WEB-BASED TEACHING RESOURCES FOR BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSES

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Abstract: In recent years, the use of web-based resources for English language learning and teaching has become an integrative part of most English language courses worldwide. Since the advent of ESP numerous specialized online resources have been created in order to facilitate the process of English language learning and teaching in different specialized fields. The aim of our paper is to carry out a descriptive analysis of some particular online resources for ESP in the business field, highlight their advantages and provide some ideas for ESP teachers on how to use them for different purposes in Business English courses.

1. Introduction

Since the late 1960s when ESP was brought about, the various theoretical and practical forces have been shaping its development (Hutchinson and Waters 1998, 5).

One of the recent challenges in the fields of ELT and ESP is teaching in the digital era and that issue is to be addressed in this paper. In order to try to enhance teaching and learning process in the ESP field in the new circumstances — the digital era, our focus will be on investigating online resources for Business English classes.

A few decades ago Hutchinson and Waters (1998, 106) claimed that "materials writing is one of the most characteristic features of ESP in practice." However, due to the fact that the interest for ESP has been increasing since the very beginning, nowadays that ESP feature is significantly changed. At this moment there are a lot of ESP course books, particularly in the Business field, which are available in the market. In addition, owing to the technology development, a lot of language teaching and learning tools and materials can be easily accessed online and most of them can be used as supplementary materials for different purposes in Business English courses. All that means that the main task for most ESP teachers of today is not any more to create teaching materials themselves, but to select the best ones among those which already exist and effectively employ them in their courses.

When teachers want to employ some online supplementary materials in their courses, they have to take into consideration various factors, e.g. that new generations of students belong to the generation of native digitals, that chosen materials should be motivating, provide variation and rich language input, that one of the key factors in language learning is the activity through which it is learnt (Prabhu 1983 in Hutchinson and Waters 1998, 92), and alike.

Having all that in mind — finding and successfully incorporating appropriate online materials into the courses can be quite challenging and time consuming for ESP teachers. In the light of ESP, CALL and the era of native digitals, we will describe and recommend some online sources suitable for practicing different language skills in

Business English courses: listening, reading, speaking and writing, particularly focusing on developing soft skills in Business context. Hopefully, the results presented will be helpful for Business English teachers and anyone interested in any further research in this field.

2. Business English Courses

In comparison to *narrow angled* courses "which are designed for a very specific group of learners", (e.g. English for Nursing, English for Accountants), Business English courses, along with English for General and Academic Purposes (EGAP), can be termed *wide angled*, which means "designed for a more general group of learners" (Ahmed 2014, 21). That property makes Business English courses equally suitable for learners in various specific fields. The primary aim of such (general) Business English courses is to prepare learners to successfully use English in business environment, which is, with no doubt, very important expertise for (future) professionals in any field.

The research which is presented in this article was triggered by the practical reason — the need to enrich the classes of Business English attended by students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages in Belgrade. According to the curriculum, students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages (at English Department) have four Business English courses during their studies, two in the third and two in fourth year. The course book series which is used is *Market Leader* by I. Dubicka and M. O'Keeffe — levels Intermediate and Advanced.

Market Leader course book is composed of units which provide authentic texts from the Financial Times and other sources, audio materials, the abundance of pair work and group work tasks which are aimed at developing the whole spectrum of language skills and business skills; all being enriched by online support at: http://product.pearsonelt.com/marketleader/.

However, in order to provide more rich language experience for the students good supplementary materials during those courses are necessary. Still, in the abundance of sources easily available online it may be quite difficult for teachers to find the ones which are the most appropriate for some particular purposes in Business English classes.

3. Tables Teaching New Generations in the New Sociolinguistic Circumstance

As for language teaching in 21st century, there are several issues which should be taken into consideration. Aiming to provide an appropriate context for the subject of this article, which is the employment of online resources in Business English Courses, we will refer to some of these issues in the following paragraphs.

First of all, as Prensky (2011, 2) clearly explains, "our educational context has changed, and a new context demands new thinking. It is critical, though, to understand that the locus of *knowledge* has, in the 21st century, moved to a great extent from the teacher to the Internet. "

In such circumstances, teachers and students have to develop a new form of cooperation, which Prensky (2011, 3) calls *partnering* in which students will "do what they do best — for example, use technology, find information, and create products that

demonstrate their understanding" and on the other side teachers will "guide students by doing what they do best — for example, ask the right questions, put things into the proper context, and ensure quality and rigor."

Terms *digital native* and *digital immigrant* (Prensky 2001), as well as the terms *millennials, net generation,* and *generation Y*, refer to "a fundamental break [which] has occurred between young people and previous generations and, consequently, between students and their teachers" (Benini and Murray in Guikema and Williams 2014, 72). In such a new context it is relevant to point out that we must question our roles as teachers of languages (Lotherington and Ronda in Guikema and Williams 2014, 24). According to Prensky (2011, 30), digital natives are specific in many respects; for example: "they are used to receiving information really fast, they like to parallel process and multi-task, they prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite, they function best when networked."

