

# BUSINESS ENGLISH AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

**Nikoleta Mihajlović<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Philosophy, Department of English Language and  
Literature, University of Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica

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Corresponding: nikoletamihajlovic96@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6761-0028>

**Abstract:** Over the decades, English, more specifically Business English, has become a lingua franca in the business world. Intercultural communication is becoming more prevalent and essential with the ever-changing and ever-merging world economy. Adopting economic terminology is crucial in these conditions and improving communication skills for efficient and effective results is becoming imperative in the business world. English proficiency has become a matter of course, particularly in occupations such as banking, international trade, business informatics, marketing, economics, communications, business law, tourism and the like. Global business relations, now more than ever, necessitate contact between people from various socioeconomic classes, cultures and languages. This paper explores the nature and linkages of Business English and intercultural communication, as well as factors that influence intercultural competence.

**Keywords:** Business English, intercultural communications, intercultural competence, global business.

## **Introduction**

Globalization, migration and population growth have accelerated in the past few decades. Language and cultural awareness, as well as the ability to interact effectively and efficiently with individuals from other cultures, were prioritized in this change. These characteristics are even more prevalent in the corporate environment. Improving Business English (BE) proficiency has become insufficient and developing intercultural competence has become crucial. The European Council affirms this by saying that nowadays, developing intercultural competence is a prerequisite in all fields. It is acquired, learned and cultivated during one's whole life. [Huber et al., 2012, 6].

Business English as a lingua franca (BELF) of the business world is essential for international trade, economic development and the implementation of new technologies. [Nickerson, 2005, 367] Not only does it focus on providing speakers with a means of communication in a professional setting, but also on getting the fastest and most convenient results for the parties involved. One of the goals of Business English thus became to develop intercultural competence as it impacts business relations. To achieve

the desired outcome, one must first understand the beliefs, behaviors and practices of other people.

Language is a reflection and a product of one's culture. It is essential to behavioral patterns and will clash with speakers from different regions. People from the Balkans, for example, will have an easier time communicating because they are of southern Slavic descent. Because our cultures share the same root, we have an easier time recognizing appropriate social cues. For example, this cannot be expected when interacting with the Americas or the Far East.

Culture plays an important part in worldwide commercial activities such as business protocol, leadership and management, decision making, conflict management and negotiations. [Samovar et al., 2017, 334]

An individual's interpersonal interactions are heavily influenced by their cultural background. They are distinguished by various points of view, values and norms and cannot be marginalized on a greater level. As a result, when learning Business English, the outcome will differ from textbook examples. Another thing to consider is that presumptions and the inability to

expect the unexpected can lead to unfavorable relations.

Effective intercultural communication can lead to success in business. This strategy pervades all aspects of operations, both external and internal. A culture-oriented environment is desired because it fosters good relations, positive workspace, attracts talent and produces satisfactory results.

### **Concept of Business English**

Anthony [2018, 32] discusses the importance of English for Special Purposes in various countries. People who are looking for new opportunities or who are already employed learn ESP. This is especially true in the business world, resulting in high demand for English for Business Purposes. Over time, the definition of what Business English entails has evolved. It is now widely acknowledged that no universal definition for BE. For some, it is centered around terminology and subjects utilized in business, commerce, finance and international relations, while for others, it refers to communication skills used in business correspondence, socialization, business reports, executive summaries, presentations, business meetings, negotiations and so on. If the speaker's primary goal is to come to a conclusion, grammar rules may

be ignored on occasion. Business English can also be defined by who uses it and in what contexts, as well as their level of English proficiency.

Ellis & Johnson [1994, 7-9] described BE with the following characteristics:

First and foremost, Business English has a Sense of Purpose. The majority of the language is transactional. The primary goal is to convince people to follow a specific route. The applied language is objective rather than personal. Instead of expressing a subjective opinion, it is preferable to study data neutrally during presentations and meetings.

Second, Business English demands the use of certain Social Aspects. Interpersonal relations are highly ritualized. For warm hospitality and introductions, formulaic phrases are employed.

