The Intercultural Dimension and BELF in the English Course Curriculum of Business Schools: Proposal for an Integrated Model

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Abstract

For a series of historical, economic and geographic reasons, English is considered the language of communication in the business field (cf. Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). Since the last industrial revolution, the models of reference have been the British and American ones, and the hegemony of these two countries has affected also the field of higher education (cf. Phillipson, 2003; Altbach & Knight, 2007) and business schools in particular have followed American standards. Although the economic paradigm may start to slowly shift because of the new challenges represented, for example, by the Asian markets, English is still the main language used in academia and in business (cf. Graddol, 2006; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). Language use is not a point of discussion in documents concerning the internationalisation of business schools, where it seems to be implicit that English is the medium of instruction, also in countries where English is not the national language.

However, merely offering English-taught programmes is not sufficient for any institution that wishes to provide students with an encompassing education which can equip them with the tools to succeed in an increasing globalised, multilingual and multicultural world (cf. Jones, 2013; Bieger, 2011). To this end, from a linguistic and socio-cultural perspective, two main aspects should be more promoted and integrated across the curriculum: awareness of language and cultural features embedded in both academic disciplines and in their models of instructions. Another factor to be considered is that, in the world of work, the kind of English used during the majority of business interactions belongs to the field of BELF - Business English as a Lingua Franca (cf. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007). The integration of a linguistic and of an intercultural dimension which takes into account the principles of

BELF, may help to improve the students and staff's intercultural and communicative skills in the context of business education.

With this purpose, a model of Business Intercultural Communicative Competence (BICC) is proposed, adapted from Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's model (2011), and inspired by Deardoff's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (2006). After a brief description of the BICC model, its possible pedagogical implications will be discussed, providing a series of suggestions for implementing its dimensions in the English course curriculum of business schools.

1. Introduction

In Europe, English is the most frequently used language of instruction for higher education programmes (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), also in non-Anglophone speaking countries; this growing trend has promoted the EMI phenomenon, a term which indicates that English is used as the Medium of Instruction in countries where it is not the official language (cf. Wilkinson, 2017). The introduction of courses delivered in vehicular English, called ETPs, English-Taught Programs (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014), is aimed at attracting international students and teachers, but also at preparing domestic students for an increasingly global and connected labour market (Knight, 2008), in which English is the lingua franca *par excellence*, both in the academic world (Coleman, 2006) and in the business world (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Through these measures, institutions wish to become more competitive on a global level, increasing their visibility and prestige and positioning themselves in the rankings that present judgment criteria such as the quality of teaching and services provided (cf. Wedlin, 2010).

The other field which has been significantly shaped by English is the economic one. In the nineteenth century, Britain was the world's leading industrial country, and its imperialism has spread the national language around the globe, while during the following century, the presence of English "was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower" (Crystal, 2003, p. 10). Nowadays, the changes brought by globalisation and technologies have extended the role

of English to all sectors of telecommunications, digital services and labour markets (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2008). The growth of globalisation of businesses worldwide has been too fast in comparison with the internationalisation of business schools, affecting the schools' capacity to prepare managers adequately for the global market (cf. Bieger, 2011). Traditional American models of reference for teaching and accreditation did not take into consideration the multiplicity and complexity of workplaces which are now more and more multicultural (cf. Kaplan, 2014; Friga et al., 2003). This has created a gap between the preparation given by business education programmes and the actual set of skills needed for graduates to succeed in tackling globalisation challenges (cf. Bradford et al., 2017).

2. Features of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca)

This section aims at giving an overview of some of the features of English used in the business field, starting from business discourse, to explain the concept of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca), in connection with the ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) paradigm. Subsequently, some of the strategies put into practice during ELF interactions will be compared with strategies used in intercultural communication to interact in multilingual environments. Business discourse has been defined as "all about how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations in order to get their work done" (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007, p. 3). The widespread use of English for business has become the object of both teaching and research. Moreover, as many researchers of English in business contexts are also practitioners in teaching (Nickerson, 2005), this field has been highly influenced by LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes). However, unlike these two types of research, business discourse is more interested in understanding how people communicate in organisational and corporate contexts, than in finding pedagogical approaches connected to it (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007). Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken have given an overview of the history of business discourse (2007, 2013), in which it is

shown how this field has steadily drawn from real business written and spoken productions, and how research has been influenced by disciplines such as discourse and conversation analysis, ethnography, pragmatics, genre theory and organisational communication.

