

CORE CONCEPTS IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Helen Basturkmen

Milica Kočović Pajević¹
State University of Novi Pazar,
Department of Philological Sciences

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), although a branch of English language teaching (ELT), has been widely recognized in recent years as an important (separate) field of teaching and research. Its practical aspect is one of the reasons why it has become acknowledged, but theoretical contributions to the field are scarce. In recent decades ESP has expanded to encompass fields such as medicine, aviation, hospitality, law, business and many academic disciplines, while research has shifted beyond classroom practice and isolated linguistic description to address teacher training, materials design, and the function of English in multilingual contexts. There has been less recent literature on the key concepts and foundational, building block of ESP, hence this work by Helen Basturkmen has emerged. In her concise Elements volume *Core Concepts in English for Specific Purposes*, Helen Basturkmen seeks to clarify and correct taken-for-granted assumptions in the field: rather than presenting a handbook of new methods or a survey of some kind, the book concentrates on two foundational notions and two core concepts in ESP: needs analysis and specialized English and subjects them to rigorous conceptual scrutiny. Basturkmen's aims are explicit and clear: to map these concepts, expose difficulties in their practical application, and point to avenues for further research. As the author herself points out, in this book the aim is to demonstrate that ESP is not just "a practical teaching area that has evolved as an off-shoot or add-on of ELT but a distinctive field of teaching with a distinctive theoretical basis" (Basturkmen, 2025: 3).

Since the Element is deliberately concise, Basturkmen targets an audience of ESP researchers, teacher-educators, and graduate students in applied linguistics who benefit from conceptual syntheses that bridge research and practice. She places ESP historically (tracing its origins and growth since the mid-twentieth century, from the 1960s onwards), summarizes drivers of its expansion (work mobility,

¹ Email address: mkocovicpajevic@np.ac.rs

Corresponding address: Državni univerzitet u Novom Pazaru, Vuka Karadžića bb, 36300 Novi Pazar

internationalization of higher education and adoption of EMI, dominance of English as a lingua franca, policy demands), and then devotes compact, evidence-based and research-informed chapters to the two named core concepts before concluding with recommendations for future research. The volume is structured into four numbered sections: Introduction, Needs Analysis, Specialized English and Concluding Comments, each containing short overviews, discussion of practice, potential issues, and discussion questions for readers.

In the introductory chapter, Basturkmen presents the situational position of ESP, by defining ESP as teaching directed at learners' work- or study-related language requirements and by distinguishing ESP from General English teaching, which typically aims for broad proficiency. This chapter is divided into several subchapters: Overview, where the author answers the question of what ESP really is, Contexts of ESP teaching, Drivers of ESP and concludes with discussion questions. She outlines the multiplicity of ESP contexts (from pre-professional university courses to in-service workplace programmes), and argues that despite contextual variety, ESP rests on a relatively small set of core assumptions, most notably that instruction should be informed by analyses of learners' needs and that it should target the forms and practices of specialized English. The introduction also sets the methodological tone: the Element is not "a methodological cookbook" but a conceptual intervention intended to provoke reflective practice and focused research. In this part, as in all other sections of the book, the author gives some potential issues, and central to this discussion is an exploration of possible problems, particularly the fact that many ESP teachers may have only limited knowledge of the specialized language they are required to teach.

Section 2 examines the role of needs analysis (NA) in ESP, by pointing out how needs analysis and ESP are *inextricably intertwined* (Basturkmen, 2025: 5). Needs analysis has always been recognized as crucial for ESP and at the core of it (Basturkmen, 2025: 12) because it identifies learners' target communicative situations and specific language requirements, thereby directly informing syllabus design, materials development, and assessment (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Munby, 1978). This chapter offers a clear map of needs analysis (NA) approaches: target vs present situation analysis, task-based instruments, stakeholder consultation, and mixed-methods designs, and describes how these approaches have been used to derive course content, materials and assessment criteria. Basturkmen goes beyond procedural description to highlight the rhetorical and political dimensions of NA: choices about whose needs count, how stakeholders are consulted, and the limits of access to authentic workplace data all shape what gets taught. Although the author recognizes that NA is not exclusive to ESP and any language course can (and should) be based on NA, in ESP a set of common needs can be identified to a greater extent, compared to General English (Basturkmen, 2025: 12). In this part, the author explains the distinction between target situation analysis and present situation analysis, identifying them as two sub-analyses whose function is an extension of the NA function, that is a "gap analysis" (Brown, 2016). Although immensely important in ESP, NA also has some potential issues that the author addresses.

Namely, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 10) contend that the narrowly targeted nature of ESP courses makes them more motivating than General English, hence the efficiency of needs-based instruction: by concentrating on the specific language and skills learners actually require, teaching becomes more economical, which boosts learners' motivation and thereby enhances learning outcomes. In fact, motivation has been suggested as the only directly educational factor offered to explain the success of specific-purposes programs. However, as Basturkmen observes, although theory suggests ESP should be more motivating and effective than general English, there is little solid empirical research to confirm this, which is the main issue regarding NA. Additionally, the author points out practical constraints (time, institutional resources, teacher subject-knowledge) and invites readers to consider learner engagement as an important complement to the motivational rationales that typically justify needs-based ESP classes.

