

# NEW TRENDS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING BUSINESS ENGLISH: ADAPTING TO INTERNALIZATION

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*This paper focuses on how new trends have appeared in teaching business English as a result of globalization. During the recent years, along with all the changes that have taken place in every domain of our lives, we have witnessed major changes in how business English students want to learn. It is interesting to analyze the way in which technology muscled its way onto the teaching scene amid a mixture of delight and anguish – perhaps more anguish than delight in many teaching contexts. Over the last ten years, the international business had four major influences that had an impact on the teaching and learning of business English. This has had a huge impact on the teaching of business English in terms of teachers needing to have more than just knowledge of basic business vocabulary and grammar. Effective communication can be achieved when we are aware of how people from different countries and with different levels of English communicate globally, and how globalization has changed the business practices on the international stage.*

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The last ten years have witnessed the rapid development of the world of business along with an explosion of interest in globalization, global issues, and global education in every area of our lives. Due to recent developments in communication and technology, as the world in general and especially the world of business has become smaller, international business is done more quickly, easily and effectively. We live in a world in which the economic bases have shifted, new economic houses have emerged, and new markets have opened. The world has been globalized and the face of today's international business has a totally new complexion.

As far as teaching and learning business English is concerned, the situation described above, having to deal with the internalization of business, has led to significant changes in both what we teach and how we teach it.

Regarding the teaching profession, and especially the English teaching profession, this can be documented in the journals and conference programs of international English teaching organizations such as TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) and IATEFL (the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language). It is interesting to analyze the result of a survey of teachers in over 110 countries, survey published by the English Teaching Professional magazine, where they had to give their opinions on the future of business English language teaching. 67% percent of teachers thought that, over the next ten years, we would witness an increase in the importance of English as a global language and over 80% thought that the number of students would increase accordingly. Moreover, today's business English students have different needs and expectations of what they learn and how they learn.

## **The changing face of the international business**

Over the last ten years, the international business had four major influences that had an impact on the teaching and learning of business English.

### **1. Changing technology**

Generally speaking, the field of technology has developed significantly, and particularly, the field of communications which now permit us to connect with people all over the world in just a few

seconds. Financial transactions are done at a push of a button and people are able to communicate quickly and easily due to the huge development in technology.

## **2. New powerhouse economies**

The second major influence has been the emergence of new powerhouse economies, such as China, India, and Russia, leading to a shift in the economic bases. Ten years ago, there were some other leaders in terms of manufacturing, quality and efficiency. Nowadays, the above mentioned countries provide goods more cost effectively due to cheaper raw materials and labor force.

## **3. New markets**

The third major influence is the emergence of new markets. The collapse of the communist Soviet block has led to the appearance of new markets in Eastern Europe having consumers hungry for new products.

## **4. The financial sector**

The financial and commodities markets' internalization have had a great influence on our lives. Having to deal with open markets, the economic exchanges in financial goods and commodities have become freer and more dynamic after many years in which unparallel global wealth has been created. However, this has also had a negative effect whereby crises in one country, now has a major impact on the economies of others. No matter of it is positive or negative today's business world is more closely joined together through the international exchange of financial goods and services.

## **The impact on what we teach**

All these four changes have meant that business people are more likely to be dealing with a wide range of different countries, different cultures, and different ways of expressing and interpreting things. This has had a huge impact on the teaching of business English in terms of teachers needing to have more than just knowledge of basic business vocabulary and grammar. Effective communication can be achieved when we are aware of how people from different countries and with different levels of English communicate globally, and how globalization has changed the business practices on the international stage.

## **Vocabulary – a constantly changing area**

The English language is notoriously fast in adapting to the changing world. New words enter English from every area of life where they describe the changes and developments that take place from day to day. Being a living language, English is continuously developing, changing constantly, sometimes even more quickly than lexicographers can keep pace with. English grows through the acquisition of new words, coming from many sources such as: other languages (e.g. *damame*, *pierogi*), retail (e.g. *man stand*, *size zero*) and changes that come from how professionals do business (we will give lots of examples below). Often, this development of the English language is done when words that once were used in specific areas, for specific activities, now become part of everyday language. There is no other place where this is seen more than in the use of business vocabulary; while some words have become part of the everyday use; many words apply to specific occupations or business practices.

