

Languages, Cultures, Curricula: The Semiotic Triad of ESP for Globalization

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ABSTRACT

To foster the globalization of college ELLs with business majors, and improve their English proficiency in the content areas, the authors conceptualized Peircean semiotics into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by integrating language arts, multicultural literacy, and curriculum in business. Students' English proficiency, multicultural awareness, and successful communication with real people in the business world were achieved through formal and authentic assessment.

Keywords: “globalization”, “semiotic triad”, “ESP”, “multicultural literacy”

1. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Traditionally, the English for Business course was delivered by instructors from the English Department at this institute in Taiwan. Grammar-Translation Approach supplemented with drills was the major strategy in instruction. The assessment was determined by students' ability in translating vocabulary words and phrases from Chinese into English, and vice versa. But the students' high scores in this course did not really indicate that they were able to communicate with real people in the authentic world of business. To overcome the curriculum deficiency, new approaches were required.

2. OBJECTIVE

To develop college students' English proficiency as well as multicultural competency and business knowledge for successful communication with the real people in the authentic business world for globalization, the authors conceptualized semiotics into the instruction of the Business English course by integrating English language arts, multicultural education and the contents of business.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SEMIOTIC TRIAD

The creation of meaning is a biologically determined need of the living organism, and all living things communicate by exchanging signs. Any item, whether natural or artificial, that is to have meaning can be employed as a sign (Eisner, 1978; Langer, 1978). The world in which we are living is perfused with signs and call for interpretation (Eco, 1990). Semiotics is the study of signs and the process of signs. Languages, arts, music, dance, drama, cultures, etc. are all signs that humans created to mediate the world (Cunningham, 1992; Deely, 1994). In this study, the application of Peircean semiotic triad (Siegel & Carey, 1989) comprises three sign systems:

languages, cultures and curricula. These three signs are interwoven as a semiotic web (Sebeok, 1979; 2001) for college ELLs' survival and flourishing.

3.1 English Language Proficiency

3.1.1 ESP (English for Specific Purpose)

ESP (English for Specific Purpose) is one of the prevailing approaches that integrate language and content like CBI (Content-based instruction), EAP (English for academic purpose), and CLIL (Content and language integrated learning), all describe similar practices in the instruction of English that integrate content areas including art, business, culture, drama, health, medicine, music, etc. (Nordmeyer & Barduhn, 2010). This study is focused on English instruction that integrated multicultural knowledge and business content.

3.1.2 Additive Literacy for College ELLs

Additive literacy (Bauer, 2009) asserts that learners' first language (L1) and second language (L2) are interdependent and affect literacy development. Additive literacy supports the interchange of L1 and L2, and provides learners with opportunities to expand L1 and L2 literacies simultaneously. Educators like Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps (2013), Ariza (2009), and Au (2006) cherish learners' primary language (L1) as a valuable asset and bridge to English proficiency (L2) for comprehensive input and assessment of learners' literacy in the primary language as well as English.

3.1.3 Holistic Approach for College ELLs

Based on cognitive and psycholinguistic principles, language learning is an ongoing process, and cannot be segmented. A holistic approach sees language learning as a whole, which is not divisible in a meaningful way for teaching. This approach contrasts with the atomistic approach which attempts to analyze language into parts, such as grammatical structures or functional exponents, and later becomes the content of the syllabus. When holistic approach is implemented in the classroom, it provides a framework of meaningful content-based and student-centered instruction in language (Blanton, 1991).

Freeman & Freeman's (2004) whole language principles, and McNutt's (1984) five basic components of a holistic language learning processes were framed in this study: (a) experiences emphasizing oral language, (b) reading and writing together, (c) individualized reading and writing, (d) discussing written language, and (e) strategic lessons within a holistic framework. The four literacy skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing should be interwoven into a cohesive whole.

