

Volume 7. Issue 2**Article 11.****ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF TOURISM AND
BANKING PERSONNEL**

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Abstract

This paper is an exploratory study of the use of English by tourism and banking personnel. It attempts to examine the communication needs of the personnel in the workplace by shedding light on their perceptions of needs, wants and lacks. Also it attempts to explore the workers' attitudes toward English and the use of English in the workplace. The sample consists of thirty senior personnel who are equally distributed by type of work. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire, interviews, and analysis of authentic workplace texts. The results of this study have shown that the workers' perceptions of their needs, wants and lacks are greatly affected by their attitudes toward English. The findings presented here bear on orientations toward the importance of studying ESP as a means of communication in relation to the group of workers using it and the workplace in which it is used.

Keywords: Business English, Business communication, English for Special Purposes

1. Introduction

During the past 20 years, the explosion in business and communications technology has revolutionized the field of English language teaching, and has radically shifted the attention of course designers from teaching English for Academic purposes to teaching English for more specialized purposes. In the last few years, first (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition research into language teaching have led to an increased interest in investigating the most effective ways of improving the ability of

workers in using English for specific purposes in the workplace (Li So-mui and Mead, 2000; Louhiala-Salminen 1996). Several recent studies of ESP have provided evidence of the importance of teaching English for specific purposes (Li So-mui and Mead, 2000; Edwards, 2000; Louhiala-Salminen, 1996; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). For example, it has been observed that the type of language used by each worker is influenced by the worker's working instrument (see for example, Pogner, 2003; Zak and Dudley-Evans, 1986), by his aims and professional constraints, as well as by his specialization and the type of duties assigned to him, and by the texts the worker produces and deals with (e.g., Edwards, 2000; Macintosh, 1990). These educational studies have been developing in tandem with a recognition that learning English for specific purposes play important roles in workers' and administrators' success in their fields of work and business environments.

Over the last few years, many researchers have offered a number of books and articles bringing out new insights and approaches from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, an important survey was conducted in Finland in 1998 by the National Board of Education on the language and communication skills in the fields of industry and business. It studied language/communication needs of industry and business employees and was aimed at showing how language teaching could best equip students with the skills required in professional life. The survey has revealed that compared with engineers, employees in production jobs, installation and repair workers do not need to use foreign languages as much as the members of the other group. However it is clear that they have to read instructions, socialise and travel. They rarely get involved with writing formal papers, giving presentations or negotiating. The study thus has shown that the need for oral communication overrides written skills (reading and writing) in the first group, while the discrepancy in the second is smaller (Reported in Viel 2002:1).

Similar studies have been carried out in other European and Asian countries (see Perrin, 2003; Ponger, 2003; Edwards, 2000; Le So-Mui and Mead, 2000). In his study on writing and interacting in the discourse community of engineers, Pogner (2003:865) has concluded that writing in the discourse community of engineers cannot be isolated from its contexts, from the chains of communication of which it is a part, or from the

interaction between the writers (consultants) or readers (Clients). On this issue, Pogner also adds:

Text production and revision by consultant engineers are not only cognitive problem-solving and communication processesbut also means of negotiation professional standards and roles; defining strategic functions of texts and genres; establishing, maintaining or changing the text's and interaction's context by helping the readers/users of the text carry out their own complex technological and business tasks.

In like manner, in a study which took place in a specialised business context involving senior German bankers, Edwards (2000) has observed that there is a correlational relationship between the place of work and the effective needs of workers in terms of language skills practiced, terminology used, and syllabus design and materials preparation for the workers.

1.1. Rationale for the Study

This work arose from a long-standing association between the on-going process of research in the field of teaching/learning English for Specific purposes in General, and our study plan towards a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Department of English for Applied studies at Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST)¹. More specifically, it developed from an attempt to revise our study plan continuously based on the results of other studies on ESP along with an authentic analysis of learners' perceptions of needs, wants and lacks in the workplace. The rationale behind choosing these two areas of work (banking and tourism) for the purpose of investigation is because they are two of the most important fields in which English is used extensively.

