

Teaching Reform of Business English's Listening Course Based on the BEC Test

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ABSTRACT: Business English Certificate (here in after called BEC) test is becoming increasingly heated, but many candidates were perplexed by the listening part. The author gives a brief introduction to the BEC test, analyzes the testing type, the emphasis and the listening parts between BEC test and the College English Test 6 (here in after called CET6) comparatively; then, the existing problems will be pointed out and suggestions will be put forward for teaching reform of Business English's listening course based on the BEC Test to improve the teaching quality.

KEYWORD: BEC test; listening comprehension; CET6; Contrastive Analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

It is known that CET6 (College English Test Band 6) is very common in China, it means a lot to Chinese college students. In the other hand, BEC (Cambridge Business English Certificates) test is an every important examination for the students who majoring in Business English and the certificate are accepted by many enterprises, so it has become a step-stone for the English graduates to get a job in a foreign company. Some investigations show that 65% of candidates think the most difficult part of BEC is listening, and the data from testing center indicates that the rate of losing mark in listening part is highest among BEC Test. Chinese candidates are familiar with the testing mode of listening of CET6, while BEC is totally different from it. BEC includes methods of setting questions, testing emphasis, the code of points, and so on, all these factors lead candidates a fail in BEC test. Thus, the author is to come up with some solutions to help students to improve their listening skills as well as the comprehensive abilities, and be better prepared for the future working-life.

2 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LISTENING PART BETWEEN BEC TEST AND CET6

2.1 Analysis of testing type

2.1.1 Section A in CET6 and Part Two in BEC

In Section A of the CET6, there are eight short conversations and two long conversations spoken

only once and followed one question for each conversation and four choices for each question, contestants must choose the best answer from the prepared choices. Even one can understand the conversation roughly, if he misses the questions, he cannot make the right decision.

Comparatively, part two in BEC Vantage is a kind of match with two parts and five similar or related monologues spoken twice for each part. The answer is a summary for each monologue. So, candidates can get the right answer on the condition that they listen to the whole monologue and make sense to it.

2.1.2 Section B in CET6 and Part Three in BEC

In Section B of CET6, there are three short passages followed ten questions. Candidates have five seconds to read the choices of before the recordings. So, candidates have to use the short time before listening to read up all the choices and find out the key information and the connection between the choices.

In part three of BEC, there is a long text lasting for about four minutes, which can be an interview, a discussion, a speech or report. (Zhi-Nan: 2012) There are eight questions and three optional choices for each question. Candidates can get the answers to the questions directly in this part.

2.1.3 Section C in CET6 and Part One in BEC

Section C in CET6 is a kind of compound dictation played three times, which is a 240 to 260 words'

passage with some words and some sentences subducted. The exact words should be written down in the words part, and either the exact words or the main idea in the sentences part. Thus, candidates have to get the main idea of the passage and the missing sentences.

Contrast, part one in BEC is a kind of dictation about words, phrases or numbers. It is divided into three sections with four blanks separately with a 160 to 200 words phone call or a dialogue twice played. Candidates must be careful when write down their answers on the answer sheet because all words are requested to write down in capital letters.

2.2 Analysis of testing emphasis

2.2.1 Requested skills

When it comes to the listening part in all kinds of language tests, skills are in a special need. In the listening part of CET6, it is very important to guess what the conversations and questions are about according to the prepared answers before listening. Psyching up is the first thing before listening, and then read the materials to predict main ideas of the conversation and mark out key words.

While listening, it is important to focus on the tape to catch key words and sentences, then combining them with the key words marked out on the paper to catch details. Notes-taking about time, price, address, name or other numbers is very helpful. Pauses and the stresses, some examples and data should be paid attention to. Keeping eyes on the paper, ears with the recording and hands on notes-taking, then the best answer can be chosen.

Listening is the most difficult part in BEC Vantage. For part one, candidates should guess the missing words before listening. Mostly, speaker will say the same meaning words to the words on the paper, so that candidates must pay attention to those homonyms and the sentences expressing the same meaning.

