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PEDAGOGIC ISSUES FOR TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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The article dwells upon pedagogical issues for teaching Business English. Considered are the peculiarities of BE syllabus, which depends on the learners' needs; language proficiency and skills requirements for BE teachers, the balance of training time to be spent on input and output; feedback on learners' performance, flexibility of the trainer etc.

Introduction

Business English must be seen in the overall context of English for specific purposes (ESP), as it shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, course design, and materials selection and development which are common to all fields of work in ESP. However, Business English differs from other varieties of ESP in that it is often a mix of specific content (relating to a particular job area or industry, and general content (relating to general ability to communicate more effectively). We use the term "Business English" to cover the English that is taught to a wide range of professional people, and people still in full-time education preparing for a business career. Within this range we find people with commercial jobs, research jobs, technical jobs, as well as people working at management level.

Research and publications analysis

It should be mentioned, that Business English is an area of ESP that is relatively poorly researched. Linguistic analysis is more frequently based on the written forms of language such as business correspondence, articles in business journals and annual reports [1–3]. Only some kinds of analysis have been carried out with respect to the language of meetings and discussions [4].

Most manuals on Business English, which have been published in Ukraine and Russia recently [5–8] are devoted mainly to practical purposes of training business English.

Formulation of the article's purposes

As far as pedagogical issues for teaching business English are poorly researched, our article will be devoted to this problem. The purposes of the present article will be: to consider the Business English syllabus, identify the learner and find out what needs they are likely to have, language proficiency and skills requirements for business English teachers, communicative approach to teaching Business English, the balance of training time to be spent on input and output, feedback on learners' performance, flexibility of the trainer, etc.

Characteristics of the learners and their needs

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-experienced 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 aware of their language needs in terms of communicating in real-life business situations, and their expectations of language learning will be moulded by their experiences from school.

Job-experienced learners will also be influenced by their educational backgrounds, but they will, in most cases, have gained some practical experience of having to communicate on the job. This experience focuses their attention on their own shortcomings in terms of fluency, getting the message across, and being able to understand the people from other countries that they have to deal with. Our article will be devoted to job-experienced learners. One very important characteristic of Business English for this category of learners will be the need to be pragmatic. The practical use of the language will be more important than theoretical knowledge about the language. The objectives for the course and its content will be the product of a negotiating process between the learner and the trainer. The learning parameters are flexible and perhaps even vague, and it is difficult to assess in precise terms the success of training. Courses for job-experienced learners will differ in objectives, course content, and methodology – depending on the type of business the learners are involved in, their jobs and job requirements, the length of the course, and the structure of the learner group.

The first step in identifying the learner and finding out what needs they are likely to have is to look at the kind of jobs they are doing.

We draw distinction between three very broad job categories: managerial, technical, and secretarial positions.

A large proportion of those who seek language training because of the demands of their job are managers. It is mainly managers who work with international affairs and who therefore travel most and deal most with people from other countries in face-to-face situations. In terms of job skills senior managers, for example, will probably need: chairing meetings, participating in meetings, negotiating, giving formal presentations, and socializing – especially entertaining. As they are involved with the running of the company as a whole, senior managers will want to discuss global concepts such as the principles of management, the organization of the company, decision-making procedures, long-term planning, and defining the company image. Skills that are normally required by technical staff are: participating in meetings, giving presentations, describing and explaining or giving instructions to others. They are also likely to need to read technical manuals or specifications, reports, and sometimes contracts. Some may need to write some of these documents. Secretaries have the following needs: to be accurate, to use appropriate levels of politeness, and to know conventions and formulaic language. When dealing with visitors, they are likely to be performing definable roles: welcoming, offering hospitality, responding to requests, and perhaps describing the company. If they attend meetings, it will normally be to take minutes rather than to put forward their own ideas.

