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The Role of English in Global Business Communication

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Abstract

English is gaining ascendancy as an important language of communication in the business world across the globe. In the globalized world, English has become essential for transactions to take place among organizations, entrepreneurs and even international markets and businesses. In this paper, it is proposed that English proficiency affects the context of business communication especially on entrepreneurs and how it is utilized in developing a connection between international and local businesses. Both descriptive and qualitative methodologies are employed in the paper to show the importance of English proficiency as a phenomenon in improving the professionalism and work opportunities of the world market.

Keywords: *Lingua franca, Business communication, Globalization, Professional competence, International trade.*

Introduction

The lingua franca of business over the world has become English which is relevant in ensuring communication amidst the varied linguistic and cultural settings. The proper use of the English language in the modern global business world can enable an entrepreneur and an organization to conduct business at international levels, form alliances and extend their business reach and connectivity beyond the local markets. This paper takes a look at the significance of English in communication in business and in particular its contribution to the relationship between local and global businesses. The study concludes on descriptive and qualitative measures of the significance of English to professional competency, business efficiency as well as career opportunities in the global economy.

Methodology

The approach in the research will be qualitative approach, which in turn is using descriptive research design to explore the role of English in business communication and influence of English in professional practices in international business. The research will contribute to the study of the significance of the ability of the English language in the process of cross-border effective communication in the framework of improving business communication on the international level. To develop a deeper insight of the role of language in a real life setting in which communication is frequently associated with professional identity, negotiation, culture and strategic interaction, the study will utilize qualitative approach research due to its importance.

The researchers will use the exploratory research design during the study, which will enable the researcher to investigate English as a communicative and organizational tool instead of a linguistic system. There is no specific hypothesis to be tested in this, but patterns, meanings and strategies of communication related to the use of English in business situations are being established. This design suggests themes that could be explored such as globalization, business discourse and competence. Although the study does present some useful details on the use of English in business communication, it may be said to have several limitations that were related to the nature of the research design like the utilization of self-reported data that may be susceptible to personal interpretation and responses. Nevertheless, this design offers an excellent and contextualized insight into the English use as a professional tool in the modern business environment and offers an important contribution to the overall range of the language and communication studies.

Results and Discussion

Here, the results of the research regarding the role of English in business communication will be discussed and analyzed in global perspective. Both the theoretical and practical perspective will be discussed and include the theoretical perspectives on language, globalization and communication. The results demonstrate

that English is not only the means of information exchange, but also the instrument of developing professional identity, efficiency in the organization, and the ability to compete in the world market.

English the Global Lingua Franca in Business Communication

The paper has revealed that English has remained one of the preferred languages in the international business communication, particularly finance, tourism, trade, education, information technology and diplomacy. The respondents agreed with one another that English was applicable in communication when sending e-mail, drafting contract, negotiating, making presentations, and using internet marketing etc. This has been seen to conform to the fact that English has become a global lingua franca because of historical, political and economic forces, such as the spread of British colonialism and American economic influence (Crystal, 2003). Similarly, Graddol (2006) indicates, that the English ownership is no longer vested in any nation, rather it has become a global resource, which is influenced by the multilingual speakers in most nations of the world. This notion is supported by the results of the current research, with business people of different linguistic profiles adopting English as a common means of communication to make sure that no one specific national language is preferred. This linguistic neutrality is also useful in the multinational companies where representatives of different countries can work on one project without any linguistic barriers.

Moreover, the respondents emphasized that they did not learn English but had to do it to be able to work in the office. This is in accordance with the concept of a global English by Neeley (2012), which is the institutionalization of English as the official language in the work place particularly in multinational firms. According to Neeley, the English language is applied in the workplace to provide global communication, to make the company somehow coherent, and to prevent some misunderstanding that might arise because of linguistic fragmentation. The findings of the current study supported the findings that the English language could be used as a global language that connects the workplace, and thus, through it, the company could standardize its documents, training programs and communication.

