

Genre-Based Approach in Teaching Business English

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Abstract: This paper mainly discusses the effective application of genre-based approach in teaching Business English based on the analysis of the students' needs in the Foreign Language School of Xi'an Shiyou University. A genre-based instruction is designed after the analyses of the learners, course material, contents and approaches. 17 years of teaching shows that it is practical and effective in teaching Business English to English majors.

1 Introduction

With what is called globalization of the economy, companies in the world need to negotiate with each other. An international language is thus needed in business, and English, with a wide range of speakers in the world, is playing the role of a lingua franca in the present business world.

Business English, or English for Business Purposes, can be seen as a branch, a form or a variety of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It includes English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) [2].

Business English is similar to other forms of ESP in that it "implies the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kinds of communication in a specific context" [1].

However, Business English differs a lot from other forms of ESP. According to Ellis and Johnson [1], Business English "is often a mix of specific content (relating to a particular job area or industry), and general content (relating to general ability to communicate more effectively, albeit in business situations)."

With increasing needs of Business English in the world, universities, colleges, language schools, companies and some other institutions have developed growing enthusiasm in offering *Business English* programs to learners in various conditions. In Xi'an Shiyou University, different types of *Business English* courses have been designed for both the students majoring in English and the students majoring in business. Some of the programs turned out to be very effective while some courses have been considered unsuccessful teaching/learning experience by both the teachers and the learners.

There are bound to be many factors that influence the success of a Business English program. Therefore, a variety of issues need to be considered in the teaching of Business English --- the learners, their needs, content of the course, course materials, teaching approaches as well as the class activities.

2 The Learners

There are many different Business English learners. The first type includes people who are just going to start on a career in business, perhaps having finished a university course. There is a saying that these people are learning business in English rather than English for business. Therefore, they are usually called "pre-experience learners" [1].

Another type of pre-experienced learners refers to those who are learning Business English as a kind of insurance for the future. They have no immediate or clearly identified need for Business English, but just feel that it could be useful sometime in the future. Most of the university learners are included in this group.

Business English is the most useful to those who are already working in businesses. English is

necessary for some part of their work. These people, together with people who are on the point of changing their jobs and facing new demands, can be called post-experience or “job-experienced learners” [1].

These job-experienced learners, in my opinion, can be divided into low-experienced and high-experienced. The former includes junior company members and those who are moving jobs to a relatively new area. And the latter includes the managers, experienced technical staff and clerical workers.

3 Needs Analysis

Different learners have quite different needs for Business English programs. They can never be satisfied in the same teaching group, even when their levels of English are similar. Therefore, needs analysis is very important in designing a teaching program of Business English.

First, the kind of job the learners are doing or going to do decides the needs they are likely to have. Ellis and Johnson [1] have drawn “distinctions between three very broad categories: (1) managerial, (2) technical, and (3) secretarial/clerical positions.” Actually, these involve a variety of job areas, which will influence greatly the curriculum design and the ways of teaching of a Business English program.

Second, the learning purpose of the learners should be considered in analyzing their needs. Some may want to know Business English more generally while others may want to gather information of a certain field. For example, some Chinese company managers, whose general English levels are high enough and who are highly experienced in a specific field, may want to gather together to get awareness of the most advanced and scientific ways of management in their field. Therefore, an advanced Business English training program can be designed for them and some world famous CEOs in the field, if possible, can be invited to offer them lectures.

Third, the learners’ money and time, in my opinion, will also influence their needs. Some may want to attend a part time course while others may want to read full time. In China, a lot of companies will pay for their employees to learn Business English. They will cooperate with universities by inviting teachers to offer weekend classes in the company or they will provide full time study for their employees to have the training in the university.

The learners’ general English level is bound to influence their needs in learning Business English. And many other factors, such as learners’ attitude to Business English, should also be considered in the needs analysis.

4 Contents of the Course and Course Materials

The content of a Business English course covers a wide range of topics. Generally, we should take the following parts into consideration in deciding the content and materials of a Business English program:

1. The focus of the course: terminology, textual structures or contextual structures?
2. The language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, interpretation or translation?
3. The range of business: meeting, discussion, telephoning, emailing, business correspondence, or socializing?

