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ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ

ՕՏԱՐ ԼԵԶՈՒՆԵՐԸ ԲԱՐՁՐԱԳՈՒՅՆ ԳՊՐՈՑՈՒՄ

Գիտական աշխատությունների
ժողովածու

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համալսարանի ռոմանագերմանական
բանասիրության ֆակուլտետի խորհրդի կողմից

Խմբագրական կոլեգիա՝

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ON SOME PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING ESP TO ECONOMISTS

This paper aims to discuss some peculiarities of Business English Teaching (BET) in the light of ESP theories. ESP has been subject to criticisms ever since its introduction. Eckard criticizes the “set of philosophical and pedagogical implications” on which ESP is based, stating: “When one teaches or learns English for specific purposes only, one automatically and callously disregards the multiplicity of uses and purposes that language itself has.” (Eckard, 1981:9) However, our genuine opinion is that teaching English for specific purposes does not limit the language learned, English in this case. On the contrary, it encompasses a huge complex of knowledge and skill span indispensable for the representatives of the given specialty.

Business English is a mix of specific content (relating to a certain job area or industry), and general content (relating to general ability to communicate more effectively in business situations) and it cannot exist or survive when isolated from such crucially important “GE” notions as **lexis** (by saying lexis we don’t narrow our understanding of this word diminishing it to the specific terminology), **grammar** and **pronunciation**. This is why learners find it very hard to cope with learning BE basically because of the lack of General English skills. It goes without saying that rich and active word stock is a must for a Business student. Meetings and negotiations especially demand extremely sophisticated use of language if speakers are to persuade or explain, object, interject, regale or inspire. We also find it important to note that especially during meetings people are sometimes reluctant to say exactly what they mean, particularly when they have bad news. This *diplomacy vs. forcefulness* dilemma makes it imperative that the vocabulary taught to students should by all

means include vague statements with their blunter equivalents. In the Business English context appropriate and correct use of grammar and pronunciation, too, is often vital if communication is to be successful. Thus, the misuse of tense forms or articles, incorrect word order as well as wrong pronunciation and improper intonation may cause serious misunderstandings. Moreover, in a BE course some structural areas may require more attention than in a conventional course: for instance conditionals for negotiations, or modality for expressing possibility or politeness.

Another peculiarity of BE is that it is taught to adults who are more affected by the psychological aspect of language learning. They are afraid to make mistakes and lose face. They tend to be very cautious about making errors, for this would be a public display of ignorance. Not only may this fear result in their reserved language behaviour but also may deter them from participating altogether (Our experience as lecturers confirms that this is quite a common situation) which becomes particularly obvious during role plays or case studies and is certainly a major obstacle on the language learning path with the inevitable result that learners scarcely get enough improvement in language competence to deal with business-related situations.

The above-mentioned comes to prove once again that GE is by no means dispensed with or disregarded while teaching BE, on the contrary, it proves to be an indispensable basis on which the "floors" of BE are built.

According to some specialists the teacher does not need to have specialized academic knowledge of the learners' major subject of study and doesn't need to have relevant expertise. They maintain that although the teachers' familiarity with these areas will enhance their teaching, lack of expertise need not be a cause for too much concern. They are primarily language specialists. However, our genuine opinion is that on a practical level, gaps in the teacher's expertise in such areas as history and current situation of world economy, marketing and management theories, preferences or practices within specific industries or corporate cultures, a wide range of specialties such as computing, banking or telecommunications may not only affect linguistic choices for specific situations in class but also will have a major negative impact on the teaching

process altogether, deterring them from conducting efficient discussions, organizing role-plays or doing case studies and actively engaging the learners. However, besides the theoretical knowledge vital for Business English teachers we would like to stress the importance of practice which is the essential mechanism for turning learnt rules into effective teaching. Lack of practice may mean more anxiety, more focus on detailed lesson plan or more discrete teaching techniques. And if general purpose language teachers can perhaps be relatively relaxed in this respect, at least at the beginning of their teaching practice, lack of practice in Business English classroom will necessarily mean less efficient teaching, mainly due to the nature of EBP, which, like business world itself, is highly dynamic and labour intensive.

