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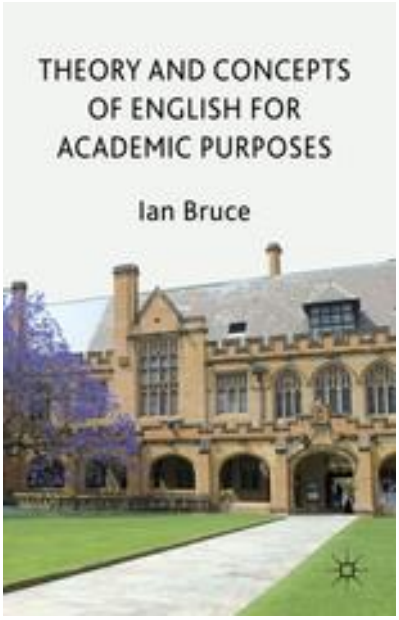
BOOK REVIEW



EAP IN A NUTSHELL

Ian Bruce. THEORY AND CONCEPTS OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (2015), Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. 227 pp., ISBN 978-1-137-50453-1(PB).

"During the last two decades, English for Academic Purposes (hereafter EAP) courses have grown exponentially around the world" (p. 3) is the introductory sentence of the book *Theory and Concepts of EAP* by Ian Bruce. Considering the rapid growth of this relatively new field of English language teaching, the book aims to provide the theoretical framework for EAP teaching and learning practices. In achieving this, the author relies on theories and concepts established in the field of applied linguistics and combines them with specificity of teaching and learning languages for academic purposes.

The book is divided into three parts and presents relevant topics and issues in a 'general to specific' pattern. Thus the introductory part titled *Theoretical Basis for English for Academic Purposes* starts with a chronological overview of the development of this branch of English teaching and offers definitions of EAP by some of the most prominent researchers in the field, such as Widdowson (1983), Jordan (1989) and Hyland (2002). As the process of designing an EAP course begins with gathering information about the academic community, defined here as a group of professionals that EAP students aspire to join, the author further addresses three general approaches to investigating the academic world:

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researching the academic community and its practices, researching the discipline-specific knowledge and researching the meta-knowledge of academic subjects (norms and conventions of universities). Each of these research approaches, as the author observes, can employ a different framework of analysis. Discussing further the approaches of researching the academic community, Ian Bruce explains and compares the terms "speech community", "discourse community" and "community of practice". He concludes that whatever approach is employed, it should acknowledge the role of the genres used for communication and reflect the relationships within the community. Similar to the ways of researching academic community, three conceptual frameworks are described for the analysis of disciplinary knowledge: ethnographic investigation, i.e. the use of language in naturally occurring settings, a genre-based and a corpus-based approach. While describing the three frameworks, the author critically addresses their strengths and weaknesses and at the same time provides a substantial list of references of some of the most important studies that have applied the three approaches. Finally, the third and the last chapter of the introductory part theorizes the process of needs analysis stressing its importance for designing an EAP course. The central idea expressed here is that each needs analysis procedure is to be related to both a theory of learning and a theory of language. The remainder of the chapter is mostly an overview of the procedure for conducting a needs analysis and relies on Hutchinson and Waters' schemes and frameworks for present and target situation analyses (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Part II, *The Design of EAP Courses*, deals with more practical issues, such as the development of an EAP syllabus and the integration of disciplinary and language knowledge into it. As the development of a syllabus requires a systematic organization of the course content, the author first stresses the general principles in the syllabus design and these refer to the types of knowledge and knowledge processing, syllabus objectives and syllabus types. The chapter thus gives a brief overview of some of the fundamental issues in applied linguistics – declarative vs. procedural knowledge, top-down vs. bottom-up processing, atomistic vs. holistic objectives, and synthetic vs. analytic syllabus type. An EAP syllabus, the author concludes, should focus on both procedural and declarative knowledge and apply mostly top-down processing, as EAP students are generally higher-level language users. This in turn requires a holistic approach to the course objectives and an analytic syllabus organized around larger units of language. Describing further the process of syllabus design, Ian Bruce refers to general principles of formulating course goals and overall objectives, providing a number of examples of syllabus specifications for EAP reading and writing, and listening and speaking courses. The following two chapters of this part of the book consider how knowledge of the subject discipline and language knowledge can be incorporated into EAP courses. Thus, with regard to subject discipline knowledge, apart from referring to the three well-established models of gathering information (co-operation, collaboration and team teaching), the author makes a useful reference to some

recent studies reported in the literature that have used combinations of the three approaches. However, what seems to occupy the author's attention in this respect is a pedagogic transfer of disciplinary knowledge into an EAP syllabus. This activity, as Ian Bruce states, requires the skills of discourse analysis. In this respect, he proposes an approach that falls within two broad categories – social genre and cognitive genre. This dual approach equally focuses on social purpose and function of specialist texts and their rhetorical organization, providing thus a useful framework to EAP practitioners for analyzing complex disciplinary knowledge. As for linguistic elements in specialist texts, i.e. language knowledge, the author focuses on three areas within which the texts can be examined: textual grammar, metadiscourse and vocabulary. In reviewing briefly the three areas, the emphasis is constantly on a holistic approach to the analysis of linguistic elements, as opposed to decontextualized use of language. Applying top-down analysis and the proposed social-cognitive genre approach, the author in this section offers a number of illustrative examples of how language elements can be deconstructed and implemented into an EAP syllabus.

