



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Pedagogiska utvecklingsprojekt rapport

Course Renewal: English for Specific
Purposes for Students of
Law/Economics

Innehållsförteckning

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Summary

This project provided educational renewal to two previously taught courses—English for Specific Purposes for students of Law and Economics—with joint sessions. It aimed to more effectively utilize joint sessions to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration for students who will encounter similar situations in English language and communication professionally, and as a result of student feedback and evaluation of exercises and assignments a workbook was compiled for use in future courses. The project also took into account how one can maintain the integrity of each subject while teaching an effective course for both. The course was furthermore updated to enhance the current teaching material to incorporate blended learning methods.

Project Description

This project for the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for students of a) Economics and b) Law updated and enhanced these two pre-existing courses as taught through several joint sessions. It furthermore aimed to more effectively reach students who are likely to work in similar environments or together in a professional capacity. The primary goals of this project were to 1) improve student learning by bridging relevant pre-existing material for both law and economics students studying English for Specific Purposes and to engage the students more effectively in the joint sessions, 2) develop a workbook that incorporates pertinent English exercises and study information for both groups of students, and 3) to renew instructional methods to include more blended learning in the form of apps and online means of self-study. In these courses, students are offered the opportunity to communally develop written and communicative skills that they will likely share in the workplace through joint sessions. They therefore share a great deal of instructional material and may gain professionally through further cross-disciplinary cooperation.

Throughout the course of this project students provided feedback at several points during the term on the material and assignments presented to them, to ensure that important topics and skills were incorporated from both the instructor's perspective and according to their own interests. The workbook itself includes text and exercises concerning 1) basic English grammar, 2) genre conventions for documents relevant to law and economics, and 3) applied grammar in use for law and economics. Vocabulary is primarily addressed via reading assignments based on current events and publicly available legal documents, and blended learning methods such as quiz apps (e.g. *Quizlet*).

This development project was carried out in the Department of English, which currently offers these courses for students of Law and Economics. Within the English Department, two project members were involved: 1) the project manager, who is the Director of Studies and had previously developed and taught the courses; 2) an instructor who previously taught the courses and carried out the

project's planning and implementation. The instructor was responsible for planning seminars, adapting assignments, designing feedback forms, and compiling the workbook and this report, while the project manager was responsible for oversight of the project and worked with the instructor in planning the course, reviewing feedback at regular intervals, and assessing the overall results.

Implementation

The project was carried out during two terms: HT 2019- VT 2020, with the first term dedicated to development and assessment in the classroom. There, continuous student evaluations were used to assess the suitability of exercises and assignments. The second term then focused on addressing the students' feedback with respect to the scope and focus of the course as well as assignments, revising the lessons based on the teacher's assessment, and designing a revised workbook for students.

First, during the pre-planning stage, considerations were made given the course plan, pre-existing course materials, and previous student and teacher evaluations of the courses. The course plan was previously established for the two terms, so any changes made were done in line with learning outcomes described therein. New exercises, however, were able to be integrated into the existing course structure, with minor changes to the order and topics addressed for individual lessons. Materials such as feedback forms and new assignments were also prepared. During the first semester, both the instructor and students continuously assessed the effectiveness of the new materials. Students provided their expectations for the course, noting which exercises were useful and effective, which aspects they wanted more or less focus, and which topics were most appreciated. During this time, exercises and assignments were evaluated for inclusion in the workbook and next semester of the course, and the overall feedback was evaluated regarding course updates and improvements.

In Semester 2 the revised course outline was implemented using the new materials and assignments, and exercises for the workbook. Self-study methods were addressed, and new seminar topics such as intercultural communication and negotiations were introduced. Additional continuous feedback was received from students, further indicating which methods were most effective and preferred. Finally, the exercises for the workbook were revised and compiled into a working model for future classes' use.

Theory

To better prepare them for the workplace, students need exposure to different interactions and an awareness of registers and style so they can develop pragmatic competence in English along with grammar. Furthermore, law students specifically

have indicated a gap between skills taught at university in ESP courses and the real world application of English—specifically negotiation, organization, coordination, team work, social and presentation skills, and project management (Lehtonen, 2017)—notably, areas which are highly relevant to students of economics as well. In response to these needs, effective use of joint seminar sessions and presentations among students from both fields are shown to encourage teamwork and feedback from peers.

