An ESP Course Design for Airport Information Desk Staff

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Abstract

This paper presents the process of designing a course for airport ground staff working at the Information Desk. It reflects the situations that lots of ESP practitioners are confronted with when designing course tasks; that is, analyzing the needs of specific learners, identifying the occupation-related aims, and tailoring the authenticity-featured materials. The paper introduces a course framework, a set of sample material and a series of plans on learning assessment and course evaluation, with some reflections made on the limitations of both the process and the products, as well as the directions of further research influenced by the current trends of ESP development.

Key words: ESP; course design; airport information desk

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) implies meticulous research undertaken to produce pedagogically suitable materials and exercises for mostly adult learners defined in a specific context (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991). Tremendous efforts have been made in different aspects of ESP courses associated with different disciplines, for example, analyzing linguistic features of English used by business men (Nelson, 2006) and hospital staff (Blue & Harun, 2003), assessing the needs of learners working in textile and clothing fields (Somui & Mead, 2000) and hotel service (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999). In aviation industry, the most prevalent trainings are for air traffic controllers and flight crews, and the language they are required to command is usually referred to as Aviation English, featuring radiotelephony and operational procedures. In contrast, Information Desk staff working at airports mainly relies on language abilities and communicative skills to tend to all sorts of
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enquiries and requests of travelers, and yet very little literature could be found on English courses tailored for Airport Information Desk staff. Thus this paper addresses how to design a language course for these airport workers, from examining the context, analyzing the needs and indentifying the objectives, to designing the syllabus and the material, as well as planning the assessment of the learners and the evaluation of the course.

2. Context

Quilty (2003) observes that the airport is an environment of turbulence and uncertainty, if seen from the viewpoint of organization; it shoulders the pressure from and juggles the needs of government, travelling community, and users of the airport, if viewed from the angle of management. Therefore, staff working in this environment is supposed to reach and maintain a high standard of flexibility and productivity, which are often enhanced by means of personnel training and education (Quilty, 2003). It has been pointed out in the Annual Conference of Civil Aviation Administration of China (Annual Conference of CAAC, 2008) that Beijing Capital International Airport ranked just the 62nd for passenger satisfaction in contrast with the 9th busiest for passenger handling in a survey conducted by an international airport council. As to the huge gap between the surging flow of inbound and outbound travelers and the disappointing level of customer service awareness and quality, there is a lot to do about improvements through staff training and education. The policy makers of Beijing Capital International Airport Corporation have decided on an intensive training project for the employees. As part of the project, a non-assessed, one-week English course is to be administered to 40 Information Desk staff (working in different airport Information Desks), whose English level is supposed to be lower-intermediate. The goal set by airport HR department is to enable the Information Desk staff to communicate effectively with international passengers in English so as to help them and make them feel at home during their stay at the airport.

3. Needs Analysis

3.1 Rationale
The aims of this needs analysis are three-tiered: firstly, to investigate the “necessities” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 55) that the Information Desk staff at any airports are generally aware of so as to function effectively at their locations, which include the situations where they need to function (communicating events), the linguistic features identified in these situations, the language skills required in these situations, and other areas of knowledge (if any) needed to fulfill their duties; secondly, to elicit the learners’ views on and experience associated with these “necessities”; additionally, to assemble the most basic information of the learners’ background. To collect these information, the target learners (insiders) are the most direct and convenient source; apart from them, relevant airport department managers and passengers (outsiders) can be useful sources, too, if available.
3.2 Methods
After piloting the questionnaire to some Information Desk staff working at an airport and making some adjustments as to these insiders’ respondents, the updated questionnaire was carried out at Beijing International Airport. Some individual interviews with staff and passengers or observation at the airport could be as well useful for gathering feedback for the previously conducted questionnaire, and recording setting data and non-verbal behaviours, but permission was not obtained because of confidential and security reasons on the airport part. To increase the reliability of the data assembled through questionnaires, Information Desk service specification on other airport websites and some job searching websites were examined for a wider knowledge and closer checkup about the communicating events and required competence of Information Desk staff.

3.3 Data Collection
4 copies of Questionnaire were piloted and 40 copies of Chinese translation of Questionnaire (see Appendix 1) were handed out at different Information Desks of Beijing Capital International Airport and left there to be completed during 3 weeks so as to collect response from both the day shift and the night shift at the Information Desks. In the end, a full response rate was obtained. The reason for using Chinese version of Questionnaire in China contexts was to ensure the intelligibility and avoid the ambiguity of the questions to the respondents, which was reflected from administering the pilot questionnaire.

Besides the data collected via questionnaires, some descriptive data about Information Desk were collected from three other airports’ websites where explicit information was provided about Information Desk (Philadelphia International Airport, Belfast Airport, City of Derry Airport, 2008); some information about the daily routine, qualification, experience, skills and knowledge of Airport Information Assistants were gathered from two job-searching websites (Learndirect-Careers Advice, 2008; Goskills-Aviation, 2008) and an online newspaper review (Ritchie, 2007; unpaginated).

3.4 Findings
Results of the data elicited from rating scale questions and multiple-choice questions have been put into Table 1 and Table 2 respectively (see Appendix 2). The findings obtained from the responses to these two types of questions as well as those to the open-ended questions are listed below:

– The most frequently used airport knowledge was that about checking-in and baggage-handling, while the most frequently performed airport tasks were giving directions about airport facilities and services, giving information about travelling and transportation, and catering for special needs of passengers (such as those with wheelchair and children).

– Despite the fact that these respondents were aware of their main duties as airport informants, they did not display very satisfactory performance when required to write their response to five samples of passenger inquiry. For instance, to answer “Hi, I just found this hearing aid near the lift,” 16 respondents wrote “What did you hear?” 8 respondents wrote “Sorry, I don’t know,” and 14 respondents wrote “Really? That’s good”
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or “That’s good.”

– Thirteen respondents chose airport newspaper and magazine for reading and no conclusion was drawn on writing. When asked about the e-mail writing style at Information Desk, 25 respondents chose “in line with specific passenger’s style.”

– When it went to the satisfaction degree for Information Desk work, the most chosen response was team-working and the least chosen response was attending to very specific needs of passengers. This implies that the course is on one hand to help the respondents make best of what they enjoy doing and on the other hand to help them face and improve what they do not enjoy.

– Moreover, it was also found that what more than half of the respondents aspired to gain was effective on-the-spot communication with passengers. This in turn explains why intensive listening and speaking training as well as work-related expressions were what they desired most to have in an English course. Additionally, a great majority of the respondents expressed their frustration for difficulties of communicating flight delays with the passengers.

As amendment, some information about Airport Information Desk Tasks was found useful from three airports’ websites (Philadelphia International Airport, Belfast Airport, City of Derry Airport, 2008). After incorporating the information gathered on these airports into the questionnaire findings, a list of tasks is outlined as follows:

– Giving directions to airport facilities and services
– Dealing with telephone enquiries
– Dealing with e-mail enquiries
– Giving suggestions about tourist information
– Imparting information about prohibited items
– Dealing with Lost & Found properties.

Besides language competence, some other qualities of Airport Information Desk staff were gathered from some job searching and review websites (Learndirect-Careers Advice and Goskills-Aviation, 2008; Ritchie, 2007; unpaginated). A brief summary is given below:

– Team-working ability
– Tactfulness in problem-solving situations
– Helpful approach with a smiling face
– Mind-reading ability.

Apparently, this collection of Information Desk staff qualities was expressed in a narrative and somewhat rhetorical language. For the sake of generating language learning objectives, they are interpreted into the language learning theories or skills underpinning these ethical qualities so as to be of use in syllabus planning and material production:

– Collaboration
– Verbal and nonverbal conversational devices
– Speech act—deducing and inferring speakers’ intention
– Interaction.
4. Objectives

With the findings obtained through the needs analysis and the context consideration taken into account, a set of objectives for this course was formulated in light of Basturkmen’s five general categories (2006: 134-144), namely, language system and use, target performance, strategic competence, cross-cultural awareness and critical awareness. These objectives will be used as a reference whenever the learning is observed, reflected on and evaluated as the course goes along.

At the end of the course, the learners will be able to:

– recognize the patterns of giving directions, making phone calls and writing e-mails
– use the appropriate expressions, grammar structures and lexis in given situations
– use the appropriate intonation and paralinguistic features to help others understand what is being said
– identify and use task-related vocabulary
– recognize the ways of open, continue, and close a conversation
– identify the conversational tactics and give examples to them
– skim relevant texts for content and meaning, and scan them for specifics
– identify the sequence of service telephone calls and the expressions used to actualize it
– identify the features of different e-mail writing styles
– use the language and skills specified in objective 1 and 2 while doing situation role-plays
– tell the difference between conventional behaviors in the target cultures and the local culture
– make critical judgements about target practice according to their own experiences at Information Desk.

