



## Some Reflections about the Construction of College English Teaching System

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### Abstract

The paper analyses and researches the problems of constructing college English teaching system, the fostering of students' abilities in language learning and language communication, the teaching according to students differences, the scientificness, the practicability and the rationality of compiling textbooks. It also puts forward a few tentative ideas of the constructions of the college English teaching system in order to promote the scientificness and rationality of constructions of the college English teaching system.

**Keywords:** The construction of college English teaching system, Teaching according to students' differences, The combination of teaching, Learning and applying, Lcientificness and rationality

### 1. Current situation of college English teaching

Since the policy of opening and reform formulated in China, college English has undergone three phases: recovery, development and increase, and it have formed its own series of teaching system (Yan Zhijian et al. 2002). Some experts thought that the English education process should be divided into these three phrases: recovery, development and stability (Liu Runqing, 2002). Pleasant achievement as well as great improvement has been reached in college English teaching. In order to keep up with the new trend of higher education, we should deepen the teaching reform; improve the teaching quality to meet the need of qualified graduates for our country and society in the new time. So in our country the outline of English teaching is revised and "College English Teaching Requirements" is set up as the main English teaching guidelines for non-English-majors in colleges and universities. However with the width and depth of English teaching, some problems are exposed to us. For instance, the students are incapable of speech communication (Cao Xia 2003), and they are inept at practical application for listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating (Zhu Wang 2002). "English is like a kettle of water that never boils." (Jing Shenghua, 1999). College English is the most time-consuming and painstaking compulsory course. Most students have to spend over two hours a day in learning English besides English classes (Wang Qimin 2002), while the result of study is disappointing. Furthermore, that teaching only aims for examination is very severe. It is despairing that some universities link CET-4 and CET-6 with the graduation credit (Cen Jianjun, 1999). A group of essays, published in China Youth on April 7th, drew full-public attention as the author put forward concepts of "Mute English" and "Deaf English". Indeed, there is no denying that some unreasonable factors do exist in college English teaching when we ponder over the current situations as well as the scientificness, rationality and optimization of college English teaching construction. Although everybody does utmost effort; the practical teaching result is far from our expectation. The students who have passed CET-4 or CET-6 are inept at putting their knowledge of English into practical use. Therefore, we should not only reconsider the problems in college English, but also look for the fundamental reason for these phenomena. We are pondering over the construction of college English teaching system. If we find it unreasonable, the improper aspects should be optimized to be more scientific and more reasonable. We should check up which aspects in college English teaching need reforming to improve the teaching quality and to satisfy the need of our country for qualified graduates in the new time.

The paper analyses and researches the problems of constructing college English teaching system according to scientificness and reasonableness. It also presents a few ideas sharing with colleagues to discuss together. There may be some improper viewpoints. Your criticism and suggestion are most welcome in order to promote college English development and reform.

### 2. Analysis of constructions of the teaching system of college English

#### 2.1 Problems to be solved in the construction of college English teaching system

What is college English? Who are the targets of college English teaching? Why do they learn English? What skills of English language will they use after their graduation from university? What differences exist between college English and major English? How could we arrange the teaching system of college English aiming at different targets so as to

reflect the scientific teaching theory, systematic teaching process, purposeful teaching performance and the obvious effect of teaching? What teaching methods and patterns should we take to improve the interest, flexibility and variety of teachers' lecture, to inspire students' enthusiasm and active thinking in learning, to cultivate students' ability to use knowledge in a flexible and accurate way? How could teachers faster and improve students' ability to independently learn and characteristically use knowledge with self-help and in multiple ways? What evaluative standards are in favor of the development of college English teaching and the improvement of teaching quality? How could we design and compile English textbooks to help students master and digest and then accurately apply what they learn? The above problems must be analyzed and resolved. Otherwise the teaching reform of college English will be impractical and superficial. Thus the construction of teaching system may lack scientificness and rationality, and the arrangement of curricula is also inaccurate.

### *2.2 Analysis of the nature of college English*

Apart from English majors, college English is a compulsory course for full-time university students. At this point it is the same as any other university compulsory courses. The difference is that it is a course with more class hours. It covers a large span of school teaching time (4 semesters throughout the whole university studying), and is more practical.