3.1.4 Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation

Most ELLs have little opportunity to engage in appropriate linguistic behaviors outside the classroom, which results in a growing awareness that simply exposing ELLs to grammatically appropriate sentences is inadequate (Bardovi-Harlig, 2011); the authors added activities for Pragmatics: Teaching natural conversation (Houck, & Tatsuki, 2011). Students learned the

following interactional activities in authentic language patterns like expressing gratitude, saying apologies, paying compliments, taking turns & talking naturally, and performing pragmatic competency in telephone conversation. Through this kind of authentic discourse, the college ELLs develop functional literacy (Dolly, 1998).

3.2 Cultural Competency

Semiotics of culture (Salupere, Torop, & Kull, 2013) defines culture from semiotic perspective as a type of human symbolic activity like the creation and interpretation of signs. Usually culture was rarely mentioned in this course, but the authors shifted the paradigm by adding the exploration of cultural diversity. Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan, has developed herself as one of the international cities like Tokyo, Shanghai, Singapore, and Hong Kong since two decades ago, and everyone walking on the street feels that he/she is a citizen of the global village where people of race, linguistic, culture and religious diversity come together. To foster the students' global awareness, and increase knowledge of different cultures, the authors as cultural mediators (Bennett, 2011) integrated multicultural education into the curriculum of Business English with two cultural approaches (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012): Cultural-general approach and Cultural-specific approach. The interchange of these two approaches was to develop college ELLs' cultural awareness about diversity, and to avoid the stereotypes.

3.3 Content Literacy in Business

Most students taking this course plan to work in the area of accounting, auditing, banking, economics, finance, insurance, management, marketing, restauranry, technology, tourism, international trade, or to attend graduate schools in business. All students took these basic level courses in their first language (L1) when they attended vocational high schools, and worked for two years in business. The authors took advantage of this by inviting students to use their familiar content knowledge in their primary language (L1) as the comprehensible input (Au, 2006; Shapiro, 2010) and to translate that prior knowledge into English as content literacy (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013).

4. THE APPLICATION OF THE SEMIOTIC TRIAD TO ESP

4.1 Participants

4.1.1 Students

Usually there are about 100 students in this class during freshman year. Most students hold a diploma in business from vocational high schools, and had working experiences in business for at least two years. Their English language proficiency varied from Limited, Intermediate and Advanced levels (Ariza, 2009). Yet most students were mature and were highly motivated.

4.1.2 Faculty

Since content area teachers can teach content courses better, it is more appropriate for a professional whose major is business than an instructor in English language to teach the Business English course using holistic approach (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). Based on their professional

knowledge in business content like accounting, banking, finance, marketing, and international trade, and their academic experiences in foreign language learning using Grammar-Translation Approach and later whole language principles, the authors implemented holistic approach in the Business English instruction.

4.2 Design of Curriculum

The authors designed the curriculum so that cultures and contents were embedded in the weekly lessons of Business English. They grouped students according to their English proficiency, professional experiences and cultural interests. We all believe that learning is a social process (Short & Burke, 1985) and ideas can flourish when students work collaboratively to negotiate problems in the case studies.

4.3 Instruction in Action – English Language Proficiency

Within the framework of holistic approach (Freeman & Freeman, 2008; McNutt, 1984), additive literacy, and pragmatics for teaching natural conversation (Houck & Tatsuki, Eds.), activities and strategies like read-aloud (Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2009) and think-aloud (Oczkus, 2009) were included for phonemic awareness, word recognition, reading fluency, reading and listening comprehension through teacher’s model, students’ role play, and reader’s theater in the Authoring Cycle (Short & Burke, 1985).

4.3.1 Principles in Holistic Approach

4.3.1.1 Learning proceeds from whole to part (Principle 1)

Usually the authors initiated their teaching by introducing the content and followed by using “meaning vocabulary” (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, & Burns, 2007) – the vocabulary in the content area that are strongly connected with a specific topic that cut across discipline and appear in textbooks. Because the knowledge of vocabulary words contributes to the comprehension of the topic, in addition to direct instruction for word meaning, correct pronunciations, and correct spelling, the authors added a variety of vocabulary strategies, like Frayer Model, structural analysis, concept mapping, and quick write to deeply and widely define the vocabulary words in business and expand students’ word knowledge towards comprehension of content area. Moreover, the authors presented the vocabulary words in a specific context so that students would know how to use the new vocabulary words correctly in writing and speaking for effective communication.

