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## REFLECTIVE TASKS IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: A LINGUISTIC AND DISCOURSE-ORIENTED APPROACH

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**Abstract.** The article examines reflective tasks as a linguistically grounded component of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education. Reflection is usually discussed in pedagogy as a cognitive or affective activity; this paper argues that in ESP it should also be treated as a discourse practice with its own recognisable language resources. Drawing on the theory of reflective practice, systemic functional linguistics, appraisal theory and the concept of metadiscourse, the study describes the lexico-grammatical and discourse features through which learners report, interpret and evaluate their professional and language learning experience. The paper concludes that reflective tasks become effective in ESP only when the language of reflection is taught explicitly and is linked to the communicative demands of the learners' future profession.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes, reflective task, reflective writing, metacognition, appraisal, metadiscourse, learner autonomy, professional discourse.

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**Annotatsiya.** Maqolada oliy ta'limda maxsus maqsadlar uchun ingliz tilini (ESP) o'qitishda reflektiv topshiriqlarning lingvistik asoslari tahlil qilinadi. Refleksiya pedagogikada ko'pincha kognitiv yoki emotsional faoliyat sifatida qaraladi, biroq muallif ESP sharoitida uni o'ziga xos til vositalariga ega diskursiv amaliyot sifatida ham o'rganish zarurligini asoslaydi. ESP mashg'ulotlari uchun reflektiv topshiriqlar tipologiyasi, to'rt bosqichli ta'lim sikli, iqtisodiyot, tibbiyot, huquq va turizm yo'nalishlari uchun namunaviy topshiriqlar hamda refleksiya darajalarini baholash mezonlari taklif etiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** maxsus maqsadlar uchun ingliz tili, reflektiv topshiriq, reflektiv yozuv, metakognitsiya, baholash nazariyasi, metadiskurs, talaba avtonomiyasi, kasbiy diskurs.

**INTRODUCTION.** Over the last decade the teaching of foreign languages in the higher education system of Uzbekistan has moved steadily towards profession-oriented instruction. Since the adoption of Presidential Decree PQ-1875 “On measures to further improve the system of learning foreign languages” (2012), universities have been expected to prepare graduates who can use English not only as a general means of communication but as a working tool in economics, medicine, law, tourism, engineering and other fields. This expectation has given English for Specific Purposes a central place in non-philological curricula and in the training of future language teachers.

ESP is by definition needs-driven: its content, genres and tasks are selected according to what learners will have to do with the language in their target situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Needs analysis, however, is usually carried out by the teacher at the planning stage, while learners themselves often remain unaware of why particular language forms matter for their profession and how their own performance compares with professional norms. As a result, students may complete terminology exercises and case studies successfully and still be unable to transfer what they have learned to a new professional situation.

Reflective tasks offer one way of closing this gap. When learners are asked to look back at a simulated negotiation, a patient interview or the drafting of a contract clause, to identify what worked linguistically and what did not, and to plan how they would act differently, they begin to monitor their own learning in terms of the target discourse. Yet in ESP practice reflection is frequently reduced to a short question at the end of a lesson (“What did you learn today?”) that produces vague, formulaic answers. The underlying problem, in our view, is that reflection is treated as a purely mental activity, whereas what the teacher actually receives and assesses is a text: a journal entry, a spoken commentary or a self-evaluation form. Such texts have linguistic features that learners of a foreign language do not acquire automatically.

The **aim** of this article is therefore to examine reflective tasks in ESP from a linguistic and discourse-oriented perspective. The following **objectives** are pursued: (1) to clarify the concept of reflection as it applies to ESP instruction; (2) to describe the language resources that realise reflective meaning in English; (3) to propose a typology of reflective tasks and an instructional cycle for ESP classes; (4) to formulate criteria for assessing the depth of learners’ reflection.

