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APPLYING DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN ESP CLASSROOMS: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract
English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gained prominence in language education due to its targeted approach in meeting learners' professional or academic needs. Discourse Analysis (DA), the study of language beyond the sentence level, offers a powerful framework for enhancing ESP instruction. This paper explores the application of discourse analysis in ESP classrooms, highlighting its pedagogical benefits and identifying the practical challenges it presents. Through an examination of current literature and classroom practices, this study aims to provide educators with insights into how discourse analysis can be effectively integrated into ESP curricula.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis (DA); English for Specific Purposes (ESP); genre analysis; pragmatic competence; language pedagogy; authentic materials; ESP instruction; classroom challenges; applied linguistics.

Introduction

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) focuses on teaching English tailored to specific domains such as medicine, engineering, business, and law. Unlike general English instruction, ESP emphasizes context-specific language skills that learners need to function effectively in their fields. Discourse Analysis (DA) provides tools for understanding how language operates in real-world contexts, particularly in written and spoken texts typical of professional and academic settings.

The integration of discourse analysis into ESP instruction can enhance learners' understanding of genre conventions, rhetorical structures, and pragmatic features of communication. However, the application of DA in the classroom poses several methodological and practical challenges.

There are following benefits of applying discourse analysis in ESP classrooms:

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Enhanced Genre Awareness. Discourse analysis helps learners in architecture and civil engineering recognize the structure, language features, and rhetorical patterns used in professional texts such as design proposals, technical specifications, and project reports.
Example: Students analyze a real architectural design proposal to identify how visual language (e.g., diagrams and layout plans) is integrated with verbal descriptions. Through DA, they learn to structure their own proposals with appropriate section headings (e.g., *Project Objectives*, *Site Analysis*, *Design Concept*), use passive voice for formality (*"The materials were selected to meet sustainability standards"*) and employ modality to suggest alternatives (*"This layout could be adjusted to accommodate more light"*).

Development of Critical Thinking. Discourse analysis encourages students to go beyond surface-level reading and examine how design and engineering texts communicate assumptions, priorities, and professional values such as safety, sustainability, and innovation.
Example: In a group activity, students analyze excerpts from two different civil engineering feasibility reports. They explore how choices in language reflect different priorities—for instance, one report emphasizing cost-efficiency ("the most economical solution") while another stresses environmental impact ("to minimize ecological disruption"). This leads to a deeper understanding of how language can subtly influence decision-making in technical contexts.

Improved Pragmatic Competence. Students in technical fields often need to participate in site meetings, present designs, or write project correspondence. DA helps them develop the pragmatic skills to do so effectively—understanding how to use language appropriately in different roles and settings.
Example: In a mock project meeting, students examine transcripts of architect-client dialogues. They learn how turn-taking and hedging (e.g., *"Perhaps we might consider a different facade treatment..."*) are used to express disagreement diplomatically or make suggestions. Practicing similar discourse helps them improve their spoken interaction in client presentations and team discussions.

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Authentic Materials and Tasks. DA supports the use of authentic, discipline-specific texts in the classroom, which prepares learners for the language they will actually encounter in their professional environment.

Example: Students analyze a set of building code guidelines or a site inspection report. They identify recurrent lexical patterns (e.g., *load-bearing structure*, *compliance with standards*, *reinforced concrete*) and grammatical features such as conditionals and modals (*"must comply," "should be inspected"*) used to indicate obligations and recommendations. They then apply this knowledge to write their own brief inspection summary or compliance memo.

Some challenges in implementing discourse analysis in ESP classrooms are studied:

Teacher Expertise. Effective application of discourse analysis requires instructors to have both linguistic knowledge and familiarity with the specific professional contexts of architecture and civil engineering. Many ESP teachers may lack this combined expertise.

Example: An ESP instructor teaching civil engineering students may not be fully familiar with technical terminology, typical document structures, or professional discourse used in engineering reports or project proposals. Without adequate background, the teacher may struggle to guide students in analyzing nuanced language features like modality in safety regulations or genre conventions in architectural design documentation. This can limit the depth and relevance of DA activities.