5. Syllabus

5.1 Choosing Course Content

It is necessary to choose the content of a course before a syllabus could be designed for the course, for “choosing course content” means to consider what the learners should learn, what the course should include or exclude, and how different elements link to one another, given who these learners are, what their needs are and what the course is aimed at, so as for the decisions on syllabus to be made (Graves, 2000: 39). The content of the course in this paper was chosen according to the needs analysis findings, the course objectives and the course designer’s beliefs about language and learning. They are shown in the two grids as follows:
Focuses on Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language system</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grammar</td>
<td>e.g. models and conditionals when giving suggestions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocabulary</td>
<td>e.g. signposts such as baggage claim, ticketing service, and quarantine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pronunciation</td>
<td>e.g. pitch movements such as fall, high rise, low rise, fall rise and rise fall (Bogle, 1996)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language in context</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>discourse</td>
<td>e.g. formulae in direction-giving dialogues such as turn-taking, pauses and fillers (Scotton &amp; Bernstein, 1988)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pragmatics</td>
<td>e.g. politeness (Cutting, 2002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language skills</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>paralinguistic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical features</td>
<td>e.g. gesture, facial expression and eye contact (Harmer, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocal features</td>
<td>e.g. whispering, breathiness and nasality (Harmer, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focuses on Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning styles</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>developmental</td>
<td>e.g. building on existing knowledge and experience of the learners (Hutchinson &amp; Waters, 1987:128)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>e.g. engaging the learners in problem-solving situations (McDonough, 1984: 91)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other than language</td>
<td>e.g. subject content or carrier content (Dudley-Evans &amp; St John, 1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning styles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognitive</td>
<td>e.g. transforming the declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1980: 224)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social-cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactive</td>
<td>e.g. employing conversational tactics such as repetitions and confirmation checks (Mitchell &amp; Myles, 2004: 191)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Selecting Syllabus Framework

Richards (2001: 161) observes that some theorists on second language acquisition have advocated “task” as a basis of syllabus design. As Long & Crooks (1991: 43) argue that tasks serve as vehicles of presenting suitable target language models, which learners could restructure through cognitive process, where difficulties could be negotiated during comprehension and production. Based on the designer’s perception of ESP as a learning-centred approach and the objective describing both process and product, together with the information gathered through needs analysis about the learners’ target performance, a task-based syllabus was decided on for the course.

There have been a number of concerns raised for task-based syllabus. One of these concerns is the definition of task. Two kinds of tasks have been widely used as the syllabus basis: pedagogical and real-world. The latter are those found to be significant through needs analysis and will turn out to be significant and useful in real world communication (Richards, 2001: 162). Arguably, the six general tasks or macro-tasks derived from the needs analysis belong to real-world tasks, or more appropriately work-place tasks, while a
series of activities or micro-tasks which are designed for each macro-task are supposed to stimulate second language learning closely associated with the general task, thus they are usually pedagogical tasks (problem-solving being an exception).

Another concern about task-based syllabus is the selection and sequence of tasks. Ideally, these general tasks could be sequenced according to how often the staff needs to do them, if the degree of need had been elicited from the needs analysis. However, the needs analysis failed to reveal a generalizable order. It is expected that more valid information will be gathered once the course is on the way. At the time, the decision was made according to the designer’s perception about their learning needs. “Giving directions around the airport” comes first as the orientation to the surroundings, then travelling, lost & found and prohibited items are displayed as two of the frequently handled issues in the surroundings, and telephoning and e-mailing come eventually, as they are specific skills used when addressing those issues in the surroundings and deserve particular treatment. Given that there are just six of them, changes could be made to this temporary sequence when necessary. Additional content and arising problems and the suggestions elicited through on-going evaluation will be addressed as the course carries on.

Under each macro-task, suitable micro-tasks for pedagogical purposes should be determined and sequenced. Since the learning under discussion has specific purposes pre-determined by the context, micro-tasks should be aligned with the objectives, too. As regards the order, these micro-tasks roughly follow the Bloom’s taxonomy (Dalton & Smith, 1986), which sequences learning activities from basic levels to advanced levels, featuring knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, though more than one level of learning does occur in the same activity. Following these micro-tasks, there are language focuses, which are specific activities on the discourse features and other aspects of language system the learners are expected to acquire in the tasks. It is assumed that a language focus embedded in each lesson would cater for Chinese learners, who always complain about the learning experience involving uncertainty of the knowledge they are supposed to accomplish (Huang, 2005).

