Reflections and Suggestions on the Development of ESP Teaching in China

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Abstract: English for Specific Purpose is the English for actual application, and its teaching in the West has already formed a complete system. This paper firstly introduces ESP development in China and then points out its presently existing problems. Finally it analyzes the reasons and puts forward three measures.

Keywords: ESP teaching; ESP development; existing problems; reasons and measures

I. The Introduction to ESP

1. The definition to ESP

ESP is the abbreviation for English for Specific Purpose. That is to say, it's the English for actual application, such as tourism English, commercial English, accounting English, medical English, engineering English and so on. "It is an approach to language teaching in which all decision s as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, 1987).

In early 1964, Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens corporately published the work of The Linguistic Scics and Language Teaching, in which they once pointed out the definition to ESP: English for civil servants; for policemen; for officials of the law; for doctors and nurses; for specialists in agriculture and for engineers and fitters.

As a matter of fact, ESP learning is not the language itself learning but the purpose. The purpose is not only the language skills, but also includes the language function and notion. It is just as Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens systematically explained that teaching contents and approaches are accordingly de-

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It is a branch of English teaching and learning. Generally Strevens' (1998) definition to ESP is much better, which owns four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics respectively. Four absolute characteristics are the followings: firstly, ESP learners are mostly those people who are engaging in all kinds of majors, such as engineers, entrepreneurs, medical personnel and the like, or the trainers receiving skill training, or the college students majoring in international financing, foreign insurance, journalism and so on. Secondly, ESP learners regard English learning as a method or approach, so as to continue their occupation learning, for instance, college students of non-English major complete their work by English learning. Thus, the pith of ESP is to analyze and meet different students' needs. Thirdly, the focus of ESP is to the application of the designated language which is connected with certain grammar, words and paragraph structure. Lastly, it is obviously different from the EGP (English for General Purpose). And two variable characteristics are: one is that ESP teaching focuses on certain language skill training, such as reading skill training and language-distinguishing training; the other one is that ESP performs its teaching according to any teaching approach.

3. Review on ESP Teaching in the West

In English countries, linguists commonly think ESP occurred in 1960s. After several decades' development, ESP teaching of Britain, America and the like has gone through three periods which are register analysis, rhetorical or discourse analysis and target situation analysis. At present, it is on its fourth period: skills and strategies analysis, and the fifth period learning-centered approach is just in the bud.

Therefore, ESP teaching of the West has already formed a complete system including vocational English such as commercial English and English for Academic Purposes. In the research field, many fruits are gained. For instance, many representative persons such as Halliday, McIntosh, Strevens, John Swales, Henry Widdowson, John Munby and works such as The Structure of Technical English, Communicative Syllabus Design appear. And ESP journals come out, i.e. English for Specific Purposes; An International Journal and English for Specific Purposes Newsletters.

II. ESP Teaching in China

1. The Rival of ESP Teaching in China

After the Second World War, ESP once came to college campus of china, yet, ESP teaching was really popularized in 1970s. The education committee of our country issued The College English Teaching Syllabus that divides college into the major-English reading period and the basic period. The syllabus pointed out that the aim of the major-English reading period is to make college students gain their occupational learning by the tool of English. Especially, during the reading of English major, students can enhance and improve their knowledge and reading abilities which are obtained in the basic period. Therefore, the first ESP course was mainly EST, i.e. English for Science and Technology.

With the development of the cooperation and communication between international countries and our country, people usually regard that linguistic knowledge obtained from EGP can't meet the requirement of actual communication. And many occupational persons attend ESP training in their spare time. For example, millions of learners take part in the Examination of Business English Certificate sponsored by Cambridge University.

The National Educational Committee, experts and scholars from the foreign language circle, and foreign language teachers began to realize the significance of ESP course. In 1994, our country's Educational Committee formulated the teaching content and course system reform policy of the 21st century. The course discussion was commonly carried out by Shanghai Foreign Language University and Beijing Foreign Language University. And experts and professors from the Beijing University, Qinghua University, Nanjing University, University of Foreign Affaires, and the like were all invited to the course discussion. Under the direction of the Foreign Sector, National Education Committee, the course discussion groups began their work in 1996, and completed it in
June, 1997. During the period, they carried out many investigations, information data statistics and analysis; then wrote out their analyzing report. Besides, in June 1997, the members of the course discussion attended the English Year-meeting of High-level Institute Foreign language Teaching Directional Committee. In November 1997, they also joined the Year-meeting of the national Foreign Institutes. In these two Year-meetings, members attentively adopted foreign language experts' opinions and suggestions to the reform.

