Pedagogical Approach to Business English: Dimensions and Interventions

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Purpose: The study aims to develop a framework allowing the systematic investigation of the various dimensions of the approaches for teaching business English (BE) in an ESL environment.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study is based on the mixed method approach of non-empirical and qualitative observation of the existing theories and practices put in use for teaching business English across several universities of different cultures and continents. The role of the structural method, functional method, and interactive methods for effective business English teaching shall be investigated in this study.

Findings: The importance of ethnolinguistics and cultural pluralism have been ignored in teaching Business English, especially in the cultural setup other than the natives. No pedagogical approach and teaching methodology shall reckon with any effective course learning outcomes for a specific occupational purpose.

Research Limitations: The study focuses more on the critical analysis and observation of the wide-ranging theoretical articles, and previous works of literature dealing with Business English.

Managerial Implications: The adequacy of the findings can be established only after the findings are implemented in a cross-cultural pedagogical setup and then evaluated through mixed methods of research findings.

Originality/Value: The study focuses on the core issue of the neglect of the cultural and ethnic aspects involved in the teaching methodology of Business English in non-native cultural set-ups.

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Introduction

The communicative needs of people led to the emergence of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the early years of the 1960s. This development took place because of the research-based language education that gets its theoretical foundation from Halliday et al., (1964) groundbreaking work nearly forty years ago, ESP started life as a branch of English language teaching, promising a stronger descriptive foundation for Pedagogic materials." Language for Halliday is a cultural code and not simply a method of communication (Hyland 2018). The broad communicative needs that emerge from inter discursivity are reflected in different disciplines and cultural interactions for professional purposes. English is now the language of business, law, science, and academia. In this way, ESP is an umbrella term used to cover English language teaching with divergent objectives of language acquisition for specific goals. Like English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE) has developed out of the broader field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The expected variety of communicative needs is different in diverse fields of inquiry and study. English for Business and Economics (EBE), English for Science and Technology (EST), and English for Social Studies (ESS) share the common theoretical foundations of language acquisition in general and ESP in particular. With the broadening canvas of ESP in recent years, several other determinants like Technical English, English for Medical Professionals, English for Tourism, English for Art Purposes, etc. appeared. Further, these subject areas were classified into two categories: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). The reason for such multiple subject areas and several categorizations is that "most of the traditional models of language education have become grossly inadequate to meet the challenges of the present-day interdisciplinary demands and practices of the academy and the world of professions". (Bhatia 2014)

For a long time, it was felt that the learners should be granted autonomy and equipped with self-sufficiency in the process of acquisition of the target language. To pragmatically fulfill this requirement, a language policy was a prerequisite. It will not only provide autonomy to learners but also give them intercultural awareness and help them understand the importance and need of pluri-lingualism. It will also give learners the competence to record their learning achievements and experiences (Council of Europe 2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) was launched along with the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in 2001. "…foreign language education is admitted to be convergent with the objectives of education for democratic citizenship…" preoccupied with intercultural inter-action and communication promoting mutual understanding and developing individual responsi-bility (Marinescu 2018). The changing dynamics of the world interface with various socio-cultural identities and aspirations. The role of language teaching must be on its toes adapting rapidly to the changing paradigms of the world we live in. Teaching English for business and eco-nomics in the context of the continuous and consistent changes of the contemporary world and the building of a knowledge-based society has to be reconsidered (Marinescu 2018). It can be safer to draw a difference between EBE and Business English (BE) as a premise for further elaboration. EBE is closer to English for academic purposes in comparison to BE which seems to fit in English for occupational purposes. Business English is generally related to corporate English training British Council underlines the use of BE to improve your English for the workplace and learn about business topics to help you work more effectively and make the most of career opportunities". A comparison of the book of English for Business and Economics and the book of Business English can well support the argument that EBE is for EAP and BE is for EOP. A first glimpse of the content page of a book for EBE may appear to be a book of economic concepts dealing with the nature of commerce. However, "*English for Economic and Business Use*is a reading, speaking, listening and writing coursebook for first year students of the Faculty of Economics, Commercial and Management Sciences…" (El-Moffock 2021). In contrast, the contents of a book Business English Course emphasized dealing with meeting new clients, everyday work activities, exchanging details, making travel arrangements, formal and informal phone calls, etc. "It is designed for people who want to teach themselves the English lang-uage. The business English edition covers essential English phrases and constructions for a wide range of common business scenarios" (D. K. 2017).

