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1- Globalization of Business and Language Proficiency

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Abstract

Expansion of business enterprises is one of the basic objectives of business. Though Globalization has brought individuals in contact with one another at an unprecedented scale, it has also brought forth some challenges of which language skill is one. While English is widely employed in today's business world, one can never underestimate the importance of other foreign languages such as Arabic, French, Chinese, etc. Partners in business transactions or employees are likely to feel more comfortable using their own language(s) to communicate important issues. If, for example, a business is conducted with English language, one may not know that his partner did not understand the negotiation until when things do not out as expected. In this kind of situations, searching for an interpreter is not the best option; a minimum degree of understanding of at least a foreign language in order to conduct business becomes essential. The responsibility of facilitating this linguistic requirement and challenge falls on the shoulders of individual educators. Presented in four sections, this paper focuses on the importance of understanding foreign languages in business process and development. The paper begins with an introduction, then, proceeds to address the role of language in business transactions, followed by a brief allusion to the importance of language in advertising goods and products. It ends with a conclusion with some recommendations.

Keywords: Globalization, Business, Importance, Foreign Languages

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Introduction

Business activities are becoming increasingly globalized as numerous firms expand their operations into overseas markets. For example, many U.S. firms attempt to tap emerging markets by pursuing business in China, India, Brazil, Russia and other Eastern European countries. Multinational corporations (MNCs), which operate in more than one country at once, typically move operations to wherever they can find the cheapest labor pool able to do the work well, these rapid changes in new global dimension has brought numerous challenges to human life. (Microsoft Encarta 2009). Consequently, the role of language, which is the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another becomes inevitable and cannot be underestimated, especially those foreign languages that have become international means of communication. In some circumstances one may find himself with a golden business opportunity that requires understanding a foreign language. In fact, a native speaker of the other language in business transaction may prefer negotiating in his own language in some situations. It is critical that one has immediate understanding of the potential business partner's message.

Today, English is more used worldwide as an official language or as the main means of international communication than any other language. French is widely used due to the substantial number of African countries with French as their official language. Widely employed in conversation also is Arabic which is the native and official language in the Middle East which consists more than twenty nations. Certain degree of understanding of these languages may create huge opportunities in our international business deals.

Language and human relations are interdependent; no human relations can take place without language as a means of interaction. On the other hand, language itself is meaningless if it does not as a means of communication and interaction in a given society. Language is obviously a vital tool not only as a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but also assists in forging friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships. Consequently, if the primary objective of commercial education is the preparation of people

to enter upon a business career, or having entered upon such career, and to render more efficient service therein and to advance from their present levels of employment to higher levels as claimed by Nichols (1933), then the knowledge of language becomes an additional advantage.

Language and Business Transactions

Globalization according to Strada (2003), is a catchall term for many processes that are at the heart of the global economy: the spread of instant global communications; the rapid growth of international trade, global *capital markets* (markets in which national currencies are traded), and foreign investment; and the emergence of a new breed of global corporation. The global economy and business is the basic component of all. This has made the expanding of the geographical footprint of any business in the era of globalization pressing much more than it was in the past. Indeed, going by the global demands also requires adequate linguistic competence. A businessman that aims international market and international customers cannot rely on monolingual competence, but would also try to equip himself with at least a minimum degree of understanding of the language of the target country. Failure to do this is likely to result in loss of collaborations and low market attraction in today's world of business.

Business as an organized approach to providing customers with goods and services plays a vital role in the life and culture of countries with industrial and *postindustrial* (service- and information-based). (*Microsoft Encarta Premium 2009*). International trade leads to more efficient and increased world production, thus allowing countries and individuals to consume a larger and more diverse bundle of goods. In recent years foreign trade has also been viewed as a means to promote growth within a nation's economy. Developing countries and international organizations have increasingly emphasized such trade. Consequently for this vital role to be effectively and internationally played there is a need for linguistic competence.

The charm of language in fascinating and facilitating business transaction is obvious; foreign language proficiency makes our companies mature and

become better negotiators. This is because the knowledge of language adds to the company's credibility and opens doors for a rapid development of our business and economy. Indeed, knowledge of the language and culture of foreign counterparts in business transactions helps in generating trust between marketers and clients faster than expected. We are in the era when the world is seen as a global village, this has made the understanding of the complex and subtle relationship between language, society an essential condition for the purpose of business and economical development. On the basis of this assumption of correlation between language and human transactions, the role of foreign language proficiency in business world becomes apparent.

Although English is known to be the most powerful language and widely being spoken in international conventions and organizations probably due to its political power, human relations especially business relations and transactions are not confined to a particular language. The assumption that "they-all-speak-English" which is well known to American business is not ideal and should not be accommodated in the era of globalization trades. (Peterson, 2002). A minimum degree of understanding of some other foreign languages such as Arabic and French is an additional machinery and tool of boosting international business transactions because there is no doubt that talking to business partners in their own language(s) is a great ice-breaker and saves a lot of time and money.

Understanding Arabic for example can open doors to employment in various Arab and international companies as well as in any business related to oil and travel. For the employee involved in finance or oil exploration, minimum degree knowledge of Arabic can be a critical asset. Studying the language to communicate with the locals is certainly beneficial. In fact, the ability to communicate in Arabic with companies operating in Arab world affords the Arabic speaker an edge in business over other contestants who speak only English.