It is obvious that technology plays a key role in those new circumstances in ELT, thus nowadays it is almost impossible to imagine teaching English without some kind of involvement of technology. In fact "technology becomes more a factor in ESP education as a tool for language learning, as a site for varied and authentic materials, and as a place for publishing and sharing work […]" (Ahmed 2014, 18) The concept of CALL which started to develop at the University of Illinois in 1960 (Marty 1981), almost at the same time when ESP was created, stands for Computer Assisted Language Learning and denotes a new teaching approach in which technology plays a principal role. It refers to any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language (Beatty 2010, 7). CALL materials "include those which are purpose-made for language learning and those which adapt existing computer-based materials, video and other materials" (Beatty 2010, 8). Along with the development of technology new ways of communication have been developed as well which brought a lot of new language tasks in ELT classrooms.

In addition, the last, but not the least element that is crucial in language learning in general and, therefore relevant to be mentioned here is *motivation.* "Cognitive theory tells us that learners will learn when they actively think about what they are learning. [...] Before learners can actively think about something, they must want to think about it" (Hutchinson and Waters 1998, 47). It means that affective factors have to be taken into consideration whenever it comes to language teaching.

When the aforementioned teaching context is considered it can be concluded that online teaching resources may be recognized as indispensable elements in the process of successful language acquisition of new generations of language learners. Being the subject of our article, those materials will be dealt with in more detail in the following sections.

4. Teaching Materials in ESP

Beside the tasks such as: research, teaching, evaluation, needs analysis, syllabus design and collaboration/negotiation, materials development is one of the most important tasks of ESP teachers.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1998, 107) "good materials are supposed to provide a stimulus to learning" and "encourage learners to learn", therefore, they should contain: "interesting texts, enjoyable activities which engage the learner's

thinking capacities, opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills, content which both learner and teacher can cope with".

An integrated methodology is of essential importance, since "using a range of skills greatly increases the range of activities possible in the classroom. This makes it easier to achieve a high degree of recycling and reinforcement, while maintaining the learner's interest." (Hutchinson and Waters 1998, 141). Hutchinson and Waters (1998, 75) explicate these criteria by claiming that

"[i]f an image gets into the brain through a number of different pathways – i.e. hearing, reading, writing, speaking – that image is likely to be a richer image than if it gets in through only one pathway. The image will thereby be much stronger and much more easily accessible, since it will have more connections into the network."

As for the employment of authentic materials in ESP, it is important to take into consideration that they are specific in many respects and deserve particular attention in ESP courses.

Most online materials are authentic and there is a plenty of ways how to successfully incorporate them into Business English courses. In the business English teaching guide *Teaching with authentic materials* created for the Business English series *Intelligent Business*, Heitler (2005, 5) composed a list of the reasons why to choose authentic materials in ESP:

"1. Authentic materials bring learners into direct contact with a *reality level* of Business English.
2. Authentic materials drawn from periodicals are always up-to-date and constantly being updated.
3. Authentic materials from a particular source, such as *The Economist*, tend to work in consistent areas of language, so, after a while, students who practice reading *The Economist* will become experts in reading English language business publications.
4. Authentic materials provide us with a source of up-to-date materials that can be *directly relevant* to business English learners' needs."

On the other side, in the same teaching guide Heitler (2005) provides some practical ideas on how to choose and deal with authentic materials in Business English classes.

When all the aforementioned factors are taken into consideration and, among other things, materials selected accordingly, successful language acquisition is more likely to be achieved.

4.1. Web-based Complementary Materials for Business English

In this chapter we will present certain online teaching resources which may enrich book-based Business English courses by providing additional language exposure and practice and thus enhance improvement of all skills which are necessary for successful communication in the business context.

The classification is made on the basis of skills which can be practiced by using them.

4.1.1. Web-based Resources for Practising Language Skills

(1) http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts

BBC podcasts provide a number of different topics and a rich source of authentic language. Some radio shows which are related to business field and which are available online on this platform are: Global News podcast (the day's top stories from BBC news), The Business Report (the latest business and finance news from around the world), Hard Talk (interviews with newsmakers and personalities from across the globe), Money box (the latest news from the world of professional finance), 50 Things that made modern economy (inventions, ideas and innovations which have helped create the economic world we live in).

Apart from BBC podcasts, TED videos can be used for listening practice as well. Some available TED videos related to business will be recommended below.

(2) Online newspapers: Independent, New York Times, The Economist, The world street journal, Business Standard, Business Day, Business Line, Investor's Business Daily, The Australian Financial Review, Business Daily Africa, Business Recorder, Globes, Business World, Business Mirror, Inside Business.

All these newspapers can be easily accessed online and all of them are dealing with the various business topics. They may be used as an excellent language practice tool, since they provide a rich authentic language input for language learners.

(3) www.thebalance.com

The site *TheBalance* provides tips for writing different types of business letters such as: Guidelines for writing a letter of application, Declining a job offer, Sample letter to transfer from temporary position to permanent one, Resume for a summer job, How to properly resign by email (if you must), Letter of introduction, and alike.

Besides, it provides speaking tips for different situations, such as How to handle interview questions about your experience, Second interview questions to ask the employer, How to handle harassment at work, Top six career networking tips for millennials, and alike.

