



A Study of How to Develop Students' Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) In Business English Teaching (BET)

Zhiyi Fu

Department of Foreign languages, Guilin University of Technology, Guilin 541004, China

Tel: 86-773-312 7510 E-mail: foolzhiyi@126.com

Abstract

Under the economic globalization today, the ultimate goal of business English teaching is to develop students' language transfer competence in the intercultural communication environment and improve the strategies of the Business English Major students in dealing with the international business affairs. After presenting the intercultural issues in current China's Business English teaching, the study focuses on five constructive suggestions of the workable strategies of how to develop students' intercultural communication competence (ICC) in the Business English teaching (BET).

Keywords: Business English teaching (BET), Business English major, Development, Intercultural communication competence (ICC)

1. Introduction

The whole world is becoming a "Global Village." People from different societies, cultures and regions have the desire to communicate with each other effectively. Learning, mastering and applying the foreign languages become fashionable and attractive in today's China. In the past ten years, most China's universities and colleges have opened the majors of Practical English and Business English, paying more and more attention to their specialties and courses construction, teacher development, advanced equipment, facilities, etc. The relevant enrollment, students' learning motives and interests, and employment are very encouraging. And of course, the requirements of teachers and students to develop their own ICC are getting more and more urgent and have simulated more intensive and extensive study and research in the field than before. All the English learners, especially the students majoring in the Business English, should develop their ICC in theory and in practice. Undoubtedly, how to foster the intercultural awareness and promote the intercultural communication teaching are English teachers' duties, and how to develop the ICC for their future professional career are the prime goals of the students majoring in English or in Business English in order to minimize intercultural failures and conflicts, is demanded with respect of BET.

2. Intercultural issues in current BET

Facing the current situations of the entry into WTO and the trend from globalization, China needs a great number of specialized experts and employees who master and understand the professional knowledge of international trade, tariff, finance, economy, law, diplomacy, and other fields concerned with foreign affairs. And only the proper and scientific teaching methods can effectively improve the teaching quality and quickly foster students' abilities. BET programs should make a valuable contribution to intercultural competence training by changing their focuses from an abstract and formalistic knowledge and concept study of language and business regularities to concrete and practical cultivation of language competence and workable business skills used in society and in international business fields. Through the literature analysis and retrieval study and on the summary of teaching experiences in theory and in practice, roughly there conclude some typical issues in China's current BET, such as: 1) Business English has been opened without regard for the actual conditions, misleading into either the mere English teaching or the notional and international business teaching; 2) paying less attention to the basic English knowledge such as phonetics, morphology, and syntax, having no solid understanding of the Business English as a tool or a competence with strong aspects of practice; 3) students exercised the improper discourses, conversations, situations, settings and contexts in classroom activities and daily practices; 4) lacking of the field study, not meeting with the demands of the international business actuality; 5) the knowledge level of the professional teachers and the teaching approaches are not constructive, relevant textbooks and materials are not matched and fully equipped, the teaching equipment is short, the learning environment is not real and feasible, the evaluation mechanism in teaching and examination is not scientific, etc. All these have been the barriers that have restricted present China's BET going forward and developing qualified talents more or less.

3. Teaching Strategies for BET based on the ICC perspectives

3.1 *Combining input of language structure system and pragmatic transfer of cultural awareness into one in the BET*

In BET, how to enable the learners to carry out effective intercultural communication is naturally an issue of first priority. In case of intercultural communication, it means either of the participants has to learn a foreign language or a second language. The most emphasized is to learn how to combine input of language structure system and pragmatic transfer of cultural awareness into one in the BET. For the students majoring in the Business English of course, English is their specialized fundamental course, their major tool working in the business world in the future. First of all, BET should not end in itself; it must be coupled with culture. Teachers should often have the idea that culture teaching is as important as language teaching, so that students have the general understanding of the related English-speaking countries' cultural background knowledge, history and politics, etc. Language and culture must be integrated in one.

Owing to the complexity of culture itself and the impossibility to cut off all cultural factors in the short span of the college life, the students are required to have a full picture of the cultural elements in BET. What's more, it is the focal suggestion that teaching a language is teaching how to shape the cultural context of business-oriented use. By teaching and learning a foreign language we should take the learner's native discourse patterns into account and help them adopt those of the new involved language, and enhance the target cultural awareness and sensitivity through comparative study of native-foreign cultures.

