

## CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT IMPROVING BUSINESS ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS

**Călin DENEȘ**, *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, ROMANIA*  
**Valentin GRECU**, *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, ROMANIA*

**ABSTRACT:** This study aims at presenting a brief, yet comprehensive insight into one of the crucial aspects with which the Romanian economy is faced, especially as a member of the European Union and a ‘player’ in the global market. Within the context of Romania’s European membership and that of the afore-mentioned globalization, the paper presents the main features of the Romanian business environment as well as specific communication needs, emphasizing communication in English. The economic success of companies is closely related to business communicating abilities, which call for improvement. Starting from the model of the communication process, substantial arguments are brought in favor of improving communication by using business English. The conclusions apply not only to Romania, but also to other countries.

**KEY WORDS:** lingua franca, globalization, business communication

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the business environment and the increasing complexity of business relations have called upon all companies and organisations to acquire business or diplomatic communication skills in English and have a good command of them, proficiency being nothing but the standard in any self-respecting successful organisation. Although not very long ago engineers could have contented themselves with knowing strictly what their project-specific tasks required and perhaps several notions encountered in the specialist literature of their field, these days are bygone.

Today’s engineers, and in particular economic engineering specialists, possible managers, can no longer survive on engineering skills alone. Starting from this axiom, universities have inherently appended subjects such as Business Communication and Business English to their curricula [1, 2]. Furthermore, efforts are constantly being made to improve

the teaching process and meet the demands of Romanian (and not only) companies.

To prove the relevance of English, a few facts will be highlighted and exemplified with the help of a case study focusing on the issue of language in the European Union. The problems arising from this genuine ‘Tower of Babel’ are also pondered upon and the relevance of a single language being used in business and politics throughout the world is restated, together with its pros and cons. The backbone of all these considerations will be—regardless of what the future may bring—the communication process model.

For those who are skeptical enough to question the importance of business communication in English, let us just mention the importance of a successful job interview, the key to getting any desirable job, the seriousness of an act of political incorrectness or, more specifically, the dialogue with one’s company’s suppliers and customers and indeed with partners from abroad.

## 2. THE ENGLISH DOMINION

Today, English is the mother tongue for about 400 million people, whereas more than three times as many people show some abilities in communicating in it. It is the language of the Internet, the language of international conferences, political gatherings, multinational companies—in a word—the language of globalisation.

This is an astonishing fact when recalling that only four million people spoke Shakespeare's language during the latter's time. This brings us to the point when we ask ourselves what confers English the status of a universal lingua franca. Globalisation is an undeniably capitalistic process which aims at enmeshing distinct cultures, races and economies, among others, creating a border-free environment, proliferating political and cultural relations of similar values. To achieve this goal, an internationally understood language is the sine qua non component.

Now that Russia's pretence of speaking an international language has died together with communism and since English has become the 'default' language in Brussels, replacing Moliere's mother tongue, Europe is readying itself to embrace it. An embryonic-state language, sometimes called 'Euro-English'—a variety of English—is claimed to be evolving into a lingua franca. Its norms and correctness are to stem from European, rather than British or American roots. It aims to correct certain oddities of the 'parent' language, such as the difficult pronunciation of certain lexical groups.

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, the European Union welcomed ten mostly ex-communist countries to join this somewhat elitist club and on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, Romania and Bulgaria have also been admitted. This enlarging process cost the translation service an extra 189 million Euros, thus reaching 800 million Euros, which is the equivalent of 2.55 Euros per EU citizen. To this an extra 30 million was added in 2007 for the Irish language (EU

Statistics). In the context of using an international language, which is now impossible within this forum, given the penalties paid for denying access to information in a country's mother tongue, these costs would be cut off. Still, the problem of allowing a lingua franca to emerge is a problem which needs to be analyzed from all the possible angles.

## 3. WHY ENGLISH?

First, we shall present the premises of English's outstanding progress towards becoming an international language. To begin with, a brief account on the history of the language must be given. English began its 'impurification process' (its lack of purity being considered a strength when nominating it for a lingua franca) when Danes mingled with Anglo-Saxons in the sixth and seventh century. Then, three hundred years later, the Norman invasion brought thousands of new French words with it, helping simplify grammar, as well. The British colonial expansion from the seventeenth century onwards meant the further impurification of the language, unrestrained by any British or American academies that would guard its purity.

