

Business English and Socio-Economic Transformation of Urban Societies

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Abstract

This paper examines the socio-economic impact of Business English in transforming urban societies. The paper is built on the Speech Act Theory. Through methodical exploration of literature, the researcher established that efficient use of Business English has the potency of creating a suitable atmosphere for business transaction. Therefore, the researcher recommend among other things that Business English should be incorporated as part of academic curriculum in tertiary institutions to be studied as a general course and that more researches should be carried out on the subject matter so as to come up with new approaches on teaching.

Keywords: Business, English, Socio-economic, Transformation, Urban

1. Introduction

Language is the spine of every successful society. In fact, it is as old as human existence. People use language in their daily routine for diverse purposes. For some, language is a medium where they express their feelings and emotions while others use language for business transactions and other social interactions. In our contemporary world, English language is one of the international languages used for diverse purposes and engagements.

The complex nature of the human society, coupled with the distinction in professions and areas of specialization such as economics, marketing, education among others, necessitate the need for the use of language for specific purposes. In their view, Hendon *et al* cited in Ojanperä (2014) assert that in international business, people use different languages, different negotiation styles and different business etiquettes. In addition, ways of perceiving the world and to express feelings, motivations and interests vary. Therefore, it is unarguable that the nature and purpose of English language used in the business world is quite distinct from that of the other strata of society.

According to Wikipedia (2018), Business English is a part of English for specific purposes and can be considered a specialism within English language learning and teaching. To put it another way, Business English entails the efficient and effective use of English language with the sole purpose of exchanging goods or service at local, national or international level. It is therefore axiomatic to affirm that there is a nexus between business English and socio-economic transformation. The authenticity of the above claim is associated with the fact that effective and efficient use of English language for business purpose has a potency to create an understanding between the parties involved thereby giving room for economic activities to thrive which would definitely result in a tremendous change in a social milieu. Furthermore, advertisers and marketers in the business world use English language to package their messages in such a manner that would persuade and attract potential consumers of a product or service (illocutionary force). It is in the light of the above, that the thrust of this paper is tilted towards examining the nexus between business English and socio-economic transformation of urban societies.

2. Theoretical Foundation

It is apt for an academic paper of this nature to be built on a solid theoretical foundation. With that in mind, the researcher deems it appropriate to anchor this paper on the Speech Act Theory. According to Metalogicon (2005), the speech act theory was propounded by John L. Austin in 1962. Another scholar, Kushinka (2017) states that Speech Act Theory is a theory of language that says that our utterances (the things we say) aren't just about words and their dictionary definitions. Our utterances can accomplish things and bring about various actions. Kushinka (2017), further notes that speech acts are nothing more than the actions that occur during communication. For example, we use language to compliment and persuade, to beg or scold, and to ask for and give information (ibid). Similarly, Smith (1991) corroborates that Speech Act theory is concerned with the ways in which language can be used.

According to Green (2017), Speech Act Theory basically consists of three components. These components can be considered as the tenets or the assumptions of the theory. These components include:

- i. Locutionary act: saying something (the locution) with a certain meaning in traditional sense. This may not constitute a speech act. Locutionary act is the literal meaning of an utterance, that is, the meaning of the utterance which is carried by the words in the utterance and their arrangement or the structure of words (Wagiman, 2008:69) cited in (<http://hariku23.blogspot.com.ng/2015/01/locutionary-illocutionary-and.html>).

- ii. Illocutionary act: the performance of an act in saying something (vs. the general act of sayingsomething).The illocutionary force is the speaker's intent. A true 'speech act'. e.g. informing, ordering, warning, undertaking.(Green, 2017)
- iii. Perlocutionary acts: Speech acts that have an effect on the feelings, thoughts or actions of either the speaker or the listener. In other words, they seek to change minds (ibid)

The implication of the above components of the speech act theory is that what a speaker has in mind may be different from what is actually understood; divergences are frequent between locution (literal meaning) and illocution (intended meaning) on the one hand and between them and perlocution (actual meaning as received by the addressee) on the other; the relations between these acts are governed both by norm and context (Metalogicon,2005). This implies that in order to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation of messages in the business terrain, there is the need for dexterity when using business English to convey an idea.

