



English as a business lingua franca - recent research and implications

Evan Frendo www.e4b.de

**41st Annual International TESOL
France Colloquium**



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Abstract

Research into English as a business lingua franca continues to play an influential role in ESP and business English teaching, and many trainers find it hard to keep up to date with developments. In this session I will summarize some recent research, and discuss what implications there are, if any, for trainers and their clients.



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Cross-cultural Job Interview Communication in
Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) Contexts:
A Corpus-based Comparative Study of Multicultural
Job Interview Communications
in World Maritime Industry

by
Seunghee Choi

A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

5 Conflict Talk and ELF Communities of Practice

Anne Kari Bjørge

Introduction

In the field of ELF research, relatively little attention has been paid to the expression of conflict (Bjørge, 2009; Bjørge, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2009; Knapp, 2002). However, as ELF is used in all kinds of contexts it is also of interest to look into situations where

Lying in Intra-Asian Business Discourse in an ELF Setting

Hiromasa Tanaka¹

International Journal of
Business Communication
2014, Vol. 51(1) 58–71
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Business Communication
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DOI: 10.1177/2329488413516209
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Perspectives on the Use of English as a Business Lingua Franca in Hong Kong

Stephen Evans¹

Journal of Business Communication
50(3) 227–252
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jbc.sagepub.com



DE GRUYTER MOUTON

JELF 2015; 4(1): 31–53

Patricia Pullin Culture, curriculum design, syllabus and course development in the light of BELF

Abstract: Research into the use of BELF, notably through the analysis of authentic data from business contexts, has shown that BELF communication is intrinsically intercultural, with BELF being used in a wide range of settings and with diverse

10 Language is only a tool

[Japanese expatriates
working in China and
implications for language
teaching](#)

Ryuko Kubota

In China, Japanese, rather than English, is used [in the workplace] in many cases; but there, the language needed is basically not Japanese or English but Chinese. . . . What's necessary is for the Japanese (expatriates) to learn Chinese.

Workers, who are capable of doing their job well in Japan, can manage [language demands] once they are overseas. Basically, we don't consider language skill as the goal . . . in

DE GRUYTER MOUTON

JELF 2015; 4(1): 125–148

Anne Kankaanranta*, Leena Louhiala-Salminen and Päivi Karhunen

English in multinational companies: implications for teaching “English” at an international business school

Abstract: In recent years, the use of English has become everyday practice in multinational companies (MNCs), and it has been investigated in three disciplines:

Business English as a Lingua Franca in Advertising Texts in the Arabian Gulf: Analyzing the Attitudes of the Emirati Community

Catherine Nickerson¹ and
Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli²

Journal of Business and Technical
Communication
27(3) 329–352
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DOI: 10.1177/1050651913479930
jbtcc.sagepub.com



Article

Mismatch: Globalization and Native Speaker Models of Linguistic Competence

Kevin Michael Hodgson
United Arab Emirates University, United Arab Emirates

RELC Journal
2014, Vol. 45(2) 113–134
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0033688214533863
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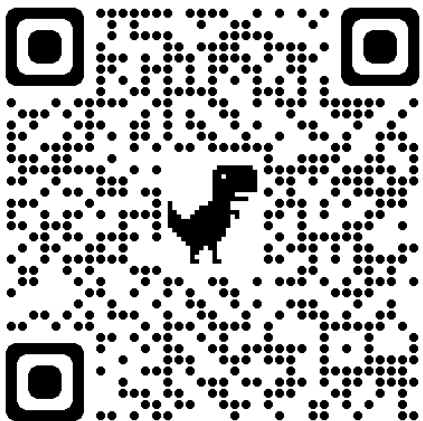


Where are we with BELF and where are we going? (Munich, Germany, 5 Nov 2016)

Session D2 - Evan Frendo - Where are we

Adobe Acrobat Document [1.6 MB]

Download



Downloadable from
<https://www.e4b.de/resources/>

A bit about ESP and BELF – where we are now



Implications

Traditional view of language teaching

“When I think of my own students taking basic-level university courses in Sweden, many of them start with strong convictions about ‘correct’ forms of English and with a traditionalist mindset.”

