

## INCORPORATING LITERATURE INTO ESP BUSINESS CLASSES

© **Luganskaya E.V., 2023**

Irkutsk State University, Irkutsk

The article describes the experience of using the novel *The Firm* to expand on a Business English course. Having provided a rationale for reading literature in ESP settings, the author offers her own perspective for discussing the book. She argues that despite being a legal thriller, the novel has a wide range of benefits for business students. In particular, it addresses a lot of management-related issues (corporate culture, employee motivation and satisfaction, onboarding practice, leadership, decision-making, career growth, etc.) that add to the theoretical aspects taught in management courses that students take. The incorporation of this book also helps develop critical thinking skills, language skills, and emotional intelligence. After sharing different methods and teaching tips to enhance the reading experience, the author concludes that with the thorough selection, focus on the major-related topics rather than on literary and linguistic aspects, appropriate methods, and manageable activities, literature becomes a valuable addition to the ESP course.

*Keywords:* reading literature in the original, literature in ESP, teaching business English

There is no denying the fact that reading literature is beneficial for ELT students; however, it is not so straightforward when it comes to reading with students whose major is not English. After facing ups and downs, incorporating literature now is considered valuable and useful for students, although it should be done with caution not to demotivate students and to offer an effective way of exposing them to major-related context, real language and different life situations. The paper traces the attitudes in scientific pedagogical sources to integrating literature into English classes and suggests some ideas how to engage business students in reading using the novel *The Firm* by John Grisham. Being interesting, relevant, educational, thought-provoking, and manageable in terms of language, this book meets a lot of criteria.

#### Context

Before describing the experience of reading the novel with business majors, it is necessary to give an overview of the book under discussion. *The Firm* is a legal thriller written in 1991. Though it is more than 30 years old, its plot is still relevant. The main character is a young ambitious man Mitch McDeere who wants to be rich and successful. He has a degree in accounting and graduates from Harvard Law School with honors. He has a lot of job offers from prestigious companies, but he is recruited by a small unknown tax firm from Memphis, which turns out to be a deadly mistake for Mitch. The firm makes an offer he cannot resist: it pays much money and gives lavish perks. However, there is a price he has to pay. The firm is involved in illegal activities and works for the mafia. The FBI starts investigation and chooses Mitch as an insider to help them find evidence against the crimes that the firm commits. Mitch's life turns into a nightmare as he tries to survive, continuing working for the firm and meeting the terms of agreement with the FBI. Thanks to his wits, good planning skills, hard work, helpful companions, and luck he manages to stay alive, but the ending is not so explicit.

#### Literature Review

Many English teachers believe that the use of literature in the ELT classroom is enjoying a revival for a number of reasons. During the dominance of the Grammar Translation method in English language teaching, literature was the main source of input. With the advent of communicative language teaching and the focus on the functional use of language, literature as a language material lost its popularity. Later the role of literature in the ELT classroom was re-assessed and now many view literary texts as valuable resources and tools that provide rich linguistic input, effectively motivate students to learn better and to express themselves in other languages [1]. M. Khatib [2] summarizes numerous merits of literature in ELT as follows: authenticity, motivation, cultural awareness, reading practice, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, language skills, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking.

Not only is literature a rewarding material for ELT, it can also be successfully incorporated into ESP. Ch.

Lima contends that literature «can also be used by teachers working with students attending courses in a wide range of disciplines to promote the development of language awareness, critical thinking and interdisciplinary knowledge» [3]. Although language scholars are generally unanimous considering literature useful for boosting L2 learners' language skills and cognitive abilities, some note that it should be incorporated with caution due to students' limited language proficiency. Ch. Lima's article gives ten tips how to use literature in ELT/ ESL successfully. To her mind, it is all about the text, selection, response, thinking, motivation, options, connections, sharing, creativity, and learning [3].

A. Hirvela, advocating the use of literature in ESP classroom, even coined a special term — literature for specific purposes (LSP). The author wrote that literature «offers a host of advantages to course designers, teachers, and students alike» [4]. G. Hall claims that literature reading goes beyond purely linguistic goals [5], and this an important consideration for ESP. It is hard to disagree that when used in ESP classrooms, the approach to literature usage should be different. Besides language instruction, developing some professional competences can be a relevant focus. E.V. Luganskaya states that «thoughtful attentive reading and interpretation can enhance professional competencies required of future specialists» [6]. For future managers, exposure to different examples of corporate culture, methods of employee management, ways to establish leadership, conflict-solving techniques and decision-making is a useful learning experience.

