Becoming a Doctor in Syria: Learning and Identity in English for Specific Purposes at a Syrian University

Submitted by

Dima Farhat

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Signature: .................................................................
This thesis explores the teaching and learning of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) in a Syrian Arab university (Tishreen University). It investigates the inherent contradictions in the position of EMP in an Arab-medium university by drawing on the socio-political and economic factors shaping English language education policy in Syria. It also critiques “mainstream” ESP through examining the “purpose” in English for Medical Purposes. Rather than viewing learning as an end product, this study suggests that learning English is part of a dynamic process of learning to become a doctor in Syria and as part of constructing the 21st Century Syrian “doctor” identity.

I draw on aspects of poststructuralism and complexity theory to take the analysis of English for Specific Purposes beyond issues of needs analysis, content, and materials development. ESP, from its outset, has been proposed for decades as a commodity that meets students’ linguistic and communicative needs. However important these concerns are for the development of the discipline, as I argue in this thesis, ESP seems to adopt a “mechanistic” approach by predetermining “needs” and “purposes” which fails to account for the complexity of human beings’ behaviours and responses in educational contexts. The deterministic conceptualisation of ESP places rigid boundaries between ESP and the reality of the medicine profession, therefore, fails to meet students’ needs which transcend boundaries of classroom in aspiration for recognition by the medical community worldwide. English for Medical Purposes, in this study, goes beyond “specific purposes” to account for the role of English as a foreign language in constructing doctor identity and in the process of becoming a doctor.

Data in this qualitative research were collected through focus groups with students of medicine in Tishreen University, semi-structured interviews with medical tutors and management officials in the Faculty of Medicine and the Higher Institute of Languages, as well as ESP teachers. Policy documents were analysed, and field notes were taken in classroom and hospital observations. Based on the analysis of these sources, a deeper understanding of EMP at Tishreen University is reached through the lens of poststructuralism and complexity theory. Finally, this thesis ends by drawing an ESP/Applied Linguistics relationship among the implications the findings have for policy makers, teachers and medical students, alongside recommendations for future ESP research directions.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Ibrahim, who believed in me when I didn’t even believe in myself, a loving man who has not only raised me but devoted his life for my education and intellectual development.

It is also dedicated to my mother who blessed me with her immense love, encouragement and prayers.

My aunt Mimi who has been missed very much, this is also for your soul.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL  Applied Linguistics
AMI  Arabic as a Medium of Instruction
BERA  British Educational Research Association
BE  Business English
CAL  Critical Applied Linguistics
CARS  Creating a Research Space
CEAP  Critical English for Academic Purposes
CNP  Communicative Needs Processor
CoP  Community of Practice
EAP  English for Academic Purposes
EFL  English as a Foreign Language
EGL  English as a Global Language
EIL  English as an International Language
ELF  English as a Lingua Franca
ELT  English Language Teaching
EMI  English as a Medium of Instruction
EAMP  English for Academic Medical Purposes
EMP  English for Medical Purposes
ESL  English as a Second Language
EST  English for Science and Technology
ESP  English for Specific Purposes
ESPJ  Journal English for Specific Purposes
ETF  European Training Foundation
FL  Foreign Language
GE  General English
HIL  Higher Institute of Languages
IATEFL  International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
IELT  International English Language Testing System
L1  First Language
L2  Second Language
LP  Language Policy
LPP  Legitimate Peripheral Participation
MoHE  Ministry of Higher Education
MoE  Ministry of Education
MoH  Ministry of Health
NNS  Non-Native Speaker
NS  Native Speaker
NTFL  National Test of Foreign Languages
SANA  Syrian Arab News Agency
SFL  Systematic Functional Linguistics
SLA  Second Language Acquisition
SME  Small Medium Enterprise
TCF  Test de Connaissance de Français
TESOL  Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TESP  Tertiary, Secondary and Primary
TOEFL  Test of English as a Foreign Language
UMD  Unified Medical Dictionary
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme