

BUSINESS VOCABULARY ACQUISITION: ASSESSING THE STANDARD OF RESPONSES OF VERNACULAR AND ENGLISH MEDIUM STUDENTS OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION

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Abstract. *With the growth of ESP Business English (BE) in professional education curriculum, vocabulary enhancing strategies assume pivotal importance as effective business communicative competency promotes professionalism of engineering students. The growth is for three reasons: Firstly, the urgency of specialized English to suit specific needs of a profession; secondly, the changing contours in the field of socio-linguistics from formal linguistic features to real work-a-day features of communication; thirdly, need-based education psychology, i.e. learners' needs and interests determine the effectiveness of taught subjects. The present study attempts to assess the level of business vocabulary acquisition and the standard of responses of three groups of students – “Vernacular Medium with English as a Compulsory Subject at School and Intermediate Level (VMECSSIL), “Vernacular Medium with English as an Optional Subject at School and Intermediate level (VMEOSSIL), and “English Medium Background” (EMB) of an ESP BE language laboratory “Communication and Interpersonal skills for Corporate Readiness Laboratory” (CISCR). The 30 hours experiment comprising of 10 lab classes were conducted taking 18 engineering students of 6 from each medium. The obtained result revealed that the samples with the students of EMB had higher business vocabulary proficiencies than the students of VMECSSIL and VMEOSSIL.*

Key words: *ESP, Business English, Vocabulary Proficiency, Vernacular medium*

1. INTRODUCTION

As India posits an IT power circle, and a developing economic vendue and its skilled techno-businesscrats contribute significantly in this globalized era, the workforce needs to be equipped with adequate English in order to work and communicate effectively with the foreign counterparts. In spite of experiencing the impact of English for 179 years (Macaulay's Minute and English Education Act 1835) in Indian educational curriculum, still the zone of comfortability in the fields of reading, writing, listening and speaking a considerable number of people are still facing difficulties. It becomes a challenge for the ESP curriculum enricher to facilitate a workable syllabus contents for developing communicative competencies of students of professional education. Vocabulary plays a significant role in ESP Business English (BE) as appropriatability to the situation requires placement of the appropriate word in appropriate place in appropriate order to get appropriate response. Rivers (1983) advocates for the sufficient vocabulary acquisition for the use of L2 (second and a foreign language) as without extensive vocabulary, students/practitioners can be puzzled, even found helpless mongers to employ the structures and functions (grammatically prescribed) they have learned for comprehensible

communication. According to Blachowicz and Fisher (2005), limited knowledge of English vocabulary may affect the performance of English language learners in at least four ways: (i) the development and maintenance of social relationships with other students, (ii) participation in academic learning routines, (iii) comprehension as a part of reading instruction, and (iv) comprehension as a part of content area instruction. By taking into account the importance of BE vocabulary and the problems learners may encounter through their lack of knowledge in workplace settings, successful vocabulary enrichment programs in language laboratory are needed to expand the learners' level of knowledge and communicative competency.

2. COGNITIVE REFLECTION OF WORD ACQUISITION AND PROBLEMS OF RE-(PRESENTATION)

A bilingual or multilingual learner has a complex stock of multifaceted words (a kind of sign residue) unconsciously attuned in the subconscious psyche. Words act as cognitive interpretative signs. During the process of encodation they subsume unconscious overlapping (L1, L2 and L3 codes mixing) posing a challenge to conscious orientation. A consequence of this is that the informative/interpretant theme is a kind of trans-(lation/creation) of mother-tongue reflection through foreign language codification, that is, a kind of re-(reflection) and/or referential substitution. The meaning of a sign or of a group of signs, usually culturally determined, is decrypted accurately or to an extent faithfully for proper feedback. Effective documentation and proper decodation of sign/signified is closely related to sender-receiver ('s) semiotic-syntactic resonance.