Lastly, Business English requires clear communication. The information must be delivered with the least amount of chance of misinterpretation. Both the speaker and the listener must save up on time. Speech should be clear and logical. As a result, certain terms came about to express one's Business English proficiency, such as "brainstorming" or "parent company".

Most of these come in form of abbreviations like VP, CEO and IT.

Frendo [2005, 7] sees Business English as a combination of everyday English, English used by native Englishmen in the corporate world and as part of ESP.

Wu [2013, 131] focuses on the concept of BE as a lingua franca, describing how it encompasses a wider range than regular BE, including areas such as advertising, banking, economics, commerce, law, foreign trade, tourism and so on. By taking into account the perspectives of several authors on BE [Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Jiang & Guo; Lin] Wu divided BELF into:

1. English Lingua Franca for General Business Purposes - ELFGBP has core features of Business English.
2. English Lingua Franca for Specific Business Purposes - ELFSBP has variable linguistic properties which depend on the context it is used in.

According to Nickerson & Planken [2015, 14], researchers feel that BE teaching with native only communication should transition to BELF in an international setting. This change has come about due to globalization. They say that BELF involves conversations between people who speak English as a second or additional tongue, whereas

International BE involves conversations between native and non-native English speakers. BELF is thought to be the more successful alternative.

## **Intercultural Communication**

Culture is a concept that anthropologists struggle to define even today, states Spencer-Oatey. He describes how culture relates to social groups, categorizing all individuals into sub-groups such as generational groups, nation groups, gender groups, ethnic groups, professional groups and so on. [Spencer-Oatey, 2008, 3].

One of the earlier definitions made by Tylor [1871] states that it is a broad concept consisting of behavioral patterns, systems and conventions of one's society. It includes practices, laws, norms, knowledge and lifestyle of individuals of said culture. Kroeber & Kluckhohn [1952, 50] define a society's culture as a collection of memories and encounters, as well as the interpretations of their imagery and symbols, that have been developed or acquired over time. Nelson & Braff [2020, 6] proposed one of the newer definitions by defining culture as a representation of an all-encompassing set of beliefs, norms and rituals that are both acquired and taught, as well as being able to

affect people's ideologies world-wide.

To have suitable and fluid communication with individuals of different cultures in the business world, we must first recognize the major characteristics that make up and affect intercultural communication. To begin, we must define cultural communication.

To Chen & Starosta [1998], interaction among people from two distinct cultures is referred to as intercultural communication. Lustig & Koester [2010, 46] have a broader definition, defining intercultural communication as a process where individuals from various ethnic groups form common understanding through symbolic, interpretative, transactional and contextual means.

## **Developing Intercultural Competence for Business English**

There is more to learning Business English than meets the eye. It is not only a means of communication but a survival tool that focuses on the most effective ways to communicate in a professional setting. It displays one's communication skills which are linked to interpersonal qualities, managerial abilities and empathy. [Frendo, 2005, 66] To thrive in an intercultural setting,

these abilities should be mastered through developing intercultural communication competence.

Communicating with people of other cultures can be accompanied by negative emotional responses, such as discomfort and anxiety. To succeed in intercultural communication, one must be willing to deal with problems such as language barriers, foreign and sometimes unusual traditions and behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal cultural heterogeneity.

Samovar et al., [2017, 61], by reviewing Spitzberg and Kim, define intercultural competence as a person's overall ability to analyze and respond suitably and effectively in a given setting, while handling the challenging aspects of intercultural communication, such as cultural differences and limited knowledge, inter-group posture and pressure that comes with it. In other terms, being interculturally competent involves being able to connect successfully and properly with people from different ethnic, historical and linguistic backgrounds on their own terms.

It can be said that intercultural communication skills are founded on intercultural competence and in the business world, like any other setting, refers to having an intercultural mindset, that is, to be able

to understand a foreign culture, having the ability to think critically and knowing how to engage in a respectful and meaningful manner with diverse individuals. To build intercultural communication competence, one should: [Samovar et al., 2017, 61]

1. Have motivation.
2. Possess a pool of knowledge to draw on.
3. Have a certain set of communication skills (Listening Skills, Communication Flexibility, Tolerance for Ambiguity).

