

Study on the Effective Ways to Organize Business English Classes

LI Juan^{[a],*}

^[a]School of Foreign Language Studies, Shandong Jiaotong University, Jinan, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by the Research Base of Humanities and Social Sciences of Shandong Province-International Business Study Centre, the Teaching Research Foundation of Shandong Jiaotong University: Curriculum Design for Business English Students Based on Needs Analysis Theory-A Case Study of Shandong Jiaotong University (JY201211), and the Scientific Research Foundation of Shandong Jiaotong University (R201301).

Received 12 February 2014; accepted 26 May 2014
Published online 25 June 2014

Abstract

The increase of international business activities has been an increasing demand for business English talents. To cultivate qualified business English talents in limited teaching hours, the classroom teaching patterns should be innovated to stimulate the students' initiative. Based on the characteristics of business English, this paper discusses the effective ways to organize business English classes, which include explosive teaching, simulation, role play and case study in hope of increasing the teaching efficiency of business English and shed light on the improvement of business English teaching.

Key words: Business English; Classroom teaching; Practicability

Li, J. (2014). Study on the Effective Ways to Organize Business English Classes. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(3), 111-115. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/4924>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4924>

INTRODUCTION

As an important media for international business communication, business English is frequently used nowadays. The study of business English teaching is

arousing the attention of researchers and educators. As a multi-discipline subject, the teaching of business English poses higher requirement for teachers, for they should integrate English language, business knowledge, and communication skill together in their teaching. Classroom teaching is the main channel for students to obtain knowledge and skills and how to maximize the efficiency of classroom teaching is an important issue. As the organizers of the classroom, business English teachers should find effective way to organize the class effectively and make the class valid by using different measures. This paper discusses how to make business English classroom teaching more effective and it is the author's hope to provide some implications for the teachers and researchers.

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BUSINESS ENGLISH AND ITS LEARNERS

1.1 The Characteristic of Business English

Business English is the language used when people are engaged in international business activities. In China, the talents of business English are mainly cultivated in universities or colleges, which are quite different from the western countries, where business English is teaching systems or profession that serves for other industries abroad (Li, 2011). In China, over 1,000 universities or colleges have set up business English major or branch. The most popular practice is that students will receive English training in the first two school years and then study business courses in the later two years.

Business English falls within the scope of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Ellis & Johnson, 1994; St John, 1966; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Chen & Zhang, 1996; Wang, 1997;

Feng, 1999; Huang, 2000). Thus the teaching of business English should follow the framework of English teaching, in which language is an important skill, which should be highlighted. Besides the language skill, business English learners have to master the knowledge of other models, namely, business knowledge and skills, cross-cultural communication and human attainment. Language teaching is the root of Business English teaching, which has much in common with General English teaching (Donna, 2000, p.2; Dudley-Evans, 1998, p.54). When designing a business English course, international trade, marketing, international transportation, international accounting, international business law, cross-cultural business communication, etc. are the courses that should be included in a business English curriculum. According to Wang Guanfu (2010), business English has three distinguished features:

1.1.1 Multi-Discipline

Business English covers the field of linguistics, economics, law, management, and education etc. In 2009, the *National Curriculum for BA Program in Business English* (hereafter called National Curriculum) was released. Its goal is to cultivate the talents who have perfect English language proficiency, broad international vision, reasonable international business knowledge and skills. These talents must master the theory and practice in the field of economy, management, law and related disciplines and have the quality of humane attainment and cross-cultural ability, and can work in the field of business, economy and trade, management, finance, and foreign affairs. According to Ellis & Johnson, business English is a mix of the “specific content” and “general content”. The specific content refers to the contents of a particular job area or industry while the general content is the general ability to communicate more effectively, especially in business situations (2002).

In business English teaching, Business knowledge and skills should be highlighted at the same time when language is taught. How to balance the relationship between business and English in the limited teaching hours is an issue worthies further discussion. This obliges business English teachers to explore the effective teaching method in class, such as case study, simulation, role play, or other methods and put them into business English teaching to bridge the gap between campus and working positions. In this way, the adaptability and competition power of the graduates will be enhanced in this way.

1.1.2 Practicability

As stated before, business English is the language used in business activities. Compared with general English learners, Business English learners are likely to be more goal-orientated and to expect success. They have higher expectations of efficiency, quality and professionalism (Ellis & Johnson, 2002). Job-experienced learners have

an even precise notion about why they learn business English. One of the distinguished features of business English is its practicability in the real business world. Students may be engaged in the field of commerce, finance, industry and other fields doing the job of negotiation, telephoning, reporting, e-mail writing and drafting contract etc. after they graduate. They should know the international conventions, local cultural customs and can deal with different people speaking different languages from different cultural backgrounds. Business English teaching should cater to the needs of the society and cultivate the practicability ability and communication competence of students.