The technology of business vocabulary acquisition is associated with cognitive thinking, situational coherence, target achievement and total effect. 'Technical vocabulary' (Nation 2) endorses specificity of word-use and the term 'technical' is related to the appropriability and referentiality resonance of word-meaning of subject prescribed. In an ESP BE class, learners encounter a trans-pollination of nativity concept (cognitive reflection and conscious encodation of object) and its documentation through L2 substitute. Further learners have to construct meaningful documentation/message by investing their consumed knowledge of syntactic management of L2. As language is culture-specific, the process of words selection is a kind of emotion-codification. Mostly business documentation is a virtuoso of calculated reasons, information transfer, and target achievement, where words selection is an art and a conscious orientation. The re-(presentation) of earned words with new usages sometimes makes the learners confused.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Analyzing the development of ESP BE in Indian universities (both technical and general universities), it is seen that the effectiveness of the course can be brought out provided the practising syllabus should be restructured and/or reengineered from the secondary and senior secondary (intermediate) levels. There is no language laboratory class for intermediate students of science like basic science labs. The students are reading literature-related topics – poem, essay, drama, biography and writing practise related to the field of letter writing, telegram writing, report writing and essay writing – the traditionality of General English (GE). The technique of the classroom teaching is 'chalk and talk method'. As a result, the students who were accustomed to mimicry-memorization as

their style of learning, the projected involvement, problem-solving and project-based approaches of ESP appears difficult for them and students coming from vernacular schools feel alienated since the new approach seems contrary to their accustomed learning styles. However, students from English-medium background show proficiency in this regard.

4. ESP BUSINESS ENGLISH: AT A GLANCE

There is a phenomenal growth in ESP BE in today's professional education curriculum for three reasons: firstly, the urgency of specialized English to suit specific needs of a profession; secondly, the changing contours in the field of socio-linguistics from formal linguistic features to real work-a-day features of communication; thirdly, need-based education psychology, that is, learners' needs and interests determine the effectiveness of taught subjects. The ESP BE teaching for mastery acquisition (a zone of comfortability) is to a considerable extent based on Robinson's insights (1991): (i) ESP is "goal-directed"; (ii) ESP language teaching is designed to meet specific needs of the learners; related in content to contextualize references of target job activities (in terms of the mock practices or specialist studies); centred on language proficiency acquisition in syntax, semantics and discourse aspects (the documentational/presentational strategy); designed in contrast with GE. Ellis and Johnson (1994) define BE as a variety with a "specific linguistic system and specific communication purposes". As system-purpose symmetry BE is related to lingua-situational appropriability. It implies a mixture of specific content (related to target job) and general content (referring to the ability to communicate successfully in general). So, for Ellis and Johnson, BE comprises only those language forms (essentiality of communication) that are specified by a given group of learners as being relevant for them. Pickett's diagrammatic representation typifies the difference between GE and BE:

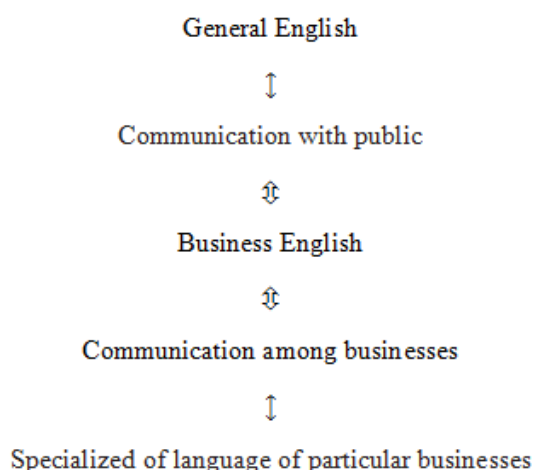


Fig. 1 (cited in Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, 55)

The diagram shows that BE has two aspects: firstly, it is a part of GE as communication relates to general world (public) and secondly, it is world-specific, that is, communication

within specific business circle with specified group of people through specific manner and channel of communication. Donna (2000) argues BE contains GE as it relates the skills that are associated with documentation of presentations, taking notes and references. And difference between BE and GE lies with the notions of specification and implicit area accountability. So far as language as a strategy of representation and communication purposes (the projection of physicality and sociality of linguistic codes) BE remains similar to GE, but, when specificity of meaning resonance - appropriability and contextuality of documentation – is concerned, BE stands pole apart. Similarly in teaching technicality BE (unlike GE based on total effect) is based on “a need-directed teaching in which as much as possible must be job-related, focused on learners’ needs and relevant to them” (Čepon 2005, 46). The technology of course design of ESP BE is “authentic-material based, purpose-relation oriented and self-directed” (Wang Jin, Jin Min, 2007 as cited in Xiarong and Lili, 2009). Authentic-material based aspect implies the use of newspapers, YouTube teaching videos, TV and internet browsing which are not specifically designed for classroom learning. Purpose-relation oriented endorses the use of task-based/project-oriented classroom activities comprising of real-life problem-based learning. ESP BE focuses more on vocabulary in context than on teaching grammar and language structures as the students are learning the language integrated into a subject matter area important to them “in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions” (Fiorito 2005).

