Language + Culture = Effective Communication:

How Much Intercultural Competence Do Business English Teachers Need?

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Abstract: Teaching Business English in the context of international business and globalisation puts more strain on Business English teachers than ever before. This essay will analyse the current situation and the direction into which Business English is heading: (1) the need to integrate cultural aspects into language teaching; (2) the need to teach communication strategies as communication does not fail for linguistic reasons alone; (3) how this can be achieved even when the teacher is not a qualified intercultural specialist. This article will also give some advice on how to prepare own materials, and analyse published materials and their use for the classroom.

Key words: communication, intercultural, Business English, role of teacher

1. Introduction

At the BESIG's annual conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in November 2011, keynote speaker Jeremy Comfort shared some useful and important insights on how the teaching of Business English has changed over the years. He pointed out that companies have grown and changed, often becoming multinationals which try to establish a common corporate culture to establish co-operation across borders and across cultures (Comfort, 2011). Still, the impact of culture on the way they do business, on how their staff work with their colleagues, customers and suppliers, is peripheral and not seen as relevant to any language training, be that English, Spanish or Chinese. While working on cultural issues, these issues are separated from language and communication training — three issues that have become more or less inseparable.

What is often neglected in the context of teaching English as a foreign language is that the dimensions our students are facing need to be taken into account. Business English teachers deal with people who need to communicate in English in different ways. They have to speak to speakers from different native-speaking cultures: those are present in the classroom as listening models, but in person, they are not part of the classroom situation — neither in the English language classroom nor in the intercultural or the communication classrooms (it seems that many of them also think that as native English speakers they will cope with whatever communication and intercultural situations will occur — a false belief). On the other hand, Business English students need to communicate with people for whom English is often not their first or second language, either; whether native speakers or non-native speakers: students will communicate with people from other cultures who all bring in their

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culture when speaking. This culture determines their manner of speaking, their use of reference and jargon, their non-verbal communication etc. — all of which can foster or impede listener understanding. So my key argument is if the aspects of culture and communication strategies are not brought in, it is not possible to have effective Business English teaching. The people who attend the course have already been exposed to English language teaching, and even if they have moved beyond grammar perfectness, they still require to know tools that help them to communicate successfully in English with people from other cultures (cf. Dignen 2011, p. 4).

The following article presents some examples of my own teaching experience and investigates the needs students at university, but even more at in-company training courses, do have.

1.1 The Interplay of Language, Culture and Business

Teachers who work in companies or teach at universities quickly realise that at the heart of their classes there is a triangle made up of language, culture and business. To elaborate: There are two general approaches pursued in Business English training: (1) People need to learn vocabulary relevant to their jobs and the activities involved. These sets of word include specialist knowledge (which is often covered by the term English for Specific Purposes, for example Finance, Accounting or Engineering as professions or special fields of industry such as Oil & Gas or Medicine). (2) People need to learn phrases for handling typical business situations they are facing (business trips, making arrangements, receiving visitors, working in projects). Many of those business situations are skills based, i.e., people need to improve their reading and writing skills (for e-mails, reports and letters), their speaking skills (for meetings and presentations) and their listening skills (for telephone conversations, conference calls etc.). It becomes obvious that a lot of these activities involve interaction with other people, may that interaction be personal and face to face or more virtual and remote. A young sales person starting at a company may soon find themselves looking after foreign customers or dealing with foreign suppliers. They might be put to that job because they speak English fluently — but do they also have the necessary skills of negotiation and conflict management and the necessary cultural sensitivity? In the classroom of Business English today, this is what we teach people using role plays and simulations which interlink those three aspects (cf. Camerer/Mader, 2012, p. 135).

However, as soon as interaction with other people is involved, I need to take different ways of communication into account as well as different cultural backgrounds. Whereas the first one — communication — may explain itself, the second one — culture — is a concept that needs definition. For the discussion of this article, culture will be defined as the rules and behaviours of a group of people who share certain values and ideas. Thus, culture can be national, regional and local, but also corporate or professional. As we are dealing with English as a foreign language, a lot of examples will be drawn from miscommunication between people from different regional or national cultures.

