COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS ENGLISH – NEW CONTEXTS AND NEW APPROACHES IN TEACHING IT

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Abstract: *The reflection of time in teaching Business English is definitely an immense one, as language is about communication and the development of learning it, walks hand in hand with the societies which give rise to it. What does this mean? Being human activities, both teaching and learning a foreign language are as well social as they are linguistic. The development of the societies led to an unbelievable technological development which comes as an aid in the process of teaching and learning Business English. Among some other factors, the gradual economic globalization has led to a great demand on teaching English for specific purposes, as part of English Language Teaching. Being widely used in a globally connected world, the importance of Business English is increasing more and more, as the market is dominated by multinational companies which need their staff to be fluent in English. Thus, teachers face the need of keeping the pace with the fast-developing technological world, try to find new methods of boosting the teaching process. Moreover, teaching Business English has already developed its own methodology, involving specific language, specific types of communication in a certain context, as it is designed to meet the exact needs of the learners. The general term of Business English is centered on the appropriate language, approaching it in terms of vocabulary, grammar, case study, and discourse. The goal of all the persons involved in this complex process is to create users of the language who communicate effectively, in correspondence as well as in face to face situations. The present paper approaches new ideas, new methods that can be put into practice in the process of teaching Business English. The topics of the Business English include business phrases, terms of sale, advertising, marketing, tourism, management – all these requiring the teacher's ability to select, develop, combine the material in order to boost the results of the students involved in the process of learning.*

1. Introduction

Due to the development of the two most important English-speaking countries in the world, The United States of America and the United Kingdom, as well as a consequence of globalization, English has become the lingua franca, the common language of the international communication, in all the fields of life. In 1996, Richards claimed that the lingua franca 'is originated in the Mediterranean region in the Middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds.

Beginning with those days, English has become the main means of communication between different linguistic groups in a multilingual speech community. The development of a common language of communication has appeared along with the necessity of carrying out different commercial activities and trading between different parts of the world. Along with the development of the commercial activities, the necessity of developing a common language started to be considered as a key factor, so people all over the world started learning English and started speaking it fluently. This is the way English has become the common language of the international trade.

2. Literature review

The development of life, in general, has brought about another great demand, in another aspect regarding English Language Teaching, that of teaching English for Specific Purposes. In other words, the preparation of the students to communicate effectively in different domains of activity has come as a result of the needs analysis. We all know that communication differs from one field to another, depending on the field of activity and the work situation. Consequently, we have English for Science, English for Law, English for Politics, English for Agriculture, Business English, so on and so forth, all these forming the family of English for Specific Purposes. Many years ago, teachers all over the world were asking themselves what the characteristics of the language the students needed in order to succeed were and what the best methods available for answering the question were. Thus, the advocates of English for Specific Purposes have come to the conclusion that the curricula should be based on accurate, systematic and empirical measures of the tasks students must perform after graduating faculty and also measures of their needs. In 2002 Savignon argues that *"a language for a purpose means the use of English for real and immediate communicative purposes. "In* other words, students need to acquire knowledge of English not for the sake of having general education but knowledge based on needs analysis, accuracy and real-life situations.

As we have mentioned above the cultural background plays an important role in the educational process and in communication in business. In order to understand cultural variations, and their importance in teaching Business English Communication, Goddard and Wierzbicka say that *'there are differences in values, communication styles, traditions and behaviors and we must understand this if we want to be successful.'* People coming from different cultural backgrounds will always act differently and these variations can affect negotiation, customer relations, teamwork, etc.

There are several cultural differences in Business Communication, among which we mention:

- Direct Communication is clear, straightforward, saying exactly what they mean (e.g. the Netherlands, Germany) while Indirect Communication use more subtle, polite ways of expressing opinion, in order to avoid conflict (e.g. Middle East, China, Japan);
- Levels of formality: there are formal cultures which expect respectful titles, well structured business interactions based on polite language (e.g.

France) while informal cultures which prefer relaxed conversations, having first-name basis;
- Hierarchical and egalitarian cultures: in the hierarchical cultures, decisions are made by the senior leaders and respect is demanded (e.g. Germany, China) whereas in the egalitarian cultures, input from all the employees is valued (e.g. Sweden, Denmark);
- Time orientated cultures: monochronic cultures value punctuality and deadlines, being based on the saying *Time is money!* (e.g. Germany) whereas polychronic cultures are more flexible and relationships are prioritized over scheduled which are strict (e.g. Midde East, Latin America).

