

KEY ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *A brilliant business mind knows that perfect communicative competence opens the doors of opportunity and of fruitful collaboration but effective communication has its challenges. Any language learner should understand that the lexical part is as important in the verbal and the written contact as the linguistic and the cultural parts are. In a competitive international business market communicating your thoughts effectively is vital. So, good business people need – besides the abilities specific to their domain of activity and those related to all thinking processes – other abilities, just as important, such as using correct grammar structures, reading body language, and interpreting cultural signals necessary to offer information as well as to acquire data. Moreover, it is essential to master the four language skills – listening, reading, speaking, and writing – in order to transmit accurate messages in international business contexts which can be done only if the communicative abilities mentioned above are developed. Therefore, language and culture risks should not be ignored and steps should be taken to prevent them. Clearly, linguistic and cultural competences are a must in an international and multicultural world.*

Keywords: *communication, issues, risks, challenges, competence, body language, culture, international business market*

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is the result of years of teaching ESP as well as of studying and observing the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication in the international business context. It is a fact that people of different nationalities who choose to communicate in English while doing business need to develop their grammar and lexical skills in the same time with their knowledge of the behavior specific to a particular nation in a business situation. Thus, communication competences include an accurate and fluent use of the language plus an appropriate interpretation of the cultural message transmitted and of the allusions made followed by a suitable response constructed logically and strategically in accordance with what the situation requires. It must be mentioned here that such realities are valid in all communication instances no matter if the receptive skills (reading and listening) or the productive skills (speaking or writing) are necessary especially in the cases when a set of skills or one skill support(s) and/or entail(s) the other(s) since language skills are known to have by definition a relation of interdependence. Taking into consideration everything mentioned above, it is clearly the job of foreign language professors to raise the learners' awareness about these aspects when teaching. Although this is true for

communication in any language, the focus of this paper is the English language which is without doubt the language of international communication. Therefore, people who add English to their abilities not only become able to do their work in an international environment improving thus their financial prospects but also enhance their professional and personal development. Nevertheless, without good English grammar knowledge, a rich vocabulary and a deep understanding of such issues as culture and body language, there will always be failures in communication which can even lead to serious problems.

2. THE IMPACT OF GRAMMAR, CULTURE AND BODY LANGUAGE ON THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

2.1 Theories and Approaches. Due to the fact that more and more business companies are being globalized, the English language – which is considered the lingua franca of international communication – is used to acquire and communicate information and knowledge as well as to build relationships in a business environment. Therefore, students aspiring to become professionals in different domains need to develop their English for Specific Purposes.

English for Specific Purposes is a “special discourse used in specific settings by people

sharing common purposes” (Ruiz-Garido *et al*, 2010:2). Actually, as Henry Widdowson – one of the authorities in the field of applied linguistics and language learning and teaching – says “all language use is specific in a sense” (*apud* Ruiz-Gurrido *et al*, 2010:1) meaning that “language serves a specific purpose wherever it is used” (Ruiz-Garido *et al*, 2010:2). The idea is that ESP professors design their courses taking into consideration the real needs of future professionals at their job and it is essential that they help students understand the necessity of working both on the lexis and on the grammar part of the English language without disregarding culture and body language issues if they want to avoid misunderstandings and eliminate obstacles to professional and even personal development. In order to prove true everything mentioned above, the needs of students in computing and information technology will be analyzed as technology is becoming increasingly important in our lives leading to the development of the IT market.

The greatest difficulty when teaching an ESP class is to convince students that in the process of developing English language competences they cannot focus only on learning new lexis and on practicing it or better said on trying to practice it. The reason for this is that lexis alone cannot render meaning by itself in certain contexts and even if new words were put in structures and these structures learned as such the result would not be a desirable one because the human brain is unable to remember too many new items or constructions without finding some logic in them. So people are more likely to remember rules which enable them to come up with new meaningful sentences or/and phrases in accordance with an existing context.