In her review of the literature about business English, Nickerson (2005, p. 369) identified a shift from the analysis of isolated written texts or speech events, towards a more contextualised analysis of communicative genres, giving emphasis also to cultural factors. Another shift occurred when the focus of research moved from users' language skills to the language strategies which would make the communicative events successful, whether the users involved are native or non-native speakers of English.

Today, business communications occur more and more across borders, in multinational and multicultural contexts in which English is used as a lingua franca by first, second and foreign language speakers of English, sometimes in co-existence with one or more other languages (Nickerson, 2005, p. 377). In these communicative situations, the study of BELF – Business English as a Lingua Franca, has been relevant both for the field of international business communication and for ELF – English as a Lingua Franca (cf., for instance, Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken, 2007, 2013; Ilie, Nickerson & Planken, 2019; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011).

In Europe, two large research projects conducted by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, from 2000 to 2009, led to the definition of the term BELF (cf. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005). In their first project (2000-2002), which investigated in-house interactions between Finnish and Swedish professionals, the pragmatic use of English was determined by the need of "getting a job done in the domain of business" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013, p. 25), and by the target audience and its communication preferences. This characteristic is in line with the underpinning ELF paradigm, in which:

> The term "lingua franca" […] is understood in the strict sense of the word, i.e. an additionally acquired language system that serves as a means of communication between speakers of different first languages, or a language by means of which the

members of different speech communities can communicate with each other but which is not the native language of either – a language which has no native speakers. (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 146)

In BELF interactions, however, business professionals use English in the context of a shared culture within the international business community, which co-exists with the BELF speakers' individual cultural backgrounds (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). BELF does not present fixed norms or standard versions, but it is composed of different varieties which differ from the "standard" English (cf. Kankaanranta et al., 2015). BELF users regard "proficiency" as useful, but their concept of proficiency is "intertwined with their conceptualisation of business communication competence, business competence and business know-how overall" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010, p. 207). In fact, according to the studies conducted in BELF situations, users are more focused on: (a) clarity, directness and politeness, rather than linguistic accuracy, to communicate more effectively (cf. Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011); (b) the use of business terminology and domain-specific vocabulary rather than just general English (Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010); and (c) the development of a more relationally oriented discourse, aimed at building networks, which may ease relations and the transmission of information (cf. Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010).

Regarding language proficiency, research on ELF has helped to discover a different perspective which is not filtered by the cultural bias of native norm compliance (cf. Cogo & Dewey, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2000) and has made ELF a legitimate reference model (cf. Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009), though challenging to be defined in the multiplicity of the European contexts (cf. Seidlhofer et al., 2006). In the academic field, ELF studies (cf. Mauranen 2012, 2010) may contribute to counterbalance the tendency to refer to the Anglo-American model which leads to a high standardisation of teaching approaches, through the adherence to native English speakers' language norms.

Normally, as part of the process of acculturation into a community of speakers, the linguistic forms of usage are acquired together with the contextual conditions of their use (Seidlhofer, 2009, p. 199). In BELF contexts, the

community of users is constituted by members of the global business discourse (cf. Kankaanranta et al., 2015), whose characteristics should then be known and acquired:

> specialized business know-how and knowledge of business communication conventions contribute more to BELF competence and proficiency than native-like linguistic correctness. In relation to teaching business discourse for the international context, this implies that a BELF model is now perhaps more appropriate and relevant than the native speaker model, in determining what constitutes sufficient competence in BELF, what learning targets are relevant, and how proficiency should be assessed. (Ilie et al., 2019, p. 30)

2.1   The Link between BELF and Intercultural Skills

Nowadays, the majority of international business interactions occurs among speakers of different linguacultural backgrounds who use English as their medium for communication. Most research into English in international business contexts has opted for an uncritical approach, observing and analysing English as a neutral medium, preferring to not associate it with a particular dominant culture (Nickerson, 2005, p. 377). An implication could be that language is used as a tool, favouring a pragmatic use of the language, where clarity and fluency are more important than accuracy.

