

## ORAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH: THE WORKPLACE NEEDS

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Prezentul studiu investighează formele de comunicare orală în limba engleză la locul de muncă. De aceea, practicile de comunicare indică faptul că este un aspect important și că angajații au nevoie de competențe eficiente în domeniul limbii engleze, dacă vor avea succes în cariera lor de afaceri. Aceasta reflectă rolul omniprezent al limbii engleze și al comunicării în societatea umană.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** loc de muncă; comunicarea orală; Engleză, aptitudini

English is the language of international communication and a good communication skill of English makes a highly attractive candidate for future employers. This paper reports on an investigation into the workplace oral communication needs. Oral communication covers a wide area, ranging from formal presentation to participation in teams, meetings and discussions. The literature on workplace oral communication that follows indicates that it is an important aspect of the workplace, and that business graduate employees require effective English language skills in this domain if they are to be successful in their business careers.

This puts added pressure on the kinds of linguistic support these business graduate employees may require in their education at university and in the workplace as well. Bizzell asserted that for successful workplace communication, business graduate employees require more than the formal ability to present well and a range of formulaic expressions [1, p.483-486]. Successful communication is context-dependent and therefore embedded in its particular discourse community. In their cutting edge paper of 1990 Carnavale, Grainer and Meltzer said in the workplace, successful oral communication reflects the specific internal and external influences on the particular company. Internally, communication is underpinned by an understanding of the nature of businesses, their purposes for operating, their structures, and how these affect decision-making within the tapestry of explicit and implicit power structures in the organization. Carnavale also pointed out that oral communication skills are required to navigate the complex social waters of the organization [2, p.30].

For example, business graduate employees may not realize that workplace communication practices are more censured, than those of the academic environment. Carnavale stated that team work is a tool for achieving flexibility and adaptability, enabling a workforce to remain competitive. As well as working with staff from diverse backgrounds, the teams may also be cross-functional, meaning that team members communicating with each other must bear in mind differing disciplinary backgrounds. These team members need to know how to understand each other, communicate their own thoughts and beliefs and listen to what others have to say. That is, a degree of rapport and perhaps trust is the basis of a well-functioning group, and it would seem that informal communication and exchanges for building relations are significant for this purpose. Carnavale, underlined that the changing nature of business further underscores the importance of oral communication skills. With the increasing use of technology, issues of quality, innovation and competitiveness, oral communication skills take on a higher workplace focus [2, p.159]. Indeed, Mellinger pointed out that oral communication and social interaction are the means for achieving occupational activity, enabling employees to learn and acquire new skills which facilitate the development of solutions to problems [3, p.79-109].

In his overview, Halliday underlined that communication is more than merely an exchange of words between parties, it is a sociological encounter and through exchanges of meanings in the communication process, social reality is created, maintained and modified. The researcher also explained that the interpersonal component is evident in language and communication and it is integral to communication. It refers to the relative status and position of the parties communicating and is for establishing and maintaining social relations. In turn, the interpersonal component is composed of three elements: the status of the parties in the relationship, the contact or degree of familiarity, and the effect, which is the emotional charge embedded in the communication, or the speaker's viewpoint or attitude to the topic [4, p.22].

Bloch is correct to argue that language skills can contribute to career enhancement. Figure 1 puts together topics discussed in the literature review, illustrating how language skills can affect individuals' job performance in multinational corporations. Firstly, it is stated that language skills affect career opportunities. Positive effects include enabling recruitment, promotion, delivering more power to linguistically skilled employees, new work tasks or overseas assignments. On the other hand, employees with poor language skills might not be offered these opportunities, creating a barrier for them. Secondly, language skills have indirect effects on job performance such as contributing to better cultural awareness and intellectual growth [5, p.42]. Negative effects have to be taken into account as well, since people might feel disqualified and afraid of speaking English because of poor language skills, as a result of underestimating one's language skills. In these situations, people's job performance can be negatively affected.

Using English at workplace has effects on individual level and company level [6, p.260-282]. The aim of this study is to examine what kinds of effects it brings to use English at workplace.

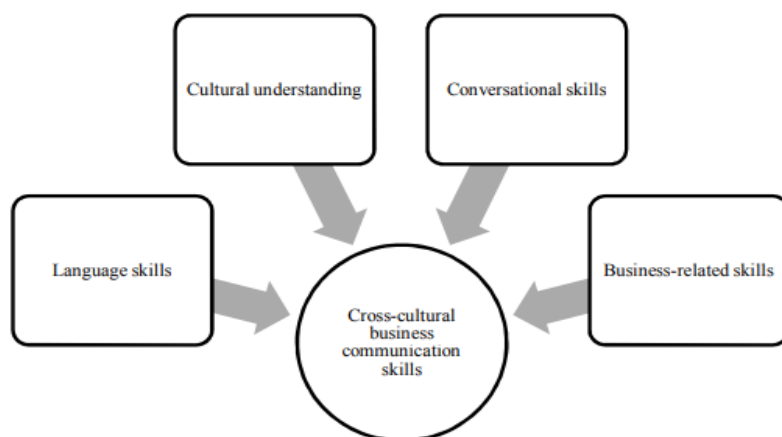


Figure 1.