In *How to Teach Grammar*, there are clear points regarding the connection between grammar and meaning. Grammar is described as “a process for making a speaker’s or a writer’s meaning clear when contextual information is lacking” (Thornbury, 2008:4) which is done by employing “rules of syntax and rules of morphology” (Thornbury, 2008:4). Consequently, students “need to learn not only what forms are possible, but what particular forms will express their particular meaning.” (Thornbury, 2008:4) This is why good communicative competence is due on the one hand to the ability to combine knowledge of grammar rules which include form, meaning and function added to broad word knowledge and on the other hand to the ability to read culture signs and body language which will be discussed later in this

article. As most students believe that all they need is to learn how to communicate and they do not realize the importance of grammar in this, the professor’s job is to balance grammar input with practice in communication and allow the learners to gradually reach accuracy as long as it is made clear from the start that being intelligible is not possible without being correct or that grasping meaning and sometimes nuances is not possible without a previous acquisition of language structures and their use. Moreover, grammar can also be seen as a competence that supports the development of other competences in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. When grammar is incorrect or misunderstood in any of these areas, communication may be disrupted and/or the message(s) lost.

For an ESP course design a diagnostic test on grammar and on words of general and specific usefulness in English are necessary in the beginning in order to establish the students’ level and thus later choose the appropriate materials and ways to teach. Grammar structures occupy a high place in the learning of the English language and must be understood and used correctly in specific contexts and situations which must be emphasized. For instance, in computing and IT students need to develop their reading and writing skills a lot because, usually, computer specialists develop and maintain the computer equipment and software programs which means that they have to read a lot to be able understand certain processes and then to be able to find their own solutions according to the problem they are facing. Thus, students or people working in computing have to know how to formulate logical series of commands and instructions necessary in the work with and use of computers and sometimes they need to give coherent explanations to the beneficiaries of their computer work. Moreover, as their domain can also be considered a business domain from the point of view of selling devices or ideas/concepts which in their turn are used in different businesses, they have to talk about possibilities, expectations, obligations, rules and regulations; make logical deductions; give advice; speak about their actions and business activities, talk about their plans and so on. People in the computing domain should definitely master tenses, moods, voice as well as the modals and their nuances to be able to comprehend any piece of reading material, to write accurate e-mails and to understand and communicate fluently with their business partners or customers/clients. All this does not mean that

other grammar structures are ignored. It is obvious that students have to be capable of using all grammar structures correctly in order to have meaningful conversations free of misunderstandings or in order to transmit a message verbally or in writing. Clearly, grammar is taught in context and rules are elicited from the students because they are supposed to already have some knowledge of grammar and are supposed to be motivated to practice in their main field of study – grammar structures in meaningful context are understood and acquired more easily. The vocabulary teaching is also very important and has to be focused both on words of general use in English and on specialized core lexical items.

As long as students are motivated to learn, the teaching process is valuable and ends with acquisition. ESP professors' task is to teach students English grammar structures in the way they appear in future work related contexts and to shed light especially on those grammar parts that can entangle meaning. An experienced professor of ESP can say what problems students have when they work on their English and what can put them in difficulty. A good way to make students see the importance of grammar in reaching their goals is to speak to them about risks and about eliminating them. An analysis of the SWOT type always works perfectly. Students are told to think of the process of communicating and sharing information as well as of working in a globalized world in terms of the SWOT sectors: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Obviously, English language can open the door to the opportunity sector as long as it is used as a tool or a means of developing one's business, of working more efficiently and effectively. Thus, English can be placed in the strength sector only if it is polished otherwise it will transfer English in the weaknesses sector or the threats sector because a misused, misunderstood or badly handled grammar structure can cause serious problems.

The mistakes that students make when asked to use English for one purpose or another are mostly the same. The list of common mistakes built over years of working with students in informatics uncovers that their lack of grammar knowledge can lead to either a total failure in communication or to a show of ignorance which can result in people judging the rest of their work in accordance with the attention paid to their communicative competences. However, a good command of English can help students with more than transmitting the right message properly and

figuratively. It can make it easier for them to understand their interlocutors if their language is poor.

Usually, students react well to activities which imply exposure to an inductive approach in teaching as they see the benefits of solving language problems themselves. Nevertheless when professors see their students struggling to identify rules and uses of the language, they should point out which is the focus of the lesson and even make use of deductive presentations of grammar.

