Achieving Communicative Competence in Business English

A study of teacher and participant attitudes in Business English courses

Malin Jonsson
Achieving Communicative Competence in Business English

A study of teacher and participant attitudes in Business English courses

Abstract

The increasing globalization of trade has resulted in a growing need for Swedish corporations to ensure that their work force is able to communicate in English. In order to meet this demand, there is a growing market of companies offering courses in Business English. When English is used for communication between people from different linguacultural backgrounds in a business context it is referred to as BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca). The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not the participants and teachers in different classes of Business English are more open to the non-native speaker model, as this type of course is supposed to prepare the students for communication with people of various nationalities. This was done with the aim to explore how these attitudes can be linked to the development of communicative competence in a business context. In the study a survey was distributed to twenty-one participants of courses in Business English and four teachers were interviewed. The study showed that although the business context affects the attitudes of the participants, there is still a preference for a native-like model. However, the teachers show an open attitude towards BELF, focusing instead on promoting communicative competence in their teaching. The findings of this study support previous research in the field indicating that there exists a certain discrepancy between the perceptions of the teachers and learners as to what constitutes an effective communicator.

Keywords

Communicative competence, BELF, Native speaker, Non-native speaker, Second language acquisition, Pronunciation.
Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................. 1
2. Theoretical background .................................................... 3
   2.1 Second language acquisition ............................................ 3
   2.2 Communicative competence ............................................ 3
   2.3 BELF ......................................................................... 4
   2.4 The native speaker vs the non-native speaker .......................... 5
3. Aim .............................................................................. 7
4. Material and Methods ......................................................... 8
   4.1 Questionnaire .................................................................. 8
   4.2 Interviews ....................................................................... 9
   4.3 Delimitations ................................................................ 10
5. Results ........................................................................... 11
   5.1 Participant attitudes ....................................................... 11
   5.2 Teacher attitudes .......................................................... 14
6. Discussion ......................................................................... 19
   6.1 Participant attitudes ....................................................... 19
   6.2 Teacher attitudes .......................................................... 20
   6.3 Implications in relation to communicative competence .......... 20
7. Conclusion ....................................................................... 21
References ........................................................................ 22
Appendix A ........................................................................ 24
Appendix B ........................................................................ 29
1. Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, the increasing globalisation of trade has fundamentally changed the requirements for participation on the international arena. With new markets opening up, communication across lingua-cultural boundaries become more common, which in turn necessitates a different level of communicative competence among people of all trades. As English is the most wide-spread language of the world (Graddol 2006) and has historically dominated in the financially strong countries of the west, it has become a lingua franca in business communication. When referring to English as being a lingua franca (ELF), this study will focus on the idea that English is the language of common choice among speakers who come from different lingua-cultural backgrounds (Jenkins 2009:200). This means that the speakers have chosen to use English, since this might be the only language they have in common. It is the nature of the communication taking place which distinguishes it from communication between two L1 speakers, as it is characterized by a higher level of mutual negotiation from all parties (ibid, p 201) in forming meaningful communication, compared to a communicative act between two parties from the same lingua-cultural background.

As this mutual negotiation is vital for any successful communication, it also highlights the importance of ELF. This negotiation aspect is central to the idea of business communication and as such, the changing circumstances have prompted the development of a market for the teaching of English for business purposes, as people have identified the need for greater understanding of intercultural and international differences. As a consequence, the topic of Business English as a lingua franca (or BELF) has gained an increasing amount of interest in the academic world, with scholars from different fields contributing to the ongoing research (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Bhatia & Bremner, 2012).

However, as Jenkins (2009) points out, certain scholars argue that any mistakes that cause a deviation from a native-likeness are judged to be deficiencies in the language of the speaker. The main danger in subscribing to this school of thought, according to Jenkins, is that it implies a certain derogatory mindset concerning any individuals who do not achieve a native-likeness in their English. This might then affect the attitudes of the participants of a conversation (ibid.). Ranta’s study from 2010 shows how the attitudes of the students and teachers at an upper secondary school towards the concept of ELF support Jenkins’ findings, and that both groups are still favouring a native-like model of language teaching, though the students are much more positive to non-native models being employed as well.

Continuing this line of questioning, this study will investigate whether or not the participants and teachers in different classes of Business English are more open to the non-native speaker model, as
this type of course is supposed to prepare the students for communication with people of various nationalities. The aim is then to explore how these attitudes can be linked to the development of communicative competence in a business context. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with teachers of courses in Business English and through a survey distributed to participants of the courses.

