

The Changing Role of the Business English Teacher in the Business English Class

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Abstract: Our paper will insist upon the changing role and methods employed by the teachers of Business English, so as to match the students' needs and wants. Some authors have used metaphors to describe what teachers should be – actors - they are always on a stage; orchestral conductor - direct conversation and set the pace and the tone; gardeners - plant the seeds of knowledge and watch them grow. As times have changed, the teaching methods must change too, the teacher is no longer a *guru*, but a facilitator, the one who fosters learner autonomy, and is no longer a transmitter of knowledge.

Keywords: ESP, teacher, Business English, lingua franca, facilitator.

1. Introduction

Most authors, who wrote about English, English language teaching, see Business English in the larger context of ESP, as it shares the important characteristics of needs analysis, syllabus design, course design, and material writing, which are common to all fields of work in ESP. Similar to other varieties of ESP, Business English implies a special language corpus and emphasis on specific types of communication, in a specific context. According to Ellis & Johnson (1994), Business English is different from other varieties of ESP, due to its mix of specific content and general content. Therefore, the challenges Business English teachers face in their activity should be the following: the main focus; specialised vocabulary; communication skills in a business related context; needs analysis related to the Business English they need in their future careers; the role of the teacher and the techniques most appropriate to be used for Business English students.

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2. Business English as a Lingua Franca

2.1. What is BELF

There is so much literature about this topic, that one cannot read a fraction of it in one's career. The concept of BELF has appeared, according to the Chinese, i.e. BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca), after the founding of the People's Republic of China, and it refers mainly to the teaching of English in China, and not only. Although Chinese is the most spoken language as L1, due to China's population of over 1.355 billion, the largest of any country in the world (according to World Bank Statistics about the Population Growth in China, 2001 – 2011), there is a strong need for English, as China has developed a lot and it needs to communicate with the rest of the world, especially in terms of trade. China produces almost everything and that "almost everything" needs to be exported. What is taught in China is called BELF, and it is aimed at teaching students both the English language and the way of conducting business. Content – based courses were offered in English in Chinese universities, such as management, marketing and international relations. It was believed that by providing students with an English language environment they could learn both language and business knowledge naturally. In their view, BELF has a wider application than Business English in international business communications. However, many authors see BELF as having much in common with BE, the former differs from the latter in some aspects BELF is deeply rooted in the growth of the domestic economy and influenced by the process of globalisation.

The same concept of BELF has been a focus in Europe for the past two decades. Scholars such as Nickerson and Bargiela-Chiamppini (2002) have contributed a great deal in this line of research by examining the effect of English as business or corporate language in international business context.

2.2. Characteristics

In their book "Teaching Business English" (1994: 7-13), Mark Ellis and Christine Johnson have defined the characteristics of BE from five aspects:

- "Much of the language needed by business people (apart from social language) will be transactional."
- "Social contacts are often highly ritualized."
- Clear information should be conveyed within a short time.
- The language used in business "will be neither as rich in vocabulary and expression nor as culture-bound, as that used by native speakers, but will be based on a core of the most useful and basic structures and vocabulary."
- Business English courses differ greatly in some aspects like needs analysis, assessment of level, syllabus, course objectives, etc.

There are numerous definitions of BE, but no universally accepted one. While there is some overlap with BE, BELF covers a wide variety of English usage in many areas of interest, such as finance, economics, business law, foreign trade, tourism, advertising, and it mainly characterises the Chinese way of teaching and motivation for learning English. Taking this into account, BELF falls into two main categories:

ELFGBP (English Lingua Franca for General Business Purposes) defined in accordance with the main characteristics of BE, and ELFSBP (English Lingua Franca for Specific Business Purposes), defined in accordance with the varieties in levels of language as well as the specific context English language in use.

2.3. BELF in the world

Starting from China the need for English does not characterise China only. After implementing the China Open Door Policies in 1978, and especially after China's successful entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), there has been an increasing demand for efficient English language users with business expertise.

A similar fact happened in Romania, after the events of 1989, the study of foreign languages, and especially the study of English revived the Romanian educational system and the entire society. The reason for this revival of English was the need for employees with good English skills on the Romanian job market, and more and more multinational companies are now operating here.