In addition to the formal classroom environment, students have access to many informal digital modes of learning. Therefore, it is good to encourage self-directed and naturalistic learning (Benson, 2011) through blended means, as well as to offer group-wide online discussion forums of current events. Apps for vocabulary learning (e.g. *Quizlet*, *Memrise*) are especially useful for discipline-specific material such as “terms of art” in Legal vocabulary (Łuczak, 2017). Here, they can be applied not only to strictly legal language, but also translations of Swedish terms, and to learn specific word classes such as formal adverbial prepositions (e.g. *thereof*), and relevant financial and economic vocabulary. These methods allow students to practice where they want, when they want, regardless of their proficiency level.

To accommodate both grammatical and communicative competence, teaching strategies were tailored to address the wide range of skills used by students, including oral communication with clients, effective translation, conferencing, and summarizing of information. This has the aim of preparing students for professional communication, familiarizing them with respective terminologies, and preparing them to address the requirements of further educational programs in law and economics.

Results

Evaluations from both students and the instructor were reported to the project leader following each semester. Students provided feedback via evaluation forms on several factors throughout the term, such as a) relevance of an assignment or range of topics to their given field, b) interest in a particular topic or assignment, c) suggestions for improvement and topics they would like to address further or think are particularly relevant for their disciplines.

Exercises and Workbook

Grammatical exercises were provided for students which contain tasks that are relevant to both disciplines and language practice at a general level. In the final version of the workbook, students are able to be assigned general study exercises, find areas where they need grammatical improvement, and be referred to further description of that topic. The development of this workbook is a primary goal of the first and second terms—using assignments to find which types of exercises provide the most benefit, and how to integrate the relevant material, along with asking for student feedback and assessment.

New reading comprehension assignments were also introduced which allowed the students to closely read current news articles or real reports, letters, or documents on topics related to Law and Economics, and an effort was made to find topics that could be discussed from both perspectives. These assignments not only concentrated on understanding key points and arguments from the articles, but also interesting uses of vocabulary and grammar. Sometimes, students were asked to find two or more examples of grammar, vocabulary, or phrasing they found difficult, confusing, or interesting and admirable to bring to class and discuss with their peers, while others gave specific vocabulary terms that students were asked to define. Written assignments were also adapted, and new assignments were included so that students had the opportunity to evaluate and re-write formal/informal letters.

There remained two graded spoken assignments: one presenting a news article and the other argumentative or problem-solution. However, the second presentation was given online over Zoom, which was both a consequence of the mandated distance teaching situation during the second term, but also a welcome opportunity to implement such an exercise. This provided a realistic environment mimicking a conference call or online meeting, one which students were almost entirely unfamiliar with, but in a safe space. Activities planned for the class on 'negotiations' were adapted for online meetings, including a version of the "\$2 Game" in which students have different negotiating personality roles and must try to decide who gets what portion of the money. This worked well using breakout rooms in Zoom, and 'secret' roles (e.g. try to get more than a fair share) were distributed via individual chat.

Evaluations

Initial evaluations were conducted after the first lesson and were presented in conjunction with a language diagnostic exercise. Students took the questionnaire home, and responded to questions regarding their previous experience with English and learning, types of exposure to English, information about their personal or professional backgrounds which could have some impact on their goals or learning, and finally, their expectations and hopes for the course, and desired focus. Over the two terms, a total of 16 students chose to take part in the surveys (with varying numbers each survey), and the chart below indicates the types of responses students reported when asked about their expectations, what they would like to gain, and areas of focus. These were freely written responses, and topics of note were categorized into the groups illustrated below (Figure 1).