5.3 Structuring Instructional Blocks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving directions to airport facilities and services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Target performance:**
   - Identifying the expressions that open, continue and close a conversation about giving directions
   - Identifying fillers and their functions in conversation and generating more examples

2. **Strategic competence:**
   - Problem-solving: giving directions to passengers of specific needs

3. **Cross-cultural awareness:**
   - Recognizing and exploring what politeness in conversation means in the target cultures, by making contrast to that in local culture
(4) **Critical awareness:**
- Articulating the feelings and opinions about the target practice
- Suggesting ways of adapting the target practice to the local context

(5) **Language:**
- Conversational tactics: fillers, confirmation checkers, etc.
- Intonation: pitch movements—fall, high rise and low rise
- Paralinguistic features: Physical—gesture and facial expression

**Giving suggestions about travelling**

(1) **Target performance:**
- Skimming and scanning websites about tourism and transportation
- Identifying the skills for taking turns and expressions for dealing with interruption and generating more examples

(2) **Strategic competence:**
- Problem-solving: dealing with the passengers who do not take turns properly and interrupting appropriately if you have to

(3) **Cross-cultural awareness:**
- Discussing the difference in taking turns and making interruption politely between the target cultures and the local culture

(4) **Critical awareness:**
As is required in Day 1

(5) **Language:**
- Grammar: Modals—Offers and suggestions; Conditionals
- Conversational tactics: expressions used in time of interruption
- Lexis: tourism and transportation
- Intonation: pitch movements—fall-rise and rise-fall
- Paralinguistic features: Physical—gesture and facial expression

**Dealing with Lost & Found properties**

(1) **Target performance:**
- Identifying what relevant questions to ask in order to elicit details about the lost items
- Identifying the expressions used to encourage a speaker to continue and to say more, and generating more examples

(2) **Strategic competence:**
- Problem-solving: coping with stressful passengers who lost things in airport

(3) **Cross-cultural awareness:**
- Exploring relevant cross-cultural issue if any

(4) **Critical awareness:**
As is required in Day 1

(5) **Language:**
- Grammar: past tense
- Conversational tactics: back-channeling, repetition and clarification request
Imparting information about prohibited items

(1) Target performance:
   – Skimming and scanning updated airport security policy
   – Identifying skills for giving instructions without offending the addressees

(2) Strategic competence:
   – Problem-solving: giving valid information about prohibition policy and suggestions for getting through security checks

(3) Cross-cultural awareness:
   – Comparing the relation of politeness and face in the target cultures and the local culture

(4) Critical awareness:
   As is required in Day 1

(5) Language focus:
   – Grammar: Modals—permission, advisability, obligation and necessity
   – Lexis: categories of prohibited items
   – Intonation: Main focus and weak forms
   – Paralinguistic features: Physical—proximity

Dealing with telephone enquiries

(1) Target performance:
   – Identifying the common sequencing conventions of service telephone calls in the target language and the variations
   – Identifying the appropriate language used to implement sequencing conventions

(2) Strategic competence:
   – Problem-solving: answering phone calls in the right way even when the speaker has a bad manner

(3) Cross-cultural awareness:
   – Comparing the service telephone conventions in the target cultures and the local culture

(4) Critical awareness:
   As is required in Day 1

(5) Language focus:
   – Expressions: opening sequence and pre-sequence in reason-to-call
   – Lexis: learner-generated
   – Intonation: revision
   – Paralinguistic features: Physical—revision
     Vocal—whispering, breathiness, nasality, etc.
Dealing with e-mail enquiries

(1) Target performance:
   - Identifying different patterns of subject, opening and closing of e-mail
   - Identifying the register and stylistic features of e-mail

(2) Strategic competence:
   - Problem-solving: answering a passenger’ e-mail

(3) Cross-cultural awareness:
   - Comparing the e-mail writing convention in the target cultures and the local culture

(4) Critical awareness:
   As is required in Day 1

(5) Language:
   - Accommodate the genre to the demands of the international aviation community

Assessment—Situational role plays

The situations and criteria of the role play will be decided according to the learners’ feedback throughout the previous six days.

