

Usefulness of Multilingualism in Business

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Abstract

The process that makes global people to cooperate in order to achieve goals or share experience requires communication but it's no longer acceptable for that communication to be in English only. English as global lingua franca of the business world is challenged by other languages, for a range of reasons. Multilingualism can be answer to global processes and to business needs.

Keywords: Business, globalization, lingua franca, multilingualism

*"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.
If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart"*

Nelson Mandela

Introduction

The contemporary world dictates new rules of development, along which are knowledge of more than one language, skills of proper communication and quick adaptation abilities. It is arguable to say that reason can only be globalization, perfection of technology or thrive in business. However, the complexity of modern improvements introduces new demands to humanity in order to progress, succeed or survive.

Influence of Globalization on Multilingualism

Multilingualism, knowledge of more than two languages, is the demand faced by due to the process called globalization. Globalization has broad meaning. According to Business Dictionary *"globalization is worldwide movement toward economic, financial, trade and communication integration"* (Business Dictionary).

Globalization is truly complex process and it has a number of causes. According to Shiyab, linguist and translator, the main causes of globalization are: economic investment and free trade policies, reduction of investment and communication costs, free private enterprise and global network. Their requirements are social, economic, political and informational integration that requires close interaction and mutual understanding of people (Shiyab, 2010). In my opinion cause of globalization is deeply based curiosity of people and continuous aspiration of uncovering, creating and exposing themselves to gain leading position, accumulate wealth or to share and study different viewpoints. Globalization makes people communicate whatever the purpose of their action is.

Communication can be established in different ways, but still widely spread practice is communication via languages in written or oral form. However, it is high risk of miscommunication as according to latest data of Ethnologue, there are 7,099 languages spoken in the modern world (Ethnologue). Apart from this, cultural diversity promotes misconception as different cultures see and value the world differently. When the globalization demanded increasing mutual cooperation *"translators become significant mediator among cultures"* (Shiyab, 2010, p. 9). According to US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *"employment of interpreters and translators is projected to grow 29 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations"* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor). This is the evident proof that cooperation between people is driven by increasing process of globalization. Therefore, translators help for business entities appeared not to be much attractive as business deals under the influence of certain culture sometimes requires semi-formal negotiations. Due to that, knowledge of mutual language is the best solution. However, a single person is incapable to study all languages of the world. People usually study two foreign languages. Modern education system worldwide offers two foreign languages to secondary students in most cases. In case of choice opportunities, it is quite difficult to choose a language without any preconditioned needs.

Which Languages can be Chosen?

The greatest concern for business universe is the choice of mutual language. It is widely accepted that the most common language for business deals is English. Supremacy of English is not caused by the simplicity of the language struc-

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ture, vocabulary or other linguistic aspect. The main reason appeared to be *“consequence of the power and prestige enjoyed by the nations speaking it”* (European Commission, 2011, p. 42). If it is stated, that English is a global language for business communication, why the multilingualism is required.

The scholars argue that knowing English is not enough anymore. It has a lot of reasons. The primary reasons are that the language is losing its strength in trade and in the internet. It does not mean that English is incapable to serve the need of global market any more, but more and more companies chose to enter to the local market with local language to gain credibility and trust easily.

The scholars also argue that acknowledgment of English a lingua franca *“underlines that choice of a specific linguistic medium is never neutral”* (European Commission, 2011, p. 40). Grin, a Swiss economist who studied language economics at University of Geneva, favors multilingualism and concludes that multilingualism and acquisition of other language than English can benefit to economics as it represents *“equitable distribution of costs”* (European Commission, 2011, p. 40). World money can be distributed more or less equally and non-English speaker will not be obliged to pay to English speakers only. Philipson, a research professor at Copenhagen Business School’s department of English, talks about *“linguistic imperialism”* and threat facing the world to be colonized voluntarily by native English-speaking part of the world. The only thing that can resist the upcoming process is multilingualism (European Commission, 2011).

The other reason for multilingualism preference is that English can never cover the whole world. There will always be a part of people whom English is not accessible, less interesting or not so important to master. There are the markets especially the Asian and Latin ones which offer great opportunity. That makes American or European people think more about the choice of communication tool. It is observable the interest towards Arabic, Hindi and Chinese is increasing. *“In 2006 a private school in the UK decided to make Mandarin Chinese a compulsory subject”* (European Commission, 2011, p. 44).

Another problem that emerged with the use of English as global English is that, it loses its originality as it borrows the forms, or words from the world languages. It deviates from the original pattern and that can become a problem for English learners and users in future (Crystal, 2003).

Based on the research of David Graddol, a British linguist, the three language which challenge English as lingua franca the most are Mandarin, Spanish and Arabic.