With regard to this interplay, we have to bear in mind that a majority of today's business is done in English. Nevertheless, the people who do it are not always native speakers of English. Far from it: studies have shown that in business communication, native speakers of English (UK, US, Australia, etc.) are outnumbered by people who use English as a second language (India, certain African countries etc.) and as a foreign language (mainland Europe, for example; Graddol, 2007, p. 110ff). So people communicate in English in many different ways, and all the different speakers do not only bring different variations and registers to English, they also bring in their culture when speaking (cf. Flinders, 2000, p. 4). If we fail to incorporate an awareness of this connection, then our students will have severe trouble when communicating globally in English.

1.2 Intercultural Training of the Past: A Case Study

About ten years ago, one of the German companies I was working for was taken over by a British parent. That meant more English courses for my colleagues and me, as the HR department saw the need to prepare staff linguistically for communicating with the new colleagues and bosses. On the other hand, the management went beyond the peripheral and saw the need to hire an agency to provide intercultural training. Now, the new parent company had its head office in London, England. Consequently, the agency provided intercultural training on England — they covered key facts of population and geography, the Queen and football, the political system and so on: the native-speaking fever (Anchimbe, 2006), following standards of teaching English as a Foreign Language.

The question remained: was that useful for my students and the situations they had to face? Well, the football issue helped — they learned about one taboo topic best not to discuss as a German with an English person: "When it matters, England can't win" (especially when taking on the German team on penalties). It also explained to the Germans why their English colleagues (in particular, the newly appointed integration team) supported South Korea during the semi-finals of the World Cup in 2002 and not Germany. But, as one of my students at that time put it very bluntly: "I'm sitting in conference calls with people from the US, China and Greece to discuss cash management. What good does it to know that Tony Blair is Britain's Prime Minister?" It emerged that language training and intercultural training where clearly seen as a different pair of shoes. At this point, it becomes necessary to clarify which attitudes to both language training and intercultural training were revealed here. On the one hand, language training was supposed to teach people to produce correct English (with usually some idea of native speaker level in mind), i.e., to work on grammar, vocabulary, phrases and pronunciation; on the other hand, intercultural training was seen as a kind of country briefing, comparable to information you might obtain in a guide book or a school lesson. The missing factor was a discussion of the students' own culture to foster cultural awareness, of differences in communication and ways of working and of the danger of cultural stereotypes. The two were seen as not compatible, and this attitude was shared by many of my customers, something which illustrates what Comfort defines as "peripheral" (Comfort, 2011).

2. Cultural Expectations

The case study and its impact show that there has to be some more detailed probing of cultural expectations. Cultural expectations, especially when it comes to regional or national cultures, are always shaped by assumptions based on information people have received and processed previously. Those assumptions are valuable when they travel to the country and know, for example, that they have to look to the other side of the road first to avoid being run down by a car. Nevertheless, one should always be prepared for the unexpected — cultures do change and adapt, they are dynamic, and not static. The New York visited twenty years ago is not the New York people are visiting today. In addition, when working with individual people from a specific country, one's assumptions about that person's national culture can be very misleading and even impede the collaboration. "You never deal with cultures, you always deal with individuals" (Baber in Camerer/Mader, 2012, p. 3). Yet a person cannot be separated from cultural influences that helped to shape the person they are. Still, the individual is the enemy of the stereotype. This particular person might not share the common cultural values and might not fulfil the stereotype of a member of that culture that one has constructed in their mind. Not all men in Scotland run around in kilts — and we can also see that habits and values differ from region to region and vary between urban and rural

environments. To avoid stereotyping, cultural theorists then often go for a very large grouping of cultures, e.g., "Asian culture". In my opinion, that makes matters even worse, as there are so many generalisations involved that this would certainly lead to many opportunities where students would put their foot in. Vice versa, as a European I would refuse to accept the generic term "European culture", realising more differences between the individual regions and countries of Europe. So when we want to integrate cultural aspects in the classroom, we have to start with cultural awareness and the risk of stereotyping. Nevertheless, as simplification often helps, those measurements of regional and national cultures are often the content of intercultural training today. But we need to be aware that this is a picture of reality, a construction to foster understanding. The classroom dilemma can then be defined as follows: students need to be aware that miscommunication can be culturally rooted. On the other hand, they have to be aware not to judge people according to their own cultural assumptions.

