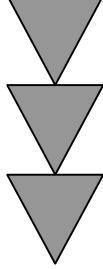


*Considerations on LSP
Teaching*

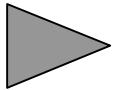
DEVELOPING REFERENCE SKILLS FOR ESSAY OR RESEARCH PAPER WRITING



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Abstract

Research activity, part and parcel of modern academic training, results in writing research papers. Success cannot be attained in this activity without knowledge and possession of specific reference skills, such as documentation, library/dictionary use, etc. Their acquisition by the students represents the task of the academic educational scheme, and specific training units including specific activities should be part of the modern languages department curriculum.



Reference skills – an academic requirement

The importance of developing reference skills from the very start of academic studies hardly needs to be emphasized. The students' academic success will depend on their mastering these skills, especially for pursuing higher research. It is not seldom that we are faced with the students' ignorance in this respect, when required to prepare an essay or any other type of research paper. The fact refers either to their

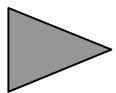
lack of knowledge regarding the writing of bibliographical entries, often listed at random and containing incomplete items of information, or to their documentation skills, including the location of written materials in the library and/or the use of a dictionary/encyclopaedia etc.

The students, even senior ones, are not to be blamed for their lack of knowledge in this respect. The educational training programmes should be called to include the acquisition of such skills in their scheme of study in the first year of academic training. The teacher's description of certain requirements regarding references is not enough. It is only by practising specific activities, even for a limited number of classes, that the students will become aware and motivated to acquire these skills, a *sine qua non* condition for pursuing higher studies.

The kind of skills under discussion should be quite extensive, including study skills as well, such as note-taking, outlining etc. Any English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course should include, as an initial step, the students' training in this respect. Also, Internet skills are of utmost importance for obtaining information posted on different sites.

In what follows, for space consideration, I shall restrict my presentation to three major reference skills:

- (a) use of the library
- (b) use of the dictionary
- (c) documentation



Use of the library

To encourage the students, by developing specific activities, to use the library, is of long-term value at a time when their study pattern has been adjusted to the demands of tertiary-level study. In addition, for ESP, the library, as a learning location, is more realistic for reference and study skills than the classroom, where most of the working materials are texts photocopied from books/magazines, many available in the library, anyway.

Therefore, the importance of the library as a reference tool should be correspondingly emphasized, at a moment when one can note the students' increasing interest in the Internet, which offers ready-made materials, rather than in the services offered by the library.

A good library offers three kinds of reading materials: books, reference materials and periodicals.

In my research regarding the services provided to the students by libraries, I have taken as an example the Central Library of the Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest. The library has been recently modernized providing on-line access to the data base, electronic magazines, and the bibliography data base of the subjects which are part of the training process in the university.

The material provided includes *books* (about 800,000 volumes) in fields such as economics – information science, marketing, management, accounting, auditing a.s.o. – along with other subjects, including philosophy, linguistics, mathematics, religion, history, geography a.s.o., *reference materials* (dictionaries, encyclopaedias, studies, annuaries etc.) and *periodicals* (e.g. 350 periodicals in English providing economic information).

The classification system in use is the Dewey Decimal System which classifies knowledge into ten categories (0-9), each represented by the figure in the hundreds position; this system corresponds to the standards existing in EU libraries. The modern on-line library service provides the students with various information according to title, author, subject, publisher, year of publication, key word etc. As regards the subject, more information is provided by a specialized Bibliography Reference Office.

The books can be borrowed for a specific period, consulted in the reading halls, or parts of them can be ad-hoc photocopied. The library includes a number of reading halls with an open-shelf system, and the students need to learn how to locate the books on the shelves.

Periodicals are of a special value for research, in case the needed information is not available in books. It is important for the students to learn the procedure for

locating a relevant article in a specific journal, current issues of periodicals being usually put on display.

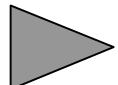
As regards reference books, they cannot be lent to the students, and must be consulted in the reading halls.

There is a lot to be learned about the type of information offered by the different programmes/projects working in the library of the Academy of Economic Studies (e.g. ProQuest/ABI Inform, TStor, etc.), the users of which are the students, trainers, researchers, and other categories of interested persons.

But, in order to encourage the students to use the library, the description of the benefits of its services is not enough; it is necessary to familiarize the students with the operation of a library, and this could be achieved by giving them some practical training.

