From Foundational English to
Subject-Based English and Advanced English

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Abstract:
This paper describes the actualities in Subject-Based English teaching, and Advanced English teaching, analyzes the differentia between natural science and social science departments, and discusses the approaches to the problem. The author believes that the teachers of English make great efforts to improve English teaching quality. The college officer should provide an appropriate environment to the teachers of English.

Keywords: College English, Subject-Based English, Advanced English, English Teaching

Based on the New Revised Syllabus (1998), College English Teaching can be classified into three phases: Foundational English (common required), Subject-Based English and Advanced English (for senior students). As we know, Foundational English is the common required level for all the college students in the first two years of studying, that is to say, the freshman and sophomore students need to pass CEB 4 or even CEB 6. But Subject-Based English and Advanced English, according to the Revised Syllabus, are the new requirements, which are rarely mentioned in the former Syllabus. Therefore in our English teaching practices, we found it quite difficult to reach the targets.

The reasons are complicated. First, teachers (include English and other specialties) have limited background knowledge; Second, students are short of the appropriate materials as textbooks; Third, there is a differentia in specialties (e.g. in Chinese History or in Chinese Calligraphy), we can’t imagine that a Chinese teacher give a lecture on “Lisao” (《离骚》by Qu Yuan) in English; Forth, Students’ English levels in college entrance examination scores are quite different, with the number of recruit students increasing, this problem is getting more and more serious; Fifth, the awareness of the college administrators can’t keep pace with the quick development of the college education.

Although we can solve some of the problems that I have mentioned above, such as we can send some specialty teachers abroad to study the method of teaching subjects in English, we can also introduce the excellent foreign textbooks to supplement our lack in teaching materials, however, we cannot treat different specialties equally without distinction. On the other hand, our social science students can’t adapt themselves to the method of teaching subjects in English.

Take economics course in our college for example. The professors complained that (1) teaching economics in English is a tough job. To most students, there is nothing to learn but a few English words. They have to spend a lot of time looking up new words, so that they have no time
to learn their specialties; (2) the teaching assisted equipments don’t conform with the teaching reform, so that the teachers need to spend too much time typing and writing the teaching materials, but not to concentrate their energy on the lectures; (3) what the specialties teachers said are almost “Chinglish”, not English; (4) the obstacle between two kinds of languages and different culture backgrounds make it impossible to discuss specialties deeply.

I have made an investigation in our economics department, there are more than 60% of students believe that teaching specialties in English are not worth the candle; about 30% think that it is difficult to learn both English and specialties; the rest are satisfied with the method, and they think that they have not only learnt the new knowledge of specialties but enlarged their English vocabulary as well.

But the case is quite different in the natural science departments of our college. Take the course “Probability for Application” in the math department for example. There are few new words, and the structures of the sentences are simple, they are easy to understand. In addition, there are a few good textbooks written in English, easy to read and easy to teach. Nearly all the students like this kind of Subject-Based English Course. Quite the same is the chemistry department, especially the course of Organic Chemistry and Inorganic Chemistry. Because the amount of terms is very limited, they can remember them easily; the text is simple, they are familiar with them, so that they can guess the meaning of the new words and terms.

However, even in the natural science departments, the specialties teachers’ English levels are quite different. Some teachers can just write a few English terms, but they can’t give a lecture in English, we can just see some English items written on the blackboard. Needless to say, we can’t even hear a single English word in the class; nearly 50% of teachers who are interpreters, what they have taught in class is just translations. No wonder the students can’t really think in English, for what they have learned is only to translate the sentences into Chinese.

How to solve this problem? Of course, going aboard to learn the teaching method is the best way for the Subject-Based English teacher to solve all the problems, but obviously, it is not realistic. I think that it is vitally important to improve specialty teachers’ English level. In this case, we, teachers of English can play an important part. We can train the specialty teachers to improve their oral and listening level, help them to improve their pronunciation and do the presentation. In addition to this, another solution is to invite international teachers to present the lectures.

There are only about 12% - 20% of professional teachers in natural science departments who can be the really qualified to be Subject-Based English teachers, and they can teach the students very well and can make the students think in English directly.

Over 75% of students in natural science departments enjoy Subject-Based English Courses. They said that these courses not only provide them with English language, but also give them useful specialties knowledge, which is more important for them. The teaching materials, the major courses and the teachers are three crucial elements in this case. For the students studying natural sciences, Subject-Based English can also provide them with a lot of new knowledge, which is fundamental background for them to further more studying in the future.

But, there are still nearly 25% of science students who are not good at English. What can we do for them? I recommend that the college offer supplemental special English course for the students who want to study more but poor in English. As in our chemistry department, they have given lectures on Introductory Chemistry --- Specialty English (Peking University Press), a good book suitable for all the sophomore students, and it is just like a bridge that connected the
But in social science departments, teachers haven’t found suitable books for students to read. Hence, there is obvious differentia between social science and natural science specialties. They suggest that Publishers can introduce or press some valuable simple reading materials to meet the different subject students’ needs. And we, teachers of English may also give the liberal art students some special English courses, such as Introduction of Literature, Introduction of Sociology, and so on.

For the teacher’s sake, so far, teaching about Advanced English is nearly a vacuity in our college. Unlike Subject-Based English, the contents of Advance English involve more extensive fields, from humanities to art, from nature to society. The various background knowledge and higher English level are necessary for both teachers and students. We need the teachers who have the characteristics of interdisciplinary knowledge. We also need the teachers who can play an important part in quality education, because Advanced English places an important part in humanistic quality education.

As we know, quality usually has two different meanings. One is innate or inborn; the other is postnatal or acquired. These two parts interact with each other take the form of the mental and physical steady feature. We call it quality. In the inner part of the quality there are some complex composition. Consequently, the quality includes Thought and Moral quality, science and culture quality, the appreciation of beauty quality, the labor skillful quality, personality and psychology quality, research and develop quality, and physical quality. So we can say the quality education is a multiple competent education. Except the physical quality, the others can be divided into three types. They are humanistic quality, scientific quality and philosophical quality. The humanistic quality means how to make student be a good citizen. The scientific quality refers to teach students to use the instrument to solve the problems that they have met in their real life. The philosophical quality indicates critical and rational quality. These qualities together with physical quality construct the base of independent personality.

Since there are some different compositions in an inner part of the quality education, different composition of the quality should be train or develop in different subjects. As we know the humanistic quality is about how to make the students to be a good citizen. Therefore, The train or development of the humanistic quality is not only the task of political subjects, but also the tasks of all human sciences and social sciences include Advanced English.

Advanced English is an important course in college education degree. Its objects are senior college students or even graduated students. They have learnt extensive knowledge and have feelings about life and society. Advanced English can help them form steady viewpoints and judge things correctly. So that I think Advanced English is not only the language of English but also the culture written in English. Because of this, Advance English can be an elective for all the senior students. The traditional exam and test method need reforming, the thesis writing should be a good way for Advanced English testing.

Advanced English teaching is a new domain for most of us, so that it may be a real challenge to our teachers of English. We are familiar with College English teaching, but Advance English is not out of our domain. We need to reckon with it.

As I have mentioned above, it is not the case that we, the teachers of English, are just teachers of foundational English. In fact, we have a great deal to do in the field of Special English and Advanced English teaching, and even in Subject-Based English teaching. In order to fulfill the
task, we ought to do our utmost; at the same time, college officers and every field in our society should give English teaching appropriate support.

Reference

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