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## TEACHING CULTURE IN BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSES

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*У статті розглядаються питання навчання ділової англійської у сучасному світі, а також інтеркультурні стосунки та їх роль при вивченні ділової англійської мови.*

*Ключові слова:* ділова англійська мова, культурні відмінності, інтеркультурні відношення, Грузія.

*В статье рассматриваются вопросы обучения деловому английскому в современном мире, а также интеркультурные отношения и их роль в изучении делового английского.*

*Ключевые слова:* деловой английский, культурные различия, интеркультурные отношения, Грузия.

*The article addresses the questions of teaching business English in the present-day world, as well as intercultural relations and their role in learning business English.*  
*Key words:* business English, cultural differences, intercultural relations, Georgia.

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### **“Culture is what remains after one has forgotten everything” (Eduard Herriot)**

English is regarded to be the most influential language in the XXI century. Popularity of English language emerged 40–50 years ago. After the Second World War the age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity began. It created the world dominated by two forces – technology and commerce, and English became accepted as the international language for business (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Moreover, this development was sustained by the Oil Crises that occurred in 1970 and led to the flow of funds and close communication between America and oil-rich countries. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1998), “English suddenly became big business and commercial pressures began to exert an influence” (p. 7).

A new global wave arose. Gradually, the demand for English grew, bringing out the necessity of English for specific purposes. Since the 1960s Business English has been the most popular branch of ESP as a result of rapid globalization and rapid changes in the world (Master, 1985).

In teaching business English the main emphasis is put on traditions and values of people from different countries, ways of negotiation, conflict solutions and cooperation. To say it briefly, along with the specificity and terminology, it is an art of communication within a specific context. Therefore, it means that cultural awareness plays a big role in teaching business English.

**Culture as the fifth skill in learning business English.** Foreign language teaching/learning is a complex phenomenon comprised of different components, including grammatical, communicative,

writing competences, as well as general attitude towards one’s own and foreign culture. Obviously, it is difficult to teach all the elements of culture. However, the teacher should succeed in helping learners to develop understanding of cultural meanings of words and phrases of the target language, to understand how people behave in common situations and to recognize cultural images and symbols.

In order to raise student awareness of cultural differences, a curriculum should contain interesting, culture specific elements, especially for business English, such as: negotiation strategies and communication styles in different countries, organizational culture, body language, delivering a presentation, reaching a decision, etc.

There are different opinions about the role of intercultural communication in the business English classroom. Some think that business English teachers are only language specialists, but others argue that the two cannot be separated and they are two sides of the same coin (Frendo, 2008).

It is widely known that culture consists of many categories, such as: products, ideas and behaviors. Products include traditional objects, ideas, beliefs, values; and behavior refers to customs, habits, body language, dress, food. Teachers should pay equal attention to all these categories in teaching business English.

Moreover, integrating teaching about culture in language classes provides students with opportunities to learn not only the foreign language, but also cultural differences. Intercultural communication helps people to interact successfully with people from different countries. It includes teaching appropriate language that is used in different contexts. These cultural aspects should

be a part of business English curriculum in order to minimize the chances of cultural shock and misunderstanding. It is more than just communication with foreigners. It involves the factors that can influence the proceedings.

There are a lot of activities, including role plays, debates and discussions, oral presentations that promote student speaking and communication skills in business English.

In order to increase student cultural awareness one of the course modules was based on American negotiation styles to help students to learn how American people hold business negotiations and understand the different cultural meanings, messages and gestures in their behaviors and responses. With regard to student speaking competence, it is widely acknowledged that group discussions, role plays and presentations should be used during classes. Role playing activities give students an opportunity to be physically and emotionally involved in cross-cultural learning.

The sample given below is a good example of observation that was used for assessment of business English students at Telavi State University. It turned out to be an effective way to evaluate students' achievements.

**Observation goal** – students will develop cultural awareness and improve English speaking skills.

**Course objectives** – knowledge of relevant vocabulary and specific materials on American negotiation styles, their behavior, attitudes, manners to avoid barriers and achieve success.

**Students profile** – the course was designed for pre-intermediate business English students. The classes took place three times a week. The total number of students was 30. The observation lasted 2 weeks.

**Materials and equipments** – PowerPoint presentations (phrases and vocabulary) and short videos about Americans conducting business negotiations (expressions, attitudes, body language typical for the American style of negotiations); handouts with instructions for role plays.

During the first week students were given handouts with vocabulary and sentences used by Americans in negotiating. Then the teacher explained some particular elements that should be taken into account to negotiate a business deal with Americans, due to the fact that they are generally considered hard to understand because of the racial and cultural diversity. For instance: when does “no” mean “no” in negotiations in the USA? It may be a difficult question for a foreigner. There are situations, when American negotiators say “no” or “we can’t do it”, but it

means that they suggest another alternative or urge to reach an agreement. Moreover, it is also noticeable that during negotiations non-verbal communication is paid full attention; contains important information and underlying messages. American negotiators observed non-verbal signals and gestures carefully and spent significant time on finding out the real goals, especially of non-US partners.

The handouts distributed among the students covered the information on business negotiation topics and gave relevant phrases/sentences. Then the students were asked to split into groups, chose one topic and practise role playing in a particular situation, such as: selling company shares, finding business partner abroad, establishing sales agencies in different countries, etc. Each group consisted of two American and three non-American partners. Then the groups performed their role-plays in front of the class. After that the teacher showed them short videos on how U.S. and non-US businessmen conducted negotiations on the same topics.

**Evaluation** – in order to find out whether the students achieved the goals, the teacher carried out observations in the classroom.

It is commonly acknowledged that group work and discussions promote student achievement, enhance interaction and develop practical skills in decision making, problem solving, communication and negotiation (which are highly important skills for running a business). While a group is working, the teacher can observe each student's contribution into the work process and evaluate their performance.

Eventually, at the end of the second week on the basis of the teacher's detailed observations students were evaluated according to the special grading rubric worked out by the teacher in advance (see below).

<b>Using the appropriate vocabulary</b>	Perfect	Good	Satisfactory
<b>Understanding different phrases and cultural meanings</b>	Perfect	Good	Satisfactory
<b>Speaking skills (fluency/accuracy)</b>	Perfect	Good	Satisfactory
<b>Communication skills</b>	Perfect	Good	Satisfactory

Thus, in view of the aforesaid, cultural aspects should be highlighted in teaching business English. In addition to mastering the language students should study the art of communication in doing business on an international level. Teachers can raise student intercultural awareness by using different methods and types of activities that facilitate understanding not only cultural differences, but also one's own culture.

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