Professional English teachers know that it is a challenge to keep track of and explain new business vocabulary. So, what are these new words? How do we find them? How do we evaluate them? Risking to be predictable, some of these words are impossible to avoid: *credit crunch* is a good example in this respect. But did you know that *credit crunch* is not really a newly minted term? Economists first coined this term more than a decade ago, in order to describe a downturn in the Japanese economy, but have become widely used in the last year or so to describe the

current global slowdown. This example shows us that what words are considered to be new doesn't necessarily mean that they are brand new to the language, but that they are newly important to native speakers and this professional English teachers and students.

But what makes the vocabulary of the English language develop? Being a living language, the current economic, social and cultural climate makes our vocabulary expand, making us learn terms that were previously known only by a handful of specialists. The recent world financial crises have also brought subject-specific words into the public domain. As an example, we will mention *sub-prime mortgages*, *toxic debt*, *derivatives*, *foreclosures* and a very specific sense of *correction*. Just a year ago, who would know what these words were. But, these are not new words to the English language.

Although it dominates the headlines of the newspapers, the current global economic situation does not represent the only source of new words for business English teachers and students. Changes in environmental issues and technology throw up new words on almost daily basis, and it is extremely difficult for us to keep up with these.

### **Technology – a rich area for new language**

Perhaps the biggest area of change is in technology and particularly the Internet as new methods of communicating and sharing information develop and gain more and more popularity. During this last decade, we witnessed the way in which technology muscled its way onto the teaching scene amid a mixture of delight and anguish – perhaps more anguish than delight in many teaching contexts.

It is fascinating to see how adaptable the English language is. In the following lines we will give a few examples in order to illustrate this. For several years now, **Facebook** and **Google** have been around and dominate more and more our lives, and now they are used as verbs as well as nouns. An even newer socializing network on the web is **Twitter**, perhaps while you are out and have a **dongle** plugged into your laptop. Marketing departments look for increased web traffic and many companies use social networking sites in order to launch and promote their products; so if you want to spread something around on the Web, **go viral**. We all know that the concept of **Web 2.0** has been around for several years, but nowadays the concept **2.0** is being used in other ways. As an example, we've met '**management 2.0**' in order to describe the future generation of business managers. And while we download applications for our computers, I-phones, I-pads, and so on, they are now often simply called **apps**. Finally, have you seen the acronym **picnic**? It stands for 'problem in chair, not in computer'.

Taking into consideration the few examples given above, we come to the conclusion that business English teachers need to constantly update his/her business vocabulary knowledge.

### **Grammar versus lexis**

The shift in emphasis from a grammar based methodology to a lexical one represents another area to look at. We cannot claim that there is one, homogenous business English today, as it is said that half the business English spoken at any time is between two non-native speakers. So, there are many 'Englishes' spoken by people of different countries and of different cultures. Of course, this has always been the case, as we all know the existing differences between British English, American English and Australian English. However, today this list can be completed with the appearance of a number of rather new 'Englishes', such as Chinese English, Indian English, Japanese English, Nigerian English, and so on. Moreover, if we take into consideration the increasing need for speed in modern business, the teaching of business English shifts its emphasis from complex and grammar-heavy ideas of correctness to fast and effective communication. Therefore, a new trend in teaching business English focuses on a more lexical approach, teaching widely and easily understood standard phrases, rather than straight grammar. These phrases are called 'functional', as they serve a function of business and communication.

In order to be clearer, let's give an example of a sentence commonly found in e-mails: "We would be grateful if you could send us the leaflet until Friday." From the grammatical point of view, we have to deal here with a tricky construction: this is the Second Type of Conditional Sentences, that is If + Past Participle Clause, with a 'would' clause, complicated further by the fact that the past participle in this case is a modal verb, followed by a verb in the present participle. Such grammatical constructions are taught at an intermediary level or above, in a general English course. However, looking at this sentence as a lexical item with a function, we could simplify a lot this sentence, saying: 'Please send us the leaflet until Friday.' Thus, a sentence having a difficult grammatical construction has become a phrase easy to understand and used by an Elementary level student.

