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The Most Common Problems in terms of Foreign Business Language Learning Regarding the Following Fields of Studies: Economics, Logistics, Administration and National Security

1. Introduction

The following paper focuses on the most common problems occurring in terms of a foreign business language learning and teaching. For years I have been teaching business languages and at the same time observing the most common problems that tend to occur in terms of the above-mentioned process. These obstacles will be described here at the example of four fields of BA studies: economics, logistics, administration and national security concerning Jan Amos Komensky University of Applied Sciences in Leszno.

Learning a foreign business language is usually a very challenging task. Taking into consideration the fact that there is only one goal: to learn it at a very satisfying level which will enable a person to write and converse without any trouble. Improving the so called general language skills requires a wide range of knowledge when it comes to a language itself – knowing grammar rules, comprehending listening exercises, being able to write a short message or a longer text. Finally, having no barriers when it comes to speaking. The very last aspect is usually the most troublesome one, but luckily there are many possible ways to work on students' conversational skills. When we think about learning a general or a business foreign language, the second option is definitely considered as more complex. It demands students' full engagement due to the fact that it is not only a language – it is also a very specific business knowledge that should be considered as a significant background while focusing on a foreign business language (Mann/ Kiaer/ Cakir 2022: 85). From my experience as university lecturer I can see that this very demanding aspect causes a lot of problems to many students. Another significant obstacle seems to be a situation in which a person has a good (or sometimes even a very good) business language knowledge, but when it comes to speaking, the student experiences a huge psychological barrier. In fact, he or she has a feeling of not being able to say anything and always refuses to speak or says quietly just a few words to get rid of a teacher's question as soon as possible. The above-described situation is not very bad in comparison to another quite common one in which a student has a very

low self-esteem – not only when it comes to language skills, but generally towards life. Such people do not feel convenient in any situation due to the fact that they experience a constant lack of something that can be hardly defined. This article will analyze the three most common problems as well as it will try to present some clues how to handle these very uneasy situations.

2. Insufficient background knowledge within a certain study field as an obstacle regarding foreign business language learning

It is extremely hard to find a student who is totally unaware of the importance of foreign business language learning nowadays. Various international companies have been present in Poland for a long time. They are visible in many different branches and offer a wide range of attractive positions. To get a well-paid job does not only require university degree and internship, but also the ability to communicate in a foreign language. What I mean here is not strictly connected with uncomplicated tasks such as welcoming guests from abroad or using some small talk at an integration company party. The insufficient level of language skills as well as lack of knowledge of a different country may lead to unnecessary misunderstandings (Martin/Chaney: 2012: ix, Moore 1998: 1, Sabath 1993: 7). Not to mention a total negotiation disaster. On the other hand, an employee skilled in a foreign business language might become a very significant team member as well as a valuable part of negotiations in terms of international business meetings (Thomas 2007: 56). Today's working life has become a global village with a variety of international connections that enable Polish people to work for a foreign corporation in Poland or abroad (Lüsebrink 2005: 7). There is also another option that has become very popular in the time of COVID-19 pandemic – online work. Many companies continue to work this way up to now and their employees enjoy the possibility of visiting the office on certain days while working from home on the others. Some branches – especially those connected with IT – do not see any problems if their employees prefer to stay at home all the time. This option opens a brand new perspective for many young Polish people. They may get a very attractive job abroad and at the same time stay in their homeland surrounded by family members, friends and places that are already familiar to them. It seems to be a very good option for people who do not enjoy any big changes in their life (Kumar 2015: 6).

For the above-mentioned reasons it would be quite difficult to imagine that students of economics, logistics, administration or national security are unable to speak at least one foreign language. Taking into consideration study programs at Polish universities, at least one foreign language is usually offered there. When it comes to students of Jan Amos Komensky University of Applied Sciences in Leszno, two following languages are taught – English and German.

