TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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Abstract: *The use of English as the language for business has significantly increased over the last decades. Within the worldwide development of technology, science and communication, Business English has emerged as an important component of worldwide business and commerce. As a matter of course, great emphasis on the teaching and learning of business English has been laid. The teaching of business English has to take into account a range of elements such as needs analysis, communication needs, pedagogic needs and business needs in order to meet the learners' needs.*

Key words: *teaching, business English, needs.*

Throughout the years, English has become an international language, a lingua franca, being thought and learnt everywhere around the world. This increasing spread of the use of English, especially between non-native speakers, is one of the consequences of the fast development of the world economy and technology, of people's necessity to interact and communicate globally. English speakers use the language for a variety of purposes, for cross-cultural communication, for accessing and sharing information, for doing business etc. Given the great diversity of users of English and their various purposes in using the language, it is important to consider and determine the right approaches in teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes. As a matter of course, within the general concept of English as an International Language, a more restricted area has emerged, that of English for Specific Purposes where the reason for learning the language relates directly to what the learner needs to do in his/her vocation or job. "As English gathers momentum as the main language of international communication, it is perceived as the language of career opportunity, so the pressure grows for teaching to be more directly employment-related." (HARDING, 2007: 3) Furthermore, as the focus on the learner's needs increases, ESP is divided into English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes. At its turn, EOP is split into several branches: Navigational English, Business English, Technical English and so on. Every domain has its own linguistic identity, its specialized terminology used to communicate and interact in specific contexts. "[...] in ESP – English for Specific Purposes – the purpose for learning the language is paramount and relates directly to what the learner needs to do in their vocation or job." (HARDING, 2007: 6) Harding states that in all definitions of ESP two elements are axiomatic: the sense of purpose and the sense of vocation.

Business English, as part of the larger concept of English for Specific Purposes, refers to a wide range of fields such as: economics, management, marketing, finances etc. Generally speaking, business English is about specific language used to communicate in specific business contexts, and for business aims. It is used to socialize, travel, deal, analyze, buy, sell, predict, negotiate, market, advertise, produce, predict and so on and so forth. It uses the language of commerce, of industry, of finance, of providing services and goods and the list can be endless but, at the same time, it is not limited to the language that only appear in some special business environment. Business

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people need English to do business, not just to talk about business. They need to use the language effectively across a variety of different cultures and alongside a variety of different business skills, and in a wide range of business contexts, and with a wide range of interlocutors. Therefore, the teaching of business English has in view all these features and the fact that language is used to achieve an end. The learner's needs and his final aims are of great importance in teaching business English. So, in order to meet the learner's needs teachers have to take into account a range of elements such as needs analysis, communication needs, pedagogic needs and business needs.

Needs analysis

Finding out about and analyzing the needs of the learners is vital in business English teaching. When teaching a business English course, teachers need to gather a certain amount of information in the form of a needs analysis which will help them to determine where the learners are, in terms of communicative competence, and where they have to be to meet their business goals. Therefore, the trainer will collect and examine critically information about the learner's current level and the learner's target level of knowledge he needs to gain at the end of the teaching process. The difference between these two circumstances, the current and the target one, leads to the course design, and explains the choice of the syllabus, of various approaches, learning strategies and so on. Needs analysis is not just a mere data collection, but its main function lies in the interpretation and use of this data, offering the chance to focus on those areas which are relevant to the learner.

Referring to the nature of a needs analysis, Evan Frendo states that: "A needs analysis is unique to a specific training situation. There is no standard model of needs analysis, and there is no 'single best way' to do it. A needs analysis is not an objective exercise; it entails exercising judgment and finding compromises to make the best use of resources in a particular teaching context. It is about working with learners to decide on the best way forward." (FRENDO, 2008: 16) Moreover, needs analysis is not just an initial one-off activity, but it should be an ongoing process.

Communication needs

Various communication contexts directly lead to various communication needs. In order to determine the learner's communication needs, the teacher has to find out as much as possible about the different contexts and styles of discourse that the learner might engage in. For example, the learner may need to be able to negotiate with English-speaking clients, deal with enquiries or correspondence. For each different context a different style of discourse and terminology is required, and the teacher has to take into account this information when determining the target end.