2.1 Intercultural Differences Students Were Experiencing

When I argue like this, I am often asked: where is your evidence? My reply to that is: "the reality that my clients are facing". Returning to the example of the British-German takeover I have cited above: the British company was in fact a multinational active in more than 60 countries. As a consequence, many employees did not only work with English people: their new colleagues came from Scotland, the US, Greece, and China. Later on, chores of IT and Accounting were to be outsourced to Poland, Hungary, Portugal and India. The challenge was: how to handle that? Would it be sufficient and feasible to provide country briefings on 20 different countries because students might have to work with people from those countries? Discussions with fellow teachers at conferences have revealed that they often face the same situation. In addition, Business English teachers are not intercultural trainers — they do not have the in-depth knowledge to provide such trainings. And, referring to the example I cited earlier, this might not be the training that my students would find helpful. Now, let us look at some examples in detail to find out what could be done instead. In the next two paragraphs, there will be some scenarios that come from my experience as a trainer, focusing on spoken communication as well as written communication.

After a couple of telephone conferences involving both native and non-native speakers, one of my students complained about "the Americans". He said that "they" were always very loud, spoke very quickly and tended to dominate the meeting. What he saw confirmed was the stereotype of the loud, bossy American who clearly believed that the American way would be best for all.

Another example was the experience of one student that when attending meetings, small talk was made before, during and after the meeting. He found this very difficult to cope with, as for him, it was important to separate business and private life and small talk was clearly assigned to the latter.

As a last example, many of my students in Accounting complained about the fact that they send very clear and concise emails to India instructing people what to do and never received a reply, not to say the work result they expected. Consequently, they formed an opinion of their Indian colleagues that was very low: "They never do as they're told." All of these incidences reveal that these are not linguistic problems as such: the reasons for the breakdown in communication were cultural expectations and cultural stereotyping, thus increasing the reluctance to work with any person from that culture and impeding better collaboration. What can be done in those cases?

2.2 Handling Different Expectations: Changing Perspective

Firstly, let us resume the example of conference calls with the Americans: when probed about this, the student in question admitted that not all of his American colleagues behaved like that — but his perception focused on those that fulfilled his own stereotype and preconception. He realised that there were also speakers

from other cultures who behaved like that and that, in general, he found it difficult to cope with a specific style of communication. A perceived cultural problem was revealed to be one of communication styles.

Secondly, the small talk issue. Despite the stereotype, there are many Germans who are quite good at small talk (and not all of them are women); but certain professional cultures (e.g., accountants and engineers) which seem to be more focused on facts, figures and processes often find it hard to see the point of small talk: they view small talk as a waste of time. However, small talk helps to build relationships, and it is always easier do to business successfully with people you like or feel comfortable with. That means something they are culturally uncomfortable with could be put to a communicative advantage. To those students I explained that they could use small talk in a strategic manner: small talk also helps to identify if you understand your partner's English in terms of accent, pace and wording, and, vice versa, if you are understood by your partner. Doing that about topics such as the weather or food is easier than starting straight on with a complex negotiation. If some common ground is established linguistically, there will be fewer gaps in the communication and less need for clarification.

Thirdly, receiving no reply to emails needed to be tackled from two ends: on the one hand, the participants had to think about if their "clear and concise" emails were written in an appropriate manner. Maybe the person at the other end thought the emails to be bossy and too direct, and they would have preferred a phone call to establish a more personal relationship. On the other hand, the participants had to imagine the situation of the colleague in India: maybe they were not lazy, but had a huge workload. Maybe they were not the right person to deal with this issue, but did not dare to tell the German client that. In all cases, students needed to step aside and try for a different point of view that would help them to cope with the situation.

3. Language and Culture

It has to be taken into account that one of the key tools to express culture is, of course, language (cf. Deutscher, 2010, p. 1). People produce cultural artifacts and they express values, beliefs and traditions in language, either their native language or another one — English here being a very popular second choice. Many misunderstandings in English are not linguistic, "I do not know the specific term you are using" or "I understood a different word", but cultural: I interpret what was said in a different way because of my cultural background, and because of my different perception and communication style. That means when talking to people it is not enough to identify the words as such (the denotative level), but also the meaning behind (the connotative level). In order to do that, people must be aware of the fact that they use their own cultural filters to interpret what other people say. The more one is aware of this method of filtering and interpretation, the more one will be able to interpret things that were said or written from a number of different perspectives. Such misunderstandings are not easy to be resolved in people's native language as they are often based on assumptions which are not verbalised; in a foreign language, the clarification of misunderstandings becomes a real challenge if people do not develop an awareness of this issue.