Language is a comprehensive expression of a country's political, economic, diplomatic strength, and cultural and educational strength as well. People use language to negotiate their business transaction and to achieve their

market ambitions. A businessman who is competent in speaking French has plenty of people to talk to in business transactions. Apart from France, people use French to communicate in Canada and some other countries especially in Africa. Interestingly it is mentioned in *Microsoft Encarta Kids* (2009) that, in order to interact with Chinese people who are the largest people in the world, one needs to know their language (Chinese) because it is the world's most widely spoken language. More than 1.2 billion people speak Chinese. Arabic is second and then Hindi, with English in fourth place. Other languages in the top ten are Spanish, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, and German.

According to Peterson (2002), Americans have always relied on foreigners' ability to speak English for some decades; the habit that made them to neglect learning foreign languages. Unfortunately, the price of that weakness and nonchalant linguistic behavior has never been so evident as it is in the wake of September 11. Indeed, the U.S. was paying a price for its lack of linguistic sophistication before September attack. It was reported that a year before the attacks in congressional testimony, lobbyists for increased funding of foreign-language instruction cited Commerce Dept. statistics showing that 97% of U.S. export growth in the '90s came from small to midsize businesses. But the statistics also showed that only 10% of such companies were exporting their products. The most frequent reason cited by the others for not exporting was a lack of the background knowledge and language skills required to understand foreign markets

U.S. businesses have experienced the dangers of such myopic thinking a long time ago. Nowadays, learning and acquisition of foreign languages is rapidly increasing in the USA; the increasing number of learners of Arabic which has resulted in a steep rise in the rapid demand for teachers of Arabic as a foreign language is a good example. More and more universities and private institutes are offering Arabic as a foreign or second language course, which led to a rise in the need for professional graduates of Arabic. This is reflected in the increasing number of Arabic graduate assistants (students) who teach in prestigious Language programs in several reputable Universities and Institutions especially in the U.S such as the University of Texas,

Georgetown University, Michigan University and Ohio State University, where linguistics courses with some focus on Arabic are offered even before they graduate. Therefore, it is now the time for other nations to learn from America's pasts and understand that learning a language is not just about memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, rather it is about coming to a deep cultural understanding as well. Language is very essential for survival and development as human being especially the modern era of rapid development. To sustain their constant contact especially in terms of trade and business, and achieve the goals, the need for multilingualism is of great importance.

These days, no multinational company would dream of introducing an important product in a major foreign market without doing its homework first. Today, most employees in foreign markets are natives who understand the nuances of the local language and culture. Although English is the primary language of international business, understanding the host country language can be potentially useful because it allows managers to interact more effectively with their local colleagues and workers; it helps businessmen to communicate more directly with their suppliers and consumers.

Of important advantages is that the knowledge of foreign language(s) allows the managers to monitor the competition more effectively. Apart from the aforementioned understanding of and international or a foreign language is useful in recruiting local talent and developing good and sound relations with local organizations. It is also useful in helping to learn about a country's culture and to interact socially with people. Indeed, it is language that brings people together and keeps them together. (Rugman & Collenson, 2006).

Language in Advertising

Business nowadays, especially large organization with complex service products are realizing that there so many benefits they can achieve through advertizing their business operations worldwide for better improvement. However, despite all that may be said and heard about business, products or services do not sell themselves. No matter how good an idea is, unless proper marketing principles are employed and utilized because the principal goal is to bring sellers and buyers together. (Scott,1998).

The production and distribution of goods and services involves a large number of activities out of which marketing is vital. (Inegbenebor & Osaze, 1999). Consequently, talks on marketing and advertising business without mentioning language proficiency is incomplete because language has a powerful influence over people and their behavior. This is especially true in the fields of business activities. The choice of language to convey specific messages with the intention of influencing people is vitally important.

It is obviously agreed that with promotion, the effect of use of communication is very essential in producing result. Good advertising in local language of the consumers creates sound and clear awareness and incentive for the consumers to take action(s). Businesses develop marketing strategies by conducting research to determine what products and services potential customers think they would like to be able to purchase. Firms also promote their products and services through such techniques as advertising and personalized sales, which serve to inform potential customers and motivate them to purchase. (Encarta Premium 2009). Obviously there is no hooking tool of enticing costumers and creating business relationships like language. Furthermore, foreign trade, the exchange of goods and services between nations requires understanding of foreign languages. Indeed, failure to response to linguistic challenges could signal the demise or decline in business promotion and business potential performance for knowledge of language shapes business operations especially at international level.

Conclusion

Both long-term and short-term business transactions are likely to be much smoother when there is a level of understanding. Language matter is a part and basic component of that understanding. Once a good relationship and understanding is established, this is likely to move the business forward. Therefore, once one have established a good working understanding of language which is probably the basic factor of human relations with the target group, the climate for trust exists. In fact, a potential businessman while he is comfortable in staying within his own language and cultural parameters, he may miss some wonderful and profitable opportunities if he does so. In this global business, opportunities often exist world-wide, even for smaller

businesses. However, one must be prepared to move beyond the comfortable environment of his world. A minimum understanding of a foreign language can be a business asset in order to make his dream of global expansion a reality. Whatever specific measures business educators may take, the important thing is to promote a reverence for the learning of foreign languages. It shouldn't be seen as a threat to English as official language. Quite we should think the opposite; learning foreign languages such as Arabic and French should be a doorway to the true benefits of globalization especially in business arena. A program for foreign language proficiency in the context of business and commerce (Language for Business Purpose) should be designed and promoted. This may also serve as a useful introduction to the business world by making students involve on varieties of commercial activities.

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