

# On the Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence of the BE Students from Higher Vocational College

**Changying Liu**

School of Foreign Language,  
China West Normal University

No.1 Shi Da Road, Nanchong. Post Code :637009.

Sichuan, P.R.China

E-mail: [2815947165@qq.com](mailto:2815947165@qq.com)

## **Abstract**

*In the case of globalization, Business English students in higher vocational colleges need to have good language skills, business skills and intercultural communication competence, and they will directly affect their business. To foster the skills, especially the intercultural communicative competence, we should study it seriously, and take effective measures for its development*

**Key Words:** Business English students, intercultural communication competence, higher Vocational College, language skills, business skills

## **1. Introduction**

Intercultural Communication is a new cross subject, which originated in The United States in the sixties last century, focusing on the research on cultural communication. Intercultural Communication means the communication between native and non native speakers, also refers to the communication between people who have differences in language and culture background.( Hu,1999) The differences in national ecological, material, social, and religious environment result in the different language habits, social culture, local customs and practices, and people from the different cultures have different ways and manner of speaking. The BE Students who will work with the people from different nations and cultures have to have the Intercultural Communication Competence, which is defined as the understandings, attitude, competences and identities which enable effective participation in a cross-cultural setting(Chen, 2010).

## **2. The importance of intercultural communicative competence for the business English Majors in Higher Vocational Colleges**

**2.1.** With Chinese increasing integration into the world's economic system, we are witnessing more and more international business dealings taking place in multicultural contests. Many Chinese firms conduct and expand their business globally by exporting their products and service, importing the raw materials or

machinery they need. What's more, they also venture into cross-border M&A transactions, and some of them such as Lenovo, Haier and Huawei, are beginning to compete with leading multinationals. But many Chinese firms investing in overseas markets arrive unprepared, overpay for acquisitions, and are not sure how their new foreign holding fit into their global strategies. The result is a recent series of nasty corporate disasters. The litany of Chinese mistakes clearly echoes Western companies' own in the China market (Dou,2011).In this case ,more and more BE graduates with good intercultural communicative competence are needed.

**2.2.** To develop the intercultural communicative competence is the training goal of Higher Vocational Business English students. That is to say to cultivate English language communication ability, necessary knowledge and skills in international business activities so that they can do well in international business activities because after graduation, they will inevitably be engaged in business activities, and carry out cross-cultural communication. This ability has an important impact on their employment and development in the future.

### **3. The training goal and course setting of business English Major**

According to the Training Program for the Business English Students in Higher Vocational College, we should set the curriculum reasonably and scientifically in accordance with the abilities needed in practice, pay attention to practice teaching, and ensure the all-round development, especially in communication ability in English, and a grasp of the necessary basic knowledge and skills in business and foreign trade ,so the students can be the high skilled professionals in business, and foreign trade .That means the students should be "Knowledgeable", namely rich in English culture and business knowledge; "Skillful", namely good at the language and business skills. Language skills include listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation skills, and business skills include international trade, business administration, and business translation; The "quality ", namely the cultural quality, occupation quality and foreign affair quality. Cultural quality includes qualities in literature and art , and the humanities. Occupation quality includes occupation moral, team spirit and professionalism. Foreign affair quality includes business etiquette, good manners and so on. Business English is a practical English course combined with business and English ; in essence, it is skill teaching more than language teaching. The course should consist of three basic elements, namely knowledge in business, language in business settings, and business communication skills, all of which have close relation with Intercultural Communication competence.

### **4. The content of the cultivation of intercultural communication competence of Business English students in higher vocational colleges.**

In fact, most of the failure in intercultural communication isn't caused by lack of language skills , but by the cultural differences. Therefore, in teaching, we should not only train and improve students' language level, but also consciously cultivate students' intercultural communication competence in English. The content of intercultural communication is: the world and value view, characteristic of speech act and non-verbal communication.

