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ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AND ITS INTERCULTURAL CONSEQUENCES: APPLIED LINGUISTICS APPROACH

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Abstract: *The presented paper focuses on current approaches of applied linguistics with regard to intercultural communication in current business environment. Its shows the importance of practical approaches in English Studies in today global world which stresses pragmatism and practical scientific approaches. Current English Studies will thus have to prove their place in modern universities and intercultural communication courses arising from and supported by English Studies create a unique chance to prove that.*

Keywords: *applied linguistics, intercultural communication, business communication.*

1. Introduction

English as a Lingua Franca and as a global language are clear facts of today world; however, how does this simple fact influence intercultural communication in business communication still deserves our undivided attention. The objective of this paper is to show potential threats, pitfalls and opportunities of intercultural communication based in English Studies in international environment. Even though not everybody in the world speaks English, practically everybody is doing business on a more or less English basis (Crystal 2-3).

The source of business is clearly based on basic communication principles and forming of elementary contacts and their development is purely communicative. Business discourse thus leads to repeat business and therefore to increasing profit – business communication and any kind of social interaction in business environment desperately needs further investigation and research.

2. Applied linguistics and current English Studies

Both business discourse and business communication as academic disciplines within English Studies concentrate on text and its context (Louhiana-Salmien 305). New communication technologies and recent development of intercultural global business discourse presents current

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perspective in applied linguistics and I state that to retain the importance of the discipline in academic world we must analyse these specific trends because they dramatically have recently altered the scope of the communication and global communication environment.

Intercultural communication is one of the most progressive disciplines in our universities in the context of applied linguistics founded in modern curricula but also supported by such academic disciplines like management theory, psychology, rhetoric, sociology and discourse analysis – leading therefore to increasingly desired interdisciplinarity (Moran 36). Business discourse arising from multicultural and multilingual reality exists predominantly in the scope of English for Specific Purposes (widely known as ESP). The skills-based approach of the discipline in the late 90´s has even been reinforced by intensive academic enquiry in the recent years.

3. Modern approaches

Many European universities see the urge and have established intercultural communication in their curricula as a branch of applied linguistics, however, out of the scope of English Studies. At the beginning of the 21st century there were many dramatic and fundamental changes radically influencing business environment and business emerging from such environment. The changes were perpetuated by technological changes in communication channels and changes in corporate structure in the global world which influenced not only international companies but also small and medium enterprises without foreign capital but operating in the global market.

New communication technologies thus changed both the way of communication and organisational structures. Text-processing software and email communication dramatically altered the patterns of classic commercial correspondence of the previous decades. Radical dominance of email communication even over phone and personal contact has led to linguistic changes which are currently under way. Studying these new ways of information transfer in email communication, business reports and presentations needs deep academic attention, and therefore this urge to curricular change and highlighting the importance of applied linguistics with a rather changed scope.

Evident attempts to increase business effectiveness have recently led to increase in specialization, focus on core competencies and outsourcing and therefore on new methods of communicating ideas and information. Here, the academic discipline of intercultural studies has an inevitable place in modern curricula and universities can again be the centres of practical research leading to effectiveness of business communication and business as such. Improved and enhanced communication through applied linguistics courses will prove the importance of English Studies which have recently been challenged many times – they have been said to be impractical, obsolete and unrealistic.

4. English as a lingua franca

Globalization processes which are under way influence all communication aspects, but the most important is using of English language in all environments all over the world as a lingua franca in business, political, scientific and even cultural environment. English has simply become official corporate and institutional language used mostly by non-native speakers of English – Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF).

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English as a shared communication means, not only in intercultural communication and international business, will facilitate to show the inevitable place of English Studies which have lost their position in today practical, skills-oriented world which prefers pragmatic approaches and English Studies again have to prove, their fundamental role in academic world which – supported even by EU academic and scientific standards – promote practical scientific aims.

5. Intercultural communication courses in current curricula

Intercultural communication courses can lead to better understanding of ourselves and other people as they are always based on the language we use, and the discourse we use must be carefully studied and analysed to show how we tend "to group people together under simplistic labels, while not considering the implications of doing so" (Holliday 61). Everyday discourse thus creates potential problems and misunderstandings, therefore a rigorous analysis can help us to consider the implications it can have in our behaviour and communication patterns. Realising that, we could be better intercultural communicators and will be able to reflect and assess possible opportunities and threats of the current world.

Culture is always a dynamic and interactive process which must be studied by a process defamiliarization, "which takes us away from our comfortable, limited, commonly accepted and often unconsidered opinions about what everybody and everything is like and makes us more sensitive to the way that these opinions are formed and maintained. It alters us, to the ways that things which at first sight appear obvious and natural are actually the result of social action, social power or social tradition" (Alasuutari 35-36). We have to agree that "in the context of globalisation, intercultural communication has become ubiquitous in contemporary business communication and the importance of preparing business graduates for communication in the global village has become a truism" (Louhiana-Salmien 307).

There have always been attempts to find a language to act as a lingua franca – sometimes when communities traded with each other a simplified language was adopted, also known as a pidgin, usually a combination of English and local languages (Crystal 9). Crystal puts it aptly when he says that "the pressure to adopt a single lingua franca, to facilitate communication in international contexts, is considerable, the alternative being expensive and impracticable multi-way translation facilities" (10).

The measure to cut down the number of languages used in international bodies, companies and other institutions is purely utilitarian and practical – simply, to reduce the costs and increase the flexibility of all operations. General competence in English is growing all over the world and it is quickly becoming the language of information transfer on many levels: "the need for a global language is particularly appreciated by the international academic and business communities, and it is here that the adoption of a single lingua franca is most in evidence, both in lecture-rooms and board-rooms, as well as in thousands of individual contacts being made daily all over the globe" (10-11). This is the biggest opportunity for English studies – to facilitate such an endeavour.

International contexts and their growth is the source for a global language to increase quickly and efficiently. Living in a global village means that we have become more mobile, our communication is based on electronic data transfer and doing business worldwide not only in an isolated location.

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Crystal (12) sums it up clearly: "There are no precedents in human history for what happens to languages, in such circumstances of rapid change. There has never been a time when so many nations were needing to talk to each other so much. There has never been a time when so many people wished to travel to so many places. There has never been such a strain placed on the conventional resources of translating and interpreting. Never has the need for more widespread bilingualism been grater, to ease the burden placed on the professional few. And never has there been a more urgent need for a global village."

6. Conclusion

One of the most important challenges of today world is the fact that all our communication, not only business, is based on cross-cultural context. Development of intercultural communication skills is therefore one of the most important competencies for a modern student not only for business or English Studies but generally for anyone who potentially will have to work in the global environment. These courses not only teach us to be competent communicators in professional life but also better in everyday human encounters.

Intercultural communication within English Studies and applied linguistics can facilitate transfer of information and ideas of people who speak a different language and communicate their thoughts, ideas and feelings – the aim which is absolutely necessary in our information world.

By means of intercultural communication courses dialogues on various levels will be engaged and complexity of people´s cultural identity will prove to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage – we will respond to people according to how we find them not what we have heard about them. We will avoid easy answers about how these people are. We will appreciate each culture and its complexity, uniqueness and variations. And lastly, we will learn to build up clear notions what happens between us and others when we communicate – we will work out how to communicate as we go along (Holliday 11). I consider this skill to be the most important asset and objective of all applied linguists and English Studies as such.

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