TEACHING NEGOTIATION SKILLS

Maria ENACHE

Faculty of International Business and Economics, The Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest

Abstract: The present paper outlines the importance of teaching negotiating skills in the Business English seminars at the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. Its main focus is the development of the professional and language skills, taking into account the similarities between the MBA programmes and Business English training. The context, the setting and the situation are very important when using the language. In developing negotiating skills one should bear in mind the cross-cultural communication competence which helps us become better negotiators and communicators. The method employed in teaching is the communicative approach using interactive techniques, collaborative tasks, role plays and simulations.

1. INTRODUCTION

As markets become more and more global there is a constant demand for managers and business people with language skills and cultural sensitivity. The changes in the EU brought about by the presence of Central and Eastern European economies have contributed to the increased interest for Business English in Europe and elsewhere.

Within this framework a need has been felt to redefine the goals of Business English courses and teaching methods.

1. THE BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHER

As Business English lays emphasis on performance rather than on competence, on fluency rather than on accuracy, so the Business English teacher trains learners to become "operationally effective".

Business English courses focus on such areas as meetings, presentations, negotiations, - areas which are also addressed in management skills training (where behavioural strategies and techniques play an important role).

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ROMANIA

GERMANY

"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
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Some English language teachers feel that they should not be concerned with matters beyond teaching the language, while other teachers are keen to move into new fields and develop themselves professionally; and there is still another category of teachers who are so much absorbed by the professional content that they forget about teaching the language.

Therefore, there should be a proper balance in teaching professional skills via the medium of English language.

3. THE METHODS

The methods employed in management skills training such as role play simulations, or the case study method (which are also common for Business English training) have the following characteristics:

These methods:

- are task oriented and purposeful, the goal being to find the best solution and support it in order to persuade others of its merits;
- are motivating, due to the relationship to the real-world problem solving and interpersonal strategies;
- are also challenging for both pre-experienced and in-service students;
- emphasise co-operation, the students build on each other's ideas;
- are constructively competitive.

All in all we can see that emphasis is on the process rather than on the product, since there is no 'one' correct answer.

3.1 BUSINESS ENGLISH/MBA PROGRAMMES

There have been certain assumptions stating that the purposes of Business English and MBA programmes are essentially similar and therefore the same methodology and syllabi are appropriate.[1].

The purpose of BE is to develop communicative competence for business settings, where communicative competence refers to Canale and Swain's [2] classification of language skills into areas of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Among all these, advanced students interested in business are usually most in need of sociolinguistic and discourse competence.

An appropriate definition for Business English would be **communicative competence for the business settings**. While the difference between BE and professional education for business lies in the following: the main goal of BE is not to teach students how to think like business managers, but rather how to **communicate** like business managers in English.

The Business English teacher should not approach a course from the point of view of setting out the stages of a meeting, negotiation, etc., and developing the participants' skills at negotiating, etc., by getting them become manipulators of these stages. Nevertheless, the Business English teacher does necessarily have to know what these stages are, otherwise there will be no focus on language.

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4. LANGUAGE CONTEXT AND MATERIALS

The language areas are so context-rich that whatever the language item, there is always a reason for performing it: it is always clear **who** is doing **what** and **for what** purpose. Thus, the language tasks have reliability, face validity and practicality.

The materials used in a Business English course present a familiar area, a virtual world of work, where the participants will want to practise the interactions they imagine take place in that world. In such an environment, the teacher's role would be that of process manager, language and culture consultant, facilitator of learning.

In sum, the Business English course benefits from the practice-centred methods for professional education while focusing on the specific purposes of the language course.

5. FOCUS REDEFINED

The discussion of purpose and pedagogy for Business English is an example of the older debate between a focus on language or content.

As Mohan [3] points out: "In subject matter learning we overlook the role of language as a medium of learning. In language learning we overlook the fact that content is being communicated."

Business English learning for students, as any second language acquisition, is an integral part of their **enculturation** process, in this case, acquiring communicative competence in business settings.

What is cross-cultural communication competence?

Teaching a foreign language without its underlying culture is, even if it were possible, totally useless. On the other hand, too much stress on the importance of culture can have totally undesirable effects: there is always the danger of blocking communication if we become too specific in our attempts to give students too much cultural information.

It is not only information that our students need, but the development of specific strategies that lead to competence in surviving and getting by in an increasingly multicultural world as ours has recently become. Such strategies help students to survive better, with fewer misunderstandings and breakdowns in cross-cultural communication, and also to better understand aspects of the other culture and, at the same time, become aware of their own cultural values and practices.

