

## READINESS OF FUTURE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMISTS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION DISCOURSE

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This article examines the degree of readiness of future international economists for the discourse of professional communication and an important aspect of successful communication in the field of international economic relations is the high level of students' mastery of English. **Methods:** For this study 120 students of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of studying were questioned on their English language abilities. We were monitoring those students during nine months and by means of different tasks and tests were able to calculate their ultimate skills and abilities in the professional discourse.

**Results:** By the end of this study almost all 4<sup>th</sup> year students were ready to perform professional tasks in their future career. **Conclusion:** We concluded that the focus of studying should be listening comprehension involving native speakers.

**Keywords:** Professional discourse; International economists; Skills and abilities; The use of business English as a Lingua Franca; Professional vocabulary.



## PRONTIDÃO DOS FUTUROS ECONOMISTAS INTERNACIONAIS PARA O DISCURSO DE COMUNICAÇÃO PROFISSIONAL

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este artigo examina o grau de preparação dos futuros economistas internacionais para o discurso da comunicação profissional e um aspecto importante da comunicação bem-sucedida no campo das relações econômicas internacionais é o alto nível de domínio do inglês pelos alunos. **Métodos:** Para este estudo, 120 alunos do 3º e 4º anos foram questionados sobre suas habilidades no idioma inglês. Monitoramos esses alunos durante nove meses e, por meio de diferentes tarefas e testes, pudemos calcular suas competências e habilidades finais no discurso profissional. **Resultados:** Ao final do estudo, quase todos os alunos do 4º ano estavam prontos para realizar tarefas profissionais em sua futura carreira. **Conclusão:** Concluimos que o foco do estudo deve ser a compreensão auditiva envolvendo falantes nativos.

**Palavras-chave:** Discurso profissional; Economistas internacionais; Competências e habilidades; O uso do inglês para negócios como língua franca; Vocabulário profissional.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This article will focus on professional discourse, which involves communication between specialists in this field, as well as with those who seek help from these specialists (Bandura, 2008). Professional discourse plays an important role in the socialization of professional relationships, during which the necessary knowledge is studied, skills and abilities are formed for the successful performance of their professional roles (Berry, 2003; Keyton et al., 2013). Professional discourse in the field of international economic relations is an act of speech production based on such ideas as "customs regulation", "negotiating", "signing contracts" and so on. The specialists in the sphere of international economic relations are greatly concerned in such issues as market competitiveness, designing, analyzing and evaluating the essence of economic cooperation. That is why it requires the high level of communication skills with the representatives of different economic communities. Of course, this communication is still carried out in English, which preserves the features of being an international language and it is quite understandable why mastering it is of vital importance for the future international economists.

### 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of scholars agree that communication is associated with intentional, interactive,



teachable and observable actions and is considered to be productive. It takes place in all the styles of interaction, as well as broader social and organizational culture. Globalization has given greater importance to the ability of employees to cooperate in teams. In an international communicative environment, interpersonal interaction is constantly taking place as a result of teamwork or meetings in small groups. Really, communication always ranks first in all demanded skills by employers, and oral communication skills are considered to be the most important attribute.

It is absolutely evident that all types of professional communication often take place in the field of an international economy: participation in the negotiations, project work, meetings. Professional knowledge also remains important, they must be presented orally and with an excellent level of communication skills. In order to improve such skills, various methods are suggested by the methodologists: peer review; role-playing games; video review; and the use of different professional presentations.

In a study by other linguists the ten most common forms of communicative behavior in business transactions and workplaces in the United States were identified, namely: listening, asking questions, discussing, exchanging information, agreeing, offering, receiving feedback, seeking feedback, answering questions and explanations. Despite the fact that such behavior is not limited to the level, regardless of whether a person is a supervisor or subordinate, and the type of work, a common way to implement communicative competence in the future career would be to focus on behavior in verbal communication (Ruff & Carter, 2009).

Thus, in order to become a successful economist, and in particular, an international economist, the following communication skills were offered to improve their communication skills in English:

1. the ability to plan professional situations appropriately as well as to communicate effectively with different professional communities;
2. the ability to clearly to show the overall picture at a higher level of generalization and explanation of codes, methods and design solutions, communicating their intentions;
3. the ability to resolve conflicts constructively;
4. the ability to perceive communication (for example, actively listen and ask adequate questions);
5. the ability to express your opinion avoiding complaints;
6. the ability to use generally accepted norms in the types of formal and informal communication most commonly used in the international economy.



Such a level of proficiency in English can be considered as the key to individual success of the international economist (Welch et al., 2005).

