

Participation and performance in international business meetings

Pamela Rogerson-Revell*

*English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (ELTAL), School of Education,
University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RF, UK*

Abstract

This paper reports on an analysis of meetings data which forms part of a broader study investigating the use of English as a lingua franca in international business meetings. This discourse analytic stage of research builds on an initial survey which explored the use of English for International Business (EIB) in a particular European organisation. The survey uncovered a range of communication issues and frustrations raised by meeting participants as well as an awareness of some of the strategies that could be used to overcome them (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). This analysis of the meeting discourse attempts to relate these perceptions to the actual interactive characteristics of the meetings themselves. Initial findings suggest that there is some support for the issues raised in the survey, particularly with regard to levels of participation, for, although Native English Speakers (NSE) do not dominate talk in terms of talk time, there is a much higher proportion of inactive Non-Native English Speakers (NNSE) in the meetings. However, despite concerns from some participants that communication in English can be problematic, the analysis illustrates the overall positive linguistic performance of speakers in the meetings themselves. It also reveals some of the ways active participants employ a variety of interactive resources and strategies to achieve substantive goals and to establish a sense of normality in situ despite generic and linguistic constraints. The study also suggests that the apparent paradox between the negative perceptions of some participants and the overall positive performance of speakers in the meetings themselves needs further investigation.

© 2008 The American University. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

* Tel.: +44 0116 252 5750 (office)/+44 0185 843 3867 (home).

E-mail address: pmrr1@le.ac.uk

1. Introduction

Despite socio-political concerns about the spread of English (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992), its prevalence in international business is largely accepted as a pragmatic necessity by many business organisations and practitioners, for whom it is part of their everyday professional lives. Nevertheless, while English for International Business (EIB) has an essential function as a lingua franca in multilingual settings, it can also present challenges both linguistically and culturally, particularly as more and more interactions are between speakers whose first language is not English. Indeed there is now a growing body of research into the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) where the term is used to refer exclusively to the use of English between speakers whose mother tongue is not English (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer, 2001). There has also been some research into the use of ELF in business contexts, or BELF, again between ‘non-native’ English speakers (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005). However, this focus excludes a substantial body of business communication between ELF and English as a Mother Tongue (EMT) speakers. The term EIB is used here to refer to the use of English for International Business purposes in contexts where both EMT and ELF speakers may be present. In my own teaching and research experience, such international events are commonplace both in Europe and elsewhere around the world, although there seems to have been little investigation of authentic interactions in such contexts.

This study investigates one such context, where English is used as a common language for international communication within a European business organisation. The study forms part of a larger scale research project to explore further the nature and role of EIB, focusing specifically on its use in international business meetings in Europe. The overall project has both a theoretical and practical goal, on the one hand aiming to build on earlier research in this field (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997; Firth, 1996; Planken, 2005; Poncini, 2004; Rogerson-Revell, 1998, 1999) and on a practical level, to relay the findings back to the European organisation involved, in order to help it improve communications in future international events. Ultimately, a further goal is to use the findings in the development of generic training materials to facilitate international professional communication (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Rogerson-Revell, 1999, 2003; St. John, 1996).

The impetus for the research came from within the organisation itself, where there was some concern about what was seen as unequal participation by non-native speakers of English in meetings. This led to an initial survey-based study of meeting participants, which revealed a variety of frustrations and issues among respondents about international meetings but also their awareness of some of the strategies that could be used to overcome them (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). This led to a second stage of research involving a discursive analysis of meetings, which tries to relate the respondents’ perceptions to the actual interactive characteristics of the meetings themselves. The paper reports on this second discourse analytic stage of research.

2. English in European business

The spread of English in Europe is commonly seen as a ‘language problem’, particularly at EU policy level, where English is often seen as threatening to engulf and replace other indigenous European languages (Phillipson, 2003). However, there is also an emerging view among researchers, such as Seidlhofer (2001), Spichtinger (2001) and Brutt-Griffler (2005),

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/355588>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/355588>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)