3.2 *Integrating a wide cultural backgrounds and atmospheres to stimulate and activate BET*

It will be much easier to learn a certain language in the certain cultural background, just as the children brought up in the foreign land will naturally pick up the foreign language and behave as foreigners in many aspects, which is in fact the result of cultural background. How to integrate wide cultural backgrounds and atmospheres to stimulate BET and to cultivate the students' sharp awareness of the forces always empower continuously to sustain and familiarize the business cultures of the English speaking countries, the forces that always create culture shocks and fatigue in coping with the varieties of business activities in the target language culture. For these major forces that help to generate cultural differences include biology, interpersonal communication patterns, institutional networks, technology, history, education and ecology. Such knowledge may allow learners to understand both the deeply embedded nature of the culture and the complexity of a series of forces that produce cultural differences in the international business activities. So far, the senses and actions upon getting rid of the distinct stereotypes and barriers in intercultural business communication always become the focal points for the students majoring in the business English. In order to promote the true combination of language usage system and pragmatic construct system, teachers can implement the teaching from many ways and dimensions, such as in listening, intensive reading, extensive reading, writing and oral courses. Especially, it is feasible to suppose some virtual commercial situations for students to imitate and to adapt, and summarize the primary experience in the alien intercultural communications, enjoying some original movies and video tapes, or give some lectures on cultural varieties. By doing this students can not only be trained in four English abilities but also learn and grasp the cultural knowledge of English speaking countries, and make the language learning more colorful and attractive.

3.3 *Offering cultural comparison and contrast in BET to strengthen students' cultural sensitivity*

In training students' cultural awareness, teachers can introduce the western cultural knowledge by comparison and contrast it with the Chinese culture so that students can understand western culture and also be familiar with the ancient eastern culture, such as traditions, customs, folklores, norms, science and technology, politics and economy, literature and education, etc. And the purpose is to deepen students' understanding of both of culture and find cultural similarities and differences to broaden their cultural knowledge and perfect their language performance. Teachers can also guide students to compare and contrast the two countries in some distinctive cultural similarities and differences. By the comparison between English-speaking countries, students can trace their historical source, understand more of each country's social development conditions and know more about the whole social capitalist development history. Step by step they would enlarge their cultural and business information, improve the culture qualities and world trading skills in the business world and promote the total development of their comprehensive English to become the new-type talents in the new century indeed. But in the culture and business English teaching, teachers should not only introduce good characteristics of western culture and the rapid development conditions in politics and economy but also help students to possess the proper cultural value in the business dimension and to the real Business English perspective, point out some unhealthy and negative elements in western cultural values, in many textbooks of practical college English and communicating English in the business world. After analyzing all kinds of business conditions shown in Chinese and western social and cultural politics, both teachers and students can probably have a deeper understanding, naturally draw the conclusions through comparing and contrasting the varieties of the Chinese and western business cultural similarities and differences and finally enhance the students' comprehensive Business English competence and their love to the motherland, which is also a good way to develop the students' morality education and express the patriotism. After students' culture awareness has been enforced they can consciously improve their own ICC and become the future

excellent national and international business masters in the flourishing world economy with their general Business English abilities and qualities.

3.4 Keeping solid business knowledge and practical commercial ability abreast

There ought to be a common sense that business knowledge and workable commercial ability of the students in the Business English major should be paid equal attention to as well as the comprehensive quality and skill of the English language. BET, as a very important branch of English Teaching and with somewhat considerable differences from English Teaching, besides the same stresses on the basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, has its own distinctive demands for teachers' knowledge and specialties background, mainly involving into mastering of business concepts and knowledge and skill. The professional teachers must have the teaching qualities of how to readjust the specialties offered, how to institute the courses on basic business theory and how to improve teaching materials for Business English, offering the compulsory courses of business culture, business management, marketing planning, the society and culture of the English-speaking countries, the laws of the UK and the USA, the backgrounds of the UK and the USA, etc. to students, in order to enrich their business knowledge, broaden their mind and liberalize their outlook. While the students of the Business English major, unlike those in the general English major, have their own unique studying requires and motives, which are how to master the skills of engaging in the business and commercial activities and employment in the English language familiarly and set up their career extension in the world business field on the knowledge they have learned. The students are also encouraged to hold every chance to take part in the live business activities to practice their business theories and English skills and to obtain real experience preparing for their future employment. On deepening their business application and emerging the English culture, the student must make great progress in developing their intercultural communication in the business world.