Proficiency in English is a key requirement for international economists, starting from participation in professional activities and ending with achieving the desired position in terms of their career growth, and in particular, international economists. Knowledge of English also provides a huge advantage in terms of employment of graduates who want to work abroad or in international organizations in their own country (Piekkari et al., 2014).

If the international economists want to get the successful position in their sphere they must develop all kinds of competences to cope with complex professional challenges (Brown & Yule, 2000). Thus, several sets of communication skills required by international economists have already been considered in the sphere of paper work, and international economists must be able to explain, justify, argue or convince. Thus, the field of study is English language proficiency with the following characteristics: fluency in oral speech; fluency in written speech; non-native accents; economic lexicology (Taillefer, 2007).

In order to achieve a communicative goal from the point of view of the operational aspect of business, some linguists pay special attention to the use English as a business lingua franca.

### 3 BUSINESS ENGLISH AS LINGUA FRANCA

What is it? English as the Business Lingua Franca (BELF) is similar to ELF in that it refers to the use of English as a shared language by speakers of different mother tongues in interpersonal encounters (Ehrenreich, 2010). Both concepts are thus ontologically distinct from English as Native Language (ENL). What sets BELF apart from ELF, however, is the B, 'business'. Business ELF reflects three key contextual characteristics: the scope of its use (global business), the role of its users (business professionals) and the overall purpose of interaction (performance of work). These facts facilitate or actually provide an opportunity for communication between professionals working internationally (Evans, 2013) Business ELF reflects three key contextual characteristics: the scope of its use (global business), the role of its users (business professionals) and the overall purpose of interaction (performance of work) (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009). Who uses the concept?

BELF is mainly used by researchers in applied linguistics, in particular in business



communication, recently attracting interest among scholars in international business and management (Kankaanranta & Lu, 2013). Although practically non-existent in corporate communication and PR research at the moment, it is likely to attract more attention in the future since the linguistic resource utilized in the communications of multinational cFit with intercultural dialogue? BELF is inherently intercultural as its users come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In spite of the differences, however, they share the overall 'culture' of international business (Seidlhofer, 2011).

BELF as a concept is highly context-dependent and situation specific, reflecting the dynamic nature of intercultural dialogue (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). What work remains? In the domain of international business, BELF research contributes to our knowledge of how intercultural dialogue takes place in this specific, but significant, context in today's world. So far we still know little of how knowledge is actually shared and constructed in BELF, how different native languages affect its use, and how the nature of corporate genres used in multinational companies affects the choice of the resource used for communication in official/corporate vs. individual/private level genres (Kanoksilapatham, 2013).

As a result of the current era of globalization and the growing interaction between professionals, English has led to the formation of the concept of business English as a Lingua franca (BELF). BELT has been proposed by business communication scholars over the past decade, and defined BELF as a language used by the representatives of global business community where there are no non-native speakers and students (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

This study is aimed to investigate how the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students of the Faculty of International Economic Relations are ready to perform tasks for professional communicative situations, and to identify the ways in which these students perceive their own English language proficiency, ability to perform English-language related tasks in their further career.

#### 4 MATERIALS AND METHODS

We selected 120 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 110 4<sup>th</sup> year students. First of all, we asked them to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do you consider English language proficiency important for your future career?



2. What professional situations will you encounter more often?
3. What skills and abilities are most important for you regarding the performing the professional tasks?

Answering the first question almost 98% of the recipients answered that English language proficiency is crucially important for their future career. As for the second question the most popular answer was:

1. Building relationships among colleagues
2. Conversing informally among colleagues
3. Solving conflicts among colleagues
4. Negotiating with colleagues
5. Persuading colleagues
6. Reading project reports
7. Reading official documents
8. Writing E-mails
9. Writing presentation slides
10. Engaging in business interactions

Concerning the third questions 100% of the students answered that they will need the abilities in pronunciation, Grammar accuracy, operating with professional terminology and skills in writing, listening, speaking and reading. Their points of view fully coincide with the directions of their curriculum in Professional English training. We were monitoring the results of the selected students during the 12 months, suggesting them different kinds of tasks.