It may already be clear that the scope of BET is a “hard nut to crack”. We have already touched upon the importance of lexis, grammar and phonetics (namely pronunciation, intonation and stress), but we haven't yet covered a very important field to be included in BE syllabus. At this age of globalization, when international trade gathers pace, many organizations and companies are now operating across national boundaries, and it is little wonder therefore that alongside with many other factors cultural ignorance may cause major problems for multinational companies. Hence cultural awareness and business etiquette are two very important threads that should be interwoven into all the classroom activities. No less important than grammar or lexis, cultural ignorance may quite often prove to be even more disastrous for companies (and for their business leaders) than, for instance, an incorrect choice of a tense form. During World War II, the phrase “Loose lips sink ships” was used to discourage people from talking about military matters when they were within the hearing range of strangers. For international businesses, the phrase might appropriately be modified to “Misunderstood lips sink companies”. (Ricks, 1993: 153) Of course, complete knowledge and understanding of a foreign culture (moreover, cultures), is almost impossible to acquire. In fact, no general agreement even exists as to what “culture” is, but most experts do concur that it is a complex set of variables involving a group's beliefs and ways of living. They also agree that an understanding of any foreign culture requires knowledge in great many areas.

Below we will consider the main culture-specific points that should be included in BET. These points fall into three categories related to business, language and culture respectively.

Management practices that work domestically do not necessarily work overseas. Different cultures require that companies take different approaches. We can cite many cases of management blunders that have plagued multinational corporations. Here is only one. Many companies have faced labour troubles in Western Europe where governments tend to protect employees and often make layoffs difficult. Some of the most sensationalized cases have occurred in France. Shortly after World War II ended, many American companies rushed in to France, hired people, and enjoyed the ensuing business boom. However, the good times didn't last forever and more than a few firms made the mistake of trying to reduce employment levels. General Motors, Remington Rand, General Electric, and other firms soon found themselves forced to reverse layoff decisions.

Business etiquette is also closely related to cultural awareness. Guidelines on such important aspects as dining, greetings, gift-giving, dress and clothing, as well as meetings, protocol or negotiation are a must. Ignorance of these has led many companies and business people to crises. Negotiations in this respect have often proved to be a tricky undertaking. If the company negotiators are unaware of local customs, inappropriate prices are quite likely to result. The risk is best illustrated by examining the negotiation process involving Japanese and American managers. In one reported case an American raised the price he was willing to pay three times after the Japanese were prepared to accept. Unaware of Japanese customs, he didn't realize that the hesitation and discussion between the Japanese (in Japanese, of course) were not a result of unhappiness over the price quoted. With each higher price offer, the Japanese negotiators expressed amazement (in Japanese) but then proceeded to check out with their colleagues' opinions. This delay only unwittingly encouraged the American to offer even more!

An important constituent part of a culture is **body language** extensively used by everyone around the world. Business English students should be made aware that people of each culture uniquely utilize body movements and the meanings of motions and signs common in one culture

may relay something quite different in another. The OK hand sign, for instance, signifies zero in France, in Japan it symbolizes money, while in some parts of South America, is a vulgar gesture. One unfortunate company learned this when it had an entire catalog printed with an OK stamp on each page. Although the error was quickly discovered, it created a costly six-month delay while all the catalogues were reprinted. Another instance of such a blunder occurred in a Korean firm, Kunja Industrial Co., which owns the Kunja Knitting Mills plant in South Carolina. It made the news when an American employee innocently “crooked” his index finger while trying to catch the attention of his Korean boss and motion him to come closer. The employee succeeded in getting attention all right. However, he certainly didn’t succeed in getting his boss physically or emotionally any closer. In fact, he was almost fired. The American finger-crooking gesture for asking someone to come closer is considered vulgar in Korea.

Other forms of communication also cause problems. **Tone of voice**, for example, can be very important. Some cultures permit people to raise their voices when they are distant from one another, but loudness in other cultures is often associated with anger or a loss of self-control. Even laughter is interpreted differently around the world. While most countries consider it an expression of joy, some cultures discourage it. In many West African countries, laughter indicates embarrassment, discomfort, or surprise.

The failure of firms to consider **specialized aspects of local religions** has also created a number of difficulties. Companies encountered problems in Asia when they incorporated pictures of Buddha in their promotions. Religious ties are strong in this area, and the use of local religions symbols in advertising is strongly resented—especially when words are deliberately or even accidentally printed across the picture of Buddha. One company was nearly burned to the ground when it ignorantly tried such a strategy. The seemingly minor incident led to a major international political conflict remembered for years. Saudi Arabia nearly restricted an airline from initiating flights when the company authorized “normal” newspaper advertisements. The ads featured attractive hostesses serving champagne to the happy airline passengers. Because alcohol is illegal and unveiled women are not permitted to mix with men

in Saudi Arabia, the photo was viewed as an attempt to alter religious customs.