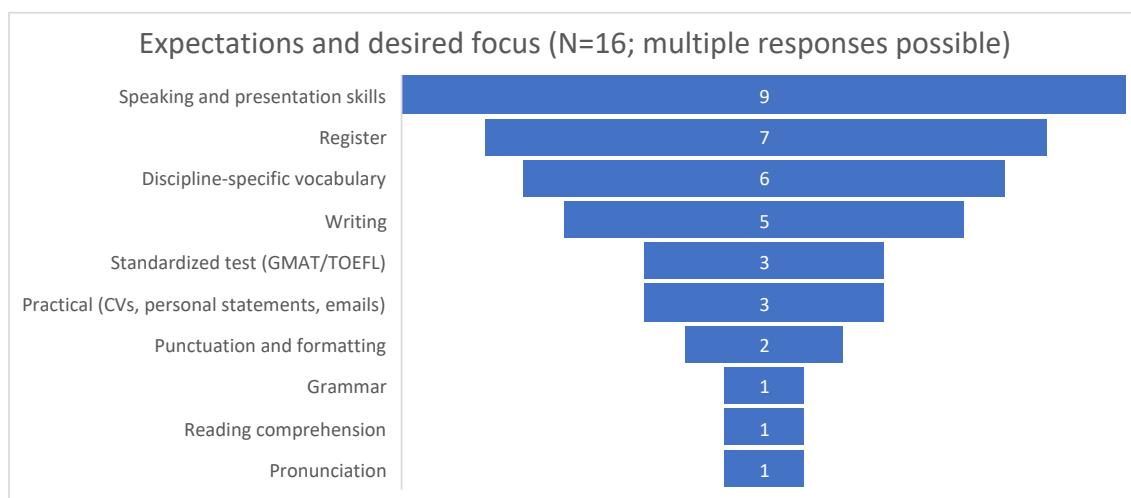


Figure 1. Initial categorization of responses re. expectations and desired focus (N=16; multiple responses possible)

Results from the diagnostic survey indicate that speaking and oral presentations are an area of high concern for students, which they would like the opportunity to explore, as one student said, “in a safe space.” These included discussion activities as well as formal presentations. Another chief area of focus was their ability to adjust their speech and writing to the correct register and use appropriate levels of formality. This was mentioned in connection to writing formal texts as well as communications such as emails.

Later in the course, evaluations were made with respect to specific activities and exercises that had been completed by the middle of the course (shown in Figure 2). Students were also asked about what they thought of the joint legal/economic approach thus far, and how the course was meeting their expectations. Responses indicate that, overall, students found the combination interesting or were indifferent (Table 1). None reported the joint sessions to be detrimental or difficult in any way.

Table 1 Example responses to the question, “What do you think about the joint economic/legal approach?”

Interesting as they are often intertwined
Not bad!
I find it interesting as it broadens the perspective
It would have been nice with more economy students but it is good that some articles cover the subject. It's a good idea to share experiences and topics.
I hardly know who studies what so it doesn't bother me at all