First and above all we were worried about their professional terminology. Not occasionally our students get used saying that to enlarge their special vocabulary is their sacred duty. They were suggested to fulfill different types of lexical exercises on the basis on the following glossary:

*Strategic Management:*

In conjunction with

In the light of

As distinct from

With a view to

On account of

In line with

Or tell a story using the table:



**Table 1.** Working with special lexicology

Personal choices of policy makers	A banking crisis	A refugee crisis	Collective action
Safety precaution	Competition	Dictatorship	Videos going viral
Real political influence	Economic interests	Cyber attacks	Corruption of political and legal systems
Social media	To be arbiters of the business environment	An array of global political actors	To enrich some persons at the expense of others
Market fundamentalism	Terrorist attacks	Supply chain innovations	Epidemics
Corporate lobbying	Protests	The tech revolution	Superpower rivalry

In order to develop our students speaking skills, their abilities to work in the team we offer them such tasks:

**Role play 1**

Hold a meeting with your team to discuss a business plan for a new market.

<p><b>Role 1 Damian</b>                  You are a newcomer; you have been with the company for 6 months. You are outgoing, with good communication skills. You are the driver type of employee, you are very interested in getting what you want, are forceful and demanding. You were chosen to work on a special project. You were given your brief last week. It includes a two-week deadline to come up with a business plan for a new target market. In private you and Eliza (the other employee) are suspicious of each other. Your idea is to grow sales in a fast and aggressive manner through a lot of TV ads. You disagree with the other employee, cannot find common ground. There is no progress. You are concerned about the deadline. You agreed to work on your plans separately. You do not share your ideas with each other.                  The day of the deadlines has come.                  You are quite satisfied with your plan. The advertisements you have prepared are quite catchy and diverse.</p>
<p><b>Role 2 Eliza</b>                  You have been working for several years already. You are a reserved person who prefers to keep oneself to oneself. You are an analytical type; you'd rather be quiet and shy letting the others get what they want. You were chosen to work on a special project. You were given your brief last week. It includes a two-week deadline to come up with a business plan for a new target market. In private you and Damian are suspicious of each other. Your idea is to grow sales organically, by attracting people to your side by winning hearts and minds. You disagree with Damian, cannot find common ground. There is no progress. You insist on discussing differences in opinions but he refuses to do it.                  You agreed to work on your plans separately. You do not share your ideas with each other. The day of the deadline has come.                  You realize that the plan is actually quite weak. The advertisements are too fragmented, aggressive, do not take into account cultural or demographic differences. But there is too little time to change anything.</p>
<p><b>Role 3 The marketing director</b>                  You are a manager who is obsessed with achieving goals whatever the human cost, autocratic and abrasive, telling what to do and directing your employees. You have assigned two employees to work on a business plan for the new target market. Two weeks have passed. You have found out that the employees don't get on with each other. You have arranged a meeting to discuss the business plan.</p>

Our students are familiar with the criteria by means of which they will be assessed



(McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988):

**Evaluation Criteria**

**Table 2.** Evaluation criteria applied to teamwork

<b>Criteria applied to teamwork</b>	
1. Task accomplishment	5 points max.
<b>Criteria applied to individual performance</b>	
2. acting according to the role description	3 points max.
3. active participation (individual contribution to the discussion) (at least 20 cues for each participant)	4 points max.
4. interaction with the other speakers (asking questions, expressing agreement\disagreement, picking up and developing an idea, summing up a point, asking for clarification, rephrasing, etc.), no interaction – 0 points	4 points max.
5. accuracy (more than 10 mistakes - 0 points, 1-2 mistakes – 9-10 points, 3-4 mistakes – 7-8 points, 5-6 mistakes – 7-6 points, 7-8 mistakes – 4-5 points, 9-10 mistakes – 2-3 points)	10 points max.
6. manner of performance – without reading (reading – 0 points)	4 points max.
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 points</b>

We often practice our students’ participation in different situations of professional communication, but simultaneously they are obliged to assess the ideas of the partner according to given criteria as well (Kress, 1985). Thus we develop our students’ critical thinking, analytical abilities:

*Task 1*

Your company produces breakfast cereals with unusual flavours (mint, grapefruit, strawberry and marmalade). You work in the marketing department.

Talk about

- how your company can increase its market share in a saturated market
- if you need to extend the product range (add new flavours or products)
- how and where you can promote your product

*Task 2*

Assess your peer’s answer according to the following criteria:

1. Relevance to the topic: all the points have been elaborated on; max. 3 points
2. Adequacy of the managerial decisions: the measures proposed are effective; max. 3 points
3. Consistency: logic, linkers (besides, however, that’s why, moreover, etc.), introduction and conclusion; max. 2 points
4. Persuasiveness: your partner uses convincing arguments, repetition; max. 2 points
5. Appropriate usage of the lexical units (topic vocabulary) max. 2 points
6. Accuracy: 1-2 mistakes – 3 points; 3-5 mistakes – 2 points; 6-8 mistakes – 1





point; 9 and more mistakes – 0 points.