Everywhere ESP is needed by people in their business activities. "ESP is a term often used to describe language that is inaccessible to people who are not members of a particular language community" (Frendo 2012: 6) and "Business English is an umbrella-term for a mixture of general everyday English, general Business English and ESP" (Frendo 2012: 7). Business is about buying and selling, and it uses the language of commerce, finance, industry, of providing goods and services. It is about cooperation, negotiation and compromise. It is about persuading and understanding, power and control, explaining and finding solutions to problems. "In short, Business English is communication with other people within a specific context" (Frendo 2012: 1). "Business English is not only about language, but about language use" (Frendo 2012: 8). Language learners need to be able to use the language in real life situations, and according to Frendo (2012), Business English teachers need to focus on three key-components in particular: linguistic competence (the use of basic elements that go together to form a language, such as vocabulary, grammar, etc.), discourse competence (deals with elements of language at a basic level and tends to focus on language out of context), intercultural competence (it refers to attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and values from different cultures and the way to behave in such situations).

So most reasons why people want to study English are that it is a necessary part of their job; it is an investment which brings status and financial reward, among others. Here are some of the most encountered reasons for learning English:

- English is the lingua franca used in all business contexts therefore it is a must for our business students and their future career.
- All important companies have subsidiaries all over the world and the employees need to communicate in English (KPMG, Deloitte, Alcatel, Draxelmaier, Continental Automotive, etc.).
- All banks deal on a daily basis with foreigners, or foreign investors; all banking documents are issued in English and the bank personnel needs to communicate with the clients, hence they should have a medium level of English.

- Any import-export company has employees travelling for business purposes, so they will need to use English for business and socially.
- Foreign managers need to be in frequent contact with the headquarters and also to handle negotiations with foreign customers.
- When a merger takes place, and the companies belong to different countries, usually English is preferred as a joined company language. (adapted from Ellis & Johnson 2009: 17)

3. Students' needs and motivation

The main thing to remember is when considering what Business English is, relates to the students' expectations. Students expect a training course, which relates to occupational or professional language needs. "Investigating, analysing and fulfilling Business English students' needs is, in fact, so important for the success of any Business English course, that a great deal of attention should be paid to these processes" (Sylvie 2008: 2).

The purpose of teaching Business English is to fulfil student's work related needs. Usually, these needs are very specific and cover a wide range of language. Any decision is governed by students' needs. In order to reach our goals in teaching, we need to make our objectives clear; decision-making and objective-setting can be passed on to students, who are often used to making decisions, setting objectives and respecting dead-lines in their day-to-day work. Our teaching objectives are concerned with "what" we are teaching, activities and techniques focused on "how we do it"; they must be selected and used with sensitivity according to our goals and students' response.

Students and teachers should work in partnership, to build a constructive learning environment, which is appropriate to individual student's professional and personal situations. The teacher is a partner and the student, besides being a learner, is also a provider of information and material as s/he may know more in their area of interest.

It is generally accepted that there is no success without people being motivated – people have to want to do something to succeed at it. Without motivation, any action is doomed to fail and therefore motivation is a key element to success that is why we need to clarify *what it means*, *where it comes from* and *how it can be sustained*. Motivation is in a way an internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something. The strength of motivation will depend on how much value the individual places on the outcome s/he wishes to achieve. In discussion of motivation, an accepted distinction is made between extrinsic (coming from "outside") and intrinsic (coming from "inside") motivation (Harmer 2008: 98). Other authors such as Gardner and Lambert (1972), distinguish between two forms of motivation: instrumental (the reflection of an external need) and integrative (derives from the desire of the learners to be members of the speech community that uses a particular language).

External / extrinsic sources of motivation:

- The goal (a source of motivation if the students perceive the goal of their study);

- The society we live in (attitudes to language learning and to English in particular, i.e. how important is the study of English for the society we live in);
- People around us (the attitudes of parents, older siblings, and other close friends – if they approve of language learning or if they think mathematics or sciences in general are what count);
- Curiosity (every student has a natural curiosity, which is a kind of initial motivation, they want to see what it is like).

