

Limits and Variations in Business English

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Abstract

Business English is the way that this language relates to international trade. Many non-native English speakers learn the language of English for the primary purpose of doing business within English speaking countries. It can be used for communication with other people that also speak English as a foreign language. Business English is also commonly taught among native English speakers who want to conduct business with non-native speakers around the world, such as college students preparing to enter the global business market. This type of interaction is considered using a shared language, or lingua franca, and it is very common in the world today. The goal of Business English is to achieve effective and efficient interaction. Sometimes, proper grammar is overlooked or even ignored because the two parties want to reach an agreement as quickly as possible. Business English can be used in a variety of forms, including training, presentations, negotiations, networking, reports, correspondence and even small talk at social events.

Key words

modern communication, language, business English, ESP

The global spread of English can be regarded as one of the most significant linguistic phenomena in the world. Two main factors for the present-day world status of English have been British colonialism and American economic supremacy. It is evident that the successive promotion of English by Britain and the United States through political influence, economic power and technological superiority together with the global forces searching for a single lingua franca or common language for cross-cultural communication have strengthened the status of English as an international language. Perhaps the third factor that encourages the use of English in the 21st century is economic globalization. Graddol describes a new order for the world economy in which English has become and will continue

to be the major business lingua franca as it is used extensively by the world's 'big three' trading blocs – North America, the European Union and Japan, which dominate the world trade.

Nowadays, in the 'shrinking' world of advanced information technology, English also dominates as the means of modern communication; namely, the internet, e-mail systems and various computer programming languages and information transfer protocols, which are of tremendous use in the local and international business worlds. The free trade and Information Technology Age have led to the so-called 'world without boundaries' where most nations are sharing one common language in their cross-cultural communication – the English language.

How English has become the language of international business can be traced back to the colonial era when English was introduced to many colonial states not only for political purposes but also for business purposes. The outstanding factor in extending the use of English has undoubtedly been the political power and influence of the English-speaking nations and the superiority they attained in various fields of commerce. The status of English as the dominant medium for commerce has been strengthened over time by the boom of world trade which has led to the establishment of a large number of international economic organizations such as the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA).

As a global business language English is famous for its diversity and changeability, which leads to its existence in different forms and its variety of different cultural backgrounds. English grows in contact with other languages thus becoming a mixed language and evolves constantly and rapidly to meet the needs of culture and communication. So international business translation personnel should give a special attention to the differences between their own culture and exotic cultures as well as English's differences of semantic information and cultural information in different cultural backgrounds and try to achieve the equivalence of cultural message. In other words, the former focuses on semantic translation, pays attention to equivalence of semantic message and equivalence of stylistic message of original texts and translated texts; the latter focuses on communicative translation, pays attention to equivalence of effects, namely, pays attention to equivalence of response of original texts and translated texts. Equivalence of semantic messages and equivalence of stylistic messages are the two basic equivalences in international business English translation. Original text is a whole of semantic

message, stylistic message and cultural message. Translation is a course to transfer those messages into the target language. Thus the information of the translated text is also a whole of semantic message, stylistic message and cultural message. Cultural message of original texts and translated texts is the deepest equivalence in business English translation, very obscured and veiled. With this understanding, if the original text contains cultural message, translator should unconditionally try his best to transfer cultural message into the target language as much as possible. So with the changes of global economy, linguistic and cultural knowledge are now recognized to be two of the most vital areas of knowledge that organizations must come to acquire if they are to succeed in the marketplace. And strong development of the world economy quickens the pace of the development of culture and ethics by overcoming many cultural conflicts. Needless to say, the rules of market-oriented economy greatly strengthen the people's desire for money and utilitarian spirit. When a man is doing business with foreign partners, he is having a cross-cultural communication. It is sometimes the simple mistakes we make, like showing the soles of our shoes or giving a thumb up, when dealing with different cultures that can ruin a relationship or months of hard work. Learning the simple cultural do's and don'ts can avoid this and generate respect and understanding.

Some linguists have suggested that language is more than merely a system of communication that facilitates sending and receiving messages. Languages serve more than a communication function, they would argue, because they establish categories in our minds that force us to distinguish between objects we consider similar from those things we consider different. Because every language is unique, the linguistic categories of one will never be identical to the categories of any other. Consequently, the speakers of any two different languages will not categorize in the same way, nor will they perceive reality in exactly the same way.

Communication and thus language is of vital importance in business. Corporate communications – the discourse of corporations with internal and external stakeholders – is an important aspect of a company's overall strategy. When companies communicate, whether internally among the staff or externally with customers, competitors, government regulators or with the general public, they do so with precise communicative goals in mind that they aim to achieve. In corporate genres such as memos, mission statements, advertisements, brochures and newsletters, companies define not only what they do and why customers should buy their products, but also increasingly who they are and what values and ethics they espouse in order to communicate a consistent corporate image to stakeholders.

At the same time, corporations are constantly under the pressure that their message must resonate with the target audience and that it must be integrated and harmonious across markets, nationalities and stakeholder groups.