4.3.1.2 Lessons should be learner centered (Principle 2)

Learning is the active construction of knowledge by the students, and instructors are facilitators providing scaffolding activities (Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2009). In the inclusive classroom, differentiated instruction (Chapman & King, 200) for intensive intervention, or small group instruction was applied to meet students’ linguistic and cognitive needs. For example, students from rural areas are relatively not fluent in English pronunciation.

4.3.1.3 Learning should have meaning purpose for students now (Principle 3)

The authors delivered the lessons to meet students' immediate needs with real people in a authentic business environment. They included audio-videos in the lessons so that students could figure out the contents related to the communication behaviors with real people in a real-world setting regarding the different situations in banking (loan, trust, credit cards, etc.), investment, funds, insurance, finance (Viney, 2008), travel, hotel, and other interpersonal skills with business people from diverse linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds (Au, 2006). Through the read-aloud strategies, the college ELLs improved their pronunciation of the new vocabulary words and learned the language patterns for oral and written proficiency.

4.3.1.4 Learning takes place as groups engage in meaningful social interaction (Principle 4)

The authors managed the class following “The Authoring Cycle” (Short & Burke, 1985) in order that each student in the small group might be fully engaged in the activities like role play and reader's theatre.

4.3.1.5 In a second language, oral and written languages are acquired simultaneously (Principle 5)

Translation-grammar approach focuses on the translation in writing. But the authors strengthened oral practice in all their lessons that all students can communicate orally as well as in writing.

4.3.1.6 Learning should take place in the first language to build concepts and facilitate the acquisition of English (Principle 6)

Since the students' major is business and they have already developed content area knowledge in their first language (L1), it is easy for them to transfer that knowledge into the content area in a second language (L2). If students know a concept in the first language, they can easily acquire the vocabulary words for that concept in a second language (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2009). This principle worked very well for the vocabulary development and content comprehension by using the students' first language as a bridge to English literacy (Au, 2006). This principle also provided students comprehensible input for further L2 learning.

4.3.1.7 Learning potential is expanded through faith in the learner (Principle 7)

Most college ELLs were very conscious of their accents and grammatical errors and were hesitant to try a new language. The authors perpetually encouraged the students and eliminated students' affective filters like fear, worry, and anxiety (Krashen, 1982). The class really enjoyed the meaningful interaction through role play and reader's theatre in L2.

4.3.2 ESOL Methods and Strategies

In this study, teaching and learning activities were within the framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013; Ariza, 2009; Bennett, 2011; Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006). Under the umbrella of whole language, the following strategies were implemented for developing oral language, word identification, meaning

vocabulary, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and business writing (Reutzel & Cooter, 2012):

Retelling Story (Contents)
Read-aloud and Think-aloud
Choral reading in storytelling
Audio/Visuals – DVD, films, music, songs,
Interactive Strategies – group project, role play, and reader theatre
Language Experience Approach (Ashton-Warner, 1965):
Story (content) sharing, writing, and reading.

4.3.3 Differentiated Instruction to Meet Students' Diverse Needs

4.3.3.1 Minimal English Speaker

Students demonstrate very little understanding and cannot communicate meaning orally. Intensive intervention started from phonics with focus on phonemic awareness to explain the correspondence between letter and sound, and language experience approach (Ashton-Warner, 1965) on writing with the process of decoding (translating message from letter to sound) , and encoding (translating message from sound to letter).

4.3.3.2 Limited English speaker

Students demonstrate limited understanding, and communicate orally in English with one or two-word responses. Instruction focused on vocabulary and fluency in terms of reading-aloud, choral reading and sharing reading.

4.3.3.3 Intermediate English speaker

Students can communicate orally in English, mostly with simple phrases or sentence response with significant grammatical errors. Instruction focused on fluency and comprehension.

4.3.3.4 Advanced English speaker

Students understand and speak English fairly well, but make occasional grammatical errors. Instruction focused on comprehension and writing.