However, learners need to renew their motivation and their priorities if they want to continue, or stay motivated over a long period, even if the progress might be slow. It is the teacher's task to encourage them to reflect on what they have done in the past and what they want to focus on in the future so as to become autonomous from the teacher.

4. The Business English Teacher

Autonomy allows for students to take increasing charge of their own learning. Our students still rely on the teacher and do not make any efforts on their own. Maybe this attitude was inherited from high schools, where most of the teachers are a kind of transmitters of knowledge and testers. They did not teach the children how to learn, how to plan their studies, how to manage their time, and to reflect on the process and products of learning.

Many ESP teachers have ESP courses and they have simply adapted from general ELT teaching. Many teachers and universities divide their time and resources between the two types of work: ESP and ELT. Although some of the different skills required by the ESP teachers have been identified (both terms have already been defined), British Council organizes in Romania from time to time special training courses. Year ago, when the British Council was more involved in the Romanian teaching, they also offered ESP courses in Great Britain for a period of three months, or even more.

Shifting from ELT to ESP is not easy and the teachers should, according to Kennedy and Bolitho (1991), there are some requirements from the ESP teacher.

- The teacher might be expected (with or without support) to carry out and interpret a needs analysis for a group of students.
- On the basis of this analysis, the teacher might be expected to design a syllabus for his/her classes.
- As nowadays there are a lot of published materials on ESP, the teacher might be expected to select and adapt teaching materials for his/her classes.
- If there are no materials suitable or adaptable to the needs of a particular class, the teacher will have to select and adapt suitable texts, device appropriate activities.
- The teacher may have to prepare course outlines.
- The teacher may have to develop a working knowledge of his/her students' subject. No English teacher can be expected to become

acquainted with a specialist subject over night, in this situation s/he may be advised to team-teach with a subject specialist, or ask for advice. The match between language and subject content will be much more apparent to the student, resulting in a rise in the level of motivation.

Of course more requirements could be added to the above ones, however “it is clear that the demands on an ESP teacher can be considerable and that s/he may have to be very persistent to achieve a measure of success in his/her task. ESP has raised learner expectations, and ultimately it is the teacher who has to live up to them” (Kennedy & Bolitho 1991: 141).

However, in Romanian schools and universities, many teachers have been influenced by the teaching that they were exposed to in their own school days. Whether we acknowledge it or not, much of our view of what a teacher is and what a teacher should do can often be traced back to the years when we were students ourselves. Disappointingly enough, a lot of the teaching that has left a deep impression on us was old, traditional, non-stimulating teaching. “As well as some excellent teachers, most of us have probably seen examples of teachers who were boring, unkind, incompetent, sarcastic, or inapt” (Scrivener 2009: 15). From this quotation we understand that such unprofessional and undedicated teachers are to be found everywhere, not only in our schools.

4.1. The concept of *traditional teaching*

Traditional teaching is often characterised by an emphasis on “chalk and talk”, in other words the teacher spend quite a lot of class time using the white board and explaining things, i.e. transmitting knowledge to the class with occasional questioning. After these explanations, the students will often do some practice exercises to test whether they have understood what they have been told. Throughout the lesson, the teacher keeps control of the subject matter, makes decisions and tells the students what to do. In this type of class the teacher probably does most of the talking and is by far the most active person. The students’ role is primarily to listen, pay attention, take notes and stay still, not to bother the others.

This view of the role of the teacher is relatively widespread and in Romania it still represents the predominant mode of education, although most of the teachers do not admit it. Students will expect that a teacher will teach in this way, and fellow teachers may be disapproving and judgmental of teachers who do not. However it is important to remember that a teacher’s choice of methodology is about what is appropriate in a particular case, with particular people.

The process by which traditional teaching is imaged as working is sometimes characterised as “jug and mug” (Scrivener 2009: 17), the knowledge being poured from one container into an empty one. It is often based on an assumption that the teacher has the task of passing over knowledge to his/her students, and that having something explained or demonstrated to students, will lead to learning. If it does not, it is because the teacher has done his job badly, or the student is lazy or incompetent. In other words, teaching does not necessarily lead to learning and even if the teacher is a good “explainer”, a teaching approach based mainly on this technique can be problematic and the traditional role of the teacher has not the expected results.