So, for a better understanding of the day-to-day activities and the 'real world' needs of these workers, an empirical investigation was carried out so as to see whether the type of material and skills being taught to our students suit

their needs or not. Another aim of this study is to see whether there is a need to modify our objectives or to update our programs in light of the results of this investigation.

Given the importance of the learner's attitude in the process of learning any foreign language, we find it essential to examine the senior workers' attitude toward English in general, and English for specific purposes in particular. So this study will concern itself partially with studying language use, attitudes, and the workers' perceptions of ESP in light of their abilities and 'real world' need.

1.2. Data and Methodology

The design of this investigation is based on the work of Hutchinson and Waters (1987), and Dudley-Evans and Jo ST John (1998), in which they define needs in terms of "target needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and Learning needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do in order to learn)." The main concern of this investigation will be an analysis of the target needs of the subjects in these two workplaces. However, as all the subjects of this study are university graduates no attempt will be made here to investigate their learning needs. To understand the undergraduates' preferred ways of learning, it is highly recommended that such investigation to be conducted at the University of Science and Technology in Irbid city-Jordan, where several ESP courses are taught to the university students. The target needs, the focus of this work, are further broken down into the necessities, wants and lacks of the workers. For more clarification of these three elements an attempt will be made here to examine the workers' attitudes toward English in general and English for specific purposes in particular. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), and Dudley-Evans and Jo ST John (1998), the best methodology for studying the target needs of any particular group of workers/students is to use such methods as Questionnaires, follow-up interviews, collection of authentic workplace texts, and visits to the workplace.

The corpus of this study was collected with the assistance of three ESP students enrolled in the Department of English for Applied Studies at Jordan

University of Science and Technology (JUST) by means of a questionnaire and interviews. Some of the interviews were conducted by me. The present research is based on data collected from thirty respondents in leading positions (executives) in twelve different institutions: banks and travel agencies. The participants in the survey were expert professionals occupying important and influential positions, all of whom are Arabic-English balanced bilinguals capable of using English for different purposes. Fifteen of them work in the field of tourism and the other fifteen in the field of banking. The sample is composed of twenty-two males and only eight females. The unbalanced distribution of the sample by sex is due to the fact that the chances of females in Jordanian society in occupying senior positions, like managers or directors, are smaller than those of males. All of respondents are supposed to have studied English as a foreign language for eight to ten years and their education for the university degree (B.A., M.Sc.) was English medium. Also it is worth noting that all those executives have worked for duration of five to twenty years in their respective fields of work.

The linguistic questionnaire utilized in this research was largely influenced by those used in previous works on needs analysis, language use, function and attitudes (e.g., Huthinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans and John, 1998; Louhiala-Salminen, 1996; Li So-mui and Mead, 2000; Perrin, 2003; Alm, 2003; among others). However, the questionnaire was modified in a way so as to better serve the purposes of this study with these particular workplaces. The questionnaire was designed to elicit different types of data on the workers' target needs, wants, lacks, use of English in the workplace for different purposes, and attitudes. One section of the questionnaire is designed to elicit some attitudinal data toward the use of both English and Arabic in general, and English for specific purposes, in particular.

Additionally, the assistances were asked beforehand to note down any additional information they might get from the subjects, whether in direct or an indirect way. By so doing, they were quite able to provide us with some extra information of great value on both language use and attitude. To verify the

truthfulness of some of the collected data, the respondents were asked to provide us with authentic workplace texts and correspondence. In this way, we were able to check on such matters as the type of English being used, the most common channel(s) of communication, and the extent of English usage.

2. Results and Discussion

The results of this study are reported and discussed under five main headings:

1. Workers' needs and use
2. Workers' wants
3. Workers' lacks (self-assessment)
4. Workers' attitudes

2.1. Workers' Needs and Actual Use

The responses below were given by the personnel in answer to the following question: What I need English for? To answer this question each subject was asked to say whether he/she needs English for any of the purposes shown in table 1 below. Also, based on their answers we ranked their needs in priority as shown in the table.