Once established that Business English is meant for English for Occupational Purposes, theoretical groundings can be recognized and set for the pedagogical approaches that can best suit the objective of this specific subject area. As stated earlier, Business English is a research based teaching process. Several pioneering studies of Business English around the world by Ann Johns, Marian Williams, Sims and Guice, Nickerson, Maier, Poncini, Rogerson-Revell, etc. have discussed the strategies used by both native and non-native speakers in teaching and learning Business English. However, it seems that some works need to be done on the basic theoretical foregrounding before entering the realm of teaching approaches, strategies, and techniques. Further, the article shall discuss relevant theories that need to be addressed in the context of the widening scope of Business English across the globe.

Plurilingualism

If 'language doesn't just mimic meaning, it creates meaning', then interconnectivity among languages in a prolific lingual reality should and must be complex. The global stretch of the use of English in Business has brought the world together in terms of communication, negotiation, and benefit-settlement. The world of commerce though seems to shrink but in reality, it has also diversified many-folds with many significant yet small business players participating actively worldwide. With the increase in the labor market and the expansion of the market in terms of trade in the post-colonial third world, the determining forces of trade have shifted eastwardly. The use of English is so widespread in the East that "English is now an Asian language" (Bolton 2008). The presence of Asian multinationals across the globe and vice versa has put the framework of BE in an ever-changing dynamic of professional expertise that integrates discursive competence. This poses challenges before BE in dealing with the discursive competence to manage the intricacies of dealing with a plurilingual global society. Another challenge is to make BE relevant to world English.

Discursive Competence equips us with the capability to recognize, comprehend, and examine the construct in a specialized situation. Thereby, it enables us to use a wide range of professional genres making our participation almost homogenous any given specific professional culture. It also helps to

exploit generic resources to create new forms, and thus claim ownership of a set of relevant genres in a professional context (Bhatia 2014). But the question is 'What is a professional culture and how is it affected by cultures that participate in it?' The broad outline of the professional culture of a business genre can be identified and marked but the players participating in it are comprised of divergent cultural identities. When BE as a subject aspect for language acquisition is brought into play it necessarily interferes with the linguacultural consciousness of the participants and stakeholders. Halliday (2007) calls for language planning to meet this challenge. Languages across cultures and different speech communities have suffered human interference where people have interfered with the languages of one another. For this reason, he advocates language planning. For Halliday (2007) the human activity of interfering with the language of one another shouldn't be deleterious. Rather, it should be progressive and symbiotic in the sense that it should be relevant to people's practical needs.

Halliday (2007) acceptance of human interference with each other's language is a significant realization and sets the premise of language and cultural conceptualizations. In any acceptable set of business genres, the anthropological linguistic interface is evident though ignored. Business English is no exception to such discrimination. The parlance common to any cognitive construct – language being one – exhibits ethno-lingual biases and influence. As assumed and agreed that BE is English for Occupational Purpose, the pedagogy involved should accept and respect cultural diversity in terms of both the structure of language and lingual consciousness. The norm-providing inner circle like the United Kingdom and the first diaspora of English speakers like Australia, New Zealand, North America, Anglophone Canada, and Ireland set regulatory standards for the outer and the expanding circles. Ironically, the English speakers in the outer and expanding circle are more than those in the inner circle. Though difficult, it is estimated that the users of English for specific purposes especially in business contexts in the expanding circle comprising countries like China, Russia, Nepal, non-Anglophone Europe, Korea, etc. range from 100 million to one billion. The need for strict standards complying with the native consciousness is accepted with reservation by the people of world English. Unlike other ESPs, BE

has an encompassing but fixed narrative of communicative objectives that have been over-burdened by standards of stylistics and rhetoric in terms of etiquettes followed in spoken and written communication in a corporate set-up.