The common confusions and mistakes made by students can be classified as weaknesses or threats. The former are the grammatical errors that do not influence the outcome of the verbal interaction in the speaking – listening process or do not modify the meaning in the writing – reading process but are still instances of inaccuracy. The latter are those errors that interfere with the message transmitted while using the productive skills or that prove a real stumbling block in the use of receptive skills. Whether you are doing business or you are socializing, when you are in an activity that requires you to produce language there are grammar structures that can raise the standard of communication. These types of structures are a proof that the user has detailed knowledge of the English grammar but if used incorrectly they become uncomplimentary even if the message remains unmodified. Grammar books like *Cambridge Grammar of English* and MyGrammarLab reveal that this happens when:

a) pronouns occur together or a pronoun and a noun appear close to each other

eg *My colleagues and me are going to test the app, as it is, on the live environment.

My colleagues and I ... (the pronoun and the noun are both subjects)

*The most indicated for this task are him and her.

The most indicated for this task are he and she. (after being verbs we have to use subject pronouns)

b) *which* and *what* are used in questions

eg *Of the two variants we have suggested via e-mail, what variant is best for you.

Of the two variants, we have suggested via e-mail, which variant is best for you. (*what* is used when specific information is requested from a general or an open-ended possible range whereas *which* is used when specific information is requested from a restricted range of possibilities)

c) agreement between subject and verb is required

eg * Either the managers or the owner are expected to discuss with the accountants today.

Either the managers or the owner is expected to discuss with the accountants today. (the predicate agrees with the subject which is closest to it)

* Any employee from our firm work hard but also get benefits.

Any employee from our firm works hard but also gets benefits. (the omission of the „s” from the third person singular)

d) tenses are used in some cases

eg * During yesterday’s meeting, our team proved that this contract was very well written.

During yesterday’s meeting, our team proved that this contract is very well written. (the present tense is justified here because the situation regarding the contract is still valid)

e) verb forms or tense forms are wrong

eg * They thought that that they could solve the issue.

They thought that they could solve the issue. (think – thought – thought)

* Did they managed to finish?

Did they manage to finish? (Did + S + Verb?)

f) word order is overlooked

eg * You can find below a list with the items.

You can find a list with the items below. (verb + direct object + adverb)

* We need to know how do you want us to proceed.

We need to know how you want us to proceed. (*how* being in an indirect question does not require an inversion between the subject and the predicate)

* Not only we have to postpone this delivery but we also have to stop the production and check what has gone wrong.

Not only do we have to ... (after a negative adverb placed at the beginning of the sentence, an inversion between the subject and the predicate is necessary)

g) *will* – auxiliary for the future is used in temporal clauses or *will* – auxiliary for the future/*would* – auxiliary for the conditional appears in *if* clauses.

eg. * We will let you know when we will finish testing.

We will let you know when we finish testing. (future tense is replaced by present tense in temporal clauses)

* If you will send us a complete bug report by tomorrow we will to fix the bugs in the estimated time.

If you send ... (the conditional is replaced by the subjunctive in *if* clauses)

h) *which* and *who* introduce relative clauses: *which* refers to a non-human subject and to objects whereas *who* refers to human subjects

Eg. * The client which has sent new requests is expecting an answer as soon as possible.

The client who has sent ...

In addition to such grammar structures, there are some grammar structures that can compromise the interaction if they have not been properly acquired and are thus incorrectly used grammarians show. Users/ Speakers have to know the meaning these structures express and put grammar structures in correct contexts lest confusion should arise. Here are a few examples which are convincing:

a) aspect

- *Present Continuous* for temporary situations and *Present Simple* for general situations

eg Our company is working hard to provide its clients with the best and most creative software products on the market.

Our company works hard to provide its clients with the best and most creative software products on the market.

- *Present Continuous* for actions in progress at the moment of speech or for arrangements that will take place in the future

eg. I am working on the computer. (This sentence is ambiguous without a time indicator.)

I am working on the computer now/ tomorrow.