On the basis of many investigations, the whole reform and development of every institute, the needs for foreign talents of 21st century, the course discussion cabinet submitted Advice on the Foreign Language Education Reform, the key points of which are: 21st century is an international, high-tech economy, information and intelligence era; Students as 21st-century socialism builders and successors should be able to play their own part in different fields of our country's economy establishment, such as communication with foreign study, education, academic research and so on. They are also new requirements of China and the World for the foreign language talents. Besides, the suggestions pointed, the task of the foreign language education reform is to transform and renew the educational concepts. Since social requirements for foreign language talents has a pluralistic tendency, the mode of foreign language talents training should be transformed to the mode of application or complex-talents training. At present, some modes being tried on are foreign language plus occupation knowledge, occupation plus foreign language. Thus, students of English major are just minority of ESP learners, and the majorities are those students of non-English specialty and occupational workers, who must strengthen their English for Specific Purpose in the occupation field.

2. The Present Problems Existing in ESP Teaching of China

The idea of ESP has also been introduced to China for years, yet it seems that the idea has been neglected in the College English Syllabus. And ESP teaching having practiced in tertiary educational in-
stitutions for more than a decade, compared with the system research and development of the west countries' ESP, its effectiveness has been far from satisfactory and related researches have also lagged behind. Indeed, few teachers from their ESP teaching experiences explored the mode of College ESP Teaching, for instance, Shao Yuzheng's Construction on the Specialty Reading Course (1992) and Wu Mingfang's Exploration and Reform to the Late-period Teaching System of College English (1998) pointed that English for Science and Technology Course should be established in the fifth term of the whole institute, but most published papers are just to introduce the study findings of foreign countries.

Simultaneously, with the popularization of its alternative bilingual instruction, the number of ESP courses increasingly declines and now they are confronted with the danger of being eradicated in the high educational system of our country. For example, in 1986 the former Huaxi Medical University set up the medical science and technology English specialty. Besides English study, at least one medical course must be opened up every term; the length of schooling is five years. The training aim of this University is to cultivate those graduates of Medical colleges who can be qualified to not only the public English teaching, but also medical English teaching or Latin teaching. However, the graduates of this major didn't have its priority since the medical English lesson wasn't opened up in some medical colleges or the medical English lesson was not performed by English teachers in certain colleges. As a result, students in the English specialty of this University didn't have all medical lessons from 1994, and their schooling period is narrowed to 4 years.

III. Reflection on ESP Teaching in China

Based on careful analysis, I think that three factors mainly affect the development of ESP instruction negatively in our country. They are the followings:

1. Lack of sufficient administrative concern

Since the reform and opening up, English is paid attention to and the experts of the national education administration came to realized the advantages of
ESP course, which can be found in the College English Teaching Syllabus of 1985. But due to the social economy of that period and ESP's multi-subject, ESP teaching was popular just between the late 1980s and early 1990s; then its development was almost stagnated.

Even though in the College English Teaching Syllabus of Certain directive requirements for ESP reading was put forward that after EGP course, three semesters' major English reading course whose total studying period must be over 100 classes should be opened for students. It, too, suggested that the specialty English literature reading, document translation and abstract writing be opened in the 8th term. However, in fact most colleges didn't carry out the syllabus. Take Tongji University for example, there were 42 specialties, among of which ESP course wasn't opened in 7 specialties. And ESP course in 28 majors was limited to one semester, of which class hours are under 36. (Wang Beilen, 2004)

The stagnation of teaching development, of course, leads to increase of ESP study and research. Yet, concerning administrative sectors were conscious of the role of ESP for college students, they had to put their wish onto the bilingual teaching. In 2001 the National Education Department required that public course and specialty course be carefully taught by English or other foreign language in the undergraduate education period of all institutes, i.e. bilingual teaching. Then in College English Teaching Requirements of 2004 any direction upon ESP teaching wasn't concerned with. So nowadays ESP teaching nearly is on the end of its way, that is to say it will disappear from the stage of our country's college English teaching.

2. Misplacement of teachers

In our country, ESP teaching is lately started, lacking further theory studying. It is also confused whether ESP course should belong to English course or specialty course. Before the College English Teaching Requirements of 2004, ESP is formulated by the College English Teaching Syllabus. So ESP course should belong to English course and is public fundament course. Contradictorily, the College English Teaching Syllabus of 1999 issued specialty-English lesson should be taught by occupation teachers and foreign department should give certain cooperation and help. In actual practice, the cooperation and help of foreign department is nonsense and ESP course is completely teachers' work of specialty lessons. We also take Tongji University for example. ESP course is opened in 42 majors, among which there are 21 majors regarding it as specialty fundamental course, 15 majors taking it for specialty course, and 6 majors for public fundament course.