- “Successful interactions in English require native speaker language skills”
- “native speakers own ‘their’ language”
- “culture relates to the ‘national cultures of [native speakers]”

Jeong, H. (2021). Global English in the Workplace: Introducing the Concepts of ‘Workplace English as a Lingua Franca’ (WELF), and ‘Successful WELF Users’. In A. Henry & A. Persson (Eds.), *Exploring work in English studies: A practice-based engagement*. (pp. 197-220). Palgrave Macmillan.

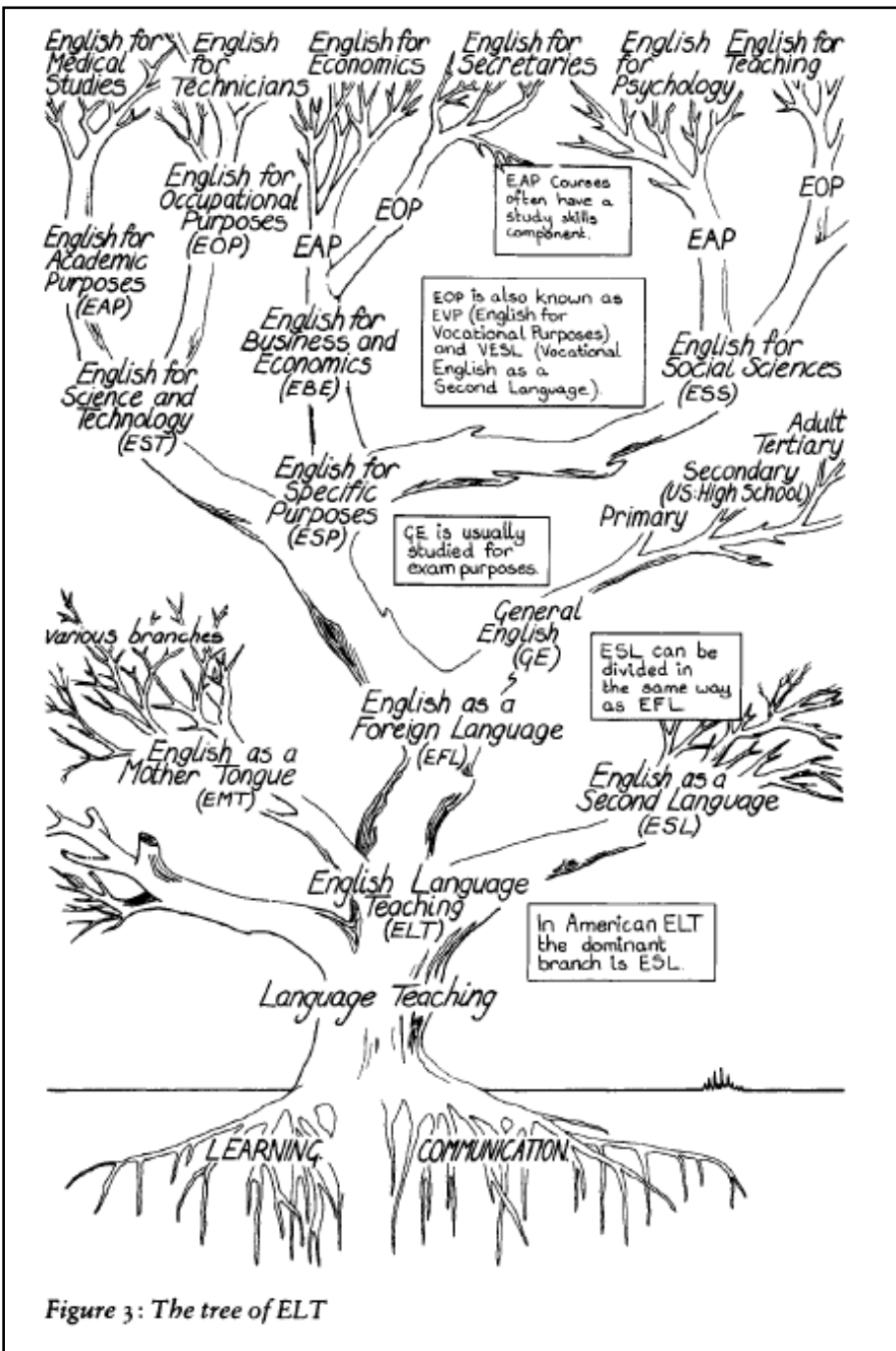


Figure 3: The tree of ELT

“ESP should properly be seen not as any particular language product but as an **approach to language teaching** which is directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning.” (p.19).