1.1.3 Innovativeness

According to the *National Curriculum*, the total teaching hours for business English program is 1,800. To teach students English language, business knowledge and cross-cultural communication ability simultaneously in limited teaching hours is not an easy task to accomplish. The teaching goal of business English also differs from the economic programs and has its own distinctive feature. In terms of quality, business English teaching should emphasis the framework knowledge and thinking patterns of the related subjects; in terms of quantity, knowledge is not taught as profound and specialized as economic specialty (Wang, 2010). In this sense, Content-based Instruction (CBI) is advocated by some researchers (Sun, 2011; Chen, 2011; Xie, 2011). In light of CBI, business knowledge should be the carrier of language, which does not mean simply adding some words or technical terms to English classes. The teaching design should reflect the innovativeness of business English.

1.2 Learners of Business English

Business English learners come from education institutes, such as universities, schools or other institutions, private language schools, in-company training and one to one basic teaching and learning. Compared with general English learners, business English learners have much precise learning objective. According to Evan Frendo, business English learners can be classified from different perspectives, for example, experience, needs, language level, national culture and the level of the organization’s hierarchy (2005). According to experience, business English learners can be divided into pre-experienced learners, job-experienced learners and general business-experienced learners. Pre-experience learners are usually university students who intend to pursue a business career after graduating. They have little or no experience of the business world. Classroom teaching is the main source for them to obtain business related knowledge and skills. In contrast, job-experience learners are those who have business job experience. They have precise objectives and relatively richer experience in the world of business. General business-experienced learners fall somewhere between the above two. They have a certain amount of business experience and they study business English for a specific purpose or a new job.

This paper mainly discusses the way of organizing business English classes for the pre-experienced learners.

2. HOW TO ORGANIZE BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSES

2.1 Expositive Teaching

Expositive teaching is the most traditional way of teaching in classroom. In the earlier years, expositive teaching is the most efficient and economical way of teaching. The teacher, who dominates the class, orally teaches the knowledge to the students systematically with a blackboard and a piece of chalk. From the teacher's perspective, expositive teaching is a direct way of teaching, by which the teacher, through his effort, can make the esoteric and abstract knowledge in the textbook more concrete, vivid and easy to understand. Expositive teaching is beneficial to enhance the teaching effect and efficiency of classroom teaching. With the teacher's guidance, students may not go astray when they are faced with massive knowledge in the textbooks. Besides, expositive teaching is the basis and prerequisite for other teaching methods, which cannot operate well without the teacher's explanation. Moreover, it is applicable to all kinds of courses.

With the development of the society, various teaching methods immerge and computer technology is integrated in teaching, expositive teaching inevitably has its disadvantages. It may lead to spoon-feeding teaching and the teacher may neglect the personalities of students. On the other hand, students may easily depend on the teacher and this will suppress the initiative and creativity. During the learning process, students do not participate in classroom activities and this is unfavorable for them to find the problem and solve the problem. The teacher may not notice the difference of each students and it is impossible for the teachers to modify his way of teaching to suit the special requirements of students.

2.2 Simulation

Simulation teaching was originated in Germany in the 1950's. It refers to the economic activities that simulate the real business condition. Students can experience the whole business operating process of the simulation and learn the relationship between different segments without bearing financial loss (Wang, 2008). For business English learners, simulation enables students to put what they learned from textbook to practice and thus improved their practical ability. During the simulation process, students cannot be passive as they are the subjects in the simulation. They must collect information, analysis and select information and solve the problem independently. Teachers, during the process, become the guide and organizer. Simulation is an efficient way of bringing the picture of real business world

to students and this enables them to have the real business situation experience in the campus.

A typical example would be POCIB (Practice for Operational Competence in International Business), which is an online international trade simulation for business majors. In its system, the whole international trade (both import and export) process is designed. Students have to process their "international business" through customs, banks, inspection bureau, insurance company, shipping company and 14 parties concerned in international trade. Besides, in the simulation system, the Harmonization Code System (HS-Code), import and export tax rate, insurance premium rate, tax refund rate are set according to the real market condition. The most frequently used trade terms in *Incoterms 2010*, FOB, CIF, CFR, FCA, CIP, CPT and the payment terms L/C, D/P, D/A, T/T are employed in the payment process. Meanwhile, the documents involved in international trade, for example, the contract, the commercial invoice, the packing list, the weight memo and altogether 60 documents are designed according to real trade practice, each document has "help index" and can be checked by the system automatically.

