

ATTITUDINAL IMPLICATIONS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING BUSINESS ENGLISH

Katarina Ilić

Clinical Center Niš, Serbia

Phone: +381605250688, E-Mail: katarina.iiilic@gmail.com

Abstract. *Throughout its short history, there have been many attempts to define the concept of Business English. One of the definitions states that Business English is English for the purposes of effective communication in business in a variety of specific business contexts. In that sense, it is not easy to distinguish whether it belongs to the field of business studies or language learning. As there are numerous factors influencing BE, it is important to distinguish between two main categories- aptitude and attitude. The authors here present four most important attitudinal factors influencing language learning: self-esteem, motivation, inhibition, anxiety. They can be divided into those which inspire a positive attitude towards language learning (self-esteem and motivation) and those which have a negative effect on the very process (inhibition and anxiety). Therefore, the individuals with strong motivation and self-esteem ascribe their achievement to their great effort and, simultaneously attribute failure to the lack of effort, believing that it is what determines the result. On the other hand, the individuals with strong inhibition and anxiety give up tasks more easily and make little effort believing that they are not associated with the final result. In this respect, it is claimed that teachers are responsible for developing students' positive attitude to language learning. For this reason, they design different strategies in order to achieve the atmosphere of encouragement. The attitudinal factors are even more emphasized in learning Business English as the opportunity to practice the acquired knowledge and enhance the overall performance is immediately available.*

Key words: *Business English, aptitude, attitude, attitudinal factors, teacher's strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is not an easy task to define the concept of Business English, since it is, on the one hand, a new branch within English Studies, and, on the other, a topic often avoided by linguistic researchers (Pašalić 2009). Nevertheless, it has rapidly become one of the most spread categories in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). One of the definitions of the very notion states that the term Business English is used to cover the English taught to a wide range of professional people, and students in full-time education preparing for a business career (Sampath and Zalipour 3009). Yet another expresses the idea that Business English is English for the purposes of effective communication in business in a variety of specific business contexts (Medvedeva 2003). Language practitioners thus divide Business English learners into two categories: (a) Job-experienced language learners who work as managers, office staff and other professionals, and (b) pre-experienced (low-experienced) language learners from universities, colleges or trade and commerce schools who study business courses (Ellis and Johnson 2000). In that sense, it

is not easy to distinguish whether Business English belongs to the field of business studies or language learning. Furthermore, Business English is a *thicker layer cake*, the “layers” of which are numerous:

- knowledge of business,
- knowledge of language(s),
- communication skills,
- problem-solving skills,
- decision-making skills,
- data processing skills
- cultural awareness etc. (Medvedeva 2003).

So, a frequently asked question in this domain is whether we teach language or skills. In any event, it is clear that Business English is content oriented and requires domain specific knowledge (Jenkins 2011). If the two aspects were reconciled, we could say that the overall objective of a Business English course is to improve performance (Anissimova 2003).

As Business English is a layered phenomenon, it can be observed that there shall be numerous factors influencing the learning process in this field, including aptitude and attitude (Krashen 1981). The task of this paper is to clarify the importance of attitudinal factors in the acquisition of English as a second language, with an emphasis on Business English.

Before discussing the position of attitude in the process of language learning, it is essential to define the terms ‘aptitude’ and ‘attitude’ as generic concepts and in educational context as well. A dictionary definition characterizes ‘aptitude’ for a particular activity as natural ability or skill to learn something quickly and to do it well, while ‘attitude’ is defined as the way one thinks or feels about somebody/something (Sinclair 2001). The second level represents aptitude and attitude in the educational context, the subcategory of which is second language learning. Aptitude thus represents combinations of cognitive abilities that are differentially related to processing under different conditions of instructional exposure to L2 input (Robinson 2002). Popular literature often interchangeably uses the terms ability, aptitude and intelligence, the scientific distinction of which is lost due to their synonymous application (Sturgeon, 2014). Next in order is attitude which encompasses the factors that encourage intake (Krashen 1981). In other words, these are motivational variables which influence the process of learning. Thus, the terms attitude, motivation and affectivity are adopted as equivalents. It is widely assumed that aptitudinal and attitudinal factors are statistically independent, as they relate to different and independent parts of language performance (Krashen 1981). In that sense, aptitude is characterized as the mental side of learning, while attitude is the emotional.

