

Study on Course Design of Business English (as an ESP Course) based on TBLT and SPOC

Fengbao Cai

Faculty of College English Education, Nanfang College of Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, 510430, China

Abstract: The approach of TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) highly applies to the teaching of ESP (English for Specific Purpose). In traditional class, however, most of the class time is constrained on language teaching, hence professional knowledge cannot be internalized. The teaching idea of SPOC is a perfect blending of the advantages of traditional classroom teaching and popular information technology. This paper investigates the course design of Business English based on TBLT and SPOC, in the context of follow-up English courses of private applied university.

Keywords: SPOC; TBLT; ESP; Business English

1. Introduction

Since 2013, Professor Armando Fox of the University of California at Berkeley has proposed the SPOC (Small private online course), the concept of "small-scale restrictive online courses". The hybrid teaching that highlights the "online + offline" in the network era came into being. Thanks to the technical support provided by the Internet and mobile devices, classrooms are no longer limited by time and space, and teachers can teach and communicate remotely with learners anytime, anywhere. Since then, universities in the education sector have successively carried out reform experiments on the SPOC teaching model. In order to train students to become excellent talents with good international business communication skills and high professional culture, the author's school, a privately-run college in Guangdong Province, offers a series of follow-up courses for college English, including English for Specific Purpose courses such as Business English and Management English. How to apply SPOC to ESP teaching is an important issue to improve students' interest and efficiency in learning. Based on the characteristics of SPOC, this paper combines TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) method to explore how to construct a business English course teaching mode.

2. The Enlightenment of SPOC to English Teaching

2.1. SPOC mixed learning mode features

SPOC is taught by course teachers and is open to small and specific number of people. It is especially suitable for students who meet certain prerequisite conditions,

have similar knowledge base and academic level. The SPOC mixed learning mode has three stages: early, middle and late. In the early development work, teachers need to focus on designing and developing learning resources. Generally, the most direct way is to introduce high quality MOOC resources or modify the use based on the videos of the school's excellent courses. However, in order to meet the individual needs of the course, teachers usually build SPOC micro-videos based on the curriculum and the actual level and needs of students.

The online learning phase of SPOC mixed learning is completed outside the classroom, transferring the knowledge of shallow learning in the traditional teaching process to pre-class time, saving classroom time and improving the efficiency of classroom teaching. Students independently watch the macro-videos according to the learning task list arranged on the SPOC platform, complete the pre-class preparation, understand the learning difficulties, give feedback and exchange in the discussion area. For the more difficult part, teachers can answer them during the classroom. The SPOC offline learning phase, on the other hand, is completed in the traditional classroom where students form groups to explore and solve specific problems. As an instructor, the teacher must record the student's learning path in the discussion area in time, provide decisions for solving specific teaching problems, and facilitate teaching in accordance with their aptitude. As to the later stage of SPOC teaching, the SPOC platform provides students with opportunities for after-class testing, timely feedback and reflection, which continuously consolidates students' knowledge.

The entire SPOC teaching deconstructs the roles of teachers and students in the traditional learning process. Teachers have more opportunities to embody personal

wisdom and improve creative labor in teaching practice, and become an innovator of the curriculum teaching model. At the same time, students' participation and interaction are improved. The multi-modal learning information that integrates graphic, sound and shadow, and dynamic portraits not only enhances students' interest in learning, but also cultivates their multimedia literacy and builds self-confidence. On balance, a vivid, complete and in-depth learning experience is conducive to improving the quality of teaching in the school.

2.2. Close relationship between SPOC and EPS teaching

ESP teaching is different from other general English teaching behaviors. For example, business English courses incorporate knowledge at the business level, which is a huge challenge for students who have no practical work experience. A large number of unfamiliar professional English vocabulary and long-form professional English articles bring great pressure on students. In this case, if the traditional teaching mode is still used for teaching, the students' interest in learning is difficult to mobilize and the learning efficiency is very low. The SPOC teaching system has individualized and multi-level features that provide feasibility for ESP teaching. Therefore, the combination of SPOC and ESP teaching has practical significance. SPOC can systematically deliver online teaching content and promote students' learning experiences on content. The teacher's guiding role is to provide real-life contexts for the target tasks in the classroom, as well as to provide conditions and help for students to solve problems. Students get training with meaningful purposes and gain comprehensive development in language and cognition. Through active participation and interaction, students continue to develop relevant professional language skills, and in turn can participate more actively in the next meaningful learning process.

3. The Enlightenment of TBLT to ESP English Teaching

3.1. The teaching activities design based on texts of different units

TBLT teaching reflects the concept of "Learning by doing", which is student-centered and embodies the needs of students. Teaching activities must be designed so that students can learn from them, and they can apply what they have learned even if they are outside the classroom. TBLT aims to transform students from passively accepting knowledge to actively constructing knowledge. The emphasis on "situational communication skills" is highly consistent with the goals of ESP teaching. In ESP teaching, language knowledge is closely linked to specific industries, professional disciplines and skills. Students not only need to remember the language of a particular

field, but also learn to use the language and communication skills in this field to solve practical problems.