At the beginning of the simulation, each player is assigned to a specific country and each country has its specialties. Each player manages his or her own "company". The price of the products, the shipping line are subject to fluctuation. Each player has to "negotiate" online with their competitor about the product selection, price, payment terms, trade terms and all the conclusion details. Before quoting the price, they have to make a budge for the cost incurred. The budge system is designed according to real international trade company and this enhances their ability to calculate the cost and profit accounting.

2.3 Role-Play

Role-play was designed by Fannin Shaftel and George Shaftel in 1967. Role-play is an activity where the learner takes on a role, and they do not play themselves (Frendo, 2005). Role-play differs from simulation in that the participants are asked to adopt a new character that may have different attitudes and opinions from their own (Ellis & Johnson, 2002). Role-play are good for pre-experienced learners because most of the information are given in the cards. Role play bridges the gap between classroom teaching and practice and combine these two perfectly, which make students plunges themselves into communication (Holder, 1983). During a role-play activity, students are motivated in the learning process and the classroom is students-centered (Sun, 2006). Students can practice in a relatively real situation and they may get a deeper understanding of what they learned in their textbooks. Teachers can get feedback from the performance of the students.

The disadvantage of role-play is that for pre-experience learners, it is hard for them to memorize the details in the

cards and they have to refer to the cards from time to time. But pre-experience learners will be more likely to respond well to role play than job-experienced learners, perhaps because they are less likely to have strong opinions of their own (Ellis & Johnson, 2002). Therefore, the teacher must make sound plan for the whole process and have the ability to cope with emergencies in the classroom. For the students who are passive and silent during the role-play

process, the teacher should initiate them and make sure everyone is active and involved in the role-play process.

For example, in an international trade class, when talking about how to develop business in the American market, the teacher may give two cue cards (Cue Card A and Cue Card B) to a pair of students. Both of them have a cue card but these two cards are different in contents. Each of them knows the information in his own card, but

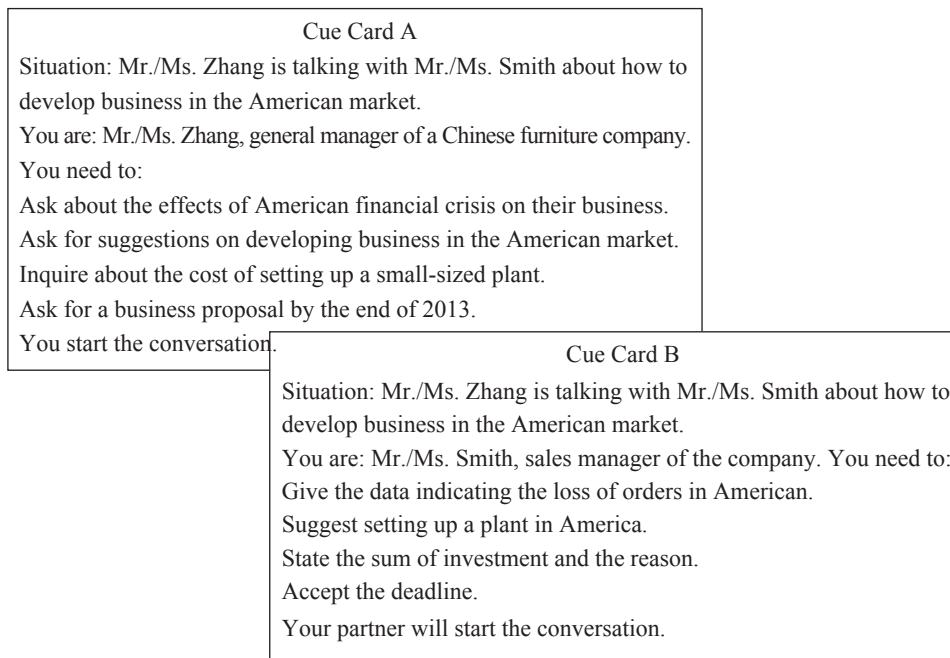


Figure 1
Role-Play Cards

(Source from Oral Examination of China National Business English Certificate Testing)

he does not know his counterpart's. The teacher should formulate the cards beforehand and distribute them in class. The following is a specific example.

2.4 Case Studies

When students had mastered the theory and operational skills, case study can be used to guide the students to analyze the case finally solve the practical problem. Cases are used in the case study and the facts and experience in the case are the basis for discussion. The cases are not a systematic elaboration of the theory, but a distribution of the real situation (Chen, 2004). Students are encouraged to pose questions and teachers, accordingly, should listen to the students and help them solve the problem. Students can be divided into groups and they are encouraged to discuss and debate in the classroom. The teacher should organize and guide the debate and in case of the deviation from the point. It is not advisable for the teacher to express his own idea in the case of influencing the students' own idea. Finally, the teacher should summarize the key point. Case study highlights the role of students in the learning process.