**4.1.** World and value views are the core of a culture, which have a decisive influence on almost all the aspects of a nation, such as society, economy, politics, culture, and so on. It directly affects the people's understanding of the universe, their existence, life, death, disease, and other various problems. So if you understand the world and value views of a nation, you understand the way of thinking in that culture. (Hu,1999)

**4.2.** Speech act has clear social and cultural characteristics. It exists in all languages as the general phenomenon of linguistics. Speech act is subject to specific social conditions, and different social conditions will directly affect the performance of the speech act and diversify the performances of the speech act, which leads to difference in the forms of communication. The use of speech act in different contexts, especially the use of indirect speech act, shows a coordinated process between languages and social and culture (Duan, 2002)

**4.3.** Nonverbal communication ( including body language, paralinguistics, object language, environmental language)namely, all the communicative behaviors except language communicative behaviors such as the body movements and facial expressions, space utilization, touching behavior, voice hint, dress and other many aspects such as adornment. It is another important research aspect of cross-cultural communication and an important supplement to language communication, and can express the connotation of speech act such as thoughts and feelings which are difficult to be expressed by speech act.

World and value views, Speech act, and Nonverbal communication have deep influence, so we should pay enough attention to them in teaching process and contents.

## **5. The strategies of cultivation of business English major students' intercultural communication abilities in Higher Vocational Colleges**

### **5.1. Design the curriculum and teaching content scientifically and rationally.**

The main purpose of English teaching is to promote intercultural communication, and to communicate with people from different cultural background. So to improve the efficiency and quality of business English teaching in higher vocational colleges, and the students' language application ability effectively and greatly, is an urgent task for higher vocational business English education in the new century (Ruan JiZhi,2007). In order to achieve this goal, we need a correct understanding of the relationship among language, culture, and commerce, then fully reflect it in the aspects of teaching syllabus, curriculum, teaching materials, teaching methods and content, improve the students' intercultural communicative awareness and competence.

### **5.2. Establish a team of highly qualified teaching staff.**

#### **5.2.1. Change the existing teaching methods and the traditional teaching concept.**

It is very important for the teachers to change the traditional teaching concept and teaching methods, and understand the reality of cultural conflict and the importance of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence. So they can improve the students' awareness and intercultural communicative competence in theory and practice, combine language teaching and culture teaching organically, to cultivate the intercultural communicative competence in language teaching in different ways and in the whole teaching process. Then the goal of the curriculum can be achieved.

### **5.2.2. Further improve the teaching level of business English teachers in higher vocational colleges.**

We should improve teacher's Professionalism, specialism and learning capacity, and the most important, have a team of "double type teachers" who are good teachers and experts in international business. We can take the following measures to achieve the goal by arranging them to work in the international trade enterprises for a period of time; sending them to take a refresher course in famous universities, even take part in international academic exchanges; encouraging them to get the certificates of international commerce; hiring senior experts in international trade enterprises as part-time teachers, etc.

### **5.3. Cultivate students' pragmatic competence and the ability to use language**

The cultivation of intercultural communication competence includes both the ability to use language and pragmatic competence. The former refers to the basic language skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. The latter refers to the competence which decides whether the language used is in accordance with the culture background, communication is appropriate and successful in the process of communication. In the process of teaching, teachers should pay more attention to both language teaching and culture teaching. Language and culture are inseparable: language is the carrier of culture, also a form of culture, and culture is reflected by the language. " Language is a part of culture. If you don't understand the cultural patterns and norms, you can't really learn the language." (Hu,1999)

### **5.4. In the teaching process, the following ways can be used.**

#### **5.4.1. Real objects and pictures**

Because the students generally do not have first-hand experience of foreign culture, it is difficult for teachers to achieve the teaching goals to explain abstract concepts only by written materials. Therefore, in order to make the students understand its true meaning, try to use pictures, photos, films, objects which can be get easily should be used widely.

#### **5.4.2. Comparative teaching**

Some experiments show that it is an effective approach to make a comparison between the native social cultural knowledge they mastered with the corresponding foreign social knowledge. This can arouse the interest of students, cultivate communicative ability, make the combination of knowledge, attitude and skills, and develop all-round intercultural communicative competence.

