

ESP Course Construction for Transportation Majors

Fangpeng Gai

School of Foreign Studies, Shandong Jiaotong University, China

Abstract—Since the traditional College English can no longer adapt to the current situation, its development has become the focus of the society. ESP has recently been paid more attention, whose goal is to develop the students' comprehensive language skills required in future career and academic research. ESP teachers should not only follow the rules of English language, but also think about how to use English language to promote the study of professional knowledge. This study provides a design of ESP course for transportation majors in Shandong Jiaotong University. It is constructed from the perspectives of learners' needs, objectives, content selection, teaching methods, and assessment.

Index Terms—ESP, College English, transportation majors

I. INTRODUCTION

With the economic globalization and the rapid development of higher education in China during recent years, the society has increasingly favored compound talents with both professional knowledge and good English communication skills. At the same time, the transformation of some local colleges into applied technology colleges is imminent. So the issue of how to cultivate college students' English communication skills has been put forward in discussing the direction of college English reform.

ESP stands for English for Specific Purposes, which originated in the 1960s and refers to English related to a specific occupation or subject based on learners' demands for specific purposes, such as Engineering English, Computer English, etc.. The concept of ESP was first mentioned in the book *Language Science and Language Teaching* by Halliday, McInish and Stevens (1964): "English for civil servants; for policemen; for officials of the law; for dispensers and nurses; for Specialists in agriculture; for engineers and fitters." In 1969, the first seminar of ESP was held internationally. After that, the term also experienced a change from English for Special Purposes to the current English for Specific Purposes.

From the 1960s till now, many countries has established a relatively complete system for ESP research. At each stage of ESP development, there are representative figures and works. Although there is still no agreement on the concepts and branches of ESP, ESP curriculum design, textbook compilation, and curriculum design are relatively complete in many European and Asian countries and regions, and ESP teaching is gradually entering the mainstream. However, in China, most universities do not have relevant experience to train students in ESP.

Regarding the classification, originally ESP was classified by Mackay & Mountford (1978). Mackay & Mountford (1978) drew a tree diagram of English language teaching, which divided English language teaching into English as mother tongue, English as foreign language and English as a second language. English as foreign language can be divided into General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Then they divide General English into three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary/adult, and ESP is divided into English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EEB) and English for Social Science (ESS). Each category is further subdivided into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Jordan (1997) mainly focuses on the ultimate purpose and language use environment of learners and divides ESP into EOP and EAP, and EAP is further divided into ESAP and EGAP.

College English is mainly General English in China now. There is professional barrier for College English teachers, and so we need a transition for students to prepare for the start of professional learning and future work.

II. STATUS QUO OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

At present, with the improvement of English teaching standards in primary and secondary schools, senior high school graduates has made significant progress in English. Some senior school students' English level has been equivalent to CET-4. But many experts and scholars suspect our current English teaching is just a simple continuation of high school English teaching, without qualitative breakthrough, and so it is undoubtedly a waste of resources. In 2007, the Ministry of Education promulgated *College English Curriculum Requirements* which clearly defines the objectives of College English teaching. The objectives include developing students' English comprehensive abilities, especially their listening and speaking skills so that the students can effectively communicate in English in their future studies, work, and social interactions. At the same time, they can also enhance their independent learning ability and improve their

comprehensive cultural qualities to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchange. This goal can be seen that the direction of College English teaching in China in the new stage is clear and it is moving toward the goal of practicality.

Then how to keep the current College English teaching in accordance with the needs of students and help students achieve better development in their respective professional fields? During recent years, in the process of exploring integration of College English teaching with students' professional knowledge, ESP has received more and more attention as a teaching direction to the combination of content and language. Many researchers, experts and professors in China, such as Wang Shouren, Liu Runqing, and Liu Fagong, have mentioned ESP. Liu Runqing (1996) pointed out that the English teaching in the 21st century tend to combine the professional content and English language. Some scholars mentioned that we need to make strategic adjustments to College English teaching. The main task is to decentralize general English teaching to secondary schools so that students can focus on professional English learning when they enter colleges and universities. However, how to help students transit from General English to professional English, and how to set up different English courses for the integration between subject content and language for different majors has confronted College English researchers. Wang Shouren and Wang Haixiao (2011) have analyzed the survey results of college English teaching in China, and proposed that college English teaching should strengthen the classification guidance and propose different solutions according to different types of schools, their positioning, levels, and school characteristics.

This paper is in favor of the idea of classified guidance, especially for local colleges and universities transitioning to applied ones that can be pragmatically oriented, integrated closely with careers or future studies. Ensuring that students are able to acquire the English skills necessary for their future work during school time should be the main goal of College English teaching.

