

EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: WHAT TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT

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Schimbările care au loc în lume și în Europa, în particular, contribuie la faptul că oamenii din diferite țări sunt tot mai mult și mai mult implicați în procesul de globalizare. Considerând aceasta, învățământul superior ar trebui să răspundă prompt la aceste schimbări, la înzestrarea cu cunoștințe mai bune a studenților cursurilor de limba engleză, în special engleza de afaceri. Este necesar de pus accentul pe aspectele internaționale, competența limbii și culturii, precum și dezvoltarea competitivității sociale și abilităților de comunicare. Articolul evidențiază importanța competenței interculturale în dezvoltarea și predarea cursurilor englezei de afaceri și discutarea căilor de implementare a perspectivei internaționale și interculturale în limba de afaceri în sistemul de învățământ din Moldova.

Due to the current political and economic changes in the world people, still retaining their national identities are getting involved into the globalization process, Moldova not being the exception. In this respect, it sounds reasonable to put efforts to contribute to broadening an international understanding component of EFL/ESP courses curricula at Moldovan universities. Under those new conditions today's Moldovan university graduates have more chances for international job opportunities. A lot of students from different departments of Moldova State University combine studies with part time jobs with international companies/projects, others seek future employment outside of educational system as translators, office/administrative managers, secretaries, etc. with international companies, joint ventures, or programs, where foreign languages skills will be an asset. Higher education, university professors teaching foreign languages (in our case- English) should respond to these changes and current tendencies, as the globalization process has an impact on English and Business Communication curricula in countries with transition economies, in terms of their conceptual and pragmatic framework. Among the issues to highlight in the adapted courses/curricula would be: emphasizing international aspects, language and culture competence, development of social and communicative skills. In this context the question arise: how to better equip our students (e.g. Business English courses) to meet the requirements dictated by the new trends, to prepare them for effective communication in intercultural context? The most effective ways of teaching BE course in a global context should be selected and followed.

Learning the target subject (business) via the target language (English) and the target culture (e.g. American)

My experience of an English lecturer, as well as my intercultural experience (based on being alumna of American and European exchange programs, working with international projects, help me in better identifying my students' needs, and the ways of meeting them, in order to equip them with necessary skills to be competitive on the work market today. One of the important things to realize is that teaching Business Communication requires much more than just standard vocabulary and related terminology. The fact that a student has looked up the meaning of the word “aggressive” and made up a couple of examples, does not guarantee that he/she will be able to use it appropriately in the real business relations environment. Our goal of language education here should be to develop cross-cultural perception of similarities and differences and get some “shared” meaning. Culture can be effectively taught when practicing new vocabulary, grammar and discourse patterns. It is crucial to know not only about a lexical equivalent of a certain semantic formula but also to be aware of its functional and contextual appropriateness. Coming back to the example of “aggressive”, it should be mentioned that in American discourse the adjective “aggressive” can function as a synonym of the adjective “assertive” in business-related and general contexts gaining a positive connotation, while in Moldova the adjective “aggressive” will be more often used and perceived with a negative connotation. Numerous business terms and concepts contain an attribute aggressive as a component of their semantic structure, e.g. *aggressive marketing, aggressive promotion, aggressive bank management, aggressively trained managers*, etc. Frequently used concepts of aggressive management and aggressive marketing denote publicity, successful encouragement, and extensive self-promotion and are central strategies of American companies. Cross-cultural

sensitivity and awareness may equip students with an appropriate understanding and interpreting of “American aggressiveness” in professional and general contexts. Developing and teaching BE courses we should take into account the fact that properly developed and structured classroom activities materials, contribute to bridging the gap between language and culture. Cross-cultural competence implies an awareness of one’s own cultural heritage and understanding of the culture of another language in addition to studying the language of this country. The importance of developing general language knowledge as well as oral and written professional communication skills should be emphasized.

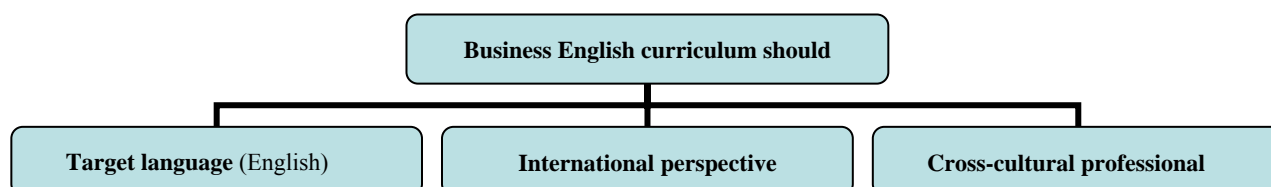


Fig.1. Business English course curriculum

To be successful on our way of adjusting our courses to new political and economic changes it is important to be able to search and select appropriate cultural content, and reasonably apply effective teaching methods and techniques of bringing the real business world into the classroom. Comparative-contrastive analysis (e.g. culture-specific differences in American and Moldovan business contexts), and a content-based approach with the focus on acquiring the target information via a foreign language, meaningfully organized and performed role plays, brainstorming activities, presentations, job interviews, powerful CV writing techniques, etc. contribute to this purpose.

