

# Study on the Teaching of College English to Students Majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages in China\*

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**Abstract**—At present, most universities and colleges in China have enrolled students majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages, which refer to languages except English. English as a lingua franca has been recognized by people all over the world. Therefore, students majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages have to learn English as well. In order to improve these students' English level, many universities and colleges stipulate that graduates of Less Commonly Taught Languages have to pass certain English tests upon graduation, such as CET4 or CET 6, which are the authoritative tests in China. This paper discusses how to cultivate these Less Commonly Taught Languages majors' English proficiency and proposes several suggestions in regarding to the requirement and setup of English courses as well as the building up of internet courses, in the hope of offering some beneficial perspectives of English teaching in the future.

**Keywords**—*Less Commonly Taught Languages majors; college English; English course; Internet course*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Less Commonly Taught Languages (here and after refers as LCTL) have two meanings, a broad meaning and a narrow one. In the broad sense, Less Commonly Taught Languages refers to languages other than English, such as Japanese, Korean, German, Arabic, etc., all belonging to non-lingua franca. In a narrow sense, Less Commonly Taught Languages refers to languages other than the working languages stipulated by the United Nations. Lu Jingsheng (2012) pointed out that English, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic are the working languages currently used by the UN General Assembly [1]. In general, all but the above six languages are defined as less commonly taught languages. This paper only discusses the Less Commonly Taught Languages and the related majors in the broad sense. Now many colleges and universities in China have set up the LCTL majors, and these higher institutions have adopted diverse standards on the requirements of the curriculum,

teaching methods and teaching forms, but on the whole, "Less Commonly Taught Languages + English" teaching mode is one of the most popular teaching modes, which requires universities to provide English courses for Less Commonly Taught Languages majors. When students graduate after four years' education, their English level will reach the level of CET-4 or even higher in certain universities,

Most of China's colleges and universities have provided English courses for Less Commonly Taught Languages majors so that the students are required to learn English as well. However, it is still in urgent need to explore and reform the English courses' curriculum requirements, curriculum setups and the usages of network resources in traditional classroom to improve the process of teaching students majoring in less commonly taught languages. This article talks about some current problems existing in the teaching of English courses and proposes some suggestions to tackle these problems in the hope of getting more mature opinions from the peer experts and scholars in the nearest future.

## II. REQUIREMENTS OF ENGLISH CURRICULUM AND THE SETTING OF ENGLISH COURSES

With the development of the society, those who can speak more than one foreign language are gaining in popularity in the job market. Gong Kunyu (2008) analyzed the different methods of the cultivation of the "compound type" language talents who can master two or more languages, and explained the current requirements of English proficiency for students majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages. He noted that students majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages were required to have a professional English level upon graduation. However, in recent years, as society raised higher standard for these students, they were expected to achieve a higher English proficiency [2]. Professor Wang Xuemei of Shanghai Foreign Studies University (2011) pointed out that with the development of foreign language education, students who can speak only one foreign language no longer meet the needs of the job market and the requirements of the society, and the cultivation of international multilingual talents has gradually become the trend of reform in key universities and

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foreign language colleges [3]. Therefore, Shanghai Foreign Studies University requires some Less Commonly Taught Language majors, such as Portuguese, Greek and other majors, to achieve TEM-4 at the time of graduation. For example, Portuguese majors should have a solid foundation of Portuguese and English, achieving language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. In addition, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, another well-known foreign language university in China, requires Less Commonly Taught Languages majors such as Vietnamese and Indonesian to graduate with English level equivalent to CET-6. As it can be seen, those who understand both English and one Less Commonly Taught Language will be greatly welcomed by the society and employers.