- *Present Perfect Simple* for a past completed action with results in the present vs *Present Perfect Continuous* for an action which started in the past and is still continuing

eg Don’t worry! We have been improving the methods of management. (here the achievement is clear)

Don’t worry! We have improved the methods of management. (here there is stress on duration and thus on incompleteness – present perfect simple works better here because it refers to the fact that the methods are much better now whereas in the case of present perfect continuous the client would understand that they are in the process of getting better so problems may still arise)

- Present simple is used for facts and things that are generally true and present continuous is the

tense and aspect used to talk about things going on at the moment of speech.

eg. What do you do? – I am a software developer.
What are you doing? – I am reading about operating systems.

- Present Perfect which is connected somehow to the present and Past Tense which is not connected to the present

eg The computer has crashed. I cannot work on it. (The result of the past action influences the present.)

The computer crashed and we had to call somebody from technical support. (The past action remains in the past.)

We have been working as software developers for NASA for five years. (We are still working there.)

We worked as software developers for NASA for five years. (We are no longer working there.)

They have outsourced their IT work many times. (They are still open to this approach.)

They outsourced their IT work many times. (They no longer do it.)

b) reported speech

eg It was agreed that our IT team would deal with the issue in question. (The issue should have been solved at the time of the message)

It was agreed that our IT team will deal with the issue in question. (The issue might not have been solved at the time of the message.)

The clients said that they would leave soon. (The clients left.)

The clients said that they will leave soon. (The clients have not left yet.)

c) modals

eg You must not hit „reply all” when there is only one person who needs to read your e-mail. (It is forbidden.)

You do not have to hit „reply all” when there is only one person who needs to read your e-mail. (It is not necessary.)

You must not be late at the meetings and the conferences with the client. (It is forbidden to do this or it is very important not to do this.)

You do not have to be late at the meetings and the conferences with the client. (It is not necessary.)

It must be the browser that is causing all these issues. (It is a certainty. No further tests are required.)

It may/might/could be the browser that is causing all these issues. (It is a possibility. Some tests are necessary.)

The PC settings did not need to be modified. (It was not done because it was not necessary.)

The PC settings need not have been modified. (It was done, although it was not necessary.)

d) *few* vs *a few*

eg There are a few major bugs. (They are not many but enough to entail serious consequences.)

There are few major bugs. (They are not many.)

e) passive constructions. These constructions are often needed in business language to make reference to things being or having been done. The difference between *be + past participle* and *have + D.O. + past participle* is vital for the message transmitted.

eg The report of risk evaluation has been done. (We have done it ourselves – an investor might get discouraged by this.)

We have had the report of risk evaluation done. (We have had an expert do it.)

f) *when* – *if* – *in case*: *when* – implies certainty, *if* – reveals the fact that there is a condition, *in case* – stresses the idea that an action is done as a precaution

eg When you discover all the types of bugs from this application and you can classify them, you can consider yourself a tester of a higher rank. (It is only a matter of time until something happens.)

If you discover all the types of bugs from this application and you can classify them, you can consider yourself a tester of a higher rank. (There is a condition to be met in order to have the desired result.)

When they contact you, please send us the report. (The moment you are contacted you have to send the report)

If they contact you, please send us the report. (You have to send the report if you are contacted.)

In case they contact you, please send us the report. (You have to send the report just in case you are contacted)

g) *even if* vs *even though*

eg Will you accept their offer even if they cannot provide you with all the estimates? (There is no certainty that something will happen.)

Will you accept their offer even though they cannot provide you with all the estimates? (There is a certainty that something will happen.)

h) reference pronouns

eg We started the app. It put up a warning window. We tried closing it and it crashed. (Here it is unclear what the user tried closing – the warning window or the app.)

We started the app. There appeared a warning window on the screen whose closing led to the crushing of the app. (Here the idea is clear but no reference pronouns are used.)

We started the app. There appeared a warning window on the screen and when we tried closing it, the app crushed. (The message is clear and reference pronouns are used.)