However, even though in BELF interactions English can be perceived as neutral to each party's mother tongues, data collected in a multinational context revealed that its use reflected the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the speakers (cf. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Although BELF is used as an internationally shared communication code, it is shaped and modified by the users' respective cultures (cf. Ilie et al., 2019). Therefore: "Doing good business presupposes sensitive insight into a different way of acting and speaking. What is therefore needed as a learning goal is a *lingua cultura* rather than a crude *lingua franca*" (Phillipson, 2003, p. 85-86).

Since language is not simply a tool, but is culturally rooted (cf. Crystal, 2003), cultural awareness has become ever more relevant in international business situations in which non-native speakers of English communicate with

others who can be both native or non-native speakers of English, and thus attribute different cultural connotations to the same concepts. Considering people's diverse linguacultural backgrounds, their communicative competence in lingua franca will be highly affected by their intercultural sensitivity, even more than in monolingual or bilingual contexts (cf. Mauranen 2006).

According to Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010), when both parties are familiar with the business context of their interactions, misunderstanding in communication rarely occurs. However, BELF communication may fail because of a mismatch in cultural discourse and strategies between the participants (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009, p. 182). Failure can be caused by lack of comprehensibility, or by cultural differences and stereotyped associations, which can happen as singular events on in combination (p. 182).

For example, in a study of internal meetings in a multinational organisation with representatives from over 30 countries, a survey found a series of communication issues, experienced by both non-native and native speakers of English (Rogerson-Revell, 2010). Through a discourse-based analysis of the meetings, it was discovered that the participants were displaying some interactive strategies to facilitate understanding (Rogerson-Revell, 2010, pp. 442, 444, 446, 449): strategies such as "let it pass" (participants only focus on the gist of conversation), "make linguistic difference explicit" (requests for clarification), "procedural formality" (the use of strict conventions for turn taking and to follow the agenda), and "careful speech style" (native speakers adapting their speech).

It can be said that the use of communication strategies may help to overcome the lack of language proficiency and ensure that the communicative speech event is effective. In ELF interactions, research has shown that speakers manifest an orientation towards mutual intelligibility; for example, using frequent confirmation checks, self-repairs and self-correction, and signalling of comprehension, to ascertain an interactive flow and a successful management of the conversation (cf. Mauranen, 2006). Moreover, speakers who are involved in intercultural interactions may learn to anticipate and offset difficulties in communications by making a greater effort towards mutual understanding (Mauranen, 2006).

Accommodation is one of the prevailing pragmatic strategies in ELF communication (cf. Jenkins, 2010): "Repetition is used as an accommodation strategy in order to achieve efficiency and, at the same time, to show cooperation among speakers" (Cogo & Dewey, 2006, p. 70). Accommodation can also be manifested through convergence (a speaker tries to resemble the interlocutor's speech); divergence (the speaker makes use of verbal and non-verbal behaviour to be distinguished from others); or maintenance, when the speaker maintains his/her behaviour, without trying to converge or diverge (p. 70). Another pragmatic strategy used by ELF speakers is negotiation of meaning, which can be applied in many forms, not only to prevent misunderstandings, but also to explore cultural differences and idiomatic use of the language (cf. Cogo, 2010), or to adapt idioms and co-construct words that may suit the speakers' communication purposes (cf. Seidlhofer, 2009).

Other strategies which do not strictly belong to the ELF paradigm are those applied in the field of intercultural competence, where many models have been proposed over the last 30 years (cf. Deardoff, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In one of the most accepted definitions, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is described as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardoff, 2006, pp. 247–248) to achieve one's goals to some extent. This concept presents some similarities with the communicative and strategic skills needed to succeed in BELF interactions (cf. Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010).

