

THE STRATEGIES FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN CHINA'S HIGHER EDUCATION

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Nowadays, as an effective way of language acquisition, bilingual education is being attached increasing importance in the educational reform in the world. However, the blind implementation of it in education will inevitably lead to some negative influences. This paper gives a brief introduction of the bilingual education and points out some problems of bilingual teaching existing in higher education in China. Based on this, some main strategies have been put forth so as to make bilingual teaching develop more smoothly and healthily in higher education.

Keywords: bilingual education, successful bilingual teaching, strategies, teaching reform, relationship

1.Introduction

Bilingual education is one of the most essential parts of the educational reform in higher education, as well as in Primary and Secondary education. According to *Beijing Youth Daily*, it is reported that colleges and universities across China will launch bilingual education to meet the need for bilingual talents and that major courses such as information technology, bio-technology, information technology and law etc. will be given both in Chinese and English. Therefore, it's necessary to make it clear what bilingual education is and what factors should be taken into account in order to make the bilingual education develop smoothly and healthily rather than implement it with blindness.

2. The Definition of Bilingual Education**2.1 The definition of "bilingual"**

There are various definitions for "bilingual". However, the definition of it is quite controversial. According to *The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*, the definition given is: "A person who knows and uses two languages." In *Encyclopedia Dictionary of Applied linguistics: A handbook for Language Teaching* (Johnson, 2001), "bilingual" refers to "A person who speaks two languages equally well."⁸⁸ Very recently, some scholars in North America have regarded "bilingual" in an even looser meaning. It is pointed out that a person does not have to speak both languages with equal fluency to be bilingual. It is very common for bilinguals, even those have been bilingual since birth, to be somewhat "dominant" in one language.

2.2 The definition of "bilingual education"

A correct understanding of bilingual education is vital for us to carry out this program. According to *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*, the definition given is "The use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects." Richard, J. C. & Platt, John (2002) stated that bilingual education

is the employing of a second (foreign) language at school for subject teaching."⁸⁹

It is known that in Canada, bilingual education refers to the employing of French for subject teaching in the areas where English is their native language, and in America, it usually means to use Spanish to teach the other science subjects. In China, as English plays a dominating role in the world, the combination use of Chinese and English is one of the primary forms of bilingual education. This places a great emphasis on the improvement of students' English level, which is important for them to learn much from advanced countries and hence help promote their competition in the world. However, in some multiethnic areas, it is the combination of Han Chinese language and ethnic languages. For instant, in Xinjiang, it is the combination of Han and Uyghur. Bilingual education in this form can help them equally develop language and culture of each national and also help them learn much of our main culture, which is beneficial for their self-development. "learning a foreign language may reduce conflicts among different racial, ethnic, or religious groups, as well as among nation states".⁹⁰ In a word, bilingual education varies from country to country, from region to region. Therefore, we should pay special attention to the situation and should not follow the others' model blindly.

3. The Models of Bilingual Education

At present, the following three models are often adopted in bilingual education in the world.

3.1 Immersion Model

Immersion Model refers to the use of a single school language which is not the child's home language. This is sometimes called an immersion program. (Cummins and Corson, 1997).

In this model, all the subjects are required in the target language and even in the assignments and exams. It is directed by Krashen's theory of Second Language

⁸⁸ George Yule. *The Study of Language* [M], Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press & Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁸⁹ Zhong Qiquan, My opinion on "Bilingual Education"[J], *Global Education Outlook*, 2003. (2).

⁹⁰ Hu Zhuanglin, *On Bilingual Education in China*[J], *Foreign Languages in China*, 2004. (2).

Acquisition. Students are encouraged to master the target language naturally and unconsciously in the process of learning science subjects. the integration of language and culture learning by using the language as medium for the continuing socialization of students is a process which is not intended to imitate and replicate the socialization of native-speaker teachers but rather to develop student's cultural competence from its existing stage, by changing it into intercultural competence" (Feng-ping Gao)⁹¹

3.2 Maintenance Model

It is the use of the child's home language when the child enters school but later a gradual change to the use of the school language for teaching some subjects and the home language for teaching others. This is sometimes called maintenance bilingual education. (Cummins and Corson, 1997). This model emphasizes that native language can be used to maintain the comprehension of the content subject while the target language is learned.

3.3 Transitional Bilingual Model

It involves the partial or total use of the child's home language when the child enters school, and a later change to the use of the school language only. This is sometimes called transitional bilingual education. (Cummins and Corson, 1997).

This model is to some extent to ensure students' no sacrifice of subject content learning.

The effectiveness of the first model is eventually turned out to be the best and most successful one. However, it is not as effective as the students in China learning in the Chinese background. And in most cases, the second and the third models are adopted in our current situation due to the nature of bilingual education.

4. The Problems of Bilingual Education

4.1 Lacking of qualified bilingual teachers

As we all known, bilingual education has a high demand for bilingual teachers, who should not only have proficiency in English especially in oral English, but also must be specialized in one of the science subject. The lack of adequate qualified bilingual teachers is our major problems. This is the key factor to successful bilingual teaching. Therefore, we should carry out the program at the right time and under the appropriate circumstances.

4.2 Lacking suitable teaching materials.

The lack of suitable teaching material is another major problem of bilingual education. Given that the differences between Chinese students and oversea students, it is not easy to have access to the right original teaching materials. On the other hand, some original materials may not be quite suitable for our students' level. Then how to select and edit the teaching materials which suit to our students in higher education is also a major concern.

4.3 Weakening the native language learning.

Since our bilingual education must pay much attention to the education localization. That is to say, we

can not waken our native language learning while carrying out bilingual education program. This is also a problem some people are worrying about. Just as Professor Zhang (Zhang Zhendong, 2002) once pointed out that bilingual education can cultivate an intellectual who may speak two languages well, but may not be a qualified translator as a result of his incorrect use of native language.

4.4 Traditional College English teaching

In the traditional College English classroom, more emphasis is laid on vocabularies, grammar, not on lively language. Limited chances are given to students for communicating. Listening and speaking skills are often neglected. This obviously forms an obstacle for the successful bilingual teaching, which to some extent depends much on students' listening and reading skills. And bilingual teaching has a high demand for input as well as output. Apparently, the present teaching model can not meet the need for our bilingual teaching model. In addition, the traditional examination and assessment systems also contribute to this negative influence. How to realize the relationship between College English teaching and bilingual teaching is something important for successful bilingual teaching. As a result, much effort must be made to strengthen the teaching reform of our College English teaching.

4.4 Affecting content subject learning.

In America, bilingual education is to help immigrants learn the mathematics and science subjects, and meanwhile promote their English level. But in our country, as Chinese and English do not belong to one language family. So it seems far more difficult for learning English than other languages. Using English for subject teaching should take both teachers and students' English level into consideration. Otherwise it may affect content subject learning. This is another problem to which we must attach more importance. And the ability of mastering much advanced academic information is so important that it can not be neglected in the competitive modern world.

5. Some strategies

5.1 Dealing with the following relationships appropriately

5.1.1 Native language and target language

It is said, "Language is civilization."⁹² or "Language is the symbol of the nation." Any country pays much attention to its native language learning. So the implementation of bilingual education must be based on the fact that it can not affect the native language education. Namely, we must make sure there's no sacrifice of our native language. As native language is our advantage language, we'd better make full use of its positive transfer while learning English and avoid pursuing the form of using target language only and weakening the learning of our native language.

5.1.2 Language teaching and content subject

Bilingual teaching as an effective way of language acquisition is playing an increasing important role in China as well as abroad. And it is also a special type of

⁹¹ engping Gao, "Japanese: A Heavily Culture-Laden Language"[J] Journal of Intercultural Communication, Issue 10, December 2005

⁹² Du Jingping, Deng Shaoli, On the relationship between ESP, ELE, CBI, bilingual teaching and college English [J]. Crazy English (Teacher Edition). 2012. (3)

teaching which is different from either foreign teaching or the teaching of other content subjects. For this reason, it is vital to deal with the relationship between language teaching and the teaching of content subject appropriately so as to achieve the ideal result of "Killing two birds with one stone". With this in mind, our bilingual teaching must avoid focusing only on language form, which is our habitual way of foreign language teaching. More attention should be paid to content learning. Culture and language teaching complement each other and are inseparable. Attaching importance to cultural teaching in language teaching not only helps to improve the efficiency and quality of language learning, but also helps to cultivate talents with international vision and cross-cultural communication skills. Sherzer (1987:305) considered discourse "to be the concrete expression of language-culture relationships"⁹³. The author also discusses the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and reconceptualizes it (p. 296): It is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies, and fine tunes both culture and language and their intersection, and it is especially in verbally artistic discourse such as poetry, magic, verbal dueling, and political rhetoric that the potentials and resources provided by grammar, as well as cultural meanings and symbols, are exploited to the fullest and the essence of language-culture relationships becomes salient. Consequently, the combination of consciously learning of the science subject and unconsciously acquisition the language is an effective way of successful bilingual teaching.

