ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A theoretical outline of the importance of cross-cultural and pragmatic awareness in the business scenario

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ABSTRACT

English has become crucial for professional success within the globalized world, and indispensable for communicating with people from other countries. It has become a Lingua Franca and, therefore, has been used to speak among people with different mother tongues who share English as a second language. In light of this multicultural process, this paper aims to provide the reader with a theoretical outline about the relevance of cross-cultural and pragmatic knowledge. Such aspects need to be specially considered when developing an English course for business students as there has been a growing need for professionals to be competent users of English within the business context. Due to this specific context, we have favored an approach – English for Specific Purposes – that targets specific aspects of the language. Our focal point is to validate the need of raising both pragmatic and cross-cultural awareness when teaching business professionals as they will probably have communicative scenarios where such capabilities would be remarkably advantageous.

KEYWORDS: pragmatics; cross-cultural awareness; English for specific purposes; business English.

Um esboço teórico sobre a importância da consciência *cross*-cultural e pragmática em contextos de negócios

RESUMO

Saber inglês se tornou crucial para profissionais de sucesso no mundo globalizado, e indispensável para comunicação com pessoas de diferentes países. Essa língua ganhou *status* de Língua Franca e, portanto, tem sido usado como forma de comunicação entre pessoas de diferentes línguas maternas que compartilham inglês como segunda língua. Tendo em vista esse processo multicultural, esse artigo tem por objetivo dar ao leitor um esboço teórico sobre a relevância de conhecimento pragmático e *cross*-cultural. Esses aspectos precisam ser especialmente considerados quando desenvolvendo um curso para alunos de inglês para negócios, considerando que existe uma necessidade crescente de profissionais que sejam usuários competentes de inglês no contexto de negócios. Devido a esse contexto específico nós favorecemos uma abordagem, inglês para fins específicos, que objetiva aspectos específicos da língua. Nosso ponto focal é validar a necessidade de fazer ambos, conscientização *cross*-cultural e pragmática, quando ensinando inglês para negócios como eles vão estar em cenários comunicativos onde essas habilidades serão vantajosas.

Palavras-chave: pragmáticas; conscientização *cross*-cultural; inglês para fins específicos; inglês para negócios.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English has become essential for students if they want to be placed in the labor market. Especially in the business marketplace, English has grown to be the dominant language. Various companies have adopted the language even in internal communications. As we will show throughout this monograph, the English language required by the entrepreneurial world is very focused on oral capabilities.

Speaking the English language has transitioned from a luxury to a need, and many of us still wonder why it is so necessary. In fact, there is a myriad of reasons as to why being orally capable in English is important: a) it is the most spoken language in the world, although English is not the language with the largest number of native or first language speakers, and has become a lingua franca (Harmer, 2001); b) most academic texts are only available in English and c) the labour market requires most professionals to be fluent in English.

The latter is the motivation to the present research. More often than not in the general labour market, business professionals are required to speak in English. But it is not enough to speak the language, one has to be able to communicate efficiently and, for that, it is not sufficient to be proficient, but also to understand particularities of the language. In this research, we will focus on pragmatic competence in the teaching environment.

Pragmatic competence is essential to business professionals and since the business scenario is quite varied, people with different cultures engage using the English language. Each person knows their country's specific rules and norms. The divergence of these rules and norms may cause misunderstandings, misperceptions and consequently, constitute flawed communication.

Because English is spoken in such divergent settings some misunderstandings and misconceptions are created because of the unawareness of pragmatic features. Not only the need to respect other cultures, but also the knowledge on how to appropriately take turns in conversation, how to use basic structures – that are generally considered common-knowledge among native speakers – to signalize understanding and how to express constructive criticism.

The present research, then, is motivated by the need of a reflective description on how to become pragmatically and linguistically competent in a multinational meeting scenario. We have perceived that there is a gap in course designs which could be filled with the development of language strategies in order to improve communication between businessmen with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Thus, we elicit the subsequent objectives:

a) To characterize some of the main theoretical foundations regarding the teaching of English in business contexts as a widely encompassing field contingent on pragmatic and intercultural competencies.

b) To foster awareness amidst business English teachers concerning the importance of pragmatics and cross-cultural awareness in the classroom context.

As for our research questions, based on the theoretical foundations made explicit in this paper, we were guided by the following:

a) Can the knowledge of pragmatics help speakers in a business environment succeed in conveying their ideas?

b) Can oral interchanges be pragmatically improved in order to be better understood and/or not misinterpreted?