The acceptance of the standards set by the inner circle finds its reason in the outer circle which mostly carries the legacy of the colonizers. The users of English in the outer circle have not been accoladed or even accepted as equals in the lingual brotherhood. They are 'accented', 'false beginners', and 'lexically-ambiguous.' They are 'almost the same but not quite". Still, the ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and the colonized encourages the latter to 'mimic' the former. When BE is juxtaposed to the 'third space of enunciation' (as Homi K Bhaba calls it), ambiguity emerges because the third space is the space, according to Bhaba, of 'hybridity' itself. The liminal space gives rise to a new area of negotiation of meaning. The pedagogy of BE shall have to overcome this challenge to keep itself relevant in the changing times where ethnocultural pathos is asserted. "If we are wise, we will adapt to the person we are talking about and to the person we are talking to" ([MacClintock 2011](#)). Lingual discourse never happens in isolation, nor does it take place without a proper organization of all components that comprise speech communities.

Generally, ESP has been defined along the disciplinary lines in the conventional way. As a result, the resourcefulness and usefulness of genres in academic and specialized situations have been neglected so far. To make the best possible use of the genres, ESP should not merely be defined conventionally. It must be demarcated to 'negotiate' the angles of 'specificity' within the broader socio-pragmatic space of ESP in a more flexible way, keeping in mind the needs, wants, and desires of the target community in question ([Bhatia 2014](#)).

[Bhatia (2014)](#) calls for the integration of 'discursive competence', 'disciplinary knowledge', and 'professional practice'. For him, this integration is pivotal in the acquisition of proficiency in language especially in any perspective of ESP. In addition to the proposed integration, as suggested, one more element needs assimilation into the integrated network and that is the acceptance of different types of business rhetoric used by the speech communities of the world Englishes. If BE fails to

embrace the anthropological quest of the target community, it is a fear that English shall be considered the language of the 'Other' by the numerically widening speakers of the language. Any language when spread across a large section of the global community doesn't merely transmit its coded forms and meanings to diverse surroundings for people of variant speech community to use those codes and meanings. English is no exception to this characteristic of the spread of language. Also, the spread is not of the actual language. Instead, it is the spread of virtual language and not the actual. Moreover, in the process of the spread, the virtual language is actualized. The two processes are different in the sense that the spread of the actual language indicates adoption and conformity, but when the virtual language is distributed and actualized it denotes adoption and not adaption. It also implies non-conformity ([Widdowson 2003](#)).

To meet the challenges mentioned above, BE must have to reinforce its pedagogic approach with certain innovations and changes. To minimize the overindulgence of the norm-deciding inner circle, certain changes in the approach towards teaching and learning Business English are inevitable. These are proposed and discussed further.

Pedagogical Approaches to Business English

Three levels of language teaching methods namely approach, method, and technique were formulated by Professor Edward Mason Anthony of the University of Michigan in 1963 ([Anthony 1963](#)). The best teaching strategies are the result of the understanding of pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. For Anthony, the "approach is axiomatic" which aims at defining principles about the nature of language learning. Though at first 'approach' may seem to be more abstract and conceptual than the method and techniques of teaching, it helps the stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning process to underline general principles and guidelines to establish the theory and practice of learning which is more often influenced by several extrinsic factors like culture, society, economy and polity. In an educational framework, the awareness of the multilingual forces that affect the learning process helps the teachers and instructors to acquire a certain degree of assurance in implementing the best tailored strategies for the researched-based target students.

"When the pedagogical approaches are to be formulated or put into practice, there are several factors that the instructors need to be aware of the students. Some of these include their academic goals and objectives, age groups, grade levels, subjects and concepts, learning abilities, interactive abilities, personality traits, standards of education, laws, and rules of the educational institutions, and other needs and requirements of the students. Pedagogical approaches impart knowledge and understanding to the individuals in terms of how knowledge and skills are imparted in the educational framework" (Kapur 2020).

Since the conception of the teaching framework, several approaches have been put to use in the pedagogical process of ELT. Constructivists, liberationists, behaviorists, reflective and communicative approaches, etc. have all been implied in imparting language acquisition to the learners. Among these different approaches the advocacy of the 'Communicative Approach' and 'Translingual Approach' shall benefit the BE learners of the outer and the expanding circle of English learners. Though the 'constructivist approach' to language learning is popular in European academic circles and the communicative approach has several criticisms to bear, yet communicative approach has a strong theoretical base and support from the academic ideas.