Because of the characteristics of ELF and BELF discourse, and the contexts in which they occur, it is possible to compare them with the communication strategies described in intercultural models such as the one proposed by Deardoff (2006, p. 256) and Byram (1997). The table below (Table 1) illustrates the main concepts of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) and ICC (Intercultural Communicative Competence):

Table 1 – Comparison between BELF/ELF and ICC

Characteristics	BELF (and ELF)	ICC
Context of use	Interactions in multicultural and multilingual environments	Interactions in multicultural and multilingual environments
Successful interactions require	Business communication skills and strategic skills.	Attitudes: Respect (valuing other cultures); openness (withholding judgment); curiosity & discovery (tolerating ambiguity).
The users aim to	Effective communication; Get the job done (pragmatics).	Effective and appropriate communication & behaviour in an intercultural situation.
Non-native speakers are seen as	Communicators in their own right.	Communicators in their own right.
Cultural identity	Business community culture and individual cultural background.	Cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness.
Norms of reference	Norms and strategies of business shared by the business community.	Informed frame of reference shift (adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view, empathy).
Skills used in communication	Focusing on clarity, brevity, directness and politeness.	To listen, observe & evaluate; analyse, interpret & relate.
Strategies needed for communication	BELF speakers need to possess accommodation skills, listening skills, an ability to understand different "Englishes", and overall, tolerance towards different communication styles. (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2013)	"Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, p. 34)

As Table 1 suggests, BELF and ICC seem to have a set of similar concepts, which in some situations may overlap, as far as the context of use and the skills required for successful communication are concerned. This concept will be further expanded in the section dedicated to the model's proposal, in which suggestions will be given on how to adapt and integrate these characteristics to transform them into common learning outcomes for higher education curricula (cf. Par. 4).

3. The Use of English in Business Schools

The linguistic and economic hegemony of English has been exerted also in the field of business education, whose aim is to create and disseminate knowledge about economics and management, and which is highly affected by market forces such as globalisation, technological innovations and changes in the power balances (cf. Friga et al., 2003). The birth of business schools can be traced back to 1819, when the world's first business school, ESPC Europe, was founded in Paris, offering both theoretical and practical approaches. The school immediately introduced an international element: one-third of the students were coming from outside France, and ten different languages were taught (Kaplan, 2014, p. 530). Other pioneering institutions were opened in Belgium - in Antwerp - and in Italy, where Ca' Foscari University of Venice was the first in 1868, followed by the privately financed Bocconi in 1902 (p. 530). The business schools founded in Germany chose the more theoretical educational model, which was then also followed by Scandinavian business institutions.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of European economies and institutions, since 1945 there has been a growing Americanisation of European business schools. This process slowed down only after 1997, when the EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) accreditation was created (Kaplan, 2014, p. 530), and thus the standards and criteria for quality were established at the European level. The business schools founded in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century were inspired by the ideas of Taylor and

Ford and were directed to a more local audience of future American entrepreneurs (Kaplan, 2014; Friga, et al., 2003). Universities in the USA aimed at the standardisation of their procedures, thus the creation of rankings and of accreditation agencies (such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – AACSB) helped the establishment of benchmarks, and of the educational models of reference. While in the US, the need to adhere to general quality standards for education led to a homogenisation of the system, in Europe the Bologna process begun in 1999 has promoted a harmonisation among the various academic institutions (Kaplan, 2014; cf. Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Another consequence of this process has been the internationalisation of universities, defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels" (Knight, 2008, p. 21). Internationalisation has also been used as a strategy to expand a university's network and improve its status and position in global rankings (cf. Wedlin, 2010).

