

## An Integrated Approach to Business English Teaching in China

### UNE APPROCHE INTEGREE A L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE L'ANGLAIS DES AFFAIRES EN CHINE

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#### Abstract

Chinese Business English Teaching (BET) has developed more rapidly since China's entering the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, traditional BET has its problems such as too much emphasis on business knowledge and professional vocabularies, which leads to learners' lower practical language ability. There is a great necessity to solve the problems to meet the increasing demand for high quality business talents being able to work competently in the context of economic globalization. Based on sound language teaching theories and practices, this paper proposed an integrated approach to BET which aims to cultivate business expertise rather than just teach professional terms and knowledge.

**Key words:** Business English Teaching (BET); Integrated approach; Task-based teaching; Application of video; Text structure analysis

#### Résumé

L'enseignement de l'anglais des affaires en Chine (BET) s'est développé au plus rapidement depuis la Chine est entré dans l'Organisation mondiale du commerce (OMC). Toutefois, BET traditionnelle a ses problèmes qui sont trop l'accent sur la connaissance des affaires et des vocabulaires professionnels, ce qui conduit à la capacité des apprenants de langue inférieure pratique.

Il ya une grande nécessité de résoudre les problèmes afin de répondre à la demande croissante pour les hauts talents d'affaires de qualité étant capable de travailler avec compétence dans le contexte de la mondialisation économique. Basé sur de solides théories d'enseignement des langues et des pratiques, ce document propose une approche intégrée de BET qui vise à cultiver l'expertise d'affaires plutôt que de simplement enseigner des conditions professionnelles et de connaissances.

**Mots clés:** L'enseignement de l'anglais des affaires (BET); L'approche intégrée; basée sur les tâches d'enseignement; L'application de la vidéo; Analyse de la structure du texte

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720120802.2645>

#### INTRODUCTION

Economic globalization leads to increasingly frequent business communications which greatly boosts the demand for business talents. However, traditional teacher-centered BET system has its problems such as putting too much emphasis on vocabulary and grammar learning, too much mechanical exercises, lack of exposure to authentic language and lack of opportunities to interact with teachers and classmates. Consequently students who have already got used to the passive learning habits turn out to be communicatively incompetent in real business world. Therefore BET teachers should creatively combine the theory and practice and develop an efficient teaching system effective in enhancing learners' practical language proficiency.

## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING

Richards & Rodgers pointed out that the commonest solution to the “language teaching problem was seen to lie in the adoption of a new teaching approach or method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, 244)”. However the teaching problems cannot be solved by resorting to any single particular approach. Zhang (2007) proposes a tripartite curriculum for teaching Business English, which is composed of three component parts: subject knowledge, business practice and language skills. It is mainly an innovation in the field of curriculum design. This paper proposed an integrated teaching approach with task-based approach (TBA), multimedia-based approach and discourse-based approach as its main framework.

### Task-based Approach (TBA)

Traditional Chinese BET is teacher-centered, with teachers explaining vocabularies and grammatical structure. However Prabhu (1987) argues that focusing on a descriptive grammar is likely to inhibit learners’ language acquisition. Students under teacher-centered system are learning passively with fewer opportunities to use the language which severely prohibit the development of their language competence needed in the authentic communicative world. Nunan (2004) advocates the concept of learning by doing. Learning by doing is not the mere mechanical repetition of the language exercises designed in the textbooks, whereas learners should apply what they have learned from teachers and textbooks to complete various tasks so that they can survive in their future working institutions where their practical language proficiency is greatly demanded. Completing tasks is a good approach to realize learning by doing. The way how practical language abilities are acquired through doing tasks cannot be replaced by teacher’s instructions of the grammatical structures and explanation of vocabularies.

Nunan (1989, 10) defines task from communication perspective in which task is a piece of classroom work which involves students in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than on form. Communicative tasks involve using language to express meaning so that a particular purpose can be obtained. TBA is based on theory of constructivism which emphasizes the constructive nature of the learning process. “The main underlying assumption of constructivism is that individuals are actively involved right from birth in constructing personal meaning, which is their personal understanding, from their experiences.” It holds that “the learners learn constructively, building their personal understanding of the world in which they live” (Williams & Burden, 1997). “The aim of constructivism teaching is not so much to transmit information as to encourage knowledge formation and meta cognitive processes for

judging, organizing, and acquiring new information” (Bruning, Schraw & Ronning, 1997, 7).

Nunan (1991, 279) outlines five characteristics of a task-based approach:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

The five characteristics are what teachers should pursue while designing tasks for business English teaching. Here is a demonstration of how tasks are designed when instructing students on how to describe selling points of products to win potential customers.

Teaching objective: The purpose is to help the students get to know how to promote products and win as many potential customers as possible by skillfully highlighting their selling points.

**Task one:** Teachers emphasize that learning to describe the selling points is the key part for product promotion. First let the students read the advertisement of the New Ipad and describe its selling points. And then let the students brainstorm as many phrases or sentences to describe selling points of a particular product as possible. Finally the teacher presents the important expressions to the students as the following:

Selling points: Our products are good/attractive/beautiful/delicate in design, small in size, light in weight, easy in operation/to operate/use/handle, durable/strong in texture, allow variations in patterns, feel soft, need little ironing, have the added advantage of saving on oil/being trouble-free, worth the value spent on it, appeal to all ages and both sexes.