It also depends on whether the learners are pre-experienced or post experienced. For example, most post-experienced learners have already known the terminology of their own area of business in English, but they don’t know how to use their specialist knowledge effectively for doing business in the real English world. For these people a Business English course is mainly not about special terminology but the contextual structures or social and cultural context of Business English. On the other hand the pre-experienced learners will still have to learn the terminology of their chosen area in their own language, and will not yet be clear about what terminology they might need in Business English. Therefore, they will need to study general terminology as part of their course.

The course materials for a Business English program should be chosen according to the content

of the course and the learners' needs. There are general course books in a variety of businesses, for example, "A Financial English Course Book", "Business Negotiation in English", "An English Course Book of Human Resources" and so on. Ellis and Johnson [1] divide Business English course materials into published materials, framework materials and authentic materials. Course materials can also be divided into course books, supplementary materials, reference books and self-assess materials according to the different roles they take.

With the development of the science and technology, we can have access to computers and inter-net nowadays. Therefore, we can also make use of the video materials and inter-net information like e-library, e-dictionary as well as other types of e-materials.

5 Teaching Approaches, Syllabus Types and Class Activities

Teaching approaches are the theories about "the nature of language and how languages are learned" [4]. They provide theoretical instructions for the adoption of syllabus types and class activities.

A syllabus is "a description of the contents of a course of instruction and the order in which they are to be taught" [4]. A variety of syllabus types have been developed in the long history of language teaching --- grammatical, lexical, situational, notional, functional-notional, topic-based and so on.

Class activities are techniques adopted in classroom teaching. Class discussion, role-play, presentation, and interactive activities are listed in the most popularly used class activities in the teaching of language in recent years.

Many different approaches and syllabus types can be adopted in the teaching of Business English based on the learners and their needs. And a wide range of class activities can be designed to match the teaching approaches and syllabus types. A genre-based approach of teaching is usually very effective in teaching *Business English*.

For example, in dealing with the genre of "contract", the teacher can provide the learners some type of contract in English and ask the learners to discuss the text and context of it. This is a case study of contract. The learners will develop a clear mind of the format, key information involved, terms chosen as well as the social or cultural implication in the contracts. This is the understanding or *input* of information in the learning process. Then they will be asked to work out an English contract by imitating the samples based on a certain instruction provided by the teacher. This is the process of expression or *output* of information in learning.

Other types of class activities such as *group-discussions*, *role-plays* and some *interactive activities* are all effective in a genre-based approach of teaching in Business English. For example, in dealing with the genre of "telephoning", both group discussion and role-play are helpful for the students to perform well in making and answering telephone calls in English. As a sample, either a taped- or a printed- telephone conversation text can be provided for the students. After a group discussion, the students can play roles according to the situation given by the teacher. In this way, the learners can pick up the language (vocabulary, structure, pronunciation, and intonation), the functions and the skills of telephoning in an active way.

In some advanced Business English training programs, lectures offered by famous or successful managers from English-speaking countries are also effective for the learners to gather latest information of the field.

6 Result Analyses

In the Foreign Language School of Xi'an Shiyou University, some English majors want to find a job in business. To help the students to prepare for the future job, the school has designed some courses of Business English for the students based on an analysis of their' needs.

Due to the fact that the students are pre-experienced learners of business, and most of them will do a kind of clerical job, it is decided that EGBP should be the focus of the courses and both oral

and written courses should be included. The following is the list of the courses: *Oral English for Business, English Interpretation in World Trade, English Translation in Business, Business English Writing, Public Relations, Scribe and Secretary and etc.*

All the courses are selective ones. Students who are interested in business or who are preparing to find a job in business can choose the courses freely.

With 17 years of experience, we are proud to see that most of the courses have turned out to be effective and helpful to our students. Some of the students graduated from our school have been successful in their jobs relating to business. Several of them have been competent managers in business. In 2016, when they came back for the 65th anniversary of the university, some students suggested that *Financial English* and *Administrative English* should be added to the list.

7 Conclusions

As is discussed above, in successful teaching of Business English, a variety of factors that will influence the teaching should be taken into consideration. The general factors include the learners, the learners' needs, course design, course books as well as the teaching settings. Teachers should work out a proper syllabus for the course they teach. At the same time, they should also adopt effective class activities suitable for the specific group of learners. Besides, there exist a lot of individual differences in the learners. A successful teacher should design carefully every procedure for the teaching, and simultaneously, a successful teacher of Business English is bound to know both English language and business, although he/she may not be an expert in business.

References

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