



On the Problems of Bilingual Teaching

----- In Perspective of a Teacher

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Abstract

As lots of colleges and universities are engaged in discussing whether a subject should perform bilingual teaching or not, the bilingual class encounters unexpected confusions. For example, why should we have bilingual classes? Why is this class bilingual? What textbooks should bilingual classes use? And how does the bilingual teaching perform? Aiming at these questions, author puts advance several suggestions in this paper for further discussion based on her experiences in bilingual teaching.

Keywords: Bilingual teaching, Problem

Since the issue of document No.4 *Suggestions on Strengthening Higher Education and Improving Teaching Quality* constituted by the Ministry of Education, PRC, in Sep. 2001, all colleges and universities rush into the theoretical studies and teaching practices of bilingual teaching. Take the academic papers and education theses in publish for example. At the moment of completing this paper (on Oct. 8th, 2008), 4669 items appear as the author inputs “bilingual teaching” as the “subject” or “key word” and retrieve in VIP Chinese Periodical Database. Apparently, bilingual teaching has already aroused a wide attention from academic and educational fields. However, in practice, bilingual teaching faces unpredictable problems.

1. Students: “Why do we take bilingual classes?”

The first bilingual class given by the author is *Information Management* for the specialty of statistics, selecting *Management Information Systems for the Information Age (Second Edition)*, the English gravure, as the textbook. Its hundreds of pages trouble most of students. Several classes later, some complains rush out: “Why do we take the bilingual class? We already have English classes every week. We just want to learn specialty techniques and knowledge. Why do we have to learn the specialty by English?” At the very beginning, the author is confident in this bilingual class. Firstly, the author prepares the class carefully and tries hard to motivate students in class. As a matter of fact, the author feels better after each class. Secondly, bilingual class is new learning experience for students. They are supposed to like the bilingual class. Therefore, students’ question is completely out of the author’s prediction. Therefore, the author has to think about this issue following students’ thoughts. Do we have to learn specialty knowledge in bilingual classes? Do all students have to take bilingual classes? In a bilingual class, which one is the most important, specialty knowledge or English capability? As for a series of questions, the author can not offer convincing answers at once. In the author’s opinion, to open a bilingual class is necessary. But it is also important to take two key factors into consideration. Firstly, in an objective aspect, whether the bilingual class is good for updating specialty knowledge in time. Secondly, in a subjective aspect, whether students are interested in the bilingual class and good at English. A survey shows that: students’ English level directly determines their attitudes toward the bilingual teaching.

2. Students: “why do we learn this course in a bilingual class?”

The second bilingual class given by the author is *Organizational Behavior*, selecting the *Essentials of Organizational Behavior (Severn Edition)* as the textbook. It is a special bilingual textbook published by the China Renmin University Press. This course is elective. Only twenty students take it. Most students at the same grade prefer to take Security Investment and Financial Science. Neither is a bilingual class. Here, some students may ask: Why is this course

bilingual class? Is the examination in English or Chinese? What this course emphasizes on, English or Specialty? Thanks for valuable experiences, the author has already prepared for these questions. Therefore, at the first twenty minutes in the class, the author delivers a speech to motivate students' enthusiasm for the bilingual class, making them understand some fundamental principles of a bilingual class. First of all, in the author's opinion, any bilingual class should give priority to specialty knowledge, then English, as an extremely important tool in learning specialty knowledge. Secondly, the final examination is in English. It means the text questions are presented in English but students can give answers in English or Chinese. It depends. Finally, whether a subject will be offered in a bilingual class is not determined as will. Before opening a bilingual class, it has to pass a series of strict demonstration and discussion. The core is to analyze the feasibility and necessity of applying a bilingual teaching to certain subject. The feasibility focuses on the teaching effect. In other words, whether students can learn relevant specialty knowledge better in a bilingual class instead of a traditional class, and whether the bilingual teaching can drive students to study the specialty knowledge well. The necessity emphasizes on the characteristics of a subject. In other words, whether the subject has an international background, and whether its development is more advanced and latest outside. Generally speaking, the bilingual teaching is right for economics and business management courses. However, in some colleges, teachers may prefer to apply a bilingual teaching to *Maozedong Thoughts*. Therefore, as for what courses the bilingual teaching is right for, colleges and universities do not reach an agreement at present.

3. Teachers: "What is the textbook in a bilingual class?"

It is a great challenge for the author in preparing for a bilingual class. At present, the textbooks and teaching references for bilingual classes include three kinds: the first kind is the photocopies of foreign textbooks published in China; the second kind is special "bilingual textbook" edited by Chinese and published in China, based on foreign textbook; the third kind is self-prepared textbook of teachers who have rich experiences in bilingual teaching field. In teaching practice, the author has already tried the first two kinds of textbooks. Unfortunately, the author does not feel better. As for the first kind, although students can learn specialty knowledge directly from original English, they feel unfamiliar with the contents and structures of these textbooks, since they have been edited for English students. Most students think this kind of textbook is too difficult for them and agree that it will frustrate them in a sense. As for the special "bilingual textbook" edited and published in China, its structure and contents are more close to students' traditional textbooks. In general, both teachers and students welcome this kind of textbooks. However, due to small quantity of this kind textbook, alternatives are few for teachers. No matter what it is for 32 study periods or 48 study periods or 64 study periods, the relatively appropriate textbook is sometimes only one. Therefore, the author prefers to the third kind of textbook for a bilingual class. This kind of textbooks are compiled or edited or written directly by experienced teachers who usually possess rich specialty knowledge and speak English well after years of teaching practices. In forming this kind of textbooks, bilingual teachers take the complete teaching process into consideration, as well as students' difficulties in learning specialty languages in a bilingual class. So, it may satisfy the needs of bilingual teaching better.

4. Students and teachers: "How is a bilingual class going on?"

As long as it is the first time for a bilingual class, no matter what they are teachers or students, they will ask this question. Although since the implementation of bilingual class it has already covered a wide field, most teachers and students are merely trying it. As for "how is a bilingual class going on", there is not a universal agreement at present. In the state core course project, few of them are listed as "bilingual teaching". Concerning this problem, the author offers an answer in three aspects. Firstly, provide a bilingual teaching for a small class (with less students, no more than 30, for example) and enhance intercommunication between the teacher and students in class. It is determined by the characteristics of English teaching. In a bilingual class, the teacher should guide students to join in discussions and encourages them to share their thoughts in form of presentations or lectures. By this way, it can stimulate students' interests in the subject and achieve better teaching effects. Secondly, the teacher should manipulate both English and Chinese in class, adjusting the proportion flexibly. In a bilingual class, whether the teacher should speak more Chinese or English, the teacher can make choice according to students' responses. Therefore, in the teaching process, the bilingual teacher should pay more attention to the class response, adjusting the teaching rhythm timely, and guaranteeing the optimal teaching effect. Thirdly, make best use of multi-media. By means of English or English-Chinese PPT that can effectively make the subject easier, students can understand and master the specialty knowledge better. As a result, it will improve the teaching quality and effect.

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