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge University Press.

“However, while the goal of ESP—specific-learner-centered language instruction—may appear straightforward enough, how best to meet the goal may be less obvious.” (pp. 1-2)

Belcher, D. (2009). *English for specific purposes in theory and in practice*. Michigan ELT.

Needs analysis

Domain specific genre analysis (including interdiscursivity /
intertextuality)

Specific lexical / grammatical features

Course design & materials development

- Narrow-angle / wide angle
- Authenticity
- Specificity
- Tasks related to real-life situations
- Learner autonomy

ESP

English for the workplace



English for their workplace

English as a lingua franca (ELF)



“any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7).

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford University Press.

ELF research – three phases

1. “Focus on forms ... the possibility of identifying and maybe codifying ELF varieties”
2. “Variability ... ELF use transcends boundaries”
3. “Multilingualism ... English as one among many other languages”

“major departure from the monolingual bias of most (non-critical) SLA, ELT and even Applied Linguistics” (p. 78)

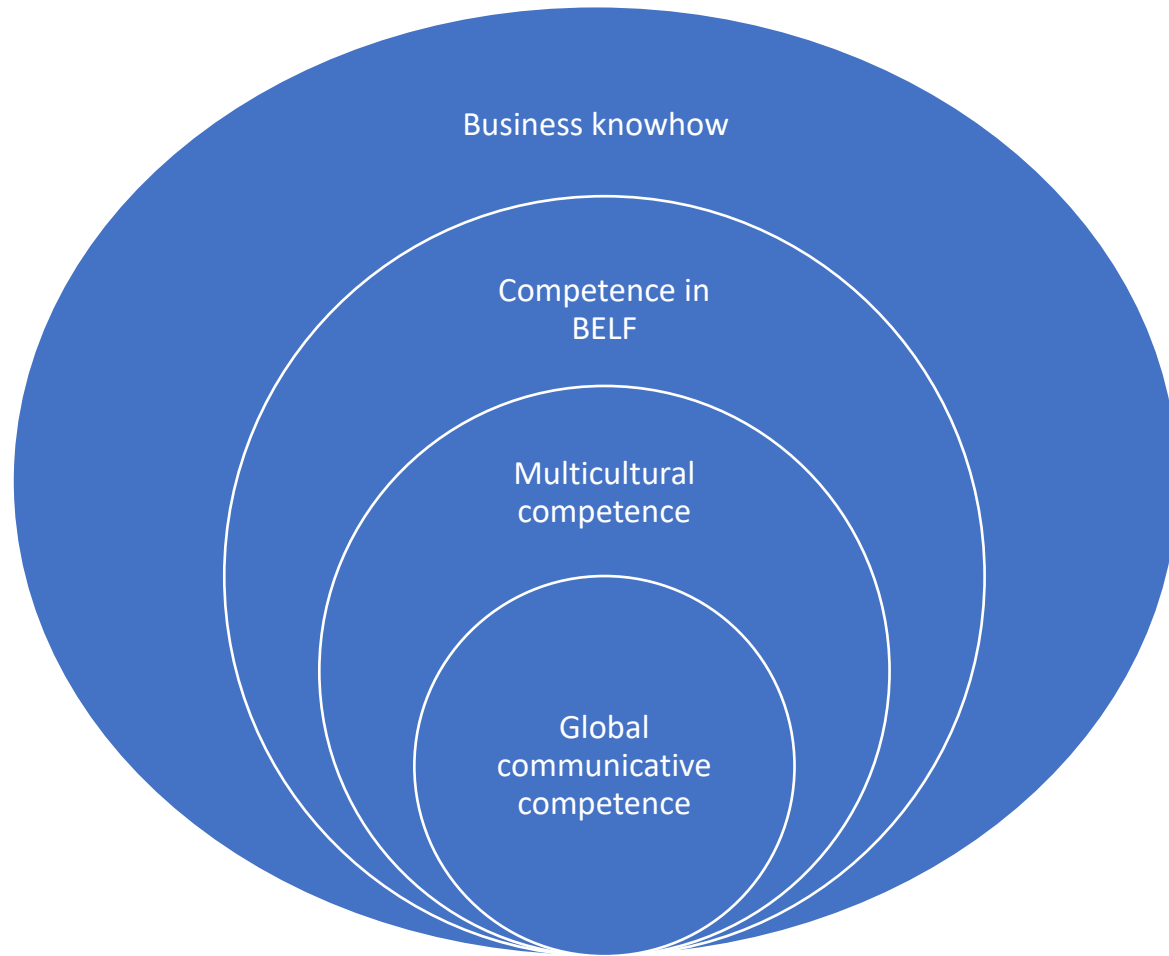
English as a business lingua franca

“conformity with standard English is seen as a fairly irrelevant concept”

“I don’t actually care whether something is correct or incorrect. As long as the meaning is not distorted” (p. 418)

Ehrenreich, S. (2010). English as a business lingua franca in a German multinational corporation: Meeting the challenge. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(4), 408–431.

Model of Global Communicative Competence



BELF competence =

- English 'core'
