

Literature Review on Shifting from EGP to ESP in College English Teaching in the Context of the 21st-Century China

Tingting Sun

Dalian Maritime University, Dalian, China

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Abstract: This study draws on a literature review on the issue of shifting EGP to ESP in College English Teaching in China. The literature review reveals that there is a difference in language researchers' attitude toward the discussion on the orientation of College English Teaching, and ESP instruction into the College English course. In the discussion part, use DMU's College English Education reforms, revising maritime students apply College Teaching textbooks, updating the outdated maritime curriculum and enhancing teaching resources to show that the strategies of language learning should combine the EGP and ESP together, to help the student achieve the competency-oriented goal.

Introduction

Foreign Language Education in China has consistently been related to the macro state level in the last 70 years, which is mentioned by the language researcher Professor Wen in her early lecture on the Youth Linguistic Research Forum in January. She summarized three stages of Foreign Language Education since founded People's Republic of China [28,30]. From 1950 to 1960, Russian was the most popular foreign language because of the relationship between China and the Soviet Union during that time. In late 1970, the reform and opening-up policy has adopted in China, English language teaching became more admired and entered into the "recovery stage" [30]. In the following years, English gained the prominent status of "the first foreign language" under the development of Chinese economy [28]. English has become the standard language for international commerce and communication. In the new century, events such as China's entry into the WTO in 2001 and hosting the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 encouraged the whole of China to learn English [28]. English hasn't been one kind of discipline or knowledge in China's education system; it has turned into an opportunity for the Chinese learner to embrace the world. Overseas enterprises and institutions favored in the recruitment of talent with higher English competence. With excellent English, learners could find a better job. Using this international language, learners have the opportunity to discuss common global issues at an international conference, such as economic, environmental pollution etc.

Against this background, as a direct interface with social need, English language teaching in the higher education system of our country plays a significant role in providing practical language talents for the society. At the state level, three levels are mentioned in the National Guidelines on College English Teaching. The basic, higher and developmental level of teaching objectives is set to

meet the diversified needs of students (Yu, 2016; Wang, 2016; Cheng, 2016). Nowadays, course for English language learning at the tertiary level divided into three categories: English for General Purposes (EGP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Intercultural Communication (EIC) [28]. As an essential part of Foreign Language Learning in China's Higher Education, College English Teaching is the compulsory course for most non-English first-year college students (*College English Guidelines*, 2017). The primary mission of EGP is to “enhance student’s general language competence for a more accurate and fluent production and reception of English in dealing with the everyday situation” [21]. It gets a better way to cultivate college students' interests and habits of learning English.

ESP is “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning”. We can know that both EGP and ESP researchers hope to shift the current general English-oriented College English Teaching to special-purpose English that trains students to pursue professional studies in English or to deal with future occupations. However, researchers have another understanding of the word “shifting”. Whether ESP should replace EGP has become a famous debate since the early 21st century [27,30].

Foreign language researchers in China have a different opinion on this issue. From the definition of the ESP, the study of Wen (2014) summed up three distinct points of view. In the paper, it is suggested that Academic English should be dominant in College English Teaching. She advised that General English should be gradually replaced. Language researcher Cai (2010, 2013, 2014) has given the theory of ESP completely replaced EGP by analyzing the current situation of College English. Wang (2013) suggested that the philosophy of EAP as part of ESP becomes all the content of College English Teaching should be examined carefully. He discussed the relationship of EAP with the internalization of higher education and High School English Teaching. It is believed that EGP is the dominant language, and Academic English can only be implemented in a small part of universities [27].

Therefore, in this paper, in the literature review part, I will focus on reviewing the studies of language researchers discussed the theory ESP (EAP) or EGP in College English Teaching in the last 10 years [1-8,10,26,29,30]. I draw on my understanding of the ‘shifting’ from the EGP to ESP based on the reflection of the aforementioned studies. It isn’t so simple to talk about ESP should replace EGP in College English Teaching [26,27,29,30]. The most important thing is to find a proper and efficient way to fill the gap between EGP and ESP in the tertiary level. To find out a "bridge" by consideration of the applicable curriculum, use textbooks, teaching methodology, assessment in College English Teaching [24,28]. In my discussion part, there will be a practice review of college English teaching reform in DMU under the situation of the shifting from EGP to ESP.

