

## ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES ACTIVITY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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### **Summary**

**Introduction.** *The greatest importance of the continuing professional development is the use of 3-5 languages, with at least 2-3 on the level of native/first language to form varied cooperative networks for the creation of new knowledge. English for Academic Purposes activity as a form of life activity is a basic demand for studying English for Academic Purposes.*

**Aim of the Study.** *Aim is to identify and analyze English for Academic Purposes activity on the pedagogical discourse.*

**Materials and methods.** *The search for English for Academic Purposes activity on the pedagogical discourse involves a process of analyzing the meaning of key concepts “English for Academic Purposes”, “joint activity” and “outcome”. Moreover, the study demonstrates how the key concepts are related to the idea of “English for Academic Purposes activity”.*

**Main results:** *the study presents a potential model for development indicating how the steps of the process are related following a logical chain: English for Academic Purposes → English for Academic Purposes activity → outcome → empirical study.*

**Conclusions.** *English for Academic Purposes activity offers many interesting possibilities for studying English for Academic Purposes lifelong, life-near and lifewide learning.*

**Key words:** *English for Academic Purposes activity, outcome*

### **Introduction**

The greatest importance of the continuing professional development is the use of 3–5 languages, with at least 2-3 on the level of native/first language to form varied cooperative networks for the creation of new knowledge (Maslo, 2006, 16).

English for Academic Purposes activity as a form of life activity is a basic demand for studying English for Academic Purposes as an integral part of professional development (Zaščerinska, 2008, 3).

**Aim of the study** is to identify and analyze English for Academic Purposes activity on the pedagogical discourse.

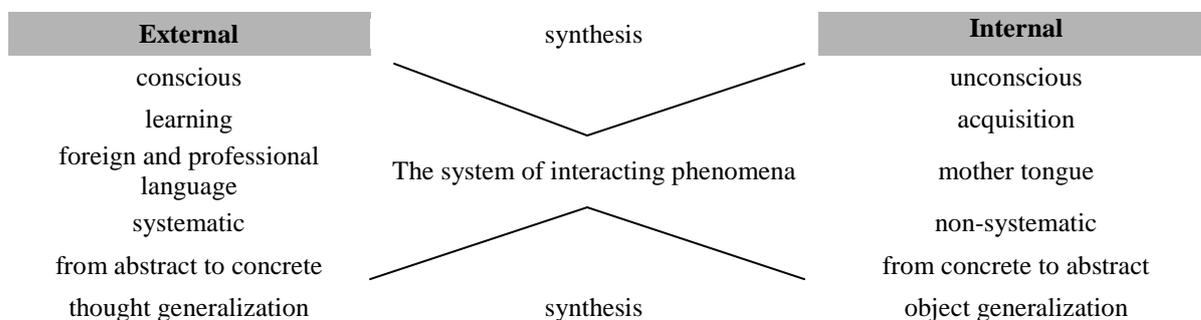
### **Materials and methods**

The modern issues of global developmental trends emphasize “a prime importance in sustainable development that is to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Zimmermann, 2003, 9). Hence, sustainable personality is a person who sees relationships and inter-relationships between nature, society and the economy (Kaivola and Rohweder, 2007, 24). In other words, this is a person who is able to develop the system of external and internal perspectives, and in turn this developing the system of external and internal perspectives becomes a main condition for the sustainable personality to develop. For instance, the concern of the European Union, namely, to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Commission, 2004, 2) demonstrates the significance of developing the system of external and internal perspectives for the development of humans, institutions, society and mankind where everyone is

responsible for the world and history, for his/her own unique fate and for the fate of nature and culture (ПАНОВ, 2007, 140).

Thus, the life necessity to develop the system of two perspectives, namely, external and internal, determines the research methodology on identifying and analyzing English for Academic Purposes activity for professional development on the pedagogical discourse (See Table 1):

*Table 1: Developing the system of external and internal perspectives as a life necessity*



However, sustainable personality is often realized from one of the perspectives: from the internal perspective accentuating cognition, from the external perspective accentuating social interaction, finding a balance between the external and internal perspectives (Surikova, 2007, 29).

The methodological foundation of the present research to identify and analyze English for Academic Purposes activity for professional development is formed by the System-Constructivist Theory based on (Maslo, 2006, 39) Parson's system theory where any activity is a system, Luhmann's theory which emphasizes communication as a system, theory of symbolic interactionism and theory of subjectivism.

The System-Constructivist Theory assumes that the world is constructed in modules (Maslo, 2006, 39). New Constructivism supposes that understanding is not separated from the observer, and reality is socially constructed that is confirmed by people who are at close quarters (Maslo, 2006, 39; Maslo, 2006, 57). Constructing is a creative process that assumes a variety of meaning understanding to offer a variety of opportunities to construct mankind development (Maslo, 2006, 16). Constructive process is always situational (Lamberigts and Dīpenbroks by Ose, Surikova, Fernāte, Daniela, Kalniņa, Maslo, 2008, 443). Cognitive process is considered by the Pedagogical Theory of Social Constructivism to be a component: perception is not right or wrong but it is relevant to a place or conditions (Maslo, 2006, 39; Maslo, 2006, 57).