6. Material

When designing the sample material for the lesson to be delivered on the first day (see Appendix 3), a macro-task had already been decided: giving directions to airport facilities and services. As a result, rather than starting from looking for appropriate input, examining language and content in it, and then devising tasks in which the language aspects and content will be used, as Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 109) suggest, the next step was to look for the resource which involves the communication situation of the task in the exact or similar way that the situation happens in the learners’ work place. With the right type of resource, what should be extracted was the typical language aspects, skills and content featured in it. Then, pedagogical tasks needed to be devised so that learning targeted on the language, skills and content could be activated through completing the tasks. The activities were worked out by the designer herself, because very suitable activities for the first day’s task were not available from published source books. In approaching other learning objectives apart from the target performance competence, such as cross-cultural awareness, some published source books were used as a supplement. Besides the texts for reading tasks, videos were selected mostly as the language input of other tasks, so that the learners can have a chance to associate the paralinguistic features with the aspects of formal language system, which should not be separated in making sense of the real world communication. For the consideration explained in the syllabus writing, a language revision will be conducted in each lesson after the other tasks described in the syllabus have been completed, focusing on all the linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the communication in the task situation and meanwhile recycling the content of previous lessons. As part of the whole course evaluation process, there is a peer evaluation stage at
the end of each lesson. The reason that the peer evaluation comes after the language focus is that the learners are expected to have a clear knowledge about what aspects to look at when they judge their own language behavior.

A profile of the course is gathered below to facilitate the production of a complete set of material:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course duration: 7 days</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course length: around 10 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson time: about 2 hours per lesson in the afternoon or evening (adaptive to different shifts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size of group: 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources: a prepared course, plus the resources to be drawn from the learners and airport management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants: airport information desk staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment: no exit test required</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The course objectives, the course syllabus, this course profile and the sample material for the first day constitute a course framework, which helps check if all the relevant elements have been considered and balanced and complete the rest material production work. Given the size of the rest material, it is excluded from the appendixes of this paper.

7. Assessment

As presented in the literature review of this paper, the stages of needs analysis, objectives and syllabus build up a significant foundation for assessment planning. It is just a matter of time for any language program organizer to take an interest in assessing its learners’ achievements (Brown, 1995: 111), despite the airport employer’s idea of a non-assessed course. In line with those elements identified and emphasized in the preceding stages, the assessment of this course will be conducted by two means, portfolio and situational role play.

Portfolio is an informative assessment tool that documents individual learner’s progress over time in specific areas recognized in the syllabus, facilitates their reflection on the weakness, strengths and needs so that they can set personal goals towards the objectives (Tierney, Carter & Desai, 1991: 59). Apart from the learners’ after-class assignments, portfolios can as well include video-recordings of learners’ task performances (see Appendix 3). Kept on a day-to-day basis, portfolios provide a good ground for teacher-learner communication about what and how much effort to be made towards learning objectives. This is also aligned with the designer’s fundamental perception of the present course as learning-centered.

As effective communication with passengers stands out in the needs analysis as the end that most of the learners desired to achieve, speaking and listening performance in a range of work-related situations should be assessed to see the learners’ progress over the seven days. As a result, situational role plays will be done on the last day, and the video-recordings of the role plays will be compared with those in the portfolios to gauge the
progress. The perspectives of language in context, paralinguistic features and social-cultural aspects can be reflected in this assessment phase. The specific content and rubrics of the situational role plays will be created by means of elicitation from and negotiation with the learners as the course goes on, so as to avoid the mismatches between the predetermined situations and the important situations popping out as learning carries on, as well as any unfairness or negligence.

8. Evaluation

On planning course evaluation, decisions were made about setting the four basic parameters of an evaluation, which are purpose, audience, participant and approach. Firstly, since the course will last only for seven days and not have an exit test, the evaluation may make a daily measurement of what is working well, what is not, and what needs to be changed or improved, so that timely reaction could be made as the course goes on. Given this fact, a formative evaluation will apply. The audiences who will be interested in the evaluation results will be the teacher and the employer. The former is concerned about the learners’ feedback on every aspects of the course, while the employer would like to know whether the course is delivering what is supposed to, whether it is well organized and whether the employees are making progress. Those will take part in the evaluation are temporarily just the learners. Probably when the course is carried out, some consultants can be asked to attend the class and give opinions.