2020-06-11

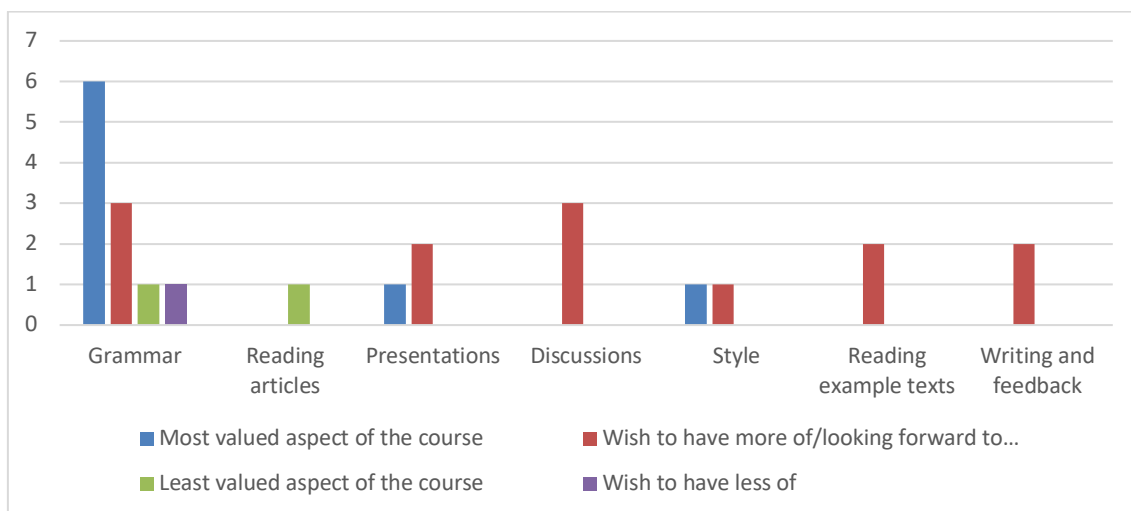


Figure 2. Mid-term categorization of responses re. questions of 'value' and the desire to have more/les...

The assignments evaluated in the mid-term evaluation included their first oral presentations and a short written assignment describing their dream job (Figures 3 & 4). Results indicate that, while students enjoyed the writing assignment, they did not associate much future value to it, whereas even if the spoken presentation was not as enjoyable, it was a rewarding activity. The first written assignment is seen as valuable from the point of the instructor, as it is their first complete text and provides a good diagnostic of their writing level, adherence to formal style, and information about what sort of work they hope to do in the future.

