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## ENGLISH & GLOBALIZATION—BUSINESS ENGLISH—THE CHALLENGE FOR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

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**Abstract:** The English language has undoubtedly collapsed the boundaries of nations, languages and cultures across the globe. In the business world, the lingua franca is English; and its users are growing by the day. Business houses cater to clients in far flung locations in various continents. This has led to the advent of Business English. In common parlance it can simply be referred to as a specialized kind of English needed and used by businesses. But now it has come to manifest itself as a new entity with its own unique characteristics. This has legal sanction now with international organizations like the British Council conducting the Business English Certificate (BEC) exams in collaboration with the University of Cambridge, London. This has got due recognition from many companies.

We need to acknowledge the fact that this has posed a challenge for academic institutions, especially those offering higher education. Universities are drafting newer policies to enhance the employability skills of students with a major focus on communication skills. This stems from the fact that lack of communication skills has been a major hindrance in the students getting placed in organizations of repute. In my research paper, I would like to present the possible strategies that can be used effectively to enable students to gain proficiency in Business English. This will not merely provide better career opportunities but also give an impetus to their career advancement.

**Introduction:** Before I get on to the details I believe that a definition of our topic would be the ideal starting point for this research paper. As stated by Wikipedia, “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; for example, the teachers’ organisation IATEFL has a special interest group called BESIG. Many non-native English speakers study the subject with the goal of doing business with English-speaking countries, or with companies located outside the Anglosphere but which nonetheless use English as a shared language or lingua franca. Much of the English communication that takes place within business circles all over the world occurs between non-native speakers. In cases such as these, the object of the exercise is efficient and effective communication.

Business English means different things to different people. For some, it focuses on vocabulary and topics used in the worlds of business, trade, finance, and international relations. For others it refers to the communication skills used in the workplace, and focuses on the language and skills needed for typical business communication such as presentations, negotiations, meetings, small talk, socializing, correspondence, report writing, and a systematic approach. In both of these cases it can be taught to native speakers of English, for example, high school students preparing to enter

the job market. Business English is a variant of International English. One can study it at a college or university. Institutes around the world have courses or modules in BE available, which can lead to a degree in the subject.”

We are the inhabitants of a world in which geographical boundaries no longer hold any sanctity for the business world. Organizations cater to clients who are located at multiple centres spread across the globe. Closer home perhaps the best examples are the BPOs in India offering plentiful employment opportunities to a cross-section of youth. But the actual clients are situated in a place rather alien to these service providers. There exists a lot of diversity between the two of them. The heterogeneities of cultures, nationalities and languages (to mention a few elements) are rendered insignificant in this context. Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that the crux lies in the fact that successful business transactions do take place, creating a populace of satisfied customers. So the question that follows is what is that magical factor that renders these divisive features ineffective? The answer is the English language or more specifically, Business English.

Many surveys conducted by business houses reaffirm the above. The findings of the report submitted by Pearson help us emphasize our ideas. “The global economy grows more interdependent and interconnected by the day, and recent research by Pearson English Business Solutions\*, the leading provider of on-demand Business English communication software to the world’s top companies, affirms the trend. Two recent groundbreaking studies—the 2013 Business English Index (BEI) and the Globalization of English (GOE)

report—confirm the primacy of Business English as the de facto language of business. With a growing number of companies operating in as many as 20 countries with different native tongues, the majority of the world's business conversations now take place between non-native English speakers—in English.”

But for academic institutions, the successful completion of the students' education and their ability to secure a job in a company of their choice is the end of a long process as it were. This is owing to the fact that one of the biggest challenges that colleges/universities have to grapple with is the issue of employability of the students who have completed their formal education. It is common knowledge that the major impediment which students encounter during their placement is poor communication skills. Graduates- be it engineers or others are considered to be industry ready only when they have the right balance of technical as well as soft skills. It goes without saying that English language competence is the major component in this. Organizations are surely not looking for the fluency of native speakers but “effective” communication in English is the key to securing a place in an organization. Despite this awareness, why does the problem remain unaddressed?

At the outset, all the stakeholders need to clearly understand that a multipronged and multilevel strategy needs to be evolved in order to find feasible solutions to this issue. The first steps need to be taken at the plus2 or what we call in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana as the Intermediate stage. If the focus is on technical education, care should be taken by the governing bodies to ensure that equal weightage is given to English on par with the core subjects. The past few years have witnessed the unprecedented growth of the “corporate colleges” that have overemphasized the importance of the science subjects by subjecting the students to repetitive learning for long hours through the day and even during the weekends. This has had the support of the parents as they believe that this learning methodology will guarantee a seat either in engineering or medicine.

But all this while, it is the English language communicative competence that has suffered. The consequences are faced when the student is on the threshold of his career. Having lost precious time focusing only on the technical subjects, the harsh reality stares them in their face when they are confronted with the grim prospect of poor employment opportunities due to lack of communication skills.

I believe that instead of allowing this problem to grow into a magnitude where it becomes unwieldy, it needs to be sorted out at the grassroots level. There is an urgent need for academic institutions to

recognize the fact that technical and communicative competences go hand-in-hand. They complement each other; one cannot ever be the supplement for the other. The need of the hour is to develop the students' linguistic competence. Accordingly, attention needs to be paid towards this.