As regards the evaluating approach, both quantitative and qualitative type will be adopted. To draw certain patterns and tendencies from the learners’ feedback on the course so as to revise objectives and modify materials and teaching accordingly, course evaluation questionnaires for learners will be used. However, the questionnaire data is normally limited to the questions and ratings predefined by the teacher. As a complement, video-recordings of classroom teaching will be used as a vehicle for formative evaluation. Watching video-taped classroom practice provides the teacher a good chance to listen to his or her own instruction as the learners do and observe their reactions and responses simultaneously, which will help the teacher more easily obtain some objective viewpoints and comprehensive perception of the aspects needing modification and adjustment (Davis, 1993; unpaginated). Apart from that, a checklist (Davis, 1988) will be applied to assist with a close scrutiny on the areas of significance in the videos. Because of the small size of the learner group, it will not be too difficult to analyze and interpret the data collected. The positive aspect of making video recordings is storing both verbal and nonverbal information for peer evaluation and formative course evaluation, avoiding interruption and facilitating fluency (Westerfield, 1989), whereas the negative aspect is that the video recording instrument or the person who is operating it may be intrusive to classroom activities. Some communication is necessary for helping the learners get used to it and make better use of it.
9. Conclusion

To sum up, ESP course design is an integrated, systematic and flexible process, in which consistent review ought to be made on individual sub-processes in terms of the core elements of language use, language learning and learners’ specific needs in a target context. It is not a one-off production but an on-going process of planning, implementation, negotiation, reflection and refinement. In this final section, it is necessary to discuss the limitations and future research directions of this course. First of all, the material needs to be piloted before the course starts on a group of subjects similar to the target learners in terms of age, proficiency and profession so as to check whether the syllabus and material are pitched on the suitable level and to allow time for some necessary shifts and supplements. Certainly, the pilot materials and questionnaires should be prepared in advance. Furthermore, although the learners were claimed to be intermediate, a proficiency test before entry is still needed as part of the needs analysis process to make an accurate measurement of the learners’ English proficiency so that some refining work could be done on the material. For example, it would help if the learners ever sat BEC (Business English Certificate, which assesses the English performance in workplace and for business careers), for the scores should be a good source of reference. Finally, as Widdowson (1998) comments, the aim of an ESP program is not just presenting the learners authentic materials prevalent in certain domain, but to teach the target learners the effective language use of a discourse community in which they are or will be involved for further professional or occupational purposes, and more importantly to raise their awareness of the updated communication conventions shared by the target discourse community. In the case of this course design, some research is worth doing on the analysis of the text features of e-mail writing and other communicating conventions of the target airport discourse community to benefit the on-going course development.

References


Appendix 1 Questionnaire for Airport Information Desk* Staff

Introduction:
This questionnaire aims to gather the information about in-service Airport Information Desk Staff’s needs in language and communication skills. The findings of the questionnaire will be used only for research and educational purposes, so please be as truthful as possible. It will take you no more than 15 minutes to finish. ANONYMITY AND NON-TRACEABILITY ARE ASSURED. Thanks for your time and support!
*Information Desk is also called Help Desk at some airports, where staff is available to help with any enquiries passengers may have about their journey, the airport or the local area.

Part I: Work-related Questions
Please answer question (1) by ticking ONE box only.
(1) How long have you been working at the Airport Information Desk?
   a. less than 1 year □
   b. 1 to 3 years (including 1 and 3) □
   c. 3 to 6 years (including 6) □
   d. more than 6 years □

Please answer question (2) to (5) by ticking an appropriate number for each item and give a few examples when required.
(2) How often do you use the knowledge about the following areas?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Very seldom</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   | a. checking-in  | 1  2  3  4  5
   | b. security     | 1  2  3  4  5
   | c. ticketing    | 1  2  3  4  5
   | d. baggage-handling | 1  2  3  4  5
   | e. travelling   | 1  2  3  4  5
   | f. others       | 1  2  3  4  5

(3) How often do you undertake the following tasks?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Very seldom</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   | a. giving directions to airport facilities and services | 1  2  3  4  5
   | b. giving suggestions about travelling       | 1  2  3  4  5
   | c. giving information about prohibited items | 1  2  3  4  5
   | d. dealing with lost & found properties      | 1  2  3  4  5
   | f. others                                   | 1  2  3  4  5

   |                             | 1  2  3  4  5

(4) How often do you READ the following types of English texts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>Very seldom</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. e-mail</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. letter</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. documents and policy</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. newspaper and magazine</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) How often do you WRITE the following types of English texts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>Very seldom</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. e-mail</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. letter</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. reports</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) Please indicate the important factors that determine the success of communication taking place at Airport Information Desk.

