

Global Village, Different Customs

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Abstract

Having worked with a variety of Management or Marketing students throughout the years, as well as with students from multinational companies that need Business English in their jobs, we have come to realize the importance that cultural diversity has for large organizations. It is therefore crucial to be aware of customs in different countries, despite living in a global village. Our observations have been confirmed by many textbooks of Business English that contain chapters or whole sections dedicated to the idea that acknowledging cultural differences together with having respect for somebody else’s culture can only benefit the businesses in question. While our company students have already learned that imperative when at work (through training or personal experience), our university students at Ovidius need to be taught awareness in advance to stand better chances of success in their future professions.

Key words: global, awareness, Business English, culture, diversity

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1. Introduction

Looking back to how we learned languages thirty or even twenty years ago, there is a huge discrepancy in comparison to today’s learning process. Methods and means of teaching were scarce in the past, topics were not very appealing to students. A lot of progress has been made since then which transformed ESL learners into global citizens starting with their textbooks. Now we prepare students for their journey worldwide as professionals who are aware of cultural differences and who are ready to work in diverse teams. This new approach has taken over not only in higher education, but also in teaching English at a high school level, even at an elementary school level. Our aim, though, is to analyze the matter, the perception of globalization, the way we pass it on to learners, from a university student level’s perspective. In order to achieve that, we have to consider some of the definitions and explanations available for the concept of globalization. May we add that we are solely going to focus on the positive aspects of globalization as the debates around it have triggered many negative reactions, too.

2. Theoretical background

Thus, globalization is especially benefic for developing countries because it is a catalyst for progress, being connected to a higher standard of living, an increased life expectancy span and better health care. Such a powerful process will surely put a stop to global inequality, creating more opportunities for all. Shared knowledge can only lead to equal chances which also leads to a more just society with a wider range of human resources.

There are countless advantages to globalization amongst which global knowledge, mutual support, sharing values, acceptance, collaboration, communications in different aspects of business and daily challenges. Education is undoubtedly a human right. Having access to education creates social inclusion, braking barriers such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion.

Teaching is linked to globalization as many sectors of our societies grow. In Romania, things are not that advanced in the direction of transforming our country into an obvious global village since migration has not yet soared (in big cities it has started already, still at a micro scale), but it might happen in the following years as our country becomes more attractive to people from other countries. Nevertheless, it is imperative to raise awareness and to prepare citizens for accepting different cultures and customs as we all want to live in peace and harmony. Each year, more and more companies are opening subsidiaries in Romania and so, future employees have to deal with different cultures, with different work styles and with different demands. These bring along many employment opportunities which equal wealth. In this context, education needs to constantly adapt employment market as new jobs and positions appear all the time many of which require accepting differences in culture thus in mentalities.

Current students who are to become future employees have to develop hard skills (knowledge related to their profession), but most importantly they need to have soft skills (to be able to communicate and work with people from everywhere). Our personal view on this is that we had better prevent lack of communication by teaching people while in school how to deal with differences in terms of culture, acceptance, attitudes. Our students are going to compete in a global world thus they need to acquire the necessary skills to manage the requirements of global industries. They might have managers from Asia or from the USA, they might need to work with colleagues from France or from Saudi Arabia. They need to be ready and competitive and our education system has to provide them with learning opportunities of this sort. Collaboration, problem solving, global awareness fall into the category of soft skills and are mandatory for 21st century graduates, prepared to respond to industries' requirements.

The international labour market is constantly expanding which makes competition tougher than ever, at a global scale. Our schools are responsible for our students' success:

In the current globalized environment, schools must prepare students to succeed at an international level through an infusion of 21st century skills, while also enlightening students so that they can not only compete, but also collaborate at an international level (Howard, 2013, p. 6)

Competition stands essential, but, more importantly, collaboration and team work are the keys to long-term success.

All the above aspects are not new, nor globalization is. In fact, people have always tried to find better chances in life and moved to different areas, learning to exist in an alien culture to them. The discussions and the awareness about it are new, more visible after the 2nd World War. It has become more obvious than ever that education needs to align with international enquiries as summarized by Sadeh Bakhtiari: to develop the learner's cognitive strategies for self-monitoring of progress, "to foster the learner's ability for high-order thinking skills"(Bakhtiari, 2006, p.13). In such an environment, the teacher holds a determining role, too, as he needs to set an example of tolerance, openness, a global and friendly approach of the textbook contents, a deep understanding of cultural differences.