2. CLASSIFICATION OF ATTITUDINAL FACTORS

In the field of foreign language acquisition we have experienced a great number of turns caused by changes of paradigms within linguistics: the cognitive turn, present in the 1960s and 1970s, brought in the sociopsychological paradigm; the narrative turn, which dominated in the 1980s and 1990s, raised the interest in narratives; social turn of the late 1990s and 2000s introduced the interest in critical studies and power relations; and the most recent, affective turn, is inspired by increased attention to emotions (Gabrys-Barker and Bielska 2013). According to the postulates of this turn, affectivity, or attitude, is at

the core of every educational activity, including second language acquisition. Thus, the focus of examination is language learning process through the lens of affectivity. The center of attention is Business English, as it is a category in which the attitude and motivation are strongly expressed due to the opportunity of immediate application of the acquired knowledge in the field of career and business.

The classification of attitudinal or affective factors which influence the success in EFL/ESL learning provided by Veronica de Andres (2002) includes the following components:

1. Self-Esteem. De Andres (2002) points that a student who feels good about himself is more likely to succeed. Self-esteem can be considered as either cause or result of academic success. On the one hand, a good result in learning raises self-esteem, while, on the other, a high level of self-esteem generates educational progress. In any case, it is a component which can be guided and controlled. Namely, it is a teacher's task to modify self-esteem through direct instruction which can lead to achievement gains. This point is rather important in the classroom as teachers can exert an influence both on the performance and well-being of the students.

The factor of self-esteem carries significant importance in the context of learning Business English because, if considered as the result of the studying process, it infuses new energy in the very business and, consequently, improves work performance and enables better ability to maneuver.

2. Inhibition. "The weaker the self-esteem; the stronger the inhibition to protect the weak ego", claims De Andres (2002). It is believed that those learners who favor attitudes of openness and the tolerance of ambiguity find language learning less difficult than those who are less open and exposed. As language learning truly involves a great deal of self exposure it inevitably involves making mistakes, which are considered to be threats to the self. Since students are frequently equipped with an already developed defense mechanism for tolerating criticism, it is teachers' task to focus on students' strengths rather than weaknesses and enable the breakage of learning blocks. This is a possible way to overcome inhibition (De Andres 2002).

As inhibition is closely related to self-esteem, it can be observed that in Business English learning blocks have an even bigger inhibitory effect since they deter not only the process of learning but also the acquisition of skills and overall performance.

3. Motivation. Despite the fact that attitude, affection and motivation are sometimes used interchangeably, De Andres (2002) classifies motivation as a variable among attitudinal factors. Motivation is defined as an inner impulse, emotion, desire that triggers some action, but also as a need or drive. According to Maslow's theory of motivation (Maslow 1987), there is a hierarchy of needs from basic psychological, such as air and water, to higher needs of safety, belonging and self-esteem. On top of the hierarchy is the need for self-actualization which refers to people's desire for self-fulfillment or to become actualized in what they are potentially. It is, in fact, the need for self-actualization that is at the core of successful EFL/ESL learning. There are two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is outside individuals and aimed at rewards and success and failure, while intrinsic is inside individuals and it refers to enjoying the activity itself, rather than doing it for its instrumental value (Madrid 2002). It is stressed that intrinsic motives should be emphasized in the classroom, but the balance between both stances should be kept (De Andres 2002).

In the process of studying Business English the motivational factor is especially emphasized since the goal of the very process is tangible. In that sense, it can be seen that the success of studying Business English is related to extrinsic motivation as the reward would be the progress in acquiring knowledge and its application in the professional context. It follows that the objective of professionals engaged in studying BE is not in the process of learning but in the outcome.

4. Anxiety. It has so far been demonstrated that all attitudinal factors are interdependent and related, which is also the case with anxiety. As De Andres (2002) claims, any task that involves a certain degree of challenge can expose the learner to feelings of self-doubt, uneasiness or fear. These feelings are closely linked with the degree of self-esteem and inhibition, but also to anxiety as the main question behind them is whether I shall succeed. Since second language learning is a demanding task, it is likely to raise anxiety in the learner. It is thus teachers' task to keep the level of anxiety to a minimum because it is considered a negative factor which interferes with the learning process. The author's classroom experience has shown that assignments without balance and support can dishearten the learners and submerge them into a state of emotional dullness or paralysis (De Andres 2002). Nevertheless, a certain amount of anxiety can be a positive factor in the classroom since a degree of challenge can raise learners' anticipation and curiosity and, in that way, enable achieving a learning goal.