For business schools, the main rationales behind the need to internationalise are both academic and economic (cf. Hawawini, 2016; cf. Knight, 2008). According to Hawawini (2016, p. 18), the academic reasons are driven by the desire to: (1) accomplish the school's educational mission; (2) remain academically relevant in an interconnected world; (3) attract the best students and academic staff worldwide. Instead, the economic reasons are meant to increase the university's revenues, reduce risks thanks to geographical diversification (e.g., when a business school has branches in other countries) and to receive funds for supporting its activities on the main campus (p. 22). The latter set of rationales seems to be mainly linked to the situation of privately funded business schools, which have to rely on the funding coming from their students, alumni or economic partners (cf. Hawawini, 2005). Therefore, the field of business schools is highly competitive, and it is also characterised by the isomorphism of the reputation-seeker schools which try to imitate the fewer prestigious ones (cf. Guillottin & Mangematin, 2015). American elite universities have led the business education sector also with their teaching methods, for example, the case-study approach invented at Harvard Business School (Kaplan, 2014), and exported their model abroad. The exportation of a

specific methodological and ideological model has probably contributed to the spread of English as the medium of instruction in higher education (cf. Wilkinson, 2017, p. 40). In Europe, according to the ACA survey (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014, p. 66), the highest proportion of English-taught programmes is offered in social sciences, business and law (35%).

However, "if business schools just teach standardized disciplinary models, they degenerate into pure selection machines and [….] they become exchangeable" (Bieger, 2011, p. 106). Once the benchmark for quality stand-ards has been reached, diversity of strategy should prevail over uniformity (Guillottin & Mangematin, 2015, p. 354). For any business school that intends to differentiate itself from other institutions, it is important to adopt "a more systemic and integrated perspective on teaching" (Bieger, 2011, p. 104) which would have an impact not only on the business and management curriculum, but also on the reference models used for teaching.

4. Proposal for an Integrated Model of BICC (Business Intercultural Communicative Competence)

Considering that the majority of current business communicative situations occurring today happen between non-native speakers of English using the language in a pragmatic way, higher education institutions should be able to provide students with the tools to develop both disciplinary knowledge and intercultural awareness. This is particularly necessary for business schools aiming to prepare their students for a globalised job market in which intercul-tural understanding is necessary to operate in increasingly diversified work-places, also at a local level.

As previously observed, language skills are considered as a common requisite, but language accuracy is not sufficient by itself, if it is not combined with intercultural skills and the language specific terminology belonging to each work domain. From a pedagogical perspective, the model of Global Com-municative Competence (cf. Figure 1) suggested by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) seems to represent a good framework of reference for

business higher education. Their model entails the acquisition of a core communicative competence (inner circle) where the three other layers represent competences in: managing multicultural communicative situations (multicultural competence); using BELF strategies focused on "clarity, brevity, directness and politeness" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013, p. 28); knowing the business-specific terminology of the business domain and the norms shared by the business community (knowhow).
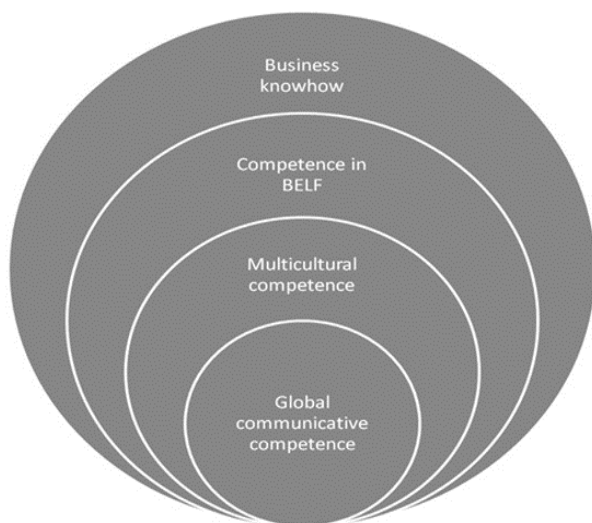

Fig. 1 – Model of Global Communicative Competence (adapted from Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011, p. 258)