First, it is examined what kinds of effects language skills bring on individual level. According to Bloch's study, language skills can contribute to career enhancement. Through language skills, employees' career prospects are enhanced. Firstly, Bloch argues that "high level of knowledge of a foreign language enables one to do things that would otherwise be impossible". Therefore, employees can be assigned to new kinds of work tasks and even to new positions if they are able to speak a foreign language. Many companies only recruit candidates with specific language skills for their international positions. Thus, language skills can contribute to getting a job in the first place [5, p.16].

Considering the many benefits of language skills, knowledge of a foreign language can be considered a valuable resource for employees. However, it is argued that although language skills are important in international business, they are seldom sufficient without a combination of other kinds of skills.

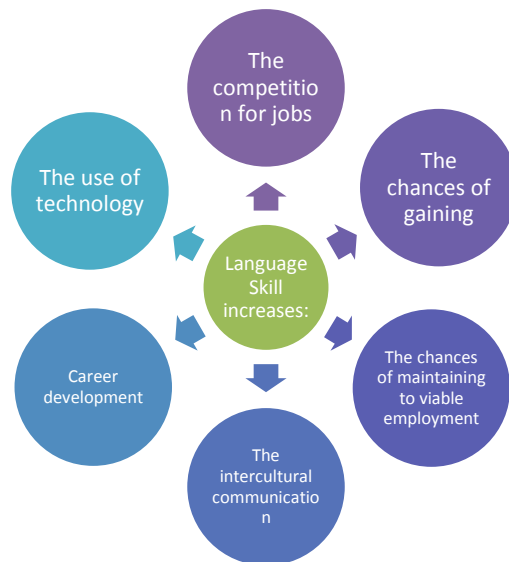


Figure 2.

Due to globalization and the internationalization of companies, Moldovan companies have faced the effects of English as a lingua franca in their everyday work as well. Lingua franca refers to a “language used for communication among people of different mother tongues” [Collins English Dictionary 2018]. This issue is quite a large one and even though when there has been some research on it so far, no uniform result has emerged as to how much it is actually used in practice. English skills are starting to be already a requirement for doing one’s job instead of an aid in succeeding. Bergroth points out that most companies may not use translators extensively anymore but instead, in addition to professional knowledge, workers are expected to have knowledge in languages as well [8, p.11]. It was also revealed in a study made in a company that the interviewed employees told how they use English at work Multilingualism at work is a relevant issue today in Europe as the borders between nations are slowly fading and many companies are employing people from different countries.

Berthoud has taken note of this, stating that companies today have a growing number of international partners and multicultural and multilingual staff working together, both virtually and physically [9, p.8]. One major example of investigating this phenomenon is the DYLAN research project which addressed mainly language practices, policies and strategies and representations of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in twelve different European countries [8, p.6-7]. One of the project’s focuses was on European companies, in the side of EU institutions and bodies, and higher education.

Figure 3 illustrates how internal labour markets are traditionally organized in Moldovan and European/American organizations. Career development in Moldovan companies differs from that of European or American companies. Traditionally in the Republic of Moldova, it has been common that employees stay in one company during their careers, quick promotions for young employees are rare in the Republic of Moldova. It is interesting that in Europe/USA - job rotation is typical, meaning that employees get work experience in different areas and with many colleagues and supervisors inside the company.

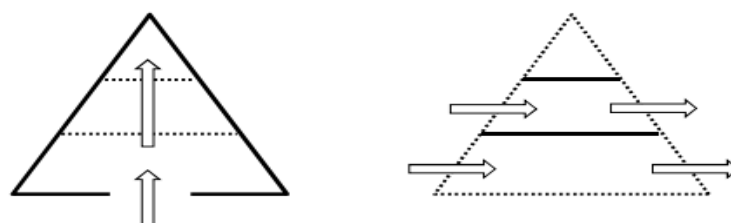


Figure 3.

The way a career path is formed is unique in each company. Salaries have traditionally been determined by seniority, ability, educational degree and job description. Company leaders are also selected from the company rather than hiring outside managers; it has been considered important for leaders of large Moldovan companies that they have wide experience within the specific company, preferably in all of the company's important posts. Moreover, Moldovan companies have specific recruitment practices. It is common that new university graduates are hired by companies directly after graduation. It is argued that English language skills may be required even in the initial stages of recruitment so that only candidates with English language skills might be considered. English language skills might be one measure of employee's ability in the future in Moldovan companies, shaping employee's careers in the company. It is argued that companies and employees that can best promote cross-cultural communication skills and diversity will define Moldovan companies' role in the global environment in the future.

In today's global society business is increasingly being conducted across borders with English often being used as an international language of communication. The ability to use English in the workplace has a number of benefits including: helping the company to succeed, building trust with colleagues and clients, building and improving international relationships, enhancing a skill-set and commanding a higher salary and enhancing international relationships through cultural understanding.

Finally, it can be summarized that language issues should be part of company strategy, starting from human resources such as hiring new people and offering training, creating a supportive atmosphere to use English, and making the language strategy match the company's business needs.

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