**LITERATURE REVIEW.** The modern understanding of reflection goes back to J. Dewey (1933), who defined reflective thinking as the active, persistent and careful consideration of a belief or form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it. D. Schön (1983) later distinguished between *reflection-in-action*, which happens while a professional is performing a task, and *reflection-on-action*, which takes place afterwards. This distinction is particularly relevant to ESP, because professional communication often requires on-the-spot adjustment (for example, rephrasing an explanation for a patient), while systematic

improvement depends on retrospective analysis.

Cyclical models have translated these ideas into classroom procedures. D. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle moves from concrete experience through reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation to active experimentation. G. Gibbs (1988) elaborated the cycle into six stages – description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan – and his model has become a common scaffold for reflective writing in professional education. D. Boud, R. Keogh and D. Walker (1985) emphasised that reflection involves returning to an experience, attending to feelings and re-evaluating the experience, while J. Moon (1999) showed that reflection functions differently depending on the purpose and form in which it is represented.

In language education, J. C. Richards and C. Lockhart (1996) and T. S. C. Farrell (2015) developed reflective approaches mainly for teacher development. The learner side of reflection has been linked to metacognition, understood as knowledge about and regulation of one's own cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979), and to self-regulated learning, in which learners plan, monitor and evaluate their performance (Zimmerman, 2002). D. Little (1991) connected learner autonomy with the capacity for critical reflection and independent decision-making. N. Hatton and D. Smith (1995) proposed a widely cited distinction between descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection, which offers a useful basis for assessment.

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Within ESP, the learning-centred approach of T. Hutchinson and A. Waters (1987) already implied that learners should understand the purpose of what they study. H. Basturkmen (2010) and D. Belcher (2006) stressed that ESP courses must respond both to present needs and to the “imagined futures” of learners in their professional communities. Reflection is a natural means of making these futures explicit, since learners compare their current performance with the communicative practices of the profession they are entering.

The linguistic side of reflection has received comparatively less attention. M. A. K. Halliday's (1978) view of language as a social semiotic allows us to see reflective writing as a register shaped by its social purpose. M. Ryan (2011) and M. Ryan and M. Ryan (2013), working within systemic functional linguistics, showed that successful academic reflection relies on specific resources: first-person mental and verbal processes, temporal and causal connectives, evaluative vocabulary and modality used to project future action. J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White (2005) provided, through appraisal theory, a systematic account of how writers express attitude, adjust commitment and position themselves in relation to other voices. K. Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse, in turn, describes the interactional markers – hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions – through which writers manage stance. Taken together, these works suggest that reflective competence in a foreign language is inseparable from control over evaluative and interpersonal

meaning.

**METHODOLOGY.** The study is qualitative and theoretical-applied in nature. It combines (a) a theoretical and comparative analysis of the literature on reflective practice, metacognition and ESP; (b) a functional-linguistic description of reflective discourse based on systemic functional grammar, appraisal theory and metadiscourse analysis; and (c) a pedagogical modelling method used to design a typology of tasks, an instructional cycle and assessment criteria. Illustrative language examples are constructed to reflect the types of utterances typical of learner reflection in ESP classes; they are intended to demonstrate linguistic categories rather than to report quantitative results. Empirical verification of the proposed model through classroom data is regarded as a subsequent stage of research.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.1. Reflection in ESP as a discourse practice**

In ESP the object of reflection is twofold. Learners reflect on the *professional content* of a task (the logic of a negotiation, the accuracy of a diagnosis, the legal effect of a clause) and on the *language* through which that content is realised (terminology, genre structure, politeness strategies, register). A reflective task in ESP can therefore be defined as *a purposeful learning task in which students retrospectively or prospectively analyse their own professional-communicative performance and express this analysis in an oral or written text that follows the conventions of reflective discourse*. This definition places three elements at the centre: a real or simulated professional experience, a metacognitive operation performed on it, and a linguistic product that can be taught and assessed.

Understanding reflection in this way changes the teacher’s role. Instead of simply asking students to reflect, the teacher introduces the language of reflection as explicitly as the terminology of the field. Learners who have only the resources of general English tend to produce narrative accounts (“First we read the case, then we discussed it”) or global judgements (“It was interesting and useful”). Movement towards analytical reflection requires causal, concessive and evaluative resources that must be modelled and practised.