3.5 Enforcing the nonverbal perspectives and time mechanism in intercultural business etiquette and protocol

It is unavoidable to pay relative attention to the nonverbal intercultural communication, for it is usually responsible for first impression, and it is a continuous flow throughout the interactive process disregarding the presence or absence of verbal behavior. The body message reinforces the words and action speaks more than words. The importance of nonverbal communication could be felt from Shakespeare's famous verse "there's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip". Nonverbal behaviors, with their features of being symbolic, explanatory, affective, regulating and adaptable, are the symbol and marks of communication for its social-functional perspectives: social relationships, discourse structures, communicative contents or semantic codes, and feelings or emotions, which have constructive significance for the intercultural communication in doing world business and in commercial negotiation. From the moment of recognition till the moment of separation, people observe each other with all their senses, hearing pause and intonation, attending to dress and carriage, observing glance and facial tension, as well as noting morphology, syntax, discourse and context. Every harmony or disharmony of signals guides the interpretation of passing mood or enduring attribute. Out of the evaluation of kinetic, vocal and verbal cues, the business or trading decisions are made to argue or to agree, to laugh or to blush, to relax or to resist, to continue or to cut off conversation. In many cases, it turned out the old saying that it is not what you say but what you do counts at last. One's silent action, that is the business manners, always performs as recommendation in your job-hunting and in your solid employment.

In business activities, punctuality is regarded as the utmost virtue and lack of it is an end of a deal. The different attitudes toward time and time behaviors lie in the different cultures of China and the West, which has always brought about many cultural conflicts and troubles in the world business field and made the intercultural communication get more difficult. Appreciating cultural differences in time sense becomes increasingly important as modern communications put more and more people in daily contact. If we are to avoid misreading issues that involve time perceptions and the use of time, we need to understand better our own cultural biases and those of others.

When people of different cultures interact, the potential for misinterpretations in the nonverbal communication exists on many levels. To cultivate the competence of the nonverbal intercultural communication is another door brightly to the comprehensive talent for a student in the business English major.

4. Conclusion

China is pursuing more and more extensive international cooperation in all fields. Certainly, China would take great measures to develop high-empowered Business English talents and pay great attention to the constructive significances for teaching frontiers of BET. The present study implied great expectation of China's BET should sustain adherence to taking firm actions to optimize and integrate the past and present knowledge, approaches, strategies and measures, create a good Business English educational environment, strengthen the teaching assessment, improve quality assurance system, enlighten students engaging in the effective and significant studying, and develop the ICC required in the real business field.

References

Chen, Junxin. (2006). *Cross-cultural Communication and Foreign Language Educaton*. Publishing House of

Mid-China University of Technology.

Claire Kramsch. (2003). *Language and Culture*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Du, Ringqing. (2005). *Intercultural Communication: Research and Practice*. Publishing House of Xi'an University of Transportations.

Editial Office of Language Institute of China Society Research Bereau. (2000). *Dictionary of Modern Chinese*. Business Publishing House.

Ellis, M. & Johnson, C. (2002). *Teaching Business English*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter. (2000). *Intercultural Communication*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon. (2000). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Sarah Jones-Macziola and Greg White. (2005). *Oxford Business English Course*. Huaxia Publishing House.

Shi, Dianle. (2004). *Business Intercultural Communication*. Publishing House of Wuhan University.

Verluyten, S. P. (2000). *Intercultural Communication in Business and Organizations: An Introduction*. Leuven: Acco.

Wang, Xing. (2002). Business English Teaching and Intercultural Communication Competence. *Journal of Dandong Teachers' College*. (3).

Xu, Jinglin. (1999). *Practice in International Trade*. Publishing House of Northeast University of Finance and Economy.

Xu, Lisheng. (2006). *English Course of Intercultural Communication*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Yu, Hongying. (2006). On Business English Teaching and Intercultural Communication Competence. *Study of International Business*. (2).