- Business-specific genres
- Communication strategies focusing on clarity, brevity, directness and politeness

Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Kankaanranta, A. (2011). Professional Communication in a Global Business Context: The Notion of Global Communicative Competence. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, Special issue on Professional Communication in Global Contexts*, 54(3), 244-262.

What is BELF?

“BELF is perceived as an enabling resource to get the work done. Since it is highly context-bound and situation-specific, it is a moving target defying detailed linguistic description.” (p. 129)



Isn't this what ESP aims to do?

Kankaanranta, A., Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Karhunen, P. (2015). English in multinational companies: implications for teaching “English” at an international business school. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 4(1), 125–148.

What is BELF?


“BELF is the use of English as the medium of communication among speakers of different first languages in an emergent, variable and hybrid manner that is appropriate to the demands and (multilingual) resources of the specific business context.”



Is this the sort of communication you practice in your classroom?

Komori-Glatz, M. (2018). Conceptualising English as a business lingua franca. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(1-2), 46–61.

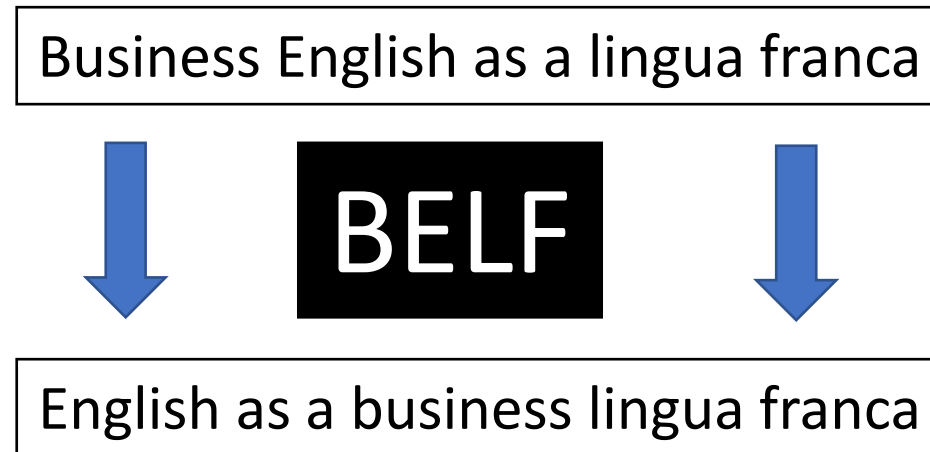
“BELF communication is **intrinsically intercultural**, and for that business professionals need to be able to deal not only with multiple backgrounds and identities, but also with different ways of operating or acting in multiple business cultures”
(p.100)



Is this possible in a monolingual class / in-company training?