As practically all the students mentioned, writing skills are also important for their future career. We train them with the help of such tasks, (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011) for instance:

DESCRIBING AND EXPLAINING A GRAPH IN A SHORT REPORT (150-170 words)

You will be given a graph or a pair of graphs to analyse, explain and comment on. Follow these steps:

- Read the instructions twice and make sure you understand what you are being asked to do.
- Study the graph(s) and decide what general trends they show and what you can conclude from these. Make short notes to help you.
- Write the report with the following structure:
  - o an introduction (explaining the subject matter of the graphs)
  - o a main body (describing and comparing each development in general terms)
  - o a conclusion (explaining what conclusions can be drawn from the facts presented in the graphs or a recommendation)
- Do not describe the development of the curves in year-by-year or month -by-month detail.
- When you have finished, go over your text and check for basic grammatical errors, e.g. consistency in use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, spelling mistakes.

Here is an example about the number of vehicles per capita of the world's population (Rajprasisit et al., 2015). Look first at the graph. What are the main trends? What will be the effect of this in your view? Make brief notes on what you are going to say.

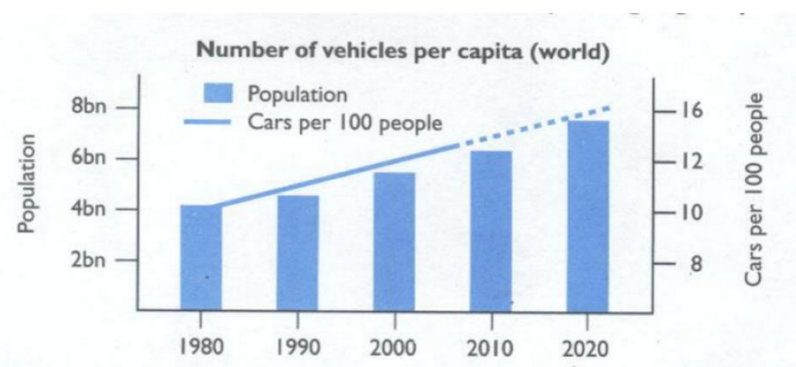


Figure 1. Analysing a graph

Taking into consideration the fact of English as the Business Lingua Franca at our



classes we propose for our students listening comprehension material with the representatives of spanglish (Spanish English), "greekish" (Greek English), etc. Thus we teach them how to comprehend different accents of non-native English.

As it was already mentioned that we were monitoring those 120 students during nine months and by means of different tasks and tests (we have shown some of them in the article) were able to calculate their ultimate skills and abilities in the professional discourse. We used descriptive statistics including percentages.

**Table 3.** Overall results of students' skills and abilities of the participation in professional communication situations

No.	Situations from professional discourse	3 <sup>rd</sup> year students %	4 <sup>th</sup> year students %
1	Reading skills		
	1. Reading specific instructions	86	93
	2. Reading economic articles	79	94
	3. Reading official documents	89	96
2	Writing skills		
	1. Writing e-mails	81	95
	2. Writing meeting minutes	85	90
	3. Writing project proposals	63	89
	4. Writing presentation slides	95	98
3	Speaking skills		
	1. Making oral presentation	90	98
	2. Participation in business interactions	80	95
	3. Responding on telephone	62	86
	4. Engaging in social conversation	81	95
4	Listening skills		
	1. Understanding standard English	56	83
	2. Understanding a particular accent	47	70

As we see from the table the 4<sup>th</sup> year students are practically ready to perform professional tasks in their future career. The focus should be put on training their listening skills regarding non-native English accent.

## 5 CONCLUSION

We have considered English language proficiency as a key requirement for the specialists, starting with participation in the professional area to reaching a desirable position in terms of their career path, and in particular, international professions. We have conducted a research among the students of the Faculty of the International Economic Relations in the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation. The interview questions asked the students to express their opinions toward significance of economic knowledge and English language proficiency, factors affecting international economy career advancement, nature of English economic



communication, interpersonal communication in English and challenges encountered in communicative situations. Besides we managed to collect some data at our English classes by means of different tests on the students' skills in speech activities in order to rate the future international economists in their general English language proficiency, and abilities in terms of performing the tasks connected with professional discourse of a future international economist. On the basis of the research together with the students we have agreed that in order to be a successful economist, and in particular, an international economist, all these skills are crucially important in order to be a success in the economic sphere, to get a happy ticket into someone's business career.

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