

NEW APPROACHES TO MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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Abstract

The present paper looks at new approaches to designing effective teaching materials for the Business English classes. Recently, there has been a shift where students' needs are concerned in view of the changes going on in the labour market. Consequently, shifts in the pedagogy of teaching Business English to both undergraduate and postgraduate students are manifest. This paper argues for the need to draw extensively on the authentic raw economic data and process it into meaningful and topical texts and drills.

Teaching Business English is in particular a very difficult task, combining the challenges of teaching a foreign language with those of having that very foreign language become another language in itself through the parallel economic paradigm of its vocabulary, thus performing a dual communication task. To this we also have to add the ever new communication skills required of our graduates in the labour market. This is indeed a very important element that needs to be taken into consideration when taking up the difficult task of writing modern and effective business English textbooks.

The shift in pedagogy from the very traditional textbooks to materials that place more emphasis on developing the new skills required of our economic graduates once they reach the labour market has become more and more evident in the late 90s. This approach is more likely to render them successful in the job market following graduation.

The accent falls more and more on communication skills with ever new economic terms permeating from the IT and other domains and with vast economic information to be covered. Hence the need to go to the very raw economic data and to authentic and topical economic texts referring both to the domestic and the international economic environment and draw the textbook and the drills based on this type of materials.

These types of approach not only offers our students better chances and render them better prepared to face the competition, including that on the European market as more and more of our graduates seek jobs in foreign countries. Moreover, it also makes the English class a great deal more fun and definitely more rewarding, the ideal setup on which short grammar drills/pills function and the point made in it is quickly acquired. Indeed, there still remains the need to care for the improvement of our students' level of grammatical knowledge, as well.

When placed in perspective it becomes obvious that designing materials for the English Business classes in the current globalizing and ever-changing economic environment has become a more and more complex endeavour, going far beyond the traditional models and patterns of the theme-based textbooks that do not provide or care too closely for the communicative skills, for the academic writing skills, for the critical reading skills, to only name the most important. However, the traditional textbook still has many supporters and often lecturers especially in Romania will chose to

design more "orthodox" materials being attracted probably by the ease and practical aspects and also knowing they would have a very useful tool in the class in terms of business English vocabulary teaching. Nonetheless, this type of materials will only care for the needs of beginning and lower intermediate students.

A really interesting approach has been to try to set the exercise of writing Business English textbooks by Romanian academia in a diachronical perspective.

Looking at the evolution both prior to 1989 and subsequently, especially of such textbooks written by the professorial body at the Academy of Economic Sciences of Bucharest we noticed a few interesting things. For the textbooks designed in the 70s we noticed the careful attention to choose relevant information regarding international economic institutions, national ones, the economic vocabulary. No appears the very first publishing of a specialized textbook on the vocabulary of accountancy by Professors Chiriacescu Adriana si Alexander Hollinger: *Special English Finance-Accounting*, ASE, Bucharest, 1979.

A shift occurred in the textbooks of the 80s which are heavily tributary to the party propaganda. More and more it was a question of getting through the party censure. Thus, the bibliography includes speeches by the dictator, documents of party congresses while the lessons covering the "realities" of the Anglo-Saxon world are to a great extent contaminated by the socialist propaganda according to which Capitalism was the evil of all evils, the labour force was heartlessly exploited, etc. In terms of the drills offered they are pretty much the standard ones: gap-filling, giving synonyms and antonyms, translations of texts into English/Romanian, the well known grammar drills of "put the verb in the bracket at the correct tense", etc.

While this study of the materials produced by the *Germanic Languages Department* in the Academy of Economic Sciences of Bucharest is by no means a comprehensive one, we think it relevant to the topic approached in this paper. Also, the current involvement of one of the authors into a Leonardo mobility project with the University of Alicante, Spain, has opened up an unexpected opportunity to dare a few remarks at the end of the paper on how the professorial body in the English Department of this partner university has developed business English textbook writing over the years.

More recent Business English textbooks domestically produced have also made the shift towards more student-centred activities, towards active learning and communication techniques, towards a better selection of texts and economic information. However, there is still too little space allotted to the issues regarding critical reading, essay writing, *academic writing*, skills that are vital to our students and graduates in the labour market, both domestic and foreign. For it is well known that writing is an important aspect of the business activity. No matter what position they end up in they will always have to write a great deal of formal texts: letters, memos, reports, explanations, decisions, procedures, negotiating techniques. The skills for these are only formed through intensive communication activities and many many academic writing assignments. Hence, the need for a new approach in designing and writing the Business English textbook becomes evident.

Raw data coming from annual reports of banks and companies or short-term financial analysis can be employed to develop students' language skills in all the four components: listening comprehension, writing, speaking and reading skills.

Asking students to bring into the seminars new data on financial analyses, the BIZNEWS drill we do with our students in each seminar, corporate and bank reports, data on the new developments concerning the domestic as well as the world economic environment is motivating them to read and translate more. Also, short dictations from such texts constitute good spelling drills, which students are asked to correct it themselves or have their peer do it. For the listening skills video and tape recordings of economic programmes are also very useful.

A large and varied range of exercises can be thus designed making good use of the Internet, the IT and *all the equipment our Department has got* thus bringing into the classroom not only the specialized and up-to-date vocabulary of all specialty areas of the economic domain but also a great deal of information that students will need with some of their other subjects in the curricula.

Lastly, I would like to make a point of how well our colleagues in the English Department of our Partner University of Alicante have carried out their task of *textbook producing* over the years. It is deep admiration I felt after studying their works of the 90s and especially the most recent one (Guillen, V., Williams, J. – *Writing Strategies for Business Communication*, Agua Clara, Alicante,

2004) by Professor Vicotria Guillen, the Chair of the English Department, who so kindly offered the textbook to us in our very first meeting at the Department. *Writing Strategies for Business Communication* is indeed the implementing in practice of the theoretical approaches we presented in our paper and I am sure it is a very useful instrument in the English class and it will prove to be so in our seminars on our return. It will definitely stir the interest of the students and increase their motivation while making the study of language creative, enjoyable and a highly rewarding activity as it should normally be.

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