The anxiety factor can be even more dominant when a learner is studying a Business English course. It is due to the assumption that the degree of learners' anxiety increases in case of failure in the learning process. When failure is experienced the learner doubts not only his study potential but also the potential for skill acquisition and business achievement.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH STRONG ATTITUDINAL FACTORS

Observing the given classification, it can be interpreted that attitudinal factors can be grouped into those which have a positive effect on the learning process, such as self-esteem and motivation, and those with negative implications on educational development, which are inhibition and anxiety. Accordingly, the individuals who possess refined motivation and self-esteem are more likely to achieve academic goals and apply it in the professional world. On the other hand, the persons with expressed inhibition and anxiety undergo strong limitations related to the process of SL learning. Therefore, their educational results will be weaker, which is a blocking factor in their application in business.

3.1. Individuals with strong motivation and self-esteem

According to Heider (1958), the individuals with strong motivation and self-esteem show the following behavioral patterns:

1. Ascribe their achievement in certain activities to great capacity and outstanding effort.
2. Persevere when facing failure, attributing it to lack of effort, something which is modifiable.
3. Choose activities of average difficulty as they produce more self-assessable feedback.
4. Make a considerable effort, as they believe that it is what determines the result.

3.2. Individuals with strong inhibition and anxiety

As motivation and self-esteem are inversely proportional to inhibition and anxiety, it follows that the persons with weak motivation and self-esteem are strongly inhibited and anxious. Heider (1958) attributes the following performance to the individuals with strong inhibition and anxiety:

1. Getting involved in few activities, as they attribute success to external rather than internal factors and do not consider effort as its cause.
2. Giving up tasks when facing failure, as they regard the latter as being caused by lack of capacity, something which is uncontrollable and invariable.
3. Choosing easy or excessively difficult activities, as they result in feedback which is less self-assessable.
4. Making little effort as they do not consider it has anything to do with the final result.

4. TEACHER'S ATTITUDINAL STRATEGIES

Developing students' positive attitude towards the SL learning is primarily the FL teacher's task, who is asked to use strategies in the classroom to encourage students' motivation and self-esteem, thus decrease the effects of inhibitors and anxiety. As Madrid (2002) points out, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors are used to enhance students' affirmative perspective towards learning. Though the priority is given to intrinsic factors, which concentrate on the process of learning, rather than the result, teachers very often have to resort to the extrinsic strategy, or the so called "carrot and stick" approach. Namely, this approach is based on the "reward and punishment" method, which is directly related to the instrumental value of the learning process.

As indicated above, Business English, as a task-based learning category, is a goal-oriented academic activity, which proves that the extrinsic factors, such as money, praise or professional attainment, are more dominant than in standard SL learning. Thus the goal rather than the process takes priority.

On balance, it can be said that the aim of all teacher's strategies is to create the atmosphere of encouragement in the classroom and, in that way, inspire learners' positive attitude. According to Hitz and Driscoll (1989), the teacher takes the following actions to strengthen students' motivation and self-esteem and decrease negative attitudinal aspects:

- Offers specific feedback rather than general comments.
- Takes the initiative.
- Focuses on improvement and efforts rather than evaluation of a finished product.
- Uses sincere, direct comments.
- Helps students develop an appreciation of their behaviors and achievements
- Avoids competition or comparison with others.
- Works toward students' self-satisfaction.

Finally, if these strategies are used and properly managed, it is believed that they can produce greater engagement in the classroom tasks, better performance on the part of the students, less absences and higher quality learning (Madrid 2002).

5. CONCLUSION

If the goal of Business English is to improve performance, BE teaching and learning is aimed at establishing meaningful communication in the classroom, which will subsequently lead to the development of an affirmative perspective on the learning process. The first step in raising the teacher's awareness is not denying the importance of factors which influence students' acquisition and presentation. (De Andres 2002). As "language is a way of life, the foundation of our being, which, as such, interacts simultaneously with thoughts and feelings" (Brown 1994), it is necessary to distinguish between two sides of the same coin- aptitudinal and attitudinal factors in the process of language learning, concurrently affecting Business English.