#### **5.4.3. Cosplay**

Cosplay is a situational language teaching activities in which learners simulate different roles and situations. In this activity, Students play with characters, and the things that happen in a certain situation language and actions. It greatly promotes the development of communicative competence, such as listening comprehension, application ability and language sense, observation, flexibility, imagination and improvisational expression force, etc., and will certainly have positive influence on students' interest in language learning.

### **5.5. Establishing Meeting Hall for Business Negotiation**

We should reform the traditional English Corner, English Square and English Debating Competition into such as Meeting Hall for Business Negotiation. We'll arrange for a foreign teacher or Chinese teacher to work as a negotiator when necessary, and a prompter when negotiation or Chinese teacher (for teaching English) are also involved, which motivates the BE students. When they get positive response from foreign teachers, BE students will see the "fruit of their hard work. As a result, the BE students will become more confident and interested in this activity. Thus, students also develop skills specific to their business career path and imperative for future job success. Students have opportunities to improve their leadership, interpersonal and intercultural communication skills while also increasing their self-confidence. By working together with other individuals, students learn to negotiate, communicate, manage conflict, and lead others. Taking part in this out-of-the-classroom activity will help BE students understand the importance of intercultural communicative skills, time management, and intellectual competence. Extracurricular involvement allows students to link business knowledge with practical experience, thereby leading to a better understanding of their own abilities, talents, and career goals.

### **5.6. Simulating the Customs**

The BE students have learned many courses such as International Trade, International Import and Export and so on. If they want to obtain really practical knowledge about international business, they should know to deal with various international application procedures at the Customs. Maybe, the knowledge of international import business is not theoretic, but very practical. If the BE students have some practical experiences for international business, they will further prefer these international business courses. Furthermore, extracurricular activities provide a setting of international trade to become involved and to interact with other BE students, this leading to increased learning and enhanced development.

The simulating Customs may be shifted by the traditional English drama or English performances and so on. One group of BE students could play roles as the Customs officials, another group of BE students would play roles as businessmen or businesswoman. The BE student will change the performance on the stage into the business practice. The BE students will have many chances to deal with different procedures for the Customs application, and learn a lot of things through these contexts and working style.

Nevertheless, this kind of extracurricular activity provides a place for BE students to come together, learn how to work and accomplish their common goals. Within this community, where BE students will feel comfortable and refresh with one another, their professional learning and development are enhanced and BE students interesting in extracurricular is positively impacted.

### **5.7. Set up different business services based workshops**

The BE students in our Higher Vocational College will be organized to go to work in business services based workshops, such as English Bar, English Hotel, Restaurant, Shops and so on.

The College should encourage BE students to participate in these business service based workshops, so that the BE students can be practical of business services will be decorated with western cultural style. The shopper or customers will try their best to speak English. Sometimes, the BE students may invite foreign teachers as customers to bargain with BE students. In this way, the BE students feel some special like the

Western culture. And then they really like to work such business service and really enjoy talking about something with classmates in English. It is no doubt that they will not only improve their English, but also know how to serve different people. Of course, this will enhance their intercultural communication competence.

In this way, the BE students will overcome the fearing emotion in their minds. Especially, they are not afraid of “losing their faces” in front of the people including their teachers and classmates, because the Chinese students always look shy and dislike to service the other in the business services as waiters, shoppers and so on. The BE students will really realize that the important roles in the social life the business services play and are willing to devote themselves to business services. Furthermore, the BE students will know that social work is different in the world. No matter whoever does any valuable work, he or she should be respected by other people. Maybe, ..... In short, this is the good beginning and early preparation for future business practice activities.

## 6. Conclusion.

According to the “Teaching Standards for Business English Majors in Higher Vocational Schools”(The Ministry of Education, Occupation Education and Adult Education Department,2012), Business English Majors should have English communication competence that is made up of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating competences, especially spoken language and intercultural communication competence.

Thus, the purpose of business English teaching is to help BE students to develop their intercultural communication competence, which includes both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness. I believe the above-mentioned ways and English activities will be efficient to provide BE students with opportunities to experience authentic situations, and raise their awareness of the sensibility of intercultural communicative routines in the target culture, so as to make the BE students obtain the awareness of specific communicative rules and routines that exist in the target culture and the ability to apply them accordingly.

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