So, the first step is the communication needs analysis for which a variety of tools can be used, such as questionnaires, interviews, direct observation and so on and so forth. Depending on the specific teaching context, standardized needs analysis forms can be used, followed by interviews and direct observation during lessons in order to gather further details. Here is a model of a standardized needs analysis form which may be tailored to suit different teaching contexts.

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NEEDS ANALYSYS FORM

Date:
First name:
Family name:
Occupation:
Telephone number:
Email:

Language learning history:

Current level of English:
□ elementary
□ pre-intermediate
□ intermediate
□ upper-intermediate □ advanced

How often do you use English?
□ daily
□ weekly
□ monthly
□ less often

What do you use English for:
□ introductions, welcoming a visitor
□ arranging schedules and appointments, making travel arrangements
□ interviewing
□ describing processes
□ dealing with clients
□ giving presentations
□ socializing with business partners
□ writing emails
□ speaking on the phone
□ taking part in meetings
□ reading technical materials
□ negotiating
□ correspondence
□ planning a meeting
□ travelling on business
□ making contacts
□ contracts
□ engaging in small talk

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My main priority is to:

Pedagogic needs

Pedagogic needs are related to the teaching context, and therefore can vary according to this. Anyway, there are three main aspects to take into account: the trainer's needs, the learner's needs, and the means to do the course. (FRENDO, 2008: 22)

The trainer's approach is determined by the result of the needs analysis, the learner's current level of knowledge and the final end they have to reach. However, the trainer's approach and methods are influenced to a great extent by his/her own style, experience, and needs.

On the other hand, learning success also depends on the learner's own learning style. "For example, we talk about learners being visual (they think in pictures and respond most readily to visual stimuli), auditory (they think in and respond most profoundly to sounds), and kinaesthetic (they think in terms of touch and smell and learn best when some kind of physical activity is taking place)." (FRENDO, 2008: 24)

Learning styles are as well influenced by the learner's culture. A relevant example may be given if we compare an Asian context with a Western one. While the former sees the trainer as an expert who has to provide the right answer and give instructions, the latter expects the trainer to act as a facilitator, to encourage learners' autonomy.

As for the means to do the course, the trainer has to identify what facilities, equipment, and materials are available and to design the course accordingly. For example, a course which includes audiovisual materials cannot be done without the appropriate devices. So, the trainer has to choose the materials for the course in accordance with the equipment he has in the classroom where the course is going to take place. A very good course book based on multimedia tools may prove useless if you don't have the appropriate equipment.

Business needs

Determining business needs and fully understanding the business situation where the learner will be using the language are of the greatest importance to the teaching of a business English course. As Frendo clearly explains, the needs of people working in the engineering department for example will be very different from those of people working in the financial department. "We will also need to understand the various business functions of those involved. If we are analyzing the engineering department, for example, its perspective will be very different from that of people in the financial department. […] The engineers who build mobile phones will have a very different perspective from the one we may have as users. They will be interested in materials, technical specifications, and so on. The financial people will be more interested in the last auditors' report, and next week's balance sheet." (FRENDO, 2008: 26) Consequently, each of them, be it engineer, accountant, etc., will need the

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appropriate language to act, interrelate in his target situation, according to his job requirements. Moreover, if the content of the course is designed according to the learner's interest then the teaching and learning process develop more effectively: "language users learn more effectively if programme content is relevant to their specific area of need or interest." (JOHNSON, 1989: 12)

Conclusions

During the last decades, business English has developed as one of the most significant areas of teaching English for Specific Purposes. A lot of attention and consideration have been given to the teaching of business English and many efforts have been made so that the teaching process may reach its main goal. Consequently, trainers have started to focus their efforts on meeting the learner's needs. Business English teaching is centered on the learner and his final needs so it has to take into account a range of elements, such as needs analysis, communication needs, pedagogical and business needs.

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