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## WHAT IS CHALLENGING ABOUT TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH TO LEARNERS OF PRE-EXPERIENCED LEVEL?

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*The purpose of this article is to analyse certain challenges that both teachers and learners face when it refers to teaching and studying Business English. We are going to identify types of learners, as well as their needs and demands. The article considers the syllabus design, material selection and methodology implemented in the Business English courses with suggested adaptation to fit current business environment.*

**Keywords:** *Business English; learners' needs; syllabus design; adaptation; business environment.*

## КАКИЕ СЛОЖНОСТИ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ДЕЛОВОГО АНГЛИЙСКОГО НЕОПЫТНЫХ СЛУШАТЕЛЕЙ?

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*Цель данной статьи является анализ некоторых проблем, с которыми оба учителя и ученики сталкиваются, когда речь идет о преподавании и изучении делового английского языка. Мы будем идентифицировать типы учащихся, их нужды и потребности. В статье рассматривается также разработка учебных программ, выбор материала и методики – реализованная в бизнес-курсах английского языка с предлагаемой адаптацией, чтобы соответствовать текущей бизнес-среде.*

**Ключевые слова:** *бизнес английский; потребности учащихся; учебный план; адаптация; бизнес среда.*

## Introduction

According to the definition by Frenco E. ‘Business English is an umbrella term for a mixture of general everyday English, general business English, and ESP’ [3, p. 7]. Business English is English language especially related to international trade. It is a part of English for Specific Purposes and can be considered a specialism within English language learning and teaching.

As a proof to this statement majority of specialists agree to the point that Business English (BE) shares the most characteristics of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) such as peculiarities of needs analysis, syllabus design, course framework, material selection and adaptation seeming common to all fields of ESP. Similarly, ‘Business English involves a specific language corpus and emphasis on specific types of communication in a specific context’ [1, p. 245]. However, Business English differs from ESP due to its mix of specific content and general content. ESP is more concentrated on a specific word stock, discourse style and profession, like engineering, logistics, tourism.

Hence, the challenges that teachers of Business English face in their occupation are as follows:

- How to design the Business English course best to meet the expectations and necessities of learners?
- Should the main focus be on improving specialized vocabulary or just communication skills?
- What teaching and learning techniques are more suitable for Business English courses?

The list of questions is not indefinite, but we will attempt to provide answers on some questions based on the practical experience of the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics in the faculties of economic studies.

### **The specifications of the syllabus and course design of BE**

It is commonly accepted that students with a major in economics and business should study business language, vocabulary and skills. The curriculum for students at PRUE comprises 2 semesters of studying a foreign language in the form of a General English practice course and 6 semesters of a course and seminar entitled ‘The Language of Business

Communication'. Though in future it is going to be shortened up to overall 6 semesters with the course named 'Foreign Language – Part 1', and up to 6 parts. Later, learners will have a two-semester practice course in other aspects of Business English, being rather specialized and skills-led programs, such as 'Business Correspondence' and 'Case Study Practice'.

The following part refers to the components and elements involved in the structure and content of the Business course for the of economic faculties. The following essential aspects are taken into account: the course content, language skills, specialized vocabulary, teacher's knowledge related to economic data and business-related contexts.

It should be noted that business English courses undergo continual changes and developments dictated by spread of globalization, international trade and expansion of student exchange programs amongst universities. Ongoing improvements have been observed as well as in textbook materials since 1980s and they have begun to concentrate greatly on communication skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening) within a business context. Business English is currently being more focused on functional areas, such as language of negotiating, recommending, agreeing or disagreeing, giving advice, expressing opinions, presentation techniques, meeting skills. Therefore, the practical use of the language has overshadowed the theoretical knowledge of the language.

### **Who are Business English learners and what are their needs?**

Another important distinction made by the specialists is between the types of Business English learners: pre-experienced, low-experienced and job-experienced learners [2]. Each group of students has their basic language abilities, needs and expectations. They vary in their levels of business knowledge or experience, motivation, time limitation and commitment. Thus, students in economics could be considered as pre-experienced learners and they have special needs according to the their current level of English and to the language requirements involved in their future profession or job. Pre-experienced learners seem to be more open-minded in comparison with job-experienced ones but they definitely lack confidence in their knowledge about business issues. Therefore, teachers here

act as experts who deliver not only the foreign language, but as well provide basic adequate information on business subject which is under study.

