

UDC-81

TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH – INTERCULTURAL MATTERS

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Address: 1, Chavchavdze Ave., 0218 Tbilisi, Georgia**Abstract**

The paper addresses the issue of the widely recognized role of intercultural matters while teaching Business English in 21st century . It is known that every time learners use Business English it is likely to be with someone from a different culture – they are involved in intercultural communication, thus they use specific language as well as certain techniques to get their message across. That is why they need some business communication skills along with Business English. The need of Intercultural Training is also emphasized and different approaches are discussed in this paper. In addition some key aspects in teaching Business English are analyzed: Sense of Purpose, Social Aspect, Clear Communication. Several approaches to identifying different dimensions as a method of analyzing and describing the nature of culture are discussed. This paper also deals with the significance of communicative competence. From the practical viewpoint two modern Business English books are mentioned, as they are well-tailored according Business English Students' needs and used by us in the teaching process. It is concluded that Intercultural training should be an integral part of the Business English teacher's job.

Keywords: *Business English, intercultural communication, business communication, Intercultural training, communicative competence.*

Even in the 21st century it seems that Business English (BE) is an area of **ESP** (English for Specific Purposes) that is relatively poorly researched. We are going to focus on some key aspects of Business English, based on years of working with various BE learners and modern works of field experts.

According to E. Frenco Business English is an umbrella term for a mixture of General English, Business English and ESP. ESP is a term often used to describe that language that is inaccessible to people who are not members of a particular language community, e.g. accountants use language of accounting (specific lexis) to talk about accounting matters (specific context).

According to M.Ellis and C.Johnson Business English must be seen in the overall context of ESP as it implies the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kind of communication in a specific context. However, Business English is different from other varieties of ESP as it is often a mix of **specific content** (e.g. particular job area or industry) and **general context** (e.g. general ability to communicate more effectively).

Every day millions of people all over the world use English in their business activities. They use Business English in different fields, e.g. commerce, finance, industry, service, etc and different contexts, e.g. in negotiations, cooperation, conflict resolutions – Business English is communication with other people within specific context.

Business people use specific language as well as certain techniques to get their message across. That is why they need some business communication skills together with Business English.

The English used in international business in 21st century is not necessarily the same English that native speakers use. It is *Lingua Franca*. We can even call it a new type of English which has

developed and is developing to meet the needs of its users. The issue is that people whose first language is English (Native speakers) do not necessarily speak that language (Business English). At the same time we can/should teach learners according their aims, as they need to be able to use English successfully across a range of different culture and alongside a range of different business skills, and in a wide variety of contexts, and with a wide variety of people in interaction (some of whom may not speak or write particularly good English themselves). Our students need English to do business, not just to talk about business.

M. Ellis and C. Johnson give us their own understanding of what BE is. Among many others, we would like to focus on *Sense of Purpose*, *Social Aspect* and *Clear Communication*.

The most important characteristics of exchanges in business meetings, telephone calls and discussions is a *Sense of Purpose*. Language is used to achieve an end and is successful if there is a successful outcome of the business transaction or event.

Another important point is *Social aspect* – international business people have a need to make contact with others whom they have never met before, or know but not very well. Meeting are often very short, because business people are always short of time. There is a need for an internationally accepted way of doing things so that people from different cultures and different mother tongues can quickly and successfully interact and feel comfortable with one another.

One more key point is need of *Clear Communication* – it is very essential that information to be conveyed with minimum risk of misunderstanding, because ambiguity can cause different problems in the future. As it is known that business people around the world conduct business meetings in English even though English may be a foreign language to all parties. The language they use will not be rich in vocabulary and will not be culture-bound compared with the language used by native speakers. The matter is that businesspeople do not always need to know complex structure of grammar and idioms.

We, as teachers, aim to teach appropriate language and develop learners' understanding of the role that culture plays in communication. This is called "**Intercultural Training**". Every time one of our learners uses English it is likely to be with someone from a different culture, be at different national culture or a culturally different organization.

There are two ways of thinking about what it can achieve. The first is called "*dealing with diversity*" or "*culture-general*" *approach*, encourages learners to understand what culture is, gain awareness of how their own culture works, and appreciate that the way they do things is not necessarily the only way. The idea is to break down prejudices, look at the pros and cons of stereotyping, and to recognize that people have points of view that are as valid as your own. The aim is to provide learners with strategies that they can use to cope with diversity, and ultimately to create value of that diversity.

The second approach focuses on preparing people to work with *specific cultures/contexts* and is often called *culture-specific training*. Sometimes learners will only need to deal with one or two cultures. This is typical for expatriates who are abroad for a period of time, and need some understanding about how a specific culture works, and what behaviour is or is not acceptable.