The tenets of this theory clearly elucidate its correlation with the subject matter. For instance, Business English is basically utilized in communicating ideas in the business terrain and such communication has its literal meaning (locutionary act). Meanwhile, the sender or initiator of the message has an intended meaning he/she wants to convey (illocutionary act), and such meaning may have an effect on the receiver or listener (perlocutionary act). For example a salesperson may decide to say “it is the best product around here...” The literal meaning of this statement could be that the product is of high quality or standard (locutionary act). Meanwhile, the salesperson’s intended meaning was probably to simply say buy from my store (illocutionary act). Meanwhile, the receiver/buyer may be persuaded to purchase the product (Perlocutionary act).

3. Conceptual Explication of Business English

Globally, many languages are used for the purpose of business transaction and other social interactions but English language seems to be one language that is widely used worldwide. According to Crystal (1997), cited in (Luminița, nd), research has established that 85% of international associations make official use of English, 70% of the linguistics journals in the world are published exclusively in English, 85% of the world film market is in English, 85% of the scientific articles in the world are written in English, 80% of the world electronically stored information is currently in English. This makes English language a lingua franca at the international level hence the need for Business English.

Zhang (2016) points out that Business English is an important branch of ESP (English for Special Purposes), which is composed of all English language texts applied in business fields.

Charles (2007) cited in (Ojanperä, 2014, p.41) argues that what matters in the field of international business is ‘business English as lingua franca’. Charles (2007) further notes that in business context, communicational skills are more important than being grammatically correct and the aim of the speaker is “to get the job done” rather than aim at native like speech. Conversely Dahlia (nd) aptly states that:

Business English is quite simply the English you need to conduct business in a professional manner. It provides you with skills to write, e-mails, produce reports, make presentations, negotiate with clients, participate in meetings and conferences, write letters and deal with clients on the telephone and face to face situation

The above definition given by Dahlia (nd) implies that business English goes beyond the ability to just carelessly speak English in the business ambience. But rather it deals with professionalism and acquisition of skills to write e-mails, produce reports negotiate with clients amongst other skills. From Dahlia’s perspective business English requires a reasonable degree of skills and dexterity in order to sustain patronage. Anything short of that would result in business disasters.

In light of the above, this paper conceptualized business English as a subfield of English for Specific Purposes that deals with the deliberate use of English language by two or more parties with the sole aim of exchanging goods or services. To put it another way, Business English can be described as a form of communication with the use of English language in the business terrain at local, national and international level for the purpose of business transaction. It may be in office, actual buying and selling, correspondence or any transaction, provided the aim of achieving interactional or transactional purposes is attained.

There is much argument by scholars that favor the approach that there are more similarities between general English and Business English than there are differences (www.lingoda.com/eb/english/business). This is probably true, as you will have to know the basic rule of grammar both in written and spoken forms, and also know the basic amount of vocabulary to even hold the earliest conversation (ibid). there has to be adequate language items in the users’ repertoire to enable them transact successfully.

This paper contends that, despite the fact that speakers in Business English just require a basic knowledge of the law of grammar as argued by Charles (2007) and Wikipedia (2018), there is the need for dexterity on the side of the speakers since business focuses on persuasion and negotiation during business transaction. To put it another way, certain basic skills in general English are required in Business English such listening, speaking,

writing, reading among others. In advance business however, courtesy, knowledge of chains of communication and power to effectively debate or argue out the gains derivable from certain transactions facilitate success in business.

4. The Concept of Socio-Economic Transformation

According to Business Online Dictionary the word socio-economic connotes a field of study that examines social and economic factors to better understand how the combination of two affects something. Conversely, the word “transformation” according to Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, means “a complete or major change in someone or something’s appearance, form etc.

Socio-economic transformation is commonly defined as a process in which an increasing proportion of economic output and employment are generated by sectors other than agriculture (Kisamba, 2016). This process of transformation connotes the shift from agricultural-based societies to urban, industrial and/or service-based economies with sustained high GDP growth rates (ibid).

This paper conceptualizes socio-economic transformation as a holistic process of positive economic alteration capable of upgrading people’s standard of living. This connotes that socio-economic development and the society are inseparable.

Definition of Urban Community

The definition of ‘urban’ varies from country to country and, with periodic reclassification, can also vary within one country over time, making direct comparisons difficult (UNICEF, 2012).

An urban area can be defined by one or more of the following: administrative criteria or political boundaries (e.g., area within the jurisdiction of a municipality or town committee), a threshold population size (where the minimum for an urban settlement is typically in the region of 2,000 people, although this varies globally between 200 and 50,000), population density, economic function (e.g., where a significant majority of the population is not primarily engaged in agriculture, or where there is surplus employment) or the presence of urban characteristics (e.g., paved streets, electric lighting, sewerage) (ibid).