Dozens of blunders have been made by firms that failed to study local **customs** and **values** carefully. A marketer of eyeglasses, for instance, promoted his spectacles in Thailand using commercials that featured animals wearing glasses. This was an unfortunate decision, however, since animals there are considered a low life form, and it is beneath humans to wear anything worn by an animal. Pepsodent reportedly tried to sell its toothpaste in regions of South-East Asia through a promotion which stressed that the toothpaste helped enhance white teeth. In this area, where some local people deliberately chewed betel nut in order to achieve the social prestige of darkly stained teeth, such an ad was understandably less than effective.

The incorrect choice of even seemingly innocuous things like **colour**, **numbers** or **flowers** can prove to be disastrous for companies, as the aforementioned are culture-specific variables

Sometimes companies have failed to sell their products overseas and have never known why. Often the reason was simple: the product or its container was merely an inappropriate colour. The Singer Company, for example, found it necessary to halt an elaborate outdoor ad campaign, when, just prior to the campaign's introduction, the company discovered that the background colour, blue, was local colour representing death. United Airlines had start-up problems with its initial flights from Hong Kong. The company handed out white carnations without realizing that, to many Asians, such flowers represent death and bad luck. A US golf ball manufacturer, for example, tried to sell golf balls packaged in groups of four to the Japanese. Problems arose because the pronunciation of the word "four" in Japanese also sounds like the Japanese word for "death". The number four, therefore, is considered undesirable, and items grouped into four simply don't sell well.

In today's world, with global companies, as well as countries populated and influenced by different religions and cultures, it's important to develop good business relationships and **gift-giving** can be a decisive factor here. Just a few lines on this will persuade you that a seemingly unimportant thing like gifts can cause one a huge trouble. Cultures without strong gift giving traditions, such as European cultures and countries

influenced by them, don't use gifts as an integral component of a business relationship. However, no matter which culture you may be doing business with, it's always professional to be attuned to opportunities for developing a more comfortable business relationship by hosting a meal, an evening at the theatre or a sporting event. Countries like Malaysia and Paraguay, concerned with corruption, frown upon any gift that could be construed as a bribe. In Malaysia you wouldn't give a gift until you had established a relationship with the person. In Singapore, government employees are not allowed to accept gifts, and the United States limits the acceptable dollar value to \$25. However, in some countries like Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines, exchanging gifts is strongly rooted in tradition. Part of the tradition is the gracious style used to present and receive them: the gift is offered using both hands and must be gift-wrapped; though it won't be opened in front of you. It will be set aside and opened later. Both for Chinese and Japanese cultures symbolism is very important. However, these symbols drastically differ from country to country. In Chinese culture, for example, red is a lucky colour; pink and yellow represent happiness; and the number 8 is the luckiest number. The colours black, white and blue and the number 4, or four of anything, are negatively associated with death or funerals. Also included in this category are clocks, handkerchiefs, and straw sandals. In Japan, however, though number 4 means death, too, the colour red is associated with funerals, so you shouldn't give a pen with red ink, or write out a card using red. Books aren't appropriate; and sharp objects like knives, scissors, and letter openers symbolize 'severing a relationship'. In these two cultures gifts are given and received with both hands, while in the Muslim or Hindu cultures gifts are presented using the right hand, or both hands. The left hand is never used alone to hand someone a gift, as it's considered unclean.

It is impossible to cover all the aspects of international business etiquette and cultural awareness and blunders in these areas since we have space restrictions. However, we do hope that the above is enough to show how important for business people these aspects are. Besides, in any learning situation there are two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. The former type unfortunately tends to dominate over the latter (students learn something to pass an examination or gain qualifications

and not because they are deeply interested in the language for its own sake), whereas the inclusion of materials with the above-mentioned content will boost their interest and motivation, increase their cross-cultural understanding (something they will badly need in their future career) and improve their language, as this information is given to them in English.

In fact linguistic knowledge and the knowledge of the culture of different peoples are two main targets of BET, which are interconnected and each of them guarantees the efficient teaching of the other. Thus, BET incorporates linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic elements, and consequently is not a purely linguistic course, but rather a communicative one.

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