TRADITIONAL VS. MODERN APPROACHES IN BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD

Lecturer Adriana TEODORESCU PhD.
"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University
Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management, Constanta
Email: ada_teodorescu@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This paper aims to examine different techniques and approaches used in teaching and learning business English in the economic field. Besides applying the already well-known methods used in second language acquisition, we also tried to incorporate computer-mediated communication into the communicative approach. At all times, the choice of the methods and approaches used in teaching business English has focused on our students' needs in their vocation or job. We worked with two groups of students studying business English for the economic field and assessed their knowledge of the target language throughout the whole teaching/learning process. We evaluated the impact and results of each teaching approach, and finally decided on the best way of improving students' business English skills.

Key words: *business English, teaching, methods, communicative skills*

JEL Classification: *I25*

Business English within the general concept of English as an international language

Throughout the years, English has become an international language, being taught and learnt everywhere around the world. This increasing spread of the use of English, especially between non-native speakers, is one of the consequences of the fast development of the world economy and technology, of people's necessity to interact and communicate globally. English speakers use the language for a variety of purposes, for cross-cultural communication, for accessing and sharing information, for doing business, etc. Thus, within the general concept of English as an International Language, a more restricted area has emerged, that of English for Specific Purposes where the reason for learning the language relates directly to what the learner needs to do in his/her vocation or job. "*As English gathers momentum as the main language of international communication, it is perceived as the language of career opportunity, so the pressure grows for teaching to be more directly employment-related.*" (Harding, 2007: 3)

The use of English as the language for business has significantly increased over the last decades. Within the worldwide development of technology, science and communication, Business English has emerged as an important component of worldwide business and commerce. Consequently, business English has developed as one of the most significant areas of teaching English for Specific Purposes, as every domain has its own linguistic identity, its specialized terminology used to communicate and interact in specific contexts.

Business English, as part of the larger concept of English for Specific Purposes, refers to a wide range of fields such as: economics, management, marketing, finances, etc. Generally speaking, business English is about specific language used to communicate in specific business contexts, and for business aims. It is used to socialize, travel, deal, analyze, buy, sell, predict, negotiate, market, advertise, produce, predict and so on and so forth. It uses the language of commerce, of industry, of finance, of providing services and goods and the list can be endless but, at the same time, it is not limited to the language that only appear in some special business environment. Business people need English to do business, not just to talk about business. They need to use the language effectively across a variety of different cultures and alongside a variety of different business skills, and in a wide range of business contexts, and with a wide range of interlocutors. Therefore, the teaching of business English has in view all these features and the fact that language is used to achieve an end. The learner's needs and his final aims are of great importance in teaching business English.

Various approaches used in teaching business English

The teaching and learning of English as a foreign language has generated a lot of debates over the years, as researchers and linguists have tried to identify the best way of doing it, and the best way of helping learners study more effectively. Second language acquisition issue has developed into an extensive field of inquiry, and many techniques and methods of teaching English have been offered. Therefore, current teaching practice and teaching materials are both the result of these debates concerning abstract theory and various practical techniques. Over the years there have been used various methods, such as the grammar -translation method, the audio-lingual method, the direct method, the communicative approach etc. Even if some of them are no longer used, some trends continue to have a major impact on how English is taught nowadays.

Given the great diversity of users of business English and their various purposes in using the language, we considered necessary to examine different approaches in teaching and learning business English. Besides applying the already

well-known methods used in second language acquisition, we also tried to incorporate CMC into the communicative approach. At all times, the choice of the methods and approaches used in teaching business English was closely related to our students' needs in their vocation or job.

We worked with two groups of students who learn business English for the economic field and assessed their knowledge of the target language throughout the whole teaching/learning process. We evaluated the impact and results of each teaching approach, and finally decided on the best way of improving students' business English skills.

The Grammar-Translation Method

This method was first introduced in Germany, dating back to the late nineteenth century. It is one of the most traditional methods of foreign language teaching and focuses on memorizing grammatical rules and word lists. Although a great deal of knowledge about the target language can be acquired by applying the grammar-translation method, considering its focus on grammar rules, vocabulary knowledge and their application in translation exercises, this method doesn't help learners communicate effectively in the target language. Moreover, it prevents them from activating their language knowledge, or getting a good natural language input, since they are always looking for equivalents in their mother language.

The use of this method within our students revealed considerable improvement of grammar rules and vocabulary knowledge, while communication skills in the target language were not improved to the same extent by the grammar-translation practice.

The Direct Method

The direct method, also known as the natural method, or the anti-grammatical method has emerged in Germany and France around 1900, and was the result of the discontent with the grammar-translation method, which forced learners focus on the written language, and thus neglected speaking skills improvement. The direct method focuses on the idea that second language learning is more than the learning of rules and the acquisition of translation skills. Knowing a foreign language means being able to speak it. Consequently, we

directed the teaching process within our group of students towards good speaking proficiency, much more communication in the target language, while grammar rules were acquired inductively. Visual aids were used to explain the meaning of new words while abstract vocabulary was explained by associations of ideas.