### *2.3 Analysis of the targets of college English teaching*

College English is delivered to full-time university students exclusive of English majors. The goal for undergraduate education is to cultivate them into advanced professional intellectuals who should not only love the cause of science and have consciousness of innovation but also are adapt at self study and have fine ability to practice. Thereupon, university students must mainly pay their attentions to their specialties, and college English is only a tool for them to expand their knowledge. Each semester, they have 4-6 subjects. With the selective courses, there are nearly a total of 30 class hours each week. In the spare time, in order to widen the scope of their specialty knowledge, students have to look up a great many books and then get data in the libraries or on the Internet for the acquirement of their specialty knowledge. In order to well prepare for the exhibition of their specialty performance in the near future, they also need a lot of time to carry out experiments about their special theory so as to further understand what they have learned, and to cultivate their accomplishment and experimental capability in their specialties, and to improve their ability to think and act, to stir up their consciousness of innovation and then well prepare for their specialty performance.

### *2.4 Analysis of the difference between college English and English major*

The fundamental difference between college English and English major lies in that English major is directed at students who are majoring in English, thus the construction of the teaching system is centered on English. The arrangement of curricula, school teaching, student learning and their pattern of thinking are all around the core of English. Students of English majors will be engaged in English research, teaching, translation and so on. They make English as the orientation of their career development, so they spend all their energy on English learning. While students studying college English are different. They just use English as an instrument to improve themselves and they cannot devote all their time and all their energy to their English studying. The construction of college English teaching system is multi-level, complicated and interdisciplinary, and therefore the arrangement of curricula is multi-disciplinary and juxtaposed of art and science. They may learn math in the first and second classes and then English in the third and fourth classes. Because of the difference and mixture of different courses, students have to switch their thinking according to the change of classes, which results in student' discontinuous thinking of English learning. Thereupon, according to different fostered aims, we should scientifically and rationally construct the teaching system of college English.

### *2.5 Analysis of the purpose of college English teaching*

When students who study college English graduate from university, they need, by way of practical language communication, to learn foreign advanced science and technology and different culture to comprehend foreign customs and traditions, humanistic knowledge and pattern of thinking. At the same time they should introduce our science, technology and culture abroad, and do their best to reduce the misunderstanding caused by language barrier when they communicate in the respects of academy, technology, culture, trade and so on. The purpose of college English teaching is to enable students to possess the skills of listening, speaking, reading and translating English and the proper ability to use the five skills. The school teaching of college English must give prominence to the combination of teaching, learning and applying.

### *2.6 Analysis of the arrangement of college English class hours*

College English is designed for 240 class hours, which can be said comparatively rational and scientific. Beside the 240 class hours of English teaching in their spare time, students must do a great amount of self-study so as digest what they have learned in class. Furthermore, they have to spend much more time in exercising on listening, speaking, reading, writing, reciting and translating. And if the students want to master English proficiently, they need even more time. All

the time we mentioned above is not included in the 240 class hours. If the 240 class hours are added, it will be a great number. Therefore we should have a reasonable calculation of the class hour for college English teaching system.

### *2.7 Analysis of college English teachers' teaching concept*

English teachers in colleges, most of them having been majored in English, have bias in college English teaching to a certain extent. In their English teaching they always require students to learn English as they did, even require students to spend as much energy and time as they can. Apparently, this kind of teaching method is not appropriate and breaches the genuine rule of college English, and at the same time diverts from the teaching principle of teaching according to students' differences.

### *2.8 Analysis of college English evaluation system*

Presently, the only standard for college English teaching are CET-4 and CET-6, and they are not very rational. A few scholars such as Dai Manchun (1993), Niu Qiang (2001) and Li Huiying (2002) have criticized CET-4 directly or indirectly for its obvious disadvantages. They pointed out that CET-4 cannot wholly and efficiently estimate student's language ability. Some questions of CET-4, breach the test purpose, lack evaluation index, violate the language input rules in foreign language learning, and thus bring teachers and students severe anxiety about the test and impure learning motivation. Another example, Wang Chuming (2001b) argues that the existing English test system and method should be the causes of "high investment and poor reward" in English teaching. He points out that some questions in our existing exams have misled student's learning. Reform is necessary and the test should be centered on improving the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing even if we lose certain reliability and discrimination. In some colleges CET-4 or CET-6 are related to graduate certificates and diplomas, which aggravates English teaching for test. Students just seek for the pass of CET and result in poor English application.