In addition to the cultural expectations and preconceptions, many Business English teachers are facing yet another situation in their classroom. Difficulties and misunderstandings are related by their students to language problems alone: they blame their command of English. Referring once more to the problem of emails: participants complained in my courses that they never understood the emails of their English colleagues. They brought some examples into the classroom and showed them to me. Then I pointed out that those emails were poorly written: they contained long sentences without punctuation; the writer was formulating thoughts while writing and thus

presenting them not very clearly, and the sentences were elliptic and full of jargon. My students' response was: "But he is a native speaker!" To that I replied that not every native speaker is a master of their own language or of effective communication, in other words, of writing for the reader. Everyone who teaches essay writing at school will surely agree. The problem lay in the style of writing, not in the linguistic command of the reader. And of course there have been discussions how to improve this situation with regard to the fact that a lot of international business is done in English by first, second and foreign speakers of English.

3.1 Globish and English as a Lingua Franca

In those recent discussions of Business English, the role of English as a means of communication between non-native speakers (and native speakers) of English has gained importance. David Graddol even pleads for a world project of English (Graddol 2007, p. 109). Interestingly enough, many non-native speakers of English say that they find communicating with other non-native speakers easier than with native speakers. Again, the verbal and grammar quality of English seems to be less at stake, but confidence and consideration of other speakers' needs. Non-native speakers also make mistakes, so they will be forgiving when the speaker makes a mistake, and many non-native speakers will even make similar or identical mistakes. The English word *actual* (real) is often confused with words such as *actual* (Spanish) *actuel* (French) or *aktuell* (German, Swedish): all of which mean current or present. So if a German uses *actual* in the German sense of the word, he will be understood by his European colleagues, but not understood by the native English speaker.

One of the issues that impede the flow of communication here is the "inconsiderate native speaker of English". This type of person — often without meaning to — is neglecting the fact that, for example, the other participants in an international conference call handle English as a second or foreign language and that doing so might be quite difficult for them. Although they are able to formulate their thoughts, they might need more time to do so, and they might also need more time to process what has been said. In addition, if native speakers use jargon or culturally encoded references (e.g., to certain writers or TV programmes), they cannot be sure that those will be understood. It has been noticed that if this type of native speaker has the feeling that everyone's English is just brilliant, their pace will become faster and their accent will become stronger — at the risk of losing the non-native speakers completely. In addition, you might have speakers who mumble or start a sentence three times, something which also may impede listener understanding (although the latter behaviour is by no means reserved to native speakers of English). Thus what might be the native speaker's linguistic advantage becomes the native speaker's disadvantage — communicating less effectively in their own language if rules of communication are ignored.

Therefore, there have been an increasing number of publications that tell native speakers of English how to behave in international business situations, especially meetings and conference calls. The Franco-Canadian Jean Paul Nerrière even argues that in the international business world, we should speak Globish: a simplified set of 1,500 English words shared by all which will help to improve communication. This tool would also require native English speakers to relearn a specific subset of their language. Nerrière points out that Globish, unlike English, is not a language: "A language is a vehicle of culture. Globish does not want to be that at all. It's a means of communication" (Blume, 2005). What Globish tries to do is then stripping the culture from the language and reducing it to a tool that would work for all. However, the language cannot be stripped from the person who is using it (the speaker and the listener) and this person, in turn, cannot be stripped from their culture. Just because everybody uses the same words does not mean that everybody has the same interpretation of them.