As for pragmatics, there has been much discussion about how to teach it. In the realm of pragmatic teaching, a dichotomy has been established between explicit and implicit teaching, as we will expose throughout the monograph. We have advocated in favor of explicit teaching as it seems both faster and easier to learn through it.

2. MULTIFARIOUS THEORETICAL VIEWPOINTS

The term "English as a lingua franca" (ELF) has surfaced as a way to refer to communicative situations in English among speakers of different first languages. ELF interactions are quite common in the business setting as English is the main language spoken by business professionals from various countries.

In the United Nations, and at most significant international meetings, English is the most important working language. Business people use English for communication in many international trade discussions. Thus, compared with other languages, English is regarded as a global lingua franca (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995 apud Yuan, 2012, p. 2).

According to Education First's EPI (English Proficiency Index, 2012), Brazil ranks in the 38th place in a list organized from the most proficient country in English to the least proficient. Brazil is described as having low proficiency.

In comparison, if we take into consideration only countries from Latin America, Brazil ranks in 4th place. Although it may seem like a positive ranking, it is not. Many companies that seek new countries to invest in, look at these statistics and perceive a much better chance of success in Argentina (1st place) or Uruguay (2nd place).

Even though Brazil does not stand out as proficient, it stands out as an investor in English teaching. Currently, Brazil holds the record for the largest number of language schools in a country, surpassing even China. Recent data from ABF (Brazilian Association of Franchising) highlights the fact that Brazil has 73 language school chains that totalize more than six thousand locations in which one can learn English in Brazil. The actual number of language schools in Brazil far exceeds this number as it only takes into account franchises, omitting small businesses and private teaching.

The fact that Brazil is not proficient transposes into the business area. In 2009, Catho Online conducted a research among business professionals in Brazil and found out that only 24,5% of the respondents were fluent in English (Arruda, 2009). This statistic is alarming as Rone Costa, Head of Development of Cambridge ESOL Examinations in Brazil, point out that many business opportunities have been lost by Brazil because of the lack of English proficient professionals (Moreno, 2012).

It seems that if pragmatic awareness was considered when assessing English fluency, the number of English fluent professionals in Brazil would

be even narrower. We have not found any kind of statistic that regards pragmatics in Brazil, probably because of its difficulty to be evaluated. It is problematic to use English as a lingua franca in business settings as it is "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication" (Firth, 1996, p. 240).

The aforementioned language schools in Brazil employ mainly the traditional 'grammar-translation' and 'examination-oriented' method that does not take into consideration pragmatics and ends up reducing English students into 'mute' and 'deaf' language learners (Zhang, 2008; Zhao, 2009). Many students lack pragmatic knowledge on how to interpret discourse by relating utterances to their meanings, understanding the intention of language users, and how language is used in specific settings (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

Communication in society occurs mainly through the medium of language. However, the users of language communicate and use language on society's premises, and society controls their access to the linguistic and communicative means (Mey 2001).

Therefore, it is not enough to know the English language to be successful in communicating with other English speakers. It is also paramount to be aware of their cultural background and their society's particularities.

This paper will rely mostly on Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor's (2003, p. 37) working definition of pragmatics as "the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate" and also contemplate some notions from Interlanguage Pragmatics (which is a subfield of both interlanguage studies, which belong to the realm of Second Language Acquisition, and pragmatics); for example, Schauer's (2003) statement that foreign or second language learners must be able to both produce utterances appropriate in the context of the target language, but, also, must be aware of what is considered a suitable linguistic behavior in varied social situations in their L2 or foreign language.

It is important to notice that these social situations vary from culture to culture and also have a different response depending on the nationality of the speaker. The cross-cultural aspect of communication will also be central to this paper. As Yuan (2012, p. 65) pointed out:

> Communication in many contexts is becoming increasingly cross-cultural. It involves people who have different cultures, different first languages, and different conceptualizations. Although use of a grammatically common language, or lingua franca such as English, that language is a pragmatically diversified instrument of communication because it represents different cultures and different norms and values. For example, many non-native English speaking cultures use English as a common language of communication with each other and native speakers of English.