Relying on theoretical principles presented in previous two parts of the book, Part III, *The Implementation of EAP Courses*, is concerned with every day teaching practice and delivery of EAP courses. The section starts with a frequently discussed topic in EAP literature, the competencies of EAP teachers. In addressing this issue, Ian Bruce first presents a brief overview of the requirements for EAP teachers stated in the *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (CFTEAP) developed by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP, 2008). Following the CFTEAP organization, the author describes and discusses the knowledge and skills stated as essential for EAP teaching. He refers to specific competency statements grouped around four general areas: competencies relating to academic practice, EAP students, curriculum development and program implementation. Although written on seventeen pages, the section does not provide a detailed description of all competency areas stated in the document. Nevertheless, it certainly provides valuable guidelines to all EAP teachers and instructors worldwide, particularly to those who are novice to the field. After quoting and discussing some of the key elements of the four areas, the general conclusion of the author is that the given list of competency specifications goes beyond the skills and competencies required for teaching English for general purposes. Therefore, the author concludes, EAP teachers need to go through specialized trainings and develop and add to their skills and practices on an ongoing basis.

The remainder of the book is devoted to teaching the four language skills and assessment in EAP. The priority here is given to writing since, as the author notices, written assessment is a common practice in academic courses. In discussing this skill, the emphasis is put on the notion of discourse competence as a basis for successful writing in academic context. Referring to some of the definitions of this term in EAP literature, the author summarizes their key

components and in that way defines discourse competence as "a consummate ability to process, respond to and create extended texts that are appropriate to the contexts, discourse conventions, values and identities of a particular community" (p. 121). What follows then is a critical review of pedagogical approaches to writing where the author claims that, in an EAP context, genre-based approach provides the most systematic pedagogy for developing discourse competence as it focuses on organizational, contextual and procedural elements of disciplinary discourse. The following chapter concentrates on the reading skill with an overview of the psycho-linguistic process of reading, the role of contextual knowledge and the analysis of reading subskills. Special attention is given to reading speed and vocabulary knowledge as these usually represent the most challenging issues to EAP readers. It is acknowledged that EAP courses need to focus on both extensive and intensive reading activities in order to widen students' passive vocabulary and develop strategies for dealing with unknown vocabulary items. The listening skill is described following the similar pattern: description of the process of listening precedes the discussion of the development of this skill in EAP context. The focus is on various strategies and pre- and post-task activities that can be employed applying both top-down and bottom-up processing while listening to audio and video segments of various spoken genres. In developing the elements stated above, the author once again refers to genre-based approach to EAP teaching, stressing the role of genre knowledge, i.e. the usual patterns of organization of lectures, tutorials and other frequently used genres in academic context. As a skill that receives the least formal attention in the classroom, speaking is the fourth skill discussed in this section. Referring to interactive tasks in an academic setting, the author reports on some recent studies that have focused on questions and comments in lectures, participation in seminars and tutorials and delivery of oral presentations. The implications of the studies, as the author observes, stress the need for incorporating interactivity into regular practice of an EAP course. Alongside speaking, the chapter focuses on a relatively new and insufficiently explored skill in EAP literature and that is critical thinking. The author addresses the issue by analyzing two approaches to its teaching in EAP setting – the teachable skills and the cognitive apprenticeship approach. While the former perceives critical thinking as a transferable skill from EAP class to disciplinary context, the latter proposes that critical thinking requires good understanding of the field of study, its norms, standards and conventions. Taking this point of view, the author claims, makes it problematic to teach critical thinking skill in isolation from subject-specific, contextual knowledge.

The concluding chapter of the book deals with the issue of assessment in EAP. The chapter offers a thorough review of the key concepts in language testing, such as types of tests, measurement of test outcomes, test validity and reliability. Special attention is given to the use of performance tests for assessing the productive skills in EAP. In spite of being time-consuming, the use of performance tests based on academic genres is advocated as the best option for the ongoing

development of students' discourse competence. In combination with these tests, the author proposes the use of analytic scoring by means of graded descriptors as this form of assessment provides useful feedback to students and helps them develop their discourse competence.

On the whole, the book *Theory and Concepts of EAP* represents a brief but comprehensive overview of key topics and issues in the domain of EAP teaching and learning. The value of the book lies in its conciseness and systematic mode of presenting ideas. It also offers an extensive and up-to-date list of references pertaining to the field of EAP research. In this regard, it can be recommended as a valuable resource and a good starting point for deeper exploration of EAP literature, to both novice and experienced teachers and practitioners in the field of EAP.

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