Therefore, another approach is the definition of English as a lingua franca, in which English is used as a

common language, used, modified and adapted to the speaker's needs and their first-language knowledge. Mistakes as the one of *actual* and *aktuell* would no longer be seen as a mistake, but as one way of saying things. It seems that many of those errors have now become common practice and seem to be understood (Taylor, 2000, p. 59). English as a lingua franca would help as it reflects the "needs and aspirations of the ever-growing number of non-native speakers" (Graddol, 2007, p. 87) at least at a linguistic level. Although ways of simplifying English may help to reduce the number of misunderstandings, they cannot be seen as a stand-alone solution. If more sets of pronunciation become acceptable, then students may lose their fear of "mispronouncing" things, but that does not guarantee that others will understand us better. For example, many people who work for call centres in India speak perfect English because it is their second language. When talking to their clients from the UK or Germany on the phone, there is a lack of understanding as the Europeans find it quite difficult to cope with the pronunciation of some Indian speakers: it differs too much from the accents and registers they are used to. The European response is often aggressive: "Pass me to someone who can speak my language!" (Gentleman, 2005).

Remaining within a linguistic boundary means that consequently, where people cannot understand an e-mail from the UK, or struggle in an English-language conference call, their conclusion will usually be this: "My English is not good enough". Now, where this might be the case with people who have an A1 to B1 level (according to the Council of Europe's Framework for language learning, cf. Camerer/Mader 2012, p. 47), this statement is also made by people who have a very good command of English and can fluently express nearly all they want to say. Tackling the linguistic level is no excuse for ignoring cultural and communicative competencies.

For example, people who receive emails from India are upset because the email contains a salutation such as "Dear Smith" without a title such as Mr or Ms in front. This mode of addressing is seen as rude until people learn that the order of first and family name is the other way round in many parts of India, and they themselves have — incidentally — addressed people only with their family names. Although we cannot teach all rules for all countries, we can highlight that things might be different and that people should not take things for granted but rather get some information in advance to avoid such blunders. Creating an awareness of both different styles and conventions of communication (such as salutation or greetings) can help to improve mutual understanding. The following chapter will provide a case study on this.

3.2 "I'm not quite sure about that." High and Low Context Speakers

Students learn that often the misunderstandings and difficulties had nothing to do with linguistic competence or the lack of it, but rather with different styles of communication which may or may not be culturally rooted. Compare the following two sentences:

> ‣ Actually, we were hoping to receive a slightly more substantial discount.
> ‣ We want a larger discount.

Showing these sentences to my students, they have to answer two questions: How many words are used per sentence? Which words make up the message? In the first sentence, three out of eleven words ("more substantial discount") make up the message which is placed at the end of the sentence. In the second one, the sentence is more or less the message (three words out of five, "want larger discount"). The first style is described as "high context", as the speaker dresses the message nicely as not to offend anybody; the second style is described as "low context", here, only few words are used to keep the message clear. If speakers of both communication styles talk to each other, high context speakers see low context speakers as too direct and hence as rude: to them, such short wording is like a verbal slap in the face. Low context speakers see high context speakers hiding or obscuring the message. By the time

the message is delivered, they are utterly confused as they expect the message to come sooner.

These interpretations are by no means restricted to the communication between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. Speakers of any language use different levels of context, e.g., Austrians tend to be more high-context in their use of German than speakers from the north of Germany. An American person who prefers low-context communication might prefer to do business with a German who also communicates in low-context style (even though their English might not be that brilliant) over an English person who speaks high-context.

Similar conventions can be found for interrupting or active listening. For some speakers, interrupting is seen as something normal, as taking actively part in the discussion. Others may find it difficult to string their arguments when they are interrupted or will stop saying anything. Thus, the issue of interruption has to be clarified between the two speakers in a manner that communication will not break down. They have to (implicitly) agree on conversational rules which may be defined by means of small talk. Where these rules are not established, communication will be more demanding. Likewise, active listening is seen in some communication styles as showing interest (using fillers such as "Oh?" "Really?" or echoing key words used by the other speaker), whereas others may see this as interruptive, confusing or simply silly. Differences may be culturally coded, but the misunderstanding is also one of communication styles. Thus teaching effective communication in the classroom means that students will have to reflect their own preferred mode of communication. This can be done by analysing e-mails they have written, and also by reflecting on the way they communicate in the class. Starting from there, it will be possible to develop communication strategies that will help to bridge and translate between different styles of communication, for example, using medium-context phrases: "We hope to get a bigger discount." They may also see a strategic use in interrupting or active listening if they find it difficult to understand the other speaker: interrupting quite early in the conversation and asking for clarification, for example, by repeating certain words, will help to avoid lack of understanding which may lead to frustration and non-communication in the end. What we are teaching then are of course phrases of English, but with a more targeted intention of improving the competence of intercultural communication.