#### *A. Requirements of English Curriculum*

In some comprehensive colleges and universities, some requirements have been made on the English competence of Less Commonly Taught Language majors. For example, Liu Ying (2011) pointed out that since the resumption of Less Commonly Taught Language majors in 2000, China Media University has implemented a bilingual teaching model of Less Commonly Taught Language plus English. Students should not only learn Less Commonly Taught Languages, but also select English courses in accordance with the requirements of English majors. Students also take the CET-4 in their fourth term and their English proficiency should reach the professional level [4]. In some local colleges and universities, due to the small number of students, Less Commonly Taught Language majors do not pay much attention in the study of English as they have no difficulty in finding a job in a local company by speaking only one foreign language. For example, Shandong Technology and Business University requires Less Commonly Taught Language majors (Japanese and Korean) to have certain practical English skills, and there is no rigid regulation on whether they need to pass the corresponding English proficiency tests. Therefore, because of the relatively promising prospect of finding a job in some Japan and Korean companies and the less stringent requirements for English learning, the pass rate of CET-4 of undergraduates majoring in Japanese and Korean from Shandong Technology and Business University has basically remained around 50%.

According to the students' English level, every university has formulated corresponding English requirements. Many factors should be taken into consideration when setting up the requirements of English level for the students majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages, such as students' English level upon the entrance of the university, the employment prospects of different languages and the different requirements for English proficiency in some well-known international studies universities and less well-known universities and colleges. These factors are interwoven, which together influence the different standards adopted by colleges and universities in the development of English curriculum requirements for Less Commonly Taught Languages majors. In addition to the consideration of

students' English foundation when formulating the requirements of English courses, we should also aware that different languages have different requirements for English courses.

In some countries where English is the official language or where the scope of employment is narrow, English proficiency is particularly important. For example, in India, Thailand, Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, English is widely used as a business language, so while learning the native language of these countries well, a higher level of English will surely be welcomed by employers. In addition, there are some Asian and African languages with small scope of application and narrow employment, such as Burmese, Malay and so on. If it is difficult to find suitable jobs solely by learning the languages of these countries, then students' English competence is of vital importance. Therefore, when setting the requirements for English proficiency, students who learn these languages can have higher requirements and achieve CET-4 or CET-6 when they graduate. Finally, for students who learn some European languages, which has wider range of use in the worldwide, it is also necessary to note that English used to be one of the official languages in Europe continent and plays an important role in European countries, thus for students learning European languages, for example, Portuguese, French, German, Dutch, Russian and so on, they also need a higher level of English. When they graduate from university, they should reach professional level as English majors, passing TEM 4 (Test for English Major in the fourth semester) or even higher than that. Finally, for students learning Japanese and Korean, they have some competing edges as these two languages are widely used in some international companies in China or East Asian countries, thus the students find it easy to find a good job without adequate English skill. But in most universities, students studying Japanese or Korean are encouraged or required to pass the CET 4 or CET 6 upon graduation.

#### *B. Setting of English Courses*

One of the main problems in the English teaching of Less Commonly Taught Languages majors is that English courses have insufficient class hours and the curriculum is relatively monotonous, which is difficult to meet the needs of students for English learning. If only by learning from the classroom, the students would find it hard to improve their English proficiency. At the same time, these students realize English is as important as their majors, what's more, many of the students are in more urgent need to learn English, mainly from the following three reasons: one is their personal interest and hobby. Since most of China's students have started to attend English classes since primary school, and they have been exposed to English at an early age. After years of study, they have gradually fostered an interest in English. Compared with the Less Commonly Taught Language, English is relatively easier to learn, and some students with good English foundation have no difficulty in continuing their English learning in the universities. The other is the consideration of employment. Due to the narrow need of Less Commonly Taught Languages in the job market,

it is hard to find a suitable job by only speaking one foreign language. Many companies clearly put forward that they would like to give priority to applicants who have English certificates of CET 4 and CET 6, thus many students attach great importance to English in the hope of finding a suitable job with their English competency. Another reason is that language learning requires a lot of time to train and consolidate. Without necessary input and output, it is very difficult to make a qualitative breakthrough in English. When learning different languages, students often compare with different languages and think in a different way, which is also very helpful to the cultivation of thinking habits. It is proper to say that English plays a significant role in the future career development of less-commonly taught language students. So under this circumstance, it is necessary to open diversified English courses, prolong the time of English learning, expand the content of the English study, so as to help students improve their English ability, for the benefit of their future career development and their academic research.

