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商务英语教学 理论与实践

**Theory & Practice of
Business English Teaching**

刘沛 著



WUHAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Preface

With the globalization of world economy, Business English has played an increasingly important role in education as well as in business world. China, as the second largest economy in the world, is highly demanding talents with world vision and English capability, especially Business English. Many universities in China open Business English courses for students who major in English or international trade.

However, due to the short history of Business English development in China, teachers responsible for Business English course are not so experienced. In this case, a guidebook for Business English teachers or trainers is really needed. For this purpose, this book is written and published.

This book, divided into eight chapters, is mainly about teaching theories and teaching practice of Business English. In the first chapter, English for Specific Purpose(ESP) is discussed and Business English should be viewed as ESP since it has the common features of ESP. In the second chapter, the definition of Business English is given and the characteristics of Business English are discussed. In the following chapters, how to organize Business English teaching in vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking, writing are discussed respectively. Many

relative teaching skills are listed and illustrated. In the final chapter, Business English teachers are told how to make an assessment of students and how to design a Business English Examination including reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Liu Pei

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Chapter 1 English for Specific Purposes

The Definition of ESP

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a tendency of English teaching, which is based on the proposition that all language teaching should be designed to the specific learning and language use needs of specific groups of students — and appropriate to the socio-cultural contexts when students use English. The majority of the movement's practitioners are English teachers, and the needs of their students can be classified into academic, occupational, or professional groups. Many ESP practitioners live and work in English-speaking countries, teaching in programs offering vocational ESL or EAP (contexts emphasizing academic) or business language (English for Business Purposes). However, ESP is more common in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where more and more students long to learn business English or academic English in order to pursue their careers or study in educational institutions of English-speaking countries. A typical example is that the boom of ESP programs in EFL contexts has occurred in China, where foreign trade ~~has~~ risen sharply from 10 percent to 45 percent of the Gross National Product over the last thirty years and the need to speak English in international trade is urgent. Nowadays, many employers and businesses at home and abroad really need talents with ESP backgrounds, especially English for Business Purposes.

The Classification of ESP

English for Specific Purposes can be classified into two categories, which are English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). English for Academic Purposes (EAP) includes English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), English for Medical Purposes (EMP), and English for the Law (ELP). English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) includes English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and Vocational ESL (VESL).

The Features of ESP

Although the modern ESP movement has evolved and changed a lot since it started in the mid 1960s, many elements have remained relatively stable in the past decades. In 1988, Peter Strevens provided the following overview of ESP and its features.

The features for ESP are that it is focused on the learner's need and wastes no time, and relevant to the learner. It is successful in imparting learning and more cost-effective than "General English".

An ESP definition needs to distinguish between four definite and two valuable characteristics:

1. definite characteristics: ESP consists of language teaching which is designed to meet the specified needs of the learner and is related to content to particular disciplines, occupations, or activities. It is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, and the analysis of this discourse, which is in contrast to "General English".
2. Variable characteristics: ESP may be, but it is not necessarily

restricted to the language skills to be learned and not taught according to any doomed methodology.

Undoubtedly, the “absolute characteristics” of the movement, have offered guidance in the design and arrangement of ESP curricular and teaching in the past decades.

The Planning of ESP Program

The development of ESP programs is needed because many people including teachers, employers, government officials, and students, have a demand for language courses which content, skills, motivations, processes, and values are identified and specified. When ESP practitioners design ESP programs, especially language courses, they have to consider many factors and try their best to solve some basic problems.

1. Teachers Qualifications

A key issue to be considered is the qualifications of the teachers who will attend an ESP program. What kind of training will they receive? What content, skills, and language abilities will they choose to teach? Are they advanced in English language? What types of curricula and approaches do they prefer? As ESP teachers, they have to answer all of these questions when designing ESP program. For example, in many cases, the ESP teacher is not a native speaker of English, which will affect the design of ESP courses.

ESP teachers have to face various kinds of challenges. For example, one challenge is about ESP content; learning the particular vocabulary, texts, and background knowledge which are compulsory to the ESP

training of students in a specific setting. What does a teacher have to know about the language of finance, or marketing, to meet the demand of students who have chosen these occupations? Many ESP practitioners hold that as long as they can analyze text and use language well, they do not need specialist knowledge. In fact, for business English, some familiarity with business knowledge or career is helpful for teachers.