How then can we teach ourselves as Business English trainers to become more competent in those fields?

4. Professional Development

"Intercultural communication is not rocket science" (Camerer/Mader 2012, p. 8) In fact, many Business English trainers already have a solid intercultural experience on which they can build their intercultural competence; a lot of their teaching experience already includes intercultural communication although they might not have realised that yet. Many Business English trainers do not teach in their home culture — they moved to another country and have already first-hand intercultural experience. Therefore, a good way to start is by reflecting on their own culture: what did strike them as particularly odd in the culture they moved to and why? What did they like most and why? By contrast and comparison, they will be able to develop their own charts of cultural values quite quickly and to build cultural awareness. If moving to another country involves learning another language, this may help too: which words and expressions convey the values of the new culture? If they teach in their home culture, then most of their students will possibly not be from the same culture. Discussion with their students on the topics mentioned can also be a useful start to develop cultural awareness and to reflect or even challenge their own culture.

In addition to develop own cultural awareness, teachers need to think about which aspects of culture should be taught and can be successfully integrated into the Business English classroom and to which business situation they would relate. Some examples would be:

- Definitions of politeness and different communication styles as may be expressed in correspondence or in interaction with visitors, customers etc. Analysing case studies will reveal that attitudes among your students will differ. For example: "Please send me the figures by Friday." Is that polite? One student may say "yes" (the use of please is seen as sufficient), another "no" (because it is seen as a masked imperative).

- Body language and non-verbal communications as used in meetings and negotiations or presentations. Again, these aspects will include different interpretations (one gesture may mean different things in different cultures, e.g., pointing with your finger or touching your head) and expectations (does the audience expect an entertaining show, or do they want a lot of facts and detail?). As soon as students try to anticipate what things can mean from a different perspective, they will build their competence of intercultural communication.

- Clarifying misunderstandings that occurred in meetings, conversations, e-mails. What did the person say? How did the student interpret that? Can they think of other ways to interpret this? How can this misunderstanding be avoided in the future?

- Reflecting on expectations and values: such reflections, which also mean putting themselves into the other person's shoes, can help to prepare interactions with customers or team meetings more effectively. In repeat situations, this part would also include an analysis of communication patterns and typical phrases.

Of course, there are also a number of courses that Business English teachers can attend to improve their intercultural skills; in addition, many teacher training programmes include intercultural aspects, too. Where there is no time or opportunity to do so, there are a number of tools that teachers can use to integrate elements of intercultural communication into their own lessons.

4.1 Working with Published Materials

Fortunately, the publishers of classroom materials have realised that intercultural aspects need to be integrated, and the changes presented in this article have been honoured by publishers of Business English textbooks for students. One example is *Intelligent Business* published by Pearson (Johnson, 2005). In addition to the coursebook, there is a skills book focusing in particular on business skills and communication. Every chapter includes one aspect of culture, e.g., attitudes to time and (personal) space, dealing with interruptions and so on. They can be used as incidents and as a starter for role plays. In addition, students will be able to create their own cultural profile and compare this with others. Country stereotypes are avoided and a kind of grading is offered to avoid a simplified black and white picture.

Other publishers have started to focus more on the communication and culture aspect in business as such. *Communicating across Cultures* (Dignen, 2011) is a good example of that as standard business situations are taught under the aspect of intercultural communication. The book includes e-mails and meetings as well as conflict management and negotiations. Every chapter features interviews with intercultural experts which helps the teacher to bring in some external expertise on a particular matter. Publishers have also begun to interweave intercultural aspects, communication and business. One example would be the *Intercultural Business English* series by Cornelsen which addresses people who have to work in certain world regions such as Asia (Frendo/Hsu, 2010) and Eastern Europe (Williams/Amor, 2010). There are some general units on cultural awareness, but the focus is on a number of countries. Although there is a risk of stereotyping and generalisation, the case studies and

critical incidents provided make good classroom material and provide food for thought. A similar set of useful case studies is provided by *Working Across Cultures,* part of Pearson's short course series accompanying *Market Leader* (Pilbeam, 2010). Such books can also help to build knowledge in specific areas, e.g., when working with expats or with international managers. Recently, Cornelsen also decided to help Business English trainers in their professional development even further: *Intercultural Competence in Business English* (Camerer/Mader, 2012) is a self-study book that covers quite extensively a wide range of aspects and also provides a CD with classroom activities and lesson plans. This may serve as a good starting point in particular as they also present an overview about the different trends and discussion threads in the field of Business English and intercultural communication.

