IT English Course Design Based on Task-based Teaching

Zhang-Long MAO

School of Foreign Language, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Sichuan Province, China

maozhanglong@qq.com

Keywords: Task-based Teaching, IT English Course Design

Abstract. This paper targets in seeking an effective way of IT English teaching. Task-based Teaching Method, based on ESP theory, can fulfill the needs well enough. The paper focuses on dissertating the ways of realizing task-based teaching in IT English course design and proposes methods and process of IT English course design under second language acquisition theory.

Introduction

IT industry is one of the pillars of world economy in recent decade with rapid development of IT tech and unstoppable trend of globalization. World Brand Lab released its Top 500 Brand in which Google ranked the top and Apple ranked the second and Amazon on the third. The fact that top three brands are all in the same industry reminds us the power of IT. The common language used in IT field is definitely English. English is mostly unique language used in software design and development, while in the field of integrated circuit and Internet, majorities of work should be done with English. IT English is a specialized subject with combination of the IT professional knowledge and English language skills. As a newly developed ESP course, IT English has become essential to the English teaching in majors and colleges of science and engineering currently. However, IT English is usually taught by professors from IT field, students can learn more professional knowledge rather than English skills. Lacking of communication skills and language competences in students hindered them from understanding and working in IT field in a deeper way. Therefore language teachers who master the law of language learning and English teaching are needed in IT English teaching.

ESP teaching theory and task-based teaching method

At present the theory from Hutchinson and Water, ESP experts, is wildly accepted by many teachers. ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as a content and method are based on learner’s reason of learning. The core of ESP learning is learner’s reason of learning according to the theory. If teachers can't fully grasp the learner's needs, ESP teaching is impossible to succeed. Both in teaching and learning clear motivation and purpose must be existed, it is one of the basic theoretical basis of task-based teaching method in ESP teaching. The goals of IT English teaching and learners motivation come from learner’s demands to use English smoothly completing some basic tasks in their work of IT industry. In the course design of IT English, task-based English teaching method can perfectly meet the needs of learners and will also be able to maximize the teaching effect.

Krashen, language expert, said there are two steps of second language acquisition, which are the learning process and acquisition process. In the process of acquisition, language learners use second language for information exchange, they focus on the significance of second language in communication rather than on the form of a second language. The Task-based Language Teaching refers to a teaching mode that learners complete the designed tasks under teacher’s guidance. With the development of communicative teaching in the 1980 s, a new language teaching methods raised up, it emphasizes ‘learning by doing’ and attracted attention among China’s language teachers. This teaching theory was introduced into the ESP teaching gradually for its principle of ‘doing things
with the language’. Task-based teaching theory is the application of constructivism theory in ESP teaching, then mastering the second language is not simply rely on language knowledge learning and language skills training, but it becomes the result of using the target language in most of the activities. In teaching process, the teacher will design a feasible real tasks revolving around a specific communicative competence or language skills, while students accomplish tasks by practicing language skills in various ways such as asking, interpretation and communication. Ultimately the goal of learning and mastering language skills would be achieved. What’s more, the task-based teaching method absorbs a variety of advantages of other teaching methods, therefore it is not exclusive and coexists well with other method teaching method.

**IT English Course Design Based on Task-based Teaching**

Under the framework of task-based teaching, course design difficulty is much higher than force-feeding teaching method. IT English is a language course in the first place; therefore, various requirements on language abilities and skills are fundamental parts of the course. Meanwhile IT English terms and related knowledge of computer and network are necessary for a teacher. Learners are also difficult to complete a task if they know nothing about the related knowledge of IT field. Therefore IT English course is more suitable for learners of engineering or related majors in institutions. In the design of the task, hard IT knowledge should not be included; otherwise it will affect the learners to complete the task. Language skills training must be considered in tasks so tasks should have its specific goals.

**IT English Course Design Principles**

As one of the ESP courses, IT English course will also follow the basic principles of ESP course design.

First of all, IT English course design will be carried out in accordance with the principle of demand analysis. Demand analysis is the basis of compiling teaching outline and materials. The following aspects should be taken into account: first one is the needs of learners including knowledge and skills learners needed. Second, learning objective demand analysis, including the English used in future work place and the language skills needed in communication.