3. Business English Communication- definition

Communication in Business English is defined as the exchange of information, ideas and messages, whether within an organization or outside of an organization, in a professional context. There are several types of communication in Business English, according to the way it is provided, we have verbal (spoken interactions, presentations, meetings, phone calls, etc), written (emails, reports, contracts, proposals, etc) and non-verbal communication (body language, voice tone and facial expressions), all of these having as a final target, the efficient operation of the business. Why is it important to learn how to communicate in business English? The answer is based on the benefits good communication can provide:
- It ensures a clear understanding of the tasks of the persons involved in the process and the goals of the process;
- It increases efficiency, effectiveness and productivity;
- It ensures a strong relationship between the employees and employers, the employees and the clients and within the employees in the company;
- Teamwork and collaboration is strongly enhanced by good communication;
- It enhances problem-solving and decision-making;

4. General aspects on teaching Business English Communication

As we have mentioned above Business English is largely used in international trade and it is one of the examples of the English language for a Specific Purpose. During the last years, Business English has become increasingly important and the employers have become more and more aware of the fact that their staff need to be fluent users of this language. But how can we, teachers, offer courses that have as result students who are able to use Business English fluently? Teaching Business English Communication involves more than teaching language skills. The teachers must take into consideration aspects like business-specific vocabulary, professional etiquette, and cross-cultural communication. The goal of every Business English course is to make the students communicate effectively in a business environment, regardless the means of communication: in correspondence, face to face meetings or other methods. The term Business English or English for Business Purposes shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, selection of materials, and the design of the course. Just like the other varieties of ESP, Business English is not a different kind of language

but rather a branch of the English language on the whole. Therefore, as Moeller, A. K., Ketsman, O., Masmaliyeva, L. say *'a course of Business English must include topics related to Business communication, whether written or spoken, advertising, marketing, management, accounting, human resources, and so on and so forth'.* Thus, teaching Business English requires the teacher to be aware of the subject matter and of the English language teaching skill. At this stage, the teacher's role is to combine the two fields mentioned above. The stress should not be put just on grammatical elements but also on cultural issues as well as on the functions of the language. The strategies on problem solving, the improvement of the analytical skills, the strengthening of the grammatical and lexical competences should intermingle in order for the students to become fluent users of Business English. Moreover, the greatest challenge for the teachers is to keep the pace with the rapidly changing language, to be able to comprehend the fact that the language changes very fast and there is huge need to eliminate the gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language spoken by natives and the language spoken in professional environment. When teaching Business English, another important aspect is the students' age as they are already adults so the motivation of going through all the learning stages differs significantly from those ones who are in secondary schools and even high schools. However, there is always a certain need to learn English and the fact that the students are aware of their needs give them the necessary support and determination to fulfil them. As Hutchinson says, *'a mutual agreement between the student and the teacher is necessary which includes gathering important information such as purpose, content area, place and time of prospective language use, etc'.* Every teacher must have a certain level of flexibility when teaching students, as the educational process may suffer changes and all the modifications need some time to be implemented. Changes in the educational process may bring about chaos if the teacher does not have long-term control over the whole course.

5. Teaching Business English Communication today

The development of the technology at hand has brought about a change in teaching Business English Communication, meaning that new workplace demands and the changes in the ways professionals interact globally have given rise to new trends and tendencies.

Thus, we can mention some of the new tendencies that appeared along with the appearance of the Artificial Intelligence. According to Zhang, J., Li, Fei *'teachers can easily create* **virtual business simulations** *which can provide students real-life business scenarios'.* Another trend worth mentioning is the **task-based learning** which goes hand in hand with **scenario-based learning** where the lessons focus on real workplace situations where students have to negotiate, have to solve problems and have to make decisions. Moreover, teachers need to put emphasis on **intercultural communication** where students are provided business environments in which handling cultural differences is essential. **Business-task based games** where workplace scenarios are stimulated can also enhance learning Business English Communication. **Writing ethical business emails and reports** can also be appreciated by the students and can provide them useful tasks in developing Business English Communication.