Language production is the goal of TBLT teaching, and current ESP courses often use textbook materials as a starting point. How to turn a professional article in a textbook into a material that is conducive to the practical use of professional knowledge is a key point. Figure 1 is a cyclical diagram of the instructional design, showing the elements that teachers need to consider in order to design teaching activities based on unit topics and texts. The first and foremost is to do Needs Analysis (Brown, 2009). Teachers need to master student characteristics, prior knowledge and learning. Before doing the activity design, the teacher should consider the actual level of the students and deconstruct the unit topics and texts on this basis. Only by considering the three aspects of needs analysis can teachers arrange teaching knowledge objectives and implement teaching behaviors.

3.1.1. Context needs

What kind of learning or workplace situations do learners need to communicate?

3.1.2. Language points

What language materials do students need to communicate with?

3.1.3. Learning needs

How do students use these meaningful language knowledge to communicate and solve problems?

Needs analysis is a cyclical continuum, which means that each time a new teaching phase is entered, the instructor must perform a new needs analysis based on the previous one.

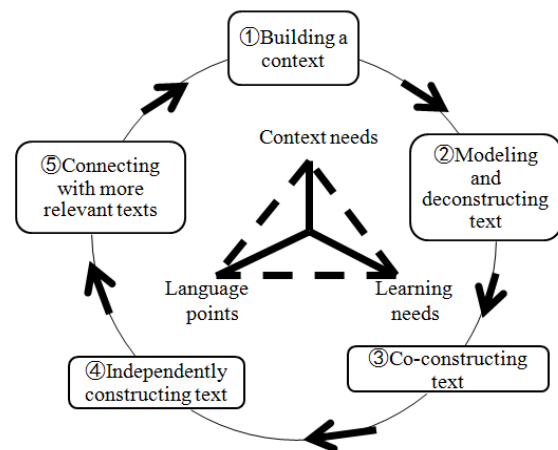


Figure 1. Designing circle of Teaching-learning activities

Whether it is an open task or a close task (Ellis, 2000), the teacher should select unit goals based on the topics of the units and the articles, grasp key learning difficulties

and design interesting questions in a meticulous way. As shown in the figure, teachers need to select language materials, design specific activities, build language knowledge and ability brackets for students, and make the whole knowledge point cycle into an organic continuum. The design is divided into five steps. The first step is to create a context. When the requirements analysis is completed, the teacher begins to establish a specific context to set the student to complete the task in the target context. This step is basically consistent with the "context needs" of the needs analysis.

The second step is to make a model and deconstruct the text. Focus on the analysis of the key genres and characteristics of specific contexts, so that the contents of the text are linked to the real-purpose contexts, and the relevant vocabulary and professional knowledge required by the students are locked.

The third step is to jointly construct the text. Teachers provide guided language training links, such as tasks of information gaps, reasoning, and opinions sharing. Students can think and express in that language in this task based on the help provided by the teacher and the interaction with other learners. They discuss, analyze, integrate the information and finally complete the task. Elements that need to be considered in this step include learners' information, opinions, attitudes, emotions, and experience exchanges, as well as confidence building and interest maintaining.

The fourth step is to construct the text independently. This step should consider giving students the opportunity to use the language independently to create conversations and solve problems. Based on previous input, students learn to establish links between the knowledge that is learned and that is in other contexts. As long as students enter a new social situation, they can actively participate in communication and solve practical problems based on actual life experience and language knowledge.

The fifth step is to contact more relevant texts. The knowledge points of teaching activities form a complex network. The knowledge that students build through participating in meaningful activities in this tasks can pave the way for the next new tasks. Therefore, teachers need to draw a network of knowledge points in advance when designing activities. Teachers can not only design new teaching activities based on the knowledge of the previous ones, but also use a new task to set the background for future teaching activities. Therefore, the design of teaching activities is a vivid cycle.

3.2. Application of TBLT in SPOC

The "pre-task part" of the course taught by TBLT can be completed through the SPOC online teaching task. The teacher records the SPOC micro video, introduces the unit background information and layout tasks, and generates a task list. Students receive input on language and

related expertise by completing the task list on the SPOC platform. In the meantime, students have enough time to discuss issues and share experiences with other members in the forum area to reflect and reorganize the knowledge of self-learning.

Next, the "While-task" presentation is completed in the traditional classroom. Students use the foreground and background knowledge to solve specific situational problems. In order to promote an effective learning cycle, teachers must make students clear their roles and take responsibility when laying out tasks. Also, teachers should constantly push students out of the psychological security area and encourage them to actively use their new words and professional knowledge to express their opinions.

The "Post-task" link runs through the entire SPOC teaching system. Teachers give a summary, analysis and evaluation of students' performances. Through the SPOC Open Platform Discussion Forum, teacher feedback can be extended beyond the classroom. Students have enough time to digest and absorb, and carry out continuous new knowledge reorganization and construction, so that they can smoothly enter the next new stage of learning.