Second, IT English curriculum design should also obey learner-oriented principle, this is determined by the properties of ESP curriculum itself. IT English learners are usually college sophomore and above, after graduation they will be mainly engaged into the IT industry related work. Colleges and universities of different professional background should design IT English course in accordance with students and actual situation. Institutions of higher learning at different levels should consider future work needs for students and the diversity of the learners as the center of making the teaching plan. Finally, the principle of authenticity must be considered in the design of IT English course. Real discourse and real learning task is the soul of ESP teaching, so the process of curriculum design cannot leave cooperation with real IT enterprises. Researching of demand for using English in real working situation in IT enterprise should be done, and enterprise’s expectations for language abilities should be considered. After above mention process, IT English curriculum design will give full play to the advantages of ESP teaching.

**IT English Curriculum Design Process**

**Demand Analysis**

At the beginning of the course design, it is very necessary to analyze learners' needs. Specific methods such as questionnaire can be used in survey to find out the learning purpose from two aspects. In the demand analysis, the background and goals of learning will be investigated, the learners' language proficiency, interest in learning and learners' real demand should be found out. Through the analysis of this step, teachers can come up with the learners' learning motivation, learning desire and learning potential. At this stage, language teacher can compile language
knowledge and demanded skills in implementing IT English course with language teaching theories, this is an important step of IT English curriculum design.

**Scene Analysis**

It is determined to use real scene of objective language and collect real corpora. In this step teachers need to look for curriculum design partners, IT companies in the real world, to cooperate. Teachers will understand real demand for English in IT companies and investigate main English using scenes of IT industry. In the stage teachers will use many methods to collect some real corpora and investigate different demand for language using in the different stages of the IT professional development. The investigation should be made from two aspects. One is learner factors and one is real work requirements. It helps to eliminate the teacher's subjective factor in course design and reflect many of the advantages of ESP in the process of teaching. The language teacher can apply the theory of language acquisition to find language skills learners need in the target scene.

**Compiling IT English Teaching Syllabus**

There are both theoretical basis and practical research and analysis to the writing of the syllabus. Given that full consideration to the learners' needs and target scene have been made, it will be no obstacles in compiling syllabus which indicate the ultimate goal of IT English teaching and direction. Course arrangement in accordance with laws of language learning should be adapted in the design of teaching content at the same time. It enables learners to achieve the expected goal after completion of the learning. Learner centered and task-based teaching concept should be reflected in the teaching syllabus compiling.

**Compilation of Teaching Material**

Compilation of the teaching materials and courseware development is a difficult part of the curriculum design. Task-based teaching should be highlighted from the teaching materials and courseware. The final teaching scene will come from the target scene demand analysis. Through the extensive data collection and research work, six to eight real scene backgrounds for the teaching are selected as follows: Understanding IT Industry; Hunting for an IT Job; Starting as an IT Rookie; Promoting a Product; Solving Problems; Leading a Team; Finding a Niche; Patenting a Product. Language skills needed for each of the real scene are extracted while teaching units are cleared in the hope to realize the goal of language learning. To make the most of task-based teaching, teachers designed special teaching tasks for students in each unit. For instance, successful completion of a job application, designing an IT products promotion scheme, solving the customer's real problems. Through the completion of tasks again and again, learners can smoothly construct target language abilities. Teaching material compilation process have to be designed in strict accordance with the principle of authenticity, usually listening, speaking, reading and writing should be included as language skills training. Multimedia teaching materials can make a vivid and interesting scene of real situation, and courseware must be clear and brief. A openness principle should be considered in the process of the courseware developing and teaching material compilation, thus teachers and learner will have a free space to play. Different teachers can use the teaching materials and courseware in different ways in their own teaching styles. Learners can also express their own points of interest and appeals by using the open teaching materials and courseware, teaching effect is maximized in learning.

**Teaching and Assessment**

Teaching implementation is at the heart of task-based teaching. Language teachers play a role as a guide, learner is the main subject to complete tasks. Learners are the center of Task-based teaching and focus on target tasks. They will complete their missions or objectives by variety of ways and in the process of task implementation language ability is constructed and acquired. Language teachers promote the realization of the task and dominate the direction of the task, they are information providers of language materials, mission designers, assistants for learners and evaluators and directors after the completion of tasks. After completing of each teaching task, language teachers
should make formative assessment on the outcome of the task to test whether the task realized the initial goals. Observation, academic records, questionnaire investigation, discussion, and other forms can be used in formative assessment.

Conclusion
As an important branch of ESP, IT English will inevitably be favored by more and more English learners in the information age. Based on ESP teaching theory, constructivism, second language acquisition theory, Task-based teaching make IT English learners become the center of teaching activity, language teachers become the leader of the task. IT English curriculum design can satisfy the learners and real requirements of IT industry.

References