For part two, directions show what the monologue is about. Then, differences among choices A-H should be found out. Even the speakers speak the same words as those of the answers; candidates will never know what the real expression is until the recording is played out. Besides, the tone, which expresses the attitude of speaker, is an important factor.

For part three, the order of the questions is matched to the recording one by one. Thus, if something is missed, candidates just need to move on to the next question and try best to get more answers for the first time. Then, in the second time, candidates need to check out the settled ones and pay more attention to those that have not been done.

2.2.2 Content

CET6 is a common test for all college students in China, whose purpose is to test the candidates' comprehensive ability of using English. In some degree, this purpose decides what kinds of questions and topics will appear in the test. CET6 is not a specialized test, so the content would not focus on a specific field, and the questions for the candidates are comparatively easy.

BEC Vantage is a specialized test for those who are majoring in Business English or those who want to work in a foreign company in the future. So, its content is mostly about business. For part one, it is usually phone calls about compliments, apology, inquiry, reservation, place an order or arrange a schedule. (Yu-Xia: 2012) For part two, monologues can be about facilities, career, place, purpose, functions and other topics that might take place in all kinds of business situation. For part three, it could be an interview, a speech or other kinds of talk related to business.

3 STATUS ANALYSIS OF THE LISTENING COURSE ON BEC BASIS

3.1 Teaching mode in BEC listening course

Normally, explanation about new words and phrases is usually in the lead-in part. Then, it comes to the listening and notes-taking part, and the summary about the recording and answers-checking followed. In addition, recording will be played sentence by sentence to know the answer and reasons of the question in doubt. Lastly, students will do some role plays to repeat the conversation by listening one more time.

Nowadays, communicative teaching method is commonly used, whose most popular one is task-based teaching mode with "learning English by doing the exercise and using it." (Jian-Jing: 2012) In BEC vantage class, teachers tend to make the language teaching more practical and more socialized to help students to carry out their studying, working and life in an English situation. Communicative teaching method centers on students, combines reading, writing, speaking and listening together, and provides them a more real situation to develop their communication skills and business skills.

There are also problems in the Business English listening class. The first thing is the equipment is not fully used. There are few on-line-self-testing systems in language labs, (Wei-Jian: 2009) which restrict the self-study ability of students. Second, students play a passive role in the study although contents are rich. Finally, students in a class are not at the same language level, which means that teaching mode is not always suitable for everyone.

3.2 *Teaching mode in college English listening course*

Now, the teaching of college English listening course is still in a very old pattern: explaining new words, playing the recording repeatedly and then check the correct answer. (Jin-Yan: 2008) If there are doubts about some sentences, teachers explain them immediately. Teachers teach the whole class and keep students listening.

The first problem is that traditional teaching method emphasizes the discrimination of the pronunciation in the listening materials, under which situation students are in the passive position to accept what was heard, and listening comprehension becomes a forced task. The second problem is lacking of class activity. Some teachers treat the listening teaching as the training for test. Students get depressed in the listening teaching when they cannot answer the questions correctly, which will eventually leads to a negative result. (Xin Zhang: 2012) The third problem is the shortage of teaching listening skills. Listening class seems to be replaced by intensive reading. Many teachers and students neglect the process of listening so that makes very little sense in the listening class.

4 TEACHING SUGGESTIONS TO THE LISTENING COURSE ON BEC BASIS

4.1 *Adding specialized core course*

In some colleges, students learned basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in the first two college years even they are the Business English majors. Then, they have Business English class in the third year. In this case, students feel that the course is very difficult for them to understand, especially the listening part. They hear nothing when the recording is played because they cannot understand those words in the business situation. So, it is very necessary to add some specialized core courses before Business English class begins.

By doing this, students can get some more knowledge about business, and learn to distinct the differences between business English and the common English. As the saying goes, well begun is half done. With the groundwork, they can catch up with teachers and learn better. The most difficult part of BEC test is the listening part, while the specialized core courses can help students do a good job in the class of BEC vantage and to pass the BEC Exam. In other word, no matter students will take part in the BEC test or not, it is necessary for them to have a specialized core course to help them get ready for farther learning and using.