Before we target Business English for the undergraduate students, it is imperative to ensure their proficiency or at least a communicative competence in the language. How can this be achieved? In the engineering colleges affiliated to JNTU- Hyderabad, the first year and the third year syllabi include the English “labs” in addition to the regular theory classes. Most Universities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana State follow a similar pattern. I believe that this is the best platform available to the teachers to help the students work on their language. These language laboratories must be learner-centric with emphasis on the student-talk time instead of the teacher occupying centre stage. Empathy must be shown to the students who have had their education from the vernacular medium. A patient and positive attitude on the teacher's part goes a long way in fostering the self-confidence of the learners. Elocutions, debates, JAM sessions, group discussions and presentations have proved immensely beneficial in helping students leverage the advantages of the labs. This provides a strong foundation for the learners to gain the requisite command on the English language. The archaic lecture method does not offer any scope for the learners to use the language. It is only when they are encouraged to participate actively in the class can they first have a clear understanding of the level of their language and accordingly work towards improving it.

When the learners have thus overcome their fears about the English language, they are now poised to take on the next level which is Business English. Before I can chalk out the strategies for mastering it, it is necessary to sound a word of caution here. Skilful use of Business English is the pinnacle as it were of English language proficiency. One can get to the summit only after successfully scaling the formidable mountain by doggedly overcoming all the pitfalls. It is only when the students have charted their own course of language learning keeping in mind their lacunae can they have the courage to take on Business English.

It is here that the role of the teacher gains a multi-dimensional perspective. The cliché of the “teacher” must make way for the trainer or facilitator. But unarguably, this is easier said than done. The daunting task of completion of the prescribed curriculum and the related formalities of evaluation do take up a lot of time and energy. The mantra of the day is constant re-invention or rather CPD as it is called- Continuing Professional Development. When

an individual has taken up the onerous responsibility of imparting knowledge it is imperative to keep himself/herself constantly updated. Promoters of academic institutions must necessarily support this endeavour. Institute-industry interaction must be encouraged. This is a win-win situation for both these partners involved. Organizations can possibly spell out their requirements which can be catered to by the institutions. Teachers can undergo training programmes in Business English offered by universities and other international organizations like the British Council. When this knowledge is passed down to the learners, they are truly in a position to satisfy the industries' demand for well-qualified professionals.

At this stage a quick glimpse of the Soft Skills can provide greater clarity to our discussion. As stated by V. Sarvanan in his article "Sustainable Employability Skills for Engineering Professionals", "The seven soft skills are, i) Communicative skills ii) Critical thinking and Problem Solving skills iii) Team work iv) Life-Long Learning & Information Management Skills v) Entrepreneurship skills vi) Ethics, Moral & Professional vii) Leadership skills"

Further to this I would also like to add that Business English cannot be learned in isolation from the soft skills. As stated above, in addition to communicative skills, Life-Long Learning is also a fundamental component of soft skills. This essentially means that instead of overt teaching learning strategies must be imparted to the students in order to ensure constant learning. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Business English is not a separate branch of knowledge necessitating a new pedagogical mode. Rather it can be classified under the broad category of ESP- English for Specific Purposes. Therefore, I would like to affirm that in order to acquire it, the student or rather the professional must be well-equipped with the right kind of attitude open to all learning. It wouldn't be wrong to state here that this skill set can be picked up while actually working. An employee who was hitherto a student is now in an environment where the currency being used is

Business English. With the inclination for learning, not only the basics but the finer nuances can also be easily mastered.

In this context I would like to quote Andreas Blom whose expert views can offer the right direction needed. "While employers across India asks for the same set of soft skills, their skill demands differ for Professional Skills across economic sectors, company sizes, and regions. These findings suggest that engineering education institutions should: (i) seek to improve the skill set of graduates; (ii) emphasize Soft Skills, (iii) refocus the assessments, teaching-learning process, and curricula away from lower-order thinking skills, such as remembering and understanding towards higher order skills such as analysis and creativity; and (iv) interact more with employers to understand the particular demand for skills in that region and sector."

This research has begun with the premise of the necessity of learning Business English in the current socio-economic scenario. Given the fact that technology has been instrumental in creating a borderless world, the academic institutions need to constantly remain abreast of the changing dynamics of the business world. Business English is one of the many features that pose a challenge/teaser to educational institutions. Through my paper I have tried to highlight the fact that this cannot be targeted as an isolated issue and customized solutions be offered. There is no single panacea for this problem. In order to tackle this, a comprehensive approach is called for. Remedial or perhaps revolutionary measures need to be introduced in order to solve this problem. It also needs to be understood by all the stakeholders viz. policy makers, academic institutions, parents, learners and above all the industry that a well coordinated effort will yield tangible results. When each of these elements do their part towards this conscientiously we can produce professionals armed with holistic learning that leads to preparedness to take on the profession. This bodes good to all the parties involved eventually resulting in increased profits which translates into successful national economies thereby creating a happy world for all.

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