Cogo, A. & Yanaprasart, P. (2018). “English is the language of business”: An exploration of language ideologies in two European corporate contexts. In T. Sherman & J. Nekvapil (Eds.), *English in Business and Commerce: Interactions and Policies* (pp. 96-116). De Gruyter Mouton.

BELF is evolving



“we want to emphasize the domain of use rather than the type of English”

Kankaanranta, A., & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2013). “What language does global business speak?” The concept and development of BELF. *Ibérica*, 26, 17-34.

Global English in the Workplace: Introducing the Concepts of 'Workplace English as a Lingua Franca' (WELF), and 'Successful WELF Users'

Hyeseung Jeong

Introduction

Although English is not the language spoken by most people in the world, it is the most spoken international lingua franca. However, departing from the original meaning of lingua franca—a language used by people with mother tongues other than itself—*English as a lingua franca*, or *ELF*, encompasses not only non-native speakers, but also native speakers. Nevertheless, non-native ELF users outnumber native speaker users by some margin, and there are now something close to two billion ELF users

Jeong, H. (2021). Global English in the Workplace: Introducing the Concepts of 'Workplace English as a Lingua Franca' (WELF), and 'Successful WELF Users'. In A. Henry & A. Persson (Eds.), *Exploring work in English studies: A practice-based engagement*. (pp. 197-220). Palgrave Macmillan.

Testing and assessment

“ELF communication is so diverse and variable that it makes no sense to focus on any specific forms. In other words, the only thing that is testable is the outcome.” (p.476)

Jenkins, J. (2020). Where are we with ELF and language testing? An opinion piece. *ELT Journal*, 74(4), 473-479.

Standard testing - IELTS

“IELTS is offered at over 900 locations around the world, and that IELTS scores are accepted by over 9,000 organisations globally – including over 3,000 institutions in the US”, ... “Test questions are developed by specialists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US, making it *a truly international test*” (p. 79)

Jenkins, J. (2015). Repositioning English and multilingualism in English as a Lingua Franca. *Englishes in Practice*, 2(3),49–85.

Standard testing – the example of TOEIC

“An ongoing challenge is that there is a growing need to expand TOEIC constructs to fit the real-world language demands of international workplace contexts.”

Im, G.W. & Cheng, L. (2019). The test of English for international communication (TOEIC). *Language testing*, 1-10.

Translanguaging

“... refers to the language practice whereby bilinguals and multilinguals spontaneously or consciously use multiple languages to complete communication.”

“Although the MNC in the study adopts English as its common corporate language, the local employees tended to mix languages to establish a linguistic space to accommodate their working needs.” (p. 39)

Sun, Wen 孙雯; Qiu, Yixi 邱译曦; Zheng, Yongyan 郑咏滢 (2021). Translanguaging Practices in Local Employees' Negotiation to Create Linguistic Space in a Multilingual Workplace. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación* 86, 31-42.

Comment from a participant in the study

“I can’t recall [the translanguaging practice]. I think I didn’t change my language on purpose. I’m just uttering the words that come to my mind. For example, I might say ‘我们team在localization上做得蛮好的’ (Our team is doing great in localization). I don’t mean to use English words on purpose. I’m just used to it. That’s how everyone talks.” (Interview, Daniel, 04/08/2019).” (p.37)

Translanguaging

- Language as process, not product
- Challenges the idea that languages have (clear) boundaries
- Affords opportunities for learners to make links (language + identity)
- Challenges traditional concepts like “standards” and “target language”

Conteh, J. (2018). Key concepts in ELT: Translanguaging. *ELT Journal*, 72(4), 445-447.



Cross-cultural
Intercultural
Transcultural

Baker, W. (2022). *Intercultural and transcultural awareness in language teaching*. Cambridge.

Workplace learning

“Learning ... seems to happen most effectively in business “communities of practice” rather than in traditional English training”

Ehrenreich, S. (2010). English as a lingua franca in a German multinational corporation: meeting the challenge. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(4), 408-443.

“I illustrated how heavily their learning was sourced from their own experience of using English at work, rather than from a systematic study of English.”