According to the Wikipedia the Online Encyclopedia, the term “urban area” is a human settlement with high population density and infrastructure of built environment. Urban areas are created through urbanization and are categorized by urban morphology as cities, towns, conurbations or suburbs. (ibid). From the above definitions, one could deduce that the term urban is the direct opposite of rural. In other words, a typical urban settlement comprises of people from different cultural and religious orientation living together.

In his opinion, Puja (nd) affirms that an urban settlement is characterized by the following:

Size: As a rule, in the same country and at the same period, the size of an urban community is much larger than that of a rural community. In other words, urbanity and size of a community are positively correlated. (Puja, nd)

Density of population: Density of population in urban areas is greater than in rural communities. Urbanity and density are positively correlated. (ibid)

Family: So far as urban community is concerned, greater importance is attached to the individual than to the family. Nuclear families are more popular in urban areas. (ibid)

Marriage: In case of urban community, there is a preponderance of love marriages and inter-caste marriages. One also comes across a greater number of divorces. Sons and daughters enjoy considerable freedom in choosing their life partners. (ibid)

Occupation: In the urban areas, the major occupations are industrial, administrative and professional in nature. Divisions of labour and occupational specialization are very much common in towns/cities/metropolises. (ibid)

Social heterogeneity: If villages are the symbol of cultural homogeneity, the cities symbolize cultural heterogeneity. The cities are characterized by diverse peoples, races and cultures. There is great variety in regard to the food habits, dress habits, living conditions, religious beliefs, cultural outlook, customs and traditions of the urbanites (ibid).

Communicative English and Advertising

To be communicative simply means the ability to exchange ideas and feelings. Hence the phrase ‘Communicative English’ refers to that English which helps us to communicate effectively with people using language functions, (Nalini, Rappan and George 2004, p.1).

The thrust of advertising and its effectiveness is hinged on effective communication; suffice it to say that it is impossible to effectively advertise a product without fundamental knowledge of communicative language. Elucidating the significance of communication in the business world, Yagnik (2012) aptly states that:

Communication plays a vital role in the fulfillment of all marketing objectives. Understanding communication is essential since it is the basic process through which managers specifically and organizations in their entirety accomplish their set objectives culminating in their success.

English language is one of the languages widely used in advertising products in both print and broadcast media. In fact even in Word Of Mouth Advertising (WORM), English language is often and widely utilized.

Therefore, it will be sufficient to say that effective communicative English can actually enhance the effectiveness and efficacy of advertising messages. This is in accordance with Burris's view when she stated that successful communication in an advertisement has a swift potency of attracting consumers.

The impact of communicative English most especially in the business terrain can never be underestimated. In his view Ojanperä(2014), argues that English has an undeniable role as the lingua franca of global business. Using English is no more a choice but inevitable for companies trying to compete in the international markets. Yet, the effects of English in business communication have not been studied much until recent years(ibid). Discussing the effect of language in the business world, Kannan and Sarika (2013) aptly captured it thus:

Language has a powerful influence over people and their behaviour. This is especially true in the fields of marketing and advertising. The choice of language to convey specific messages with the intention of influencing people is vitally important. Visual content and design in advertising have a very great impact on the consumer, but it is language that helps people to identify a product and remember it.

Kannan and Sarika (2013) further note that the English language is known for its extensive vocabulary. Where many other languages have only one or two words which carry a particular meaning, English may have five or six. Moreover, the meanings of these five or six words may differ very slightly and in a very subtle way. In discourse, communicative English has an effect or force known as the illocutionary force. This has to do with the ability of communicative language to persuade an individual to perform or not to perform an act.