Hence, the System-Constructivist Theory emphasizes that

- human being's point of view depends on the subjective aspect: everyone has his/her own system of external and internal perspectives (See Table 1) that is a complex open system (Rudzinska, 2008, 1) and
- experience plays the central role in a construction process (Maslo, 2007, 39).

The mechanism of social constructivism (Žogla, 2007, 2) is as follows: participants get word meaning not tasting it but acquire understanding, learning with understanding (interpretative cognition), to discuss and join word meaning working in groups, to improve word meaning one from another, to participate in the self-evaluation and mutual evaluation of newly constructed word meaning: work creatively and productively.

Thus, four approaches to English for Academic Purposes activity on the pedagogical discourse are revealed: from the internal perspective accentuating cognition, from the external perspective accentuating social interaction, finding a balance between the external and internal perspectives and developing the system of the external and internal perspectives.

The fourth approach is considered to be applicable to the present research on English for Academic Purposes activity.

Moreover, the author's position on the topic of the present research, namely, developing the system of the external and internal perspectives, is reflected in the principles of mutual sustainability and mutual complementarity based on the methodology of the present contribution. The principle of mutual sustainability means to provide a complex of possibilities that allows for everyone to learn (Панов, 2007, 72). And the reflected principle of complementarity points that opposite things (principles in the context of the present research) supplement each other for finding the truth (Grabovska, 2006, 21–22).

Hence, the present research is a social product where the prerequisite is dialogue (Ольшанский, 2000, 6).

The search for English for Academic Purposes activity involves a process of analyzing the meaning of key concepts “English for Academic Purposes”, “joint activity” and “outcome”. Moreover, the study demonstrates how the key concepts are related to the idea of “English for Academic Purposes activity”. The study would present a potential model for development indicating how the steps of the process are related following a logical chain: English for Academic Purposes → English for Academic Purposes activity → outcome → empirical study.

### 1. Defining English for Academic Purposes

A provisional, rather general, working definition of English for Academic Purposes is that “English for Academic Purposes is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education systems” (ETIC 1975 by Jordan, 1997, 1).

The core elements of English for Academic Purposes are determined as follows (Zaščerinska, 2008, 6): the subject content and language research skills.

### 2. English for Academic Purposes activity

English for Academic Purposes activity is based on General Genetic Law of Development or interiorization formulated by L. Vygotsky (See Table 2).

The process of interiorization by L. Vygotsky allows discussing English for Academic Purposes activity in the frame of the present research (See Table 2)

- as the quasi-autonomous zone where an individual is between his/her levels of actual and proximal development being able to implement a certain activity at a certain level with other's particular assistance (Цукерман, Елизарова, Фрумина, Чудинова, 1993, 35) and
- as the sub-phase between student's activity with the teacher's assistance and the student's autonomous activity where understanding and/or quasi-concept is assymertical, in flux at various stages and can be interpreted differently at different points in time (Robbins, 2007, 52).

*Table 2: Theses of L. Vygotsky's theory on the three zones of development*

<b>Zone of Proximal Development</b>	<b>Zone of Quasi-Autonomous Development</b>	<b>Zone of Actual Development</b>
The zone is a stage between the zone of actual development, where an individual is able to solve tasks at a certain level of difficulty, and the possible level of his/her potential development that is possible to determine while his/her implementing a task with the other's assistance or zone of training	The zone is a sub-phase between an individual's activity with other's help and his/her autonomous activity where an individual is between his/her levels of actual and proximal development being able to implement a certain activity at a certain level with other's particular assistance	The zone presents individual's knowledge, skills and attitudes at the present moment; an individual can implement a certain activity at a certain level without any other's assistance, independently or reproductive zone

Although Activity Theory is associated with the name of A. Leontyev rather than L. Vygostky, the concept originated with L. Vygostky (Blunden, 2009, 8). A. Leont'ev made a

distinction between the individual's *action*, and the social *activity* of which it is a part (Leont'ev, 1978, 7) and which gives it meaning (Blunden, 2009, 10).

For a zone of proximal development to be created, there must be a joint activity that creates a context for a student and expert (teacher in the frame of the present research) interaction (Benson, 1995, 8). For example, student's learning whereas the teacher's presence is already realized as a certain level of joint activity (Донцов, Дубовская, Улановская, 1998, 2).

Hence, English for Academic Purposes activity is joint activity (Zašcerinska, 2009, 10).

