

TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH – FROM FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO BASIC SKILL REQUIRED BY THE GLOBAL MARKET

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Abstract: *Market globalization and technological advances in information technologies are the driving forces that bring about substantial and fast changes on social and economic level. Higher education is becoming globalized together with the economy. In many countries extensive curriculum reforms are taking place. Together with the curriculum, the function of education in society has been changing. In the globalized world the nature of work and the skills and knowledge required are constantly changing opening doors to a concept of life-long learning. Being the most prevalent language in international business, English has become an integral and mandatory course of any business school preparing students for their future job careers. In this paper we have tried to illustrate how changes on the global social and economic level raise the demand for Business English learning at business studies imposing the need for tailor-made Business English courses. This paper highlights new methods and approaches in Business English teaching evolved to meet the needs of the different world in which global English is learnt and used.*

Key words: *globalization, teaching, global English, Business English courses*

INTRODUCTION

Every day millions of people throughout the world use the English language in their business activities, thereby increasing the demand for Business English courses. There are many reasons why people learn English, but generally all these reasons have evolved around the need to communicate. However, Business English could be defined as communication with other people within the

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specific context which is determined by their professional life. Since English has become the predominant language in international business, their motivation to learn it thoroughly and communicate with it effectively is understandably high.

Market globalization and technological advances in information technologies have brought about substantial and fast changes on the social and economic levels. Education is becoming globalized together with the economy. In many countries, including Serbia, curriculum reforms are taking place. These reforms should respond to the increasing capability requirements which people need in order to be able to work in a global environment. Together with the curriculum, the function of education in society has been changing. In the past, the main aim of any educational process was to provide universal education. Nowadays, in a globalized world, a different model of education has emerged requiring as David Graddol (2006) points out “institutional flexibility, creativity and innovation and the management skills required to generate and cope with constant change”. In a globalized world the nature of work and the skills and knowledge required are constantly changing opening doors to a concept of life-long learning. In order to acquire new knowledge and specialist skills, students need generic learning skills which will help them change their focus of learning as the need appears. In this paper we have tried to highlight the importance of the concept of life-long learning through one of its segments, which is Business English Learning and Teaching.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE LEARNERS

The learners at the Business English courses are adults either still in full-time education preparing for a business career or with on-job experience. The former group has little or no experience of the business world. The aim of the Bologna Declaration, an agreement signed originally in 1999 now involving more than 45 countries, was to harmonize university education in Europe, using a common approach to levels and length of courses, ECTS credits, students' workload, etc. The primary goal of this standardization of university education was to facilitate greater mobility of students within Europe and to make European university education more attractive to students from non-European countries. However, it fostered the need for the use of English in teaching and learning since it makes it easier for students to carry out the whole or part of their undergraduate or postgraduate studies in another country. This has increased student motivation for English language learning.

The latter group, the job-experienced learners, do know their job requirements very well, and usually have strong motivation to learn firstly because they or their

companies pay for the course, and secondly, because their need to learn and use English is almost always associated with their achievements at work and possible promotion prospects.

TEACHING ENGLISH AND BEYOND

Since the new time require us to respond to new challenges and changes as quickly as possible by employing new knowledge and skills, the demands placed on the Business English teacher are ever increasing. The Business English teacher is not only required to be an expert in English language teaching, but to increase awareness of the needs and requirements of business people and the modern business world.

ESP literature suggests that the Business English teacher should primarily teach language and does not necessarily have to be an expert in any particular field of business [Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggy Jo St John, 1998]. What Business English teachers need is “to understand the interface between business principles and language” [Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998:70]. Above all, teaching should be based on mutual trust and care, and the teacher may find quite important developing a rapport with the students in order to respond to their needs in the best possible way. Teachers have to adapt to a particular teaching context and be willing to learn. This, however, can be much easier if the teacher understands what their students’ jobs involve and what motivates them to enroll in language course. At the same time, in addition to being learners, the students can also provide information and material – and even expertise. As Evan Frenco [2005:5] emphasized “business English teachers need to be able to make informed decisions about language and language learning. They also need credibility, professionalism and an awareness of the business world.”

In order to achieve the objectives of the course the Business English teacher must know who the students are and at what level their English is, as well as their educational and cultural background and degree of motivation, displaying an awareness and understanding of the different learning styles acquired prior to the Business English course enrolment.

Furthermore, the teacher must be aware of the syllabus and its content as well as of the requirements of any exams students are preparing for.

MATCHING LEARNERS NEEDS TO AIMS

Business English courses often require the teacher to adapt or develop materials to the specific needs of the learners in order to carry out the objectives and goals of the course. Appropriate material selection and development is a key aspect of effective pre-course and ongoing planning. In answering the question of how and with what to teach the course, the teacher can choose between using ready-made course books available on the market or collecting or developing materials and activities for using them. Either approach has its benefits and its shortcomings.

Language learning material refers to anything which is used by the teacher or learners to facilitate the teaching and learning of a language. Materials development is the process of planning by which a teacher creates units and lessons in order to carry out the goals and objectives of the course and of each lesson. Brian Tomlinson [2002:20] claims that “materials development refers to anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to exploit those sources in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake: in other words the supplying of information about and/or experience of the language in ways designed to promote language learning.