Overview of the Functions of English Language

As noted earlier in the introductory text of this paper, language plays diverse functions in the human society. To be precise, language plays a very important role in human lives. According to UK-Essay (2014), one of the main goals of language is to communicate with people and to understand them. When someone speaks, he intends a specific purpose. He wants to convey a message through that language. A person uses his language to achieve many different purposes, for example, to express his feelings, to ask for help and to apologize (ibid). English language just like any other language is used for many purposes, hence it performs versatile functions in society. According to Geoffery Leech (1974), cited in <https://paper-due-now.com/essay-language-five-functions-language/>, there are five main functions of language. These include:

- a. **The informational function:** This can be considered most important, since it helps us deliver messages, describe things, and give our listener new information. Actually, message is a word that describes this function best. The informational function is also related to such terms as a truth and a value (ibid).
- b. **Expressive function:** We need such function every time we want to express our feelings. There are words that are used to express attitudes and feelings, which don't deliver any particular information. Obvious examples of such words are swear words, as well as various exclamations. Assignment of furies and intonation relevant to linguistic saturation will reveal the attitude of discourse partners. This function of language is used not to deliver a message, but to express feelings and impressions necessary for effective and productive participation in conversation.
- c. **The directive function:** the directive function of language is its use to induce certain actions or reactions. The example of such a function is command. Another example of this function is a request. Here affective and situational meanings of a phrase are more important than a general meaning, which makes this function somewhat similar to the expressive function. The directive function is a function of social control and interpersonal interaction. (ibid).
- d. **Aesthetic function of language:** here words and sentences are considered as linguistic artifacts. This function serves neither as a request nor as a message. The aesthetic function helps us use words as a tool of a poetic art, and as certain signs. Here the beauty of chosen words and phrases is more important than usefulness of this information. (ibid).
- e. **phatic function of language:** the only purpose of such a function is to maintain social relationships, and to begin, or continue the conversation. A well-known example from British culture is a small talk about the weather. Such a kind of talk doesn't provide us with any necessary information. (ibid).

Efficient knowledge of the aforementioned functions of language (English language) is of great importance to the business landscape. For instance, the "information function" of language could actually be used to notify consumers about the availability of a product.

5. Business English and Socio-Economic Transformation of Urban Communities: An Overview

One of the obvious characteristics of an urban community is its large population. That is to say that business transaction is an inevitable phenomenon in an urban society. It is unarguable that this transaction must be carried out using a particular language hence the need for business English.

The concepts Business English and socio-economic transformation are to some extent collocates because the former suggest or attracts the latter. As earlier noted in the introductory text of this paper, efficient use of Business English has the potency of creating a suitable atmosphere for business transaction. For instance, one

needs the basic knowledge of Business English to communicate with clients and to attract investors. Furthermore, with the efficient knowledge of Business English and illocutionary force of communicative language, one could actually be able to coordinate business to generate patronage that would build and sustain profitable transactions. Business English basically plays a tripartite function in transforming the socio-economic state of urban communities. These functions include:

1. **Advertising:** for a product to be patronized there is the need for such product to be advertised. And the thrust of effective advertisement is hinged of effective use of language taking into cognizance the choice of words, relevant transactional context and illocutionary force. That is to say advertisers require fundamental knowledge of Business English in order to effectively introduce a product to the consumers and to persuade them to purchase the product. Hence, suffice it to say that effective use of Business English by advertisers could actually attract patronage, thereby intensifying the economic activities in urban communities.
2. **Relationship with clients:** In order to maintain mutual relationship with clients and the immediate environment where one operates his/her business, there is the need for effective use of communicative language. Hence, the need for public relations officers and other management staff of an organization to acquire the basic knowledge of Business English in order to create a positive image for the organization before the public.
3. **Coordinating business activities:** it is obvious that for one to effectively coordinate business activities such as sending e-mails to client, organizing seminars, press releases, amongst others, there is the need to acquire the fundamental knowledge of Business English. This makes the subject matter inevitable in the business world.

5.1. Business Communication Model

For the purpose of this paper the researcher has designed a business communication model to succinctly elucidate how business English or communicative English could actually intensify socio-economic transformation in an environment.