III. CONSTRUCTION OF ESP COURSE FOR TRANSPORTATION MAJORS

The orientation of our university is to train compound applied talents. The main purpose of College English teaching is to strengthen the language output skills of students. Emphasizing the cultivation of language output skills firstly requires the determination of the purpose of English teaching. According to the learning demands and development direction of different learners, the research group assume that the ESP courses for transportation majors should be divided into ESAP English (such as English for automotive majors, English for marine majors) and EOP English (such as English for auto majors). ESAP courses emphasize language skills training and professional knowledge acquisition. EOP attaches great importance to developing students' English application ability in the context of traffic industry. The difference determines that the curriculum designer should select different types of ESP teaching materials. The teaching model should be established for both classroom learning and practice learning according to the cultivation objectives. The assessment should be established from the perspective of satisfying the talent cultivation requirements.

A. Course Design

The goal of College English teaching has shifted to improve students' English comprehensive practical ability. On the other hand, with the improvement of English teaching level in primary and secondary schools, College English credits have been greatly reduced, from the original 16 to 12 or 8. Compulsory credits have been reduced to allow students to devote their energy to studying other English courses so that the English language ability can be fully developed.

The demand analysis model of Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) incorporates seven aspects from the students' individual information to the Curriculum requirements. According to their theory, this study randomly selects some undergraduate students from different disciplines as the survey subjects to help research group to know about students' opinions on the current College English teaching and their expectations towards English learning. The results are as follows:

Firstly, on the current College English teaching. Most students are not satisfied with current College English teaching and the dissatisfaction are reflected in the following aspects: (1) Curriculum settings: The curricular arrangements are unsatisfying. College English classes are mainly for the freshmen and sophomores in the first two academic years. In the following two years, English learning mainly relies on students' self-study by themselves. When the seniors decide to go for postgraduate study, they will mostly concentrate on the knowledge for the exam and ignore the points that are in line with the future study work. (2) Teaching content: College English teaching is still aimed at the CET-4. The teaching materials used by various majors are the same, and the contents of the curriculum are also the same. The teaching mainly concentrates on the grammar, vocabulary and discourse comprehension of the texts, and lacks the cultivation of students' comprehensive language ability and the promotion of specialized knowledge. (3) Teaching methods: College English classes lack various teaching methods. Although teachers will give some extra learning materials as supplements, the classroom teaching outcome is not good, resulting in low enthusiasm for students to learn English. (4) The result of learning: Most students think that they rarely use English in the current learning environment. The main purpose of learning English is to pass the CET-4 exam. More than half of the students think their speaking and listening ability are poor, and they do not possess the ability to read foreign documents.

Secondly, attitudes to ESP course. Many students assume that the content of current English learning materials should be academic English that is related to their majors. They hope through the study of ESP course, they can

exchange professional information in English, which indicates students hope to apply the specialized English knowledge they have learned to later professional work or study. This is in line with the characteristics of ESP, namely, clear goals, strong pertinence, and high practical value. Only a few students think learning ESP is useless, because their General English is not good, let alone ESP. It can be seen that most students are aware of the importance of ESP for their future career development, and they are positive about learning it.

From the above survey, it can be seen an effective college English course should be oriented to meet the professional learning needs of students. The traditional college English teaching pays more attention to basic knowledge and is separated from the students' professional disciplines. This teaching model obviously can not meet the students' needs in the professional development, nor can it meet the mission of colleges in the cultivation of compound talents in the new era. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to incorporate ESP into the teaching of College English and try to construct an ESP curriculum that meets the professional development of students.

B. Teaching Objectives

The teaching objectives of GE is to develop the students' skills in reading, listening, speaking and writing, whereas ESP strengthens the English foundation and highlights students' professional skills through reading English reference materials.

Based on the above demand analysis, we have determined that the overall teaching objectives of ESP for transportation majors are: (1) To help students grasp the specialized background knowledge and the latest development trends of the respective majors, and master the basic industry English terminology based on the learners' demand analysis, the training objectives of different transportation majors, graduates' career and capacity requirements; (2) To develop students' ability of using English to acquire information. This will lay the foundation for the continued study of professional and cutting-edge knowledge. After analyzing the learners' demands and learning ESP-related language theories, the ESP teaching tasks are drafted for different majors.

Basic requirements for curriculum: Ability to use English as a medium to complete the tasks of collecting, organizing, and presenting relevant professional information. Presentation methods include oral presentations, question and answer discussions, and written reports.

Teaching focus: Design diversified tasks based on the needs of the target job and academic requirements.

Teaching methods: Flexible teaching methods can be used to complete the task according to the actual situation.

Assessment methods: Formative assessment and summative assessment are combined. In the teaching, students should display their assignments in various forms and teachers evaluate the task as part of the formative evaluation. The final evaluation is performed at the end of the semester.

C. ESP Content Selection

In the ESP teaching process, the course content must be selected carefully, which best reflects the needs of students and the principles of efficient teaching.