Being motivated might be the most important aspect of cultivating intercultural communication skills and Business English learning. It is the driving force behind all actions and showing a desire to learn, interact and grow will have a positive outcome in any aspect of business. Extrinsic motivation is most present in the corporate environment, which means that the desire for intercultural communication is fueled by an external incentive such as power, financial gain, or recognition. [Moller et al., 2006, 105]

Possessing knowledge of one's culture, history and etiquette, as well as adopting them into business communication patterns to the maximum extent, is another factor that intercultural competence entails. For example, to avoid making

errors, one must learn the culture of business partners and understand what is seen as impolite. However, such an approach isn't foolproof because anticipated behavior may differ from what Business English speakers have read in literature and being overconfident can cause misunderstandings. If their policy warrants it, a Japanese firm, for example, may be oriented toward western customs. Handshakes might be used in greeting, or western slang and phrases that might be spoken unexpectedly in a particular context. In some cultures, it is expected to bring gifts, while others might see it as an insult. As a result, one should be ready for such a scenario and know when and how to switch tactics if necessary. Another example is the value of time. Some cultures prioritize scheduling, while others don't emphasize punctuality. To create rapport, some events may require more familiar interactions than the usual cordial contact. A person with a good understanding of themes, phrases and concepts of a foreign culture can put together a plan and execute it in situations like marketing, promotions and dialogue.

Possessing good intercultural communication skills means that one can listen, observe, analyze, interpret and apply specific behaviors in

communication. It is not something that is simply acquired when learning Business English or when attending courses about intercultural competence. It is something one learns throughout a lifetime as a part of any kind of communication. They can nevertheless always be improved on in small ways.

Neuliep [2020, 36] describes active listening as a sign of effective communication skills as it demonstrates one's willingness to listen and to learn. By showing curiosity for other cultures, they also show being aware of cultural differences. Having active listening skills can ensure productive and efficient information exchange, dynamic brainstorming and trust. They require concentration and focus on both a psychological and a physical level. In the corporate sector, it is especially important to be mindful of what and how something is said. It goes hand in hand with providing feedback, which entails creating data based on the speaker's message and responding to it. [Neuliep, 2020, 53] Feedback may be as simple as a nod of acknowledgment, or simple expressions, or it could involve complete silence. It's also critical to get feedback. When conversing with clients, for example, you might show that you value their input and including them in the development of your

firm makes them feel connected to it.

LoBianco et al. [1999, 51] define communication flexibility as a skill that demonstrates one's knowledge and ability to adjust to other cultures' behavioral patterns. It enables people to accurately perceive the speaker's point of view and the ideas that they are sharing. Some patterns that are appropriate in one culture may not be appropriate in another. In direct listening cultures such as Germany, France and the US, people listen primarily for facts and concrete information. These cultures require individuals to speak directly and are inquisitive. In indirect listening cultures, such as Japan, Finland and Sweden, speakers expect no interruptions and politeness as a part of the listener's demeanor. Cultural patterns may cross into others, for example, White states that many Americans have adopted the Japanese style of listening. [LoBianco et al., 1999, 51]

When learning a new language or culture, it is important to remember that there will be encounters with unexpected and questionable mindsets, customs, or phrases which will lead to uncertainty and confusion. Samovar et al. [2017, 65] note that in ambiguous situations, one must remain calm and not be

afraid to seek guidance. To improve tolerance for ambiguity is to be non-judgmental and patient and always expect the unexpected. Perhaps the best advice, in the end, is: "When in Rome, do what the Romans do."

## **Digital Resources**

With the luxury of modern times, it is inevitable to accept the fact that media teaches and shapes the viewers' notion of reality. The more media viewers consume, the more their worldview aligns with the beliefs, values and attitudes seen on the screen. Delgad [1993, as cited in Samovar et al., 2017, 53] state that digital media provides the viewer with experience and content for intercultural communication at an interpersonal level.

This type of skill cultivation is done on a passive level and individuals can choose to actively improve their skills by seeking online resources for both Business English learning and building intercultural communication competence. All authors of referenced books advise learners to browse online sources for further training.