Business English training needs of the people within a company differ due to departmental differences. Let's consider accounts department. The need for English normally arises where the company is a multinational and financial reporting is required to be done in English. Information about accounting procedures may also be distributed to the subsidiaries in English. In this situation, accounts staff will need to know all the relevant accounting terms in English and will need to be able to read instructions about accounting procedures. Some may have to receive visitors from head office or from other subsidiaries and be able to explain aspects f their work. Staff dealing with payments may have to send letters in English to demand payment, or use English to telephone or fax to follow up problems. Senior staff and management will have to write reports in English, and will need to attend meetings with their counterparts from other subsidiaries, or with head office.

Trainers who teach English to accountants and accounts staff will require a basic knowledge of accounting procedures and accounting terms. Written documents outlining company accounting procedures, as well as examples of accounts, can

usually be obtained to help prepare for a specific course. It will be important to acquire a good dictionary of accounting terms.

Business learners use language in order to achieve precise objectives. They are likely to apply the same critical standards to language training and training materials as they do elsewhere in their business lives. They are often curious about the objectives of particular tasks. They will be critical of their own performance, and of that of the trainer. As the learning environment is highly influenced by this sense of purpose, materials, exercises, and activities which are selected for use in the classroom must acknowledge it.

The Business English syllabus

Businesspeople do not always need to know the full complexities of English grammar and idiom. Fine distinction in meaning (as are conveyed by some of the compound tenses, for example) 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.

The Business English syllabus is to be defined 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.

Language proficiency and skills requirements for Business English teachers

Business English teaching provides a chance to work with highly motivated learners who are often disciplined, intelligent, and dynamic. Besides, it involves more than simply teaching language. In Business English, there are highly specific goals and objectives which demand a tight control of the course plan and careful selection of materials and activities. And the last, Business English training may encompass professional skills as well as general language skills. These skills are taught in the context of a varied subject matter.

It is important to stress that the Business English trainer is primarily a language teacher. He or she does not need to be an expert in any particular business.

He or she is not teaching business strategies, nor good management practice, nor economic theory. It is the learners who have the specific content knowledge and who are able to bring that knowledge to the classroom. Even when working with pre-experience learners, it is not the language trainer's role to teach the subject matter. Although it is of great value to be able to talk intelligently to learners about their work, it is of greater importance that the trainer should be seen as an expert in presenting and explaining the language, and in diagnosing the learners' language problems. The language trainer's task is to train businesspeople to communicate in English about the subjects they are specialized in.

A good trainer will be able to work with a product manager, or a foreign exchange dealer with equal skill and effectiveness, and the key to that effectiveness is being able to ask the right questions and make good use of the answers, whether they come from the learners themselves or from another source such as books or company documents. It is important to focus on the systems, procedures, and products that are at the center of what the learner does in English, and to be able to deduce from this knowledge the language needs of each type of learner. The Business English trainer, therefore, needs to be informed about how language works. He or she will need to be able to identify the current language level of the learner and to select materials and set tasks that are appropriate in level as well as in content. Some trainers will also need to be able to set course objectives and devise course programmes, and to do this an indepth knowledge of the language system in terms of skills, functions, structures, and vocabulary will be essential.

More important than qualifications and a background in business is the right balance of personal skills. This is the ingredient that is common to all good Business English trainers. First, it is essential to have an outgoing personality, to like contact and interaction with a wide variety of people, and to be able to regard the less amiable learners as a challenge rather than a hindrance. A second skill is to be a good negotiator. Many job-experienced learners, particularly if they are managers, are used to dictating their own terms. However, a professional language trainer will know more about the best ways to teach a language than they do. It is important for the trainer to establish his or her credibility and professionalism so as to be able to discuss with the learners the best way to structure the course and agree the principles on which to work. This, in some cases, will require tact and diplomacy. A third, vitally important skill is to be curious and interested in all aspects of business.