Such skills-based activities as presentations, meetings and negotiations, present the “blend” of business matter, language and specific (American, Moldovan) cultural behavior. They should be designed in a way that would help students “visualize” realistic situations, as well as instruct them to act properly in different contexts. We should “train” the expressions like: “to stone-wall”, “to brainstorm”, “to table a discussion”, “to have the floor”, “ice breaker”, “to kick off”, that are commonly used during the meetings and negotiations. The things like proper turn-taking, personal space issues, or voice tone, as well as the appropriate for given/discussed cultural environment elements of non-verbal language have no chance to be missed during the classes.

A resume genre may serve a vivid illustration of specific cultural assumptions. From my experience as a university lecturer, and as a USG exchange programs coordinator in Moldova it is easy to notice that samples of resumes/CVs written by Moldovan students/ teachers in comparison with the ones composed by American colleagues differ in the choice of layout, content and language. Much more samples of resumes submitted by applicants from Moldova or other NIS countries are less persuasive and promotional as compared to the American ones which can be registered in content and language in the following: more rare use of superlative forms of adjectives, fewer dynamic words (e.g. implement, design, provide, increase, improve, promote, develop, compete, etc). It illustrates the fact that the pragmatic goal of the resume genre to promote, “to sell oneself” is much less explicit in Romanian or Russian than in English which reflects our national peculiarities and attitudes. Being able to write a powerful CV, which will help our students to get competitive jobs on the market, is one of the things we should teach them and, therefore, take into account while developing classroom materials.

Idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs among them, should be treated with a special care in order to transact business effectively. It proves to be both useful and exciting to introduce and use phrasal verbs in Business English course classes. My experience in this respect has turned out to be really effective. Phrasal verbs like **break through** (e.g. The goal is to **break through** the frustratingly slow pace at which genetic research is yielding new medical treatments.), **bring down** (e.g. The company **brought** working hours **down** to 44 hours (the move downwards from 48 h.), **cash in** (e.g. We **cash in** the shares at the end of the year.), **close down** (e.g. **Closing down** sales division is not in anybody’s best interests.) [1] are easy to introduce in different class interactive exercises and procedures. Relevant exercises from “More on Phrasal Verbs” manual, as well as various materials available in hard copies and on-line are helpful for both students and teachers.

Sources/materials

The criteria for selecting appropriate authentic texts for cross-cultural analysis depend on the pragmatic goal of learning, as well as, unfortunately, on what is at our disposal. An appropriate cultural content may be found in business publications (hard copies and on-line versions are available, for example, free of charge at the US Embassy Information Resource Center), business periodicals (The Economist, The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, etc.), mass media (movies in English, commercials, music, etc.), and literary texts. Through reading and analyzing authentic literature students explore various business issues and practices and also gain cultural insights. Wise Internet search will provide you with plenty of free resources, which can be adapted depending on the activity planned.

9 break something down (into something)

Study Read these sentences carefully.

- ▶ I have **broken** the sales figures **down** into regions.
- ▶ The software **breaks down** the results by time and frequency.
- ▶ The job's easier if you **break it down** into smaller tasks.
- ▶ The data **was broken down** into six different categories.

Check

Use the sentences in the Study box to help you do these exercises.

<p>MEANING</p> <p>If you break something down, do you:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a reduce its price so that it is very cheap? b destroy it by cutting it into small pieces? c divide it into smaller pieces so that it is easier to do or understand? 	<p>GRAMMAR</p> <p>Which of these are grammatically possible?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a I will break down the sales results. b I will break them down. c I will break down them. d The sales results broke down. e The sales results were broken down.
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→ Now check your answers on p. 000.

Fig.2. Activities available on <http://www.oup.com/pdf/el>

Opportunities opened up by international exchange programs/projects

The most viable models of acquiring international educational, professional and intercultural experience are through practice. The opportunities that became possible for both students and teachers in Moldova to participate in different international university joint projects, exchange programs, to get an internship with the international projects/NGOs, etc. should be in all ways encouraged to use. Participation in student exchange programs, international conferences, seminars, etc. brings not only a valuable educational experience but also an excellent opportunity for personal and professional development. The goal of any exchange program, among others, is to promote mutual understanding and cooperation among nations. Exchange programs provide students with the opportunity to become professionally competitive in a global context, to deepen awareness of shared human values and interests, and to increase their sensitivity to cultural differences and similarities, reflected in business communication as well. The fact that all international programs are highly competitive by definition means that the prospective exchange students along with academic excellence need to demonstrate such characteristics as adaptability, leadership potential, developed interpersonal and communicative skills, high motivation, independency, responsibility, and, of course, proficiency in a foreign language. Here they will have to pass through the application process including submitting properly composed

and arranged application forms, statement of purpose, CV, essays, or other materials depending on the program, and to feel themselves at the level during an interview process. That is where they are welcome to demonstrate their assertiveness (“aggressiveness” in an American context) to prove that they are the right candidates (and you will feel proud of your students who were able to successfully pass through all these stages and become the finalists, and will be happy to realize that you have put your efforts, knowledge and experience to help this happen). International professional experience and intercultural competence of university graduates are highly valued by western employers and investors in Moldova. Good job opportunities and competitive salaries are offered to young people with such experience in joint ventures, companies, NGOs.

Summary

In this paper an attempt has been made to provide a brief outline of what should be taken into account in the process of effective Business English courses for university students’ development. The highlighted activities will lead to the students’ foreign language and professional skills advancement, which reflects the current tendencies of political and economic development in Moldova. The students equipped with well-structured language knowledge “baggage”, based on the principles of cross-cultural awareness, and sensitivity to similarities and difficulties, will contribute to competitive business in Moldova, in this way making a change to better life.

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