If cross-cultural pragmatic awareness was taught in business school it would be possible to prevent "individuals from two societies or communities [to] carry out their interactions (whether spoken or written) according to their own rules or norms, often resulting in a clash in expectations and,

ultimately, misperceptions about the other group" (Boxer, 2002, p. 151). These misperceptions cause, many times, damages to business relations and could even result in a failed attempt to reach a predetermined goal in a meeting. Yuan (2012, p. 66) mentions that "As language and culture are closely interrelated, the ability to efficiently interact with people who are from different cultures is the key to achieving successful cross-cultural communication."

We will also work with the assumption that L2 learners must be made aware of the results of making pragmatic choices (Rose & Kasper, 2001), hence our preference for the explicit teaching of cross-cultural pragmatics.

Pragmatic competence is "the ability to use language appropriately in a social context" (Taguchi, 2009, p. 1). Pragmatics will be approached due to culture being a decisive factor in producing and understanding utterances. Specially in the business area, cultural context of the discourse plays a relevant role in understanding the intended meaning; to have a successful intercultural communication it is essential to be culturally aware.

We intend to highlight that a conventional "grammar-translation" method to teach Business School students is not fully appropriate as it does not encompass the development of language function and, thus, may prevent business students from enhancing their pragmatic awareness. We wish to provide a theoretical background that could be helpful when designing a course which enables students to attain an enhanced level of pragmatic abilities.

For many years it was believed that the best way to successfully interact with another culture and to learn about it, was to live it. However, there has not been found evidence that study overseas can improve the knowledge of culture or enhance cross-cultural understanding (Kramsch, 1991).

> Culture is not learned by osmosis. It needs an intellectual effort because culture is not readily accessible to be noticed, analyzed and taught. Culture is inserted into language as an intangible, all-pervasive and highly variable force (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003).

Because learning another culture is not effortless, it is central for the business professional to develop a sense of mutual understanding between himself and members of different cultural groups. Kramsch (2005, p. 553) stresses the fact that it is important to involve "an awareness and a respect of difference, as well as the socioaffective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others."

To be effectively intercultural one has to study, acknowledge and practice various aspects of a certain culture. It is necessary to compare cultures and grasp cultural knowledge that is specific to certain contexts. Through interaction and reflection, a critical understanding of the target culture can be developed (Paltridge, Harbon, Hirsch, Shen, Stevenson, Phakiti, & Woodrow, 2009). To be communicatively proficient in social interchanges it is crucial to master both the target language and the target culture.

Samovar and Porter (1997) emphasized that communication practices and behaviors of people from distinct cultures will inevitably vary due to their different perceptions of the world and the context that they live in. When people from different cultures communicate, an intercultural communication

process takes place, being considered "a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures" (Gudykunst & Mody, 2002, p. 165).

It is important to underscore the fact that intercultural communication does not exclusively happens when cultures have different languages. Even with two native-English speaking countries, some errors or misunderstandings undoubtedly occur (Jundt, 2001).

Miller (1974) affirmed that most of the misunderstandings between speakers do not happen due to any inability to hear them, to parse their sentences or to understand their words. These misunderstandings mostly happen because people often fail to realize the intention of the speaker and such difficulty could be better explained by the study of pragmatics.

Recent trends in language teaching are favoring students' knowledge on the appropriate ways in which English can be used in a social context over the knowledge about the systems of the language. Pragmatics is very important for language teaching, but it is even more fundamental to business professionals.

> The interaction between communities in multi lateral (i.e) international involvement at diverse level is needed in today's economic and production enterprises. National boundaries have become porous as people, goods and ideas flow across borders. Language communities and cultures have become hybrid shaped by their fluid flow of social and economic relationships. [...] in [a] multilingual context, the local norm may have to be used in clearly demarcated contexts of inner circle or outer circle usage. In extremely formal institutional contexts where inner circle norms are conventional one has to adopt the established norms. Proficiency in the post modern globalization requires the ability to negotiate this variability. The need of the hour is to address the fact that there are different norms that come into play at different levels of social interaction (Susikaran, 2013, p. 3).

3. CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS

When dealing with the present globalized world, understanding the aspect of cultural and intercultural differences and similarities has to be one of the priorities to enable successful and fruitful communication between speakers from different countries. In order to have optimal cross-cultural interchanges, one should understand and respect foreign habits and traditions.

Focusing on the cultural aspect of the language and studying sociocultural interactions are not immature fields. There are many early fields of inquiry that dealt with cultural awareness; from those, we would like to highlight two: interactional sociolinguistics (Schiffrin, 1996; Tannen, 1992) and ethnographic microanalysis of interaction (Erickson, 1996; Garcez, 1993). These fields are interested in investigating cultural patterns of human communicative behavior during social interaction.

Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008) pretty much described the cern of the present research: the pragmatic competence, or sociolinguistic competence, can be defined as the speaker's knowledge on how to express appropriate messages within the social and cultural context of communication in which they are produced.

When sociolinguistic competence is mastered, one would be able to select and sequence utterances or sentences to produce a coherent and cohesive discourse with a particular purpose in a specific situational context. However, Kramsch (1997) stressed that the foreign language learner should not aim to become an artificial native speaker but an 'intercultural speaker'.

Intercultural competence is beset with several interrelated skills: attitude (open-mindedness and curiosity), knowledge (of social groups, their behavior and life), the ability of relating and interpreting (events or documents from different cultures), skills of interaction and discovery (ability to operate and acquire new knowledge of a culture during real time communication), and critical cultural awareness (ability to critically evaluate) (Byram, 1998).

If culture is not taken into account, a number of misunderstandings may happen during international cooperation. This illustrates that there is a need for cultural and intercultural competence training. We defend that it is best for professionals to have such cultural business-like contact during their studies at the university.

Culture has been defined in countless ways, there are many different views on what culture is and how it is perceived. Heringer (2004) and Markowsky & Thomas (1995) argue that the so called standards of culture can be taken into consideration as a kind of guide in a foreign country; Hofstede (2001) additionally defines culture as national and regional particularities.

Canale and Swain (1980) agree that communicative competence consists of four different, but interconnected competences: the grammatical competence (grammar rules, pronunciation and vocabulary), sociolinguistic competence (taking into consideration a particular cultural and sociological context), discourse competence (the accurate use of grammar rules while speaking, to be understood) and strategic competence (which is the acquisition and employment of different verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication).

The National Association of Social Workers (Nasw, 2001, p. 11) has appropriately described cultural competence as "the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each." We argue that such process should be valued not only to be respectful and prevent xenophobia, but also to communicate better.

Wilczyńska (2005, p. 22) defines intercultural competence as "perfect knowledge of a foreign country and its culture; a perfect knowledge of two cultures that enables to compare them with each other, to see the contrast and differences." While we do not agree that perfect knowledge is attainable or even desirable, considering the complexity of the topic, we condone the idea of knowing the different cultures and comparing its contrasts and similarities in order to avoid cultural mistakes and disrespectful manners.

Learners generally only notice the importance of culture when they visit a foreign country and face difficulties. It is one thing to be accurate, to know the language, and another to be appropriate, to be adequate to the sociocultural rules. The lack of appropriateness may result in plenty of misunderstandings (Tomalin, 2008; Scollon, R. & Scollon, S. W. 1995).

Some of the foremost aspects of culture in a foreign language program are the need to "become aware of the culturally appropriate ways of addressing people, expressing opinion, gratitude, agreeing or disagreeing with someone, making requests, appropriate topic of conversation, speech acts (e.g. apologies, suggestions, complaints, refusals), connotations, etiquette, and appropriate or inappropriate behaviour" (Baranovskaja & Skorupa, 2011, p. 122).

Culture and language are so intertwined that Dell Hymes (as discussed by Hyde, 1998) affirmed, in 1972, that language and culture are inseparable. Hymes viewed language as a medium to express culture from a particular cultural group. He also believed that in order to use language appropriately one had to have the perception of the 'context.'

Of course, this interface of intercultural knowledge and successful communication is not enough to assure smoothness in multicultural scenarios. Bolten (2005) defends the idea that the knowledge of habits or traditions and characteristic manners do not guarantee acting in an intercultural way. That is why the teaching method cannot be simply expository, it has to encompass new approaches such as role-play or case study to help prepare students for future international collaborations. Students should learn how to recognize cultural diversity and how to become interculturally competent (Biechele; Grau & Müller, 2003).

3.1. Cross-cultural awareness in English for business management

Business managers tend to see everything in the light of profit. However, for companies to be profitable, it is essentially necessary that they invest on workers' knowledge of English (and/or any other language, according to their needs), by contracting teaching professionals who are able to develop intercultural and pragmatic competencies in their classes. Language proficiency is not something immediately profitable but, in the long haul, the lack of it can affect business relations. Feely and Harzing observed that:

> the impact of the language barrier cannot be evaluated using simple measures such as dollars spent on interpreters or days lost in translating documents. Instead the true cost needs to be seen in terms of the way it distorts and damages relationships. These in turn impose pressures and constraints on the strategies pursued by the company and the organizations and systems they consequentially adopt (2003, p. 9).