Presently Business English for Occupational Purposes’ (BEOP) corpus ranges from teaching general business-oriented vocabulary to the teaching of business skills, that is, interpersonal negotiation/compilation skills, presentation of products and such other aspects of corporate readiness skills. In the light of today’s techno-management nexus, the training of interpersonal skills for corporate readiness assumes strong significance. The emphasis on the need analysis as the chief characteristic of ESP BE holds the prime focus of the Communication and Interpersonal skills for Corporate Readiness Laboratory (CISCRL). It tries to make the students industry ready by focusing on topics of situation demands, that is, “target situation analysis” (Chambers 1980). This analysis investigates, promotes and evaluates the proficiency of the students and skills (thinking-oral-documentation) required to be learnt. The selection of situation to be discussed, debated and analysed should be done carefully by the instructors so to create interest on the parts of the students. Holliday and Crooke’s “Means Analysis” (1982) can be a valid strategy in this regard – the analysis of the learning situation within academics relates to ‘local situations’ analysis.

5. METHODOLOGY

The experiment was conducted in the language laboratory, Department of English, Black Diamond College of Engineering and Technology, Biju Pattnaik University of Technology, Odisha, India. Learners are second-year B-Tech students of Computer Science Engineering and Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, during 4th semester of the academic year January 2014 – April 2014. A group of 18 students divided into 3 groups participated in this study. The group was made on the basis of selecting 2 students from “Vernacular Medium with English as a Compulsory Subject at School and Intermediate Level (VMECSSIL), 2 students from “Vernacular Medium with English as an Optional Subject at School and Intermediate level (VMEOSSIL), and 2 students from “English Medium Background” (EMB). The students that were selected for the study are between

65%-70% mark scorer at intermediate level. The study comprised 10 weeks duration of 10 laboratory classes of 3 hours duration each. Three teachers were actively engaged in the process of conducting laboratory classes, selection and demonstration of topic outlines and evaluation of the job. One teacher was of literature background, the second one was of linguistics specialization and third one was of creative writing with MBA. They were provided "Teacher's Appraisal Sheet" as the yardstick of evaluation.

5.1. Name of Laboratory

Communication and Interpersonal Skills for Corporate Readiness Laboratory (CISCRL).

5.1.1. Syllabus

This course focuses on communication in professional (work-related) situations of the kind that BPUT graduates may expect to encounter on entering the professional domain. Some typical forms of work-related communication, oral or written, are listed below. Practice activities for all four skills can be designed around these or similar situations.

1. Gaining entry into an organization
 - (i) Preparing job-applications and CVs
 - (ii) Facing an interview
 - (iii) Participating in GD (as part of the recruitment process)
2. In-house communication
 - a. Superior/senior – subordinate/junior
 - (i) Welcoming new entrants to the organization, introducing the workplace culture, presentation etc.
 - (ii) Briefing subordinates/ juniors: explaining duties and responsibilities, etc.
 - (iii) Motivating subordinates/ juniors (pep talk)
 - (iv) Instructing/directing subordinates
 - (v) Expressing/recording appreciation, praising/rewarding a subordinate or junior
 - (vi) Reprimanding/correcting/disciplining a subordinate/junior (for a lapse); asking for an explanation etc.
 - b. Subordinate/ junior – superior/senior
 - (i) Responding to the above
 - (ii) Reporting problems/difficulties/deficiencies
 - (iii) Offering suggestions.

5.1.2. Techniques Applied for Conducting Lab

Mostly three techniques: (i) Project and Presentation, (ii) Role-playing and (iii) Mock Trials were applied to motivate, perform and evaluate the responses of the learners. Preparation of CV, job applications and business reports was assigned as project. In the presentation part the students were given PPT presentation of business-related issues (e.g. the presentation of a new product before a symposium of sales executives). In this regard the teachers provided the basic outline of the topic along with motivational lines for encouraging students to prepare the assigned topics nicely within a week time. Similarly the 'role-playing technique', that is, changing of one's behaviour to assume an assigned role, either utilizing unconsciously rooted role-model of socially seen/studied, or consciously to

act out an adopted role (matrixed role of situation conditioned) was implemented to conduct in-house communication. Mock trials technique was applied to conduct the lab related to facing an interview and participating in group discussion as part of the recruitment process.