As the concept of communicative competence might differ depending on the type of settings, it is important to discuss the role of communicative competence within a business context. This will be done in section two, together with a brief review of second language acquisition and the debate surrounding different varieties of English. In section three, the aims and research questions will be presented, followed by a discussion of the choice of a qualitative method. The material for the empirical study will then be addressed, followed by the presentation of the results in section five. These results will be analysed and discussed in the final section, where the possible implications and suggestions for further research will be presented. A concluding chapter will then summarize the main findings of the study.
2. Theoretical background

2.1 Second language acquisition and motivation

The term second language acquisition (SLA) is generally used when referring to the learning process of any language which is not the first language of a person (such as a third or fourth language). One area which has been identified as playing a large role in the success of SLA is that of the motivation of the learner. This can be divided into two categories. The first category is integrative motivation, which is based on the learner's desire to identify with the target language community, and it is often identified as an important factor behind successful acquisition of a wide range of registers and a native-like pronunciation (Finegan 2011). In contrast to this, the other type of motivation is instrumental in character. The learner's motivation is then focused on the utilitarian aspects of the target language, such as using it for academic purposes or in the work place. This is often the case with SLA, as many learners do not have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the target language community, thereby gaining a more integrative motivation. Although integrative motivation is deemed to lead to more successful language learning than instrumental, the latter is more common and the more relevant concept for this study, as the learners have a specific purpose in taking the courses. Despite this, the two models are not mutually exclusive and some learners might perceive their language learning differently. This has been acknowledged in later research and the formation of motivation is generally viewed as a complex process of the two categories.

2.2 Communicative competence

In a reaction against Noam Chomsky's (1965) view of competence, Dell Hymes (1966) proposed a more functionalist perspective on linguistic competence, where the actual usage of the language is the deciding factor. Although he agreed that grammatical knowledge was essential to the development of competence, he also stressed the importance of the situational context where the communication is taking place: “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless.” (Hymes in Mitchell, 1994). The definition of communicative competence as the ability to use the language was expanded upon by Canale and Swain (1980) with their three components: grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Grammatical competence includes the knowledge of vocabulary and the rules of creating meaningful sentences. The sociolinguistic aspect deals with the competency of knowing what is appropriate in a specific context and situation and the final component concerns the ability to apply different communication strategies. This definition clearly shows the complex nature of the term, as it is reliant on the context in which the speaker is operating.
This context dependent property of communication is related to the social constructionist view, where genre and context are closely linked (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012). With a functional approach to language description, the issue of the target discourse community is of great importance. Even a native speaker of English would find it difficult to understand certain aspects of communication within a very specialized community, such as nuclear power plant development (Swales, 1990). It is therefore important to consider the specific context in order to understand what communicative competence means in a business setting. Each act of communication is set within the specific context of a particular situation within one of the domains in which social life is organised (CEFR 2001). In this study, this domain is that of business. The effect of a communicative act is to increase the area of congruence in the understanding of the situation in the interest of effective communication so as to serve the purposes of the participants (ibid.).

2.3 BELF

The term BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) is a relatively new feature in the study of linguistics, and is used in some literature when referring to the use of English for business purposes between non-native speakers of English only (Rogerson-Revell 2007:105). However, although a lot of BELF communication takes place between non-native speakers, there are still an important number of interactions taking place between native and non-native speakers. Therefore, the definition of BELF in this study will be more liberal, referring to the use of English as the common language of choice in international business contexts, between parties from different lingua-cultural backgrounds.

There are three characteristic features that have been found to be typical of BELF: “simplified English, specific terminology related to business in general and the professional expertise in particular and a hybrid of discourse practices originating from the speakers' mother tongues” (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010:392). When related to Canale & Swain’s three components of communicative competence, this definition of BELF focuses on the pragmatic strategies in connection with the relevant knowledge of a particular field of business. Instead of Chomsky’s (1965) idealized language, it is Hymes’ definition of communicative competence as the ability to get the message across which matters, since sometimes a grammatically and lexically 'correct' message doesn’t necessarily do the job, but a message with many 'mistakes' may do so (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2007).

In contrast with the studies of ELF in the language teaching sector (e.g. Ranta 2007, Jenkins 2009),
the business and management sector is often seen as having a more pragmatic view of language norms (Rogerson-Revell, 2007:108). Many multinational corporations use English as the official language of the company, despite not being situated or connected to an English speaking country. As “communication and information flow are central features of organisations and businesses...there is a fundamental relationship between effective communication and business outcomes” (Rogerson-Revell, 2007, p.108). In other words, the focus in BELF communication is to conduct business rather than the communication being correct and native-like.

2.4 The native speaker vs. the non-native speaker

Traditionally, the varieties of English promoted in English language teaching (ELT) have mainly focused on native-speaking norms and this is still the case to a large extent (Seidlhofer 2007:146). However, the role of the native speaker model has lately been questioned, as it is an idealised figure which only loosely conforms with the actual usage of the majority of L1 speakers (Young & Walsh 2010:124). In the light of this, one might argue that learners of English should ignore these “unrealistic notions of achieving 'perfect' communication through 'native-like' proficiency” (Seidlhofer 2002:12), and instead focus on the user becoming communicatively successful. This would mean that language teaching would incorporate language diversity and variability, tolerance, strategic behaviour and intercultural and pragmatic competence (Salakhyan 2012:105). However, the reality of implementing this type of language teaching still eludes researchers, as they fail to agree on the extent to which 'correctness' and 'native-likeness' should play a part.