The findings of the current study have however also shown that the dominance of the English language may be detrimental to the low English-proficient participants and establish an imbalance in the workplace. This tends to conform to the theory of linguistic imperialism that is advanced by Phillipson (1992) that postulates that the proliferation of English globally may strengthen power dynamics in the world, particularly to favor the speakers of English speaking nations. English may be globalizing the business, yet it also may support power relations at the workplace.

English Proficiency and Professional Effectiveness

One of the key insights that the research made was the fact that English proficiency was significantly related to professional success and self-confidence at work. The respondents believed that employees who were conversant in English language felt more at ease running meetings, negotiating contracts, and even networking in a global environment. That is in accordance with Bhatia (2014), who claims that business communication competence is not limited to linguistic accuracy only, but pragmatic and rhetorical competence, e.g. persuasion, politeness, and cultural sensitivity. Besides this, the English proficiency was also found to be strongly related to leadership and career development opportunities.

In this aspect, respondents concurred that individuals who are conversant with the English language have a higher likelihood of getting a leadership and other positions that are in contact with customers. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, and Welch (1999) study on language and multinational corporations also supported this argument as it was determined that employees who are capable of communicating in the language of the multinational corporation become more visible and mobile within the organizational structure.

Similarly, Huhta, Vogt, Johnson, and Tulkki (2013) claim that professional communicative competence in the English language will help people to raise their employability and workplace performance, as it will enable people to engage actively in

networks of sharing knowledge and making decisions. The results of this study supported this argument because it was observed that employees who are able to communicate effectively in English are in a better position to be involved in strategic decision making and negotiation processes.

Nevertheless, they also acknowledged that linguistic competence was not a sufficient condition of professional achievement. Pragmatic awareness, cultural flexibility, and emotional intelligence are also required in order to conduct effective business communication. This is also in connection with the functioning theory of language by Halliday which was devised in 1978 and views language as a semiotic system that has purpose and context. Not English as a code but English as a social tool, that is based on institutional, professional, and communicative factors is used in a business manner.

English and International Business Expansion

The findings further reveal the fact that English is a crucial instrument that organizations need in order to widen their business to the global market. The companies relied on English to enter into partnerships, do business with suppliers and customers abroad, participate in international trade events and do business overseas. This proves the assertion that Jenkins (2015) made that ELF assists in facilitating international communication by forming a common ground on which communication is not constrained by national and cultural differences.

Once again, Seidlhofer (2011) states that ELF communication is more geared towards intelligibility and pragmatic success of communication than norms of the native speakers. According to the businesses that participated in the study, it affected a clear, simple, and understood business communication more than it was important to be grammatically correct.

Their results also align with the works of Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013) on English as a corporate language, which concluded that working language of companies that use English is more coordinated between overseas subsidiaries and expedites the process of decision-making.

The research participants supported the fact that English helps operations to be efficient through reducing costs on translation, breaking down the barriers of communication, and enabling real-time communication despite time differences despite the time zones. Based on the research, it can be seen that the English language in itself does not guarantee internationalization.

The respondents emphasized that cultural competence and awareness were necessary. This fact is in line with Hofstede's dimension theory (2011) which indicates that cultural values including power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and communication play a major role in international business. In spite of the bridge, there will always be the involvement of cultural values in international business.

English in Digital and Corporate Communication

The most significant finding is connected with the growth of the use of English in digital types of business communication. The respondents concurred with the fact that, English was the predominant method of online communications such as use of corporate websites, social media marketing, email communications, virtual meeting sessions, and online transactions. This observation can be traced back to a critical discourse analysis approach of Fairclough (1995) according to which the use of language within a social context is defined through the manifestation of power relations between the institutions, as well as the technological environment where the language is practiced. The growing adoption of internet in conducting business activities has led to a requirement to have a standard form of communication which can easily be understood by an international audience and once more this has added strength to the status of English.