While aptitude represents the mental side of the process, attitude is more related to the emotionality or affectability pertinent to it. Though it is generally advocated that language learning is a cognitive process, recent studies have introduced new, affective theories, which stress the importance of affective issues thus enabling the identification of constructive and destructive attitudes that students may have and determining the causes of success and failure in language learning. In that event, educational psychology has been brought to light.

When examining attitudinal factors, it is significant to acknowledge that they can be divided into those which inspire a positive attitude towards language learning, such as self-esteem and motivation, and those which have a negative effect on the very process – inhibition and anxiety. The influence of all these factors is even more emphasized when Business English is in question as the extrinsic properties of learning are in focus and the effect is what counts since the performance is the key element. The tangible opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge raises interest in learning thus decreasing the interest in the process and increasing the value of the result.

A very significant issue is the teacher's role in developing students' positive attitude to learning. By applying several strategies and schemes of behavior, such as taking the initiative in the classroom, offering specific rather than general feedback, focusing on improvement etc., every teacher has the opportunity to increase individuals' motivation and self-esteem and, therefore, to decrease inhibition and anxiety.

Finally, the aim of this paper is to raise linguists' awareness of the emotional side of the learning process and the importance of the positive attitude, as the significance of cognitive aspects is already clear. In addition, the attitudinal factors are even more emphasized in learning Business English and the affective character, rather than good cognition, is a driving force impelling the learners to achieve results since the opportunity to practice the acquired knowledge and enhance the overall performance is immediately available.

REFERENCES

- Anissimova L.A., "Current Trends and Concerns in Teaching Business English. Language Training vs. Skills Training." Лингводидактические аспекты английского языка делового общения: Материалы международной конференции. М. : Уникум-центр, 2003.
- Brown, D. Douglas. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994.

- De Andres, Verónica. "The Influence of Affective Variables on EFL/ESL Learning and Teaching" *The Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching* Volume VII (2002), <<http://www.njcu.edu/cill/vol7/andres.html>> (21 September 2014).
- Ellis, M. and Johnson, C. *Teaching business English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Fredo, Evan. "Challenges in Business English Teaching." Paper presented at the 20th International IATEFL Poland Conference, Warszawa, Poland, September 9, 2011.
- Gabrys-Barker, Danuta and Bielska, Joanna, ed. *The Affective Dimension in Second Language Acquisition*. Great Britain: MPG PrintGroup Ltd., 2013.
- Heider, Fritz. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: Wiley, 1958.
- Hitz, Randy, and Driscoll, Amy. *Praise In The Classroom*. Urbana IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1989.
- Jenkins, J., Cogo, A., and Dewey, M. "Review of developments in research into English as a lingua franca." *Language Teaching* 44(3) (2011): 281–315.
- Krashen B., Stephen. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press Inc., 1981. Accessed September 22, 2014. http://sdrashen.com/content/books/sl_acquisition_and_learning.pdf
- Madrid, David. "The Power of the FL Teacher's Motivational Strategies." *Revista de Filología y su Didáctica* 25 (2002): 369-422.
- Maslow, H. Abraham. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1987.
- Medvedeva N.F., "Business English is Just What We Need." Лингводидактические аспекты английского языка делового общения: Материалы международной конференции. М. : Уникум-центр, 2003.
- Pašalić, Magda. "What Do We Teach When We Teach Business English?" *Maribor International Review* Vol. 2, no. 1 (2009), <http://events.ff.uni-mb.si/mir/files/2009/Pasalic_Business_English.pdf> (21 September 2014).
- Robinson, Peter, ed. *Individual Differences and Instructed Language Learning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2002.
- Sampath, Dilani and Zalipour, Arezou. "Practical Approaches to the Teaching of Business English" Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference of Teaching and Learning ICTL 2009, Sarawak, Malaysia, November 17, 2009.
- Sinclair, John, ed. *English Dictionary for Advanced Students*. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 2001.
- Sturgeon, Michael. "Aptitude, Attitude and Motivation as Predictors in Foreign Language Learning." Lee University. Retrieved from <http://www.academia.edu/213230/Aptitude_Attitude_and_Motivation_as_Predictors_in_Foreign_Language_Learning> (23 September 2014).