Analysis of the Teaching of English for Specific Purposes based on the Language Common-core Notion
--A Case Study of Lexical Teaching

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Abstract. ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is an English course based on the specific purpose and specific needs of the learner, such as Business English, News English, Medical English, Legal English, Travel English, Financial English, Accounting English and Real Estate English. In recent years, with the continuous deepening and expansion of the research on ESP, many scholars have begun to pay attention to the “common-core” characteristic of ESP, that is, there are common language features and language skills in ESP in different disciplines and professional behaviors. ESP in different disciplines share common elements in style, rhetoric, genre and communicative skills. Based on the common-core notion and real teaching practice of ESP, this paper attempts to analyze the orientation of ESP and explore the teaching content, teaching methods of ESP by taking the lexical teaching as an example.

Keywords: college English teaching, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), common-core notion, EGP (English for General Purposes), EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes), ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes).

1. Introduction

For a long time, EGP (English for General Purposes) has been the focus of English teaching in domestic universities, and the development of ESP teaching is relatively lagging behind. Dai Weidong believes that it is necessary to change the situation that foreign language teaching in colleges and universities lags behind the development of social economy, and emphasizes that the overall and in-depth reform of foreign language teaching is an urgent task. [1] The “High School English Curriculum Standards” developed by the Basic Department of the Ministry of Education sets forth almost the same requirements and standards as the current general requirements of the College English Curriculum Requirements. This indicates that the EGP teaching will shift from colleges and universities to middle schools, and the center of college English teaching will gradually shift to ESP teaching. [2] In recent years, in order to meet the needs of international application-oriented talents, Chinese universities face challenges and opportunities for transition to application-oriented universities. In this background, ESP has become the goal of college English teaching reform. Many colleges and universities have set up ESP courses in different forms based on the English level of the students, teacher faculty status, and their positioning and long-term development goals. However, the development of ESP teaching in China is not really satisfactory, and there are various problems and drawbacks, such as the lack of ESP teaching materials: many ESP textbooks still use the professional knowledge of a certain subject as the content; the lack of effective teaching methods: vocabulary and translation teaching method is still largely used in ESP teaching; and the lack of effective and objective evaluation system.
2. To Clarify the Relationship between EGP and ESP and Understand the Common-core Notion is the Important Premise of Accurately Positioning the Focus of College English Teaching.

2.1 The Relationship between EGP and ESP

There has been a heated debate over the orientation of college English teaching for a long time. Most scholars believe that EGP and ESP are not opposite, and the two can complement each other. It is generally believed that EGP is the basis for ESP and EGP should precede ESP.

2.2 The Common-core Notion of ESP and ESP Teaching

The common-core notion of language is a concept formed by linguists in the study of language idea function. It refers to the part of the language used by most people who speak a certain language. This part of the language is not restricted by geography, education level, social status, occupation, and topic, and there are not many differences in vocabulary, grammar, and ideas function. [3]

The explanation of language common-core in David Cristal’s A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics is “the term common-core notion refers to a set of linguistic features common to all variants, dialects, etc. of a language”. Leech & Svartvik pointed out that many of the characteristics of English can be found in all (or almost all) variants. According to the ESP Skills Center Law, in the application of language in different professional disciplines, there are the same thinking and expression processes, such as definition, description, analysis, and debate. These rhetorical strategies used in different disciplines are basically the same. [4] Bloor & Bloor proposed the “common-core hypothesis” of ESP [5] which further consolidates the common-core feature of ESP communicative skills. Duan Ping and and Zhu Pingmei[6] point out that according to the theory of ESP register analysis, ESP can be regarded as a functional variant produced for the purpose of accomplishing a certain communication and ESP in different fields have the following six common-core features: (1). the common-core feature of ESP objectives (2). the common-core feature of ESP stylistics (3). the common-core feature of ESP rhetoric (4). the common-core feature of ESP genre (5). the common-core feature of ESP vocabulary (6). the common-core feature of ESP communicative skills. All the six common-core components constitute EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes), which is a beginning stage of ESP teaching and learning. From the point of view of general education, EGAP can be regarded as a general education in the field of ESP, and the rules and skills of EGAP are general rules and general skills that students of all disciplines need to master. The general rules and skills are the basis of ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes), which is a difficult stage of ESP teaching and learning.

2.3 The Orientation of ESP in College English Teaching

In most colleges, the students directly begin ESAP study after they complete EGP. Although students can be quickly exposed to some professional vocabulary and expression in ESAP, their ESP learning still stays at the empirical and perceptual level and their comprehensive ability of professional communication skills can hardly be improved in ESAP learning. With the continuous development of bilingual and English teaching in professional courses in our country, students urgently need a link between EGP and ESAP. [7] Therefore, the university ESP should be focused on EGAP, that is, the English for General Academic Purposes, so that students can first grasp the common pragmatic rules and communication skills which are the basis of ESAP, and quickly adapt to ESAP.