(7) Please complete the following sentence in your own words:
The primary things that I have found annoying in dealing with passengers’ questions are…

(8) Please describe the procedure you normally follow after picking up a phone call from a passenger.

Please answer question (9) by tickling ONE box only.

(9) The style of e-mail writing at Airport Information Desk can be described as:

a. commercial □
b. casual □
c. in the line with specific passengers’ style □
d. uniform within the airport corporation I am working for □
f. uniform across the airport industry □

(10) Please give respective examples of the openings and the closings frequently adopted in the e-mails you write to your passengers.

Opening:

Closing:
Please answer question (11) by ticking an appropriate number for each aspect and give a few examples when required.

(11) How much do you enjoy the following aspects of the Airport Information Desk you are working at?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>working as a team</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving accurate information to those who need it</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never knowing what the next question is</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling satisfied after solving tricky problems</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(12) Please write down your responses to the following passengers inquiries just passed to you:

a. “Hi, I just found this hearing aid near the lift.”
   “                                                                                   ”

b. “I was passing through your airport last year, and I lost something.”
   “                                                                                   ”

c. “I’ve got to get to gate B26. What food is down that way?”
   “                                                                                   ”

d. “Is there Wi-Fi in this airport?”
   “                                                                                   ”

e. “Where can I smoke without getting searched?”
   “                                                                                   ”

(13) If you were put on an English course tailored for Airport Information Desk staff, what would you like to have in this course?

Part II: Learning-related Questions

Please tick only ONE box under each of the questions from (14) to (18) and give a few examples when required.

(14) Did you use English in any of your previous jobs?
   a. yes □ b. no □

(15) If yes for (14), did you use more spoken or written English? If no, just leave this blank.
   a. spoken □ b. written □ c. half and half □

(16) Did you mainly use English to communicate with native speakers (such as British) or non-native speakers (such as German), or both?
   a. native speakers □ b. non-native speakers □ c. both □

(17) Which was your most preferred way of learning English?
   a) memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules □
   b) listening to tapes and watching movies □
   c) writing or speaking for the purpose of communication □
   d) others □
(18) What’s your attitude towards errors?
   a. they should be absolutely avoided □
   b. they should be corrected immediately after being found □
   c. they should be tolerated to some extent as long as you can get yourself understood □
   d. others □

(19) Please fill out the form below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Gender:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company:</td>
<td>Section:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English learning experience:

How long? (write your answer below) What level? (tick a box below)

- Under university level □
- At university level □
- Above university level □

Appendix 2

Table 1. Information Desk staff’s responses to rating scale questions (by person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Very seldom</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2)Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking-in</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticketing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggaging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)Tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing around the airport</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving suggestion about travelling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving information about prohibited items</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with lost &amp; found properties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering for special needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)Reading materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document &amp; policy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper &amp; magazine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Highest ranking responses of Information Desk staff to multiple-choice questions (by person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Desk working history:</th>
<th>1 to 2 years (including 1 &amp; 2)</th>
<th>21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preferred e-mail writing style:</td>
<td>In line with passenger styles</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English use in previous jobs:</td>
<td>Spoken &amp; written (50%-50%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred English learning means:</td>
<td>Listening to tapes and watching movies</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards language errors:</td>
<td>Correction right after noticing them</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 3

**Sample Material:**

**Day 1. Giving directions to airport facilities and services**

**What do you know about...**

**Discuss:**

1. What kind of facilities and services are there in the airport where you work?
2. What should you pay attention to when giving directions to them?

**What need you know about...**

Listen to a podcast of dialogue and fill in the blanks.

SI: How do I ________?

S2: ________? Go up to the bridge, and that’s on Farm Lane. And you want to go right all the way up until you pass. Do you know where — ________?

SI: Pretty much.

S2: Do you know where ________?

SI: Yeah, I know.

S2: ________. When you see the Agriculture Hall, it will be on your right hand side. You want to go left again down towards Akers. Then the Vet Clinic should be on that road, and it says Vet Clinic.
SI: It does?
S2: Yeah. You can’t miss it. It should be ______________.
SI: Okay.
S2: ____________.
SI: Thank you very much. (Scotton and Bernsten, 1988)

Discuss:
1. What are these missing expressions used for in the above dialogue?
2. Can you think of other expressions which could be used to replace these expressions in the dialogue?