Literature Review

Since the concept of English for specific purposes (ESP) was put forward formally in mainland China, about 40 years have passed when it has undergone processes of the theoretical exploration and implementation [12]. It has enjoyed a rapid development under the curriculum reform of English language education in Chinese universities [24,28]. “The public expectation that college graduates should be able to use English to engage in a wide range of international communication activities and different disciplinary areas.” [24] Whether ESP should complete replacing EGP in the College English Teaching has been discussed for a long time [2-6,9,10,28,30]. One main reason for researchers to support the theory of ESP should replace EGP, which is the lower efficiency of College English Teaching for a long time [10,26,30]. Another one is that more and more college graduates are using English in a “growing number of occupational context” [16].

The study of Cai & Liao has discussed the lower efficiency of College English Teaching in 2010.

They analyzed the situation and challenge of College English Teaching. Graduated students can only use English for passing the exams, such as CET4 or CET6. They lack the English language competency of daily communication or technical contexts [13,16]. The following studies of a reflection of the reorientation of College English Teaching have discussed for several years. Among them the most popular one is advocated by Cai who thought General English should have completed in high school, it is proper to put more attention on ESP in the tertiary level. He pointed out that ESP in China-oriented towards ESAP. Considering a growing demand in recent years for a transitional course between GE and bilingual teaching, it is suggested that ESAP should replace EGP for the first year college students [13].

As a particular purpose of English, Academic English should establish on needs analysis. Universities can provide ESP courses to serve English learner's specific learning goals [6,16]. As far as the whole country is concerned, it is equally more important to improve the English competency of college students, to cultivate cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural communicative competence, and to develop autonomous learning ability, which constitutes the essential content of College English Teaching [27,28].

"Language teacher's professional lives and practices in tertiary contexts have been profoundly impacted by educational changes worldwide." [24] By analyzing the situation of the higher level College English Teaching Peking University (PU), Zhejiang University (ZU) and Tongji University (TU), the research provides studies about English for Liberal Education (ELE), and ESP can co-exist and supplement each other. In their studies, they give the theory of College English teaching should include two levels which can divide into three stages. Two levels refer to General English (GE), the ESP stage. Depending on the teaching practice of PU, ZU, and TU, further advances have discussed on College English Teaching in their studies. They pointed out that ELE should be taught by College English (language) teachers, while ESP should inform by major-related teachers. Studies on whether major-related teachers could cultivate students' English language competency have become the core discussion area [18,26].

In the following years, ESP has enjoyed popularity in College English Teaching for many language researchers [5-8,18,26,30]. From the studies, the discouraging tone is more or less intense. It questions that it is inappropriate to implement ESP in China by considering the English language teachers who lacked disciplinary knowledge. It also believed that ESP is not an efficient way to improve student's language competency or liberal education [27]. Some researchers thought this kind of criticism was from a misunderstanding and prejudice of ESP, and it might be the significant barriers to the development of ESP in China [12].

Another reason should take into more account is that international higher education has changed the College English Teaching objectives. Just like Chien & Hsu (2010) said: "The world we live in has increasingly become more globalized" [16]. Facing a higher demand and a greater expectation for English proficiency of graduates, learning English should relate to an essential and future job. College English is no longer a major, but it should be one part of the public course with the major. The main objectives of the college English curriculum should focus on cultivating student with their future jobs. Based on these main reasons, to face the risk of College English Teaching, globalization economic development and the need of international higher education, the theory of ESP (EAP) should replace EGP in tertiary level might take more account to the reforms of College English Teaching [28]. Other researchers also provide a further discussion of this debate. Yang Feng and Sun Ling (2013) explained this question from another point of view. They demonstrated in the paper that ESP is more suitable for countries where the official language or the language of instruction is English, and its essence is different from the orientation of general education of college English in China. It can only meet the goal of the internationalization of higher education in some key disciplines and specialties. ESP is just an English teaching theory based on applied

linguistics and combined with the principles of register, rhetoric, discourse, target situation and learning skills analysis. It is a market-driven English learning that responds to the needs of society and individuals.