There are several approaches to identifying different dimensions as a method of analyzing and describing the nature of culture. One of them is *High context* vs *Low Context*, e.g. in a high context culture members use the context itself as means of communication. Often they use non-verbal

behaviour, value long term relationships, and work with spoken, rather than written agreements. In low context cultures, things need to be communicated much more explicitly – people often appear direct and dislike ambiguity.

Another dimension is *time*. In *monochronic* cultures, time is seen as linear, with one event following another. Members of *polychronic* cultures, on the other hand, are able to manage different activities at once.

One more dimension is *Power distance* – this refers to the distance or equality between individuals in a hierarchy. In a low-power distance culture people find it easy to approach their leaders to discuss issues, and even to criticize them. In a high-power distance culture the opposite happens. Subordinates are likely to do what they are told and there is little discussion.

Researchers also speak about dimension of *Masculinity vs Femininity*. In masculine cultures achievement is often measured in terms of power and wealth, and emphasis placed on work goals and assertiveness. Feminine cultures see personal goals, human contact and relationship building as more valuable.

In order intercultural training be successful in their classrooms, teachers must also consider the notion of communicative competence: *grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence*. Perhaps the most influential models have been based on work done by Canale and Swain in the 1970s. The first is *grammatical* competence which refers to the Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence – accuracy in performance. The second competence deals with *social rules* of language usage, culture-specific context embedding the norms, values, beliefs and behaviour patterns of a culture. Next comes *discourse competence* which is the ability to deal with the extended use of language in context. The last is *strategic competence*, which is defined as the ability to cope with an authentic communicative situation (C. Alptekin, 2002).

E. Frendo divides communicative competence into *linguistic, discourse, intercultural* competencies. Linguistic competence includes *lexis* (words and patterns of words) and its relationship with *grammar* (the way the words and patterns of words). Discourse competence deals with interaction between speakers, also register, genre. Intercultural competence deals with different attitudes, behaviour, beliefs and values. It is influenced by a multitude factors including environment, gender, family, age, ethics. It is arguable whether it is learned or inherited through genes. Culture is manifested in interaction between people and is continually changing. the problem is that cultural differences are not always obvious. E. Frendo gives us the *Iceberg model* to demonstrate how much of culture is hidden. He also talks about *National* culture (politically bounded nation state), which is not the same as *Ethnicity* (groups having the same language, history, religion or race); **Organizational or corporate** culture (specific behaviours and values established in organizations). *Professions* also have their own distinct cultures (e.g. a CEO of Georgian company may share many values of other employees in the same organization, but in some ways has more in common with his counterpart in an Italian company than, say, a secretary in the other Georgian firm).

Stereotypes are generalization which are often used to simplify and categorize other cultures and people in those cultures. The major problem here is that stereotypes do not allow for exceptions to the norm, which is the wrong approach. And lastly intercultural competence includes the ability to deal with and be sensitive to differences in how other cultures do things. From a business point of view, the aim might even be to recognize and utilize those differences in order to create something which adds value for the business or its customers.

Considering all these when moving from theory to practice, among many others we can refer to two modern books in Business English: “**Market Leader**” (Longman, 2008) and “**The Business**” (Macmillan, 2009) which are used by us with Adult learners at Universities as well as Language Centres in Georgia.

The objective of “The Business” is “to help you learn two things: how to do business in English and the language you need to do it”. The modules of Student’s book are: about business, grammar, vocabulary, management skills, writing and case study. Management skills and Case study modules are the core parts for intercultural training. With management skills learners can develop important skills and techniques together with relevant language. Case studies provide an opportunity to apply all the language, skills and ideas of the covered book unit. Also they present authentic intercultural problem-solving situations similar to those in real business.

As for “Market Leader”, it has been developed in association with the *Financial Times*, of the world’s leading sources of professional information to ensure the maximum range and authenticity of business content. Due to its international coverage the *Financial Times* has been a rich source of business information. The strong task-based approach of this book encourages students to use their own experience in order to maximize involvement and learning. A typical unit sections are: Starting up, Vocabulary, Reading, listening, language focus, skills, case study. Here in terms of intercultural training we can focus on Skills and Case Study sections. Skills section helps learners to develop their communication skills in the key business areas of presentations, meeting, negotiations, telephoning and social English. Case studies are based on realistic business problems or situations and learners can use the language and communication skills they have acquired while working through the unit.

To sum up we can say that language of BE depends on the general and specific contexts and communication skills play a major role.

We admit a significant role of communicative competence in learning process and that there are many different ways to approach intercultural issues. We discussed theory that culture can be analyzed using a number of different dimensions.

Intercultural training should be an integral part of the Business English teacher’s job as business English learners will use the language to communicate in an intercultural setting. We can improve our learners’ intercultural competence by using various activities to facilitate understanding of their own culture, increase their awareness of cultural differences and analyze critical incidents.

And finally - Business English is far more than talking about business – it is about communicating and doing business in English.

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