Language proficiency is not only valuable as a company asset, but also in the personal sphere. Klein (2007) tested Grin and Vaillancourt's (1997) hypothesis that language competence should be an advantage in the labor market. Klein found out that in the European labor market, high multilingual competencies affected positively labor force participation of both men and women, and also that these competencies have a direct reflex on men's wages. Klein's research exposed English as the most important language and that it was the only language examined which affected positively both labor market participation rates and employee wages as well.

One of the most demanding features for a global corporation is to transfer effective knowledge between subsidiaries, from subsidiaries to headquarters and from headquarters to subsidiaries (Vedpuriswar, 2001). Such transference is essential to a global corporation's success, it occurs across networks of operations in multiple locations, and may comprise individuals who vary culturally and linguistically, therefore making the coordination between these individuals significantly challenging (Feely & Harzing, 2003).

The aforesaid data depose to the relevance of learning the English language to manage dealings in the business area. In a study conducted in 2005, Global English Corporation demonstrated that nine out of every ten workers reported that English proficiency is either very important or required in order to receive a promotion in their respective companies. The top three situations in which workers expressed the need to use English were: Telephone calls (77%), socializing with co-workers and clients (66%) and meetings (64%).

These results attest to the need for not only knowing English, but also speaking English. As oral communicative scenarios appear to be the main demands from global companies, it is obvious the need to address oral communication in business English courses. Feely and Harzing's (2003) previously mentioned statement – regarding the current multinational status of many companies – also exudes the need for employees capable of communicating in multicultural settings.

In literature, many authors referenced throughout this paper are inclined to suggest that in order to successfully collaborate in an international business environment, it is elementary to have a) comprehensive knowledge of specific and common issues related to a particular business and b) widespread understanding of cultural and intercultural similarities and differences. Therefrom, the acquisition of managerial communication competences should be seen as indispensable to achieve success in international teamwork and to obtain advantages in entrepreneurship.

Myczko (2005) points out that intercultural competence must be considered inevitable while interpreting information coming from representatives of different countries. It became standard by virtue of the new forms and means of (tele)communication in both our private and personal lives. Such new forms and means added to intensive globalization, market pressure and migration are associated with new literacies, new measures of sociolinguistic control and new expectations regarding language learning and use (Duff, 2008).

Because of the emerging number of multicultural and multilingual workplaces, contradictions started to emerge. Many corporations instated a policy of using only English for internal company communication. Such policies hugely impacted demand for workplace language programs (Chivers, 2010).

However, these programs were criticized due to companies not being satisfied with the results of English language classes by reason of the classes focusing largely on decontextualized language study, therefore failing to address language needs immediately relevant to the workplace (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2006 cited in Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

Among many views on how to teach cultural aspects, Yates (2010, p. 109) described that it would be adequate an approach that could instruct non-native speakers to "understand patterns of language use, how these relate to cultural values, and how individuals actually draw on them in context." Duff (2005, p. 358) advocated that workplace literacy should be shaped by "specific genres that fulfill particular communicative functions within particular settings." To carry out both views, it seems that the best alternative is ESP (English for Specific Purposes), as it is more focused on specific genres and capabilities specifically desired by the workplace.

Developing cross-cultural competence is a slow learning process, it includes learning a foreign language, developing intercultural awareness and gaining experience from meeting people from different cultures (Korhonen, 2004). Cross-cultural and intercultural workplace training are currently burgeoning fields. The limelight on intercultural awareness in workplace language programs follows naturally from the focus on interpersonal and social workplace discourse. Communication is studded with communicative norms and expectations that are shaped by culture (Kramsch, 2004). Kramsch (1993) also argued that, every time we speak, we perform a cultural act.

As briefly described and highlighted in this chapter, intercultural competence has been increasingly becoming a key component in many areas, such as for business management, in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001), in adult education (Feng, Byram & Fleming, 2009) and in healthcare education.

Cross-cultural awareness is particularly preeminent for business management because when workers from divergent cultural and social backdrops engage in the workplace, there is reasonable potential for mismatches in their assessment of the relative importance of some of these components, which may result in misinterpretation and even unintended offense (Holmes, 2005).

Bearing this in mind, it is essential to highlight the importance of pragmatics on cross-cultural settings, because it specifically deals with the nature of communication among people from different backgrounds and personal experiences.