The peculiarities of English for Academic Purposes activity are determined as follows:

- language activity is based on the established *subject* ↔ *subject* relations that are the basis for a possibility of both their personalities growing richer, a possibility of forming new knowledge and experience (Fedjukova, 1998, 42). Moreover, each subject also plays a certain number of social roles at the same time (Лобанов, 2004, 82) where the alternation of all the relations at the same time makes professional development more complicated in the frame of the English for Academic Purposes activity: formal roles while functioning in a society; roles within a group while building relationships with the members of a certain group; interpersonal relations while constructing relations with a person who know each other; an individual role based on his/her own expectations;
- English for Academic Purposes activity is tied to specific activities which are characterized by an explicitness, reflexivity and formulability that is not functional in everyday practice (Wells, 1994, 5).

In joint activity of all kinds, speech performs two crucial functions (Well, 1994, 3): first, it enables the participants to coordinate their actions in relation to the object in view and, second, it provides a means for representing and reflecting on the persons, things and actions involved and on the relationships between them.

Joint activity (interaction (Council of Europe, 2001, 14) and, consequently, English for Academic Purposes activity, is based on acts of speech (Council of Europe, 2001, 9) that are also realized as speaking acts (Robbins, 2007, 53) or speech (Vigotskis, 2002, 275) where communicative speech, nominative speech, echallic speech (repetitive speech), stochastic speech (probability prediction, memorizing sets of material), constructive speech, etc. are the physiological levels of the speech organisation (Leontiev by Robbins, 2007, 54), the use of spoken or written language (Wells, 1994, 3), individuals' oral communication that includes speaking and listening (Council of Europe, 2001, 9), communicative language act (Tiĭla, 2005, 52; Maslo, 2007, 1).

Speech is used to mediate the solution of novel problem, the cultural meaning potential of the language system itself is modified and developed to meet the new demands that are placed on it (Wells, 1994, 3).

Speech develops first with external communicative/social speech, then egocentric speech defined as the transition from the social activity to a more individualized activity (Benson, 1995, 2) and finally inner speech.

The analysis of different models to foreign language teaching/learning, namely, the model of *Input-Output*, the model of *Reception-Production*, etc, allows considering the model of *Comprehension-Production* as the base of English for Academic Purposes activity because learning hinges not so much on richness of input, but crucially on the choices made by individuals as responsible agents with dispositions to think and act in certain ways rooted in their discursive histories (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 1995, 116). Comprehension and production have different genetic roots, such as with thought and speech (with thought having a pre-linguistic root and speech having a pre-intellectual root) with the emphasis on a developmental trajectory, attempting to establish the point of convergence of the two processes (Robbins, 2007, 50-51). A model of language production acknowledges the potential for and existence of different cognitive structures underlying comprehension and production (Ruder, Finch, 1987, 134). The model also allows acquiring cultural or foreign discourse competence (Kramsch, 1995, 53-54).

Hence, English for Academic Purposes activity as joint activity is based on the model of *Comprehension-Production*.

Thus, based on understanding of microgroup activity defined by Surikova (Surikova, 2007, 38) and of project (Blunden, 2009, 18) the essence of English for Academic Purposes activity in the context of the present research is defined as shared aim oriented joint activity that provides joint social interaction and cognition for each participant and increases opportunities of gaining social experience.

The advantages of English for Academic Purposes activity are as follows: widening opportunities for every student to construct social experience (the experience in social interaction and cognitive activity) that is a significant aspect of the communicative competence and promoting opportunities for self-realization.

### **3. Validity of English for Academic Purposes activity**

A feature of joint activity as its efficiency is emphasized by the European Commission (2006, 2; Maslo, 2006, 17). Efficiency involves the relationship between inputs (opportunities of gaining experience in the frame of the present research) and outputs (Robbins, 2007, 50) (communicative competence as a result – a level of quality of student's activity (Maslo, 2006, 54) in the frame of the present research) (Hahele, 2006, 148) in a process. Systems are efficient if the inputs produce the maximum output (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, 2) where the change of the focus from an input based teaching/learning process to an outcome based process is emphasized (Blūma, 2008, 673). Outcome evaluation is evaluation with the focus not on the evaluation of teaching/learning results but on the evaluation of inter-connections between teaching/learning activity and its results in the united system of criteria (Hahele, 2006, 148, 152; Maslo, 2006, 52) that comprises (Maslo, 2006, 53) self-evaluation, internal evaluation and external evaluation.

Hence, English for Academic Purposes activity is validated, assessed and evaluated by communicative competence.

### **Empirical study**

The sample of the present empirical study involves 5 students of Fifth Baltic Summer School *Technical Informatics and Information Technology* at the Institute of Computer Science of the Tartu University, August 8–23, 2008, Tartu, Estonia. All 5 students have got Bachelor or Master Degree in different fields of Computer Sciences and working experience in different fields. English is a foreign language for all the group students.