### **2. A typology of reflective tasks for ESP**

On the basis of the theoretical analysis, reflective tasks for ESP classes can be classified according to their timing in relation to the professional task, their mode (oral or written), and their linguistic focus. Table 1 presents the main types.

**Table 1. Typology of reflective tasks in ESP**

| Type of task                       | Timing / mode                    | Linguistic focus                                                | ESP example                                                                |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anticipatory (pre-task) reflection | Before the task; written or oral | Future forms, modality of intention, expressions of expectation | Business English: “What language will I need to reject an offer politely?” |

| Type of task                      | Timing / mode                      | Linguistic focus                                              | ESP example                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reflection-in-action prompts      | During role play; oral             | Self-repair, reformulation, clarification requests            | Medical English: pause-and-rephrase cards during a doctor–patient simulation |
| Post-task reflective log          | After the task; written            | Past tenses, causal connectives, evaluative lexis             | Legal English: log after drafting a contract clause                          |
| Recorded self-analysis            | After the task; oral / audio-video | Metalinguage of pronunciation, fluency and interaction        | Tourism English: analysis of a recorded guided-tour commentary               |
| Peer-reflective dialogue          | After the task; oral, in pairs     | Hedged feedback, agreement and disagreement, suggestion forms | Engineering English: peer discussion of a technical presentation             |
| Genre-comparison reflection       | After the task; written            | Genre moves, register, terminology choice                     | Comparing a student’s business email with an authentic model                 |
| Portfolio / cumulative reflection | End of module; written             | Synthesis, generalisation, long-term planning                 | ESP portfolio with a reflective cover essay                                  |

The typology shows that reflective tasks are not limited to a single end-of-lesson activity. Anticipatory reflection directs attention to language before performance, reflection-in-action trains the self-monitoring that professionals need in real time, and post-task and cumulative forms consolidate learning. Each type also foregrounds different grammatical and lexical resources, which allows the teacher to integrate reflection into the language syllabus rather than adding it as an extra component.

### ***3. The linguistic profile of reflective discourse***

A functional analysis of reflective discourse makes it possible to link each stage of reflection with typical language resources. Following the stages identified in reflective models (Gibbs, 1988; Ryan & Ryan, 2013) and the categories of appraisal and metadiscourse (Martin & White, 2005; Hyland, 2005), Table 2 summarises the profile that learners should gradually master.

**Table 2. Stages of reflection and their linguistic realisation**

| Stage          | Discourse function                                         | Typical linguistic resources                                                                                                           | Illustrative learner utterance                                                                               |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reporting      | Describing the professional situation and one's role in it | Past Simple and Past Continuous; material processes; temporal connectives ( <i>first, while, after that</i> )                          | <i>While the client was presenting his conditions, I took notes on the key figures.</i>                      |
| Responding     | Expressing a personal reaction                             | Affect lexis ( <i>nervous, confident, surprised</i> ); mental processes ( <i>I felt, I noticed</i> )                                   | <i>I felt uncomfortable when I could not find the right term for "liability".</i>                            |
| Relating       | Connecting the experience with prior knowledge or theory   | Comparison and contrast markers ( <i>similarly, unlike</i> ); reference to sources; Present Perfect                                    | <i>Unlike the model letter we studied, my email did not open with a clear purpose.</i>                       |
| Reasoning      | Explaining causes and significance                         | Causal and concessive connectives ( <i>because, as a result, although</i> ); hedges ( <i>perhaps, it seems that</i> ); judgement lexis | <i>Perhaps the negotiation stalled because I used too many direct refusals.</i>                              |
| Reconstructing | Planning future action and transfer                        | Modal verbs ( <i>will, should, could</i> ); conditionals; goal expressions ( <i>in order to, next time</i> )                           | <i>Next time I will use softening phrases such as "I'm afraid we can't..." to keep the tone cooperative.</i> |

Several linguistic observations follow from this profile. First, reflective discourse is strongly *personalised*: the first-person pronoun and mental process verbs (*realise, notice, understand, doubt*) are its core resources, which distinguishes it from the impersonal style that learners are taught for academic and professional writing. ESP learners often transfer impersonal conventions into reflection and produce texts that avoid the self, and hence avoid genuine analysis. Second, reflective depth correlates with the use of *causal and concessive* relations. A text consisting of additive links (*and, also, then*) remains descriptive, while *because, therefore, although, however* signal that the learner is interpreting experience. Third, reflection requires balanced *stance*. Appraisal theory reminds us that attitude includes affect (feelings), judgement (evaluation of behaviour) and appreciation (evaluation of products). Weak reflections tend to rely on affect alone (*I was happy*), while mature reflections evaluate performance and output (*my explanation was accurate but too technical for a layperson*). Hedges and modality allow learners to present conclusions as provisional, which is characteristic of honest self-assessment.

A further feature specific to ESP is the use of *professional metalanguage* within reflection. When a student of medicine writes that her questions were “closed rather than open”, or a law student notes that a clause was “ambiguous as to the obligor”, the reflection itself becomes practice in the discourse of the discipline. In this sense reflective tasks do not compete with specialised content for classroom time; they recycle terminology and genre knowledge in a new, evaluative function.

#### 4. An instructional cycle for reflective tasks

To make reflection systematic, we propose a four-stage instructional cycle that adapts experiential and reflective models to the linguistic demands of ESP. The cycle is summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3. The Experience – Noticing – Evaluation – Transfer cycle**

| Stage         | Learner activity                                                                                           | Teacher support                                                                                        |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Experience | Performs a professional-communicative task: role play, case study, presentation, drafting a document       | Designs an authentic task based on needs analysis; records performance where possible                  |
| 2. Noticing   | Identifies specific language episodes: successful moves, breakdowns, missing terms, register problems      | Provides guiding questions, transcripts or recordings; introduces metalanguage for describing language |
| 3. Evaluation | Explains causes, compares performance with authentic models and professional norms, formulates a judgement | Models reflective language (Table 2); supplies authentic samples; organises peer discussion            |
| 4. Transfer   | Writes an action plan and applies it in a new, related task                                                | Sets a follow-up task; checks whether planned changes appear in the new performance                    |

The distinctive element of the cycle is the *Noticing* stage, which draws on the idea that conscious attention to form supports language acquisition. In ESP, noticing is directed not only at grammar but at the functional adequacy of language in a professional context: whether a term was used precisely, whether a genre move was realised, whether the degree of politeness suited the interlocutor. The *Transfer* stage, in turn, prevents reflection from ending in declarations. Unless the action plan is tested in a subsequent task, learners have no evidence that their reflection changed anything, and reflection quickly becomes a ritual.

#### 5. Sample reflective tasks for different ESP fields

Table 4 illustrates how the cycle can be realised in four areas commonly taught in Uzbek higher education institutions.

**Table 4. Sample reflective tasks by professional field**

| Field            | Professional task (Experience)                                                 | Reflective prompt (Noticing – Evaluation – Transfer)                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Business English | Simulated price negotiation between a supplier and a buyer                     | Find two moments in your recording where you agreed or refused. Which phrases did you use? How might the other side have perceived them? Rewrite one refusal in a more diplomatic form and use it in the next negotiation. |
| Medical English  | Taking a patient’s history in a role play                                      | Count your open and closed questions. Where did medical terminology create a barrier for the “patient”? Suggest lay equivalents and plan how you will check understanding next time.                                       |
| Legal English    | Drafting a confidentiality clause                                              | Compare your clause with an authentic model. Which modal verbs ( <i>shall, may, must</i> ) did you use and with what legal effect? Identify one ambiguity and explain how you would eliminate it.                          |
| Tourism English  | Delivering a two-minute guided-tour commentary on a historical site in Andijan | Listen to your recording. How did you signal transitions between points? Which descriptive adjectives were effective? Choose two techniques for engaging listeners to try in your next commentary.                         |

The prompts in Table 4 share three features. They refer to concrete language evidence rather than general impressions; they require a causal or comparative operation; and they end with a transferable action. This design prevents the vague responses that open-ended questions often elicit and makes the linguistic object of reflection visible to learners.