5.1.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

At the beginning of each experiment the students were asked about the purpose and utility of the experiment as a motivating impulse and the confidentiality of the results. The teachers collected data from 3 angles – (i) vocabulary use and ability of re-(presentation) of L1 thoughts/words in English, (ii) psycho-socio alertness and level of participation, (iii) correctness of vocabulary documentation. The data obtained were analyzed by using SPSS. The descriptive statics were used to describe TVLSs use and the independent sample T-Test was carried out to check whether the differences in TVLSs use among students of different educational background were statistically significant or not.

Table 1 Average Marks Obtained

Job	EMB	VMECSSIL	VMEOSSIL
1	7	5	3
2	8	5	2
3	8	6	4
4	8	5	3
5	6	6	4
6	5	6	3
7	8	5	5
8	7	8	2
9	5	5	3
10	6	2	4

Table 2 Business Vocabulary Proficiencies of Students with Different Education Medium

Variable	No of Students	No of Labs	Mean	Median	Mode	S. D.
EMB	6	10	6.7	7	8	2.13
VMECSSIL	6	10	5.3	5	5	1.83
VMEOSSIL	6	10	3.3	3	3	1.64

Table 3 Overall Performances of EMB, VMECSSIL and VMEOSSIL Students

Mean	5.1
Median	5
Mode	8
S. D.	1.73

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the tables above, the result of the data analysis revealed that the samples with the students of EMB had higher business vocabulary proficiencies than the students of VMECSSIL and VMEOSSIL. Between VMECSSIL and VMEOSSIL the former showed better proficiencies than the later. This result can be explained by the fact that the emphasis on English language proficiency acquisition is much higher in English medium curriculum than the vernacular ones. The vernacular medium curriculum with English as optional subject puts little emphasis on this. On the other hand, vernacular medium curriculum with English as a compulsory subject, shows seriousness by putting emphasis on developing English efficiency. Language skill acquisition is not of short time duration accountability. As English medium students study and use English, they have sufficient experience to construct the meaning of words when learning BE vocabulary. It can be assumed that the students having adequate background knowledge of sentence construction and use of words with contextual appropriateness can foster their proficiency in BE vocabulary acquisition.

7. CONCLUSION

In approaching the complex problematic referring to the improvement of BE vocabulary competencies and the implementation of ESP BE must be looked after the following aspects:

(i) Curriculum Enrichment: This could target the acquisition and enrichment of business vocabulary for performing better in future as techno-business personnel. The holistic approach of Business Communication as subject assumes the development of each professional learner's abilities; the use of new evaluative methods; the utilization of ESP pedagogic approaches as inquiry-based applied method and problem-based learning strategies.

(ii) Curriculum Modification: As English is the lingua franca of international trade, commerce, technology and education all the vernacular medium curriculums must place English as a compulsory subject to be taught at secondary and intermediate levels for all streams- Science, Arts and Commerce.

(iii) Motivation for Self-preparation: The existence of a culture home/self- preparation and use of reading room in the institute (newspapers, periodicals, etc.), browsing e-journals, the self-efficaciousness and active participation in lecture activities both in classroom and language laboratory and doing business laboratory projects prove highly beneficial on the parts of business vocabulary enrichment of learners of professional education. The effective use of Google search engine and other internet browsers and e-dictionaries of BE, GE and e-bilingual dictionary can help the learners become autonomous and self-reliant in the sphere of vocabulary acquisition.

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APPENDIX

Teacher's Appraisal Sheet

Name of the student: -----

Name of the Group: (i) A (ii) B (iii) C

Medium from: (i) (VMECSI) (ii) (VMEOSI) (iii) EMB

Lab No: -----

Topic: -----

Date -----

1. Was the topic well prepared by the student? Yes/No
2. Could the student present/perform/participate without looking at any notes? Yes/No
3. Was there appropriate use of vocabulary? Yes/No
4. Was there any problem of encodation? Yes/No
5. Was there any trace of mother tongue influence? Yes/No
6. Was the student involved in group activity? Yes/No
7. Did the student show interest in new vocabulary acquisition and use it in sentence? Yes/No
8. Did the student give/express any suggestion/wanting for competency improvement? Yes/No
9. Did the student look tensed in the lab? Yes/No
10. Did the student show confidence in Question-Answer session? Yes/No

Name of the Evaluator: -----

Marks awarded: -----/10