However, many studies indicate that the acceptance of different non-native varieties of English in the classroom is still lacking, both from the students (Groom, 2012; Jenkins, 2005) as well as the teachers (Young & Walsh, 2010; Jenkins, 2005). The studies show that although native speaker teachers might be more accepting of non-native varieties than non-native teachers, students are still very much in favour of the native speaker model. The issue of how listeners' perception of a speaker is partly dependent on the way they speak is something which Jensen et al. (2013) touch upon in their article on students' attitude to lecturers' English in higher education in Denmark. With support from several studies, they propose that it is possible that the teachers' linguistic ability, or lack thereof, might cause stereotyped impressions and thereby affect the perceived competence of the teachers, both regarding their linguistic ability but also general competence (Jensen et al. 2013:3). Despite the focus on higher education, these ideas are transferable to the world outside academia, which Jenkins study from 2005 showed. This study showed how certain accents, such as Chinese English and Russian English, led to over generalizations on behalf of the whole ethnic group (e.g. Russian English speakers were deemed to be aggressive).

5
In the light of this ongoing debate, Hymes' statement that the concept of communicative competence “is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its’ features and uses” (1971, p.277) illustrates the complex nature of the issue. In other words: when operating in a culturally diverse context, such as international business, there is a vital need for an ability to adapt to different varieties of English, in order for the communication to be effective (Poon Teng Fatt, 1991).
3. Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how different varieties of English are perceived in a business context. The purpose is to investigate how the attitudes of the participants and the teachers, in classes of Business English, might affect their perceived acquisition process of communicative competence. The hypothesis is that despite previous research showing a continued preference for a native speaker model in traditional language teaching, the business context will engender more openness towards a non-native approach, thereby posing different demands for the acquisition of communicative competence.

This study will therefore seek to answer the following research questions:

- What variety of English do the participants aim for?
- What variety of English do the teachers promote in their teaching?
- What are the possible implications of these attitudes towards the promotion of communicative competence?

The first research question aims at discovering the attitudes towards different varieties of English of the students, as they have to identify their own target. This serves to highlight any differences in the motivation behind taking the course, which might also make them more or less susceptible to the different models. As the issue of pronunciation is one of the most obvious points of reference for the participants to distinguish between different varieties of English, the importance they place on a native-like pronunciation will be explored. This will then be compared with their views on grammatical correctness and what constitutes communicative competence. The attitudes might also be affected by the context, and although the business context is apparent, there might be transfer from other ones (such as popular culture). This can also be applied to the second research question, where the teachers' attitudes can be derived from their construction of the teaching situation, in other words how they identify what, how and why something should be taught. The final question serves to connect the empirical findings to the existing research done in the field, with the hope to contribute to further understanding of the concept of communicative competence.
4. Material and Methods

The study employs two different methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. This triangulation of quantitative and qualitative method was done in order to access the different perspectives needed to approach the research questions in an adequate manner. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants of different courses in Business English in Stockholm. By conducting interviews with some of the teachers, their attitudes towards different varieties of English were addressed, as well as their interpretations of the concept of communicative competence.

4.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire (see appendix A) was used in order to gain a general indication of the tendency of the participants’ attitudes. It was designed to gather quantitative data about the participants’ use of BELF (e.g. frequency of use, perceived proficiency level, language skills needed) and their educational background. This data served as background control towards the open-ended questions which followed. These qualitative questions addressed views about different varieties of English and their own analysis of instances of communication when using BELF. Due to the dual nature of the questionnaire, being both quantitative and qualitative, different methods were used to record the answers. A Likert-scale was used where the question was posed in a gradable manner. There was also multiple-choice questions and questions which asked for an explanation or clarification of a previous answer. The questionnaire was written in English, though it allowed for answers in both English and Swedish, and was available through an online website. This website introduced the project and gave further information regarding the aims. It also explained the ethical rules, which the study would adhere to, concerning the anonymity of the participants. Since the link to the website was distributed through the teachers (direct access to their personal details was not possible), it was impossible to predict the number of respondents. However, after receiving 21 completed questionnaires, the decision was made that this would serve as the empirical data.

Before distributing the questionnaire, it was first tested by a pilot-group of students of English. This was done in order to find out whether or not the questions posed were relevant and understandable to a similar target group. Furthermore, some questions were deemed not to provide any significant data and were subsequently removed from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in three sections, starting with broader questions regarding the participation in the course. The unobtrusive nature of the questions was deemed to be important, in order to introduce the participants to the format of the questionnaire, as well as gathering information about their interpretation of the nature of communication. The second section moved towards the more
analytical part, where the personal attitudes and experiences were addressed. These questions form the base upon which the first research question will be addressed. The most personal information, such as age, was addressed in the final section. The choice of not including gender was made after reviewing the results of the pilot-study, where no significant results could be attributed to the factor of gender.