Furthermore, entire systems are forced to change and consequently embrace diversity: "schools are to adequately prepare pupils for a life-long reality of problem-solving, knowledge adaptation and constant adjustment to changes." (Bakhtiari, 2006, p. 9) Romania is no exception to that, while as far as teaching English as a foreign language is concerned, immense steps farther have been made in the direction of the unification of curriculum, of teaching reforms, of spreading awareness, of opening boundaries because: "Education has been recognized as the basic means of promoting the skills of globalization." (Bakhtiari, 2006, p.6) Education must also be seen as a firm response to global injustice that strives with poverty and inequality.

3. Research methodology

Our personal journey of learning starts at home, in our families and continues at school. When learners are very young, they do not acknowledge abstract concepts such as values, customs and traditions, but they can definitely be taught tolerance, acceptance, kindness by setting a good example. As they grow older, they start to become aware of cultural diversity and higher-education institutions can and should provide such learning opportunities.

As higher education is an investment in human progress and prosperity, during fast social and economic change, it is especially important that universities and other institutions consider their contribution to society from a broad long-term perspective.(Chaudhary, 2016, p.2)

The academic word has developed strong connections through scholarships, Erasmus mobilities, conferences, charity events and many more, thus university students can experience cultural diversity while studying, considering future job opportunities or apprenticeship programmes away from home or at multinational companies.

Higher-education entities ought to have a business-like approach to education which translates to not producing generic college graduates, but specific ones, ready to take on a specific job straight away. This specific job does not only require hard skills, but soft skills as well, as mentioned before. So, a priority in higher-education would be to offer students an insight into their prospective working life, to get prepared for what is going to happen after graduation which includes working across cultures, performing in mixed teams, for corporations that incorporate diverse cultures and working styles: “globalization equates to cultural awareness.....we cannot exist in isolation, we are all connected.”(Howard, 2013, p.99)

Making prospects further on, our students might need to travel on business or to welcome foreign business visitors and for such events, cultural awareness is essential as they do not want to offend people from different countries or to be responsible for awkward or embarrassing situations because being a global citizen also involves resilience, curiosity and an open mind for cultural diversity.

4. Findings

For all of the above, we have selected some sample activities from an English textbook for Business English that we have been using with both our corporate students that want to improve their language skills and with 2nd year of study university students, getting a degree in Marketing or in Management. The teaching support in question, *Business Result. Intermediate. Student’s Book (second edition)*, was edited by Oxford University Press in 2016, offering a wide range of activities, from reading comprehension to listening and grammar, suitable for business people performing in various domains and industries. Our focus for this paper is on chapter 6 having the topic of *Guests and visitors* which basically points to business visitors who might be colleagues from abroad, from other subsidiaries or possible business partners that we really want to make an excellent impression on. All language activities comprised in the above mentioned chapter are meant to raise awareness in the respect of cultural diversity while cultivating mutual consideration and understanding. It starts off with speaking as learners need to share their experience as business travelers or to imagine what they would do if they had guests from other countries: “What do you think of the hospitality you receive when you travel for work?” (Hughes et al, 2017a, p.36). Raising such a question that contains the concept of welcoming foreign visitors or co-workers pushes the learner to think of what the word means in his country or different other countries and to supply examples. In this manner, university students or multinational students can realize the disparities between cultures and, at the same time, observe the similarities.

Moreover, a similar example of an activity created to raise the question of diversity in our global village is that on page 38 in a section called *Business communication skills* and it describes the way somebody welcomes a business partner to their premises through a short dialogue: “Jacinta Ross works for HYB Electronics. She meets Marvin Bernstein at reception. He is visiting the company for the day. Listen to their conversation and complete the agenda for Marvin’s visit” (Hughes et al, 2017a, p. 38). By simply looking at these people’s names, learners can notice that they come from different countries where customs might be different so it is crucial that mutual respect and attention is ensured. This type of exercise creates a scenario for learners to associate their own experience with while helping them achieve success in business.