#### Discussion

It is obvious that *The Firm*, being a legal thriller, is a good source for law students; however, this article will argue that the book can be used to expand on a Business English course to expose students to corporate lifestyle and espionage. In the preface of the study guide for *The Firm* [7], E.V. Luganskaya provides some rationale for selecting this book for business majors. In her opinion, the plot is so captivating that you cannot stop reading further. It is especially important for students whose major is not English because students keep reading without making much effort. Another reason is the style of writing and manageable English. John Grisham uses conversational, idiomatic English that is easy to understand, which makes the book appropriate even for students with an intermediate level of language proficiency. Also besides the original version, there is an adapted one published by Penguin Readers and aimed at elementary or pre-intermediate level of English. One more important reason for selecting the book is that the novel appeals to students as they identify themselves with the main character Mitch McDeere because, like him, they will have to make choices for their future after graduation. It also shows romantic relationships between him and his wife, which are fascinating for students to follow.

What is more, students enjoy reading the book as it enables to address a lot of management-related issues that they discuss at their management course. In the

beginning, the novel shows a firm with a strong corporate culture, which offers a business English teacher a lot of favorable topics for developing critical thinking. Reading this book, they analyze main components of corporate culture in terms of vision, values, practices, people, narrative, and place. For example, the onboarding practice in the firm Bendini, Lambert, and Locke is remarkable. Mitch as a new employee is warmly welcomed and introduced properly. He gets a lot of perks, which are very attractive and show how the firm values him. These include an interest-free mortgage that the firm helps to pay back, a BMW, a free membership in some sports clubs, payments for the student loan, money to buy a decent suit and some others. Also the firm encourages the main character to take a bar exam as soon as possible and appoints several lawyers who help him prepare for certain exam sections and monitor his progress. They arrange welcome parties and ask one lawyer to make friends with Mitch and Abby so that they do not feel lonely in Memphis. In addition, they appoint a mentor Avery Tollar, whose duty is to teach the novice how to deal with important clients and earn money for the firm.

Besides, the firm described in the book provides good opportunities for career growth. When novices start working for the firm, they see their future clearly and know how to get to the top. So analyzing different aspects of corporate culture of the firm, students can get useful tips on how to manage people more successfully and how to ensure employee satisfaction. In this way the book adds to the theoretical material introduced in major-related courses. As G. Hall claims, «language users do actually need to «read literature» to read life» [5].

Work and life balance is another issue that can be addressed. Mitch is a workaholic, which is good for the firm; however, at some point even the partners get concerned as nobody can work as much as he did for a long time. Moreover, his obsession with work leads to some family problems. His wife Abby is unhappy because he is never home in the evening, and she is lonely and feels neglected. Debating whether being a workaholic is a virtue can be a good activity to delve deeper into this topic.

Ethical issues are the most controversial, perhaps, and give a lot of food for thought as well, so it is useful to discuss them with future managers. To illustrate, the firm's owner was obsessed with secrecy. Even though in the beginning this secrecy seems understandable to some extent as the book describes a law firm where an attorney-client privilege, a rule that protects the confidentiality of communications between lawyers and clients should be observed, it goes too far and soon readers start suspecting that this secrecy is caused by some other reasons. There is surveillance equipment everywhere in the firm, and all the employees' homes are bugged, and privacy is violated. It is interesting to dwell on the issues of privacy and discuss the limits of safety, confidentiality, and personal freedom.

Leadership is also a favorable topic for discussion. Oliver Lambert always takes the lead as the host of

numerous events the firm arranges. Having a fatherly manner, he is especially good at building trust and respect, and in the beginning he does it so skillfully that Mitch does not suspect anything. Here undergraduates can be involved in simulation activities acting out welcome and motivational speeches. What is more, literature always gives innumerable ideas to engage in public speaking. Teachers might get students to prepare presentations about gender equality at the workplace, different organizations mentioned in the book (the FBI, the IRS, the mafia), and others.

