Lecture 1: Language for Specific Purposes (LSP): Definition and Key Characteristics

Level: Third-Year Licence
Module: Foreign Language for Specific Purposes
Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

Introduction

Language plays an important role in communication in different fields of life, such as education, science, medicine, business, law, and technology. However, people do not use language in the same way in every situation. The language used by a doctor when speaking to a patient is different from the language used by a lawyer in a courtroom or by an engineer when writing a technical report.

For this reason, learning a foreign language is not always limited to learning general vocabulary, grammar, and everyday expressions. In many situations, learners need to acquire the language and communication skills required for a particular academic discipline or professional field.

This need has led to the development of an approach known as Language for Specific Purposes (LSP).

1. Definition of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP)

Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is an approach to language teaching and learning that focuses on the specific linguistic and communicative needs of learners in a particular academic, professional, or occupational context.

In other words, LSP aims to help learners use a language effectively in situations related to their field of study or future profession.

For example:

- **Medical students learn the language used in medical consultations, medical reports, and scientific articles.**

- **Law students learn legal terminology and the language of legal documents.**
- **Business students learn how to write professional emails, negotiate, and participate in business meetings.**
- **Engineering students learn technical vocabulary and how to understand manuals and technical instructions.**
- **University students of English may study academic writing, literary criticism, or the language used in linguistic research.**

The main objective of LSP is not simply to teach learners the language itself, but to teach them how to use that language to achieve specific purposes.

1.1. General Language Learning and LSP

It is important to distinguish between General English and English for Specific Purposes.

General English focuses on developing language skills for everyday communication and a wide range of situations. It includes general vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Language for Specific Purposes focuses on the language, skills, and communicative activities required in a particular academic or professional context.

Consider the following examples:

General English	Language for Specific Purposes
Talking about daily routines	Discussing a professional procedure
Writing a personal letter	Writing a formal business email
Learning vocabulary about food	Learning medical or nutritional terminology
Reading a short story for pleasure	Reading and understanding a scientific article
Having a conversation with a friend	Participating in a professional meeting

However, LSP does not exclude general language skills. It builds on these skills and develops them according to learners' specific needs.

2. Main Types of Language for Specific Purposes

LSP can be divided into two major categories: English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes.

2.1. English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) refers to the teaching and learning of English for academic study and research.

It prepares learners to use English in universities and other educational institutions.

Examples of EAP activities include:

- **Reading academic articles and textbooks.**
- **Writing essays and research papers.**
- **Preparing academic presentations.**
- **Taking notes during lectures.**
- **Writing summaries and abstracts.**
- **Participating in seminars and academic discussions.**

For example, a third-year university student may need English to read research articles, write an academic paper, or present a research project.

2.2. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) refers to the teaching and learning of English for professional and workplace communication.

It prepares learners to use English in their future jobs or current professional activities.

Examples of EOP activities include:

- **Writing professional emails and reports.**

- **Participating in job interviews.**
- **Communicating with clients and colleagues.**
- **Understanding workplace instructions.**
- **Taking part in meetings and negotiations.**
- **Using specialized terminology in a professional context.**

For example, a tourism student may need English to communicate with foreign visitors, while a business student may need it to negotiate with international partners.

The Relationship between EAP and EOP

Although EAP and EOP have different objectives, they are closely related. Both focus on the language skills and communicative practices required in specific contexts.

EAP is mainly concerned with academic study and research, whereas EOP focuses on professional and workplace communication.

3

3.2. Clear and Specific Objectives

LSP courses have clearly defined learning objectives. These objectives describe what learners should be able to do with the language at the end of a course.

For example, learners may be expected to:

- **Write a professional email.**
- **Understand a scientific article.**
- **Prepare an academic presentation.**
- **Explain a technical process.**
- **Participate in a professional interview.**

These objectives help teachers select appropriate materials and evaluate learners' progress.

3.3. Specialized Vocabulary and Terminology

Another important characteristic of LSP is the use of specialized vocabulary and terminology related to a particular field.

Different disciplines have their own technical terms and expressions.

For example:

Field	Specialized Vocabulary
Medicine	Diagnosis, symptoms, treatment, prescription
Law	Contract, legislation, defendant, evidence
Business	Profit, investment, negotiation, budget
Information Technology	Software, database, network, cybersecurity
Linguistics	Phonetics, syntax, semantics, discourse

Learning these terms enables learners to understand specialized texts and communicate accurately in their fields.

However, LSP is not limited to vocabulary. It also includes grammar, discourse conventions, communicative strategies, and the appropriate use of language in specific situations.

3.4. Authentic Materials

LSP often uses authentic materials, which are texts and resources originally produced for real-life communication rather than specifically for language teaching.

Examples include:

- **Scientific articles.**
- **Professional emails.**
- **Technical manuals.**
- **Business reports.**
- **Legal documents.**
- **Research abstracts.**

- **Workplace forms and instructions.**

Authentic materials expose learners to the language they may encounter in academic or professional situations.

For example, students can read a real research abstract and identify its main purpose, key terms, and organizational structure.

Teachers may adapt authentic materials to suit learners' language levels and learning objectives.

3.5. Focus on Communicative Skills

LSP develops the four main language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The importance of each skill depends on learners' needs.

For example:

- **Reading: understanding specialized articles and professional documents.**
- **Writing: preparing reports, abstracts, emails, and research papers.**
- **Listening: understanding lectures, meetings, and professional discussions.**
- **Speaking: giving presentations, explaining ideas, and participating in discussions.**

LSP also develops communication strategies, such as asking for clarification, explaining technical terms, summarizing information, and responding appropriately in professional situations.

3.6. Context-Specific Language Use

Language in LSP is taught in relation to the situations in which it is used.

Learners need to understand not only what to say, but also how, when, and to whom they should say it.

For example, the language used in a formal academic presentation differs from the language used in an informal conversation between friends.

Similarly, a professional email usually requires a more formal tone than a personal message.

Therefore, LSP emphasizes the relationship between language, context, audience, and communicative purpose.

3.7. Learner-Centred Approach

LSP generally adopts a learner-centred approach. This means that teaching activities and materials are designed around learners' needs, interests, objectives, and existing knowledge.

Learners are encouraged to participate actively through practical tasks, problem-solving activities, discussions, presentations, and collaborative work.

The teacher acts as a guide who helps learners develop the language skills required in their academic or professional fields.

4. The Importance of LSP in Higher Education

LSP has become increasingly important in higher education for several reasons.

First, it helps students access specialized knowledge published in foreign languages, particularly English.

Second, it enables students to read international research, participate in academic conferences, and communicate with researchers from different countries.

Third, it prepares university students for the linguistic demands of their future professions.

Fourth, it develops practical communication skills that may improve students' academic performance and employment opportunities.

Finally, LSP encourages learners to become more independent by helping them identify, understand, and use the language resources relevant to their fields.

For university students, learning English for specific purposes is therefore an important step towards academic success, professional development, and international communication.

Conclusion

Language for Specific Purposes is an approach to language teaching that responds to learners' particular academic and professional needs. Unlike General English, which focuses on communication in a wide range of everyday situations, LSP concentrates on the language skills, terminology, texts, and communicative practices required in specific contexts.

Its main characteristics include needs analysis, clear learning objectives, specialized vocabulary, authentic materials, communicative skills, context-specific language use, learner-centred teaching, and practical activities.

In conclusion, the main purpose of LSP is to enable learners to use a foreign language effectively, accurately, and appropriately in their academic studies and future professional lives.