When analysing the response to the questionnaire, the control questions (such as age and educational background) were first used to determine whether or not they seemed to affect the answers. The data showed that the majority of the respondents were above the age of 40. This fact can probably be attributed to the fact that people between the ages of 20-30 are less likely to be active in the job market, due to studies, and that their language skills or lower position in the company might not be deemed a sufficient cause for sending them to an expensive language course. The low frequency of the age group 31-40 is harder to explain, but it might be attributed to the specific group constellation, of which there is no information due to the confidentiality issues, or a lower inclination to participate in the survey. Without further information, it is impossible to determine the cause. Despite this bias towards the older generation, the answers within this group was not consistent enough to claim age as a deciding factor. This was also supported by the pilot-study, where age did not produce any significant difference.

Once these factors had been taken into consideration, the decision was made to focus on the questions which produced significant results to the study. For example, questions 5-7 produced no particular pattern and some people had chosen to skip some of them. This made it difficult to draw any conclusions from the answers. However, questions 1-3, 8-12, 15 and 17 all provided interesting data for this study and were therefore included in the analysis. Appendix A shows the entire questionnaire, but as it was also part of a larger project, some of the questions do not relate to this particular study. Some of the questions were not answered by every respondent, making their inclusion in the study more indicative of possible explanations. This was the case of questions 3c, 9b and in particular 8b where eight respondents failed to give an explanation as to why they might find a particular accent or dialect difficult to understand.

4.2 Interviews

The interviews were held with four participants of the course as well as four teachers. The teachers were all but one native speakers of English (the other being a native Swede), but had extensive experience of working in both Swedish education, as well as in the commercial sector. They aged between 34 and 61 years of age, and all but one were certified teachers (the Swedish teacher). The
interviews were conducted in both Swedish and English, depending on what the individual preferred. Before commencing, the participants were informed of the ethical guidelines regarding the handling of their answers, ensuring anonymity. The interviews were of a semi-structured format, using a few guidelines (see appendix B) to steer the conversation, which was recorded using a mobile phone with the express permission of the informants. The interviews were first transcribed, after which each interviewee’s answers were summarized by excluding the parts not relevant to the study. Each answer was then coded (e.g. T1, T2) and a matrix was used to present the information, in order to facilitate comparison. A secondary opinion was sought, to ensure that the summarizations and interpretations of the interviews were valid. Finally, the content of the interviews were analyzed for patterns regarding themes.

The value of interviews to this study lies in their explanatory power, as it is easier to access a person's thoughts, feelings and attitudes using this qualitative method of inquiry. Using a semi-structured interview technique, the relative freedom allowed both the interviewer and the interviewee to focus on particular points of interest and relevance, which might not have been discussed in a more formal setting. A vertical analysis was used on the answers, as the study aims at investigating the relationship between attitudes towards varieties of English and the acquisition of communicative competence. The analysis focused on the identifying markers for different attitudes and positions in response to the questions. As the interviews have not been transcribed in their entirety, the markers which note points of interest are those which specifically mention a position towards any variety of English, both their own as well as general reflections.

4.3 Delimitations

This study is part of a larger project in Didactics with the purpose of investigating the relationship between teachers' conceptual understanding of communicative competence and the representation thereof. As such, the research questions in this study address a related aspect; that of attitudes towards certain varieties, but it does not intend to discuss other aspects which might affect the teachers’ understanding of the concept in any greater depth.

Validity concerns the transparency of the study, which enables the reader to judge the interpretations of the data (Larsson, 2005). The choice of methods explained in previous sections was made in order to ensure this transparency. The qualitative nature of it also means that one should be careful when drawing generalizations from the results, as the aim is to present an alternate perspective on the attitudes of learners and teachers toward different varieties, and the relationship between attitudes and the concept of communicative competence.
5. Results

5.1 Participant attitudes

In this section, the results of the questionnaire will be presented by focusing on three different aspects: students' motivations for taking the course, their view of their own English, and perceptions of different varieties of English.

The aim of the first couple of questions (1-2) was to address the motivational aspects behind the respondents' attendance of the courses. The hope was that this might highlight possible preferences of varieties as well as shed light on the role of the business context. The survey showed that out of twenty-one respondents, fourteen specifically mention the business context affecting their need for more work-related vocabulary and another level of formality in their language. Although this leaves seven not mentioning their job, four respondents mention in some way that they need to learn how to speak or write or somehow express themselves in an appropriate manner, such as talking in front of large audiences, which can be related to their job. The remaining three solely focus on achieving a more fluent language. Considering the study's aim of investigating the attitudes of the participants towards different varieties of English, it is interesting to note that only one person mentions improving their pronunciation and no-one mentions that their motive was to speak like an American or Brit. The motivational factor seems therefore to indicate an awareness that within the business context knowing the relevant vocabulary is more important than whether or not you sound like a native.