According to the name of English for Specific Purposes itself, it firstly is an English lesson that is performed by English teaching. No matter what in British and American countries and other west countries, ESP teaching is a branch of the English teaching; yet (Liang Youzhen, 2003; Hoo Wah Kam, 2001; Wang Hailua, 2003) in our country, ESP course is almost undertaken by the teachers of specialty lesson, thus more disadvantages appear in the teaching of ESP course. Because, it's doubtful, that all the teachers of specialty lesson who usually adopt the traditional grammar-translation approach during their teaching are qualified with good English knowledge. And most of their time and energy are focused on their specialty teaching and research. ESP teaching is just their spare jobs, as a result, ESP teaching approaches are dull and its academic study is stagnated. Meanwhile, English teachers who are interested in ESP course have no chance of ESP teaching practice. Even though they work on certain research, which is just out of the practice.

3. A chaotic ESP instruction system

With the lack of ESP theory study, ESP teaching has been on a chaotic state in the universities of our country, which is specially shown on these two points: implicit teaching aim and insufficient teaching syllabus. Any course is built on the basis of learners' needs. ESP course is without any exception. It's commonly believed that learners of EGP have no definite needs, so there are few people to explore learners' concrete needs.

Differently learners of ESP course have their explicit purpose, which requires that ESP course de
sign be taken on the need of learners (Hutchison and Waters, 1987). Thus, the interdependence of language descriptions, theories of learning and needs analysis in the course design is of great importance, needs analysis that distinguishes an ESP course from an EGP course plays the most important role at this stage. And needs analysis generally aim at answering such questions as who will learn the language and why, where, when the language is learned. These questions may fall into two categories: target needs and learning needs. Understanding of this helps to make clear what should be taught to the students.

However, in our country ESP needs analysis is absolutely a new concept for course designers. Without needs analysis, course designers are short of concerning thought upon the ESP course of different fields. And, what the training aim is, what the class hours are and whether the big-class mode or small-class mode is needed or not are all not obvious. For example, in certain college, there are ESP course in some specialties, but no in others. There are at most 144 class hours, yet less than 36 class hours. Even big-class mode is mostly adopted in the no matter what listening, speaking, reading and writing lesson without regarding the specialty.

ESP course has an edge subject, which combines specialty contents and English language skill training. Because of non- enough English applied ability, teaching background and teaching energy, the teachers of specialties couldn't design the teaching syllabus high-quality. Therefore, it is found in College English Syllabus (1994: 5) that fundamental college English must focus it self on the basis of language, including basic pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and notional, functional expressions. Accordingly, learning materials for them cover a wide range based on the basis of the language. On the other hand, English for junior and senior students are specialized.

Students' future professions require that they should acquire not only term s but also the ability of how to use them indifferent situations. Unfortunately the latter is not mentioned in the Syllabus although it is what the students need most in the target situations. Then, it is doubtful that students are u sing proper materials when most colleges apply only the original works of the specific major to the course. Therefore, it is obvious that analyzing target needs has not been made full use of in syllabus designing and material choosing at this stage. So that, without definite ESP Teaching Syllabus, ESP teachers can choose teaching materials and contents from their own interests or concepts. And, of course, ESP instruction system is chaotic.

IV. Suggestions on ESP Teaching in China

To solve these problems, a series of measures must be taken.

1. More linguistic researches must be done to both ESP teaching and bilingual instruction to attract attention of the national educational administration.

In the circle of college teaching theory, there are an amount of teachers and scholars concerning about the development of ESP in our country. Every year there are some papers on the subject of ESP coming out in the authorial journals for English, language and literature, etc. especially, while discussing the main direction of the future college English teaching, professor Cai Ji-gang of Fudan University and other scholars think that ESP should be the main direction of our country's college English teaching (Cai Ji-gang, 2005). The professor Su Ding-fang of Shanghai Communications University also point out ESP teaching design and implementation should much better done than unrealistic college bilingual instruction requirements (Su Ding-fang, 2004).

Although most scholars of foreign language are confident to the future of ESP teaching in our country, yet nowadays the research on its theory is in the first period. And teachers of specialties are only exploring the ESP teaching experience. As a special language teaching, ESP exploration from the scope of linguistics and language teaching approach are just in the germination, especially for the non-ideal ESP teaching of the present situation, no resolutions are explored. This proposes, ESP teachers and scholars should be much more engaged in its theory research and find out ESP teaching approaches from their
practice, so that it can improve the understanding of concerning department and college English syllabus designers to ESP teaching, even attract their renew attention.

Furthermore, in recent years concerning department and most scholars are greatly expecting bilingual instruction can easily improve ESP students' abilities, yet in teaching practice, bilingual instruction are facing with many difficulties in many schools. For example, before the Estimation by the Education Department a staff of Hubei University said: "all norms of our university can gain the level A except for the bilingual teaching rate" (Jin Xiao-bai, 2004) yet by the literatures of foreign countries, we can find out bilingual instruction is in fact the highest period of ESP teaching. So without traditional ESP teaching, bilingual instruction can't spread out in most colleges. One Canadian scholar, after his research on the most famous mode of his country, made a conclusion: compared with traditional language teaching bilingual instruction has no advantages of speaking and writing, since the course task is much more important than language teaching (Cummins, 1998). Therefore the development of ESP teaching is to some degree due to its substitute---bilingual teaching research and study.