Case study is suitable for all kinds of business English learners (except for those still at a low level) (Frendo 2005). The case can be a real one, or tailor-made. Questions should be included in the case to help students think, analyze and understand the knowledge. Sometimes, some interesting information may be added to the case to arouse the interest of the learners. Students tend to be active in the case study because they would be attracted by the concrete examples. During the learning process, students should emphasis on solving the problems by using the theory learned in the classroom and thus enhance the understanding of the theory. The knowledge learned in the case study is somewhat similar to that learned in simulation, students can intimate to solve practical problem. When a case study is used in business English classes, English should be the language when communicating to enhance their language proficiency. Case study is just an ideal method to cultivate the analytic ability, critical thinking and debating skills of students.

For example, in an international trade class when studying ocean marine cargo insurance, students may

be confused by the two concepts, general average and particular average. The teacher may specially design a case study by using the knowledge the students have learned. A real case may be much complicated and some information must be deleted to avoid distracting the learners.

Case one: A carrying vessel caught on fire on a voyage from Tianjin to Hamburg. To save the ship, the captain ordered to have the water poured into the compartment. Finally the fire was put out. But the engine of the ship was damaged and a salvage vessel was employed to tow the vessel back to Tinjin. The damage were: (a) 500 cartons was burned by the fire. (b) 400 carton were soaked by the water. (c) The engine and part of the deck were burned. (d) Service of salvage vessel. (d) The extra bunker charges and wages for crew. the refugee and other charges. Which of the above damages or charges is general average? Which is particular average? Why?

In the above case, the basic knowledge point is drafted in the case and this help students have a vivid understanding of knowledge they learned. Questions are posed in the end to help them understand.

CONCLUSION

The final goal of business English teaching is to cultivate multi-discipline talents, which demand teachers continuously update their teaching conception. The adoption of the proper teaching method poses higher demand for the teachers. In this paper, simulation, role-play and case study are advocated in business English classes and they offer a new idea for the organization of business English classes. It is advisable for teachers to weigh the advantages and disadvantage of each method. Besides the four classroom activities introduced in this paper, group discussion, oral report and games can also be employed in the business English classroom. Of course, with the development of the computer, CAI is commonly used in classroom and it greatly increases the efficiency of the business English teaching. For scholars and researchers, how to effectively use the proper method in business English teaching is an issue that worthies further discussion.

REFERENCES

Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. New York: Heinle & Heinle.

- Chen, J. P. (2004). Case study and business English teaching. *Journal of Ningbo University (Educational Science)*, 10, 113-115.
- Chen, S. L., & Zhang, G. Y. (1996). *Theory and practice of ESP*. Nanning: Guangxi Education Press.
- Chen, Y. L. (2011). ESP and content-based English Teaching. *China ESP Study*, 1, 41-46.
- Dudley-Evans, T. & St John, M. (1994). *Developments in ESP*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, M., & Johnson, C. (2002). *Teaching business English*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Evan, F. (2005). *How to teach business English*. London: Person Education Limited.
- Feng, J. D. (1999). *Current situation of business English*. Xiamen: Xiamen University Press.
- Huang, W. X. (2000). Study on the Linguistic Status of Business English. *Modern Foreign Languages (supplement)*, 23, 10-13.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- John, M. St. (1996). Business is booming: Business English in the 1990s. *English for Specific Purposes*, 15, 3-18.
- Li, J. (2011). Curriculum design for business english students based on needs analysis theory—A Case Study of Shandong Jiaotong University (Unpublished master's thesis). Shandong Normal University, China.
- Pratt, D. (1980). *Curriculum design and development*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Sun, Q. H., Wang, S. C., & Tan, X. R. (2006). The application of role play in business English teaching. *Journal of Hetian Teacher's College*, 44, 167-168.
- Sun, Y. X. (2011). CBI, ESP and the reform orientation for China English major and college English. *Foreign Languages Research*, 5, 1-4.
- Susan, H. (1983). *Modem English Teacher*. London: Longman.
- Wang, G. F. (2010). Business discipline construction: Retrospect and prospect. *China ESP Study*, 1, 12-16.
- Wang, S. Y. (2008). Study on action-oriented teaching method: Simulation teaching and its effect. *Vocational Technology*, 97, 47.
- Wang, X. S. (1997). *Study on discipline development of business English*. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press.
- Xie, Y. J. (2011). A study on the teaching process design of business English from the perspective of CBI. *Journal of Hunan University of Commerce*, 18, 115-118.