One of the recurring themes in the survey is that of identity or the respondents' perception of themselves as language users.

Table 1. 3a: What variety of English do you speak?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BrE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmE</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When describing their own variety of English, none of the respondents identified themselves with the American English variety, whereas eight of them identified with British English and one pointed out that s/he probably should be classified as a speaker of Swedish English. This is very interesting, especially considering the fact that at least three of those claiming to speak a mix between different varieties professed to prefer a British variety.
Table 2. 10a: Which native-like pronunciation do you prefer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BrE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmE</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasoning behind this heavy bias towards British English might be found in the explanation four respondents gave for speaking a mixture: that their formal education was more geared towards British English, but the American cultural impact had affected the way in which they spoke. As one respondent wrote: "I aim to speak British English but I realise that due to influence through media (TV) my English is a bit of a mixture". Since they mentally seem to connect a formal way of communicating with the British variety, one might draw the conclusion that they would prefer to identify with this in matters of formal business situations. This is partly confirmed as fourteen respondents state that they aim for a British pronunciation, with the remaining respondents claiming not to aim for a specific variety. Two respondents who claimed to prefer British English answered that they aimed for no particular pronunciation themselves.

Table 3. 11a: What native-like pronunciation do you aim for? (1 non-reply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BrE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmE</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that age does not seem to be a factor in this case. One might expect that the younger generation would be more positive towards the American variety, probably being more immersed in it, but there is nothing to support this presumption. However, considering the small number of respondents and the relatively homogenous group (all of them work at companies which are willing to pay for English courses in a recession) and the heavier bias of an older generation, no generalizations on this issue can be made from the results of this study.

Another common theme in the survey is that of comprehensibility. When communicating in English, most of the respondents found certain varieties more difficult to understand than others. This varied within the group, but Indian, Eastern Asians and Southern Europeans were deemed difficult to understand when speaking English, mainly due to the difference in rhythm. As one person explained it: "I cannot fully hear the words and the rhythm of the language is often somewhat distorted". This quote touches on how people's perception of what constitutes 'proper'
language might differ and therefore cause communication break-down.

Table 4. 8a. Are there any specific accents of English that you find more difficult than others?

Six people also mention the difficulty of understanding strong regional dialects, such as Scottish, Irish and Scouse. This is partly due to the difference in pronunciation, but also the fact that "local dialects often have certain specific expressions that are not well known by outsiders". This raises the issue of the definition of a native-like pronunciation, as being a native speaker of English obviously does not indicate a clear and homogenous group of people. It is interesting to note that all but one of those who have mentioned strong regional dialects above, also prefer a British English variety. This would support the idea that they actually refer to a Standard English, rather than a native-speaker model. However, despite this 81% claimed to agree with the question if they felt comfortable when speaking English to a native speaker of English, compared to 62% feeling comfortable when speaking to a non-native speaker of English. This seems to indicate a perceived difference in what it is required in order to achieve communicative competence in different situations.

The issue of pronunciation is central to many people's understanding of what it means to speak a language 'properly' according to a native-speaker model.

Table 5. 9a: It is important to have a native-like pronunciation

Although only one person claimed to take the course with a motive to improve pronunciation, 67%
thought it was important or very important to have a native-like pronunciation and the three respondents who answered that it was of less importance later answered that they aimed for a British English pronunciation. The high percentage seems to support the idea of a perceived connection between being a competent communicator and sounding like a native. This is confirmed when the respondents who answered that a native-like pronunciation was important or very important explained their answers in different ways. Some argued that this would improve their confidence when speaking English:

"It makes you feel awkward if you have a pronunciation that differs too much from the one of the native speakers. It inhibits you in your talking to others and you might stay silent even though you have something to say".

However, the most common explanation was that a native-like pronunciation facilitates understanding in a conversation. Interestingly, this is the same argument used by those who chose 1-3 on the Likert scale, indicating a shared goal of effective and clear communication but different views on what is necessary to achieve it. This is illustrated in some of the comments made when explaining their position: "native-like pronunciation usually is the one everyone has learned/heard, and thus it makes it more understandable for the other party " and another "I believe the most important thing is that people can hear and understand what you're saying". This can be linked to the question of what the participants believe constitutes communicative competence (question 17). Out of the nineteen people who answered this question, all of them mentioned in some way “that you are able to get your message through”. But although pronunciation might be one aspect that can facilitate understanding, it is not the only one. As two respondents put it:

“But it is not only a language question. In my opinion psychological, sociological and cultural understanding is required in order to acquire/maintain a high communicative competence.”

“I have been a teacher in Swedish so I know it is very difficult to have a deep communicative competence- it is about jokes, expressions,cultural competences etc.”

5.2 Teacher attitudes

The purpose of the interviews was to find out to what extent the teachers use a native speaker model in the classroom and how this might affect the promotion of communicative competence.