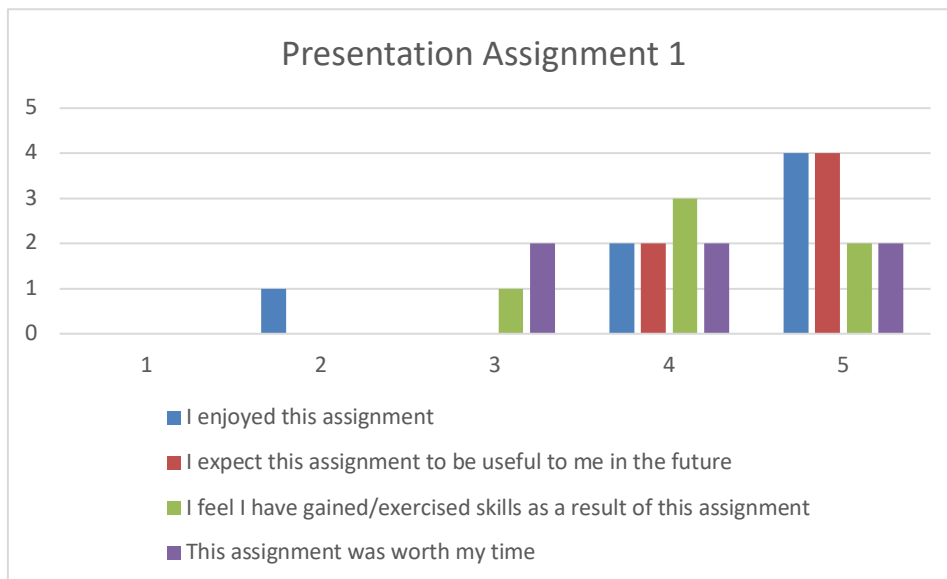


Figure 3.1 Mid-term evaluation of Presentation Assignment 1

2020-06-11

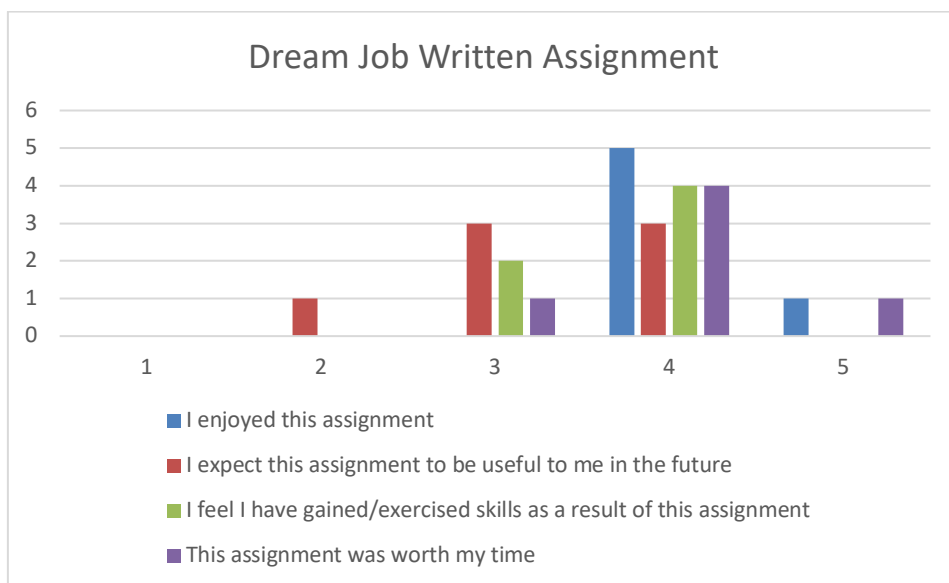


Figure 4 Mid-term evaluation of Dream Job Written Assignment

Finally, students performed an end-of-course evaluation that was separate from the official course evaluation. While only 8 participants in total fully completed this evaluation, others offered feedback via email in both terms. This survey was similar to the mid-term evaluation in that it addressed specific assignments from the course, but additionally revisited many of the questions asked in the initial survey regarding their expectations for the course and level of satisfaction with the elements addressed (Figure 3).

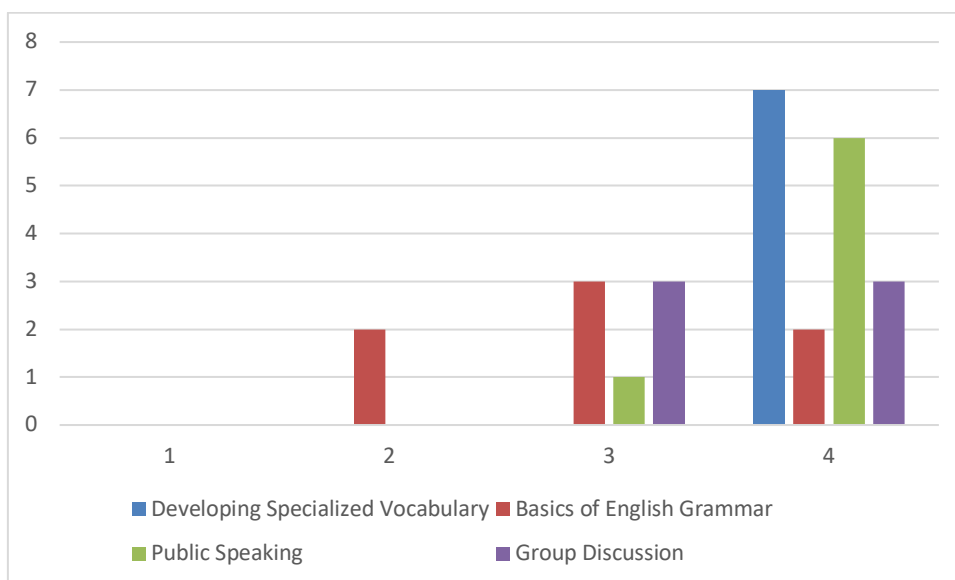


Figure 5. Responses to the question "How much focus would you like to have seen on the following topics?"

Interestingly, while English Grammar was the most valued topic in the midterm evaluation, by the end-of-term evaluation students desired more of the aspects which had recently been introduced, such as more public speaking following their

second presentations, as well as specialized vocabulary for their disciplines, which had recently been introduced via recommended self-study exercises and the online Quizlet vocabulary set. In the future, if these topics could be more evenly spread over the term, e.g. with more online presentations and the introduction of the vocabulary self-study options earlier, it may result in students gaining more satisfaction with having sufficiently addressed them.

Also, while some students felt awkward during their online Zoom presentations, as they are more used to being in a physical classroom, they also noted that these 'micro-presentations' were among the most helpful aspects of the course in gaining comfortability. This experience adds support to the integration of such online methods into a blended teaching method, as students, especially from these disciplines, will most likely be confronted with online meetings and presentations in the future.