The Audio-Lingual Method

The audio-lingual method, widely used in the 1950s and 1960s, is based on the behaviorist theory according to which behavior changes in response to different configurations of stimuli. Behaviorist theories of learning *"suggested that much learning is the result of habit-formation, where performing the correct response to a stimulus means that a reward is given; constant repetition of this reward makes the response automatic. This procedure is referred to as conditioning."* (Harmer, 2007) Therefore, the main learning technique used within the audio-lingual method was the drill.

Thus, students in our groups received different models of a sentence and had to repeat them, using various words, in order to acquire better language habits. The aim was to make students practise a particular pattern until they could use it spontaneously. Once a certain pattern was learnt, the learner could substitute words to form new sentences. Grammatical patterns were presented in simple situations, and these patterns were graded, starting from the easy ones to more complex structures. Vocabulary was not as important as in the grammar-translation method, and the meaning of words was better learnt in a linguistic and cultural context.

Although students acquired some language habits, and improved to some extent their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, being able to produce their own utterances, by using new and different combination of words, both their creativity and their ability to deal with unexpected conversational situations were considerably reduced. The use of this approach evidenced the need to expose students to real language and develop their communicative skills.

The Silent Way

The silent way method, which developed in the 1970s by C. Gattengo, focused on the idea that learners should develop their own criteria for

correctness. Thus, students' errors are seen as a normal part of the learning process. The teacher's silence sought to encourage learners' initiative and self-reliance. Students had an active role in the teaching/learning process, being responsible for their own learning. They practised all the four skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading. During the teaching process teachers did little talking while students were encouraged to talk and interact. Sustainable assessment was considered for the whole teaching process. This approach increased students' confidence in their communicative skills, developed interaction between learners, leading to considerable improvements in the language acquisition process.

Community Language Learning Method

This method, developed by C. A. Curran, regards learners as "whole individuals", with feelings, intellect and physical responses. The teacher helps students translate what they wanted to say from their mother tongue into the target language. While using this method, we aimed to improve students' speaking and listening skills, the main goal being the development of communicative proficiency.

Communicative Language Teaching Method

Communicative language teaching emerged in the 1970s and can be traced back to the work of Chomsky in the 1960s, when he mentioned the two notions of 'competence' and 'performance' as a reaction against the audio-lingual method and its techniques.

Communicative language teaching method has two main guiding principles. The first principle states that language is not just patterns of grammar and vocabulary items, but it also involves language functions such as suggesting, inviting, agreeing and disagreeing. Thus, students have to take into account the need for appropriateness when addressing people, respectively the kind of language they use, formal, informal, technical, etc., depending on the situational context. The second principle emphasizes the learners' need to get enough exposure to language, and enough opportunities to use it. Therefore, this method

focused on communicative activities, encouraging students to use all their knowledge of the language to communicate and interact.

We also tried to maximize the efficiency of this approach by incorporating computer-mediated communication into communicative language teaching. It proved that CMC constitutes a major tool in the successful implementation of communicative language teaching method. Computer-mediated communication enabled our students to benefit from authentic learning materials, by using online newspapers, magazines, etc., as well as audio, and video materials. CMC also provided plenty of opportunities to use English with native speakers, generating real-life communication situations and giving students the chance to practice and develop their business English communicative skill. As a result, CMC integrated into communicative language teaching brought about significant improvement in our students' business English proficiency.

Conclusions

Over the last decades, a lot of attention and consideration have been given to the teaching of business English and many efforts have been made so that the teaching process may reach its main goal. Consequently, teachers have focused their efforts on meeting the learner's needs.

Within the first group of students we used the traditional teaching approach, while the second group benefited from a modern teaching approach. Our final assessment proved that the second group of students improved their business English knowledge to a greater extent than the first one. Thus, we have come to the conclusion that the most efficient way of teaching business English consists of a blend of different approaches and methods. The single use of an approach was deficient to a certain extent. If some methods improved grammar or vocabulary knowledge, then the communicative skill was detrimental, or the other way around.

As we considered that our students need most of all communicative proficiency in their field of expertise in order to gain access to the labor market, great emphasize on the communicative feature was placed. Activities were designed such as to encourage and engage students in active roles, aiming to improve speaking skills naturally and effortlessly, by asking learners to talk freely about real-life situations. The teaching process was student-centered while the teacher task was to stimulate, help and involve students to interact as much as possible.

It was also obvious that teaching/learning strategies corroborated with unconventional and interactive teaching methods have paved the way to an effective improvement of students' communicative competence. Therefore, our paper aimed to prove that communicative competence and improvement of the teaching/learning process work hand in hand, and that the use of CMC enhanced students' business English communicative skills, thus offering our graduates better chances to successfully compete in their future profession.

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