All of the teachers expressed ideas on what is needed in order to be an effective communicator. The interviewees were on the whole familiar with the concept of communicative competence, describing it in words such as:
"It is the ability to communicate my point clearly and effectively so that the receiver understands what I want out of the communication.” (T1)

One of the teachers explained how this could then be related to the specific context of business communication:

“...to be able to convince someone of a solution, to understand the problem at hand, so there is a lot of work-related features to communication in English.” (T4)

There was one teacher who did not recognize the term communicative competence, but her explanation of how she would interpret it closely resembled that of the other teachers'.

"It's not something that I recognize... but if I would try to interpret it without knowing anything, I would say that it's about getting the message across, and that is what's central” (T3)

The need for a standard model was deemed to be necessary in certain situations, in order to achieve this competence. As there are several aspects to the native-speaker model, the areas of grammar, pronunciation and sociolinguistic competence were addressed. The need for some kind of common grammatical foundation was echoed in all four interviews. As the English language already has this, communication would be facilitated if all parties had a working knowledge of the same foundation.

“I think grammar is important because you might forget words in your mother-tongue, but you never forget grammar, so I think this is the most important aspect, as this can cause confusion among the listeners. You can loose the message completely. The listener will find it hard to identify where the error originates from and what the purpose behind the message is.” (T3)

T1 expands on this, saying:

"So if faced with a beginner group of adults, the grammar has to be there because communication in English needs to be facilitated through that foundation. What I have noticed from our African students is that that foundation isn't there. On an international stage it is not, it is too pidgin. So some kind of common foundation would facilitate and make it clear.”

Both of these quotes illustrate the problems which a lack of a shared grammatical foundation might cause, which in turn can lead to a break-down in communication. As there already exists a grammatical foundation for English, most of the teachers thought that there was no need to develop a separate ELF foundation, but they did acknowledge the evolving nature of the English being used internationally (T1, T4):

“It's not like you only work with English speaking people in these situations, instead you have to speak English to people from Japan, Italy, Malaysia etc.” (T4)
This awareness shows in the extent to which they promote the native model in their teaching. T2 and T4 were both native speakers of English who felt that they taught International English, rather than British English or any other variety.

“I speak British English, but it's not something I promote as being the best or only way of speaking the English language (…) we have realised that most of the people we are teaching are not even going to be talking mostly with native-speakers, they are going to be speaking with Germans or whatever.” (T2)

This was not the case a couple of years ago, one of them reflected, when they had instructions to teach British English. Some of the customers also seemed to adhere to this model, going so far as to complain when an American teacher turned up to teach, or by wanting:

“to speak like a posh English person, well what they said was that they wanted to sound like a well-educated, well-mannered English person” (T4).

However, since then the company has realised that their clients will mostly be speaking to other non-natives and the focus has therefore shifted to provide another perspective on learning the English language. Similarly, T2 and T4 claimed that their customers seem to have changed their views on what variety of English is acceptable to a certain extent. However, when comparing this view to the results of the questionnaire, it seems that although the teachers might perceive their customers as being more open to learning different varieties of English, or even an International English, the participants are still heavily influenced by the British variety.

Although none of the teachers claimed that they promoted a certain type of English pronunciation, the teachers were able to reflect on the subject of how this might affect the speaker's and listener's perception. As T1 said:

"Humans are very judgmental, and hearing and eyesight is the way in which we enter a room. I can imagine meeting a Yorkie and being very confused and not understanding what they are saying and therefore judging them as being lesser than me."

The important thing, according to her, is therefore not to get rid of someone's accent, but making the person aware of the limitations of it. There is also the issue of a lack of comprehensibility affecting the negotiation of meaning between the interlocutors. As T2 mentions:

"I don't see how having an accent can be a hindrance to communication. However, there are certain things that you really need to make sure if you are communicating that you don't have people moving off focus by some linguistic error. So you really have to make sure that key words are pronounced correctly"
There is also the another side to this issue. All four teachers agreed that if you sound like e.g. a British native, you are expected to know and understand the social codes. You therefore might have more leeway in a conversation with a NS if they can hear that you do not come from that country. T2 also reflected on the changing face of RP, ever since the BBC allowed regional accents in their broadcasts. This complicates the issue of sounding like a native Brit.

“With pronunciation it might be risky to sound too much like a native, if you don't have the grammar or the vocabulary. It can cause a lot of problems and affect the way in which the listener perceives you.” (T3)

One of the teachers (T3) professed to be a strong advocate of "proper English" and meant that your command of the grammar would affect the way in which people perceived you. Someone with extensive problems in this area would in her eyes project an image of being "uncultured yobs". In this regard, she viewed the grammatical knowledge as far more important than the pronunciation, as grammatical mistakes are far more likely to cause communication break-down.