A teacher's most important job is perhaps to create the best conditions in which learning can take place, i.e. the skills of creating and managing a successful class may be the key to the whole success of a module. An important part of this has to do with the teacher's attitude, intentions and personality and most importantly his/her relationships with the students. The teacher also needs certain organization skills and techniques, which are often called *classroom management*, therefore, first of all, the teacher should be a good manager.

4.2. The teacher as *manager*

A modern teacher should be a good manager; one of the most important tasks that teachers have to perform is that of organizing students to do various activities. The teacher should adapt the classroom format to his/her activities, then tell the students how they are going to perform the activity in charge, by putting them in pairs or groups. The first thing the teacher needs to do when organizing something is to get the students *involved, engaged* and *ready*. Any activity should have a purpose and the students should be given clear instructions so they understand why and what they have to do. Finally, when the activity is over, it is vital to organize a kind of feedback, which in some cases may be a detailed discussion of what has taken place.

4.3. The teacher as *trainer*

In the world of business, trainers are common, as they should re-motivate the employees and bring up to date their knowledge area, and inform them on the latest progress connected to their jobs. The teacher is also a trainer, as s/he has to educate the students so they have more chance at succeeding in life. A teacher's objectives may be to some extent more general, and is person-oriented, not job-oriented. The teacher tries to help a student to learn a language for a variety of business purposes that may be relevant for the student's career.

4.4. The teacher as *consultant*

Generally we see consultants as experts who are supposed to teach in an organization, because they have the skills and know-how, which are not available there. In Business English, this expertise can cover a wide area – it may include communication skills and needs, negotiations, business manners, socialising, business etiquette, etc. By using simulations within a business context, the teacher is supposed to teach his/her students all these things to a certain extent.

4.5. The teacher as *coach*

A coach is usually a person who can help the students take advantage of the learning opportunities in their own working environment. It involves helping the students to better understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and plan accordingly. It is related to the concept of *learner autonomy*, which is, in other words, the learners take full responsibility for their learning, one of the key concepts in the communication approach, as a way of teaching foreign languages.

4.6. The teacher as *controller*

Some teachers act as controllers and are in charge of the class and of the activity taking place, and are often *leading from the front*. Controllers check the attendance, give instructions, organise drills, read aloud, and in various other ways exemplify the qualities of a teacher-fronted classroom. This kind of teachers sees their job as the transmission of knowledge from themselves to their students and is very comfortable with the image of themselves as controllers. “Many teachers fail to go beyond it, since controlling is the role they are used to and are most comfortable with. Yet, this is a pity, because by sticking to one mode of behaviour, we deny ourselves and the students many other possibilities and modes of learning, which are not good for learning itself, but also for our students’ enjoyment of that learning.” (Harmer 2008: 109)

4.7. The teacher as *prompter*

A teacher is usually a prompter when the students are involved in a role-play activity and are “lost for words”. Some teachers would hold back and let them work things out for themselves, while others would try to help them in a discrete and supportive way, i.e. adopting some kind of a “prompting role”. Teachers want to encourage the students to think creatively and be more spontaneous, therefore the teacher can occasionally suggest words or phrases to avoid the use of their mother-tongue.

4.8. The teacher as *participant*

Frequently teachers are not involved in students’ discussions, role-plays, or decision-making activities, letting the students get on with it and be inventive and productive. Still, there are also times when teachers might want to join in an activity not as a teacher, but also as a participant. It means that the teacher can see things from the insight instead of always have to prompt or organise from outside the group. Participating is often more enjoyable than acting as a resource, but the teacher should not dominate the proceedings and act like any other member of the team.

4.9. The teacher as *resource*

This role is better suited when the students are involved in group-writing, or if they are preparing for a presentation. In such cases, the students may need their teacher as a resource, they might need to ask how to say or write something, or ask what a word or phrase means. In this case the teacher becomes a kind of “walking dictionary” and acts as a resource, but at the same time, s/he has to resist the temptation to over-assist the students, so that they become over-reliant on resource and not use their heads.