An adaptation of this model could be possible for further integrating both a linguistic and an intercultural dimension for the acquisition of communicative competence in a business environment. For example, by modifying the focus of the inner circle, and inserting as a core competence the knowledge of "Domain-specific business terminology" (1) since language awareness should be a priority. In the second level, "multicultural competence" may be associated with Multiculturalism, which "indicates that different cultures exist and may interact within a given space and social organisation" (Bekemans, 2013, p. 170), but has been considered inadequate to express the need for a more

inclusive approach (CoE, 2008, p. 9). Therefore, it could be transformed into "Intercultural Competence" (2), taking inspiration from the theories which define the skills that are needed not only to communicate in multicultural and multilingual environments (cf. Table I), but also to detach from one own's culture and identify those aspects which could hinder the communication with a user from a diverse linguacultural background (cf. Deardoff, 2006; Byram, 1997). An approach which promotes Interculturalism also encourages interlocutors "to mutually benefit from intercultural encounters, while respecting each other's diversity, which in turn can help to promote tolerance and understanding" (Bekemans, 2013, p. 170). In line with this approach, "Competence in BELF" (3) would then include the strategies used in ELF communication (e.g. accommodation and negotiation), and a perspective on the language which sees non-native speakers of English on the same level of native speakers, as the focus is more on intelligibility and politeness rather than on grammatical accuracy (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Finally, the outer layer of "Business knowhow" (4) would include all the practices applied to the specific context of business, which has been described as "the particular domain of use and the wider, overall goals, norms, and strategies shared by the global business community in general (e.g., strategy-driven performance, appreciation of win-win scenarios, significance of stakeholders) and the particular business sector at hand" (Kankaanranta et al., 2015, p. 131).

In the figure here below (Figure 2) the new adapted model is suggested, with the four dimensions going from the more specific and circumscribed – the business terminology – to a more global and less explicitly codified, represented by the "Business knowhow" competence, at the outer level (4).
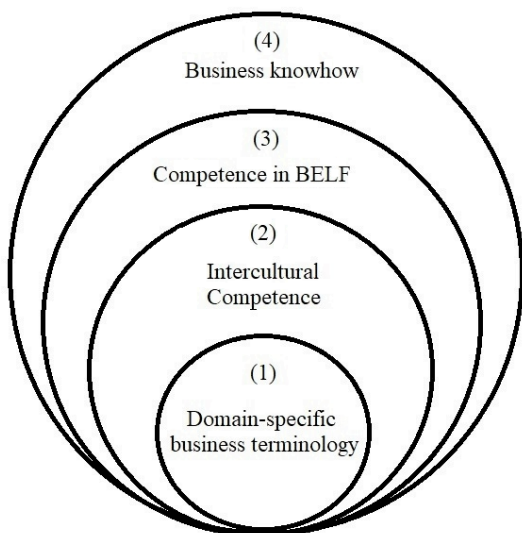
Fig. 2 – Model of Business Intercultural Communicative Competence

Within the domain of business education, the pedagogical implications of this model can be discussed at various levels of the course curriculum and syllabus design. Starting from the inner circle, the knowledge of domain-specific terminology is an essential component of business discourse, and thus should be taught in the context of the real business world, so as to allow learners to acquire "business knowledge and business competence at the same time as they are developing their discursive and/or linguistic skills" (Ilie et al., 2019, p. 103; cf. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013).

The teaching and acquisition of language specific terminology (1) should be the main aim of any academic programme, whether the language of instruction is the local language or English, i.e. in EMI settings. To realise a more widespread language awareness, language outcomes should be more integrated into the general curriculum of the programme, being considered on par with disciplinary content knowledge and expertise.

The switch to English Medium Instruction has highlighted the necessity of explicit guidance in the construction of the specific language pertaining to each academic discipline on the part of the teacher who is the expert (cf.

Lavelle, 2008; Airey, 2012). The same concern and attention for students' comprehension which has been noted in studies about EMI settings in higher education (cf. Coleman, 2006) should also be given when the language of instruction is the students' mother tongue.

A series of suggestions are provided by Bryant, Sheehan, and Vigier (2007) on how to embed more language learning across the business curriculum. They suggest favouring it through content-based materials, which can be used to make the students more proficient in the necessary terminology for communicating effectively (2007, p. 74). Moreover, students should be stimulated through exposure to authentic texts, to give them occasions to use the language in context (p. 74).