In contrast to General English, Business English course design is based on a number of specific steps and objectives, such as:

- Needs analysis: what goals and needs do learners pursue in order to meet the requirements of their future career?
- Assessment of level: one-to-one interviews, filling some questionnaires, written tests to establish the level of learners at the start of the course;
- Syllabus: fixed courses with supplementary tasks.
- Course objectives: should relate directly to the needs analysis findings; in the case of pre-experienced learners are defined in terms of course of study and required language improvement;
- Time: in case of tertiary education requirements, time is limited and course is structured according to semesters or number of hours;
- Learner expectations: in case of Business English, learners are more goal and success oriented, meanwhile pre-experienced learners can have quite vague targets, mostly led by the course objectives.
- Materials: should be defined and chosen in relation to the learner types; either existing business language textbooks, mostly tailored with lots of adaptation or in-company materials;
- Methodology: in case of pre-experienced learners the teachers' role is as an expert delivering both business and foreign language knowledge, and they should establish proper rapport with them trying not to use authority before job-experienced learners;
- Evaluation of progress: written or oral testing, exams focusing both on accuracy and functional skills [3, p. 104].

Overall, all these steps and targets were very helpful and effective in the elaboration of a general Business English course for all students of economic faculties no matter their major specialization. Consequently, students had the opportunity to narrow down their language skills and professional vocabulary only in the last years of their studies focusing on the particular requirements of the field they pursue to work after graduation (marketing, banking, tourism, etc.)

However, tertiary educational system underwent a series of changes with the waves of globalization in all areas of societies – economic, political, educational and medicine. In this respect, being dictated by the requirements and improvements of world-wide educational systems our university had to likewise alter and develop its Business English courses to meet the expectations and needs of both in-country and foreign students. Regardless of this development the majority of academics share the opinion that the structure and frame of Business English should be rather generalized, as they believe that students in economics first need to acquire general Business English knowledge, covering vocabulary and lexical items from all business fields with the emphasis on skills, functions and practical usage of language.

Others, forming the minority, feel there is a need for a more specialized and tailored course covering more specific vocabulary related to the study area they are majoring (management, marketing, audit and accounting). All in all, the structure and the content of the course are preserved containing topics, skills, functional language and culture spots being helpful for any person intending to work in the business environment or doing business at home or aboard. It is due to notice here that not all students end up working in the field they have a major; rather often management graduates end up working in a bank or marketing students in tourism. Therefore, general Business English course is what can be useful in diverse business areas.

At the beginning of the first year a level assessment written test is given to students in the university, besides the general state exams, mostly in the form of multiple choice tests based on grammar knowledge and language skills. They should at least have B1 level to face the requirements of the course and benefit from the business communication course. If they do not have this required level of foreign language, either they personally try to catch up with their peers or they are offered different in-house courses to improve their English knowledge.

The syllabus is fixed in terms of topics, structures, skills, functions, grammar issues and basic vocabulary, with the comprehensive description of Business English course per study year. The syllabus is mainly

structured on the basis of a business course book (*Market Leader*, *Intelligent Business*, *Business Advantage*, etc.) comprising thematic units which provide essential vocabulary input through authentic economic texts taken from ‘The Economist’, ‘Financial Times’, ‘BBC news’, topic-related grammar drills, functional language skills and writing tasks targeting mostly in-company business correspondence. Moreover, ‘the current decade has seen the further development of *soft business* and *soft management* skills, such as persuasions, turn-taking, problem-solving’ [4, pp. 22–23] which are included in the syllabus.

Coming to the objectives of the course, they are quite clearly defined focused on the command of structures and functions. Form level to level the goals vary, but overall they refer to the following competencies: comprehension of diverse oral messages in Business English, identifying attitudes and opinions of listening sections, communication around professional themes, mastering reading skills, and completing professional writing tasks.

As Business English is presented here as a practice course, the evaluation methods are also specific. Students in PRUE are tested twice a semester: the first is a mid-term written test covering language resources and functional skills, the second can be an oral or written test, or an end-term exam, at the discretion of the faculty.

### **Conclusion**

In this review article is made an attempt to present some specifications and challenges of teachers’ experiences of teaching Business English. The major issues are related to global changes in tertiary educational system, syllabus designing and practice course content for pre-experienced business English learners in economics. The majority of educators support the necessity of focusing mostly on the functional language rather than specialist vocabulary. However, to meet the needs and requirements of both student body (natives and foreigners) and business environment, continuous improvements are necessary and the content of the course should be supplemented with more effective techniques in order to prepare skillful future economists doing business on the global business environment.

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