All students were required to actively participate in the activities in “The Authoring Cycle” (Short & Burke, 1985) so that students with different life experience and prior knowledge may see with different eyes, listen to different drums, speak with different voices, and think from different perspectives toward critical thinking.

4.3.4. Language Experience Approach for Writing

The authors posted the tips in the classroom for multisensory learning in thinking, speaking, writing and reading:

If I can see it, I can think it

If I can think it, I can say it
If I can say it, I can draw it
If I can draw it, I can write it
If I can write it, I can read it

(Chapman & King, 2003; Lu, 2010)

4.3.5 Survival Languages for Business

The authors encouraged students to take and pass one foreign language and survey <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages> for free lessons on basic level of foreign languages like Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Spanish, French, Thai, or Arabic for greetings, apologies, or compliments. The nonverbal communication skills like smiles, hugs, pats, touch, head nodding, eye-contact, were practiced by role play to make social interaction more natural.

4.4 Instruction in Action – Cultural Competency

4.4.1 Cultural-general approach (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012)

Activities based on this approach are: the exploring the sampler of cultural groups (Ariza, 2009) for the tradition, value, religion, languages, family of people of diversity, and the inclusion of multicultural literatures and multicultural movies. Since literature plays a considerable role in the development of understanding across cultures – to get rid of xenophobia, the fear or mistrust of people from different culture, and to foster students' cross-cultural awareness (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2007), the authors required students to survey multicultural literature by the writers and illustrators of the target cultures for accuracy and authenticity yet without bias or stereotype. The multicultural literature helped students understand their business partners better and increases their business opportunities. Students can find information of movies, arts, music, dance, theatre and festivals about people from diversity by surveying the web side of National Association of Multicultural Education www.nameorg.org/resources.

4.4.2 Cultural-specific approach (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012)

Activities based on this approach were to prepare business students to become more knowledgeable about the people from culture diversity. The authors assigned students in small groups to interview and observe people who were foreign exchange scholars or international students on the campus, or potential business partners like Americans, European, Muslims, Hispanics, Indians, Asians, etc. whom they met in the international trading exhibitions. The students explored their history, religion, customs, habits, politics, value, culture, society, tradition, behavior, food, dressing, and etiquette, and shared with the whole class.

Both approaches were implemented in this course to free students from the cultural bounds and develop their multicultural competence by accepting and appreciating the differences that lie between people of different cultures (Bennette, 2011).

4.5 Instruction in Action - Content Literacy in Business

Most students planned to work in fields such as accounting, banking, economics, finance, auditing, insurance, management, marketing, restaurant, tourism, technology, international

trade, or graduate schools in business. Most students took these courses in the basic level in their first language (L1) when they were in the vocational high school, and had working experiences in business for two years. The authors took this advantage by inviting students to use their familiar content knowledge in their primary language (L1) as the comprehensible input (Au, 2006; Nordmeyer, 2010; Shapiro, 2010) and to translate the existing knowledge into English as content literacy (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013).

4.6 Instruction in Action - Techniques for Change Agency

The authors delivered the techniques for change agency (Dormant, 1997) in the curriculum. The goal was to help students develop leadership skills and to be able to implement innovation in the business community. They learned how to be innovative, to know the market, to meet the market demands, to anticipate possible resistance from their coworkers, to convince them and change them from opposing to supporting, and to successfully implement innovation in the business community.

4.7 Instruction in Action - Worldview & Globalization

To broaden students' worldview, the authors included articles from Time magazine to explore current global issues that took place in the remote corners on the earth but had immediate and severe impact on our daily lives universally. For example, *Doomsday at a glance* (Crowley, 2012) predicted life after the fiscal cliff in US; *The earthquake in Japan* (Walsh, 2013) caused the nuclear contamination of the ocean and the air; and *How Wall Street won* (Feroohar, 2013), etc. By surveying articles from Time magazine using the Internet, students' English vocabulary words increased, and the immediate connection with the world became possible.