4.2 Preparing Your Own Materials

However, not all of the published materials may exactly reflect your students' needs. Therefore, a lot of my work draws upon case studies and authentic materials presented to me by my students which can be used in individual situations. Yet I learned that many encounter similar difficulties and I am able to reuse certain lesson plans built on their examples. As a teacher of Business English, you have already learned that your intercultural competence might be greater than you thought. Let me now give you some examples how you can prepare your own materials quite easily.

(1) Prepare "The Business Advice Game". Use the list below for any country involved. Your students are business consultants and their task is to give business advice to a [US] company that wants to take over a company in your country. They will have to reflect on the following and explain things to the company:

- Greetings (handshake, bow)
- Use of names
- Rank and hierarchy
- Timekeeping

- Respecting the agenda
- Negotiating styles (direct/indirect)
- Attitudes: gifts, humour, eating
- Use of small talk

You may add other categories. As a second step, they can compare how important these things are to them personally and how much these customs have changed. Then students may be given a task to find the same information about a third country, e.g., by going online (or because they have family in that country or have visited it). Although there is the risk of stereotyping, this can quickly be avoided by challenging how much they relate to those values (and if they expect that all people from another culture always behave like that). There are a number of useful websites you can use for research (www.kwintessential.com).

(2) Use case studies of correspondence they were involved in. Ideally, the history should be quoted so that the students can see the response of another person or even other people. Discuss if they find the style always appropriate: Is it polite enough? Is the message always clear? Which communication style is used? Which (cultural) values are important for the writer? If there are issues and wordings they are not happy with, they have to reword them. Give them time to write, then let them present their options to the class and discuss the new versions. It is amazing how much students can see once they know what to look for.

(3) Play "The High Context Challenge". This is a card game in which you write different ways of saying no without explicitly using the word no on cards. Each card gets one phrase. You may have to prepare more than one set of cards. Divide the students into groups and let them sort the cards from the mildest to the strongest way of saying no. You can vary this card game for different purposes. Model phrases might be: "Sorry, that's out of the question.", "It may be difficult for us to accept that.", "That's interesting, but I need more time.", "That would be quite difficult for us." or "I find that difficult to agree to." The use of modal verbs and other key words can help to identify the hidden meaning. Some answers might not even interpreted as a no! You may also get more ideas from

the books I have mentioned and will adapt them for your purpose. There are also a number of useful videos available on the Internet that may be used in the classroom, for example, the famous local/global campaign by the HSBC bank.

5. Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

Looking back at the challenges and changes in the Business English classroom, it is fair to say that there are w more opportunities to integrate intercultural aspects and communicative competence into workshops and extensive courses on business skills. Language schools have also become more aware of the need to integrate those. However, one key problem remains: how to sell this to our clients, the companies. Companies may not be willing to pay more for what they basically consider as a language course. But if we add communication skills and intercultural competence, then there is an added value that has to be provided by qualified teachers. Consequently, a higher fee is to be expected and has to be negotiated with the client. If more intercultural competence is integrated into Business English training, then it may affect the provision of intercultural training as such. There will be a new competition although many of my colleagues work also at the intersection of culture, communication and business. The only difference seems to be that this kind of integrated training is always provided in English and not in the local language. We may also have to think about if we have to integrate intercultural and communicative competencies sooner — at high school or university levels. In the future, we may abandon the classical road of English teaching towards some native speaker role model. Instead, to be able to cope with the challenges, Business English teachers will need more support and awareness to include those aspects in teaching, and companies and schools must be willing to honour that extra qualification by paying higher fees. To close, I would like to point out that when we prepare students for doing business internationally, they need to be aware that being word perfect does not make you a great intercultural communicator. Only if we manage to successfully combine language skills with communicative competence and intercultural awareness can mutual understanding improve.

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