Time Constraints. Discourse analysis tasks often involve detailed examination of texts, requiring significant classroom time. ESP courses, especially those linked to degree programs in architecture or civil engineering, usually have tight schedules focused on technical content, leaving limited room for extended linguistic analysis.

Example: In an architecture ESP class, dedicating multiple sessions to dissecting the rhetorical structure of a design brief may conflict with the need to cover software tutorials or construction technology content. Consequently, DA activities may be rushed or omitted, reducing their effectiveness.

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Learner Readiness. Discourse analysis involves abstract thinking about language use, which may overwhelm learners who are still developing basic language skills or who are more comfortable with concrete, technical vocabulary and tasks.
Example: Architecture students at intermediate English proficiency may find it challenging to analyze discourse markers or cohesion devices in a technical report, especially when unfamiliar with the specialized vocabulary. Without sufficient scaffolding, such learners might feel frustrated or disengaged, preferring straightforward vocabulary exercises instead.

Resource Availability. ESP programs often lack discipline-specific materials that incorporate discourse analysis frameworks tailored for architecture or civil engineering, forcing teachers to create their own resources.
Example: Finding authentic and pedagogically appropriate materials like annotated architectural proposals or engineering meeting transcripts with discourse analysis notes is difficult. As a result, instructors may spend considerable time developing customized teaching materials or adapting general English resources that may not fully capture the specific communicative practices of these fields.
Concerning pedagogical implications the following strategies are recommended to integrate DA effectively in ESP,:

- **Task-based Learning**: Use real-world tasks, such as analyzing and replicating professional emails or reports.
- **Scaffolded Instruction**: Break down complex DA concepts and guide learners through step-by-step analysis.
- **Genre-based Pedagogy**: Teach the structure and purpose of genre-specific texts using DA frameworks.
- **Collaborative Activities**: Encourage group discussions and peer reviews to deepen discourse understanding.

Applying discourse analysis in ESP classrooms for architecture students presents several challenges, which stem from methodological, pedagogical, technological, and contextual factors. The following table demonstrates the summary of some key challenges [Table 1].

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Table 1. Summary Table of Challenges for research

Challenge	Description	Sample Example (Architecture/Civil Engineering)
Conceptual Complexity	Abstract discourse ideas are difficult for students to understand and apply.	Students find it challenging to grasp concepts such as coherence or modality within technical reports and project proposals.
Time Constraints	Limited instructional time restricts opportunities for in-depth discourse analysis activities.	Due to tight schedules, instructors often prioritize teaching software skills or technical knowledge over analyzing the discourse of design briefs.
Teacher Expertise	Lack of specialized knowledge combining discourse analysis and professional domain content.	ESP teachers unfamiliar with architectural or engineering terminology struggle to effectively guide discourse analysis of professional texts.
Student Resistance	Learners prefer traditional language instruction methods to abstract discourse analysis tasks.	Architecture and civil engineering students often favor vocabulary drills and grammar exercises over analyzing language use in authentic texts.
Methodological Difficulties	Technical and ethical issues complicate the recording and analysis of classroom interactions.	Recording role-played site meetings for discourse analysis is hindered by technological problems and securing participant consent.
Ethical Concerns	Issues related to permissions and anonymity complicate the collection of authentic data.	Obtaining consent to use real client-architect conversations in class is challenging due to confidentiality and privacy concerns.
Cultural Variability	Diverse learner backgrounds necessitate adaptable and culturally sensitive teaching materials.	Students from different cultural backgrounds interpret politeness and negotiation strategies in design discussions differently, requiring tailored approaches.

Conclusion

Discourse analysis offers substantial pedagogical benefits in ESP contexts, equipping learners with critical language skills tailored to specific professional domains. While its implementation poses challenges related to expertise, time, and learner readiness, these can be mitigated through targeted training, scaffolding, and thoughtful curriculum design. Integrating discourse analysis into ESP classrooms ultimately leads to more effective and context-sensitive language learning.

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