In order to satisfy the students' diversified needs, it is necessary to change the previous single curriculum and offer some courses in culture, linguistics and translation so that students can enrich their choices. While cultivating students' basic language skills, it is also necessary to set up selective courses to broaden students' knowledge, cultivate students' innovative consciousness, and comprehensively improve their comprehensive quality. Therefore, English courses should take into account not only the establishment of basic courses, but also the establishment of some courses that can learn the culture of English-speaking countries and improve the ability of applying languages into practice. According to students' different demands for English courses, English courses can be set as compulsory courses and optional courses. For those non-commonly taught language majors, such as students learning Hindi and Vietnamese, these students have a narrow prospect in choosing further jobs, so they have to learn English, with a better English ability, they can be competitive in the job market. But because these students have to spend a lot of time and energy learning their majors, so they could not have much time learning English, so it is important for them to learn some basic English courses, such as intensive reading, extensive reading, audio-visual course, writing and translation, which is helpful in laying a solid foundation for those students and improving their English comprehensive ability. For some students whose English foundation is solid, they can choose compulsory English courses in the first year and the second year, while in the third year and the four year, they can take optional courses to further enhance their English capability and expand their knowledge area. These optional courses can broaden students' horizon and help students further understand the language they learn and some culture-related knowledge, such as English literature, culture, linguistics and customs of English-speaking countries. Such courses are especially suitable for students majoring in European languages as they will help the students understand European culture and history. If the students can master one less-commonly taught language as well as English, it will greatly improve their capability, enhance their competency, and have more edges in their future career development, thus

becoming a popular "compound language" talent who can speak multiple languages.

### III. THE CONSTRUCTION OF NETWORK RESOURCES AND THE MOOCs PLATFORM

In order to make up for the insufficiency of classroom teaching, constantly stimulate students' interest in English learning, effectively improve students' learning efficiency and enthusiasm, and help them solve the difficulties encountered in the process of English learning, it is vital to advocate students' autonomous learning after class. The development of modern technology and network education provides a powerful platform in supporting Less Commonly Taught Languages majors to carry out English autonomous learning. In 2004, the Ministry of Education proposed to implement multimedia teaching of English based on "computers and classrooms", and to carry out teaching reform of College English nationwide [5]. The majorities of English teachers actively respond to the call of the Ministry of Education, actively build and produce courseware, and upload it to the network.

#### A. To Use Online Quality Courses

The construction of English network resources has undergone a process from less to more and everything started from scratch. The enrichment of network resources expands the space and time of English learning. The learning place extends from classroom to the spare time, and the arrangement of learning schedule is more flexible, thus students can learn English at anytime and anywhere.

Network courses is a good way to meet the needs of learners, but some courses need to pay to watch the teaching video and courseware, which makes the public network resources insufficient, causing insufficient use of the network class quality. Some foreign language publishing agencies also realized the importance of digital teaching resources, and produced all kinds of teaching materials. A complete set of the related CD or other digital resources were put up on the Internet for learners to download. The digital teaching resource platform built by colleges and universities and foreign language publishing institutions can well meet learners' demands for English learning. These online high-quality courses are aimed at learners of different levels. For English beginners, video teaching in the basic stage can meet the demand well. For the high level of English learners, network digital course can help them to consolidate what they have learned, expand their scope of knowledge. Through some network courses, they can have self-test and self-evaluation about their English level, thus regulating their learning process and learning method accordingly.

Of course, there are also some problems in the construction of network courses. Network courses can meet the needs of learners to a certain extent, but some videos and courseware need to be paid to use, which makes the openness of network resources inadequate, leading to the limited use of network courses. At the same time, teachers play a leading role in the construction of network courses because they are the main body of the construction of



network courses. Tong Jiameng (2017) pointed out that how to mobilize the enthusiasm and initiative of English teachers, how to record online courses from the perspective of professional teaching, how to make electronic teaching materials and teaching aids, and how to ensure that professional teachers can interact effectively with learners through the platform are all issues to be considered [6]. In dealing with these problems, network courses need to be further improved.