4.10. The teacher as *tutor*

This is the role of the teacher when students have to prepare projects or dissertations, or prepare for a talk or debate. They can be organised as individuals or small groups, and the teacher will guide them; in such situations the teacher combines the roles of prompter and resource – in other words, acting like a tutor. It is essential for teachers to act as tutors from time to time as in this more personal contact, the

students have a real chance to feel supported and helped, while the general feeling is that they are supported and encouraged in their effort. There are times when teachers need to act as a prompter; on other occasion it would be more appropriate to act as a resource, and it is up to the teacher to know how to switch between the various roles above mentioned, judging when it is appropriate to use one or other of them. “When the teacher has made a decision, however consciously or sub-consciously it is done, we need to be aware of how we carry that role, how we perform” (Harmer 2008: 111).

4.11. The teacher as *actor / entertainer*

ESP texts have a reputation of being boring and not very interesting ones, due to their subject-matter content. It is the teacher’s task to make them as interesting as possible, by making use of various activities, such as: pre-reading questions, while reading questions, and avoid dead time. Materials must be selected and good materials should, therefore, provide a clear and coherent unit structure which will guide teacher and learner through various activities in such a way as to maximise the chances of learning. It should help the teacher in his/her activity and encourage in the students a sense of progress and achievements. The teacher should not use a monotonous text and pattern of lesson to avoid dullness in the classroom, this type of teaching “if it doesn’t send you to sleep [...] it will certainly send your learners to sleep” (Hutchinson & Waters 1994: 107). The teacher should do his/her best so as to entertain and involve the students in all the activities, make any lesson interesting and approach it with enthusiasm, and avoid the assembly-line approach which makes each unit look the same, with the same type of text, the same type and number of exercises “a material’s model must be clear and systematic, but flexible enough to allow for creativity and variety” (Hutchinson & Waters 1994: 107). The teacher should therefore create a friendly atmosphere, present each unit in a very interesting way, as if it were some kind of show, so as to attract as many students as possible to take part in the whole happening. The teacher should employ all his/her talent so as to find the best way to the student’s heart.

We have mentioned a few of the roles of the teacher, mentioned in the literature of methodology and we have also added some of our considerations, which are, in a way, the result of our teaching experience. In order to do one’s best and be very efficient at it, “ESP teachers need to arm themselves with a sound knowledge of both theoretical and practical developments in ELP, in order to be able to make the range of decisions they are called upon to make.” (Hutchinson & Waters 1994: 160).

5. Conclusions

In the present paper we have tried to underline the changing role of the modern ESP teacher and go through various roles mentioned in the literature of teaching. We have underlined the positive aspects of each of these roles, but eventually teachers must remember that for efficient results s/he must combine all these roles adapted to the students s/he is teaching, i.e. to the class.

This type of modern teacher is supposed to master both English language and be familiar with the business subjects of the students. If teachers are not able to

operate highly specialised texts effectively, they should not be used. The teachers' competence is an essential ingredient in the teaching – learning process and must, therefore, be able to discuss almost any business topic.

There should be meaningful communication in the classroom, it is essential that there is a common fund of knowledge and interest between teacher and learner. This implies, inevitably, that the ESP teacher must know a lot about the world of business. The teacher should be much more sensitive to the needs of his/her students.

The teacher should know how to handle each group of students and adapt to their needs, wants and linguistic level. S/He must always remember that teaching does not equal learning. "It is quite possible for a teacher to be putting great effort into his/her teaching and no learning to be taking place; similarly, a teacher could apparently be doing nothing, but the students learn a great deal." (Scrivener 2009: 17).

In order to achieve his/her goals, the teacher should be a mix of manager, trainer, consultant, coach, controller, prompter, participant, tutor, actor and adapt himself/herself to the group of students s/he is teaching. The teacher's degree of flexibility is the key to success. "All ESP teachers are in effect pioneers who are helping to shape the world of ESP" (Hutchinson & Waters 1994: 160).

This work was cofinanced from the European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, project number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/140863, Competitive Researchers in Europe in the Field of Humanities and Socio-Economic Sciences. A Multi-regional Research Network.

Această lucrare a fost cofinanțată din Fondul Social European prin Programul Operațional Sectorial pentru Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007 – 2013, Cod Contract: POSDRU/159/1.5/S/140863, Cercetători competitivi pe plan european în domeniul științelor umaniste și socio-economice. Rețea de cercetare multiregională (CCPE).

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