4.8 Instruction in Action: Formal and Alternative Assessment

In addition to English language proficiency tests like vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, sentence patterns, writing, and translation, the authors included the following alternative assessment tools to evaluate students' cultural competency, and content knowledge.

- Reports from interviewing and observing people from cultural diversity
- Survey of multicultural literatures
- Survey of multicultural movies, and
- Survey of recent global issues

5. FINDINGS

The following excerpts are from Students' self-reflection on what they learned in this course in terms of Languages, cultures and contents:

5.1 English Language Proficiency

One female student who was labeled as limited English speaker said that she memorized a lot of English vocabulary words and grammatical rules since she started to learn English in the middle school. But she did not have any opportunity to open her mouth to say any English word or

sentence. She gained her confidence after she took this course. She is not afraid of speaking or writing English.

One male student who was labeled as minimal English speaker revealed his long struggle with English since he started to learn English in the middle School. His English teacher used Grammar-Translation approach to translate the vocabulary words and the sentences from English to Chinese throughout her instruction. He just memorized the spelling of the vocabulary words. In this course, he learned phonemic awareness and knew the correspondence between letter and sound. He said this is the short cut to learn English, and he became confident in his pronunciation when speaking English.

5.2 Cultural Awareness

5.2.1 One female student confessed that Japanese people were nasty because her family tragedy: her grandmother was forced to be a military prostitute during the World War II when Taiwan was colonized by Japan, and her great granduncle was forced to attend the war in Philippine but did not come back after the war. Later, she understood that she could not overgeneralize the Japanese people because of her personal experiences.

5.2.2 One male student confessed that the English were very proud and stubborn based on his stereotype. After his interviewing an international student from England, he said that The English are gentle and polite!

5.2.3. One female student confessed that she felt embarrassing that the person she interviewed hugged her and looked into her eyes when they talked. Later, she understands that hug and eye-contact are the etiquette.

5.3 Content in Business

Because of the content of Business English is from their knowledge of the content in Chinese, and most students feel it is easy to transfer the content knowledge from Chinese to English, and read the content of business in English is not a big deal to them.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Critical literacy and School literacy

Students coming back from practical experience and homecoming alumni brought with them positive comments on the content and activities that they learned in this course. They testified that the course helped them transfer smoothly from a school setting to the authentic world, and prepared them for global competition using language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while enhancing their interpersonal language proficiency toward academic language proficiency (Freeman & Freeman, 2008).

6.2 Integration across the Curriculum

Recent research in the successful integration of English across various content areas reveals a significant pedagogical “short cut.” To students whose first language is not English, teaching them content knowledge through English as a medium may develop their content knowledge and English language proficiency simultaneously (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013; Nordmeyer & Barduhn, 2010). The authors, according to their experiences in integrating business and medical science, are confident that the integration can be extended to English language arts, math, science, social studies, technology, and even to medical science. In a changing society, effective English language educators will know how to conceptualize the semiotic triad integrating the signs of languages and cultures across the curricula in order to move toward globalization.

6.3 Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction in this course based on students’ diverse English language proficiency, multiple intelligences, cultural interest and career goals made the teaching and learning more interesting, and motivated students to become the lifelong learners.

6.4 WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment)

Students’ performance in terms of formal and alternate assessment in their English language proficiency, cultural competency and content knowledge in business met the primary learning outcome. The authors planned to adopt WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) (2009) for English for Business in the near future. WIDA can be used as a resource guide for designing and assessing English Language Proficiency in five levels (entering, beginning, developing, expanding, bridging, and reaching) for the four language domains - listening, speaking, reading and writing. WIDA has five standards for the English language proficiency: ELLs communication for social and instructional purposes, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies spanning the K-12 spectrum. Instructors may manipulate The CAN DO Descriptors to design and assess the integrating of English across contents.

CONCLUSION

Based on students’ performance in term of English language proficiency tests and content knowledge in business English, their reflections on cultural awareness, and the increase of their world knowledge, the semiotic triad of ESP interweaving the three signs systems of language, cultures and curriculum make the teaching and learning of ESP more effective and more comprehensive toward globalization.

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