new words to contextualize the creation and dissemination of solutions, i.e. providing context is crucial. Practicing the use of engineering vocabulary, both in written and oral form, empowers learners to connect with the language of engineering.

Some tips for instructors in English for OHS can help teach students to easier learn the terminology:

- activities should be framed around a real-world problem to create context so that they can feel as if at the workplace;
- improve students' understanding of vocabulary by creating a visual glossary, e.g. following the pattern at <https://www.edrawsoft.com/vocabulary-study-graphic-organizer.html>;
- connect the new vocabulary to students' prior knowledge and real-world examples;
- help students remember new words by having them pair and share to discuss them;
- organize speaking activities so that they can create word clouds or brainstorm to generate more examples, e.g. for a topic Personal Protective Equipment+Body parts+Types of Injuries;
- teach them professional English phrases to enhance communication and help them sound more confident in a professional setting, e.g. *In light of the current situation, Please provide me with further details, I understand your concern and will consider it;*
- create situations to help students incorporate new words into conversation. By actively using these words, they reinforce their learning and improve fluency, e.g. practicing giving induction training to a new employee explaining cases when the employee is entitled to receiving damages/compensation, etc.).

One more idea is to offer students create their own OHS dictionaries containing the terms and collocations they have come across while learning ESP. It encourages students and gets them engaged and evolved into the learning process. They may add pictures to visualize the words in their dictionaries and present them in the lessons. They can be offered to have the vocabulary organized according to the topic, part of speech, or alphabetic order. These dictionaries can be later expanded with new words and used in different ways in the lessons.

As far as a good command of English is impossible without building listening comprehension skills, students can also be offered listening challenges, e.g. a task to watch a video and write out professionally-related words. For lower-level students, the speed of the video should be regulated and the script of the video should be prepared to allow them to scan through the text, understand general ideas, and identify unknown words that may hinder them from comprehending general context. For any level, the activity should result in compiling a topic-related vocabulary based on which students can generate the idea of the video, speak up, and discuss it in a group.

Unfortunately, choosing a video for OHS students is a challenge for English teachers as well because there isn't much video material on health and safety issues for low-level students (the average level of English of tech students is between A2 and B1). Thus, it is recommended to develop video lists to help students practice listening. To my mind, the following links can be used to help students enhance listening skills and enlarge their vocabulary:

1. <https://en.islcollective.com/english-esl-video-lessons/comprehension/deep-listening-focus-on-meaning/workplace-health-and-safety/503323>;
2. <https://en.islcollective.com/english-esl-video-lessons/listening-comprehension/deep-listening-focus-on-meaning/health-and-safety-at-work/237032>;
3. <https://www.listenaminute.com/s/safety.html>;
4. <https://breakingnewsenglish.com/2112/211213-workplace-accidents-l.html>;
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPxTs5YG_Ag.

Moreover, a teacher must train students how to self-study. Language learning is a continuous process, the more involved students are, the better the result will be, i.e. they should understand their responsibility for their level of knowledge. A teacher should show them the vocabulary learning strategies so that by following these steps, they can confidently enhance their vocabulary and, consequently, communication skills:

1. Reading
 - a) to make reading a daily habit, students should read a variety of materials such as books, newspapers, and online articles on professionally related subjects to expose themselves to new words and concepts;
 - b) they should be taught to look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary.
 - c) to improve vocabulary, they must understand the meaning, usage, and synonyms of words;
 - d) using vocabulary-building apps and websites with interactive exercises and quizzes will help them improve their vocabulary

2. Learning word-formation

Learning suffixes, prefixes, common root words, and their meanings can students decipher the meanings of unfamiliar words and expand their vocabulary.

3. Time equals result

Expanding vocabulary is an ongoing process, so teach students to dedicate 15-20 minutes at least twice a week to learning new words and revising learned ones.

English is used in the majority of international organizations and scientific publications in the engineering field. To pursue competitive careers, OHS students need to familiarize themselves with engineering content in English as well. Learning English for vocational and occupational purposes can be just one of the formal language acquisition techniques. To future safety experts, learning English vocabulary related to their profession is the first step in making their career in a multinational company, thus the curriculum should be designed and tailored according to the needs of the future specialists for them to excel in the chosen subject area.

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