Takino, M (2019). Becoming BELF users: the learning process of business users of English and its conceptualization. *Journal of English as a lingua franca*, 8(2), 235–267.

*Tone Holt Nielsen**

Norwegian Business Professionals' Need for and Use of English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) in Multinational Corporations

Abstract

English is now the corporate language of many multinational corporations (MNCs) worldwide. However, when English is used as a shared language resource, a lingua franca, its use may be both fluid and local, and the characteristics of its local use should then be explored. This article therefore investigates English used as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) in MNCs in Norway through task-based interviews with Norwegian business professionals about their need

Alessia Cogo and Patchareerat Yanaprasart

“English is the language of business”: An exploration of language ideologies in two European corporate contexts

Abstract: The increased linguistic and cultural diversity of international workplaces challenges different understandings of corporate language, corporate

Negotiating the meaning: BELF Pragmatics in Thai international corporations

by

Napatkamol Kantabutra

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October, 2018

10

An Analysis of BELF Small Talk: A First Encounter

Akiko Otsu

DE GRUYTER MOUTON

Multilingua 2018; 37(4): 331–351

Anne Kankaanranta*, Päivi Karhunen and Leena Louhiala-Salminen

“English as corporate language” in the multilingual reality of multinational companies

<https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0077>

DE GRUYTER MOUTON

JELF 2019; 8(2): 235–267

Miyuki Takino*

Becoming BELF users: the learning process of business users of English and its conceptualization

BELF ユーザになるとは : ビジネスパーソン
の英語の学びのプロセスを探求する

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2019-2020>

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Paola Vettorel*

BELF, COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND ELT BUSINESS MATERIALS



Negotiating the meaning: BELF Pragmatics
in Thai international corporations

by

Napatkamol Kantabutra

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October, 2018

Context:

Thai business professionals
from 3 international
corporations in Thailand
interacting with business
partners from other Asian
countries

Focus:

Pragmatic strategies in
meetings

Methodology:

Conversation analysis - 9.3
hours of meetings
Semi-structured interviews
(23 participants)

Findings:

“Unlike native speaker interactions, participants cannot take understanding for granted ... **constant process of negotiation of meaning.**” (p.188)

“**collaboration** on the linguistic level (negotiation of meaning), but **competitiveness** on the content level ” (p.207)

“**prime requisite** was the possession of **professional knowledge**” (p.208)

“**prioritization of content over linguistic correctness**” (p.209)

“**problems related to the level of vocabulary and grammar scarcely visible**” (p.213)

“most meetings shaped and determined by **time-constraints**” (p.214)

10

An Analysis of BELF Small Talk: A First Encounter

Akiko Otsu

Context:

- Japanese architect and Malaysian hotel employee, first time meeting
- Car journey to a construction site

Methodology:

- Single case analysis

Focus:

- Safe talk – talking about a mutual acquaintance – finding common ground
- Effective use of overlaps, repetition and syntactic simplification.

10

An Analysis of BELF Small Talk: A First Encounter

Akiko Otsu

Findings:

Topic choice is influenced by **power and role relationship** (Malaysian is more careful)

Participants start **gathering information** to facilitate their jobs even during first meeting (ie not just socialising)

Content is prioritised over “correct” forms / “native speaker norms”

*Tone Holt Nielsen**

Norwegian Business Professionals' Need for and Use of English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) in Multinational Corporations

Abstract

English is now the corporate language of many multinational corporations (MNCs) worldwide. However, when English is used as a shared language resource, a lingua franca, its use may be both fluid and local, and the characteristics of its local use should then be explored. This article therefore investigates English used as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) in MNCs in Norway through task-based interviews with Norwegian business professionals about their need

Methodology:

9 semi-structured interviews (40-60 mins per person) in Norwegian

Focus:

What are the BELF communicative needs?

What characterises BELF use?

Context:

6 Norwegian multinational corporations (oil/gas + telecom IT sectors) with English as official corporate language

Findings:

- English **widely** used.
- Focus is on getting the job done, but **some concern that less correct language could cause a bad impression.**
- Many tasks in English, but **meetings / discussions most difficult** to handle.
- Use of “**company speak**” common.
- **Wide range of accommodation strategies and translingual practices.**
- English more “**polite**” than Norwegian.