Another avenue of English usage has also emerged due to the growing use of virtual teams and the emergence of the culture of working at home. The respondents consented that they are using video conferencing tools to hold virtual meeting sessions and managing teams using online tools, primarily English. It is possible to find a reflection of this observation in the concept of Business English as Lingua franca put forward by

Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2012), which implies that English is used in. In addition, it was discovered that digital communication spaces transform the use of language where brevity, informality, and multimodality are promoted.

This is consistent with the discourse based research of professional communication by Hyland (2004) where he had written about the evolution of genres in the light of technology, institutions as well as the rhetorical aspects. The digital business environment English language is thus dynamic, flexible and practical as opposed to strict and standard English.

However, they also expressed reservations regarding the misunderstanding and vagueness of the written English communication, particularly when non-native speakers utilize technological translation tools or some other informal means of digital communication. This is also in line with Canagaraj arguing that successful communication in global English requires meaning negotiation and accommodation between speakers and not adherence to any prescriptive standards of linguistics. It is not about linguistic correctness, but how to make intentions out, how to understand others in a charitable manner, co-construct meaning in business communication.

English and Work Place Power Relations

The results indicate that English proficiency influences power dynamics at the workplace, access to the decision-making process, and professional status. The people who possessed greater English proficiency were deemed to be confident, competent and leader-oriented, and the individuals who possessed lesser English proficiency felt an element of marginalization and insecurity. This is connected to Bourdieu (1991) argument of linguistic capital, which symbolically implies the power of linguistic competence to generate social power, legitimacy and authority.

Similarly, Tietze (2008) argues that the language used in multinational companies constitutes organizational identities and hierarchies in that it provides a voice to some people and silence to others. The results of the present research confirm this argument by demonstrating that the mastery of the English language can serve as a gate keeping

factor in the professional life, and decide whose voice is listened to. In the given situation, lowly-English proficiency employees can either opt to go silent in the meeting or when expressing their ideas or making negotiations.

Nevertheless, the study under consideration also revealed that knowledge of English can also serve as a source of empowerment of those who represent non-dominant language groups in order to transcend horizons of locality and become able to relate to the world. It is so because fluency in English can provide the access of more networks to the people outside the local communities. This enabling and exclusionary role of English proficiency has been observed to be in line with the postcolonial language theories as put forward by Pennycook (2007). The proficiency in English language in this case can serve as a locus of ideological struggle too.

That is, it can serve as the place of resistance, mobility, and change. The paper, accordingly, highlights the importance of organizations having inclusive language policies, train them on communication, and create friendly environments where they will feel confident and competent in the use of English without fear of being stigmatized and judged. This goes along with Fairclough (2001) claim that organizational practice in discourse must be participative, equitable, and democratic, rather than hierarchical exclusion.

English and Career Mobility

The close connection between career mobility and the English proficiency is among the most significant findings. The respondents mentioned that the English proficiency enhances access to the global job, multinationals, foreign placements, professional training, and global education facilities. This observation supports the argument made by Coleman (2011) that English is a kind of social and economic capital that promotes career mobility in the international job market.

Another argument that Jenkins (2015) makes is that a lingua franca, in this case, English, is the language that helps professionals work across borders, participate in

international communities of practice, and pursue transnational career paths. This result proves that the English proficiency promotes competitiveness of individuals in the global employment market and enables them to work in the countries of the international labour market.

The combination of language skills, technical skills, interpersonal skills, ethical judgment and organizational skills are all required to achieve professional achievement. This corresponds to the model of interactional sociolinguistic presented by Gumperz (1982), where he suggested that the success of communication does not rely on the grammatical correctness of a statement, but on communicational context, inference and understanding.

In addition, the language anxiety, fear of errors, and negative self-perception can also serve as the obstacles to the active engagement in the English-mediated professional environment. This is in line with the results of the language anxiety research conducted by Horwitz (2001) who had discovered that the fear of being evaluated negatively can influence the performance of even the competent language users. Moreover, any organization should keep in mind psychological and cultural obstacles to effective communication.