Frequently, the teacher or practitioner does some researches to make needs assessment and target situation analysis before designing the curriculum. In English for Academic Purposes programs, teachers often analyze the discourses of the students' discipline, visit classes, and study the strategies that are helpful for students. In business English, the practitioner may have to pay a visit to a company in an English speaking country in order to understand the business language in the real business world.

There exists another challenge for ESP teachers, which is related to successful communication in a business atmosphere since that students need to learn. How is a good working and communicative relationship established among employees from different cultures, who are working in the same company or cooperating in the same industry? These issues can make or break businesses and affect working relationships and corporate culture.

2. On-Site Course

Different from general English, one of the aims of ESP is to achieve maximum linguistic, strategic, and situational authenticity in curricula designing. One of the most advantageous "authentic" possibilities is provided by courses offered wholly, or in part, on site in the target

location; at a workplace, such as a factory or hotel. On-site ESP provides opportunities for an accurate and rich needs assessment and ongoing training and evaluation, as well as for input from the stakeholders involved. In universities, on-site language training may occur in many courses or arrangements that permit students to experience language and literacy in the real business world.

If teachers can not provide on-site course, they may find other ways to offer authenticity to students. It is controversial to introduce into the classroom written or oral discourses that focus on the target situation in which the students will eventually use business English. Many curriculum designers analyze and categorize these discourses so that they can be studied within a curriculum.

“A traditional belief that now appears problematic is that genres for use in one context— history lessons or office work— can be straightforwardly taught in a different context such as the English lessons... Producing an example of a genre is a matter not just of generating a text with certain formal characteristics but of using generic resources to act effectively on a situation. ” (Freeman and Medway 1994:11)

For this claim, some practitioners argue that authenticity should relate to the transferability of strategies or activities rather than to spoken or written texts from target contexts. Thus, for example, if students practice communication strategies in the target language, they may be able to use these approaches under other circumstances. In the following quote, which continues to influence ESP curricula, Widdowson argues:

“Process-oriented approach accepts from the outset that the language

data given to the learner will not be preserved in store intact, but will be used in the mental mill. Hence the language content of the course is selected not because it is representative of what the learner will have to deal with after the course is over but because it is likely to activate strategies for learning as the course progresses. ” (1981:5)

3. The Selection of Textbooks

Over the years, in making curricular decisions, ESP practitioners have been influenced by trends in applied linguistics and general ESL/EFL teaching. But whatever current trends are, it is important for an ESP teacher to be context-and-student sensitive. In any case, the purpose of any ESP curriculum is to meet the specific linguistic and pragmatic needs of students as they prepare for specific English contexts. All tasks or activities should be designed to student needs and the requirements of the target vocation.

This makes the selection of off-the-shelf textbooks very difficult, as Swales (1980), among others, has noted. Should a textbook be “wide-angled” and inclusive, such as many English for Business texts are, losing some of the specificity of local student needs? Should textbooks be “narrow-angled,” addressing some of the focused needs of the learner?

Whether practitioners choose published textbooks or develop their own materials, revision and updating must be done regularly in ESP.

4. ESP Assessment

What is significant in ESP programs is that students and their teachers, or academic institutions are anxious to see assessment results that focus on specific targets. Thus, the demands of assessment, both in terms of

formative and summative evaluation, are great. In a work on ESP testing, Douglas (2000) points out the following: “specific purpose language test is one in which test content and methods are derived from an analysis of the characteristics of a specific target language use situation, so that test tasks and content are authentically representative of the target situation, allowing for an interaction between the test taker’s language activity and specific purpose content knowledge, on the one hand, and the test tasks on the other. Such a test allows us to make inferences about a test taker’s capacity to use language in the specific purpose domain. ”

In addition, ESP assessment must also be suitable for the instructional context. For example, interviewing the students about English language and content can be more effective than any traditional forms like oral or reading and writing examination. Some ESP teachers are now testing students on-line to encourage the development of computer skills and to make testing more efficient as well as convenient.