Following the same topic and connecting it with skills such as listening, grammar or speaking, in another section of the same chapter, called *Practically speaking*, learners are advised on how to address business partners. Next to a picture that shows a man from the Middle East shaking hands with a man from Asia, the below practice for communicative purposes is provided:

“Look at this list of situations with different people. In your country, how would you normally address these people? Using their first name, last name, title and last name or something else?”

- A visitor arriving at your company for the first time.
- Your work colleagues.
- Offering help to someone that looks lost.
- You start making conversation with someone at a conference.
- At a meeting with the managing director of your company.
- Meeting your mother-in-law for the first time. (Hughes et al, 2017a, p.41)

A student preparing to enter the world of international business or someone who is already working in such a field of activity can only benefit from a practice of this sort. Learners have to think of specific contexts, to give arguments based on traditions and customs and, ultimately, they would come to realize that it might be a global village that we live in, but every “house” has its own customs.

The journey of acknowledging cultural diversity continues in the same volume, in the aforementioned chapter, in a section entitled *Talking point* where cultural expectations are discussed and analyzed. One of the exercises combines listening comprehension with cultural awareness as noted in the task: “Listen to a part of a radio programme about cultural differences. Which ideas in the info graphic do they talk about? In which parts of the world should you expect them?” (Hughes et al, 2017, p.43) The info graph points to some cultural habits across the world counting expectations such as free WiFi at hotels for business travelers, staff speaking different languages, tv programmes from different countries, international adapter socket, hotel information translated into different languages, room facilities like a bowl of fruit, slippers or tea and coffee making facilities.

Keeping to the topic of having business partners as guests from abroad, the next task is aimed at a group of ESL learners. They need to debate on some situations which encourage them not only to expand their speaking skills, but also their soft skills that is to say critical thinking, acceptance, cooperation:

“Work in groups. Imagine you have a group of foreign visitors coming to your company for a week. Each day they will have some free time after work and they would like to learn more about your country and its culture. Discuss and plan a schedule for the week from Monday to Friday. Your schedule should include some or all of the following aspects: eating out and trying different dishes, visiting places of cultural importance, watching traditional theatre or festivals, going shopping in local markets” (Hughes et al, 2017a, p.43)

This task can easily be converted into a project for evaluating a group of students on cultural awareness and speaking skills. The teacher can play some clips selected from the Internet that may show similar schedules for foreign visitors to a country or he might ask learners to read and research on it.

In support of the idea that Oxford textbooks are not accidents in raising the issue of cultural awareness, but they only follow a normal trend in education, we have selected other sample activities from another publishing house. The textbook is for the same level of English, B1 according to CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and it stands amongst the most appreciated Business English textbooks for international learners- *Market Leader 3rd Edition Intermediate Course Book*, printed at Pearson FT-Longman in 2019. We have experimented with this course book, as well, when instructing both our corporate students at International House Bucharest, a language school that provides language courses for corporations, and our university students at Ovidius University of Constanta.

Our first selected sample is taken from a section named *Working across cultures. International meetings*, meant to support speaking:

Think about the last three meetings you attended (not necessarily business meetings, e.g. residents' meetings or sports club meetings) and answer these questions. 1 What was the purpose of each meeting? 2 What size were they? 3 Were they formal or informal? 4 Were they successful or not? Why? (Cotton et al, 2019, p.60)

Immediately after the above speaking practice, learners are offered a piece of vocabulary practice that is sure to boost their communicative abilities.

Another example that falls under the same category of spreading awareness in the direction of cultural differences and globalization is the following listening practice:

“Listen again. Are the following true (T) or false (F), according to the expert? 1.Punctuality is important in all cultures. 2. In a hierarchical culture, people feel able to express disapproval of the ideas of a superior. 3. Clear meeting aims are a priority in most cultures. 4. The main purpose of

meetings is to take decisions. 5 It is easy to misinterpret body language in meetings (Cotton et al, 2019, p.60)

Our collection of samples can stretch to a considerable volume. Yet, we believe that the examples provided so far are relevant enough for our thesis which states that education in general and ESL language practices, in particular, have to adapt to the times, to raise awareness towards contemporary issues, to discuss and analyze globalization for our students to become more competitive, more prepared to work in an international market.