### *2.9 Analysis of college English teaching materials*

Teaching materials are guiding literature of a course, main instruments in English learning and main sources for language input. That the quality and design of teaching materials as well as the scientificness and rationality play a decisive role in the teaching of a course. Because of the difference of individuals and purposes in English learning, the teaching materials should possess scientificness, rationality and practicability. Meanwhile they should be designed and arranged with the principle of being easy gradually to difficult and advancing gradually in due order. They should stress culture, interest and readability. But in recent years, emphasis placed on the importance of reading comprehension has caused too rapid changes in teaching materials, particularly apparent in the increasing difficulty of the text and vocabulary. Compared with former materials, texts in the present teaching materials are too long with too many new words; sub-texts in every unit are obviously increasing and the same is the after-text exercises. There is nearly no difference in the degree of difficulty from textbook volume 1 to 4. The teaching materials are rather weak in practicability culture, interest and readability. Listening materials emphasize too much on reading and writing. The design and arrangement of textbook lacks scientificness and rationality and the combination of teaching, learning and applying are not solid integrated, which has caused difficulty in teachers' and students' application.

### *2.10 Analysis of college English vocabulary*

In college English teaching, to learn, to master, to activate and to use English words is a puzzling problem. From a great many published papers we know that teachers have taken many measures in teaching and students have racked their brains in English learning. But the progress is not obvious. Why?

According to the requirements of the teaching outlines, students generally begin to learn English in their secondary school (in some regions students begin to learn English in primary school) with a total number of 430-540 hour classes, and they should master 800-1000 English words. In high school, with a total number of 384 class hours, students should grasp 1200 words and a considerable number of idiomatic phrases and fixed collocations. They are also required to understand the connotation of 750 more or less words, idiomatic phrases and fixed collocations in certain context. In these six or seven years of secondary and high school education, time spent on English learning is 800 to 1000 class hours and students should grasp 1800 to 2000 words. While in college, there are totally 240 English class hours and students should memorize at least 4500 words and 700 phrases (including 2000 words learned in high school).

From the above figures, we can find that there is a great distance between the class hours and the required vocabulary. Because students spend so limited time in practicing English, they cannot be much familiar with the language. Thus many students have this kind of feeling: they got a sense of achievement about their English in high school for they could use English freely; While after two years' college study, their English becomes very inflexible and the usage is not as free as before, so they are not very confident about their English study.

## **3. The idea on the construction of college English teaching system**

*3.1 The construction of college English teaching system must emphasize on the combination of teaching, learning and applying.*

English teaching in China, both in secondary and high school and college, should follow the rules of Language acquisition and rules of education. We should construct a scientific and rational English teaching system with a complete and orderly content. The construction should be a coherent, optimized learning framework with reasonable distribution of vocabulary quantity and requirement of the acquisition quality in different learning phrases.

According to the features of college English teaching, including the different target learners, the various teaching requirements, the learning purposes as well as the flexibility of thinking to the teaching forms, the construction should pay more attention to the teaching according to students' differences and the combination of teaching, learning and applying. The core of the construction of college English is to teach Basic English Language. The teaching goal is to train students in flexible application of basic daily communicative language and the purpose is to cultivate students' practical ability to use English and to communicate in English.

Adopting the pragmatic teaching approach and resorting to the habits and rules in the acquisition of mother language, we can teach students to learn a foreign language directly from the expression meaning and to pay attention to the external expression of the language, so as to cultivate the ability to communicate in the language (He Ziran, 2004). College English teaching should emphasize the teaching in practical aspects like listening, speaking and writing, etc. Especially it should further strengthen efficient usage of English. And with the effective language input, college English teaching should increase the quality and quantity of the language output and quicken the converting speed from language learning to language use so as to train the students in sound language learning style and represent the teaching according to different students with the combination of teaching, learning and applying.