English, Intercultural Communication and Global Collaboration

The other significant observation is that English is an intercultural communication tool that does not eliminate cultural differences in communication, values and anticipations. Some of the issues mentioned by the participants are the problems of indirectness, politeness, decision-making, turn-taking, and hierarchy. This goes in line with the concept of cultural differences between high context and low context cultures as postulated by Hall (1976) that leads to the cultural differences in communication, despite the use of a language as a medium of communication.

The cultural dimension approach proposed by Hofstede (2011) can also be used to explain the issues that exist in business communication that is mediated by the English

language. The cultural dimension approach describes that the cultural disparity in power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity- femininity influence decoding messages, expressing disagreement and conflict management. English is a communication medium but it cannot eliminate cultural differences.

The findings also confirm the theory of anxiety/ uncertainty management developed by Gudykunst (2003) that states that to achieve success, the intercultural communication, individuals have to be able to cope with uncertainty, decrease their anxiety, and adapt their behavior to the context. The participants emphasized on the importance of cultural sensitivity, empathy, and receptiveness in English-mediated business communication. Effective communication was associated with forbearance, method of clarification, and accommodation of various other linguistic and cultural norms.

In addition, the interviewees emphasized the importance of pragmatic competence in English communication, knowledge of how to soften requests, express disagreement diplomatically and deciphering between the lines. This is in lines with the pragmatic failure theory of Thomas (1983) which suggests that when speakers neglect sociocultural conventions even when the message is grammatically correct, then pragmatic failure takes place. Applied failure in business communication may result in the breakdown of the relationship, the absence of any trust, and the loss of the negotiation process. Thus, English business communication requires linguistic competence, as well as intercultural communicative competence.

English, Organizational Efficiency and Knowledge Management

The findings revealed that English helps in organizational efficiency as it helps in knowledge sharing, standardization of documents and coordination across borders. As an example, the respondents said that English language policies enable organisations to streamline the organisational internal communication, reduce unnecessary translation expenses and to standardise training resources, reports and organisational processes. This is in line with the study conducted by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) that revealed that English supports knowledge sharing within multinational corporations.

The same issue is also highlighted by the theory of communities of practice by Wenger (1998) who argues that learning and knowledge construction are based on a common communicative practice. The knowledge of English language supports the involvement of employees to the world of professionals and allows them engage in the process of innovations development. This research verifies the argument that English is a tool of organizational learning and knowledge creation, which allows one to obtain knowledge sources in the global knowledge pool and professional communities.

However, they also pointed out that the presence of standardized policies in English could also restrain local linguistic diversity, which may also be applied in the context of employees, expressing their complex thoughts in their native languages. The argument is echoed by Tietze and Dick (2013) assertion that a corporate language policy based on monolingualism may be detrimental to linguistic diversity, which will result in cognitive diversity deficiency. In as much as standardized policies within an English speaking environment could enhance performance within the corporate environment, a compromise between standardization and inclusiveness may be necessary when promoting multilingualism.

Also, the informal communication in a corporate environment, as reported by the respondents, could translate into the use of two or more languages in informal communication despite the use of English as a corporate language. This argument echoes the statement by Garcicia and Wei (2014) about translanguaging that states that a multilingual is free to move around and may alternate between languages and does not have to be confined by a rigid barrier between different languages. The process may enhance communicational efficiency and bonding hence implying that English in a corporate environment may be applied in a multilingual environment as opposed to its application in isolation.

English, Professional Identity and Self-Perception

Another finding of the study is that the mastery of the English language has an effect on identity and self-perception. According to the respondents, English proficiency would enhance confidence, credibility and self-esteem whereas poor proficiency would cause a

sense of inadequacy, marginalization, and helplessness. This is proven by the theory of language, identity and learning offered by Norton, according to which, there is a close correlation between the language learning and the identity, as language learning is perceived as being related to the personal sense of self, the place in society and the dreams about the future. Moreover, the theory of identity and the participation in communities of practice offered by Wenger implies that the knowledge of the language enables people to recognize themselves as a member of the community of practice.