5. Models of ESP Programs

What kinds of courses can be called ESP programs? Actually there are a variety of courses and programs in a variety of places, targeted to the language needs, skills, content, and processes required. Perhaps one of the most clear and widespread sets of program models in ESL contexts involves in VESL (Vocation English as the Second Language), which is similar to business English. It includes the following:

Pre-employment VESL

This is a modified version of a “general” ESL class in that the content is devoted to job readiness and general job skills. Students practice general

job functions such as responding to complaints, making requests, and answering the phone. They may also prepare for job interviews and other job hunting skills.

Cluster VESL

Students from different vocations study in one classroom. Students study all four skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, often in a theme-based program. In one class, for example, students read about how to meet people and make small talk in the workplace. Then, they meet in pairs or teams answering jigsaw comprehension questions or completing a problem-solving or writing exercise. Later, students work on individualized modules devoted to their chosen professions and are assessed on this work.

Workplace VESL

This definition refers to skills and content of a specific workplace. It can be job-specific, or it may have a broader emphasis. Often, the employer pays for some or all of the courses, and employees are excused during their workday to attend.

English for Business Programs

English for Business programs are the most prevalent in the English as a Foreign Language world. Businesses, or individuals, require classes in communication, negotiation, marketing, correspondence, and report writing, and in doing international trade. Generally, program design focus on business vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and case study.

Chapter 2 Business English

1. The Definition of Business English

Business English must be seen in the overall context of English for Specific Purpose (ESP), as it shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, course design, and materials selection and development which are common to all fields of work in ESP. As with other varieties of ESP, Business English implies the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kinds of communication in a specific context.

Business English is different from other varieties of ESP in that it is often a mix of specific content which is related to a particular job area or industry, and general content which is related to general ability to communicate effectively in business.

Since the 1980s, Business English has aroused increasing interest and awareness all over the world in education as well as in business. Business English courses are provided by a large number of educational institutions worldwide. It is estimated that there are more than 150 Business English titles in UK and a variety of examining organizations offering Business English examinations.

Generally speaking, students have two kinds of needs: (1) Academic need. The school or university may ask them to learn textbooks in English or follow lectures in English in order to gain the academic qualifications they are working for. One purpose of their learning may be the improvement of reading and listening strategies in business English, with a stress on business English vocabulary. These consist of important targets for any business English courses they study. (2) Future working need. They need to learn business English for their future working life in business. In this sense, the teachers should combine their language course with skills like business writing, negotiation, attending conference, presenting speech or interpersonal communication, depending on the vocation they dream of.

The Features of Business English Language

Due to the limited development history, the research in Business English is still relatively underdeveloped. Strict linguistic analysis is not complete and often depends on the written forms like business correspondence, annual reports, and articles in business journals. Some kinds of analysis have been made by using the language of meetings and discussions, but they are not the first-hand experience gained by teachers.

Sense of Purpose

The most important feature of business exchanges in the context of business conferences, telephone conversations, and negotiations is a sense of purpose. Language is used to achieve a specific purpose, and the successful use is based on a successful result from the business transaction or activity. By using Business English, especially speaking Business English, employees can perform better in their jobs. Business is competitive; competition exists between companies as well as within

companies, between employees working hard to advance in their careers. It is agreed that performance objectives are more important than educational objectives or language learning. For example, a German company in Shanghai may have a long-term objective to establish good trading relations, and their representative's use of English is directed to that purpose. An Italian sales manager needs to give clear presentations of recent product development to subsidiaries in Europe and the Far East. In these examples, the use of language has a potential risk: mistakes and misunderstandings could cause heavy loss for the company.

Moreover, the language needed by businesspeople will be mainly for transaction: getting what you want and persuading others to agree with the course of action you propose. The language will frequently be objective rather than subjective and personal. For example, in discussions and meetings, it will be more appropriate to evaluate facts from an objective standpoint rather than expressing personal feelings and opinions.

Social Aspects

In business, especially international business, businesspeople often need to communicate with others whom they have never met before, or know a little. Meetings are often short because businesspeople are always pressed for time. There is need for an internationally accepted way of doing things so that people from different cultures, and with different mother tongues, can get along with each another very soon.

Social contacts are often very stylized. Rigid language is used (in greetings and introductions, for example) in the context of a routine pattern of exchanges. A certain style is generally adopted which is polite