The better you know the correct pattern of the grammar structure and its use, the easiest and quickest it is to express your thoughts and/or understand others. Some say that the teaching – learning process is more effective when the grammar is presented under the form of functions. More exactly, if students are told the phrases that would be suitable in a particular situation such as: when making a request, when making logical deductions or suppositions, when negotiating, when making suggestions or trying to persuade somebody, when expressing certainty/ opinions/ disbelief, when giving permission, when offering advice, when agreeing and disagreeing, when clarifying and giving reasons, when providing and receiving feedback, etc. without being explained the forms. Still, work with students has showed that pointing out the forms used and practising them will lead to successful acquisition. There has to be a conscious rule- learning. Students often prefer to study by looking at examples and by getting to the rules themselves. The professors could first introduce language in context through the common language skills (reading, listening) and then they could discuss with the students the way language works – for lower levels they could even provide the students with the audio scripts to make the learning process easier. Later on, students could be asked to do some exercises of correction on language both in speaking and in writing. In the end, they should be ready to produce language themselves. As highlighted in the beginning and as experts have demonstrated, the human brain cannot retain things without making connections. Therefore it is a fact that prior experience of language in contexts followed by exercise in language structures put in examples and situations can help the learning process. If some feel that a list of useful phrases and vocabulary organized according to language functions will help them/has helped them it is a false assumption. Actually, it is like in the case of „the advance-organiser argument” described in Thornbury’s *How to Teach Grammar*. The researcher Richard Schmidt believes that „grammar instruction might have a delayed effect” (*apud* Thornbury, 2008:16)

in that exposure to grammatical items and an emphasis on their usage can be a decisive factor in the acquisition process. Only noticing a certain structure and its use plays a major role in somebody’s fluency in a language because analysis and pedagogical instruction act as an „advance organiser” for later acquisition.

For instance, in the present when we make requests we use the modal construction *can + verb* or *could + verb*; when we make logical deductions *must + verb* we use for the positive and *cannot + verb* for the negative; when we speculate about something we use *could/might/may + verb*; when we express opinion we use *couldn’t be more + adjective* or *couldn’t agree more* or *could/may/might have a point*; when we ask for clarifications we use either the pattern with *could* for requests or a direct question containing alternatives *Did + S + say/mean this or that?*; when we clarify something we can use *cleft sentences*; when we give reasons we can use *because + S + verb* or *because of + pronoun/noun*; when we talk about the purpose of something we use *in order (not) to + infinitive* or *so that + modal verb*; when we offer advice we can use *if + I/We + were you* construction; when we provide tactful feedback and recommendations we can use *S+should+verb* or even *S+ had better+ verb* to say that this is the proper way of acting, when we want to persuade people we can use negative questions or question tags; when we suggest something *could+verb* or *could/might as well + verb*; *sugesst/propose + that + S + should + verb* are the preferred constructions. As a result, there are several grammar structures that can be used to express the same thing. Moreover keeping a conversation going is not just a matter of having a rich vocabulary. It implies having some strategies which require some use of grammar structures. Let us take for example a conference call. It should be made up of several parts: socializing, making a start and introducing the agenda, asking probing questions or direct questions to get information from each side, clarifying and summarizing, ending the conversation. Going through all these parts supposes knowing how to ask different kinds of questions, handling modal verbs easily, being able to correctly use tenses and linking words.

When socializing on the other hand, it is advisable to use the „ask, answer, add, ask” technique mentioned in the books of culture. Being able to use all types of questions (closed, open, tag questions positive or negative and even indirect questions), tenses, and modals can help somebody

very much in conversation. Question tags with the right intonation can also help when you do not know what else to say but you want to keep the conversation going. With question tags, the general rule is to use a positive tag after a negative statement and a negative tag after a positive statement. The intonation – rising or falling – indicates if the speaker is looking for an answer or for confirmation.

When you are listening to somebody speaking, getting the right message means understanding allusions and nuances that are again evident in many grammar structures: tenses, modals, if clauses, subjunctive mood. For example in order to reach a decision regarding what is being said, the listener needs to be able to understand suggestions (modals, „Why don't you/How about + verbING”) and show agreement or disagreement (some of the structures suggested above plus the „S1 + would rather S2 + the second form of the verb/ had+the third form of the verb”, „if it hadn't been for ...” to agree; adverbs to minimize the effect of refusal) or try to persuade somebody („if” structures). Another factor that can make the difference in grasping the meaning when listening to something/someone are distractors. It is wise to continue listening very carefully until the end because new, valuable information can be added with the help of a cohesion device like „however” for instance.