The first step to be covered is to take the class of first year students to the library, to see for themselves the respective locations, and to get the explanation of the specialized staff on the correct procedures in use for getting the required information on some books, periodical articles, subjects etc in the online catalogues. This activity should be carried under the teacher's supervision. For better results the class should be divided into two/three smaller groups.

The second step to be covered consists in a number of individual tasks/activities, like the one given below.



Sample of activity:

Each student receives a list containing 1/2/3 authors/titles/ subjects/key words, etc. and a task-oriented worksheet which has to be filled in.

Name/Surname

Name of the author(s)

Title of the book(s)

Call mark(s)

Year of publication

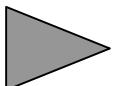
Place of publication

Publisher

Total number of pages.....

Having found the required information, it has to be recorded and the respective book/publication should be located in the library accordingly: by direct access, in case of an open-shelf system, by filling up a slip to be handed to the staff, by addressing the Bibliography Reference Office, etc.

The students' worksheets should be evaluated by the trainer, so that their progress may be assessed and additional activities be provided for reinforcing their training.



Use of a dictionary

A dictionary is a valuable aid to reading as well as to writing skills. It is an important source of information on a language – information that is generally not available in a grammar text – while specialized dictionaries provide special information focused on different areas of interest.

The teacher should start the training by introducing the students to the best dictionaries in their field of study. It is important for first year students to be informed about the best dictionaries existing in their area of study, not only in their mother tongue but also in the foreign language they are studying; It is also important for the students to be made aware of some aspects regarding dictionaries in general, such as:

- use of an up-to-date dictionary, since language is an ever changing phenomenon
- use of abridged dictionaries only in extreme situations, as they have limited value because of the limited information provided
- use of large dictionaries that contain about 125,000 entries and offer complete information
- careful use of bilingual dictionaries, avoiding those which indicate only the most obvious lexical equivalents, because they can generate misunderstandings/ mistakes
- use of at least two/three dictionaries for getting the right information, since dictionaries vary in the kind of information they offer (e.g.: Oxford

Advanced Learner's, Webster's Dictionary, Longman's Dictionary, for general English).

But the simple possession of a dictionary and the taking over of the meaning indicated for an entry is not enough. It is the teacher's task to teach the students how to interpret the information offered by a dictionary, to pay attention to various symbols, abbreviations, pronunciation, stress, other explanations etc.

For effective classroom instruction every student and the teacher should have the same dictionary/dictionaries. To start with, the teacher should make sure that the students understand the arrangement of entries, abbreviations, different symbols, pronunciation, etc. This should be followed by some practical activities, such as those described below:

Activity 1. A first activity consists in handing out a text containing a reading passage, and asking the students to underline all unknown words. The students will then be asked to infer the meanings of the words from the context and then to check the accuracy of the guess by looking them up in the dictionary.

In the case of certain words used in a very specific text the student can be faced with big surprises. Thus, a word can have a number of very different meanings; which one is to be selected in order to get the real message of the text?

Example: "***budgetary consideration***". In Romanian, the meanings of the word "***consideration***" listed in the dictionary are: *considerație, respect, analiză, studiu, examinare, discuție, dezbatere, deliberare*, but also *despăgubire, compensație, daună* etc. However, in a text dealing with financial problems, the real meaning is "*prevedere bugetară*" and not „*examinare bugetară*” or „*compensație bugetară*” which induce a totally different meaning.

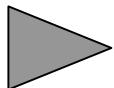
In this way, the students are made aware of the trap represented by the inadequate use of a dictionary, and of the need to rely on the clues offered by the context in order to identify the right meaning.

Activity 2. Another activity would be to indicate to the students different specialized words and to ask them to identify the following, for the respective entries:

- symbols and abbreviations

- spelling
- grammatical functions
- area of usage, etc.

This activity will make them aware of the complexity and difficulty regarding the correct use of a dictionary and the attention to be paid to it.



Documentation

Nowadays, there is a considerable expansion of knowledge in any field of research, and nobody can exist in isolation, rediscovering what has already been discovered; consequently, some information is borrowed from others. These ‘borrowings’ constitute ***documentation***, which represents, in fact, a written acknowledgement of the fact that some opinions/ideas were borrowed from others at the time when a paper/essay, etc. was being written. It is very important to train the students to become aware of the necessity of showing intellectual honesty when writing a text, as well as to understand that plagiarism is always considered a serious offence.