The command of English is, thus, a symbolic mark of professionalism, globalization and institutional legitimacy. Nevertheless, the research demonstrates that excessive focus on competence in English leads to unrealistic expectations in which professionals are rated according to their competence in the language. The respondents alleged that they are biased in assessing professionals in terms of their mastery of language whereby linguistic performance is commonly accorded more weight than technical expertise, experience, and substance. This is supported by the linguistic bias theory provided by Roberts in which it is argued that accent, fluency and linguistic style is supported.

The results hence indicate that the organizations should differentiate the linguistic competence and professional capability and facilitate the language development of employees by training, mentoring, and involving them in the inclusive communication. Instead of using English as a gate keeping tool, it should be seen as a development tool which allows one to participate and develop.

English and Ethical Communication in Business

Another theme that is being born is concerning the ethical issues of the business communication through the English medium. The participants emphasized the necessity of clarity, transparency, and honesty in English communication, specifically in the context of the negotiation process, the signing of contracts, the promotion, and interaction with customers. This conforms to the communicative action approach by Habermas (1984) who believes that ethical communication is founded on mutual understanding, veracity and rational discourse, as opposed to action.

Meanwhile, the respondents have also affirmed that English could also be employed strategically to conceal meaning, distort perceptions, wield power, particularly in a contractual agreement, corporate disclosure, and marketing language. This is aligned with the critical discourse analysis approach by Fairclough (1995) that states that language plays an ideological role to create a reality, legitimize practices, and uphold institutional power. In business communication, English may be employed in the moral and immoral communication with reference to the communicative purpose and business culture.

The implications of the results are significant in terms of the necessity of the training of businesspeople in ethical communication, which, in its turn, should be aimed at the elements of clarity, accountability, and intercultural responsiveness. Organizations have to promote open linguistic expression, and it ought to prioritize the understanding of stakeholders over rhetorical appeal. business education and professional training implications.

The research has some significant implications especially in relation to business education and training. To begin with, it is necessary to note that the training of business English should be based on the communicative, pragmatic, and intercultural parts of the language, but not its grammatical correctness. This can be proven by the fact that Hylands (2004) genre based pedagogy emphasizes the need to teach learners to effectively communicate in business.

Secondly, the business communication education needs to be modeled on real-life situations, such as the writing of emails, management of meetings, negotiation, presentation, conflict resolution, and communication through the use of digital media. This can be affirmed by the model of professional communication competence by Huhta, et al., (2013) and that combines linguistic, sociocultural, strategic, and professional dimensions of business communication.

Thirdly, organizations must establish a culture of ongoing language training, mentoring, and a friendly work environment and not stigmatize language badness. This is reinforced by the fact that, according to Canagarajah (2013), in the environment of

global English, the sense of negotiated norms needs to be developed, and effective communication can only be achieved through accommodation.

Additionally, business education should place greater emphasis on the importance of ethical communication, cultural intelligence, and reflective practice, so that business professionals are equipped to communicate effectively across different contexts.

Conclusion

Finally, it can be concluded that the results of the present research indicate that English is an important factor in international business communication which affects the performance of individuals, organizations, movement of professional paths and cooperation between countries. English is used for communication and to engage people and countries in the world trade, use of global knowledge pools and negotiation of international relations. Inclusive, ethical and growth, English communication has significance because it affects the power structure in the workplace, the effectiveness of the labourer and the opportunities available to a single person.

The results obtained are in line with Seidlhofer's (2011) and Jenkins' (2015) findings on the theory of lingua franca, Bhatia's (2014) and Huhta et al.'s (2013) findings on the theory of business communication competence, and Bourdieu's (1991) findings on the theory of language as a kind of social capital. The findings made by the authors of the study also resonate with the concepts addressed by the critical theories which study linguistic inequality, power and identity (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2007; Tietze, 2008). Collectively these theories can offer an overall insight into the dynamic, complex, and contentious nature of English in the international business communication.

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