It emphasizes that ESP is more suitable in English-speaking countries, which official language or instruction language is English. It deviates from the orientation of General English Teaching in China. It is just in line with some key disciplines, professional and international talent training objectives. ESP teaching is also a sociolinguistic category, which involves a lot of policy, technical and cultural problems. Therefore, professional requirements, employment needs and ESP teaching resources of the departments and colleges should carefully decide whether to set up the ESP course or not. At the same time, they enhance the discussion of ESP theory and teacher development plan. To enhance the compilation, use and evaluation of ESP teaching materials, so that ESP can play a role in crucial disciplines and major fields in China, so as to meet the national demand for internationalized talents in higher education, and at the same time, contribute to the theory of ESP in China.

Wu Shiyu (2013) also adopted a cautious attitude towards the full implementation of unique English and academic English teaching as the result of abandoning the EGP in College English Teaching. It has aroused the concern of the senior management of policymaking, the academic and educational circles, and even the general public, and has undertaken to present many kinds of views and voices. From the perspective of educational policy, language teaching and language acquisition, some fundamental problems in College English Teaching can be analyzed and explored [1,26]. There are many directions for future development of College English Teaching. Not only can it be incorporated into the framework of General Education for the cultivation of talents in colleges and universities, but it can concentrate on the construction of several “core courses of general knowledge in foreign languages” and the role of foreign language disciplines in the overall situation of talent training.

Hu Kaibao and Xie Lixin (2014) analyzed the origin of Academic English and the attributes of College English Teaching in China and the actual demand for the cultivation of compound talents. It pointed out that the future development direction of College English Teaching in China is General English, supplemented by Academic English teaching. Based on analysis origin of English for academic purposes (EAP), the nature of College English Teaching in China and the demand for interdisciplinary talents, it is the first time to discuss whether it makes sense to carry out the teaching of English for academic purposes as the top priority of college teaching in future China.

The paper then explores the future development of College English Teaching from the perspectives of the orientation of foreign language education and the trend of higher education in China. It argues that priority should give the General English and English for Liberal Education, rather than to Teaching of English for Academic Purposes. Nonetheless, English for Academic Purposes, in particular, English writing for academic purposes can be carried out as one of the optional courses [18,30].

The theory of ESP should replace ESP is to provide a misunderstanding of the definition of these two theories [3,30]. It is improper to say that EGP equals in English Teaching in primary and junior and high school education stage [30]. The relationship between EGP and ESP is not an alternate opinion. “ESP is well known for its learner-entered and content-based approach. It aims to meet learner-specific needs in the utilization of English for their specific field of study.” [16] In the paper, Wen summarizes the main differences between the theories “alternative” and the “complementary” [30]. She explained the main reason of the misunderstanding the English Teaching in essential stage (primary school, junior and senior school) equals to College English Teaching. They shouldn't have the same objectives in different periods.

The study of Wen, she agreed with and pushes forward the theory of coexisting with EGP and

ESP. Reform of College English Teaching needs a variety of factors (teaching objectives, teaching curriculum, teaching methods, evaluation methods, and teaching methodology) to play a synergistic role to show the teaching effect [28,30]. The key to the implementation of this system project lies in the concept, English proficiency and teaching ability of the majority of English teachers. In essence, it is the most pressing task to improve the professional capacity of college English teachers [20].

Through review, the main reasons for supporting the idea of EGP should be replaced by ESP in College English Teaching in China and different researcher's opinion on this debate [1-8,27,29,30]. It is evident that the theory of "shifting" from EGP to ESP has become the foremost consideration question in the reform at the tertiary level. Although there is a different understanding of the ESP, it has officially listed in the latest document College English Guide [28]. It means that, the influence of "the Belt and Road Initiative" and the construction "Double First-Class", which has been an important task closely related to the foreign language education in China. Whether the work can be done depends on the abundant international communication ability and the global competitive ability talents, and the cultivation of such skills depends on effective ESP course for learners [11,12,23].

