

THE ENGLISH FOR BUSINESS SYLLABUS AND ITS EFFECT UPON THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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Summary: The article aims to illustrate the importance of foreign language knowledge, especially English for business in building up a competitive business environment under the circumstances of the European integration and of the globalization. The success or the failure of a large or small and middle-sized enterprise depends, in a great extent, of how important it is nowadays to speak several foreign languages. Language skills are increasingly attractive to business and industry and valuable to students entering an ever more international and global workplace. Business English is also very important for the today's new business environment.

Key words: English for business syllabus, business culture, business performance, business meetings, business communication, globalization.

English language and the business culture

In a competitive business environment one need to be sure that his/her business is reaching its full potential. While there is no magic fix for unlocking business potential, did you know that building the language, literacy and numeracy skills of employees can have a significant impact on business operations.

In this changing world individual people carry on getting up and going to work and doing the best they can for themselves and for their families. For working people the challenge remains to manage diversity and change simultaneously. The European Union will continue to foster partnerships and joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, within the territory and across borders.

Creating a global business culture takes place on many levels and in several timeframes. At senior executive level there may be a need to create a strategy for developing a business culture appropriate to global goals with measurable objectives and benchmarks. In the short term there may be an intermediate problem with dysfunctional multicultural teams. In between these extremes are skills such as negotiating across cultures and managing project teams. Your culture is changing all the time and will do so ever more quickly with the impacts of globalization and technological development. The question is not whether you want culture change but whether you want to manage it.

English is the accepted medium for international business transactions and the market for Business English courses and textbooks is booming. There is relatively little published and practice is materials rather than research-led. An interdisciplinary approach is called for to take account of language, interpersonal communication skills, business know-how and cultural issues.

People around the world conduct business meetings in English even though this language may be a foreign language to all those present. The language that they use will be neither as rich in vocabulary and expression, nor as culture-bound, as that used by native speakers, but will be based on a core of the most useful and basic structures and vocabulary. Businesspeople do not always need to know the full complexities of English grammar and idiom. Fine distinctions in meaning may not be important in a business context. On the other hand, in a Business English course some structural areas may require more attention than in a conventional course: for example, conditionals in negotiating, or modality for expressing possibility or politeness. There is consequently a need for syllabus designers to be selective when addressing the needs of Business English learners.

Business English Syllabus

Business English is not only English for Specific Purpose (ESP) or an international language. It is not just specialist vocabulary, which distinguishes Business English) BE from other English courses. It is vital to be aware that the whole of business world (to be more precise - international business world) finds its

reflection and realization in Business English - its major communication asset. The English for Business syllabus is likely to be defined primarily in relation to business performance skills such as meetings, presentations, socializing, or report-writing. Within these skills areas, certain concepts are typically discussed and expressed: for example, describing changes and trends, quality, product, process and procedures strategy. These concepts can be broken down into more linguistically powerful functional areas such as comparing and contrasting expressing cause and effect, recommending, and agreeing. The language defined in the syllabus may include grammatical or lexical items, and elements of spoken or written discourse, including for instance, cohesive devices and stress and intonation patterns, as well as organizational features such as signaling a new topic or turn-taking in interactive sequences.

English is often called the unofficial language of the world community, which is no wonder when you consider that half of the world's scientific journals are written in English, three quarters of the world's mail is written in English and three fifth of the radio stations of the world beam their messages in the English language. English is the second most spoken language in the world but it is the official language of more countries than any other language.

Globalization, especially terms of trade, environmental policies, and oil politics, whether managed wisely or not, will also lead to shifts in the European business environment. Today's business environment is globalizing rapidly. The idea of the global village ("think global, act local") is becoming reality. Organizations are crossing borders and searching for strategies that take advantage of the new global opportunities. European unification is another factor stimulating cross-border business. This does not only affect multinationals, but also small and medium sized companies are strongly influenced by the process of globalization. In all cases, organizations are confronted with more complexity. Cross-cultural differences are an important part of this complexity and have an impact on business processes. The extent to which companies are able to cope with this new cross-cultural challenge is one of the key causes of success or failure. Technology has now created the possibility and even the likelihood of a global culture. The Internet, fax machines, Satellites, and cable TV are sweeping away cultural boundaries. Global entertainment companies shape the perceptions and dreams of ordinary citizens, wherever they live. This spread of values, norms and cultural tends to promote Western ideals of capitalism. Will local cultures inevitably fall victim to this global "consumer" culture? Will English eradicate all other languages?

English is rapidly becoming a global language in academia. At least 1,700 universities in countries with another host language offer master's degree programs in English, and an increasing number of schools have stepped up English-language requirements at undergraduate levels as well. Directors of these programs aim to prepare students "to be global leaders in this new era of internationalization", (New York Times, April, 2007) arguing that universal teaching language is a necessary and a "natural consequence of globalization". Today there are many varieties of Business English. The most important distinction to be made is that between pre-experience (or low experience) learners and job-experience learners. Students in colleges or universities will have gained their knowledge of business largely from books and, as a result, such knowledge will be incomplete and theoretical rather than practical. They will be less of their expectations of language learning will be molded by their experiences from school, and thus by the educational policies of the country in which they grew up. Job-experience learners are more likely to have a single set of needs relating to their job. The practical use of the language will be more important than theoretical knowledge about the language.