4. PRAGMATIC AWARENESS

Pragmatics is a fairly new branch of linguistics which provides a new way of looking at communicative situations. Verschueren (1999, p. 7) characterized pragmatics as "a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior." Pragmatically analyzing discourse implies that "by each utterance a speaker not only says something but also does certain things, such as giving information, stating a fact or hinting an attitude" (Byram, 2000, p. 477.)

These forms of behavior and attitudes related to pragmatics are frequently originated from our own culture. Such particular features sometimes clash with those from different cultures; therefore, in order to be communicatively efficient, it is fundamental to be pragmatically aware. Bachman (1990) argued that pragmatic competence is one of the critical components that help language learners to become communicatively competent. Thus, pragmatic

awareness is indispensable for an English course that aims at developing communicative capabilities.

How to include pragmatic development in a curriculum has been widely discussed and there are many alternatives available. There are two major types of pragmatic activities: a) to raise students' pragmatic awareness and b) activities providing chances for communicative practice (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997). Activities to raise pragmatic awareness are those designed to develop recognition of how language forms are correctly used in context (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Activities involving communicative practice generally include group work, in-class discussions and social interactions outside the classroom.

Bardovi Harlig & Griffin (2005) conducted a study that concluded that classroom activities could provide the necessary choices and information to raise learners' pragmatic awareness; consequently, they would become proficient users of a target language. There are two ways to instruct pragmatics: explicitly or implicitly.

Explicit instruction guides learners' attention towards the target structures aiming at discussing such structures, whereas implicit instruction focuses on attracting students' attention without metalinguistic explanation and, in consequence, the interruption of the communicative situation is minimized (Doughty, 2003). Martínez-Flor and Alcón-Soler (2007) conducted a study intending contrast implicit and explicit instruction, and found out that both implicit and explicit instruction are beneficial for the development of language learners' pragmatic awareness in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom.

However, a study by Alcón-Soler (2005) investigated to what extent explicit or implicit instruction influenced learners' knowledge and ability to use request strategies as a communication tool. The study concluded that explicit instruction had an advantage when dealing with requests compared to implicit instruction.

Hou (2007) conducted a study that concluded that pragmatic failures cause misunderstandings and even extreme emotions (such as, prejudice and resentment) in cross-cultural communication scenarios. Such misunderstandings may cause communication failures and constitute obstacles to harmonious interpersonal relationships. Whence, if a course aims to enable learners to communicate successfully in a cross-cultural context, it is important to recognize and reduce students' pragmatic failures and to develop their pragmatic competence in an effective manner.

One of the most elementary problems that arise from being unaware of sociolinguistic and sociocultural features (pragmatic awareness) is the lack of conventional expressions that are "tacit agreements, which the members of a community presume to be shared by every reasonable co-member" (Coulmas, 1981, p. 4). For example, expressions like: "no problem", "nice to meet you" or "that'd be great" are frequently needed by speakers of English and, if not known, may render the conversation unnatural and even inadequate.

Such expressions are so familiar and meaningful that they have been conventionalized in the target language. Consequently, for effective cross-cultural communication it is essential to be aware of the expressions and

how native speakers use them. In order to appropriately comprehend and produce such conventionalized expressions, training is needed.

Not only basic expressions are affected by pragmatic awareness. Complex topics, such as constructive criticism, become difficult and prone to error if pragmatics is not considered. Studies have found that learners of English express their constructive criticism very differently from native speakers. For instance, they tend to soften their criticism less frequently than NS, but aggravate criticism more often than them. Also, English learners frequently employ modal verbs in an inappropriate manner and therefore cause misunderstandings for not knowing which modal verb is best suited in strength to the situation (Nguyen, 2005, 2008a,b).

Pragmatic competence includes, among other aspects, non-verbal communication (such as body language and eye contact), active listening, audience understanding, style and conciseness. Such aspects are very relevant to all language learners, but in special to business professionals.

4.1. Pragmatic awareness in English for business management

Business professionals are frequently faced with the challenges of oral competent communication and being pragmatically aware can help them to understand proficient English speakers and their expectations related to their mother tongue.

In the business area, pragmatic awareness can boost communication and enhance the chance of success in corporate deals. A significant part of current business interactions occur between NNS (Non-Native Speaker) of English and, in light of that, make difficult to employ pragmatic strategies to address such situations. Very recent empirical work has suggested that the best strategy, and the one that should be taught, is the 'let it pass' principle, which argues that the single most important action required from speakers in an ELF talk is tolerance. Simply put, the core idea is not to pay attention nor address grammar, morphology, syntax and phrasing errors (Murray, 2012).