5. Conclusions

Encyclopedia Britannica issues a short, but comprehensive definition of globalization: “integration of the world’s economies, politics, and cultures” (Encyclopedia Britannica, Article “Globalization”). These three sections are strongly connected, consequently, in order to prosper economically or to warrant peace and stability into a region, one has to consider cultural values.

In his book, *Why Global Justice Matters*, Chris Armstrong argues that there are still plenty of requirements to fulfill for our world to become equal, despite all advancements that have been made. The concept that is at the forefront of his debate is *global justice* which is linked to “how we should live together on our amazing but nevertheless limited planet, what we owe to one another, and how progress towards a more just world can be achieved” (Armstrong, 2019, p. viii) Even though, on the surface, it is the developing countries that are benefiting from being open to other cultures, developed countries have to realize the advantages of globalization, too: “global justice must be a partnership between people in rich and poor countries” (Armstrong, 2019, p.ix) In the field of education, that partnership translates to reform, projects and involvement from both sides such as the one supported by the former USA president, George W. Bush, *No Child Left Behind*, as given example by the aforementioned author in the same book.

Following the same logic, in the visible support of equity, equal opportunities and fruitful collaboration, the authors of the textbooks that we have extracted activities from and have continuously used during our seminars and classes, have the same aspirations as all researchers pleading for a more just world, a world where differences are accepted and celebrated.

In *Introduction of Teacher’s Book for Business Result*, the authors describe their work as follows: “Who is Business Result Second Edition for? Business Result 2nd Edition is a comprehensive multi-level course in business English suitable for a wide range of learners. The main emphasis is on enabling your students, helping them to communicate more effectively in their working lives (Hughes et al, 2017b, p.4).

The support of globalization and its positive effects becomes more obvious in the next excerpt found in the *Introduction*, too:

“What approach does Business Result Second Edition take? Business Result Second Edition helps students communicate in English in real-life work situations. The priority at all times is on enabling them to do so more effectively and with confidence. The target language in each unit has been carefully selected to ensure that students will be equipped with genuinely useful, transferable language that they can take out of the classroom and use immediately in the workplace.

The course recognizes that, with so many businesses now being staffed by people of different nationalities, there is an increasing trend towards using English as the language of internal communication in many organizations “(Hughes et al, 2017b, p.4-5)

It is then no surprise that the same approach is embraced by authors of business English at a different printing house as the below selecting from *Market Leader 3rd Edition, Teacher’s Resource Book* proves:

“In addition to new authentic reading texts and listening material, the Third Edition features a number of exciting new resources: specially filmed interviews with business practitioners for each unit, case study commentaries on DVD-ROM, with expert views on each case, working across cultures-regular input and tasks to develop students’ intercultural awareness and skills” (Mascull, 2010, p.4)

Having clarified that all these new and updated textbooks that we use are targeting globalization in a good sense, we have to make notice of our students’ opinions and reactions towards all the material made accessible to them. We did not enquire a written feedback from our learners which

does not mean that their oral feedback that we requested after each three units covered was less valuable. Both categories that were mentioned by us, company students enrolled with International House Bucharest and Ovidius University students of Marketing and Management, had positive comments when asked to ratify the textbooks and the perspective they provide on the global world of business. In general, they said they would enjoy pleasant activities related cultural differences, that they are now more aware of cultural diversity and that they feel they can work better and are better prepared to perform in an international work environment. Furthermore, a vast majority of those interviewed by us, firmly stated they would recommend the textbooks to other learners of same interests. Upon the completion of the course, many of them reported having found better job opportunities due to their new wider horizon related to globalization and global matters.

We cannot but declare our satisfaction upon reaching such goals as helping learners become more aware of the global village we all live in and of different customs that have to be considered and, eventually, preserved. We can only express our gratitude to the learners in question and to the authors of the textbooks mentioned that made it possible for us, as educators, to keep it with the times, to support progress and better lives for all, despite nationality, ethnicity, religion.

6. References

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