Miyuki Takino*

Becoming BELF users: the learning process of business users of English and its conceptualization

BELF ユーザになるとは：ビジネスパーソンの英語の学びのプロセスを探求する

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2019-2020>

Context:

Japanese business professionals from a wide variety of industries

Methodology:

47 interviews (in Japanese)
Narrative method

Focus:

- How professionals transform from “learners of English in the classroom” to “BELF users”
- Learning in a business context

Findings:

“process requires novice BELF users to **unlearn** norms learned at school, and **relearn** new norms in BELF context” (p.248)

“most participants remain “**frustrated**” with their English” (p.250)

“”**stretching**” experiences of English use play a central role in “**forcing**” participants to develop BELF competence” (p.252)

“**Learning process is mainly facilitated by experience of using English**” (p.252)

Initial stage is most difficult as users require a **change of attitude**

Learning **process is continuous and dynamic**

Learning from experience needs to be **supplemented by study** (p.256)

Alessia Cogo and Patchareerat Yanaprasart

**“English is the language of business”:
An exploration of language ideologies
in two European corporate contexts**

Abstract: The increased linguistic and cultural diversity of international workplaces challenges different understandings of corporate language, corporate

Methodology:

Semi-structured interviews

Focus:

Language ideologies and their impact on MNCs policies, their employees and discursive practices

Context:

Two banks:

- a banking Swiss multinational corporation
- Italian branches of a multinational banking corporation, with headquarters in France and branches all over the world

Findings:

- **English is not the only language** used in professional communication, internally as well as externally
- When English is used as a *lingua franca* it is **always** a **multilingual** mode of communication.
- Contrary to the still dominant overall discourses i.e. that communication can only be managed and be efficient if one language is spoken/ used at a time – the **mixed, fluid and translingual use of BELF** can be observed in both banks.

Anne Kankaanranta*, Päivi Karhunen and Leena Louhiala-Salminen

**“English as corporate language”
in the multilingual reality of multinational
companies**

<https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0077>

Context:

English in multinational corporations

Methodology:

Surveys and interviews

Focus:

Goffman metaphor :

Frontstage - official language used in corporate communication vs

Backstage - working language used in interactions among MNC employees.

Anne Kankaanranta*, Päivi Karhunen and Leena Louhiala-Salminen

**“English as corporate language”
in the multilingual reality of multinational
companies**

<https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0077>

Findings:

- **Corporate language as language policy** – top-down, “standard” English”, “native speaker as gold standard”, “a bounded entity”, acts as a gate-keeper, public image, one-way communication
- **Working language** - English as resource /tool to get the job done, situation specific, emergent, multilingual reality, intertwined with professional expertise



Context:

Teaching business English

Methodology:

- Analysis of business ELT materials (5 coursebooks at elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate (total 15 books))

Focus:

- Communication strategies in business ELT materials
- Global Communicative Competence (GCC) model (multicultural competence, BELF competence and business-specific knowledge)



Paola Vettorel*

BELF, COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND ELT BUSINESS MATERIALS

Findings:

- Business ELT materials do not deal consistently with pragmatic strategies and even when examples are provided, they are rarely accompanied by reflection tasks; opportunities to raise awareness of the role CSs play in business contexts and BELF are not overtly and consistently dealt with.
- GCC - different components are not integrated, but rather dealt with separately
- No example was found for plurilingual strategies and resources

Implications

- Traditional ESP approaches are useful, but do not necessarily address the dynamic and complex nature of English as a business lingua franca
- BELF research is providing real evidence about how our clients use English – lots of new insights for us as ELT practitioners
- BELF research is incremental. It is also continually evolving and changing - we need to keep up with what is happening
- Testing and publishing need to adapt to better reflect the evidence – we need to put pressure on those who make the decisions
- Our job is getting more challenging!



CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT

BELF

English as a
Business

Lingua Franca



<https://communicationlights.de/conversations-about-belf/>



English as a business lingua franca - recent research and implications

Evan Frendo www.e4b.de

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