Almost every field has its own 'jargon' or specialized words and phrases used in the course of everyday work. For certain fields, however, such as business, medicine, and various scientific and technical fields, this jargon can be both much more complicated and complex as well as extremely important for clarity and sometimes safety. In international business, clear and effective communication can be the key to obtaining and retaining important clients or vendors, and because English is so widespread, it is becoming more and more important for business people and others to learn English in order to compete in the global market. Perhaps the most compelling reason for learning the language of one's international business partner is that it provides considerable insights into that culture. The language provides entrée into the 'world view' of another culture; through its structure and vocabulary it reveals the important values found in the culture; it gives insight into how directly or indirectly people in a particular culture communicate with one another; and it reflects social realities, such as status differences, within a culture.

Business English has special professional background, as well as practical background, relating to professional knowledge and practical working skills. Its characteristics are: its coverage – it covers trade, finance, taxes, custom and so on, showing different industrial characteristics. So the choice of language is wide. For the sake of these characteristics of Business English, its translation should lay particular stress on its practical effects instead of its artistic effects. Business English translation is more flexible, we can use different ways to deal with different contexts according to different purposes. However, Business English is also stricter, we often focus on conveying information and mistakes are forbidden. So, on the one hand translators should know professional terms. On the other hand they should try their best to find out equivalent words to express cultural message more accurately. When a man is doing business with foreign partners, he is having a cross-cultural communication. Any communication among different culture should go through cultural conflicts and achieve successful communication. As we all know, English has become the best media in international business, international communication and internet.

Considering the specific area of Business English which refers to the language spoken by educated people in the British communication, our attention is drawn by

the total absence of nonstandard aspects. For instance, we will never see such instances of negation:

We don't have no money for the moment...

We ain't going to ...

Our firm ain't got such items...

or double modals:

You might could do ...

They may can come...

or such comparatives and superlatives:

Our prices are more lower than ...

Our products are the most cheapest ...

business English rejects not only nonstandard aspects of English. Though almost perfect synonyms, standard denominations are preferred to their slang variants. *Constable* will never be substituted by *trap*, *friend* by *chap* / *chum*, *sailor* by *tar* and *tobacco* by *funk*.

The process of development of ESP went even further and restricted its preferences to a number of technical terms, though there still are in use standard words for the same items. ESP speakers would rather favor:

citation to a summons

settlement day to account day

audit to checking account

eurodollars to dollars circulating in Europe

devaluation to fall in value of currency

collateral to form of security for a loan

reevaluation to increase in value

liabilities to items on the debit side

sanction to measure to force a country

The Business English style imposes certain requirements, encouraging the most polite forms possible. In order to show respect, dignity, and seriousness, users of business English avoid special female-gender words whenever possible (e.g. *girl* for *secretary*) preferring instead two-sex words, eluding terms that exclude females.

We will therefore meet such words as:

business manager / executive for businessman

human power for man power

leader for statesman

insurance agent for insuranceman

member of Congress for *Congressman*
salesperson for *salesman*
the best person / candidate for *the best man*.

When the marital status of a woman is to be considered, it has been observed that the tendency is to use *Ms.* followed by the full name or the last name only, replacing in many references *Mrs.* And *Miss*.

ESP is not so strict as it may seem, it does exist and develop according to certain patterns and in certain limits, but it is not deprived itself of variety either. British English has had for a long time a parallel version – the American one which sometimes records faster evolutions than British English.

Perhaps the most noticeable differences between British English and American English involve vocabulary. There are thousands of words which either in total meaning or in some particular sense or usage are totally unknown in the other variety.

American English prefers:

Secretary of State to *the British variant Foreign Minister*
Information bureau to *inquiry bureau*
Bill to *banknote*
City-hall to *town/guild hall*
Editorial to *leading article*
Fall to *autumn*
First floor to *ground-floor*
To mail to *to post*
President to *chairman*
Schedule to *time table*
Second floor to *first floor*
Stenographer to *shorthand-writer*
Store to *shop*
Ticket-office to *booking-office*.

Vocabulary differences between the two varieties are due to several factors. The most obvious is that new objects and experiences were encountered in America which needed naming, either by adapting British English vocabulary or by creating new words. Technological and cultural developments which have occurred since the divergence of the two varieties have also been a cause of differences in vocabulary.

Given the wide-spreading of American English, it may occur that American variants be better known and more frequently used than the British ones. Therefore, if users of ESP are not well informed about these differences, errors, misunderstandings or desirable mixtures can easily appear in their communicative acts.

In business letters, one may consider it an error using a capital letter after a colon (‘*There is only one problem: **The** Government does not spend sufficient money on...*’) though American usage favors it more often. Also, normal British usage is to have a full-stop after a closing quotation mark, as in ‘*We are often told that ‘there is not enough money to go on.’*’. while the American usage has the full-stop (American English ‘period’) before the closing quotation marks: ‘*We are often told that ‘there is not enough money to go on.’*’.

As to the spelling, generally speaking the American one is simplified compared to its British equivalent. For example:

- *-our* is reduced to *-or*
- *-e*, *-ue*, *-me* are dropped at the end of words (*dialog*, *program*)
- *-ll-*, *-pp-*, *-gg-*, *-ss-* are often reduced to *-l-*, *-p-*, *-g-*, *-s-*, (*traveler*, *kidnapped*, *wagon*, *focused*)

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