Of course, this does not mean that grammar is totally absent from modern business English classes, but it means that teachers are required to have a deeper awareness of the needs of the students and of the necessities of nowadays business world. But we also need to focus on what level the students communicate; for example, there is a huge difference between students who communicate, on a daily basis, with international clients through e-mail, and students who have to write vast reports to their native speaker boss. We are talking here about a shift to an approach based on business skills, along with a shift in focus from a grammatical notion of language to a more practical, functional lexical one. Basically, it is a change in emphasis to a more skills-based approach. Of course, the skills of listening, speaking, writing, and reading have always represented a major point in our English classes, but nowadays, English teachers are expected to be able to train business students in soft skills, necessary to perform work functions such as business communication, negotiations, meetings, presentations, etc. If we think of presentations, the necessary language used in this field is not the only 'equipment' provided by today's business English teachers. It is needed to give suggestions regarding the Power Point presentation, structuring of the presentation, and also body language. These are regarded as 'extra-linguistic' skills. But still, the emphasis is on fast and effective communication, having as a basis the functional, lexical language. The message you want to send will be clearly, quickly, and easily understood if you use the correct lexical structures, the proper quantity of information in your Power Point presentation and the correct body language.

### **The importance of cultural awareness**

Living in a globalised world and having to deal with people from all over the world, business students have to be trained to deal with a wide range of nationalities, they need to learn what to expect and how to behave. Although English has been acknowledged as the international language of business, there isn't yet standardized and generally accepted business etiquette. In order for a business English course to be complete, there has to contain some references to cultural differences. In this respect, we have to mention that while Asian students of business English are learning how to shake hands properly, in a firm manner, their counterparts in the opposite part of the world are probably learning how to exchange different currencies properly. Modern business English textbooks take into consideration the global economical environment in which we function, and the topics these books use have changed, using more and more references to issues such as emerging economies, globalization, cultural differences, and so on. A more up to date vocabulary along with practical business skills can be found now alongside the traditional grammar and standard skill exercises. We cannot forget also the huge increase in the use of case studies, as they give the students the opportunity to get in touch with real situations of business practice, and to use their business skills in realistic contexts. All of these textbooks focus on fast and effective communication between people of different cultures and languages and not necessarily native speaker countries.

### **The impact on how students learn**

Our lives today differ significantly from the lives of our grandparents or even our parents and the recent years, along with all the changes that have taken place in every domain of our lives, have witnessed major changes in how business English students want to learn. We all know that the emphasis is on the content of the course, as well as on the length of it and on the flexibility in terms of time. An increasing number of people need to study English at different levels, for different reasons, however, what students need and what employers and Human Resources Department representatives want is not always the same thing. Our working lives have altered dramatically, perhaps due to the changes in the way business is done nowadays at an international level. Paradoxically, the increase in the speed of work did not lead to less time spent at work, and there has been a notably global shift towards longer working days and longer hours spent in offices.

The need for flexibility has a great impact on how students want to study and the great innovations in the field of technology led to the possibility of students to study at home via the Internet alongside with the face-to-face classes, in the so called 'blended-learning' courses. Taking into consideration the rapid changes in the field of technology, it is very possible that in ten years time, our children won't have books from which to read and learn, but I-pads that will successfully take the place of the traditional book.

Students are more and more aware of the need for studying business English. Business Spotlight has published the results of an international study of 25,000 business people, and found out that 90% of them felt that English was either critical or important in their work. However, only 9% of the respondents considered that their level of English was good enough to efficiently conduct their businesses. Thus, there are now more and more people willing to study business English at different levels, meaning that our students want more focused and interesting courses that meet their requirements, leading to a fast progress and to the possibility of instantly putting into practice the things they learn.

Both students and teachers should analyze carefully why students learn business English, in order to be able to create a balance between effective communication and accuracy. Another major aspect is linked to the atmosphere in the class that has to be cooperative and friendly so as to eradicate the students' fear of failing and the teachers need to ensure they have the requisite cultural knowledge and soft skills as well as the necessary language to do this.

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