4.2 *Complementation of basic commercial knowledge and idioms*

A real professional student majoring in Business English should learn not only the knowledge of English language, but also the international trade, marketing, management, business etiquette, negotiation, and social intercourse sometimes. (Hui-Juan: 2010) Since Business English gets involved in so many fields, how can students learn Business English well without basic commercial knowledge and idioms? However, it is not reasonable for many courses for Business English major in some colleges. Business is business, English is English, and they are two things separately. Business English students are required to study both English and business at the same time. In BEC test, candidates are expected to solve problems in a commercial way. Therefore, it is important to help students get into the habit of thinking in the commercial way, which comes from the complementation of the basic commercial knowledge and idioms. Most business English majors will be business man in the future, which means they need to know some business idioms and rules. Thus, teachers in BEC class need to help students to learn something about business so that they can learn business in the English circumstance, which will help get better preparation for the BEC test.

4.3 *Imitating real business situation in class*

The listening part of the BEC test is mostly about business, phone calls, reports or speeches etcetera. Speakers of recording may come from any countries, who do not speak Standard English. It is just as in the real business situation, in which clients come from all over the world with their accents. So, students have to get used to different tones so that they can deal with the questions well. Thus imitating the real business situation in class is really helpful.

Though students in the same class come from the same country, they still have accents because of different cities and areas. Imitating real business situation can not only help students understand English with different accents but also help them to think in the business way. Imitating the real business situation also means students have to talk and listen. Communication can go on only when two parties can understand each other, a good speaker will be a good listener at the same time because he can get information from the other speaker. The class of BEC vantage is not only aiming to help students build up the ability to solve problems in the real world, but the more important thing is to pass the BEC test. And the content of the listening part of BEC test is very close to the real business situation, so when it comes to the listening part, teachers can imitate the real business situation and ask students to do some activities to practice .

4.4 Imitating scenes of test

One purpose of the BEC vantage course is to help students pass the BEC test. As it is known that the most difficult part of the test is listening, and the best way to prepare for the test is to do the exercise to get used to the layout and the rough content of the test. Only those who have great self-control ability can get the same effect by doing the exercise both in and out of class. But for those who are not very concentrative, they have to do the exercise under the circumstance that is nearly the same as the real test. Thus, imitating scenes of the test can help students concentrate on listening and try their best to answer questions. Imitating the scenes of the test and do all the exercise, students will pay more attention to listening, and students' comprehensive ability to some degree can be shown by doing so. Students can understand themselves well, and would know what kind of exercise they have really mastered, and then spend more time on the weak points. BEC test is a professional exam, passing the test demonstrating convincingly that students have the ability to solve problems under business circumstance and the ability to get information from the spoken words and put them in order.

4.5 Building up students' awareness of cultural differences

It is not enough to emphasize the language teaching in Business English listening class. Foreign trade is actually a transnational communication, and business activity is an inter-cultural communication under special cultures and languages background in reality, hence the acquaintance of the cultural differences is the premise to the effective cross-cultural communication. Before helping students to build up cultural awareness in Business English listening class, it is important to build up the sensitive awareness of cultural differences and the consciousness of communication under different cultural language situations. Therefore, when teaching Business English listening, it is necessary to introduce the cultural background information consciously at the appropriate time, so that students can acquire the similarity and the differences between the native language and English, and strengthen students' cultural awareness. Before

listening, teachers can explain the cultural background information to help students to realize the differences directly. Awareness acts as a guidance of one's activity, once students aware the cultural differences well, they can solve problems in the test easier and pass the exam.

5 SUMMARY

Business English is more specific and professional than normal college English, so that its teaching cannot be the same as the normal college English or any other kinds of English, especially when the Business English course is based on the BEC test. In the Business English listening class, teachers should not only teach listening skills, but should also provide students the more actual situation to practice, such as imitating the scenes of the test and the real business situation. Since it is Business English, the background information of business, specialized business core courses, and the basic commercial knowledge are absolutely necessary to be taught and learned. Then, building up the awareness of cultural differences can help students to get a better result and effect in the study of Business English and the BEC test.

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