Coming back to an insufficient background knowledge as an obstacle regarding foreign business language, one needs to state that many first year students start their studies with great enthusiasm, because they can already communicate within the

scope of a certain language. Their language level is mostly between B1 and B2 which means that some written forms like e-mails or essays are easy to be handled. They have no problems in terms of listening exercises and their knowledge of grammar rules is usually quite satisfying. Various conversations, discussions and negotiations are usually not troublesome. Quite the opposite – the students tend to like taking part in them. The problems begin once some specific business knowledge connected with economics, logistics, administration or national security starts to occur more and more often. A lecturer needs to stress many times that the above-mentioned stuff has to be learnt regularly. If it does not happen, a very sad thing follows – a student that was very talkative at the beginning, suddenly remains quiet. He or she keeps silent because of a simple fact – losing the thread. It is a process that shows a previously confident student becoming fully lost. So what can be done to prevent such a situation? Well, as already mentioned, a lecturer has to repeat over and over again the importance of a regular work regarding learning significant background knowledge specific for a certain study field (Dul/ Hak 2008: 3). On the other hand, a teacher may say it a hundred times and still there will be no student's reaction to it. Therefore, it has to be emphasized that regular learning of knowledge connected with economics, logistics, administration or national security is first and foremost a responsibility of a student. His or her attitude towards this matter shows a kind of maturity or its lack. Sometimes it is clear that certain students are simply lazy – they hope to somehow go through the term without acquiring the specific business knowledge. In this case there is not much that can be done to help them from the lecturer's perspective. If someone is not eager to do something, then there is no power to push the person into it. It is really sad to look at it from the point of view of a lecturer, but a teacher is neither a master nor a ruler who can push an adult person to do it.

On the other hand, there are students who would like to work regularly, but at the same time they have no idea how to manage it (Swanborn 2010: 13). This group usually claims to have huge problems with time management as well as work organization. They also stress the fact that the problem is not only strictly combined with foreign business language learning, but also with some other everyday tasks in general. Being a first year student is a very challenging matter – it means acquiring a very specific knowledge in form of many different lectures. Some subjects have a wide range of knowledge that has to be learnt. At this point it is visible that some students find it extremely hard to differentiate what to learn first, what is more and what is less important, etc. They are unable neither to think selectively nor to set priorities. However, in contrast to the previously mentioned lazy group of students, this one is willing to listen for some piece of advice concerning their time management and work organization. From my experience a little steps method is usually the best solution in this case. It concerns everyday regular work with relatively small time required. What it means is that I advise my students to spend half an hour of learning a foreign business language every day. It would be good if they did it at the same time every single day, because it is quite an easy way to create a habit. The mentioned thirty minutes is divided into two parts – the first fifteen minutes should be spent at reading some business background stuff, and the remaining time should be devoted

to learning new vocabulary by heart. At the end of the second phase a vocabulary from the previous day needs to be reviewed. I always advise students to start working like this for a few days. After this time they will be able to claim if half an hour a day is enough for them or not. Sometimes an extension up to forty or even fifty minutes a day is needed. In other cases twenty five minutes seems to be satisfying. We need to emphasize the fact that it is a very individual issue – some students learn faster, and some do it slower. Actually, it does not matter as long as they are willing to devote themselves to a regular work.

3. Speaking blockade within a certain study field as an obstacle regarding foreign business language learning

As previously mentioned, there is a certain group of students that are always well-prepared for the class. Their vocabulary as well as their grammar rules knowledge is impressive. They are usually also good at writing and listening. The one and only aspect that is wished to be instantaneously avoided by them is speaking. While asked by the lecturer, they give the shortest and the most silent answer. These students tend to dislike speaking – not to mention public speaking. In this case the teacher's role is very important – he or she may encourage such young people to open up to conversations in a foreign language. But how can it be done? Well, taking into consideration the fact that a fear of speaking tends to be connected with public speaking it is best to create such conditions in which students feel not being watched over or listened to by the whole group, so they can regard themselves as almost anonymous. There is one smart teaching method enabling the above-mentioned conditions – case study. It concerns foreign language learning that usually concentrates on the analysis of a specific social or business issue (Baron/McNeal 2019: 183). When we talk about a foreign business language, a case study may be understood as searching for solutions to potential issues or disputes within a wide range of various economic aspects (Andrews 2021: 15). Case studies are strictly connected with a certain problem. Therefore, they motivate students to find answer to some potential disputes by asking three basic questions: what? why? how? (Farquhar 2012: 6). There is a given business problem and each student represents a different attitude towards it. They collect some arguments for their side as well as discuss and negotiate some conditions with each other (Lutzker 2022: 287). Then it comes to case study topics, there is a great variety of them that can be divided into so called general ones and more specific ones. The first group can be used while working with all fields of studies taught by me – economics, logistics, administration and national security. These case studies concern for instance a job interview (with a previously written CV by each student) or asking for a higher salary. The more specific ones focus only on issues characteristic for a certain field of studies. For example, a case study regarding supply chain can be used with logistics students. On the other hand, reporting a crime or an assault is characteristic for national security students, etc. To every case study there has

to be given a certain preparation. That means giving students necessary vocabulary as well as specific background knowledge in advance (Tsui 2003: 2). Worth mentioning is also international relations analysis that enables students to understand a variety of intercultural differences among nations (G. Hofstede/G.J. Hofstede/Minkov 2010: 4). A knowledge regarding business etiquette in various countries may as well be significant while conducting negotiations within the scope of an international business area (Bolten 2007: 22, Gibson-Odgers 2008: 147). For this reason, it is recommended for the teacher to present the students a plenty of significant business etiquette rules.