In teaching Business English the teachers should keep in mind the **main goals** of cultural instruction (adapted after *Barry Tomalin* and *Susan Stempleski*) [4]:

1. to help students develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally conditioned behaviours.
2. to help students develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
3. to help students become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture.
4. to help students increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.

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5. to help students develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture.
6. to help students develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
7. to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.
8. to develop the students' **cross-cultural communication competence** (in fulfilling the requirements under 1 – 7).

In sum, the teacher must help the students develop the knowledge and skills that form the basis of cross-cultural competence. Language use, language awareness and cultural awareness form the basis of this knowledge and are used in order to help a learner cope cognitively and affectively within his/her new experiences. The spoken language has a special role in this as it reflects the dynamics provided and maintained by interaction and allows learners to actively engage in promoting different cultural perspectives which are reflected in the selection of appropriate material. Teachers should allow their students to take charge of their own learning and to become more autonomous learners. An autonomous language learner will be more capable of learning both inside and outside the classroom. In this way, the learners' capacities for understanding, valuing and dealing with new cultural phenomena are increased.

6. NEGOTIATING IN ENGLISH

People negotiate in generally similar ways in all the cultures of the world. A negotiation can be defined in simple terms as an interactive communication process that may take place whenever we want something from someone else, or another person wants something from us. (Shell, G. Richard: Bargaining for advantage.). All negotiations proceed through a form of cooperative communication (relationship building). Then, negotiations commonly follow a recognizable path: preparation, information exchange, explicit bargaining and commitment. If we are to describe the path in more detail we get the following stages [5]: 1. Relationship building; 2.Agreeing procedure; 3. Exchanging information; 4. Questioning; 5. Expressing options; 6. Bidding; 7. Bargaining; 8. Settling and concluding.

Students who learn to negotiate in English, plan to negotiate internationally, and therefore, across cultures. So, any training focusing on both professional and language skills must take into account the cross cultural element. In this respect, relationship building, establishing trust and respect for the other party is an essential factor in business dealings.

Another aspect to be taken into account is the non-verbal aspect of communication: an example here is silence, which means different things to different nations (the British or Americans can take silence as disagreement or lack of interest, while the Japanese and the Nordic cultures consider it an opportunity to think and reflect). Other examples include eye contact, conversational overlap, touching, attitude to time, distance etc. (see Hofstede) [6]. The teachers should make the students aware of the cross-cultural communication differences in negotiations.

The negotiating skills described in this workshop are clothed in language functions and

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exponents to be used for different stages of the negotiation process. In this way the students receive the language training they need to negotiate in English, and also they improve the business skills to negotiate effectively in a real business context. An example in question is represented by a gapped table containing information about the negotiation stages and language functions, while the teacher elicits from the students the corresponding language exponents:

Table 1

Negotiation stage	Language function	Language exponent
1. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	greeting, introducing, welcoming, phatic communication, offering hospitality, small talk	
2. AGREEING PROCEDURE	suggesting, sequencing, checking & clarifying, agreeing, presenting alternatives, supporting/giving reasons, disagreeing, requesting changes	
3. EXCHANGING NFORMATION	asking for/giving info, questioning, interrupting, checking, explaining, giving opinions, expressing interest, exploring, turn taking, rephrasing	
4. QUESTIONING, CHECKING & CLARIFYING	reformulating, asking for clarification, giving information	
5. GENERATING & EVALUATING OPTIONS	suggesting, giving reasons & hypothesising, explaining, presenting alternatives, building arguments, accepting, rejecting	
6. BIDDING	making proposals, channelling the discussion, giving/supporting reasons, questioning, amplifying your proposal, emphasising	
7. BARGAINING	accepting, rejecting,	

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	persuading, justifying, making counter-proposals, conceding, giving conditions, expressing feelings, stalling, hedging, reassuring	
8. SETTLING & CONCLUDING	*summarising, checking, making future plans, celebrating, toasting, postponing action*	

Table 1: Language exponents

In completing the language exponents, the teacher uses audio- video materials, printed handouts, realia, overhead transparencies, everything that comes in handy to demonstrate the real situation. After this type of input there follows a set of realistic negotiations using role-plays and simulations to familiarise the students with the actual business setting.

The teacher points out that good negotiators generally wish to reach an agreement meeting the interests of both sides, the participants are problem-solvers and the goal is a wise outcome reached efficiently and amicably.

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