With respect to learning outcomes, most students reported that they learned best from the grammar exercises and would like to see more of them, and also that they were one aspect which helped them learn most from the course, alongside the slides from class. Some, however, who had previous experience in English reported the grammar portion as the least valuable thing they had learned; however, one noted that he "had heard [the grammar points] before, but not in this way", i.e. with relevance to the legal context¹. They also reported looking forward to working on speaking more as well as receiving written feedback. Perhaps the most insightful piece of feedback from students regarded feedback from the teacher: it was noted that in both Economics and Law, students rarely had an intimate classroom environment where they could receive one-on-one feedback from an instructor, detailed clarification of writing assignments, and especially feedback on spoken presentations. When asked specifically about the "joint economic/legal approach", students also noted overall satisfaction with the joint approach, for example,

"Yes, I think the two professional fields overlap in real life so it was great to learn their vocabulary and do their exercises as well"

As with the mid-term evaluations, no negative aspects were reported to having joint sessions, and students either had positive comments or were indifferent to the mixed approach.

Challenges

This course is an elective option for students of both Law and Economics, and therefore student numbers would fluctuate greatly during a given term. This impacted student participation to an extent, in that some would register but not attend, not all students attended with regularity, and not all completed the final

¹ This was specifically with respect to the class on "Verbs" and how one may use passive voice or subjunctive mood to attain certain pragmatic functions when writing.

exam. Furthermore, the number of students from the Law program was always higher than those from Economics, with the final term having only one student of economics attend and complete the course. In order to balance this dilemma, the purpose of the development was reviewed to the following conclusion: even with few Economics students, the principle still stood that students would benefit from a mixed perspective; several law students were planning to work or had already done internships in the business and government sector, for example with Klarna, Forsäkringskassan, or had followed corporate law. Those economics students who participated noted explicitly that they appreciated the view into legal language and believed it would benefit them in the future. Therefore, a joint perspective was maintained throughout the course.

Online Teaching

Furthermore, following the COVID-19 crisis it became clear that all courses would need to be taught fully online, necessitating the rapid conversion of planned materials. To meet this need, the grammar exercise materials for the workbook were compiled and provided to students more quickly, and online vocabulary quizzes were also implemented at an accelerated pace. There was also concern for how this would impact planned group-discussions and presentations. However, as mentioned above, because tele-conferencing is extremely common for professionals in law and economics, even under normal circumstances, this situation was not viewed as a hindrance. Therefore, sessions on 'negotiations', 'cross-cultural communication', and 'argumentative/problem-solution presentations' were specifically adapted to be delivered online regardless of whether or not the course itself is held in the classroom.

Workshops

Because 1) the foundation of these courses is built around the fundamentals of English structure and grammar, natural discussion and oral competence, and practical skills such as written communication and correspondence; and 2) students who attend the course come from a wide variety of backgrounds and proficiency levels, there is not much focus on "Legalese", terms of art, or strictly economic vocabulary. Instead, the course focuses on how the structure of English can be used in legal and economic contexts, as well as in the workplace. Therefore, for students who desired further instruction on discipline-specific usage, supplementary workshops were also offered to students who wanted to enhance higher-level skills such as legal language and GMAT preparation. The first workshop, on Legal English, provided the students with additional vocabulary-rich exercises, and the second was an overview of vocabulary and comprehension sections of the GMAT. Because these were offered in optional sessions (since not all students would have benefitted), attendance was low; however, students who attended stated that they were largely beneficial and would be good to implement in some way in the future.

Reporting and applications

The workbook will become a resource available for use in future classes, and the final results of the course development will be presented to the Department of English, could be provided to the departments of Law and Economics, and could also be presented at the next *Conference for University Pedagogical Development* at Uppsala University. Furthermore, the development of this course over these terms will have a lasting effect on how this course is planned and taught in the future, beyond the employment of new course material. Student feedback may furthermore be utilized in a qualitative study of the effectiveness of cross-disciplinary methods for teaching law and economics, with the goal of presenting such results at a conference (e.g. European Legal English Teachers' Association) or submitting a paper for publication in a journal (e.g. *English for Specific Purposes*).

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