Item	Banking	Tourism
1. For communication	72%	94%
2. For a job	44%	76%
3. For improving my performance in the Language	65%	85%
4. For traveling abroad	24%	69%
5. For studying in the language	06%	9%
6. For promotion purposes	02%	15%

7. For reading English material (books, newspapers.. etc.)	—	23%
8. For watching English TV programs	—	02%
9. To be more fluent in the language	26%	51%

Table1: Workers' needs by type of job

From Tables 1, and 2 we observe that for both groups of workers English is needed for certain purposes much more often than others. For example, in both groups the personnel have reported that English is needed much for communication, improving their proficiency in the language and travel. However, the percentage scores shown in tables 1 and 2 indicate that the two groups of officials are distinct from one another by their needs for and use of English. For instance, while the travel agency workers see English needed for communication, job, improving their performance 94%, 76%, and 85% of the time respectively, the other group of workers sees it needed 72%, 44% and 65% of the time respectively.

Item	Only Arabic %		Mostly Arabic %		Arabic & English %		Only English %		Mostly English %		No Answer %		Total %	
	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B
1. For correspondence	0	0	20	50	47	50	27	0	6	0	0	0	100	100
2. For filing & documentation	7	33	7	50	53	17	13	0	20	0	0	0	100	100
3. For communication with other colleagues	60	67	20	27	13	6	7	0	0	0	0	0	100	100
4. For dealing in public relations	13	17	7	17	60	50	0	16	13	0	7	0	100	100

T= Tourism

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Also, the results of data analysis, as seen in Tables 2 above, show that both languages, Arabic and English, are used by the executives for a wide range of activities, though Arabic appears to be used much more often than English. However, the use of Arabic, in general, appears to take place mostly when talking to colleagues in the workplace. This could be due to the fact that all workers are Jordanians, who may find it easier to communicate in Arabic.

2.2.Worker's Wants

In asking the workers about their wants (What kind of English training courses do you like to be enrolled in?) they reported the answers indicated in table 4 below. A closer examination of Table 4 below reveals that the assertion that the workers are quite aware of their wants is a valid one. For example, the great majority of both groups of workers believe that increasing their corpus of specialized lexical items and technical terms, improving writing, speaking and listening skills should be given more attention and emphasis in designing any training courses for them. These results appear to be in line with those arrived at in other sections of the paper, where the workers were found to be in need for more practice to improve their abilities in speaking, writing and listening. Comparing the percentage scores of the two working groups across their wants, we notice that they are still differentiated from one another by their responses to the included items. For example, only 54% of the banking sector workers want to increase their corpus of specialized lexical items and technical terms in comparison to 84% of the travel agency workers want that. And out of 94% of the travel agency workers who wanted to improve their speaking skill, only 73% of the banking workers wanted that. The same also is true with regard to item three, where more than 78% of the travel agency workers wanted to improve their writing skill, only 49% of the banking workers wanted to do that.

Item	Banking %	Tourism %
1. To increase my corpus of specialized lexical items and technical terms	54	84
2. To learn grammar	02	06
3. To improve writing skills	49	78
4. To improve reading skills	37	17
5. To improve listening skills	23	29

6. To improve speaking skills	73	94
7. To get information	07	14
8. To improve my ability in using the internet	—	09

Table 3: workers' wants by type of work

To explain this, one must take into consideration the effect of activities being carried out in the workplace which also seem to interact with language proficiency in influencing the type of wants being specified by the workers. Generally speaking, all evidence suggest that the travel agency workers, due to a wealth of factors discussed below, are more proficient in English than their banking counterparts. This is because they are heavier user of the language than their banking workers, and having more positive orientation toward the language. Thus it is highly likely that these elements put together are the factors most responsible for the type of wants being identified by each group and also for the distinction existed between the two working groups in their responses to the questionnaire.