*3.2 The construction of college English teaching materials must highlight the scientificness, rationality, practicability, culture and interest.*

To learn a foreign language well, we should choose materials in native language. We should not only learn the liberal language but also the practical language as well as dialects and slang. Meanwhile, we should get familiar with their culture and their way of thinking. Consequently, we will master the expressing ways, conventions and regulations of their language. So the design and compilation of the teaching materials should be on the basis of not only being rational and scientific but also being cultural and interesting, not only being practical and available but being innovative and creative, not only being focusing on basis and development but being easy to speak and memorize. The design and compilation of texts and sub-texts should be gradable in vocabulary and difficulty. The vocabulary of every text should be scientific and rationale. Moreover, it should be easy to memorize and recite. Concerning the degree of repetition and difficulty of the vocabulary, the design and compilation should take a scientific attitude to advance step by step. The content of the college English materials is not necessarily like an encyclopedia, but it should aim to foster students' basic language knowledge and to improve their ability to use English. The revision of teaching materials should keep the merits and get rid of the demerits and preserve those selected articles throughout the years. The design and compilation of listening materials should provide an atmosphere to make students feel that they were in that scene. Thus will be of help to students studying college English in their practical language communication and the extension of their specialty study.

*3.3 The teaching concept of college English teachers must be in line with the aim and task of college English teaching.*

Famous educator Mr. Tao Xingzhi once pointed out in China Education Reform (1996): "Teaching, learning and acting is one thing instead of three. We should do to teach and act to learn. The ones who act to teach are teachers; the ones who act to learn are students. From the teacher's perspective, to act is to teach, while from the student's perspective, to act is to learn. A teacher who takes acting in teaching is real teaching. A student who takes acting in learning is real learning. If acting is not taken seriously, teaching is not teaching and learning is not learning either." "The way to teach depends on the way to learn, while the way to learn depends on the way to act. The three ways should be joined together." Teacher is the core of teaching as well as the ideal that students admire. He or she directly imparts knowledge to students, so his or her teaching level, virtue and performance have instant influence upon students. College English teachers should establish the concept that teaching should be advanced according to different students. And they should consider how to improve their English level and quality in modern means. A qualified teacher imparts knowledge in the most precise words, inspires students' desire to learn and cultivates their sound learning attitudes. Then he or she can improve students' activities and interests in English learning, and strengthen their ability to use the language flexibly, efficiently and accurately, and improve the quality of combination of learning, teaching and applying according to the characteristics of college English.

*3.4 The vocabulary construction of college English should expand the practical and common ones on the active usage of the basic 2000 English words.*

First, the vocabulary construction of college English teaching system should set up a precise, scientific and rational quantity, and it should also have an accurate orientation of the appropriate application of the English words that students have learned. How many words should be mastered after all the stages of college study? We should make a thorough

analysis of the class hour arrangement, teaching material content, teaching effect, vocabulary quantity in the English teaching outlines of secondary and high school. Then we can make a scientific judgment and establish a reasonable standard on this basis. On our part, the vocabulary construction of college English teaching system should be set up on the basis of the activation of 2000 basic English words learned in secondary and high school. Then 1500 to 2000 more common and practical words are enlarged, of which 1000 words are required to be free use. College English teaching should stress the quality of vocabulary. As to special term in English, students can self study and expand them according to their different situations in their respective specialties.

#### 4. Conclusion

In short, with China's opening to foreign countries, more and more people will use English and the applying range of English will be widened. The whole society pays more and more attention to college English teaching and the requirements for it are higher and higher. Therefore, speeding up the teaching reform of college English is in urgent need. We should adhere to the principle of being practical and realistic, take scientific attitude, follow the rules of language acquisition and use any successful experience. With the efforts of all sides, we improve and reform the construction of college English teaching system, teaching concept, materials and examination form. We believe that college English will be improved and teachers, students and the society will be satisfied with it.

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