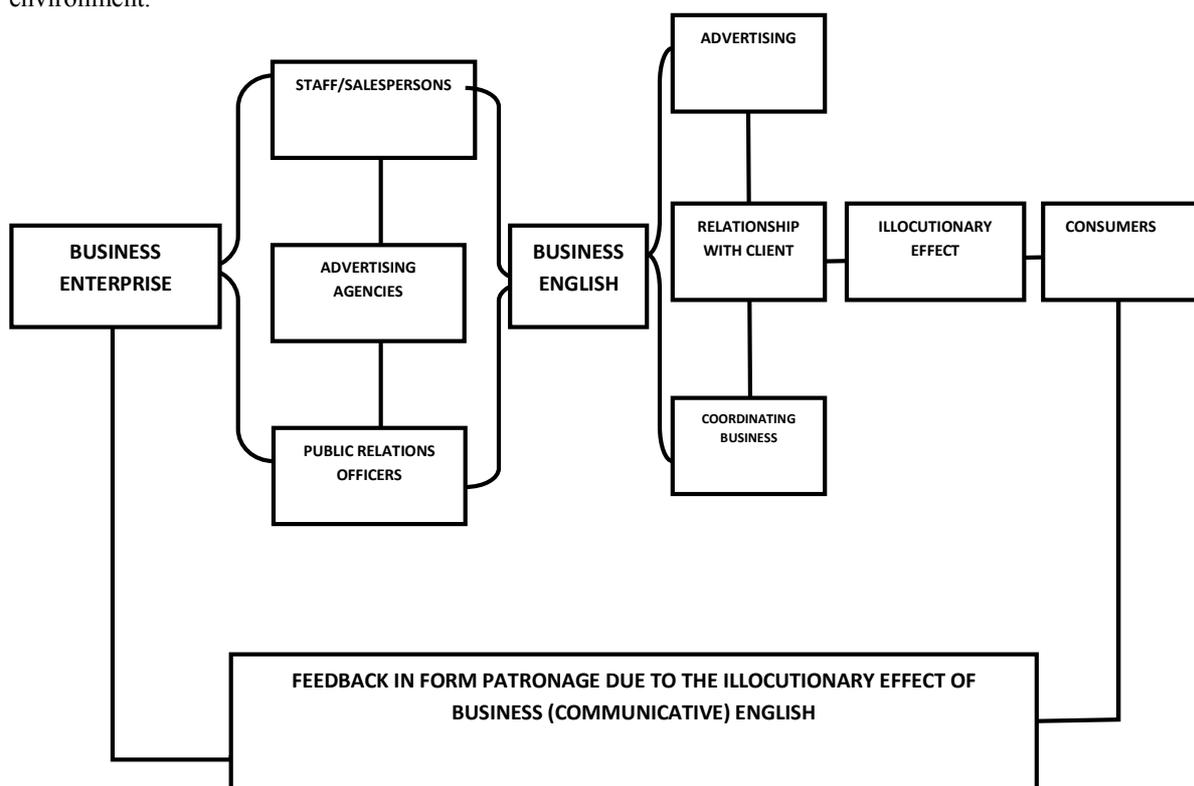


Figure 1: Business communication model

The model above clearly explains how Business (communicative) English can be used to intensify socio-economic development in an environment. The model portrays that Business English can be utilized by salespersons/staff of an organization, advertising agencies and public relations officers for the sole aim of advertising a product, creating mutual understanding and coordinating business activities. The model also illustrates that effective use of Business English can create an effect on potential customers, thereby persuading them to patronize a product which would create a conducive atmosphere for economic activities to thrive. In the light of the model above, it therefore suffice it to say communicative English is an integral part of the business

world hence the need to acquire its basic knowledge.

5.2. Constraints in Using English for Effective Business Transaction

Despite the lot of advantages associated with the effective use of Business English, this facet of English for specific purposes is faced with a myriad of issues which could hamper its potency if not identified and handled with care.

One of the challenges of Business English is the fact that there are just few empirical and conceptual literature in both linguistic and communication corpus on Business English. Ojanperä (2014) corroborates that using English is no more a choice but is inevitable for companies trying to compete in the international markets. Yet, the effects of English in business communication have not been studied much until in recent years. This implies that less attention is given to investigating the impact of business English; hence this may hamper the full harnessing of its potency in the business ambience.

Furthermore, since there are few researches on this subject matter, this automatically affects the approaches used by teachers in training individual on Business English, most especially in the Third World Countries where illiteracy prevalent and less attention given to research.

5.3. The Way Forward

In order to fully harness the potential of business English in socio-economic development of urban areas, there is the need to:

1. Incorporate Business English as part of academic curriculum in tertiary institutions to be studied as a general course. The facilitation of graduates of tertiary institutions during their national service through NIM programme is a welcome development towards inculcating Business English in our youths.
2. More researches should be carried out on the subject matter so as to come up with new approaches on teaching.
3. Organizations should train their employees to acquire the basic knowledge of business English. This can be achieved by organizing workshops, seminars, symposium etc. public lectures should be organized on strategic sites of urban centres where the use of simple conversational and interactive English could be inculcated and used to stimulate relevant business situation.

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