2.3. Workers' lacks

Worker's lacks are reflected in their assessment of their profeciency in the different language skills on a five grade scale as shown below as well as in their actual use of the various skills in the workplace. Table 4 below reveals that, as expected, the travel agency workers were more likely to assess their proficiency in the various skills as more proficient in all four skills than the banking workers.

Language skills	Excellent %		V. Good %		Good %		Satisfactory %		Weak %	
	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B
Speaking	9	2	35	22	44	32	10	34	2	10
Reading	21	13	39	29	31	30	09	20	--	8
Writing	19	12	30	33	38	40	13	15	--	--
Listening	14	8	32	22	40	42	12	20	2	8

Table 4. Response percentages: Language proficiency (self-assessment) by type of work

Comparing the percentage scores of the two working groups across their perceived proficiency in the four language skills (see Table 8), it becomes clear that the two groups of workers appear to be differentiated by their proficiencies in all language skills, although the greatest distinction between them seems to exist mostly in their proficiency in speaking and listening. Even though the type of work has obviously influenced the two groups of workers, the banking workers, no doubt due to their limited use of the language, appear to be lagging behind, showing lower percentages in their assessment of their proficiency in all four language skills.

Also in asking the question of (What kind of skill do you use most often?) their responses, as shown in Table 5 below revealed that not all skills are equally used by the workers. Workers' responses to this question have shown that writing and speaking are the skills used most often in the workplace, though to varying degrees.

Item	Almost always %		Mostly used %		Rarely used %		Not at all %	
	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B
Reading	61	49	25	25	14	26	0	0
Writing	80	37	6	20	14	43	0	0
Speaking	61	33	33	14	6	53	0	0
Listening	63	36	28	33	9	31	0	0

Table 5. Response percentages: skills used in the workplace by type of work

From table 5 it is also evident that the type of work, as said previously, plays a significant role in determining the amount and degree of use made by the workers. While the travel agency workers show a strong tendency toward using all three skills more frequently, the banks' workers, on the other hand, appear to be less efficient, tending to use these skills less frequently. This could be due to the fact that English serves a variety of functions in the industry of tourism. For example, interpersonal communication skills including, handling telephone inquiries, examining destination guides, making on-line-

ticketing, and on-line-hotel reservations, composing appropriate and accurate e-mail messages and faxes, dealing with tourists and co-workers in various situations, all are carried out in English. Therefore, their chances to improve their language skills would be much bigger than those of their banking counterparts, particularly the skills of writing and speaking which are most frequently and widely used by them in the domain of work. However, comparing to the travel agency workers, the banking workers are less frequently users of the language in the workplace and as such they have smaller chances to improve their language. The general impression of the use of English in banking is then that, for various reasons- limited proficiency of the personnel being a major characteristic.

These results appear to be a genuine reflection of what the two working groups have internalized about their abilities and lacks. They are not only aware of their competence in the language, but they are also able to make some judgments about their proficiency in it and the extent to which they use each skill as well. Thus, we are in a position to claim that the two working groups are still to be in need for more training in the language so as to improve their ability in speaking, writing and listening. This could be due in part to the fact that these three skills are still not given the amount of attention which they deserve, whether at the level of school or university education. Or it could be that even if they were given a considerable amount of attention, people realize they want more after they have had experience in the workplace.

2. 4. Language Attitude

The notion that workers' attitude toward the use of a particular foreign language is one of the determinants of achievement and use of the language in workplace has been stressed and discussed in several previous works (See, for example, Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner 1985; Al-Khatib and Farghal, 1996; among others). The great majority of previous studies have made use of the concepts of integrativeness and instrumentality which were originally introduced by Gardner and Lambert (1972). An attempt will be made in this section to highlight the attitudes of the concerned workers toward English in relation to these two notions. Unlike previous works on language attitudes, in

this particular study we will attempt to explore the workers attitudes indirectly. That is to say, by asking the respondents some questions that don't make the respondent feel that his/her orientation is being tested. So the items included in the questionnaire are designed to elicit such information on the attractiveness of language, the usefulness of language, the importance of language in facilitating the process of communication, and on to what extent the use of the language may form a threat to their native tongue and so on. The items included in the questionnaire can roughly be divided into two types: those related to instrumental orientation (i.e., using English as a means to achieve a particular goal), and those related to testing the workers' attitudes toward English as a source of threat and danger to their native tongue.