When writing a message organizing well a text implies being able to use linking words. In addition to this, again grammar structures matter. When expressing purpose, reason, result, one needs to know what follows logically after the connectors. Furthermore in comparing and contrasting ideas in a written presentation again grammatical knowledge is vital. Any written text consists of complete sentences that are connected together grammatically. For example, when you have to describe changes you have to use the appropriate tense (past tense to refer to actions within a given span, past perfect to refer to actions that occurred before other past actions, present perfect continuous to show that an action has the point of departure in the past and is still going on in the present, etc.). Grammatical accuracy implies also using numbers and figures accurately. Great attention must be paid to writing dates which are differently expressed in British and American English and also to writing numbers in tables because where the Romanian use a point, the English have a comma and the other way around. All this lead to coherence, that is to how easy your writing is understood.

When reading grammar can raise questions because of the many meanings expressed by a grammatical pattern. For example, understanding arguments and explanations can prove difficult without good knowledge of cohesive devices. It is essential to realize how things are added to clarify a point, how opposite ideas are presented and when examples come to support them, how theories and views of various persons, usually experts, are referred to, and finally how the result is introduced or how the conclusion is drawn.

It is clear that insufficient or lack of grammar knowledge can easily entangle meaning no matter if you are using the receptive skills or the production skills. If studying grammar is more a matter of reluctance, studying culture and body language is disregarded. People fail to realize that being able to read culture and body language signs can influence the outcome of the communication process. Acquiring knowledge of English as an international language is not enough, there are two other types of language that need attention.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines culture as „the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group” and body language as „the process of communicating what you are feeling or thinking by the way you place and move your body rather than by words.” The definitions hint at the idea that learning to read culture and body language is a complex task. When it comes to intercultural communication in a business context two types of culture should be considered: the national culture (the values, norms and behaviour specific to a certain nationality) the business culture (the professional and corporate culture).

IT and computing people share some beliefs with other business people as they also are business people but they are also characterized by some different traits. The author of *Intercultural Business Communication* asserts that there are some factors, among which he mentions corporate culture and professional culture, that „play a more significant part than national culture in bidding people together” (Gibson, 2014: 8). The reason is that their work-related interests are stronger than national cultural differences. The words of order for business people are politeness and tact. In the computer world, precision, creativity and in some cases – eg. software companies – team spirit are the beliefs that govern the work process. Nevertheless, national culture should not be ignored as Geert Hofstede (2001) – the famous

social scientist who worked for a computer company (IBM) – affirms.

Being polite and tactful, surprisingly or not, involves not only knowing grammar but also knowing some business approaches to certain situations. In business contexts politeness is a rule of thumb and formal language often a request. There are some grammar structures – as our grammar books show – that reflect a polite attitude or/and a formal one”

- Past Tense Simple and Continuous with a present meaning when you want to be less direct or more polite.

eg. We wanted to ask you about the delay.

We were thinking we could discuss about the suggested approach.

- Future continuous to soften questions about future instead of the more direct questions with future tense simple

eg. Will you be wanting immediate feedback?

- The use of adverbs as softeners in possible critique

eg. This is a pretty good presentation but you need to add more arguments.

- Modals and *if* clauses used to make polite requests, suggestions, and give advice

eg. We would appreciate some additional information.

We would be grateful if you could send us the necessary data by tomorrow at noon.

Would you be willing to help us with some data input.

Please let us know when/if you need further assistance.

Can/Could you make a report about it?

You can take the folders now.

You might want to check the website again.

You'd better decided now before we start the implement.

We don't think you should/ we think you should change the service provider.

If I could continue with what I was saying ...

If I might finish what I have just started saying ...

If you find out the news before us, would you please communicate them to us too?

- The use of the personal pronoun „we” instead of „you” to tell somebody to do something because it less direct:

Eg. We need to write a priority list.

We have to e-mail them the information about the accommodation arrangements.

- Indirect questions

Eg. We were wondering if you could explain the process one more time.

Could you tell us when you will be available?

- Perfect Aspect can also have a softening function

eg. We have been wanting to ask you about the investment.

And further on some approaches that are specific to business situations and that require tact need to be mentioned:

- The plural nouns and the personal pronoun „they” to avoid biased language.

eg. Testers need to prioritize the bugs found. Then they have to send the list to their supervisors.

Developers correct the written code after they receive their tester's report.

