

Book Reviews

Reconceptualising English for International Business Contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications (a review)

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Reconceptualising English for international business contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications by Elma Dedovic-Atilla and Vildana Dubravac is an excellent piece of research into the use of Business English as it is used internationally with recommendations for changes in how the language is used and should be taught, with suggestions for further research. Well-structured and narrated in an easy-to-follow style, it includes a research project carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina in southern Europe, what the authors describe as the 'Global South'. The research examines the need for Business English, what future professionals need and where problems in communication arise in the workplace where English is the international language. The use of English has dramatically increased in the last few years with globalisation and massive increases in the migration of labour stressing the need for a common language in the multicultural workplace. The lessons of the research as related to curriculum, classroom activity and the workplace apply not just to international business English but also to other widely spoken languages and are useful not just to English language teachers and researchers but specialists in other languages doing research into the use of their language in business in a multicultural environment.

The book has five chapters dealing with the role of English in the international community, an explanation of BELF (Business English as the Lingua Franca) and its role in building communicative competence, a field study of the role of English in Bosnia and Herzegovina followed by a discussion of the research project and finally, a conclusion discussing the implications of English as an international business language of communication for business practitioners and for educators. The end matter contains an appendix with the survey questionnaire used in Bosnia, references, and an index. The list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book is also very helpful.

So, what exactly is BELF? English as a foreign language or ESP (English for Special Purposes) are the most widely used terms to describe the use of business English. But Business English as the Lingua Franca offers a crucial view of how the English language is used in a professional environment. The term was coined in 2005 and is used to describe the shared communication code between and within businesses dealing with multinational workforces or clients. English is used as a functional tool to do business between different nationalities and is no longer the preserve of British or North-American English speakers or other users of English as a first

'In most industries the mastery of English is a key ingredient in ensuring successful promotion. It is surprising that the survey revealed that in three industries, administration, finance and manufacturing, English is considered less important than the native language but, generally speaking, BELF is generally considered a more important skill in international business than 'native speaker' ability'

language. One of the consequences of this is that the stress is on mastering international business terminology in English with a less important focus on perfect grammar or general vocabulary. Clarity is important, meaning that you avoid long complicated sentences, complicated phrases and explain idioms. A further stress is placed on the importance of relationship-building language, aimed at creating a positive link between people in business through the language used.

The authors point out that most studies of BELF and its usage have mainly been in companies in the northern part of Europe and in North America. This is why they extended the study and usage of BELF to the 'global south', focusing on the use of BELF in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an independent nation state and part of the former Yugoslavia. In a copybook research presentation, of value to any masters or doctoral student undertaking a research project, they used a variety of approaches to the Bosnian approach to English and how it is used in business contexts. The authors used a comprehensive range of approaches ranging from questionnaires (in English and Bosnian), telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings and interviews. They also offered an elaborate and thorough study of the use of BELF in business meetings, phone calls and WhatsApp and email messaging. Their findings offer suggestions for curriculum, teaching methodology and materials reform as well as teacher training courses. For those involved in training in English to optimise future employment opportunities, especially in international corporations and in the multicultural workplace, as mentioned above, respondents to the questionnaire and face-to-face interviewees were less concerned with grammatical correctness but with the correct use of business English in meetings, negotiation, and correspondence. Of interest to teachers of business English are the examples

of relevant grammatical features, including the use of tenses, the mismatch between subjects and verbs, vocabulary, English usage in a business context and the use of the definite and indefinite articles. The issue is not the use of 'incorrect' English forms but the misuse of language leading to possible misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication.

In summing up, the authors make clear that in most industries the mastery of English is a key ingredient in ensuring successful promotion. It is surprising that the survey revealed that in three industries, administration, finance and manufacturing, English is considered less important than the native language but, generally speaking, BELF is generally considered a more important skill in international business than 'native speaker' ability. It also found that younger managers and employees were generally considered better at the use of English internationally than many of their old and more experienced colleagues. They also found that older employees wanting to improve their English were inclined to use language tutoring face-to-face or online whereas managers under 50 were much more likely to rely on self-management learning.

The authors identify two types of language education for international business; first, where English is the official language of communication and secondly, where it is the working language. In practical terms, in the workplace grammar and vocabulary are important but maybe less so than developing strategies to understand and resolve possible miscommunication, knowing how to be polite and build rapport, and understand the different genres of language relevant to the language user's job and the workplace.

Regarding the use of the five language skills, speaking, listening, reading, writing and intercultural and intercommunication skills, all were seen to be important with speaking skills as the most important to develop for workplace communication. Although in the Bosnian research project intercultural and intercommunication skills seemed to be limited to learning a few words and phrases of other employees' and clients' native languages, the authors make it clear that intercultural and intercommunication skills are crucial in learning to communicate effectively in international business, resulting in better relations, more effective business collaboration and eventual positive business results.

The implication for language educators is to balance the focus on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation with repetitive drills with conversation-based activities involving workshops, debates and simulations

and a cross-curricular approach. Making the subject content the priority as opposed to limiting it to linguistic correctness will achieve better long-term results in assuring effective communication skills in the workplace. Allowing more time in the curriculum and in the classroom for speech-based activities such as TED-talks, debates, podcasts, auctions, and a wide range of other activities will help learners improve their communication skills and their confidence in using the language they are learning and help them relate it to their own interests. In addition, the adoption of a more informal and supportive learning environment which allows students to make mistakes and learn from them and a selection of subjects which helps them prepare for working in operations where an international language, such as English, is the means of communication.

Finally, the authors offer tips for researchers. The reach and applicability of BELF should be researched as well as how it is taught and employed in hitherto under-researched regions. The hypothesis of which types of business prioritise the use of BELF and which remain based in the native language of the country they are based in also needs further research. Also, the statement that managers and employees over the age of 50 are less likely to master or use English as the business lingua franca deserves deeper investigation as does the development of teaching situations and aids to encourage learning. As the authors conclude, in an age of multiculturalism and multilingualism the study of how international languages are used in both our personal and professional lives is an important part of our future teaching and learning success.

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