Writing and reading practice can be complemented by using online dictionaries. For example:

(4) http://www.businessdictionary.com/

Apart from the explanation for each term, the site *BusinessDictionary* provides audio pronunciation, terms in context and interesting texts related to some business topics, such as: Steps to developing an innovative solution to a problem (by Ryan May), Using SWOT analysis to develop a marketing strategy (by Adam Colgate), Impact of globalization on small businesses (by Leo Sun). Each of them contains approximately 1000 words.

(5) http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/business-english/

The site provides definitions, British and American variant for each term, pronunciation and examples.

(6) http://www.talkenglish.com/speaking/business-english.aspx -

The site *TalkEnglish* has a section Business English lessons, which provides specific tips for communication in different business situations, e.g. talking to co-workers, talking to boss, talking to subordinates, quitting or leaving work, and alike. It is not interactive, but it includes audio materials and script. Classes are short and effective. There are about 6-8 lessons per Unit.

(7) https://www.thoughtco.com/esl-business-english-4133088

The site *ThoughtCo* provides useful phrases for different business situations, such as: phrases for running business meetings, job interview questions and answers, information technology vocabulary, marketing vocabulary, and alike.

4.1.2   Web-based resources for developing *soft skills*

Various skills, such as interpersonal communication, dealing with difficult situations, leadership, critical thinking, cultural awareness, problem solving and similar ones are called *soft skills*. All those are skills which are very important for anyone's private and business life. Some studies show that soft skills are partly neglected in education and that there is a need for more intense integration of soft skills in Higher Education and EFL classrooms (Tevdovska 2015). On the other side, hard skills are closely related to the field of expertise and are applicable in the business life mainly.

Soft skills represent an important segment in Business English courses and deserve to be practiced as much as possible. The importance of being excellent at these skills in private and business life should be constantly highlighted throughout the course. Apart from being dealt with within exercises in Business English course books, these skills can be improved by employment of certain online resources: e.g. books on self esteem, effective presentations, intrapersonal communication, and alike.

Different webinars related to soft skills in the business context can be found on the web. Some of them require payment, e.g. https://webevents.spe.org/non-technical-skills-web-events, but some are available on youtube free of charge, e.g. videos on Career development and work ethics (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPGWBVKLxKI), Leadership and team work (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPwG5WQtxuA), Independence and initiative (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_pzbPkBxmI).

Books which are available online and which can be extremely inspiring and motivational and enhance developing soft skills are, among many others, *Eat that frog* by Brian Tracy, *How to win friends and influence people* by Dale Carnegie or *Six thinking hats* by Edward de Bono. Task such as preparing PowerPoint presentations, pair or group discussions or writing essays can be set on these books.

The last, but not the least, TED videos can be used for improving soft skills, as well. A lot of motivational TED speeches related to different soft skills are available online: The ideal business plan, How to speak so that people want to listen, Cultural difference in business, What it takes to be a great leader, The art of negotiation, Think fast, talk smart: Communication Techniques.

4.1.3   Other useful web-based resources

In addition to the resources described above, there is much more on the Internet what can be used to complement course books in Business English courses.

Visiting and exploring various online business web sites, for example, bank web sites, consulting agencies web sites, marketing agencies web sites or web sites of any other corporation may provide a lot of useful language input for learners. Various business documents and advertising materials are only some of the useful language learning and teaching sources which can be accessed there.

Students can be encouraged to use online sources when they are assigned the tasks to investigate some topics related to business and prepare presentations on them.

The assigned topics can be: Business communication in various parts of the World (e.g. America, China or Japan), Women in business, Leaders in business, Verbal and nonverbal communication, Seasonal jobs, Unusual jobs across the world, Companies such as Google or Facebook.

Finally, there is a platform – *News in Levels (https://www.newsinlevels.com/)* which provides practice for developing all language skills: (a) listening, (b) reading, (c) speaking (by using Skype) and (d) writing (by chatting on News in levels Facebook group).

Units available on the site are dealing with a whole range of different topics suitable for learning both general English and Business English and all of them are graded into three different levels of knowledge.

It should be taken into consideration that the tools and materials which provide the exposure to the authentic language, are suitable for learners with higher levels of knowledge, while the ones which are adopted, such as teaching platform News in Levels can be used by those who need more language practice with adopted language input.

After all, the list of online resources provided above is supposed to facilitate ESP teacher's job related to materials development in Business English courses and may, hopefully, trigger some future research in the same field.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of Business English classes is to make students successful communicators in Business environment, which is being achieved by developing both language skills and soft skills relevant for the communication in the business context.

Apart from using Business English course books, the improvement of all these skills can be enhanced by appropriate use of suitable online sources, which can be found in abundance nowadays. The greatest challenge for teachers is to find the best ones and to successfully include them into the courses

In order to use all the online potentials to the highest extent ELT teachers have to take into consideration several key factors. For example, some of them are: teaching purpose, aims, affective factors, criteria for choosing the appropriate teaching materials and the fact that we are teaching modern generations, i.e. native digitals, which are specific in many respects.

Online possibilities for improving language acquisition are immense and this field is widely open for both the advancement and research in the years to come.

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