The International Summer School offers special courses in English to support the internationalization of education and the cooperation among the universities of the Baltic Sea Region.

The aims of the Baltic Summer Schools *Technical Informatics and Information Technology* are determined as preparation for international Master and Ph.D. programs in Germany, further specialization in computer science and information technology and learning in a simulated environment.

A relevant set of methods is used to evaluate each criteria of the communicative competence, namely, students' social experience in General English, students' social experience in Professional Language and students' social experience in English for Academic Purposes: observation, self-observation, students' social experience evaluation (educator) and students' social experience self-evaluation (a student him/herself). The questionnaire involved 12 constructs, i. e. 6 constructs of social interaction experience in General English, Professional Language and English for Academic Purposes and 6 constructs of cognitive activity experience in General English, Professional Language and English for Academic Purposes for self-evaluation of each student's social experience:

- social interaction means that students (Žogla, 2007, 6) participate in the activity, exchange ideas with others, co-operate with others, analyze a problem, are in the dialogue and search for problem solving tools together with others;
- cognitive activity means that students (Maslo, 2007, 41) regulate his/her own learning process, set his/her own goals, take responsibility for his/her own learning, work independently, evaluate his/her own learning process and continue to improve his/her own skills.

The evaluation scale of five levels for each question is given where 1 means low level of communicative competence and 6 points out high level of communicative competence.

Communicative competence was evaluated on the first day of the Baltic Summer School 2008, namely, August 8, 2008, and on the seventh day, namely, August 15, 2008.

The summary of Survey 1 results of the students' communicative competence within the English for Academic Purposes activity in the frame of the Baltic Summer School 2008 allows drawing a conclusion that the critical level of the students' communicative competence dominates in the English group.

Between Survey 1 and 2 of the students' communicative competence English for Academic Purposes activity was implemented in various forms and/or teaching/learning techniques and/or activities, namely, discussion, prepared talk and communication games and information-gap activities (Zaščerinska, 2009). The results' summary of Survey 2 of the students' communicative competence within the English for Academic Purposes activity in the frame of the Baltic Summer School 2008 allows drawing a conclusion that the average level of communicative competence dominates in the English group.

## Results

Having summarized the individual results of two surveys of the students' communicative competence within the English for Academic Purposes activity in the frame of the Baltic Summer School 2008 the positive changes have been revealed: Student F1 has improved the level of the communicative competence in terms of social experience in Professional Language and English for Academic Purposes; Student F2 has enriched the level of the communicative competence in terms of social experience in General English and English for Academic Purposes; Student M1 has developed the level of the communicative competence in terms of social experience in General English, Professional Language and English for Academic Purposes; Student M2 has changed the level of the communicative competence in terms of social experience in General English, Professional Language and English for Academic Purposes; Student M3 has improved the level of the communicative competence in terms of social experience in General English and English for Academic Purposes.

After having implemented English for Academic Purposes activity as a part of the *Experience of Social Interaction and Cognitive Activity* pedagogical curriculum the result summary of two surveys of the students' communicative competence within the English for Academic Purposes activity in the frame of Baltic Summer School 2008 demonstrate the positive changes in comparison with Survey 1: the level of the students' communicative competence in terms of social experience in General English of four students has been enriched; the level of the students' communicative competence in terms of social experience in Professional Language of two students has been developed; the level of the students' communicative competence in terms of social experience in English for Academic Purposes of five students has been improved.

Taking into consideration the results of implementing English for Academic Purposes activity the conclusion could be drawn that testing the content of the *Experience of Social Interaction and Cognitive Activity* pedagogical action curriculum in all the phases of implementing English for Academic Purposes activity essentially influenced the enhancement of the students' communicative competence by the criteria, namely, students' social experience in General English, out of three possible criteria revealed by the significance in difference between

the levels of the students' communicative competence in terms of social experience in General English coefficient at the beginning and at the end of the present empirical study [„990“].

The content of the *Experience of Social Interaction and Cognitive Activity* pedagogical action curriculum promoted social experience constructing opportunities of all five students involved into the study.

### Conclusions

The findings of the research allow drawing conclusions that English for Academic Purposes activity influences and determines the students' success or failure for developing the students' communicative competence.

The present research has *limitations*. English for Academic Purposes activity was studied paying attention to the students' needs regarding the students' communicative competence in the *English for Academic Purposes* course, but it was studied in isolation from the work of educators of other courses and their contribution. If the results of the work of educators of other courses and their contribution had been available for analysis, different results could have been attained. There is a possibility to continue the study.

Therein, the following hypothesis for further studies is put forth: in order to develop the students' communicative competence it is necessary to promote the students' communicative competence, as well as to create a favourable learning environment which supports learners' needs and provides successful use of the students' communicative competence in a multicultural environment.

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