Business English has an inexhaustible amount of resources one can use for improving their Business English. Some resources take the form of webcasts, sample

sheets, joining public discussion boards, or consultations. It is a common tactic used by businesses when training their employees because it has a modern and professional feel to it. [Frendo, 2005, 100]

Learning online has advantages when compared to traditional paper-based materials when supplemented by audio and video. These resources can also include online television programming, online radio content, investment management presentations and online training and seminars.

Frendo [2005, 103] further states that one can review the company's history, download organizational chart samples, review product information and even compare health, safety and employment regulations from companies around the world if available. As a general consensus, people often rely on podcasts or audiobooks as means of learning a language in a world where there is too much shortage of time. By Google's estimate, some popular podcasts for business English learning are BEP (Business English pod), Ted Talks Business and D2B (Down to Business) English.

Building intercultural competence can also take the form of a short guideline. The European Council provided a brief etiquette for inter-

cultural communication in the form of the following rules: [Huber et al., 2012, 38]

1. Avoid making assumptions
2. Consider another perspective
3. Provide clarification if necessary
4. Pay attention and ask questions
5. Apply critical thinking
6. Discuss value judgment
7. Focus on solutions, instead of problems

## **Conclusion**

Globalization and the expansion of international trade have resulted in the formation of numerous business relations around the globe. Companies in growth constantly seek to enter new markets which are often geographically distant. Business English as a lingua franca has thus emerged as an easily manageable and widely recognized solution to language barriers. Without Business English proficiency, international or intercultural communication is almost impossible on a greater level.

Being exposed to so many different cultures makes intercultural communication a challenge. Competence must be developed and conversations must be preplanned, to facilitate success and prevent potential conflicts. Business prospects

are sometimes lost due to poor communication and misconceptions in business discussions. That is why it is essential to constantly strive for, maintain and improve intercultural competence through the study of diverse cultures, language learning and, more broadly, awakening and nurturing intercultural awareness. From several accounts, it can be concluded that intercultural competence depends on having motivation, possessing certain knowledge, developing listening and feedback skills, communication flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity and growing empathy.

Numerous guidelines and courses exist on improving Business English proficiency and developing intercultural communication skills. Some training programs are attended online, while others are in real-time. Individuals can improve their knowledge on their own terms by following textbooks or instructions like the ones given by the European council. Different perspectives exist on what is considered to be the correct modules or outlines, but one thing is certain: Business English and intercultural communications are inextricably linked in the twenty-first century, most notably in the business world.

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# POSLOVNI ENGLISKI JEZIK I INTERKULTURALNA KOMUNIKACIJA

**Nikoleta Mihajlović<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Filozofski fakultet u Kosovskoj Mitrovici, Katedra za engleski jezik  
i književnost, Univerzitet u Prištini,

Korespondencija: nikoletamihajlovic96@gmail.com

**Rezime:** Tokom poslednjih nekoliko decenija, engleski jezik, preciznije poslovni engleski jezik, postao je lingva franca u poslovnom svetu, a interkulturalna komunikacija značajna i suštinska u promenljivoj svetskoj ekonomiji. Usvajanje stručne ekonomske terminologije je presudno u ovim uslovima, a razvoj komunikacionih veština za efikasno i efektivno poslovanje postaje imperativ ekonomske globalizacije. Znanje engleskog jezika danas je nešto što se podrazumeva, naročito u bankarskom poslovanju, međunarodnoj trgovini, poslovnoj informatici, marketingu, poslovnoj komunikaciji, poslovnom pravu, turizmu i slično. Globalni poslovni odnosi, više nego ikada do sada, zahtevaju komunikaciju ljudi iz različitih socioekonomskih klasa, različitih kultura i sa različitih govornih područja. Ovaj rad istražuje prirodu i veze između poslovnog engleskog jezika i interkulturalne komunikacije, kao i faktore koji utiču na interkulturalnu kompetenciju poslovnih ljudi.

**Ključne reči:** poslovni engleski jezik, interkulturalna komunikacija, interkulturalna kompetencija, globalno poslovanje