I draw on my understanding of the "shifting" from the EGP to ESP. It is a gap between these two teaching theories, most important thing is to find a proper and efficient way to fill the gap, to find out a "bridge" between them from consideration proper curriculum, textbooks, teaching methodology, assessment in College English Teaching [28,30]. In the ensuing discussion part, there will be a practice review of college English teaching reform in DMU under the situation of the shifting from EGP to ESP.

Discussion

It has become an increasing demand for maritime cadets who not only gain all the necessary professional skills but also for qualified English competency. With the development of economic globalization and shipping industries, "many maritime colleges and universities in China, in particular, the Dalian Maritime University (DMU) has become more concerned with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), specifically Maritime English" [23].

The studies of shifting from EGP to ESP in College English Teaching has faced these common challenges mentioned in many reviews in the last ten years [1-8,26,27,30], which is the same situation faced in reform in DMU. There could provide summaries for the following reasons:

Firstly, ESP requires a specific knowledge background of pertinent subjects' teachers [24,30]. Most college English teachers in China do not have such a structure of academic qualifications. They may "confront embarrassment when working with students who have more knowledge of the related subjects [24]. It is the same situation in DMU, and there are only a few college teachers can undertake the subjected course such as Maritime English Communication [23]. A professional teacher teaches Maritime English in the specific field of English teaching course. They only focus on the meaning of vocabulary of the subjects. They can't give more explanations the language themselves. While language teachers can only emphasize the language, they couldn't provide any knowledge of the related subjects. "The two cannot achieve full integration, but they have a common purpose, to cultivate universal qualified maritime personnel for the shipping industry" [22,23]. Language teachers can help maritime students to gain knowledge of learning and conversant with western civilization. They have the ability of cross-cultural communications skills and dissemination of Chinese cultural version which is one part of the objectives of the College English Teaching at the tertiary level.

Secondly, the college student has a quiet English competency, which could not accept the ESP [5-8]. ESP teaching does not constitute an effective way to improve English proficiency

[26,27,29,30]. Although the objectives of College English Teaching and Maritime English Teaching, which can help students to master the maritime English vocabulary, background knowledge, and maritime-related reading passage, they have often been "criticized for not fully serving their purposes" [21]. It will guide students to figure out different cultural backgrounds under different societies, habits and customs. It can also cultivate the maritime talent's cross-culture communication and analytic ability. Students still feel "dissatisfied with their abilities or are frustrated with certain aspects of the course [21,28]. Therefore, General English Teaching and Maritime English Teaching are complementary to each other. The teaching of English and maritime English should base on general English and the English teaching mode, which is supplemented by the specific English [30].

Finally, in the view of the fact that most of the jobs that Chinese college students seek after graduation are mismatched, they can be competent for any work environment as long as they have strong overall English ability. [11,12]. As the Maritime English Teaching in DMU, "the Manila amendments raised a higher demand for all the seafarer's English especially for the non-native speakers" [22,23]. It emphasized all seafarers' professional adaptability, primarily focusing on effective English communication and communication skills.

Conclusion

DMU has made the first step, "is initiated and carried out educational reform, in the form of revising college textbooks, overhauling the outdated maritime curriculum and optimized teaching resources and utilization" [23]. ESP in College English Teaching has become more critical at this stage. Through reviewing the studies on the issue of shifting EGP to ESP in College English Teaching in China, I know that it is different in language researchers' attitude toward the discussion on the orientation of College English Teaching, and ESP instruction into the College English course. Use DMU's English Education reforms show that the strategies of language learning should combine the EGP and ESP together, to help the student achieve the competency-oriented goal.

Through these series College English Teaching reforms in DMU, it could supply more confident, competent and higher quality graduates in the future marine workforce. It is still turned out to be a difficult mission, and it is a necessary task to update and improve the quality of English teaching and professional content. It is with this understanding that I believe that the experience of educational reform in DMU has provided the benchmark for other maritime universities and colleges on the way of shifting from EGP to ESP in College English Teaching in China.

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