One of the best ways for the trainer to "unlock the learners' motivation and learning potential' is to show that he or she can relate to the subjects that most concern the learners. It will be much easier to do this if the trainer is genuinely fascinated by the way in which companies work: systems, organization, procedures, marketing strategies, financial planning, problem-solving, new technical developments, and products. It is important to be able to relate to the learners and their needs and this is easier if the trainer understands what their jobs involve. Reaching a good understanding of the job means: first being able to ask intelligent questions; and second, being able to fit the new information into a familiar pattern.

What can a prospective trainer do to inform him or herself and to build up confidence in dealing with specialists? The first option is to read relevant material. This might include some textbooks: for example, the kinds of books used on Business Studies courses. For those working in a college or university, it will be important to find out what textbooks the students use on their special subject courses. It will not always be necessary to read the whole book, only to understand some of the basic concepts and viewpoints.

Magazines, journals, newspapers, and other kinds of literature are also important, and have the value of being more up-to-date and less theoretical than books. Dip into the *Financial Times* or *The Economist;* skim through the business pages of the national daily papers. Business English (like other varieties of ESP) involves a certain amount of specific terminology, and this is often frightening at first. Reading articles and books helps the new trainer to become familiar with some of the terminology and special expressions used in Business English.

In-company trainers should make sure that they are well-informed about the company where they work: that means reading the company literature such as brochures, annual reports, and product information.

In addition to printed material, TV and video material can be useful. Watching business programmes can extend a trainer's general knowledge and understanding of business topics. A number of training videos have been produced which are used by companies to train their staff in basic skills such as using the telephone, running meetings, giving presentations, and so on. These can be a useful way to gain knowledge about good business practices and to see in action the kinds of skills the learners need to develop in English.

One important way to learn about business is through working with knowledgeable Business

English learners, especially job-experienced learners. The teacher can often gain more insight into the workings of companies through asking questions and listening to the answers, than through books.

One of the main characteristics of Business English is the emphasis on performance – training learners to become operationally effective. The majority of business learners need to acquire: confidence and fluency in speaking; sufficient language accuracy to be able to communicate ideas without ambiguity; he or she should be able to follow the main ideas of fast, complex speech, clarify and check unclear information, adequately react to the utterances of others. In developing the skills mentioned above the role of the language trainer personality is of primary importance. If the trainer is an open and approachable person, it is more likely that the learners will feel confident and relaxed. They will be more likely to speak, and speaking will develop their fluency. Interaction can also be encouraged by not overcorrecting (drawing attention to every tiny mistake discourages people from speaking and also breaks up the flow of communication), by asking plenty of questions, and by giving people time to answer (interruptions also discourage the more diffident learners).It is important that the learners should not feel embarrassed if they do not know something. They should be encouraged to treat the trainer as a resource: to be open about their problems and to ask for help. When they ask questions, learners are practicing the vital skills of checking and clarifying information – skills they will frequently need in real business situations.

Some problems may arise, when the training needs within a group are too divergent. There may be differences in level or in job requirements, or it may be a question of strongly opposed personalities or different learning styles. If the problem is one of level, it is advisable to aim at the learners in the middle for most of the time. It may be possible to devote some extra time to helping the lower-level learners while the others are preparing something more difficult. Some tasks and activities allow for participation at different levels. For example, chairing a meeting is more challenging than being a participant, and it makes sense, therefore, to give the role of the chair to a higher – level member of the group. If the problem is one of different job requirements, it is advisable to focus on the common core of needs and not to try to address all the specific needs of individuals. Some activities will allow individuals to talk about their own interests – for example, interviews and presentations, and of course writing tasks.

Most important in Business English training is deciding on the balance of training time to be spent on input (introducing or recycling target language) and output (providing opportunities for practice and skills development). If a lot of time is spent on introducing long lists of words or expressions, on carefully explaining the finer details of a grammar point, or on the detailed reading in class of lengthy written texts, then the time left for practicing speaking will be much reduced. It is important to stress here that the amount of course time needed for input will be a small fraction of the whole. If the aim is to develop fluency and faster reaction, then the need for practice time will be greater.