### *B. To Make Full Use of the MOOCs*

In 2011, MOOCs, as a new way of online learning, was highly praised and spread rapidly among universities at home and abroad, which attracted great attention. Driven by some well-known international courseware platforms such as Coursera, Udacity and edX, many well-known Chinese universities, educational institutions and commercial websites have established courseware platforms, which are widely welcomed by students. Among them, some rather popular courseware platforms, such as icourses and Netease Open Courses, have increasingly numbers of registers in the past decade. The body of registered students and teachers is growing year by year, and the curriculum resources are constantly enriched.

In recent years, numerous courses have been uploaded to the MOOCs. For students of different levels, these platforms offer different courses. Students can choose courses according to their needs and interests. Each course on the MOOCs platform has a five-minute audition video. Students can click on the video to listen to the teacher's lecture. If they are interested in the content of the course and the way the teacher teaches, they can register for the class and become a student formally. It enables students to choose any teacher's curriculum resources from any school at any time and any place. There will be no more cases where some students can't take this course because of the limited number of people. The two-way choice between teachers and students is more convenient. This can not only promote teachers to constantly improve teaching methods and improve teaching level to attract more students, but also stimulate students' interest in learning and self-learning, better arrange their own learning time, and enrich their own knowledge system.

Through the network teaching and MOOCs and other forms of teaching methods, it has a huge impact on the traditional classroom. Cui Xiaoping (2015), after comparing the traditional network teaching mode with MOOCs learning mode, proposed to establish a MOOC-based College English network teaching system [7]. Traditional teaching methods are unnoticeably changing, while new teaching methods, such as flipped classroom, are gradually recognized by teachers and students. Flipped classroom is also regarded as an effective teaching method in College English teaching. Many scholars use MOOCs in the teaching process to carry out the practice of flipping the classroom, and have achieved positive results. For example, Hu Jiehui (2015) used MOOCs in teaching practice to realize the flip classroom, and analyzed the feedback results of students. The experimental results show that the flip classroom teaching mode based on

MOOCs is suitable for college English teaching [8]. Xu Haiyan (2017) found that flipping classroom teaching mode can make learners think more carefully, enhance Chinese students' critical thinking and effectively improve their language proficiency. Students' learning motivation and autonomy have also been strengthened [9].

The author conducted a survey in the less-commonly taught majors students in Shandong Technology and Business University and found that of all the students majoring in Japanese and Korean in the second year, about 95% of the students chose an online English course in the beginning of the semester and has completed the course and got the course results at the end of the semester, and some of them have acquired the certificate of their selected courses. Through students' feedback, 70% of students said that they benefited a lot from online English courses, which are useful complements to traditional courses. Moreover, the network course has some advantages that other traditional courses do not have, such as the network course is less limited by space and time, and can be picked up on their way to the canteen or to the class; the network course can be watched repeatedly, and the explanation is more vivid and intuitive; the matching exercises are moderately difficult, and students can interact with teachers and other learners on the platform. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional classroom. The traditional classroom is dominated by teachers and students usually listen passively to the teacher, and there is less interaction between teachers and students. By adding some MOOCs courses or flipping over the traditional classroom, adopting flexible teaching methods, such as group discussion, interactive communication, task collaboration, etc., this will fully mobilize the enthusiasm of students, so that students can better master the English language. With the advent of the "Internet +" era, the further development of artificial intelligence will bring more flexible teaching methods, diversified teaching forms and more innovative teaching means to the English teaching of less-commonly taught majors, thus subverting the traditional classroom teaching and realizing the true flipped classroom

## IV. CONCLUSION

English plays a very important role in Less Commonly Taught Languages teaching. The cultivation of English competence is an important part of the cultivation of Less Commonly Taught Languages talents because in some less-commonly languages speaking countries, English is also used as the language of communication. In many countries along the "One Belt, One Road" corridors, English plays an important role in the social life, whether as an official language or as a foreign language. With the further deepening of exchanges between countries, it is believed that the status of English as a world language will be further strengthened. Therefore, it is of great necessity and urgency to rationally set up English courses for Less Commonly Taught Language majors in colleges and universities. At the same time, there is room for further discussion on the formulation and implementation of specific curriculum plans.

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