The independence of syntax from semantics as proposed by Chomsky (2002) led to a different type of competence which was based on transformational generative grammar. Chomsky (2002) opined that the syntactic structures are not learned but 'acquired" by the child from universal grammar. Language learning is a cognitive process and not merely an empirical truth. This concept was broadened by Hymes (1972) who disseminated the fundamentals for the comparative, ethnographic study of language use. He juxtaposed communicative competence with linguistic competence. He led foundations for exploring ethnographic communicative competence.

On a very similar note, Bruner (1974) an American psychologist advocated that the teachers should provide a framework for the learners who formulate their understanding of the world based on personal observation, knowledge, and exposure. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or the communicative approach demands interactions as the means and the end of language acquisition. The interaction of the learners with their peers and the instructor is outside the domain of traditional grammar. The teacher's role of being an instructor is neither appreciated nor needed. She/he is simply a facilitator. The verbal skills and development of oral sounds are given more emphasis in the beginning and students are encouraged to incorporate their personal experience in the target language through the topic-based learning classroom. CLT no longer intimidates the learners with the essential understanding of a culture foreign-in-context through coursebooks designed to develop grammatical competence. The extension of CLT is evident in the dialogic process and scaffolded conversation to improve the engagement and interaction of the learners through the Dogme approach of language acquisition. Dogme's approach believes that language and grammar emerge from the learning process. The process is the main drive and language and grammar are the essential by-products of the learning approach. "Are these Dogme like prescriptions just another method? I hope not. The point is to restore teaching to its pre-method "state of grace" – when all there was a room with a few chairs, a blackboard, a teacher, and some students, and where learning was jointly constructed out of the talk that evolved in that simplest, and most prototypical of situations. Who, then, will join me and sign a Vow of EFL Chastity?

Another important approach that can help learners of BE is a translingual pedagogical approach. "Adopting practical pedagogical strategies for promoting translingual skills and dispositions requires addressing the dynamics of monolingualism. We must educate our students that it is not only by conforming to and mastering monolingual standards but also by developing and using translingual skills that they can exercise agency and power. Students need to understand that the mastery of Standard English and translingual skills are not mutually exclusive objectives." (Sharma 2021). The translingual approach is a perspective for describing teaching and learning activities that involve working with and across more than one language. This approach to language acquisition involves designing tasks and activities to assimilate linguistic resources in a manner that acts as a window into different value systems,

rhetorical traditions, and practices that exist in various cultures, communities, and contexts. The term translingual is used to incorporate communicative modes like code meshing, polyglot dialog, polylingual languaging, heterography, plurilingualism, etc. Translingualism also helps us realize how "voice, diversity, and hybridity find expression (perhaps more subtly)in texts that appear to be constructed in Standard Written English". This extended meaning of translingual shows how all of us are involved in translingual communication, which "finds representation in textual products with different types and degrees of language mixing" (Sharma 2021).

Translingualism does not reject the importance of L2 altogether. On the contrary, it tries to take help from the L2 research and L2 best practices. Linguistically diverse students can be served better if L2 best practices are incorporated into curriculum design for language acquisition. Especially when dealing with learners of business English, this approach can help them accept, understand, and adopt the English language not as the 'other' but as a part of the universal lingual system. The lingual moorings of the diverse range of learners shall not be isolated or alienated in the process of language acquisition practices. "The redesign of the curriculum at FIU resulted from a faculty-development initiative within our mainstream writing program. As (Matsuda 2006) points out, "The vast majority of US college composition programs remain unprepared for second language writers who enroll in the mainstream composition courses" and ours was no exception. As a Hispanic-serving, majority-minority university, we have linguistically diverse writing classes, but most of our largely mono-lingual faculty had not been exposed to L2 research or L2 best practices. Our program viewed this mismatch as a deficiency to be addressed" (Lopez 2021).

Conclusion

As most of the learners of Business English come from the expanding circle, especially from countries like China, Japan, Korea, etc., the ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism affecting the process of language acquisition cannot be ignored. Whatever teaching methods and techniques are applied to help the BE learners, one must first accept the ethnolinguistic question that becomes pivotal in engaging the students in learning language for a

specific occupational purpose where the imposition of a fixed model of business etiquettes, rhetoric, and style will only create a lingual apathy towards target language. Hence it becomes very important to bring changes in the pedagogical approaches towards teaching Business English to learners. Some of the effective approaches have been discussed here with the purpose of open discussion and inviting critical opinion for successful implementation through innovative designs and harnessing courage to change the pedagogical approach towards BE.

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