It is also essential that learners should get helpful and constructive feedback on their performance, and this means the evaluation given by a trainer to a learner at the end of a task, during the course, or at the end of a course, focusing on the learner's strengths and weaknesses in language performance. The feedback should be on the task as a whole. Did they communicate effectively? Were they easy to understand? Did they manage to clarify misunderstandings? Only after that feedback has been given it is valuable to draw attention to specific language errors that may have contributed to lack of overall clarity.

To develop an efficient course, we need to select key components, appropriate materials, and relevant tasks and activities which will develop the learners and achieve the objectives. Success in learning can only come about if the learner is motivated. Making the course relevant to job or study needs is usually a good way to motivate the learner.

A wide range of training techniques may be used in the Business English classroom. Some ideas may be borrowed from management training – e.g. problem-solving, decision-making, and team-building tasks. Job-experienced learners will be given many opportunities to present and discuss aspects of their work. Role-plays are also commonly used.

Role plays in Business English teaching

Role plays have to be prepared in detail in advance (there are lots of ready-made ones to be found in books or management training materials. A ready – made role play must be carefully selected, taking into consideration the level and experience of the learners. It is important to avoid complicated situations with a lot of background data if time is short, if the learners' level is too low, or experience too limited. When preparing a role play it is advisable to take plenty of time to discuss it with the participants in detail: what they want to say, how they plan to back up their arguments, what they will

propose and so on. When role-playing meetings and negotiations, it is a good idea if, before the start, the participants are told that they must try to reach agreement. They could be reminded that a role play tries to imitate real life and that co-operation is nowadays seen as a more effective business strategy than aggression. If participants behave aggressively in the role play, this should be pointed out during interim feedback. The choice of a chairperson is vital to the success of a simulated meeting. The chairperson should be someone with a good command of language and a strong enough personality to be able to take control. He or she should also be a good listener and have good clarifying and summarizing skills. If no such person can be found in the group, the trainer might consider taking the role of the chair. The chairperson is responsible for keeping the meeting to its time limit, for bringing the group to a decision, and for opening and closing the meeting. The chair should also control the dominant speakers and should encourage the quiet participants to contribute. If he or she does not do so, this must be pointed out during the interim feedback.

If someone has failed to convey information accurately, or has not understood accurately, this may also provide a point of discussion, and the trainer can suggest how communication could be improved. Small language mistakes which are due to slips and which did not affect communication should be dwelt upon. It is unrealistic to expect learners to speak with 100 per cent accuracy during a role play: there will probably be an even higher rate of errors than normal, because the learners will have concentrated on communicating rather than on language accuracy. Errors which are due to lack of knowledge could be taken up and explained.

Vocabulary could be introduced where a word has been misused. Overall appraisal should focus on how well the learners communicated and how well they interacted with each other; there are the goals of every role play and simulation.

Conclusion

As Business English teaching develops in terms of diversity, richness, and depth, the demands placed on the teacher are ever increasing. The first requirement for any Business English trainer is to be an expert in language teaching; the second requirement is to develop awareness of the needs and concerns of businesspeople and to become flexible enough to respond to those needs.

Further investigations in this area may concern development of communication skills in business. In this connection working out of training programmes in meeting (negotiating, telephoning) skills based around certain procedurals steps, which can be used as a flexible guide for the practice sessions during the course, seems extremely interesting.

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Педагогічні аспекти викладання ділової англійської мови

Розглянуто педагогічні аспекти викладання ділової англійської мови. Проаналізовано особливості навчальної програми курсу, яка залежить від потреб тих, хто навчається. Особливу увагу приділено вимогам до професійних знань і умінь викладача та окремим аспектам викладання ділової англійської мови.

Т.А. Вакуленко

Педагогические аспекты преподавания делового английского языка

Рассмотрены педагогические аспекты преподавания делового английского языка. Проанализированы особенности учебной программы курса, которая зависит от потребностей обучающихся. Особое внимание уделено требованиям к профессиональным знаниям и умениям преподавателя и отдельным аспектам преподавания делового английского языка.