

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and Statement of the Problem

At present, Business English (BE) has become increasingly important in China, as the expansion in international business activity requires more business people to conduct daily business in English. Today numerous students are learning business English and their number will increase. Company employees wish to learn English because they are in daily contact with English-speakers. Such employees include secretaries, import-export personnel, distribution managers, marketing personnel, engineers, and information technology personnel. Meanwhile, university or college students want to learn Business English to gain basic business skills to enable them to work in international businesses. Many students realize that a good knowledge of Business English is the key to successful careers.

However, despite this recognized need, the teaching of Business English has not been sufficiently developed, especially offering Business English courses to English majors. Presently, universities in China only offer general English courses to English majors. However, many of those students who have graduated work as secretaries, interpreters, or clerks in a business environment. In this researcher's observation, even though the students have strong basic English skills, they find it difficult to handle their work. The reason is that they are not sufficiently familiar with the English concepts and terminology related to business-specific areas such as sales,

financing, marketing, banking or business correspondence which they encounter daily on their work. Such dissatisfaction undoubtedly points out the existing gap between the language curriculum at the university level and the realities of the workplaces. It is therefore time for language practitioners to readjust their language courses/programs to meet the needs of English majors.

Guangxi University for Nationals (GUN) is one of the biggest universities in Guangxi Region of China. The university educates minority students from various places in the region. Although many English majors who have graduated from this university work in import-export companies, joint-venture factories and other businesses, yet, up to this time, no Business English courses have been offered to the students. It is hoped that the introduction of a Business English course will enable the students to be better equipped to meet the demands of the work in the future.

From the standpoint of language teaching, Business English must be seen in the overall context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP was developed to meet the demands for the specific English skills that resulted from the expansion in international science, technology, and economic activities (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The need for specific English in workplaces has brought in new ideas in language teaching. These new ideas have shifted the attention of English teaching away from describing the rules of grammar to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication (Widdson, 1978). Since language usage varies from one situation to another, language teaching should aim at meeting the needs which arise in a specific real world situation.

Furthermore, in addition to considering the linguistic development mentioned above, one can also note the contribution of the new developments in psychology to the rise of ESP. It has been recognized that language teaching should focus on learners and their attitude to learning. Learners are individuals with different needs and interests, and these needs and interests have an important influence on motivation to learn, and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning (Rodger, 1969). An English course should relate to the learner's needs in order to improve the learner's motivation and make learning better and more effective.

There are several definitions for ESP in the literature (see Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Steven, 1988; Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Eveans and St John 1998). All these definitions describe ESP as a course designed to meet the specific needs of a learner. This requires that an ESP course should be specifically designed for the potential learners, and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that "... for the ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload" (p.21). They further state that in practice, a course designer needs to produce a syllabus based on needs analysis, select, adapt or write materials in accordance with the syllabus, develop a methodology for teaching and establish evaluation procedures to measure the specified goals.

In light of the conditions of language teaching and learning in China, and particularly in GUN, and the rationale in ESP discussed above, this research study will investigate the following specific problems:

1. What are the specific needs in terms of English use of the graduate students who are working in international businesses in China?

2. What are the preferences in teaching methodologies of the GUN students?
3. Based on the identified needs of the respondents cited in 1 and 2 above, what course syllabus should be used to prepare the learners better for the communicative demands in the work situation?

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. to identify the needs in using Business English of graduate Guangxi University for Nationals English majors who are presently working in an international business context.
2. to identify the preferred teaching methodologies of third-year English majors who are presently studying in the Foreign Language Department of Guangxi University for Nationals.
3. to design a Business English syllabus for third-year English majors at Guangxi University for Nationals based on the identified needs.

1.3 Scope of the Study

1. The course has been designed as a course of English for General Business Purposes for pre-experienced learners. The course design has been confined specifically to third-year English majors in the Foreign Language Department, Guangxi University for Nationals, China.

2. The respondents of this study consisted of two groups. One group was composed of twenty graduate GUN English majors who are now working in international business contexts. The other group was composed of thirty third-year English majors who are presently studying in GUN.
3. The course design includes needs analysis, syllabus design, and material recommendation. It does not give test and evaluation materials, however, the writer recommended a general course evaluation.
4. Needs analysis was carried out by using two sets of questionnaire designed by the researcher (See Chapter 3, Methodology, 3.2 Instruments p. 21).
5. The needs analysis focuses only on the Business English target needs and learning needs of the third-year English majors of GUN.

1.4 Definition of Terms

Arithmetic mean (X): The arithmetic average of all scores in a data set, derived by adding all the scores of a given data and dividing their sum by the number of scores.

BEAP: abbreviation for Business English for Academic Purposes

BEOP: abbreviation for Business English for Occupational Purposes

Business English (BE): Special English which is used in business contexts

Course design: A process by which the raw data about a learning needs and target needs are interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning activities which provide the learners with a particular state of information.

EGBP: abbreviation for English for General Business Purposes

ESBP: abbreviation for English for Specific Business Purpose

Job-experienced learner: Learners with business working experience.

Learning needs: The teaching methodologies, such as teachers' presentation techniques, classroom activities, teacher aids, and testing and evaluation format, which the target learners prefer to use.

Materials: In this study, this term is used as an inclusive term, which refers to teaching and learning facilities, including commercial textbook, and authentic materials such as print, audio and video, pictorial materials (originally produced for a purpose other than the teaching of language), and the Internet sources.

Needs: The needs to be identified in this project refer to the Business English target needs and learning needs of third-year English majors who are presently studying in Guangxi University for Nationals, Guangxi province, China.

Pre-experienced learner: Learners who have no working experience.

Syllabus: A plan of work to be taught in a particular course.

Target Needs: The language skills or function which the target learners need to acquire by the end of a course.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The researcher expects the following benefits from this study:

1. This study has designed a Business English course for third-year English majors in Guangxi University for Nationals who are preparing to work in a business context. The course will increase students' general knowledge of Business English which will enable them to compete better in the employment market and become more qualified in their future jobs.

2. This course design based on the learners' needs will meet the learners' expectation and therefore will motivate the learners to learn better and more effectively.
3. The findings of the needs analysis will help English teachers at Guangxi University for Nationals get a better understanding of the students' preferred teaching methodologies. These results will provide guidelines for the design of other courses to meet the needs of students.
4. The study will help language teaching practitioners become aware that language teaching should suit the particular needs in workplaces and the developments in the field of linguistics and educational psychology.

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