However, our research focuses on communication scenarios that occur between NNSs and those conversations could be greatly improved through the knowledge of certain pragmatic features pertaining to different cultures.

Although Murray (2012, p. 322-323) suggests the 'let it pass' principle, he also supports the article's core idea:

> Finally, there is value in regularly incorporating in the classroom reflective practices that help sensitize learners to breakdowns in communication, where they happen and why, and ways of resolving them. Together, these strategies make a case for including ample opportunities for learners to engage in collaborative talk that allows them to develop sensitivity to their own and others' practices and to build confidence in application.

Essentially, Murray agrees with our vision that students should be exposed to dissimilar cultures and differing socio-political contexts that will, in turn, help them understand the global marketplace and produce a very relevant tool to have in their professional skill set.

With the advent of globalization our society has become much more interconnected and plural. Nowadays, it is improbable that one will live his life without having contact with people from different cultures and languages, thanks to globalization which has opened doors for getting to know the 'worlds' outside ours.

Luka (2007, p. 2) affirmed that "the exchange of information does not take place only in a single country but a wide cooperation between countries in the fields of economics, culture, education, science and politics is developing. In these conditions the demands to employees' professionalism are growing which set new requirements to education," one of the aspects currently required from education is the knowledge of the English language. English has become the dominant and common language used to communicate in multinational scenarios.

5. ENGLISH FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

However, the English knowledge desired in the 21st century is not solely focused on language, but also on the cultural aspects associated to the language. In the knowledge society. The aim of education is not only to educate professionals for a certain field, but to help students to be aware of cultural values, form human mutual relationships, collaborate, be open, adapt to new situations, creatively express their ideas, as well as accept responsibility and challenges (Robertson, 2005).

In order to educate professionals to fulfill these needs, ESP is being widely employed. As the name suggests, ESP focuses on a specific need to delimit and adapt English teaching for specific purposes. Two keywords to ESP are necessity and specificity. All that is taught must comprise future or present needs of the students. Dudley-Evans (2004, p. 131) affirms that this branch of English teaching is based on the needs of the students, claiming that a central question is 'What do students need to do with English?'

Vilaça (2003) argues that what is sought by ESP is to prepare the student to use the language as an instrument to perform specific tasks. Comparatively, General English is much more comprehensive, it takes into consideration linguistic abilities through structural, lexical and grammatical study, while ESP focuses on competences and knowledge strictly relevant to the students' needs.

It is relevant to mention that ESP should not be understood as a teaching method, but as an approach that is guided by the students and their particular needs. This means that the identification of these needs plays a fundamental role in ESP. This approach began to be employed in late 1960's (Waters, 1988.) According to Bloor & Bloor (1986) ESP is specially connected to the teaching of Business English.

The teaching process must be informed by the deficiencies or weaknesses of the students, what is missing for them to fulfill their wishes and aspirations regarding the language. The difference between students' level of English and the level they actually need is a gap that might constitute a flaw.

In the interest of preparing students to be pragmatically fluent, teachers should consider students' discursive, contextual and textual elements, which can be influenced by global factors as, for example, socio-cultural

parameters and organizational cultures, and also local factors encompassed in the immediate context of the interaction (Capucho & Oliveira, 2005; Dijk, 1997). Although formulaic expressions and appropriate grammar are needed to efficiently communicate, they are not sufficient per se. Yuan stated that:

> It is crucial to realize that the College English course is not only a language course offering basic linguistic knowledge as well as pragmatic knowledge, but also a capacity enhancement course assisting students to broaden their horizons and learn about different cultures from all over the world. A well-designed College English course can efficiently guarantee steady progress in English proficiency throughout students' learning processes. When designing College English courses, it is essential to consider the development of students' linguistic and pragmatic capacity as well as their cultural capacity, which can help students achieve a solid foundation in the English language while enhancing their ability to use English appropriately and proficiently (2012, p. 258).

In this article, ESP will be used as a suggestion to teach communication skills to business undergraduate students. Contemporary labour market requires undergraduates to be orally proficient not only in their mother tongue, but also in English.