In English language courses within a business school programme, intercultural skills can be enhanced through "interactive, hands-on, task-based, learning activities, such as role playing and negotiating simulations, small group presentations, and debates" (Bryant et al., 2007, p. 78), helping students to reflect on their cultural behaviours and on the image they project of themselves. While using their communicative skills in student-centred activities and interactions, students can also apply new learning strategies and practice soft skills (e.g. teamworking, leadership) and other cooperative strategies (e.g. accommodation, cf. Seidlhofer, 2009; and negotiation of meaning, cf. Mauranen, 2006) which may pertain to both the fields of ELF and intercultural communicative competence.

Since it takes time to acquire and develop intercultural competence (2), it needs to be constantly practised in authentic and meaningful interactions. Therefore, having intercultural competence among the general learning objectives should become compulsory in any international programme (cf. Jones, 2014). Intercultural skills can be taught either through a dedicated course, or when not possible, through seminars and workshops; however, defining clear intercultural learning outcomes remains problematic because of the difficulty in measuring and assessing intercultural communicative competence (Deardoff, 2006). In an English course curriculum of a business school, intercultural elements could also be inserted in activities involving pragmatic strategies (e.g. on cross-cultural marketing or customer behaviour), to give students

more occasions to discuss other cultures' habits and attitudes, and to examine their own cultural beliefs.

Competence in BELF (3) can be gained through practice in multilingual environments (cf. Ilie et al., 2019). Some of the strategies of a competent BELF speaker are similar to those used for managing intercultural interactions and can be practiced at the same time. For example, negotiation of meaning and accommodation can be applied in both BELF and multicultural situations, while the "let it pass" principle is not valid for all business communications, as even small misunderstandings may have organisational and financial consequences (cf. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013).

At the university level, students may become more aware of ELF and BELF practices through explicit learning in foreign language classes where emphasis should be given to fluency and intelligibility of pronunciation, following Jenkins' suggestions (2000, 2007). According to Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013, p. 30): "Business knowledge and awareness should be imported into the BELF classroom, for example, with the help of case studies, problem-based learning, and different types of simulations." Moreover, since features like politeness, clarity and – in some situations – directness have been identified as key factors in both business communication and BELF, they could also be transformed into criteria to evaluate students, (p. 31) perhaps in the form of rubrics for grading written assignments or oral production (cf. Kankaanranta et al., 2015, p. 142).

As for the "Business knowhow" (4), it is a type of procedural knowledge, usually tacit, which entails the capacity to know how to perform a task, and it can thus be acquired through hands-on experience in the world of work. From the perspective of communicative competence, it also means to possess an understanding of the degree to which an expression is actually performed by a community of users (Seidlhofer, 2009, p. 198). Since "communication knowhow" is an integral element of "Business knowhow" for today's business professionals (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010), it is important to help students become familiar with it. To do so, as in the case of BELF, the use of real-life simulations and problem-solving tasks has been suggested (cf. Lainema & Lainema, 2007; Ilie et al., 2019, p. 104).

After these considerations about the pedagogical implications based on the model proposed, the following section further explores future options which could be adopted by higher education institutions, and by business schools in particular.

5. Suggestions for Future Actions in Business Education

The advent of the Knowledge society and of the service sector has transformed universities into the providers for highly educated individuals who can contribute to the economic growth of their countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). Universities wish to offer the highest quality in education and research, and to attract the best students and most prepared academic staff, and internationalisation represents one of the means to achieve both these goals (cf. Altbach & Knight, 2007; Hawawini, 2016). Offering an internationalised form of higher education, however, cannot only consist in the provision of English-taught programmes, as it has often been the case for many institutions (cf. Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). The programme content and learning outcomes should be internationalised as well, for it to be considered an internationalised curriculum (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Being highly competitive institutions, business schools have to face a series of challenges to internationalise their institutions (cf. Hawawini, 2016), and to preserve their function of creating knowledge and solutions for the global society and of training graduates to handle the complexity of real-life issues (Bieger, 2011). Some of the pressing issues that business schools were facing in past years are still valid today: the effects of globalisation on business education and how to respond to it; the impact of information and communication technologies on teaching and learning methods; the need to introduce more soft skills into the curriculum (Hawawini, 2005, p. 771). Globalisation and digitalisation have already modified the way in which people communicate, especially the kind of interactions occurring among speakers in multicultural environments. Soft skills are nowadays required not only by employers of multinational corporations, but at all professional levels (Jones, 2014). Often