Based on the common-core notion proposed by Duan Ping and Zhu Meiping and believing the notion that EGP and ESP should be complementary in ESP teaching and learning practice, this study will take the ESP vocabulary teaching as an example to explore the content and method of ESP teaching. The study aims to show that ESP teaching should emphasize differences between EGP and EGAP through contrast and strengthens the link and similarity through comparison and makes EGAP serve as a bridge connecting EGP and ESAP to lay a solid foundation for ESAP teaching and learning.
3. The ESP Teaching Content and Teaching Method based on the Common-core Notion of ESP Vocabulary

Wilkins once said “Without vocabulary, you can express nothing” [8]. The rich and varied meanings of ESP vocabulary poses the greatest difficulty for ESP learners. ESP in different field has a large number of specialized terms and special vocabulary and many ESP words have different meanings in different fields, and also the words that the students have learned in EGP adopt new meanings in ESP. Due to the reasons above, the ESP vocabulary has become a main barrier for the students to learn ESP, and ESP learning and teaching should begin with ESP vocabulary.

3.1 The Content of Lexical Teaching

Averil Coxhead released the Academic Word List (AWL) in 1998. This vocabulary includes 570 words, specifically 570 semantic fields. The corpus used by Coxhead includes approximately 3.5 million words, covering academic articles in various fields such as social sciences, business, law, and science, with a wide range of subject universality. This vocabulary can be seen as a common core vocabulary for ESP. The multi-word structure table [9] common to each discipline developed by Liu should also be part of the ESP common-core vocabulary.

3.2 The Method of Lexical Teaching

All the learners learn any knowledge in a subjective way and the new learning process is based on the original knowledge and experience. At the stage of EGAP learning, students actually learn EGAP through their EGP learning experience. By comparison and contrast, the EGAP vocabulary has the following categories: First, the words learned in EGP have one or different new meanings in EGAP; second, EGAP words that the student have never learned in EGP have one or different new meanings in EGAP. According to Sun Yan’s research, one-third of the EGAP common-core words are words in the CET-4 or CET-6 words list. [10] The students have learned these words and are quite familiar with them so learning these words should be the main point and the starting point of EGAP words learning. In the EGAP teaching process, the similarities between the EGP and EGAP words should be analyzed to enable the students to establish a bridge between the EGP and EGAP learning, at the same time, the differences between the EGP words and EGAP words should be highlighted to help the students to get familiar with EGAP words very quickly.

Although many common-core words are applied to different fields, indicating different meanings, the different meanings of these words are established by extending and abstracting the original meaning (that is, the meaning which has probably been learned in EGP). The concept of one word undergoes continuous expansion and abstraction, thus giving the old words a new meaning, that’s why one word may have different meanings in different fields such as the word “render” and “configuration”. In teaching this kind of words, the teacher should help the student to know that: in the dynamic development of a language, the extension, association and the transfer in the words meaning have become the most dynamic part of English vocabulary development. In the practical teaching, the method of “word association” can be employed. On the one hand, students’ knowledge learned in EGP should be given full play and on the other hand, the context should be taken into consideration to activate students’ professional knowledge.

The remaining two-thirds of the common-core vocabulary are not included in the CET-4 or CET-6 list, and this part of the vocabulary are new words. Among them, there are new words which have only one meaning, for example, the meaning of the EGAP word "equilibrium" is completely the same in all professions so this kind of words do not pose a difficulty for EGAP learners. The remaining new words which have different meanings in difficult fields may be the most difficult ones for the students so in teaching these words, the teacher can still adopt the context method to enable the students to learn the meaning of the words according to the context, which is good way for the students who already have a lot of professional vocabulary and knowledge. It is also recommended that the teacher should start from the meaning of the vocabulary of the student's major, and then the students can gradually accumulate the meaning of the word in different disciplines.
4. Conclusion

ESP should be the direction of college English teaching reform, and ESP should be based on EGP. Based on the ESP language common-core notion, and human cognitive characteristics, and due to the fact that many problems arise when students directly begin ESAP after EGP, the focus of ESP teaching should be EGAP. In the teaching process, the teaching method of comparing and contrasting EGP and EGAP should be employed and emphasized to make EGAP serve as a bridge connecting EGP and ESAP and lay a solid foundation for ESAP, thus forming a continuum of EGP→EGAP→ESAP→bilingual teaching→English teaching of professional knowledge.

References