The existence of so many speakers led to pidgin forms, engendered by the combination between certain English words with words from the respective mother tongue. The result is a partly understandable language, even when native speakers are concerned. This language pertains to a particular group of people. This entailed a certain degree of standardisation, given the context of globalisation.

Analysing the 'demise' of many languages, we find that the most effective way to keep a language alive is to invest it with political purpose. It is undoubtedly the merit of the United States that the Albion's tongue is so triumphant nowadays. These possess an unparalleled economic, political and military power and present an iconic way of life, an

epitome of the Western civilisation, which the youth yearn to imitate.

Nonetheless, the need for a lingua franca emerged in the twentieth century, since the 1950's in particular, when several international forums were formed. Accordingly, we mention the creation, in 1945, of the chief international forum for political communication—the United Nations—which now encompasses 190 countries; the World Bank (1945); UNESCO and UNICEF (both created in 1946), the World Health Organisation (1948), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (1957). Never before have so many countries been represented in single meeting places. Among other multinational regional or political groups, we mention the existence of the Commonwealth and the European Union.

They all had to have a common denominator, which was the means of communicating in a mutually understandable manner, in a language that lots of people can already speak, such as the English language.

English ensures a seamless way of communicating and sending messages worldwide, this leading to the creation of a 'global village' inhabited by people who send their ideas, images and data worldwide [2, 3]. This assertion leads us to another key concept: communication.

#### 4. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

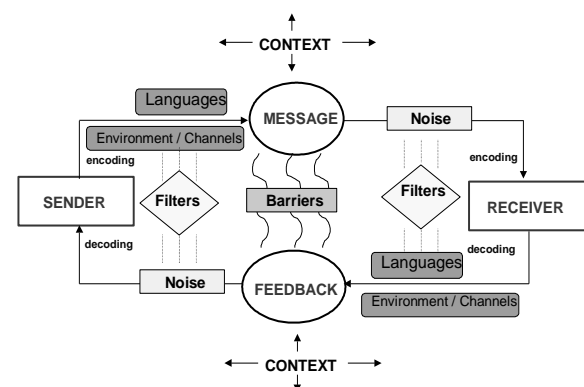
The discovery that language can be a barrier to communication is quickly made by all who travel, study, govern, or sell. The ability to communicate is essential for all aspects of life, whether professional or private. Communication is required when hunting a job, keeping one or advancing in it. When they are badly done, the presentation of our thoughts and especially the process of 'selling' our knowledge are impaired.

Because we do not possess good communicating skills, we have to make every effort in order to acquire them. This need is generated by the requirements we have to meet. Hence, when writing reports, essays, memos, e-mails, giving lectures or making presentations, we wish to convey two messages: the message itself and another message, a subliminal message of credibility that would assert our savoir-faire and the importance of our deliverance (if this be the case).

This is where English states its usefulness, providing a leisure word choice, given the large number of words (the Oxford English Dictionary alone contains more than 500,000 words, to which 1,500 words are added annually) and a flexible grammar structure. The importance of mastering this particular language is consequently crucial.

In order to communicate efficiently, apart from correct spelling, corroborated with a clever choice of words, we must add some more ingredients of considerable impact. Public speaking, for instance, is considered effective when it is 50% convincing argument; 20% psychology; 20% proficient delivery; and 10% personality [5].

A useful and operational model is presented in Figure 1, denominating the participants involved in the communication process and evidences that the process of sending and receiving messages is achieved in specific environments, using specific communication channels, and under specific contexts.



**Figure 1.** Communication model [5]

That is why messages can be more or less altered, being perceived in a modified form, as noises that have to be filtered in order to increase the accuracy of the transmitted information through the message conveyed. The special merit of the presented model resides in the fact that it is applicable to other communication possibilities (not necessarily to verbal communication), too. It represents both branches of the communication process: the direct one, representing the communication between sender and receiver and the reverse one, materialised by the receiver's reaction when receiving the message (feedback).

Feedback represents a specific message form and fulfils a special function: that of the requested reaction granted or used. Efficient communication presupposes sending a message, then analysing the addressee's reactions, which are expressed through the feedback that the sender receives. It is the receiver who can determine whether the message was understood correctly or whether misunderstanding occurred. Errors need correction and clarification, so a correcting message has to be conveyed. This message, in turn, requires new feedback, hence a good circulation of information between those involved in the communication process being provided.