As said previously, building on previous work on language attitudes (see Gardner 1985; Al-Khatib and Farghal 1996), and based on a number of theoretical observations such as the many dealings carried out everyday in the language, it is hypothesized that in both fields of work, tourism and banking, ESP is intended to serve, among other things, the following functions: the function of effectiveness, facilitating the process of communication both in the workplace and with the outside world, prestige, modernization, among other purposes. It is also hypothesized that the concerned workers have a rather positive attitude toward English as an effective means of communication. Finally, it is hypothesized that using English is motivated and enhanced by instrumental rather than integrative factors.

Questions	Arabic %		English %		Both languages %	
	T B		T	B	T	B
1. What language is more attractive?	20	17	27	0	33	83
2. What language is more useful to you in the workplace?	20	83	67	17	13	0
3. What language do you						

express yourself in better and more effectively?	93	100	0	0	7	0		
4. What language do you conduct your work in more quickly?	33	66	20	17	47	17		
5. What language do you prefer to use in your institution?	33	50	33	17	34	33		
Item	Strongly Agree %		Agree %		Doubtful %		Disagree %	
	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B
6. It is important to use English in our institution.	47	17	13	66	33	0	7	17
7. Arabic is the only language that should be used in our institution.	0	17	7	17	13	0	80	66
8. Using English indicates prestige and civilization	73	37	7	27	12	10	08	26
9. Using English facilitates communication with international institutions and the outside world.	80	66	13	0	0	28	7	6
10.. Using English takes place at the expense of Arabic.	0	0	0	34	13	0	87	66
11. Using English in our institution indicates cultural colonization.	7	0	20	16	7	34	66	50
12. Using English poses a threat to Arabic.	0	0	13	58	33	17	54	25

Table 6. Response percentages: Language Attitude toward Arabic and English by type of work

The first impression that one gets having compared the Tourism workers' responses with those of the bank workers, see Table 6 above, is that there is a clear-cut differences between the attitudes of the first group in relation to the attitudes of the second. Put it differently, Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference in the responses of the travel agency workers compared to the bank workers' responses. The results of this study suggest that the tourism workers express more favorable attitudes toward English and using English in the workplace than their bank counterparts. The responses of the tourism workers almost to all 12 questions and items indicate that they have stronger attitudes toward using English than the bank workers.

In view of the notions of integrativeness and instrumentality suggested by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner's (1985), two fundamental types of attitudes toward English and Arabic are demonstrated in the respondents' answers to the questionnaire items. The first type shows that the majority of the tourism sector respondents agree that English is valuable as a means of communication, and more useful language than Arabic in the work place (item 1). In items 5, 6, 7, and 8 the overwhelming majority of the respondents agree that it is important for them to use English as a means of communication in the workplace, and use Arabic as an important symbol of their identity. The same attitude can also be demonstrated in their answers to item 5 in which they claim that there is no harm of using English and Arabic, side by side, in the workplace on equal bases.

The relatively high percentage of positive attitudes by the tourism sector workers may be explained by the values of English (i.e. English is the language of tourism and openness to the outside world), which are perhaps linked to its importance as a lingua franca used widely in different parts of the world. This fact can clearly be manifested in their responses to item 9, in which 93% of them agreed that using English does facilitate communication with international institutions and the outside world, whereas only 66% of the banking workers have agreed on that.