One more critical skill for good leaders is argumentation. In the book Mitch faces several dilemmas. After cheating on his wife, he has to decide whether to admit his fault or pretend as if nothing had happened. However, the most important choice for him is whether to cooperate with the FBI. Although he chooses to provide sufficient evidence for the FBI to indict the firm, he does not quite meet all the terms of the agreement. He prefers to escape and not to testify in court against the firm members. Was it the right decision in that situation? So decision-making is another issue worth speculating about both at the pre-reading and after-reading stages. It is very interesting to hear students argue as they come up with solutions justifying their choices. Anyway, these activities are a good way to make them think about the consequences of making wrong decisions and engage undergraduates in meaningful conversations.

Although the focus in ESP should be shifted towards the major, the book's language learning potential is so rich that it cannot be neglected. Except for reading, the book is a great material to teach vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and writing. To illustrate, vocabulary can be practiced in many different ways: deriving and explaining meaning from the context, providing synonyms, matching the words to their definitions, completing the sentences and so on. Besides, teachers can come up with more creative ways to master the book vocabulary. For example, students might make up dialogs illustrating the use of words under study or act out situations without using idioms so that other students might guess what idioms might be appropriate for those situations.

Literature is also a good way to revise grammar. Students may be asked to find examples of certain tenses, modal verbs, articles, gerunds or infinitives. To practice question-making and check reading comprehension at the same time, teachers can divide the class into two teams where one team will be responsible for asking questions and the other, for answering. This will also make the class more student-centered.

Moreover, this book provides numerous scenarios to develop speaking skills. Readers are exposed to different situations which can be good not only for practicing speaking skills but also for raising cultural awareness. For example, the book starts with a job interview when Mitch and the partners see each other for the first time and discuss job fringes. As culture impacts job interviews in many ways, as a follow up, it could be a good idea to compare job interviews in Russia and the

USA. Companies are now facing cross-cultural challenges in how they recruit, manage and develop a multi-cultural staff base. Likewise, job seekers are often at a loss for how to show culture fit during an interview. After doing some research on interview differences in Russia and the USA, students can be made to summarize cultural differences and similarities in terms of behavior, questions asked, ethics, legal issues and so on. For more advanced groups, dubbing is a fun way to practice spontaneous speech. In this case the movie based on the book is shown without the sound, and students are supposed to voice the characters.

Furthermore, literature is a favorable material to engage students in writing. For instance, students can be assigned to writing book reviews. They also enjoy developing alternative plots or endings to the book in mini groups in writing. It is an interesting creative activity. In fact, it is hard to separate different skills in ELT, and it is more preferable and advantageous to teach them simultaneously.

The literature review mentioned emotional intelligence as one of the merits of including literature into ELT. This is one of the most essential benefits of reading literature in both one's mother tongue and foreign language. While reading, students are exposed to common life issues learning basic human values. This book offers numerous controversial situations to elaborate on: romantic relationships, infidelity, dealing with the spouse's parents, handling family problems, betraying a friend, letting down one's colleagues, revealing work secrets, saving the loved ones, and so on. All these are favorable themes for debates or problem-solving activities.

As we can see, the novel has a high potential for business majors despite being a legal thriller. After reading, students are usually satisfied with their learning experience and feel proud that they have read a book in the original, which is quite an accomplishment for them. Thus, with good planning and organization, *The Firm* proves to be a valuable addition to the Business English course and can be successfully integrated into ESP classes.

#### Conclusion

To summarize, it is worth making some important recommendations for ESP teachers who are using or planning to use original literature for language instruction.

Literature in the original for ESP purposes should be selected thoroughly: it has to be relevant, current, appealing and manageable in terms of language.

Literature discussion should be shifted from linguistic and literary aspects to major-related and common human issues.