Traditionally, language teaching materials used in Business English classrooms presented teaching points, technical vocabulary or structures which relate to the development of particular language skills, because the target of the learning activity was mainly seen in terms of linguistic competence. Such knowledge was limited to the level of syntax without much reference to structures beyond the sentence. That was encouraged by a narrow definition of what the objectives of learning Business English actually are and by an incomplete understanding of what the learners themselves have to offer.

Nowadays, there are a huge number of different language teaching-learning publications designed for Business English courses available on the market. Since ready-made course books provide a basic framework to work with, there are many advantages to using them in Business English classroom. First, they save the teacher’s time necessary for lesson preparation. Developing materials from scratch for every lesson is time-consuming and may be quite impractical. Less experienced Business English teachers may find material development particularly difficult, especially if authentic and other job-related material is not available to them. Since modern course books for Business English teaching and learning are usually a part of a set that includes teachers’ resource books with

a lot of guidelines and resources, supplementary material, and audio and video resources, they may also provide an insight into the business world. Teachers who decide to use ready-made course books in a Business English classroom are also presented with a ready-made course content. This usually means that some, if not many, pedagogic decisions have already been taken for them as well as methodologies selected and readied for employment.

However, in many teaching situations course books could be considered to lag behind an understanding of the nature of language and of students' real linguistic and learning needs. In these situations, students should be offered materials that encourage them to provide contexts which are real and which come from their own experience [Ellis and Johnson, 1994]. This direct use of the learners' personal experience is very important no matter whether we teach professionals or pre-experienced students. If teachers are required to strictly stick to a course book they are not free to make decisions. On the other hand, the text is not the course. The course is more about what the teacher and students do with the text. As Kathleen Graves [2001: 27] explained "textbooks are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities and interests of the students in the course."

The learners may have very specific requirements which can also depend on their language learning background, previous learning habits as well as their cultural background. They may find important the following factors: layout, clear structure, relevance, regular progress check and revision sections, self-study opportunities, reference sections, entertainment, up-to-date content and authenticity [Frendo, 2005].

On the other hand, Business English teachers may have different requirements. Evaluating materials requires time before, during and after the course. However, having to use certain course books may cause the problem of having to deal with a text which does not meet students' needs or does not promote the teacher's view of the roles of learners and teachers [Graves, 2001]. Depending on the teacher's experience, requirements placed by the teacher in terms of a course book selection may include the following: the availability of teacher's guidance, the extra activities and supplementary material offered, ease of use and the time needed for preparation. Selection of a course book by a teacher may be modified and influenced by the teachers' learning background, their cultural background and the wider Business English course context.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that the Business English course is far more than talking about business or about language. It is about communication and doing business in English. Because of that, Business English courses have moved from mere language teaching into new fields of professional expertise, since the Business English teacher is required to respond to the much wider range of language environments. Those challenges lie in different parts of the Business English course outline. A number of different levels of planning and development are involved in developing a Business English course based on the aims and objectives that have been established for a language program. When deciding what material to use and what to do with it, the Business English teacher should also find out if the materials are effective in achieving the purpose of the course. It is generally believed that students learn in multiple ways. Thus a variety of materials and activities is necessary.

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PODUČAVANJE POSLOVNOG ENGLSKOG JEZIKA – OD KURSEVA JEZIKA DO OSNOVNE VEŠTINE KOJU ZAHTEVA GLOBALNO TRŽIŠTE

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Rezime: *Globalizacija tržišta i tehnološki napredak na polju informacionih tehnologija su osnovne pokretačke snage koje donose značajne i brze promene na društvenom i ekonomskom planu. Uporedo sa tim, visoko obrazovanje se takođe globalizuje. U mnogim zemljama, uključujući Srbiju, u toku su sveobuhvatne reforme kurikuluma. Sa izmenama kurikuluma menja se i funkcija obrazovanja u društvu. U globalizovanom svetu menja se priroda posla kao i veštine i znanja potrebna za obavljanje tog posla, čime se otvara prostor za novi koncept učenja definisan kao učenje za ceo život. Budući da engleski jezik kao jezik komunikacije prevladava u međunarodnom poslovanju, kursevi engleskog jezika postali su obavezni predmeti poslovnih studija na gotovo svim nivoima pripreme studenata za buduća zanimanja. U ovom članku pokušali smo da prikazemo kako promene na društvenom i ekonomskom nivou povećavaju tražnju za učenjem poslovnog engleskog jezika na poslovnim studijama i nameću potrebu pravljenja kurseva poslovnog engleskog jezika po meri studenata. U članku su predstavljene metode i pristupi u podučavanju poslovnog engleskog jezika koje pokušavaju da zadovolje potrebe globalnog konteksta u kojem se engleski jezik danas uči i koristi.*

Ključne reči: *globalizacija, podučavanje globalnog engleskog jezika, kursevi poslovnog engleskog jezika*

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