The ESP curriculum is based on the analysis of teaching objectives and learners' demands, with a greater emphasis on language in target context, rather than simply teaching vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and other language points. The selection of the course content must conform to the following principles:

(1) Learner-centered. There are two types of goals for undergraduate students to accept college education: employment and academic studies. In the process of determining the content, the learners' aim must be analyzed carefully at first. Then ESP teachers can select the content according to the needs of learners, which should not only be relevant to the knowledge, the content of the subject knowledge, but also to the learners' level.

(2) Authentic material. Authentic materials may come from different sources: video clips, real interactive scene recording, TV show excerpts, newspapers, pictures, etc.. As to ESP, the authentic materials should be the ones happening in future professional workplaces or learning situations. The use of authentic materials is to enable classroom activities to simulate real communication and promote the transfer of knowledge. In our process of compiling teaching materials, the teachers are required to contact the student internship enterprises, trying to combine the actual situation with guidance from professionals. The self-edited textbooks are closer to the real employment situation of the students, and they are also adjusted according to the learners' real demands or the learner's feedback.

According to the above principles, in the design of the textbooks for ESAP students in our university, we pay attention to the academic and professional practicality. For the ESAP students, we focus on improving students' academic English literacy, and so the design is based on professional tasks and case studies, etc.. Through learning, students understand how professional knowledge is expressed in English and possess the ability to complete tasks. In this way, they can read the original materials in English, speak in English, and report and exchange information on personal research in English.

At the same time, ESAP textbooks also instruct students new direction of science and technology development through teaching materials, and prepare students for future technological progress. For example, automotive English requires students to accurately understand and translate various English accessories, electronic control systems, typical faults and other English materials. We train students to read the car repair-and -operation guide, make oral reports on the mechanical components of the car engine, chassis parts, automotive electronic control systems and typical faults, to present information on how to improve the function of engine or other components. We also provide English

professional information on repair and maintenance of imported car equipment to help students keep up with the international trends.

EOP textbooks are different from ESAP textbooks. EOP regards the working environment and requirements as a context to emphasize the application of language skills in work. The ultimate goal of the course is to develop students' ability to complete tasks in a specific work environment using English as a medium. The language requirements cover the vocabulary, grammar and discourse of the specific activities of the industry. Therefore, the content of the textbook must be centered around the target requirements of the position with practicality. The context of the situation highlights the training of skills, combining professional knowledge with practical operations, helping students get a systematic understanding of the professional knowledge in specific fields. Through role-play, case analysis and other activities, they can carry out targeted exchanges to achieve the goal of communicating with clients, better integrating English knowledge into real work. For example, in the auto service industry, English communication is provided for positions such as automobile sales and after-sales, automobile insurance, automobile maintenance technology, and automobile beauty. In response to these positions, the textbooks for students are to consolidate the basic knowledge, help students master the English terminology of auto parts and the basic skills of exquisite communication services in English.

However, the self-editing textbooks are more complicated in design. It is difficult to develop materials that reflect the real context based on the English teachers' own abilities. On the other hand, it is time-consuming, laborious and hard to obtain professional guidance, so it takes the College English teachers a lot of energy and time to undertake this task.

D. Teaching Method

Only when the learners see the relevance between the knowledge and their needs, can they be motivated. For EOP students, the academic requirements for them are not high. Oral exchanges are frequently used in the future workplace, so it is mainly to develop students' communication skills, therefore, the course design can adopt a learning-centered approach and focus on cultivating the students' workplace exchange service capabilities. Therefore, oral presentations, role-playing, and simulations are more practical.

For ESAP students, the main point is to develop academic English reading and writing and use English to read their academic papers and communicate with others. ESAP students usually have a relatively higher English level and have achieved a certain degree of professional knowledge. The ESAP course can be designed to enhance learners' academic skills through skills-centered approach. For these students, teachers can use deep-end teaching strategies, which can enable students to complete certain tasks. The advantage is it imitates the students' real academic atmosphere, which is usually associated with activities such as case projects, presentations, and simulations.

E. ESP Assessment System

The traditional College English teaching is dominated by summative assessment methods, ignoring the formative assessment of students' ability to think critically, solve problems, cooperate and communicate. It does not enable students to achieve comprehensive development. But ESP is for future development, it needs to fully evaluate the students' learning process. The formative assessment combines the students' practical skills and the acquisition of professional knowledge.

In the formative assessment of EOP, teachers can create some real contexts to test students' professional English communication ability with clients. The purpose of the real task simulation is to measure students' English proficiency in the real situation tasks. As it is assessed in real-life scenarios, not only can students assess their comprehensive language proficiency, but also can assess their abilities and language communication skills.