Excepting common knowledge – i.e. long and generally accepted scientific discoveries /facts of history/reality, etc. – any material borrowed directly or indirectly from a certain source by direct quotations/concepts paraphrased in the same or another language must be acknowledged.

Documentation is revealed under the format of: (1) footnotes and end notes; (2) bibliography; (3) reference lists and numbered citations. Footnotes and bibliography, on the one hand, and references, on the other, are also considered two different methods of documentation.

The trainer has the obligation to introduce to first year students each format of documentation selected to be used in papers, by handing out relevant texts as examples.

▪ **Footnotes / End notes / Notes**

They are used to acknowledge the source of information used, and may also include some extra comments not fitting into the text. A note is indicated by a

number placed at the end of the quotation / idea rephrased in the text; it is written either at the bottom of the page on which the reference number is placed (*footnote*), or at the end of the text, in which case it is called *endnote* or simply *note*. It contains the name of the author(s), title of the work (underlined / in italics), city of publication, name of the publisher, year of publication and, very important, the page(s) on which the borrowed text is printed. In case of more than two authors, the first author's name is mentioned followed by “*et al.*”. The facts of publication are given in brackets.

Example:

¹ Jules Backman, *The Economics of the Electrical Machinery Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) pp. 135-138

▪ **The bibliography**

It includes both the works mentioned in the footnotes / endnotes and all the other works consulted, although not directly referred to in the paper. Bibliography is listed at the end of the text, after endnotes if this is the case.

The bibliography generally contains information similar to footnotes/endnotes, but with some slight differences:

- 1) sources are listed in alphabetical order, according to the author's last name, separated from the first name by a comma;
- 2) major parts of the entry are separated by periods;
- 3) publishing facts are not placed in parentheses;
- 4) page(s) number is not included;
- 5) several works by the same author are listed in alphabetical order by title, but the author's name after the first entry is replaced by a long dash.

Example:

Calero, H. *Winning the Negotiation*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1999

Carnegie, D. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Sydney: Angres and Robertson, 2001

▪ **Reference list and numbered citations**

Sometimes, simply called **References**, these are placed at the end of the paper. References can be numbered and, in this case, the text contains, parenthetically, the respective number and the specific page of the reference after each source of

information. References can be listed either according to (1) their entrance order or (2) alphabetically.

In case of references listed alphabetically, without having numbers assessed, the year of publication is cited parenthetically within the text, also including the specific page.

Example 1:

Some grammarians, such as Quirk and Greenbaum [18; pp. 62-67] mention the existence of a “large number of other closed-system items” placed before the head of the noun phrase ...

18. Quirk, R. and A. Greenbaum, S. *A University Grammar of English*. N.Y: Harper and Row, 1988

Example 2:

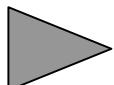
Some grammarians, such as Quirk and Greenbaum (1988, pp. 62-67) mention the existence ... etc.

An important aspect that needs to be emphasized is that consistency must be maintained in documentation. Whichever method or format of documentation the students choose, it must be consistently used throughout the paper, because, otherwise, the documentation could be considered careless. The two activities below could motivate the students to do their best for acquiring these skills.

Activity 1. Correct the errors you notice in the following footnote / endnote / bibliography entry

...

Activity 2. Given the information “...” prepare the footnote; follow one of the methods discussed.

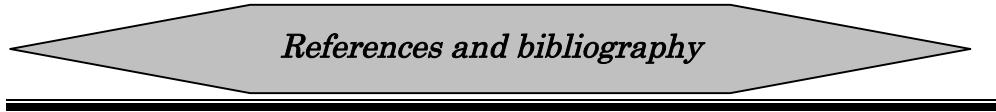


Conclusions

As shown above, reference skills are regarded as highly important for the students' academic success. Early initiation into the methodology of research, familiarization with the library, training in using dictionaries and reference-giving, according to accepted academic standards, represent a necessity, considering the students'

obligation of being involved in scientific research and of writing, over the years of academic training, research papers and annual or final dissertations.

I therefore consider it beneficial to introduce specific training units devoted to the development of reference skills in the curriculum addressed to first year intermediate-level students.



References and bibliography

- Martin V., A. et al.** 2001. *Guide to Language and Study Skills for College Students of English as a Second Language*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
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