As lecturers we cannot forget the fact that the so called specific knowledge is usually a completely new territory for each new students' group. It takes a lot of empathy not to consider it as obvious to everyone. On the contrary, we should remember that some aspects or even everything is totally new for the group. It takes a lot of patience as well a lot of explanation, but it is definitely worth doing. Observing the way that shy students develop their speaking skills seems to be the best prize for a teacher.

At this point, a significant aspect has to be mentioned. After my students have collected some arguments for their discussion, they start to speak in pairs. The important thing is that they all conduct discussions at the same time. It means quite a noisy classroom with all students working in pairs at the same time. The noise in the background is usually very convenient for them – they feel almost anonymous because only one person is listening to them as well as negotiating with them. Step by step, it can be seen how well their speaking skills develop. The shyness suddenly evaporates. It is always a great pleasure to observe such an evolution.

Here comes an example of a case study:

- 1) The subject of case study: business negotiations
- 2) The field of studies: economics
- 3) A task for student A:

You have been working as a sales representative for an international automotive company for four years. In your opinion you have a great results and therefore deserve a higher salary and some additional perks such as a new company car and ... (be creative and think of three more perks). You meet with your supervisor to negotiate some better conditions. Do not forget to mention that during the four years of working in the company there was only one pay rise.

- 4) A task for student B:

You are student's A supervisor. You think that student A is a good employee, but not necessarily as good as he/she claims. You are eager to give him/her some higher salary, but not as high as he/she wishes to have. On the other hand, you do not think that this employee deserves any great perks.

The above-presented example was made up by the author of this paper. A lecturer can come up with variety of case studies or use the ready ones. Some useful inspirations for a self-made case study can be found for instance in the following publications (the same books may also be used as a great source of business vocabulary for students):

- 1) Magdalena Filak and Filip Radej “Angielski w tłumaczeniach. Business – praktyczny kurs mówienia językiem biznesu” (English in translations. Business – a practical course in speaking the business language);
- 2) Katarzyna Remlein “Niemiecki w tłumaczeniach. Sytuacje” (German in Translations. Situations);
- 3) Justyna Plizga “Niemiecki w tłumaczeniach. Business – praktyczny kurs mówienia językiem biznesu” (German in Translations. Business – a practical course of speaking a business language).

Another important matter has to be described here – the teacher’s role. When the case study business conversations take place, it is best when a lecturer comes from one table to another (Lutzker 2022: 286). He or she listens to discussions, helps if help is needed as well as notices and appreciates speaking skills development. Some additional words and phrases not included in the vocabulary list related to a given topic might be also suggested by the lecturer. One significant aspect cannot be forgotten – the teacher is not considered to be here in the foreground. He or she is a kind and helpful advisor, but never plays the so called main role (ibid.).

As we can see, the problem of the speaking barrier can be solved by means of the case study method. It cannot be stated that this method is the best existing one, but within the scope of my experience as teacher, this method works the best so far. It seems to be the fastest way of improving speaking skills and not focusing too much on the overwhelming shyness.

4. Low self-esteem within a certain study field as an obstacle regarding foreign business language learning

The following part of the paper aims to focus on low self-esteem as a problem in terms of foreign business learning. Generally, students with low self-esteem are not difficult to be found in the crowd. An experienced lecturer notices them after just a few classes. In contradiction to the two above-mentioned obstacles, this one is not always connected with a student’s language level. Language skills do not seem a big issue here – the biggest problem are students themselves. It is all about their mental barriers that do not enable them to open up for foreign language learning and for other aspects of life as well. Literally, they tend to lack enthusiasm, energy and power, feel and look depressive or have a constant negative attitude to teacher’s tasks. When they talk about themselves or their future plans, there is usually a worst case scenario taken into consideration. Even if a lecturer or other students try to convince them to a more positive viewpoint, they show a strong tendency regarding protecting their own projections (Wapnick 2014: 9). Surrounded by the so called life lethargy, they seem to build a glass wall around themselves that is not possible to be broken by anyone. Such students often have a dull face expression, and their body language as well as a variety of gestures present this attitude (Renard 2004: 86).