Listen to the dialogue again and discuss:
1. Is the transcription you filled up exactly the same as the original dialogue?
2. If not, what are still missing?
3. Do you think it is alright to have a conversation in real situation as the transcript shows? Why?
4. Are there any difference between this dialogue and the direction-giving talks you have had with passengers? If yes, please specify it.

What would you do when...
A terminal map is displayed on the front screen (Map link: http://www.phl.org/flashterminalmap.html).

Situation 1:
You are working at the Information Desk (with icon ‘?’) around the International Arrivals, when an old man, wearing listening aid device, just off a plane, asks you about the nearest shopping mall and the ticketing point of Northwest Airlines.

Situation 2:
You are working at the Information Desk (with icon ‘?’) near Terminal F, when a middle-aged woman, holding a kid in her arm, asks you where she could collect her baggage and exchange the currency.

Discuss in pairs how to give directions in these two situations and role-play the situation with the help of the screen map. In role-play, please try to use the expressions you have just learnt in previous dialogue. The role-play will be videotaped for evaluation at the end of the lesson.

Have you sensed the issue of...
1. Watch the video clips of 10 mini direction-giving conversations on street (Video link: http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=zUD6SkItQVw)
2. Choose the worst in terms of the politeness of direction-giver responses and explain your reasons.
3. How would you respond if you were giving the direction?
4. It has been said that the British culture stresses negative politeness more than other cultures; by negative politeness, pragmatics researchers mean respecting the hearer’s need to be independent,
free and not imposed when making action, showing distance and avoiding intruding (Cutting, 2002: 45). Do you think this argument explains some behaviour in the video clips? If yes, how? Do you think this kind of politeness similar as or different from the politeness in your culture? Why? Please support your arguments with some examples.

You can be critical about...

Discuss in pairs:
1. What is your view about the direction-giving patterns presented in the podcast?
2. Do you think using or knowing them will help you in your working context? Why?
3. How would you deal with a direction-giving task if what you are supposed to do conflict with your experience and certain factual situation?

Language focus

1. Expressions
Put the randomly ordered components of a direction-giving conversation in the first framework into the second framework according to a reasonable order, and then add as many examples as you can after each component. Note: some can be used more than once or interchangeably, so you could draw some more checks if necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation components</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Opening</td>
<td>Let's see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Pre-closing</td>
<td>It's kinda a long walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Closing</td>
<td>Yep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Request for directions</td>
<td>How can I…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Filler</td>
<td>Um</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Direction</td>
<td>Go down this street…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Confirmation checker</td>
<td>Ok?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Vocabulary
In pairs, one presents some signposts about airport facilities and services, and the other write on a provided card the keywords indicated by the signposts and as many words frequently co-occurring with the keywords in airport surroundings as possible. Then exchange the role within pairs.
For example:

Baggage: baggage retrieval, baggage claim area, baggage delay, Baggage allowance, control on hand baggage or hold baggage, dump the baggage etc.

Some more signs:

3. Intonation

Listen to part of the original first dialogue again, and mark certain arrows at the end of each sentence to show the pitch movement.

(Fall \ High rise / Low rise )

SI: How do I get to the Vet Clinic?
S2: The Vet Clinic? Oh man, it’s a haul (pause) Uh, okay. Go up to the bridge, and that’s on Farm Lane. And you want to go right all the way up until you pass—um. Do you know where—um. Are you familiar with the campus?
SI: Pretty much.

Discuss in pairs about the pitch movements chosen in the dialogue, and then match different movements with the implications they have.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitch movements</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Yes/no question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High rise</td>
<td>Incompleteness; more to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low rise</td>
<td>Politeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Extra-linguistic clues

Firstly, watch the video clips of direction-giving conversations on street again, while taking down the gestures and facial expressions noticeable to you as well as the meanings they convey. Are there any other specific clues you tend to use or you saw people use voluntarily or involuntarily in similar situations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial expressions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Peer Evaluation**

Watch the video-taped role-play of direction-giving situations and evaluate each pair’s performance using the following rating scale.  
Note: Don’t forget to add any other aspects you feel important and your comments.

**Name:** _______  
**Date:** _______  

(1= awful, 2=improvable, 3=ok, 4=excellent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction Giving</td>
<td>Accurate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Filler</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Use</td>
<td>Confirmation Checker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intonation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-Linguistic Clues</td>
<td>Facial Expressions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homework**

Find a partner and make direction-giving conversations in your working environment.

*(Copy editing: Ding Yanren)*