5.1. Teaching Business English Communication strategies
Researchers have come to the conclusion that effective communication is essential for the success of companies in today's globalized world. Teachers must have innovative strategies that enhance the learner's practical skills and confidence. Research shown that the most efficient strategy for teaching Business English communication is the blended approach that integrates both theory and practical applications, depending on the learner's needs, learning styles and industry requirements. By providing the students with authentic materials, students read, see, and feel real language purposefully, capturing multiple nuances of a word, phrase or collocation that cannot be otherwise be introduced and recorded. Kustec, A. says that *'Words reflect the culture in which the language is spoken and do not always capture the meaning associated with the concept.'* Furthermore, Jiang Y, Ruan X, Feng Z, Jiang P. say that *'…every person possesses his or her mental model of the way things are supposed to look, that is developed through interaction with the system.'* This mental model is not a universal thing, differing from person to person and from culture to culture. Things can look and sound differently in another culture and this can create a sense of confusion and frustration. In order to avoid the sense of confusion and frustration, students must be provided with appropriate materials. We suggest the following strategies:

- **Task-Based Learning**

Research shows that language learning is more effective and efficient when students learn to communicate in real-life situations, exchanging information, expressing emotions and desires. Moreover, when students are given real company documents, reports and meeting minutes, this approach gives a greater desire to communicate using Business English.

- **Simulations of real-life Business Communication**

Students are given the chance of practicing in a safe environment when they face mock meetings, negotiations and interviews. This helps them a great deal to overcome the fear of speaking in front of a certain audience, building confidence and preparing students for professional success. On the other hand, discussions, debates and case study analysis give the students the chance to express their ideas in a free and way.

- **Cross-cultural Business Communication**

Students must be prepared for working in different cultural environments since multinational companies often hire employees from different cultures. This is a crucial aspect of international business. In this respect, students must be provided materials that teach cultural differences in meetings, in writing emails and also business etiquette. Role-playing for cross-cultural business scenarios, more exactly how to negotiate with different cultures is a much needed and extremely useful teaching strategy. Incorporating cross-cultural awareness into students' courses, teachers develop in students the ability to face global business environments in a more effective way and also their adaptability to different business environments.

5.2. Developing communication skills in the era of the Artificial Intelligence
There is no need to say that the increasing development of technology and the globalized market has led to the increasing need for good if not excellent communication in English. There are a lot of traditional ways to increase the students' ability to communicate in different business environments, however, as ChanLin, L.J. claims *'the appearance of the Artificial Intelligence as a viable aid in*

the field of language teaching, has represented a giant leap that just a few would have thought of, bringing new ideas and new opportunities to all aspects of the teaching/learning process'. A major and promising tool in the field of language acquisition has emerged, the new technological development enhancing the development of the students' communication skills. It has already been shown by Rusmiyanto, R., Huriati, N., Fitriani, N., Tyas, N., Rofi'i, A., & Sari, M. *'that the function of AI in the development of communication skills in Business English is an extremely important one and it has already gained a lot of strength.'* The strength comes from the fact that Artificial Intelligence can provide teachers with a lot of personalized and interactive learning activities which can have long-term effects for the communication abilities of the students. The appearance of machines, computers, and other artifacts having human-like intelligence has led to an enormous development in the field of language acquisition, being characterized by improvement in adaptability, decision-making and learning.

6. Conclusions

Over the last 10 years, due to globalization of the market, technological advancement and changing workplace dynamics, we have witnessed a continuous and significant evolution of Business English Communication. The appearance of digitalization and the impact of the remote work has given the opportunity of tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams to reshape the business interactions, requiring students who master clear and concise communication in Business English. Cultural awareness in communication has been highlighted by the global business interactions, where the people involved in businesses must understand cultural differences in business etiquette and negotiation styles. Hence, students in economics need to acquire strong Business English communication skills, master critical thinking and a large variety of language skills. Moreover, communication based on soft skills like active listening, persuasion and empathy along with the need of strong communication skills are needed in future employees. Students must be taught strong communication skills in order to build trust, manage conflicts and collaborate effectively, however, tone, clarity, and emotional intelligence are crucial variables that must be mastered by future employees, for avoiding misunderstandings in the globalized business landscape. The mastering of clear speech and engaging presentations, as well as visual communication skills are also important aspects that have to be mastered by future employees. For teachers, integrating cross-cultural training, virtual real-life situations and materials will enhance efficiency and will help them provide future employees that will be able to adapt successfully in the modern business environment.

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