called employability skills, they include: "team working, negotiation, and mediation, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills, flexibility, organization, and good communication" (Jones, 2014, p. 7).

The type of employability skills which can be gained through an internationalised curriculum that incorporates international mobility experiences, should also be available through an internationalised curriculum at home for local students (Jones, 2013). Employability skills should be promoted throughout the students' career, for example creating a sort of portfolio of all their curricular and extra-curricular activities and projects, listed and evaluated according to criteria of intercultural competence (cf. Gregersen-Hermans, 2015), to keep track of the skills they have acquired and of their development over time. According to Deardoff (2006), it should be possible to measure intercultural competence; however, considering its complexity, it should be done by using multiple assessment methods (cf. Gregersen-Hermans, 2015), over a long period instead of at one point in time, and by taking into consideration all the students' experiences (Deardoff, 2006), both in and out of the classroom, at home and abroad.

Another tool which can increase students' awareness could be a self-assessment test administered before and after an internship or a mobility experience (usually questionnaires of this kind are managed by European agencies, when the project is international). If a business school wishes to start acknowledging the role or impact of such student experiences, they should be monitored and tested regularly. The purpose behind the definition of students' intercultural competence is not only to measure the effectiveness of internationalisation strategies (cf. Deardoff, 2006), but also to raise the question of how these skills are learnt and applied in the context of international higher education.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, an adapted version of Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's Global Communicative Competence model (2011) has been proposed with a further integration of the linguistic and intercultural dimensions that assume

specific features in the context of business interaction. From a language point of view, most of these interactions can be attributed to the BELF paradigm, in which speakers of different linguacultural backgrounds choose English to communicate in business-related communicative situations (cf. Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009). BELF users belong to an international business community where the language is used mostly with a pragmatic function – to get the job done (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010) – and make use of communication strategies to ensure the effectiveness of the speech events. From a socio-cultural point of view, these users need to possess both Intercultural Communicative Competence, which is the capacity "to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (Byram, 1997, p. 71), and "Business knowhow", meant as the procedural knowledge necessary to understand how to perform a job or to communicate within the boundaries of business discourse. Therefore, the new adapted model "Business Intercultural Communicative Competence" (BICC) presents 4 main dimensions (cf. Figure 2): (1) Domain-specific business terminology; (2) Intercultural competence; (3) Competence in BELF; (4) Business knowhow. All four dimensions are integrated and are essential requirements to define a successful member of the international business community.

To make sure that the future business professionals are equipped with these competences, some suggestions have been made on how to implement this model into the English course curriculum of Business Schools. For example, students can be supported in acquiring the specific business terminology through the use of authentic texts, and through task-based projects, simulations and negotiations in which they can learn to apply communication and intercultural strategies (cf. Table 1). BELF and intercultural skills are best developed through constant practice, and the internationalisation of higher education and of the curriculum may create occasions for meaningful interactions among international students and local students attending the same English-taught courses. The possibility of training these skills in the classroom may help learners to "become more sensitized to the multicultural nature of international business and how culture shapes communication and discourse" (Ilie et al., 2019, p. 33).

Finally, this model could be applied both to EMI programmes and to business programmes delivered in the local language, to also become an integrated part of the curriculum for domestic students who do not have the opportunity to participate in a mobility experience. The acquisition of "Business Intercultural Communicative Competence" (BICC) may be useful for enhancing communications and comprehension between people of different nationalities and backgrounds, who can feel part of the same global community.

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