5.1.3 College English teaching reform and bilingual teaching

College English teaching and Bilingual teaching share the same objective of promoting students' English level, but they also have different connotations. In general, College English teaching is language-based teaching, which focuses on language form while bilingual teaching is content-based teaching, which focuses on the content learning, such as, the knowledge learning of physics, mathematics, and so on. In order to meet the high demand of Bilingual teaching, the students' intercultural communicative competence must be improved as soon as possible. language is a dance to the music of culture. Dance steps and the music they go with convey more than just rhythm and joy – they also help the dancers negotiate a relationship. We must teach language relative to culture⁹⁴. At the time being, how to reform College English teaching seems to be an increasingly important issue for successful bilingual teaching. To our relief, some effective ways are under discussion. For example, Based on the review of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) and ELE (English for Liberation Education), college English may be divided into three levels, namely, core English learning level, which is considered as English for General Purpose, ELE & ESP level, and Bilingual Instruction level. However, much effort need to be made on the reform

of our College English teaching, including teaching curriculum, teaching methodologies, relative examination systems, assessment systems and so on.

5.2 Teacher training

As to teacher training, several practical ways adopted in the present conditions are as following:

Firstly, some national policies can be issued to ensure some universities or colleges to set up practical bilingual training programs. We can not deny the fact that the effective policy assistance can have much positive impact on the successful implementation of bilingual education. One point should be clarified is that the training programs must put emphasis on teachers' ability of oral English and modern educational technology as well as the others.

Secondly, some capable teachers can be selected and sent abroad for further study for a period of time. And meanwhile, some foreign experts, especially those with bilingual teaching background can be recruited to help us for the bilingual courses constructions.

Thirdly, a new major of bilingual education may be set up in some universities, where there are possibilities for doing this to solve the shortage of the qualified teachers for bilingual teaching.

5.3 Teaching materials

To attempt to solve the problem of lacking of the teaching materials for bilingual teaching, the following measures may be taken:

1) Introducing the original textbooks

One of the advantages of bilingual teaching is the access to original textbooks for academic information. Original textbooks are obviously the best choice. However, they should be well selected so as to be suitable for our own situation and our students' English level.⁹⁵

2) Introducing the original audiovisual materials

There are many good original audiovisual materials attached to books. They are also good resources for our bilingual teaching due to their direct and quick way of learning. But they also need to be selected first.

3) Editing, translating and rearranging the teaching materials

In most cases, there are not very suitable textbooks and other teaching materials available. General speaking, most original textbooks must be altered or rearranged according to the actual need of present subject teaching. So another choice is form a bilingual research group, which is constituted of qualified and responsible teachers. That is really hard-demanding work. But it is proved by many universities in China, such as Zhejiang University, this is a very practical way to solve the problems of Bilingual textbooks.⁹⁶

6. Conclusion

In order to meet the great challenges of the new century, bilingual teaching is the trend of our educational reform. This paper attempts to find some strate-

⁹³ SHERZER, Joel, 1987. A discourse centered approach to language and culture.[M] American Anthropologist, New Series, 89 (2):295-309

⁹⁴ CEDAR, Payung, 2006. Thai and American responses to compliments in English. [J]The linguistic journal, 1(2):6-28.

⁹⁵ Yuan Duping, Yu Liming, Research on the Concept and Strategy of Bilingual Teaching in Colleges and Universities[J], Foreign Languages in China, 2005.

⁹⁶ KUBOTA, Ryuko, 2003. Critical teaching of Japanese culture.[M]Japanese Language and Literature, 37(1):67-87.

gies for the main problems which exist in bilingual education programs in China's higher education. Of course, there are others, such as the positive policy assistances, the efficient management, the effective assessment, more powerful research work and so on.

Bilingual education in universities or colleges with the aim of enhancing students' comprehensive language skills at no loss of damaging the language of Chinese and academic attainment is just our strategies of talent cultivation and educational reform. However, it still clarifies in this paper that successful bilingual teaching can be realized only on the condition that it is carried in a suitable model instead of copying the models from others.

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