2. Misplacement of teachers must be corrected to improve effectiveness, that is,

English teachers should be given the responsibility of ESP teaching.

Dudley-Evans and St John [3] believe the people of ESP course teaching should be a practitioner, not only a teacher. That is to say, ESP teachers must be qualified with the following 5 roles: ① teacher; ② course designer; ③ cooperator of student and teacher; ④ researcher; ⑤ examiner and estimator, which thus shows it's quite a hard-working to be transformed from EGP teacher to a qualified ESP teacher.

Yet in most universities of our country, ESP teaching persons are mostly specialist teachers, which reflect the traditional role of ESP teachers is completely misplaced. This phenomenon also implies that college English teachers should be given certain specialist training so as to become ESP teachers, which requires teachers establish their confidence and interest to specialty. Such is what Stevens (1988:43) pointed out "by contrast with EGP teachers, ESP teachers need much more experience, extra training, great effort and new contributions". And the same time, Edge's words (1999) can encourage those teachers eager to be ESP teachers: "People can train me and educate me, but no one can develop me: I develop."

Furthermore, Robinson once thought these teachers should be engaged in the compliment of ESP textbooks, so that they can acknowledge concerning specialist knowledge, even grasp certain ESP teaching approaches. It is also desirable to facilitate communication between ESP teachers and specialist teachers. During the teaching, with the help of specialist teachers, ESP teachers can have enough understanding to students' target situation; and specialist teachers can be made to well know students and ESP teachers' linguistic problems.

3. On the basis of needs analysis, ESP teaching syllabus and course design should be worked out.

Needs analysis generally aims at answering such questions as who will learn the language and why, where, when the language is learned. It can help put forward reasonable syllabus and effective methodology in ESP course design.

In order to make the point specific and according to the above stated ESP teaching situation, I regard, it is necessary to make the needs analysis from the following eight points: ① specialist information: refers to the analysis of target situation needs that will be students' activities by English; ② learners' data: means learners' subjective factors such as their studying experience, cultural information, learning aims, learning attitude and so on; ③ English state: means learners' present linguistic knowledge and skills; ④ learners' lack: that is, the distance between ① and ③; ⑤ linguistic learning information: refers to those effective learning approaches and skills, that is learning needs; ⑥ concerning specialist communication: naming how to apply linguistic knowledge and skills in the target situation; ⑦ course requirements to students; ⑧ atmosphere information: the
environment for the completion of ESP course teaching. So that a comprehensive ESP course syllabus can be effectively designed and drafted.

What's more, textbooks are taken on as the main source of learning input, which is decisive to the success of ESP teaching. I believe that on the basis of need analysis to select textbook can avoid certain arbitrariness and blindness during material choosing, so the selected textbooks can truly have communicative contents and are consistent with the training aims. Simultaneously, the language materials shouldn't be too difficult, but own common and suitable uses, that is to say, it should be similar to actual communicative language in style. For this, it is suggested teams be established to cooperate making full advantage of computer, network, and multimedia to accomplish teaching. During the teaching, textbooks are supposed to be estimated, corrected and improved, thus changing its effectiveness and suitableness. It's without question an effective and stable ESP instruction system can be formed.

V. Conclusion

In a whole, ESP must be seen as an approach not as a product: understand properly, it is an approach to language learning which is based on learner need. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 19) And according to the English 2000 survey by British Culture Committee from 1994 to 1995, there's a great change that the future ELT is more and more connected with one specialty or other subject in ELT of 21st century; ESP teaching will be the main trend of English Language Teaching (Liu Yunqing, 1996).

Nowadays, by statistics, more than 85% academic papers are published or read in English, and main journals of every subject are almost English. However, in our country, the present situation of ESP teaching isn't ideal at all. And with the development the economy, science and technology, multi-era culture, our country's communication with the world is becoming closer and closer, which put up new atmosphere and requirement for the ESP teaching in our country.

Therefore, in 21st century, ESP teachers of China are facing both big challenges and great opportunities. Yet as members of ESP teachers, they must be aware of not only the advantages brought by ESP teaching, but also their role to the development of ESP teaching in the new world. Thus, ESP teachers of China should be trained and improved themselves by the theoretical knowledge gained ELT and practical teaching, so as to build a perfect ESP teaching system and push it forward in the field of ELT. As a matter of fact, every ESP teachers is a pioneer helping mould the ESP world.

References: