

## THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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*In contrast with teaching Standard English, it seems that the endeavour of teaching Business English represents some particularities both in the choice of methods and especially in that of the didactic materials. If the latter are clearly necessary to be authentic and specialised on the economic fields, the former do not obviously have to differ that much from the standard, though aspects as teaching grammar remain controversial.*

### **Prior considerations**

Teaching is an activity that, like most human occupational approaches can be both tiresome and rewarding, depending on an extraordinarily high number of factors, from the teacher's degree of preparation or qualification, communicational abilities or disposition, to the student's expectations and motivation, even to their tolerance and adaptability. As analysts note, "Students learn in many ways – by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing. Teaching methods also vary. Some instructors lecture, others demonstrate or discuss; some focus on rules and others on examples; some emphasize memory and others understanding. The students bring with them their own learning preferences and how much they manage to learn depend partly on students' ability and prior preparation and also by the compatibility of his or her characteristic approach to learning and the instructor's characteristic approach to teaching."<sup>154</sup> Teaching English should be somewhat more pleasant and fulfilling for both instructor and learner as long as the subject, English language, is an appealing one, being in itself more attractive and interesting than others. But is Business English of the same category and, likewise, does teaching it show similitude with teaching Standard English or, more likely, with teaching the somehow drier specialties such as economy or business?

From the instructors' mood for teaching English for special purposes or from their ability and propensity for class management, to the students' capacity of assimilating and desire or need for this strive with the specific terminology and characteristic concepts or subject matters to discuss, there is a wide range of influential elements that cause either the success or the failure of the teacher - student professional relationship, hence the successful or deplorable teaching and learning of Business English. How much the teacher's effort accounts for this or to what degree it is a matter of students' wish and preference is a problem that can be found relevant in this respect.

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<sup>154</sup> Siti Hamin Stapa, ESP Students' Learning Preferences : Are the Teachers Aware?, [http://www.esp-world.info/Articles\\_4/Stapa.htm](http://www.esp-world.info/Articles_4/Stapa.htm)

## **Comparative analysis**

It is not exactly that the methods implied shall differ to some extent when teaching Business English from those used for teaching English in general, due to the specific of the former but the very content of the subject will require a different approach and will trigger a correlative response. Not as appealing as plain English and consequently less capacitated to get assimilated passively by the learners, Business English proves a serious 'school subject' and may become a troublesome and painstaking endeavour addressing to a specialized target groups, be those students in economics, economists engaged in affairs with foreign or international companies, people involved in business activities that require knowledge of English for their job, translators specialising in the fields of commerce or other categories that might need it for various reasons and so on. Anyhow, a remark can be straight forwardly depicted and this is the fact that, generally, Business English is not a leisure time activity, not something coming out of a hobby or pleasure but more of a career need or requirement of the job and thus the difficulties in approaching it – as in dealing with any kind of compulsory tasks – both as a teacher and as a learner are understandable and predicable. Is there any possibility to make Business English more attractive, to embroider it in the garments of Standard English for example and thus to follow the same strategies and to receive a similarly open or even enthusiastic disposition of the learners to tackle it?

How different from classic teaching is it to approach, as a teacher of English, this specialised subject of Business English?

Of course, as specialists in teaching methodology note and advise, the Business English teacher's role is – luckily, we might say – not to present business concepts to the learners or to instruct them how to conduct their business. On the contrary, it is to enable such learners to develop their language skills within a business context. So, teaching Business English differs from teaching Standard English in the choice of contexts for listening and reading texts and in the choice of lexis in grammar and vocabulary exercises. As an illustrative and yet very short exemplification we may notice that the same lexical structures and grammar pattern can be discussed on a sentence such as "We have just received the invoice", for Business English, as in a simple one taken out of everyday situations, characteristic for Standard English, of the type "We have just met Jane", where it is quite obvious that the only supplementary item to be discussed – and, nevertheless, compulsory to – is the vocabulary, the choice of words being relevant for the field of Economy.

## **Teaching vocabulary and pronunciation**

Normally there shouldn't be a relevant difference in the choice of methods for teaching vocabulary of Standard English and Business English, as vocabulary in itself implies possibility of getting accustomed – following the same procedures – to any specialised language of any particular field of human activity.

Moreover, the very use of the authentic text, of the economic magazines, of the economic documents and other specialised didactic materials implies, in itself, introducing specific terminology, not so hard to understand and thus remember – despite certain incongruence with the Romanian language – for people already studying the specific economic terminology in their mother tongue.

In Linda Cypres's opinion<sup>155</sup>, we can approach new business terms in the same way we would approach other vocabulary:

- Introducing vocabulary in context, and using it in a variety of sentences.
- Having students listen to and repeat dialogues (which illustrate business practices and language).
- With repetition drills, examples, questions and answers.
- By students participating in role-play (or mini dramas) in groups of two or more.
- With written and oral exercises.

While there are no doubts that special vocabulary has to be learned and there is not very much discussion on how it should be taught as long as the classical, general English methods cover the need of any kind of terminology, the opinions are mixed when considering pronunciation. Even though it cannot be denied that accurate pronunciation is not only useful in business communication, in assuring not only proper comprehension but also the impression of professionalism, it has come to be regarded as certainly not a must in the modern world and sometimes superfluous to be so much emphasised as long as the casual mistakes do not impede communication.

Additionally, we may want to review grammatical structures, idiomatic expressions, add listening comprehension and writing exercises to this mix.

### **Grammar teaching within Business English**

Highly controversial as this matter could be, the usefulness of teaching grammar or insisting on it, with students whose main aim is learning specific terminology and managing English in the field of Economics, still haunts the teachers who regard accuracy of the language spoken as extremely important regardless of its purpose.

The need for grammatical Business English might be uncertain and the process of introducing such an attempt to the students disdainfully received, but this however does not differ much from teaching grammar with Standard English as grammar in itself is regarded as less fun than mere conversational classes, centred on reading, discussing and involving in communicative exercises. Still, the need for it is seemingly exactly the same as in the regular English classes, as long as the objective of Business English is the same as the one of the Standard one but with the only addition that the terminology would be a specific one. Users of Business English shall use the same rules of language, the same grammar structures and will have to undergo conversational situations using such structures and will have to deal with the collocutors' flow of words following the various grammatical norms, exactly as regular speakers of the language. To successfully cope with factual situations grammar accuracy is sometimes useful so learning it becomes a necessary evil, as some might see it.

As for teaching it that is no problem at all, no bigger challenge than teaching it within Standard English classes, as long as the only thing to adept would be vocabulary. Thus, teaching past simple – or tenses in general, as a matter of fact – would be the same using either an example of the kind "The CEO convened a problem solving session last Monday"

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<sup>155</sup> cf. Cypres, L., – "Introducing Business English into the ESL Classroom: A Simple Approach", internet resource: <http://learnenglish.co.uk>

or one as "Our friend invited us to his birthday party some days ago", such will be teaching, for example, comparison of adjectives and related structures, as in "Although analysts say that keeping up with the more and more sophisticated technology has lately become a bigger problem than inflation, we still face the highest rate of that ever, and, the higher the wages, the worse" or in "Although people say that finding friends in this busier and busier age is harder than anything, loneliness is not the biggest problem of modern world if not the fact the lonelier someone is the busier he get involving in all sorts of unnecessary activities". the usefulness of learning grammar proves true if we only take into account this last example, a sentence almost impossible to understand by someone who does not master the rules of grammar implied in it, no matter how expert that person might be in the field of economy and how clearly the understanding of the specific vocabulary could hold for him/her.

### **Bibliography:**

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