All in all, these findings show that the attitudes of the tourism sector workers, and to an extent the banking sector workers toward English are both instrumental and integrative, but more instrumental than integrative. This view can be supported by the respondents' answers to item 3 (i.e., What language do you express yourself in better and

more effectively?) in which the great majority of them (93% and 100%) have reported that they can express themselves much better in Arabic than in English. So these results reveal that the respondents are quite aware of the importance of using English in the workplace as an instrument to facilitate the process of communication with international institutions and the outside world. Thus, we are in a position to claim that these results do support hypothesis 2 that is, that both groups of workers would exhibit both integrative and instrumental attitudes toward the use of English, but the instrumental would be stronger.

The lower percentages scored by the banking workers, compared to those scored by the travel agency workers, could be due to the fact that the bank workers tend to use texts of the type called 'template texts' much more often than the travel agency workers. By template texts we mean those texts whose macro structure is set in advance, and where the text producer, so to say enters new data into pre-existing gaps, as when filling a draft form, a cheque, or an income-tax return (see Enkvist, 1987). Therefore their use of English and the varied skills of the language would be affected accordingly.

3. Conclusions and Implications

This multi-faceted study was conducted for the purpose of achieving a better understanding of the communication demands placed upon Jordanian travel agency and bank senior officials. The rationale behind this study was to identify the workers' needs, wants, lacks of and attitude toward English for the purpose of including in our curriculum what is needed by our students and excluding what deemed to be less important to them. This is because, as Kavaliauskiene and Daiva (2003) put it, "keeping learner needs in mind, teacher can use textbooks and supplement additional information from the Internet and other media sources, thus creating updated and interesting for students materials."

The sample comprised 30 executives who were evenly distributed by type of work. The workers in these two workplaces demonstrated a great desire to use English extensively for the purpose of communication, though to varying

degrees. Also, it has been observed that the type of work plays a significant role with regard to evaluating and using English by the workers, as the travel agency executives appeared to be more aware of the importance of English as a means of communication than their banking counterparts. This could be because the most common reasons for communicating for travel agency workers were offering destination guides, writing and sending email messages and faxes in the language, making on-line ticketing, browsing the internet, making on-line-hotel booking, arranging for car rentals, cruises, etc. An examination of a huge number of authentic documents in both places of work, we conclude that more than 90% of documentation in the travel agencies is conducted in English, whereas only 60% of the in-bank work is conducted in the language. In addition, in-office interaction in both places of work is conducted mostly in both languages, though both types of workers use Arabic much more often than English.

Three main conclusions, then, can be drawn from this research. First, travel agency workers are heavier users of English than their banking counterparts and this is clearly manifested through their uses of the four language skills; Reading (49%, 61%), writing (37%, 80%), speaking (33%, 61%), and listening (36%, 63%) by the banking and travel agency workers respectively. Second, asking about their needs the great majority of the respondents prefer getting information themselves, improving listening skills and sharpening their ability in speaking.

Third, in responding to a considerable number of questions on language attitude the executives in both workplaces showed a great deal of desire to employ the language as an instrument for achieving multi-purpose activities, though the desire on the part of the tourism sector workers is much greater than that among the banking executives, as they (the tourism executives) appeared to be much more concerned with improving language skills and competence for the future usage.

This detailed study into the use of English in the workplace by two types of workers recommends that course designers and the developers of teaching and learning materials should provide more specifically focused English courses to learners in their

respect fields of work. The study also helps us establish realistic measures for treatment which would be incorporated in the design of a particular type of courses and textbooks to ESP students in the Department of English for Applied Studies at JUST.

The implications of this research for language teachers and for the administration in large institutions such as banks, travel agencies among other workplaces is to find the ways of motivating workers to lifelong learning, to negotiate with them on their priorities for various skills to be sharpened, to incorporate activities that trainees prefer, and to design courses that suit the needs of the concerned groups of learners.

Footnotes

1. For more information on the Department of English for Applied Studies at Jordan University of Science and Technology see the University Website: (<http://www.just.edu.jo>).

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