The question is – can anything be done here to help them? Well, yes and no. First and foremost, it is clear that the problem is wider than foreign business language learning. Secondly, as teachers we are not students' psychologists or psychiatrists. It is not our task to motivate them to change their attitude, personality or points of view. Doing that would mean going far too far. Every human being has right to choose for himself or herself. Even if they more or less consciously decide for an uninterrupted unhappiness, it should be respected. As Deepak Chopra explains: "Everyone has heard the expression *What you sow is what you reap*. If we want to create happiness in our lives, we must learn to sow the seeds of happiness" (Chopra 2007: 39). Well, if this group of students has not learnt yet how to be more glad or satisfied in their lives, it means that they might need some more time for this particular lesson (Sharma 2014: 120).

Taking into consideration this very uneasy situation, there is one thing that a lecturer can do – to build in a classroom an atmosphere of kindness and compassion. I am not talking about being kind and compassionate only towards the so called depressive students. On the contrary, it is about treating all students in this way. When the atmosphere is pleasant and the teacher is helpful, the low self-esteem students may notice a completely different way of behaving. They might attempt to use it for themselves or totally ignore it: "People who have hard time getting out of bed in the morning to go to a job they hate, who find it difficult to become engaged in their professional activities, who feel emotionally *dead* after a day in the office, need to pay attention to those feelings. These are important signals that there must be a way to get more fulfillment in their lives" (Chopra 2005: 145). The above-presented quotation might not only concern hard-working adults, but also students, teenagers or even children. The dullness of life may occur at every stage of life (*ibid.*).

When it comes to students' low self-esteem, it is very important for a teacher to completely reject the old-fashioned teaching style in which he or she is treated as a master and a ruler. At the same time, it means that the lecturer is always right. Such an attitude leaves no space for a constructive discussion and a "healthy" development of foreign business language skills. As teachers we need to comprehend the fact that students are not our audience that obediently listens to everything we need to share. For this reason, we cannot forget our role of a kind and professional helper who at the same time remains a respected professional. It is all about not creating too big and unnecessary distance between the lecturer and the students (Chopra 2013: 68).

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to present the most common problems in terms of foreign business language learning regarding the following fields of studies: economics, logistics, administration and national security. The author of the article focused on three matters that -according to her experience – occur most often: insufficient background

knowledge in terms of a certain study field, speaking barrier due to shyness and low self-esteem concerning not only foreign business language learning, but also a so called general attitude towards life. The above-mentioned obstacles have been described as well as some possible ways of solving them have been suggested.

When it comes to insufficient background knowledge, it is a teacher's task to explain it and provide students with necessary materials or sources. On the other hand, it is also students' responsibility to analyze the given stuff and to learn some new vocabulary.

The overwhelming speaking barriers seem to be very hard to overcome. The author talks here about young people whose language level is often good – they know grammar rules, find it not difficult to write or listen in a foreign language, but somehow a fear of speaking occurs. Not to mention public speaking that scares them a lot. The author focuses here on case studies as a prospective problem solution. The role of the case study method is to encourage students to speak. From my experience, it really works taking into consideration the fact that students work in pairs – everyone deals with conducting negotiations which create a certain level of noise in a classroom. They feel comfortable because there are only two people listening to them – their conversation partner and their teacher.

A low self-esteem seems to be the most difficult barrier in terms of foreign business language learning. As already mentioned, it concerns not only the studying of a language, but also many other spheres of life that cannot be handled by a lecturer such as bad mood, depression or lethargy. Due to the fact that a teacher is neither a psychologist nor a psychiatrist, his or her help is in this case very limited. The only thing that can be done is strictly connected with creating a good atmosphere in the classroom. It is about an attitude full of compassion and kindness. At the same time the lecturer remains a respected professional.

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Abstract

The following paper discusses the most common problems within the scope of foreign business language learning regarding the following fields of studies: economics, logistics, administration and national security. The author of the article concentrates on three issues that are usually the most troublesome: insufficient background knowledge when it comes to a certain study field, speaking barrier due to shyness and low self-esteem concerning not only foreign business language learning, but also a so called life lethargy and depressive attitude towards many different aspects. The above-mentioned problems are described with details. Moreover, some solutions are also suggested.

Keywords

problems regarding foreign language learning, case study, foreign business language teaching, insufficient knowledge, low self-esteem, ways of learning a language