To be defined as a good communicator one has to be able to convey his ideas in a plethora of settings and to be able to adapt to each environment, situation and level of formality. For instance, the differences existent when talking in an academic or professional setting or in a more relaxed ambient such as a bar need to be considered. Oral communication can take many forms, ranging from informal conversation that occurs spontaneously and, in most cases, for which the content cannot be planned, to participation in meetings, which occurs in a structured environment, usually with a set agenda (Rahman & Mojibur M., 2010).

Although ESP is becoming increasingly known, it is easy to perceive that many teachers know little about this approach. ESP is generally employed in mini courses and workshops, when it could be, and should be, integrated directly in the syllabus as an efficient way to teach specific areas of the English language and, in the case of this study, Business Management.

5.1. ESP for business management

Communicative competence is essential to any human being, but specially paramount to business professionals. About 70% of an active human being's life, and a higher proportion (about 90 percent) of a typical manager's time, are spent communicating (Luthans, 1973, p. 234). The importance of being able to communicate effectively does not seem to be diminishing in recent times. Gail Golden, a consultant for an executive-coaching firm, stated that communicative skills are very important for promotions, professional credibility and ultimately to career success (Lubin, 2007).

The use of ELF in international business settings has been dominant. Such reality obliged professionals and students in the business areas to master the English language, specially its communicative facet. Nickerson (2005, p. 369) claims that there are two distinct trends on articles concerning ESP:

a) there has been a 'discursive turn', a change from the analysis of fragmented business texts to the analysis of communication in context and b) the focus shifted from language skills to language strategies, much as the present article which aims to help students successfully communicate in English independent of their mother tongue.

ESP is such a suitable approach to teach when dealing with business that some acronyms were created to refer to ESP specially when applied to business matters as previously argued by Bloor & Bloor (1986). The main ones are EBE, which stands for English for Business and Economics, and also EBP, which means English for Business Purposes.

There are many reasons as to why ESP is adequate to teach business professionals. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen's (2007) interviewed business professionals and found out that in the shared business context it was not necessary to master the language perfectly, but mastering the business-related issues was enough basis for communicative success.

Furthermore, English interactions in business settings usually happen among non-native speakers of English, consequently it is not vital that the interlocutors be fluent or grammatically and idiomatically correct. What is a major concern to business professionals is to be business competent and to have knowledge of business communication.

Taking all the previous information into account, teaching English for business purposes should be planned in such a way as to incorporate as much business knowledge and awareness of the business context as possible (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). In practice, it means that cases are an effective method to bring the real world into the classroom; also, it seems that teaching strategies of effective business communication, whose ultimate aim is always the desired response, work well for business professionals too.

Regarding learners' evaluation, it is important to stress that as strategies are context-bound, neither business nor lingua franca communication respect rigid norms. What is valuable to the business professional, and thereupon to the student of Business English, is to be flexible enough to have an appropriate response to each situation or scenario presented. The ultimate aim of all student work should always be its ability to do the particular job required in the particular assignment (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2007).

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the bibliographical research conducted to write article, we can state that the English language is currently central to business professionals. It has been so hegemonically stablished that it is the preferred language within most companies, even between non-native speakers of English who share a mother tongue. Most companies conduct all their dealings in English and by virtue of this, professionals must be fully prepared to embrace it.

However, most companies who have implemented English courses for employees are not satisfied with the results. They argue that although some employees are proficient users of English, they have not been specifically trained aiming business relations. Our focus is to provide a theoretical framework that could be used to develop an English course for business professionals, ideally solving the aforementioned companies' dissatisfaction.

Ergo, our assertiveness to adopt ESP in language courses designed to address specific goals within language learning.

To be qualified in English, it is not enough to know grammar, vocabulary and lexical structures. It is renowned the need to be pragmatically aware. Pragmatics deals with a wide range of both verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication that may harm or enhance communication if appropriately employed.

Cross-cultural awareness is a valid preemptive skill to prevent misunderstandings and confusion when dealing with different cultures. Avoiding a clash between cultures might be the key to achieve a business goal or to convey an adequate message in a meeting. By not being culturally aware, a speaker may be unintentionally labeled as disrespectful or socially inappropriate, damaging business relations and possibly tarnishing his professional career.

Due to time and bureaucratic constrains, we have not created any practical material that could be used in Business English courses. But we welcome further research and would be pleased if this article is taken as reference to design such material, as it has outlined a theoretical framework of cultural and pragmatic-related issues as a way to elucidate the importance of those aspects in Business English teaching contexts.

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