"It doesn't really matter, but the problem is that sometimes you change the meaning of a word, like Swedes have a tendency to say sh- instead of ch-. That's a big problem. But otherwise it's their aims that determine how important pronunciation is (…) English isn't exactly a homogenous language when it comes to pronunciation, so it's not very important.” (T3)

Interestingly, she is the only one of the teachers to come from Sweden and the only one without a Teacher Diploma. However, her perceived favour of a native speaker model might derive from the fact that the majority of her clients seemed to have a lower proficiency level than the typical client from the other courses. This might cause her to focus more heavily on the grammatical side of language teaching.

One reason a standard model was felt to be necessary is that certain pragmatic features can affect the way in which a person is perceived by the receiver. For example when writing, "in terms of letter writing, or formal letter dear sir, dear, it is that way because otherwise it's rude" (T1). This view was supported by T2, who mentioned that "we'll do sessions on writing and talking over the phone" in order to provide the participants with different tools for communication in formal situations. However, the pragmatics do not solely focus on a standard model. As T4 explains:

“If you have to talk to Chinese people you have to be aware that they don't like to jump straight to the point, Russians are a bit special too. So you have to adapt according to the culture in the specific situation (…) You adapt the way in which you present the message according to your audience.”
Taken in a business context, where communication consists of negotiation of both meaning and business opportunities, this intercultural awareness means that any attempt at creating a common pragmatic foundation based on the native-speaker model is untenable. The Russians are unlikely to change their behaviour in a business meeting in order to fit into a British or American model of behaving.
6. Discussion

6.1 What variety do the participants aim for?

As the results of the survey show, the question of what variety the participants aim for is not a clear case of native-likeness or not. The underlying motivation and aim behind taking the course is to become better at getting the message across in English. This focus on the functionality of the language can be related to the functionalist school of thought (such as Seidlhofer, 2003) and supports Hymes' view of communicative competence as being the ability to use the language. The business context serves to highlight this aspect, as all of the respondents mention in some way that they need to learn English vocabulary or pragmatics relevant to their work. The contextual relevance also finds support in Kankaanranta & Planken's (2010) definition of what BELF is, with their identification of the need for “specific terminology” relevant to the field in which the person is working. This can also be related to the grammatical and strategical competence of Canale & Swain's (1980) model, as the grammatical competence includes vocabulary and the strategical competence also concerns the ability to use the appropriate words at the right time.

Although the respondents seem to be aware of the need to be pragmatic when communicating in English by focusing on the negotiation of meaning rather than the precise pronunciation or grammatical rule, there is a surprising emphasis on the British English variety. Despite claiming not to take the course with the motivation of achieving a native-like pronunciation, the overall impression is that the respondents' aim is to sound more British and they identify strongly with this particular variety, or rather Standard English as the questionnaire shows. This would confirm the results of previous studies, where the learners favour a native-speaker model of pronunciation, despite the expectation that the business context would dispel the need for a particular pronunciation. It would therefore seem that the inherent status of the RP accent is valued just as much in a business context, as it is in the studies by Jenkins (2009) and Groom (2012).

However, another explanation for this preference of the British variety can be found in the claims that an RP accent facilitates understanding. Instead of status, the motivation is once more to ensure that the message is understood; being communicatively competent. Arguing that this is the case involves an evaluation of the perceived needs of the audience and adapting to this need, which is a necessity for effective communication according to Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen (2007) and Poon Teng Fatt (1991). Finally, the perceived connection between competence and pronunciation mentioned by Jensen et al. (2013) is supported by some of the respondents, showing that the issue of native-likeness is multifaceted.
6.2 What variety do the teachers promote in their teaching?

When looking at the results of the interviews with the teachers, the impression of their attitudes towards different varieties of English differs from that of their clients. Although they claim to promote the native speaker model to a certain extent, the way in which they do so is clearly aimed at ensuring that their clients are able to develop communicative competence. Their descriptions of how they work during the lessons can be compared with Canale & Swain's (1980) model. First, the focus on a common grammatical foundation and work-related vocabulary are part of what the model would class as grammatical competence. Canale & Swain (1980) also placed pronunciation in this category. As the results show, the teachers only focus on pronunciation to the extent that it does not cause any misunderstandings between the interlocutors and it can therefore not be claimed that they promote a certain variety of English through this. Instead, the teachers mention at several points the importance of developing strategies in order to ensure effective communication, such as using synonyms, and being aware of the cultural aspect when communicating with someone. This awareness of the audience (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2007) and the capability of adapting your language to the situation (Poon Teng Fatt, 1991) indicate that the teachers have a more pragmatic approach to the use of the English language than the participants and by teachers in the educational system, something which is supported by Rogerson-Revell (2007).