Conveying ideas can still be problematic when basic communicating rules are broken. In order to initiate the communicating process, it is of utmost importance to catch the addressee's attention. Communication cannot end without receiving at least one feedback reaction, which confirms the correct decoding of the message (which might be distorted given the environmental 'noises,' such as: social status, education, religious orientation and so on). Thus, the message must always be shaped so that its content is clear, and it describes both the addresser's and the addressee's universe and that it contains the right information.

Most problems arise from encoding and decoding errors. The most serious problems may occur if the participants in the communication process communicate in English, and the latter is not their mother tongue, or they do not have a very good command of it. The sender first encodes the message in his/her mother tongue and then translates it into English; thus, two encoding errors may occur. The receiver may decode the message making the same errors: first, s/he translates the message from English into his/her mother tongue, and secondly, s/he may erroneously interpret the sender's message. To minimise these encoding/decoding errors, the participants in the communication process should develop their skills of communicating in English to such an extent as to be able to 'think' in English, and not in their mother tongue.

## 5. PROS AND CONS OF THE LINGUA FRANCA

Adopting a global language will certainly ease many of the present problematic aspects of communication, but it also has certain drawbacks. One of the consequences of using a lingua franca is the possible upbringing of an elitist monolingual linguistic class, complacent and dismissive of other languages [4]. This class is already being shaped up. This statement is vouched by a Business Survey carried out by Grant Thornton, which shows that, in 1996, 90% of businesses in Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Greece had an executive able to negotiate in another language, compared to only 38% of the British companies. Furthermore, the percentage, five years later, remained the same for all the above-mentioned, save for Britain, in whose case it fell to only 29%. It is also said that British exporters miss opportunities because of their poor language skills [6].

Foreign language learning is no longer a luxury in an international world. It is a necessity, if a country is to exercise a role in world affairs. It has become inevitable for

companies and workers to rethink their approach towards communication and especially towards communication in English. The Czech Republic, like other East European countries provides exactly this kind of example. There we find commuters practicing their English on their way to work and employees taking language courses instead of receiving salary raises. Romania also provides a great amount of evidence that people are interested in learning English in the prospect of becoming fully-fledged members of the European Union, given that English is preferred in most cases when studying foreign languages in school; employers require fluency in at least one international language (usually English); and continuously increasing quantities of English words are adopted by the Romanian language, to name just a few.

In Romania, English has been made a priority in foreign-language teaching, even though it has no official status. It has become the language which children are most likely to be taught when they arrive in school, and the one most available to adults who—for whatever reason—never learned it, or learned it badly, in their early educational years.

The demand for fluency in English is motivated by the strength it bestows on proficient speakers, in a world where access to information is fast and seamless, providing a solid knowledge of English.

Despite these facts, we cannot expect a global language to bring peace and unity or the return to the innocence preceding the Tower of Babel. History shows that language unification has not always ensured cordial relations between people. Two examples are given by the Civil War and contemporary Northern Ireland.

Indeed, we might experience the slaughtering of minority languages and with them the respective cultures, caused by people's

reluctance to learn other languages. This leads to the conclusion that we should not disregard minor languages which make an attractive diversity.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Professional communication, whether economic, political, diplomatic, industrial, scientific or otherwise, cannot be conceived without the existence of a global language, namely English. Development has become prohibitive when the professional's communication skills are lacking. Scientists find access to information more and more restricted and managers have problems interacting with their English-speaking counterparts when they do not share this common language.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bălan Rada, Carianopol, Miruna and others, *English News & Views*, Oxford University Press, Bucharest, Romania, 1999.
- [2] Crystal, David, *English as a Global Language* – Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2003.
- [3] Garland, Maureen, David, Shackleton, *Professional Communication*, available at: [www.library.ubc.ca/ereserve/agsc250/Comm.,](http://www.library.ubc.ca/ereserve/agsc250/Comm.,) 2005.
- [4] Jenkins, Jennifer, Seidlhofer, Barbara, "Bringing Europe's lingua franca into the classroom," *Guardian Unlimited*, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2001/apr/19/languages.highereducation1>, 2001.
- [5] Deneş, C, Grecu, V. *Essentials of Business Communication and Negotiation*. Lambert Academic Publishing (Germany), 2016.
- [6] Thornton, Grant, "Focus on... EU business trends", available at: [http://grantthorntonibs.net/files/ibos\\_2006\\_eu\\_business\\_trends\\_supplement](http://grantthorntonibs.net/files/ibos_2006_eu_business_trends_supplement), (2006).