The reasons for the increasing popularity of Spanish is that it has approximately the same number of native speakers. It even challenges English on the territory of the USA. According to United States Census Bureau, around 12.9% of USA population speaks Spanish (Ryan, 2013). Economic growth in Latin America and in the USA, promotes Spanish. Spain promotes itself as *“global centre of authority for the language”* (Graddol, 2006, p. 61). The other reason is that numbers of countries are offering Spanish to secondary stu-

dents as an alternative to English and openly declare their aspiration to become Spanish speaking countries. (Graddol, 2006)

Demographically, the fastest growing language in the world is Arabic (Graddol, 2006). Consequently, the world population in future will face the new demand of globalization, knowledge of Arabic may be tremendous advantage of business thrive.

The biggest challenge for English appeared to be Chinese Mandarin with the biggest number of native speakers of the world, growing economics and trades, which take place more between Asian countries rather than with western ones. The other reason is China’s powerful economy, accounting for 23% of global GDP. Chinese is assumed to account for around 23% and it takes second place after English that accounts for around 30%. A slight difference and rapidly growing market leads the scholars to conclude that Chinese has potential to take the first place among the business languages after a few years. (Graddol, 2006).

Usefulness of Multilingualism for Business

Current development of economics and growing interest towards Asia and South America dictates the needs of adjustment in order to succeed in business. Variety of market and flexibility of labor force make international and local organisations think about, study, plan and follow modern requirements. A lot of measures are taken to analyze benefit of language skills alongside the other essentials.

One of the vivid example to inspect usefulness of multilingualism in business appeared to be business forum for multilingualism, which was conducted in 2007 under the auspices of European Commission. It intended to figure out *“how linguistic diversity and investing in language and intercultural skills can be turned into a real asset for prosperity”* (European Commission, 2008) of business. Reports of the forum indicated the main points that should be taken into consideration. The main concern appeared to be the risk of losing competitiveness for Europe as rapidly developing Asian and Latin economies requires special language skill in order to establish fruitful cooperation and partnership. Due to the necessity of encouragement of further language training, European Commission concluded that of use of language strategically and joint platform for information exchange should be promoted or created (European Commission, 2008).

The Study of European experience about multilingualism in business shows that it is growing especially for external use (use of English for business purposes outside the company area). According to Mettewie and Van Mensel, proportion of business multilingual (80%) practice especially for external contacts is considerably higher than portion of monolingual (12%) and bilingual (6%) one. That indicates that multilingualism in European countries is *“a norm in business communication”* (Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2009).

Multilingualism is a guarantee of high competitiveness. Many businesses lose deals because of lack of sufficient

language skill. European citizens seem to be high competitive on the market as they usually study at least two foreign languages at a very early age. According to Orban, European Commissioner responsible for multilingualism, "already 40% of young people, the 15-24-year olds know at least two languages as well as their mother tongue, which is double the rate for those that are over 55" (Orban, 2007).

Sorace, Professor of Developmental Linguistics, distinguishes four advantageous factors of multilingualism for business. They are: decision making as non-native speaker can be good a controlling biases that will lead to making rational decisions; negotiating – multilingualism can grant more effective "soft power" in business that is persuading people through attraction rather than through payment or compulsion; prioritizing – multilinguals usually better evaluate and rank arguments that "strengthens the ability to cooperate, negotiate, and compromise" (Sorace); adopting the perspectives of other people – as multilinguals have developed ability to 'put oneself into other people's shoes', assess the background of the interlocutor and predict the proceedings of the agreement (Sorace).

Undisputedly, multilingualism opens wide job opportunities for a person, new markets for a business and appreciation of the other world. Multilingualism helps businesses not only in establishing proper business communication but dictates them the correct way of development of business by consideration the cultural traits of a host society. As different languages reflect the world differently, they also reflect the attitudes within the society. Interaction with the people on their mother language changes the people themselves, their behavior, habits and lifestyle get more comprehensible. Closer bonds can be built and a lot more can be noticed which are usually lost in translation (Kruschewsky, 2015).

Conclusion

Modern flexible world can never be imagined with isolated units as they are predestined to disappear. The contemporary world demands as much flexibility as possible, adaptation to constantly changing reality. Multiculturalism is a product of globalization that requires adjustability to variables. New markets appeared, with new opportunities and cooperation and sharing of experience requiring communication. Language is a main tool of communication; it can be used to follow the new trends of global business. However, the choice of the language is also defined by the recently emerged openings. The urge for competitiveness and prosperity made business evaluate ongoing processes sufficiently. Due to that, multilingualism, mastering of more than two languages, appeared into agenda in order to reach the goals. Cost of multilingual employee may not be low for business but the benefits are worth it. Apart from this, demand of new languages is beneficial for global education and more and more educated global society will be as acquisition of language make people see, think and analyze world differently. The old proverb summarizes the wealth of multilingualism wisely: 'how many languages you know that many times you are a person'.

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