ESP teachers should take into account that most students are not exposed to reading fiction much, especially in the original, so they should encourage students facilitating teamwork and discussions and offering activities suitable for learners' needs and

interests, level of language proficiency, and the course load. ■

1. Using Literature – Introduction : [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/using-literature-introduction> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)
2. Khatib M. Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom // *English Language Teaching* Vol. 4, No. 1; March 2011 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1080411.pdf> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)
3. Lima Ch. Teaching EAP: Literature: Top ten tips for using literature in ELT [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://www.onestopenglish.com/esp-lesson-plans/teaching-eap-literature-top-ten-tips-for-using-literature-in-elt/555130.article> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)
4. Hirvela, A. ESP and literature: A reassessment // *English for Specific Purposes*, 9, 1990. – Pp. 237-252.
5. Hall G. Using literature in ELT // *Routledge Handbook ELT*, ed. G. Hall. 2016. Ed. 1, Chapter 32. P. 456 – 470 [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303588261\\_Using\\_literature\\_in\\_ELT](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303588261_Using_literature_in_ELT) (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)
6. Luganskaya E. Reading David Hare's *Stuff Happens* with Business Majors // *Footpath* 13. 2020. Pp. 119–123.
7. Луганская Е.В. Study Guide for *The Firm* by John Grisham // Методические рекомендации. Иркутск : Издательство «ИГУ», 2020. – 71 С.
8. Abdul-Malik Saif Al-Selwi. Using Literature in ESP Classroom // *English for Specific Purposes World*, [www.esp-world.info](http://www.esp-world.info), Issue No.56, v.20, 2018
9. Alkhaleefah T.A. What is the Place of English Literature in ELT Classrooms? A Review of Related Studies // *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*. 2017. – №6 (7) P. 192–197 : [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.7p.192> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)

#### СПИСОК ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ:

- Abdul-Malik Saif Al-Selwi. Using Literature in ESP Classroom // *English for Specific Purposes World*, [www.esp-world.info](http://www.esp-world.info), Issue No.56, v.20, 2018
- Alkhaleefah T.A. What is the Place of English Literature in ELT Classrooms? A Review of Related Studies // *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*. 2017. – №6 (7) P. 192–197 : [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.7p.192> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)
- Hall G. Using literature in ELT // *Routledge Handbook ELT*, ed. G. Hall. 2016. Ed. 1, Chapter 32. P. 456 – 470 [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303588261\\_Using\\_literature\\_in\\_ELT](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303588261_Using_literature_in_ELT) (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)
- Hirvela, A. ESP and literature: A reassessment // *English for Specific Purposes*, 9, 1990. – Pp. 237-252.
- Khatib M. Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom // *English Language Teaching* Vol. 4, No. 1; March 2011 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1080411.pdf> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)

Lima Ch. Teaching EAP: Literature: Top ten tips for using literature in ELT [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://www.onestopenglish.com/esp-lesson-plans/teaching-eap-literature-top-ten-tips-for-using-literature-in-elt/555130.article> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)

Luganskaya E. Reading David Hare's Stuff Happens with Business Majors // Footpath 13. 2020. Pp. 119–123.

Using Literature – Introduction : [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/using-literature-introduction> (Дата обращения: 23.20.2023)

Луганская Е.В. Study Guide for The Firm by John Grisham // Методические рекомендации. Иркутск : Издательство «ИГУ». 2020. – 71 С.

---

## **Чтение романа Дж. Гришама «Фирма» со студентами бизнес-специальностей**

© Луганская Е. В., 2023

Статья описывает опыт использования романа американского писателя Джона Гришама «Фирма» в рамках курса делового английского. Обосновав

включение литературных источников в курс английского для специальных целей, автор предлагает своё видение и методику обсуждения книги. В статье доказывается, что несмотря на то, что «Фирма» — юридический триллер, роман имеет большой потенциал для обучения студентов бизнес-специальностей. В частности, в нём обсуждаются многочисленные управленческие темы (корпоративная культура, мотивация и удовлетворённость сотрудников, адаптация новых сотрудников, лидерство, принятие решений, карьерный рост и т.п.), которые дополняют теоретические аспекты курса по менеджменту. Использование данного романа также помогает развивать навыки критического мышления, языковые навыки и эмоциональный интеллект. Поделившись различными методическими находками, автор разрабатывает ряд рекомендаций для использования художественной литературы на занятиях по английскому для специальных целей. При тщательном отборе книги, смещении акцента с лингвистических и литературных аспектов на профессионально-ориентированные, использовании соответствующих методов и заданий литературный материал может стать ценным дополнением к курсу английского для специальных целей.

*Ключевые слова:* обучение иностранному языку, деловой английский, художественная литература в иноязычном образовании

---