- The „Yes, but” structure making reference to a diplomatic refusal, that is positive comment/partial agreement followed by *but/however*

eg. We can understand exactly where you are coming from but/ however at the moment this is not an option.

We see your point of view, but we are not quite sure that this will work for the best.

This seems to be a good idea but it might be a bit difficult to implement.

- Avoiding negative words or constructions in the case of refusals or complaints.

eg. Thank you for the update/ your input.
instead of

We have received your complaint.

There are some issues that require your immediate attention.

instead of

There are some problems ...

We work from Monday till Tuesday.

instead of

We do not work during the weekend.

- Always be positive and keep an open mind. If you consider yourself to be in a delicate situation, make sure you use a lot of questions and ways to clarify everything:

eg. Could you explain further?

Could you please tell me more?

So, you are saying ..., is that correct?

Well, I do not quite understand what you mean, could you please be more specific?

I have a suggestion, may I have permission to check the documents you are talking about?

Would you mind allowing me to have the documents checked?

In *Fifty Ways to Improve your Telephoning and Teleconferencing Skills*, Ken Taylor speaks about some methods of communicating delicate information in business contexts: The use of the sandwich technique when giving bad news. Business people should „give negative information between two positive pieces of information” (Taylor, 2009:104); The consensus seeking technique. „Problem-solving should start by sharing ideas.” (Taylor, 2009:105); Making use of the DORA technique – Definition-Opinion-Reason-Agreement (Taylor, 2009:77) – to make sure people are listening to you. According to Taylor, you start by making a clear statement of what you think the key issue is, then you offer your opinion, next you support it with arguments, and last but not least you try to get the others to agree with you by using question tags with a falling intonation or negative questions. Despite these general approaches to communication, it is mandatory to consider the national culture too. Hofstede’s way of differentiating cultures in the work place is a good way to start (Hofstede, 2001). As it is extremely difficult to remember the many traits a person can have as a result of the influence of the national environment, a business person can learn to differentiate between the following dimensions in a culture: „individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity – femininity” (Schmidt, 2007:28).

When working with foreigners, business people should look for signs that would tell them if their business partners are task-oriented and individualistic or relationship-oriented and team-focused, if they apply the principles of flat hierarchy being uncomfortable with inequalities or those of steep hierarchy where inequalities are expected and supervision a must in all areas, if they are not afraid to take risks and openly disagree, and are not keen on rules relying a lot on the spoken word or if they always keep chance to a minimum, rely on written rules and agreement terms; if they show empathy and caring for others or if they focus on performance and the need to compete. Nonetheless, these are just guidelines to use until there is a little time to study the culture of the respective business partners. A good book of reference for this is *When Cultures Collide* which

makes an indepth analysis of these cultural domains and then describes in detail the cultures of the entire globe.

Professors can raise students’ awareness about the relevance of culture in international communication by providing them with culture-related materials such as: texts and then case studies, definitions or descriptions first and exercises afterwards, information cards enabling role plays in communicative activities, questionnaires whose answers uncover the learners’ level of knowledge in culture issues and the impact of this knowledge on communication, etc.

As for the body language, there are general rules that apply to all cultures: smiling and nodding as a sign of attention and approval when somebody is talking, keeping eye contact without staring though, taking turns in conversation although in conference calls interruptions are common and accepted as long as they include polite language as showed above, keeping a reasonable distance from your interlocutor – usually an arm length – to avoid his/her comfort zone, using intonation together with appropriate constructions to show enthusiasm, interest or conviction. For more exact information on body language specific to the many existing cultures, *Body Language in the Workplace* (Fast, 1991) and *Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands* (Morrison & Conaway, 2006) are useful reference books for students and teachers alike.

3. CONCLUSIONS

English language skills equip students for success and enhance their job prospects. It is thus crucial that learners of English realize that being up to date with the current and emerging technologies in the IT business world for instance means also being comfortable with the use of the English language in a fluent and accurate way. In this way, these students have a unique combination of computing, technical, business and English knowledge and the awareness about the existence of culture and body language which makes it possible for them to enjoy significant rewards in the world’s most exciting and very well-paid domain. The winning recipe has such ingredients as technical, business and communicative competences.

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