Quality and price: Our products are good/the best/high/super/superior in quality.

Market: sell well, enjoy/have/find a ready/easy sale/market

Supply: carry a full stock of/supply from stock/be in stock

Delivery: We can meet the delivery date you specified.

Price and Discount: All prices are quoted FOB and subject to a 25% trade discount.

Payment: Payment should be made by 30 day draft.

Guarantee: Our products enjoy/are under a three-year guarantee.

**Task two:** Let the students watch a video clip from Charles Chaplin’s *Modern Times* in which there’s a scene with vivid description of the Billows Feeding Machine.

Remind the students to imitate how to promote your product in the real situation.

**Task three:** First let the students listen to a dialogue between a seller and a buyer who meet each other the first time at Guangzhou Fair. Let the students role-play the scene of a salesman promoting his products at a simulated trade fair.

**Task four:** let the student make a fieldwork research at a real trade fair and learn how display boards are designed for a real trade fair. And let them design a display board which properly highlights the selling points of a particular product for a trade fair by themselves.

The above tasks meet the principles of task design. Firstly, group discussion creates chances for interaction which provides the students sufficient opportunities to use the target language. Secondly, textual, audio and visual materials from the authentic world are presented to the students as input materials. Thirdly, the students are required to complete the tasks based on their real world survey, which perfectly link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom. Fourthly, the above tasks are presented to the students from the easy to the difficult and complicated which is in line with the students' cognitive ability.

### Computer-based Multimedia Approach

Computer-based multimedia learning environments — consisting of pictures (such as animation) and words (such as narration) — offer a potentially powerful venue for improving student understanding (Mayer, R.E. & Moreno, R., 2002). To integrate computers into education allows instructors to add multisensory elements, such as text, sound, picture, video and animation. Videos have been proved an effective approach in English teaching. Mayer & Moreno (2002) emphasize that the multiple representation principle states that it is better to present an explanation in words and pictures than solely in words. Mayer (2003) points out that multimedia learning occurs when students build mental representations from words and pictures that are presented to them (e.g., printed text and illustrations or narration and animation). Visual media are highly motivating for students and also contextualize language development by providing meaningful and authentic models of language use (Loneragan, 1984). This research integrated excerpts of videos into BET. Some researchers have made studies on the effect of integrating videos into language teaching. Williams and Burden (1997) investigated how textual and auditory inputs differ from video input in terms of learners' oral production based on multimedia learning theory. There are also some applications in BET. For example Paul (2000) made research on the effect of the formal integration of two interactive multimedia Business English CD-ROMs into the self-study curriculum of sixty undergraduate learners. The innovation of approach proves successful in terms of learners' attitudes, changes in their attitudes, learner

strategies, patterns of use and performance on a formal test provided evidence for the success.

In this research videos are used in BET to diversify the forms of language input. The key and difficult point for this approach is that the videos should be well chosen so that the contents are closely related to the theme of the lesson. Here are some examples. The clip from Chaplin's *Modern Times* was used when teaching the students how to learn to describe the selling points of products. In the movie the inventor of the feeding machine gave a vivid demonstration and description of the selling points of the feeding machine. When instructing what a business trip is like the clip from the movie *Up in the Air* was used. It tells the life of an office worker whose life is mainly surrounded by business trip. The film is rich in backgrounds of airport and hotels which can give the students an almost authentic display of business trips. The movie *The Terminal* was used to teach the students how to go through customs. The movie presents a paramount scene of the customs. The film fragments familiarize the students with necessary business background, though indirect experience, yet the visual presentations of information are a lot more effective than the teachers' explaining words alone.

### Text Structure Analysis Approach

Cochran & Hain (2012) define text structure as the ways that authors organize information in text. Teaching students to recognize the underlying structure of content-area texts can help students focus attention on key concepts and relationships, anticipate what's to come, and monitor their comprehension as they read. Halliday & Hasan (2001) suggest that structure, as a unifying relation, the parts of sentence or clause, always 'cohere' with each other by virtue of the structure. The elements of any structure have an internal unity that ensures what speaker/writer expresses. The research applies text structure analysis approach which leads the students to focus their attention mainly on identifying the organizational structures of texts rather than merely professional terms and knowledge. The following is an example used in class:

### Teaching Objective

The teacher presents an advertisement in an English newspaper to the students, explaining that in the ads a foreign import company is in the market for Chinese chinaware. Then the teacher explains that the objective of the lesson is to learn how to write a letter to establish business relationship with potential customers.

The students are divided into six groups to do tasks. Let the students read the following sample letter of establishing business relationships and then sum up the structure of the letter, with only one word describing each component part.

Dear Sir or Madam,

From the March 8 issue of the International Business Daily we have learned that you are in the market for chinaware which just falls within our business scope. We are now writing to you to establish long-term trade relations.