#### **6. Assessing reflective tasks**

Assessment of reflection is often regarded as problematic, since reflection is personal and there is no single correct answer. Nevertheless, the depth of reflection can be judged from the text learners produce. Adapting the levels proposed by Hatton and Smith (1995) and connecting them with the linguistic profile described above, we suggest the criteria presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Criteria for assessing the level of reflection in ESP**

| Level                  | Characteristics of content                                                                                             | Linguistic indicators                                                                                         |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Descriptive            | Retells what happened; no explanation or evaluation of performance                                                     | Chronological narration; additive connectives; general affective adjectives ( <i>good, interesting</i> )      |
| Descriptive-reflective | Gives reasons for some events; identifies strengths and weaknesses in general terms                                    | Some causal links; simple evaluation; limited professional terminology                                        |
| Dialogic               | Considers alternatives, compares own performance with models or peers' views, recognises uncertainty                   | Concessive connectives; hedges and modality; judgement and appreciation lexis; reference to sources or models |
| Critical               | Places performance in a wider professional or cultural context; formulates transferable principles and a concrete plan | Precise metalanguage; generalisation; conditionals and modals of future action; coherent argument structure   |

It is important that language accuracy and reflective depth are assessed separately. A learner with modest grammatical accuracy may produce a genuinely dialogic reflection, whereas a fluent writer may remain at the descriptive level. Separate criteria encourage learners to take intellectual risks in their reflections and show teachers which aspect – linguistic resources or analytical thinking – needs further support.

### **7. Difficulties and ways of overcoming them**

Several difficulties arise when reflective tasks are introduced into ESP courses. Learners may be unfamiliar with self-evaluation, having been accustomed to teacher-centred assessment; they may perceive reflection as a test of sincerity and write what they think the teacher wants to read; and they may lack the vocabulary to discuss language itself. Time constraints in ESP programmes, where the number of contact hours is limited, add a practical obstacle. These difficulties can be reduced in the following ways:

- introducing reflective language gradually, beginning with sentence frames and moving towards free writing;
- allowing short reflections in the students' first language at early stages, with a progressive shift to English, so that cognitive depth is not sacrificed to linguistic limitations;
- grounding each reflection in concrete evidence (a recording, a transcript, a draft) rather than in memory;
- providing timely feedback on both the content and the language of reflection;

- integrating reflective tasks into existing assignments, for instance by adding a reflective commentary to a case-study report instead of creating a separate task.

**CONCLUSION.** The analysis carried out in this article leads to the following conclusions. First, reflection in ESP should be understood not only as a metacognitive process but as a discourse practice realised through identifiable linguistic resources. Second, these resources – first-person mental processes, temporal and causal connectives, evaluative lexis of affect, judgement and appreciation, hedging, modality and professional metalanguage – correspond to specific stages of reflection and can be taught explicitly. Third, a typology of reflective tasks based on timing, mode and linguistic focus allows reflection to be distributed throughout the ESP lesson and module rather than reduced to a closing question. Fourth, the Experience – Noticing – Evaluation – Transfer cycle links reflection to authentic professional tasks and makes its outcomes observable in subsequent performance. Finally, assessment criteria that separate reflective depth from language accuracy give teachers a more reliable picture of learners’ progress.

Reflective tasks, when designed with attention to their linguistic nature, help ESP learners understand why particular language forms matter in their field, monitor their own communicative behaviour and develop the habits of self-evaluation that characterise competent professionals. Further research may focus on corpus-based analysis of learner reflective texts in different ESP fields and on experimental verification of the proposed instructional cycle in higher education institutions of Uzbekistan.

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