The main topic in Section 3 is Specialized English, a second core concept, also referred to as workplace English, i.e. language associated with a specific profession. In this section, the author emphasizes that ESP learners, who aim to enter or advance within a particular professional or academic field, must acquire the domain-specific English required in that context; consequently, ESP instruction targets specialised rather than general language competence. ESP linguistic research is primarily driven by two linked objectives: (1) to identify the characteristic linguistic forms and patterns of a given domain, and (2) to relate those forms to the communicative functions and meanings they typically realize in practice. Here, Basturkmen once again underlines vocabulary as one of the most obvious components of specialized English, by providing examples from different scientific fields. Specialized uses of English mirror the distinct values and practices of different professional and academic fields. In Section 3, Basturkmen summarizes research on specialised English (lexis, genres, discourse, pragmatics, multimodality) and links these findings to pedagogical choices. She presents a compact Framework of Linguistic Targets that helps translate corpus and genre analyses into teachable objectives (for vocabulary, grammatical choices, genre moves, and interactional routines). Potential issues that are presented within this section include limited knowledge of ESP teachers regarding the scientific field they teach in (student of law, medicine, economics), as well as materials for highly specialized areas (one of the examples provided in the book is English for dietitians). Some potential solutions are given at the end of this chapter, including but not limited to co-teaching (ESP teacher and a domain specialist), linking ESP course to a disciplinary course or simply collaboration with experts in the field to check the materials (when creating in-house materials) that ESP teachers would use in their classes. Another problematic aspect of teaching ESP that has been brought up in this section is the level of students or whether the students should have some knowledge of *Basic English* prior to studying ESP.

Although theoretical justification is limited and there are examples of ESP for elementary learners, many still claim that students should attain general English basics before beginning ESP. Indeed, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) famously note that ESP is typically aimed at intermediate or advanced learners, and most ESP case studies report work with learners at those proficiency levels.

The conclusion restates the book's principal argument: that needs analysis and specialized English are core concepts that have not been examined sufficiently and proposes several concrete research directions. Basturkmen highlights teacher knowledge development (how instructors acquire domain expertise), low-resource approaches to needs analysis, and methods for measuring learner engagement. Contributions to the field by key scholars (such as Swales, Hyland, Gardner) are also acknowledged in the final chapter.

Basturkmen highlights the reciprocal relationship between language-focused research and ESP teaching: practical questions about the language needs of particular occupations or study programmes often drive linguistic investigations, and the results of those inquiries are routinely presented as having direct classroom applications. Some ideas about future research and solutions to potential problems are also presented in this concluding chapter. Basturkmen suggests this teacher-led repurposing as a fruitful topic for empirical study: researchers might, for example, interview ESP teachers about samples of materials they have produced, asking which academic or professional sources teachers consulted, how they interpreted and transformed that evidence for classroom use, whether they found the research easy to apply, and how their own teaching knowledge informed the reworking process. Such studies would illuminate the interface between linguistic research and instructional practice.

Her closing remarks emphasize the practical aim of this work: to encourage research that is both theoretically robust and directly applicable to teaching.

Basturkmen's *Core Concepts in English for Specific Purpose* stands out for being clear, concise and focused, successfully making foundational ESP ideas explicit without unnecessary complications. Practical features such as discussion questions and the Framework of Linguistic Targets increase its usefulness for both classroom discussion and curriculum design. The book might also have gone further in offering worked examples of low-cost NA designs or modular teacher-training activities. Its main originality is conceptual: by treating needs analysis and specialized English as objects of theoretical inquiry, Basturkmen opens productive research avenues: teacher knowledge development, engagement metrics, and pragmatic NA for low-resource contexts, that promise to connect scholarship more directly with classroom practice, bringing theory and practice closer together.

In the end, the author points out who would benefit the most from this book which is especially valuable for: graduate students in applied linguistics and TESOL who need a concise conceptual introduction; ESP/EAP researchers seeking a compact synthesis that connects methodological practice with theoretical issues; and teacher-educators looking for a short, discussion-ready text to support seminars on needs analysis, syllabus design, and teacher development. It is less appropriate as a sole resource for novice ESP teachers who require fully worked lesson plans, needs-analysis templates, or ready-made teaching materials. Overall, *Core Concepts in English for Specific Purposes* represents a valuable and timely contribution to the field, offering both clarity of thought and concise and practical insight that make it essential reading for anyone engaged in ESP teaching or research.

References

- Basturkmen, H. (2025). *Core Concepts in English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, J.D. (2016). *Introducing Needs Analysis and English for Specific Purposes*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M.J. (1998). *Developments in ESP: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative syllabus design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.