As a leading trading company in Shaoxing and backed by nearly 20 years of export experience, we have good connections with some reputable ceramics factories and, sufficient supplies and on-time delivery are guaranteed.

Enclosed please find our latest catalogue. You'll see that we can offer a wide selection of quality dinner and tea sets ranging from the elegant Chinese traditional styles, to the popular European modern designs.

In particular, we would like to inform you that we have a new

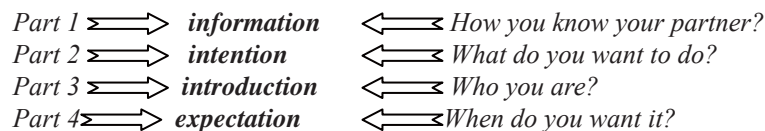
line that may be most suitable for your requirements—AB series. They are all made of first-class porcelain, decorated with hand-painted patterns, and packed in eye-catching gift cases. Most of articles are available from stock.

We are sure you will find a ready sale for our products in Canada as have other retailers through Europe and the USA.

Please let us know if we may be of further assistance, and we are looking forward to your specific inquiry.

Yours faithfully,  
Alice Lin

After the students' presentation teachers lead the students to briefly summarize the outline of the letter by using just one word for each part.



The four words “**information**”, “**intention**”, “**introduction**” and “**expectation**” briefly describe the main contents of the framework of the business letter. The approach enhances the students' awareness of organizing language on a macro level rather than a micro level so that they can naturally and easily complete a writing task in authentic business world.

### END OF COURSE SURVEY

A survey for the effect of this innovation was made by the end of the course. The questionnaire includes the students' business language skills and attitudes toward BET (see Table 1). The students are required indicate how much or how little they think they've improved with a particular language skill or attitude by placing a tick

in the appropriate box. Statistics in Table 2 summarize the students' ratings of their improvement in terms of English language skills and learning attitude. The mostly developed skill is writing which ranks the highest, with 78.1% of students claiming to have improved “quite a bit”. Speaking skills rank the second, with 69% students claiming that their speaking skills have improved “quite a bit”. Moreover most students claim that their confidence in expressing themselves and interest in leaning business English have improved either “quite a bit” or “a great deal”, the percentages being 72% and 68.1% respectively. The above statistics demonstrate that the integrated approach proved to be effective in improving learners' practical language proficiency needed in the business working environment.

**Table 1**  
**Sample of Questionnaire**

	Improved a great deal	Improved quite a bit	Improved a little	Not improved
Confidence in expressing myself in English				
Interest in business English learning				
Ability of speaking English for business purposes				
Ability of writing Business English documents				
Business English listening skills				

**Table 2**  
**Results of the Survey (n=40)**

	A great deal (%)	Quite a bit (%)	A little (%)	No improvement (%)
Confidence in expressing myself in English	12	60	14.5	13.5
Interest in business English learning	7	61.1	10.4	21.5
Ability of speaking English for business purposes	8.9	69	7.8	14.3
Ability of writing Business English documents	3.9	78.1	7.7	10.3
Business English listening skills	15	57.1	13.1	14.8

## CONCLUSION

BET has been attached great emphasis by Chinese instructors and researchers due to the boost of economic development in China and economic globalization in the world. The teaching of Business English in China has its own problems. The solution and teaching innovation in the research proved effective in motivating learners' interest and developing their originally poor language skills such as speaking and writing. The innovative approach is based on the specific situation in China. And the proposed teaching approach takes a comprehensive perspective, taking into consideration the digital technology, text structure analysis and task-based teaching. The study is limited as it is a pilot study of a small sample, further study with a larger sample is to be made for evidence of its effectiveness.

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## APPENDIX: CAPTION IN THE VIDEO CLIP FROM MODERN TIMES

The Mechanical Salesman: Good morning, my friends. This record comes to you through the Sales Talk Transcription Company, Incorporated: your speaker, the Mechanical Salesman. May I take the pleasure of introducing Mr. J. Widdecombe Billows, the inventor of the Billows Feeding Machine, a practical device which automatically feeds your men while at work? Don't stop for lunch: be ahead of your competitor. The Billows Feeding Machine will eliminate the lunch hour, increase your production, and decrease your overhead. Allow us to point out some of the features of this wonderful machine: its beautiful, aerodynamic, streamlined body; its smoothness of action, made silent by our electro-porous metal ball bearings. Let us acquaint you with our automaton soup plate -- its compressed-air blower, no breath necessary, no energy required to cool the soup. Notice the revolving plate with the automatic food pusher. Observe our counter-shaft, double-knee-action corn feeder, with its synchromesh transmission, which enables you to shift from high to low gear by the mere tip of the tongue. Then there is the hydro-compressed, sterilized mouth wiper: its factors of control insure against spots on the shirt front. These are but a few of the delightful features of the Billows Feeding Machine. Let us demonstrate with one of your workers, for actions speak louder than words. Remember, if you wish to keep ahead of your competitor, you cannot afford to ignore the importance of the Billows Feeding Machine. Feeding Machine.