4. The Enlightenment and Paradigm of SPOC and TBLT on the Construction of Business English Course

4.1. Overview and construction of business english courses

Take the College English Follow-up Course "Business English Course" set up by our Faculty of College English Education as an example. The course is based on Cambridge Business English Intermediate (Third Edition), with a total of 72 hours. 8 modules are chosen for teaching, covering business unit topics including entrepreneurship, advertising, recruitment, sales and proposal writing. The course is open to non-English majors who have passed the CET-4, with the aim of improving their English language foundation and gaining a sense of business English. It has strong practical skills and helps students to work in foreign trade, management, tourism and other fields in the future, and to improve their independent learning ability and cross-cultural communication and communication quality. However, in general, the students do not have a solid English foundation and their self-learning awareness is poor. Teachers need to stimulate students' interest in learning and use effective methods to reduce learning difficulty and improve learning efficiency.

Due to limited classroom time, highly structured activities should be broken into more open teaching tasks, further freeing student participation and interaction space outside the classroom. Based on the materials and language knowledge extended by the textbook unit topics

and texts, the teacher integrates the shallow knowledge into the extracurricular online video task list, paving the

way for deep knowledge and gradually developing the students' language comprehensive ability.

Table 1. Design of SPOC videos and learning-practice activities

Number	Goal	Input	Procedures	predicted outcome
1	Memorize professional vocabulary	English words	Explain concepts, common words and usage context	Checking in the form of competitions such as listening to words and vocabulary explanations
2		Terminology		
3	Understand professional classification	Way of working	Introduce the classification and characteristics of the field	Inductive classification and examples, give presentations using PPT
4		Company type		
5		Recruitment form		
6		Brand concept		
7		Advertisement type		
8	Get to know Operational work flow	Situational conversation	Show specific context sessions	Summarize the communication or etiquette characteristics of the scene; design a simulated work scenario and perform a conversation
9	Practice solving problems	Business writing	Overview of business memos, letters and report features	Analyze the sample and complete a business report based on the specific situation
10		Sales proposal	Lead in one or more company sales cases	Brainstorm in groups, pick a sales case to discuss, exchange ideas and propose solutions, and present proposals

Table 1 shows the SPOC video learning content and drill tasks for this course. The teaching task (Goal) reflects the gradual and progressive concept. When the students successfully receive the input of the knowledge, they can smoothly complete the Predicted Outcome. When making SPOC micro-videos, teachers must carefully consider the enlightenment and inspiration of the input form (Procedure). During the completion of the SPOC task list, students will have sufficient time to understand the input, discuss issues with the team members, and construct knowledge by consulting the network (such as Wikipedia). The students show the results of the drills in the classroom, and the teachers give timely feedback to raise the students' errors and deficiencies. All tasks are sorted by easy to difficult level. After one semester of practice, students can learn business knowledge from a more comprehensive perspective and learn to use language to solve professional problems.

4.2. Teacher's role and issues to be considered

As a supplement to the traditional classroom, the SPOC platform cannot completely replace the role of the teacher. As a SPOC designer, teachers have the responsibility to choose the appropriate model to promote students to participate in learning, to help students achieve the desired goals, and to improve the quality of teaching. It is the ultimate goal to create SPOC resources that will bring fundamental help to students.

As a classroom activity designer, teachers should actively explore the relationship between textbook content and practical applications, carefully design tasks, and consider the most appropriate way to introduce texts. Once the material is out of touch, teaching will lose its vitality.

Therefore, teachers should diligently collect extracurricular business background knowledge and relevant economic news in daily life, and read more related books. Even if the same content is arranged, tasks designed in different modes can lead to different learning enlightenment for students. Teachers should fully consider various factors, so that students can choose to complete according to their own needs and preferences.

In addition, teachers should guide students to be familiar with the technology, provide feasible online learning mediators (such as electronic dictionary learning software, business news websites), and cultivate their ability to obtain valuable information in a variety of information from different channels. As students communicate through instant messaging technologies (SPOC platforms or smart mobile platforms such as We Chat groups), the information they exchange may increase by orders of magnitude. In this case, teachers need to guide students to discuss, focus on the students' progress, and timely monitor the language interactions they participate in during the discussion, so as to support the knowledge in the classroom, make the teaching behavior more complete and effective, and cultivate students to develop deep learning habits.

Finally, teachers should continuously guide students to learn independently in an effective network environment, establish a good testing mechanism, ensure that pre-class input, class practice, and post-class consolidation are in place to promote and improve student formative evaluation.

5. Conclusion

This study is based on the research results of SPOC in English courses for specific purpose, combined with the actual situation of private college students, to explore strategies of activities designing of Business English course. However, the course construction exploration needs to be combined with empirical research to find out the clear application correlation coefficient to play the most effective role in and out of class. Only in this way can we continuously improve the teaching effect, and then promote the deep development of professional English teaching reform under the SPOC environment.

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