International businesspeople have a need to make contact with others whom they never met before, or know only slightly. Meetings are often short because businesspeople are pressed for time. There is a need for an internationally accepted way of doing things so that people from different cultures, and with different mother tongues, can quickly feel more comfortable with one another.

Social contacts are often highly ritualized. Formulaic language is used (in greetings and introductions, for example) in context of a routine pattern of exchanges. A certain style is generally adopted which is polite but also short and direct (taking into consideration the need to be economical with time). Although some situations may require more than this (for example, keeping a conversation going over lunch), the style and content of social interactions will be typified by a desire to build a good relationship while avoiding over-familiarity.

Business English is an area of ESP that is relatively poorly researched. Rigorous linguistic analysis is fragmented and is more frequently based on the written forms of language such as correspondence, annual reports, and articles in business journals. Some kinds of analysis have been carried out with respect to the

language of meetings and discussions, but there is still little to support course developers beyond their own first-hand experience gained in the field.

Achieving a sense of purpose within the business context

The most important characteristic of exchanges in the context of business meetings, telephone calls and discussions is a sense of purpose. Language is used to achieve an end, and its successful use is seen in terms of a successful outcome to the business transaction or event. Users of Business English need to speak English primarily so that they can achieve more in their jobs. Business is competitive: competition exists between companies and also within companies, between employees striving to better their careers. It follows that performance objectives take priority over educational objectives or language learning for its own sake. For example, a German company in Seoul may have a long-term objective to establish good trading relations, and their representative's use of English is geared to that end. A French telecommunications project manager in India needs to know English to communicate with his technical terms on the site, who are all Indian. A Swedish pharmaceutical product manager needs to give clear presentations of recent product development to subsidiaries in Europe and the Far East. In each of these examples, the use of the language has an implied element of risk; mistakes and misunderstandings could cost the company dearly.

Most of the language needed by businesspeople (apart from social language) will be transactional: getting what you want and persuading others to agree. A significant amount of business is being lost to European enterprise as a result of lack of language skills. On the basis of the sample, it is estimated that 11% of exporting European SMEs (945,000 companies) may be losing business because of identified communication barriers. Analysis of the findings from the survey identified a clear link between languages and export success. Four elements of language management were found to be associated with successful export performance: having a language strategy, appointing native speakers, recruiting staff with language skills and using translators and interpreters. There could be very significant gains across the whole EU economy if all exporting English is a key language for gaining access to export markets. However, the survey results suggest that the picture is far more complex than the much-quoted view that English is the world language. Russian is extensively used in Eastern Europe as a lingua franca (along with German and Polish). French is used to trade in areas of Africa and Spanish is used similarly in Latin America longer term business partnerships depend upon relationship building and relationship-management.

Performance objectives for business English

As already stated, one of the main characteristics of Business English is the emphasis on performance. For people in business, the priority is to be able to understand and get their message across, and for the majority of Business English learners many of the refinements of language are quite simply not relevant. What the majority of business learners need to acquire could be broadly summarized as follows:

- Confidence and fluency in speaking
- Skills for organizing and structuring information
- Sufficient language accuracy to be able to communicate ideas without ambiguity and without stress for listener
- Strategies for following the main points of fast, complex, and imperfect speech
- Strategies for clarifying and checking unclear information
- Speed of reaction to the utterances of others
- Clear pronunciation and delivery
- An awareness of appropriate language and behavior for the cultures and situations in which they operate.

Some learners may also need to develop practical reading and writing skills.

In Business English, these performance criteria need to be seen in the context of specific business situations which the learner will be involved in. If the requirements of a typical job are analyzed, it can be seen, for example, that the learner has to attend meetings which are carried out in English and that he or she has to follow what is going on and be able to make a contribution.

As a conclusion we may state that there is a strong relation between language skills, cultural competence and exporting performance. In contemporary business environment foreign language skills are prerequisite for success of young business people and their companies. Every professional, from scientists to engineers, to nurses, to businessmen etc, function in a global market: they rely on primary sources published in other languages, attend international conferences, and often find themselves interacting across national, cultural, and linguistic borders. Government and industry often give preference to job applicants who are proficient in one or even more foreign languages. More and more companies are competing in the global market place, which means there is a growing demand for managers with an international outlook. Graduates with knowledge of foreign countries and their business cultures, that are proficient in foreign languages, have an edge.

Business English is certainly language: vocabulary, grammar, functions, but also content: marketing, management, finance, etc., besides, it is communication skills: telephoning, correspondence, meetings, presentations, etc., and cultural awareness of social and business behaviour. A complete novice in TBE (Teaching Business English) is at risk to conclude that his concern is just the language part. This is a very serious mistake. The four parts are inseparable and cutting down any of them leads to no new acquisition in the field. One should try to enter this new world and make it his own. It is BE with its communicative and thematic comprehensiveness, reflecting every sphere of human international business relations, which can stimulate a new spiral in the development (and self-development) of an EFL teacher of a new generation in this country. The business environment comprises three major categories of -n-workers: managers, executives and clerical staff. A well designed English for Business syllabus will address separately to the three categories mentioned above because they all have different responsibilities, and as a result, they can be expected to have different needs as BE learners.

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