In the formative assessment of ESAP, students can be required to finish some papers, which are closer to real academic activities and can comprehensively examine students' ability to use English. In order to complete the dissertation, students will show their advantages in the high requirements for reading and writing and academic ability. After finishing the paper, they also will be asked to display and communicate with others on the assignment. All these can be summed as part of the total grade.

F. ESP Teacher Team Building

Nowadays, many universities face a problem in teaching ESP, that is, the faculty is not professional enough. Although College English teachers have a solid basic knowledge of language, they lack the knowledge of relevant professional fields. However, although professional teachers have rich professional knowledge, they lack language skills and have no relevant experience in College English teaching.

The professional competence of ESP teachers is closely related to the successful implementation of ESP courses. ESP teachers need possess certain qualities including career enthusiasm, ability to develop and manage courses, productivity, relationship construction and the understanding of the students' needs. In fact, there is still controversy in the academic community about the qualities that ESP teachers need possess. Many people believe that ESP teachers must understand the target workplace and have the ability to teach students professional or academic knowledge, thus, a qualified ESP teacher needs three kinds of knowledge: language, education, and professional content. Of course, the most controversial thing for ESP researchers is the level of discipline that ESP teachers should have. Under actual circumstances, we assume that the most important thing for ESP teachers is language teaching ability, plus certain professional knowledge. It is not necessary for ESP teachers to become proficient in professional fields.

With the development of College English education, the teaching ability and academic level of Chinese College English teachers have been greatly improved. At present, they can be qualified for the ESP teaching to non-English majors. ESP teachers can listen to the bilingual lessons given by the professional teachers, sum up the basic knowledge that they can grasp, figure out their questions and ask the professional teachers for help. Then, based on the level of personal knowledge, ESP teachers adopt appropriate classroom activities to help students acquire the ESP knowledge and make students' knowledge positively migrate.

Ellis & Johnson believes that the theme and task design of ESP should be language skills training to promote the development in careers. The aim is to further develop English language skills, expand specific professional English vocabulary, familiarize with the stylistic features and language expressions, and lay a good foundation for transition to bilingual courses and full English major courses. The two scholars assume that if students have certain relevant professional foundation at this time, they can also learn ESP and use the existing professional basic knowledge and skills to promote the improvement of English. In this way, College English teachers can become qualified ESP teachers with a certain amount of training. ESP teacher training includes two aspects: language training and professional training. The former refers to the improvement of language skills, and the latter refers to the knowledge structure, teaching methods and professional English style characteristics of certain profession. In the specific training, we should also pay attention to the following questions: First, ESP teacher should change their mindsets. Some teachers are reluctant to engage in ESP teaching, they are not interested in the new majors involved, and lack the spirit of further study. At this time, these teachers should be aware of the urgency of the reform of College English teaching. Fully enthusiastic commitment to this work can keep up with the requirements of the times. Second, the transformation of the role of teachers. In traditional College English teaching, students are passive recipients in most classes, but in ESP classes, teachers should not only be a good lecturer and a participant in classroom activities, but also should accompany and encourage student, evaluate their behaviour and study results.

In our ESP teaching, College English teachers actively seek to establish contact with relevant professional teachers, listen to their suggestions on textbook writing and learning, conduct regular group teaching and research activities, and provide a good external promotion environment, conduct action research to solve practical teaching problems. This has greatly improved the teaching level of teachers and broadened their horizons. After the training, many teachers can actively exchange their experiences and apply various appropriate teaching methods to teaching, which can improve the teaching level.

IV. CONCLUSION

The ultimate objective of ESP teaching should be to develop the students' comprehensive language skills needed to complete the target tasks in the target profession and subject research. In ESP teaching, demand analysis is the key to curriculum construction. The choice of ESP content must involve both language knowledge and subject knowledge. ESP learning should follow the basic rules of language learning. It is necessary to consider how to use English language to promote the ESP knowledge in consideration of the original foundation of learners. Meanwhile, the development of the curriculum is a synthesis of various methods used throughout the curriculum design.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was financially supported by Educational Research and Teaching Reform Project of Shandong Jiaotong University (Grant NO. JG201734).

REFERENCES

- [1] Dudley, Evans, T. & M. St. John. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Ellis, M. & Johnson, C. (1994). *Teaching Business English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [3] Halliday, A. McInch and P. Strevens. (1964). *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- [4] Jordan, R. R. (1997). *English for Academic Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [5] Mackay, R., & Mountford, A. (Eds.). (1978). *English for Specific Purposes: A case study approach*. London: Longman.
- [6] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2007). *College English Curriculum Requirements*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.
- [7] Wang Shouren, Wang Haixiao. (2011). *On the State of College English Teaching in China and Its Future Development*. Beijing: Foreign Languages in China.

Fangpeng Gai was born in Yantai, China in 1979. He received his master degree from Shandong University, China in 2012.

He is currently an associate professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Shandong Jiaotong University. His research interests include English teaching and legal English.