6.3 What are the possible implications of these attitudes towards the promotion of communicative competence?

When looking at the results of this study, the discrepancy between the attitudes of the teachers and the participants become apparent. Although the latter group's preference for a native-like English is tempered by their realization that their main objective is to get the message across in any way possible, there is still a marked preference for the British variety. By connecting pronunciation to the perceived overall competence of a person, there is a danger of preconceived notions disrupting the negotiation of meaning in a conversation. In other words, it would hinder the development of communicative competence. This attitude shows what the respondents believe is needed in order to facilitate communication, but as it mainly concerns the grammatical competence, there is less focus on the sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Such an imbalance could potentially lead to problems if it is not addressed by the teachers, and also serves as an indicator of what business people might lack today.

Fortunately, these areas are firmly promoted by the interviewed teachers. The main objective in their teaching seems to be to raise the awareness of their clients concerning their own limitations, the context in which they are communicating and their audience. By only promoting the native speaker model to the extent that it may serve as a common foundation upon which to build the
communication, the three different competences receive an equal amount of attention. The implication of this is that a more comprehensive communicative competence is promoted.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate whether or not the participants and teachers in different classes of Business English are more open to the non-native model, as this type of course is supposed to prepare the students for communication with people of various nationalities. This was done with the aim to explore how these attitudes can be linked to the development of communicative competence in a business context. As the results show, the business context does play a significant part in forming the attitudes of the participants and teachers, but there is still a marked preference for sounding like a native speaker of English among the participants of the courses. However, as the teachers promote a more international English, the discrepancy raises the question of possible causes. As the status of British English seems to be high, it would be of interest to expand on this in future research, investigating the hows and whys of these attitudes through interviews with participants of these courses. Interestingly, the teachers all seem to be open to different ways of promoting communicative competence and the business context seems to facilitate this development.
References


http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447153


http://lms.ctl.cyut.edu.tw/sysdata/31/24231/doc/0d040a7c00de9c3c/attach/1252840.pdf


Appendix A

The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes and you can answer the questions in either English or Swedish.

1. What motivated you to sign up for this course, i.e. which part(s) of your English did you want to improve?

2. Have your aims changed since attending your first teaching session?

3a. Do you speak a particular variety of English?

- American English
- British English
- No, I mix different varieties
- Other

3b. If other, please specify

3c. Why do you speak this specific variety or a mixture of varieties?

4. Could you give examples of different situations when it is important for you to communicate in English?

5a. When communicating in English, it is with non-native and native speakers of English equally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5b. When communicating in English, it is with non-native speakers of English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5c. When communicating in English, it is with native speakers of English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6a. It is very difficult for me to understand native speakers of English when speaking on the telephone

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly disagree

Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

6b. It is very difficult for me to understand non-native speakers of English when speaking on the telephone

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly disagree

Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

6b. It is very difficult for me to understand non-native speakers of English when speaking on the telephone

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly disagree

Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

7a. It is very difficult for me to understand native speakers of English when speaking to them in person

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly disagree

Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

7b. It is very difficult for me to understand non-native speakers of English when speaking to them in person

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly disagree

Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

8a. Are there any specific accents of English (native and non-native) that you find more difficult than others?

8b. Why do you think that is?

9a. It is important to have a native-like pronunciation:

Please indicate below to what degree you agree or disagree with the above statement.
9b. Please comment on your answer above:

10a. Which native-like pronunciation do you prefer?

- American
- British
- Other
- No preference

10b. If other, please specify:

11a. Which accent/native-like pronunciation are you aiming for?

- I am not aiming for a particular accent
- American
- British
- Other

11b. If other, please specify:

12. Grammatical correctness is important when speaking English

13. I feel uneasy speaking English if I am not sure of the grammatical correctness of what I am about to say

14. When speaking English, I try to be as grammatically correct as possible
15. The most important thing when speaking English is to make yourself understood

1  2  3  4  5

Strongly disagree           Strongly agree
Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

16a. I feel comfortable when speaking English to a native speaker of English?

1  2  3  4  5

Strongly disagree           Strongly agree
Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

16b. I feel comfortable when speaking English to a non-native speaker of English?

1  2  3  4  5

Strongly disagree           Strongly agree
Välj ett värde i intervallet 1, Strongly disagree, till 5, Strongly agree.

16c. If you have answered differently on the previous two questions, could you please explain why?

17. What does communicative competence mean to you?

18. What is/are your mother tongue(s)?

19. What languages do you speak?

20a. Is English the first foreign language you learnt?

• Yes
• No

20b. If no, which is the first foreign language that you learnt?

21. How long did you study English at school?

• I have not studied English at school
• < 3 years
• 3 to 6 years
- 6 to 9 years
- > 9 years

22. Have you lived in an English speaking country for an extended period of time?
- Yes
- No

23. How old are you?
- 20 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 65
- > 65
Appendix B

Interview guidelines for the semi-structured interviews:

• How would you interpret the concept of communicative competence?

• What is needed in order to achieve communicative competence?

• Is there any specific skill or area you believe is more important than others in achieving this?

• Would you say that you promote a native speaker model in the classroom?

• How important is grammatical correctness in a business context?

• How important is pronunciation in a business context?