Teaching Business Presentations: Coping with Linguistic Anxiety
(The Case of Engineers in the Algerian Hydrocarbon Sector)

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Abstract:

The objective of this research is to investigate the effect of linguistic anxiety on the language proficiency in Business presentations among the Algerian engineers working in the hydrocarbon sector; British Petroleum/Sonatrach/Statoil Joint Venture is the case of study of the intended research. The second objective is to design a business presentation syllabus that responds to their language proficiency deficits.

The empirical study is implemented through a Present Situation Analysis and a questionnaire. The Present Situation Analysis focuses on the English taught in the Joint Venture and the engineers' job description in order to find out the most needed language skill.

The questionnaire is administered to the engineers to examine their lacks and wants in terms of language in Business presentations. We came across the fact that the engineers' lacks rests on three key aspects of language proficiency; grammar, lexis and language of structure. The suggested syllabus lied on the compromise of three approaches: the genre-based approach, the task-based approach and the integrated skills approach.

Keywords: Business English - Business Presentations - Language Proficiency - Linguistic Anxiety - Teaching Approaches..

تدريس محاضرات العمل: التخلص من القلق اللغوي
(المهندسون في مجال المحروقات بالجزائر)

الملخّص:

الهدف من هذا البحث هو استقصاء أثر القلق اللغوي على قوة اللغة المستعملة في التحدث عند تقديم محاضرة في العمل. لقد تم إختيار المهندسين العاملين في شركة (tatslio /HS/BP) حالة للدراسة في هذا البحث.

أما الهدف الثاني فهو تصميم منهج خاص بتقديم محاضرات في العمل حتى يلبي إحتياجات المهندسين اللغوية. تم الاستعانة بدراسة الحالة الحاضرة للمهندسي (liotats /HS/BP) واستطلاع لرأيهم.

أما دراسة الحالة الحاضرة فقد اعتمدت على دراسة وتحليل مهامهم الوظيفية، وأما الاستطلاع فقد استعين به لتبيان النقائص اللغوية للمهندسين والتعرف على طلباتهم. في النهاية تم استخلاص ما يلي: المهندسين العاملين في شركة (liotats /HS/BP) يفتقدون إلى ثلاث ركائز لغوية؛ قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، مفردات العمل، وتنظيم منهج المحاضرة. نتيجة لذلك اعتمد تصميم المنج الدراسي ثلاث أنماط تدريسية.

الكلمات المفاتيح: الإنجليزية للعمل - محاضرات العمل - مهارة اللغة - القلق اللغوي - مناهج تدريس.

Introduction:

Given the predominance and the importance of the English language as a medium of communication and as a language of professional occupation which will directly influence production and productivity, and given the level of the Algerian engineers as far as English is concerned, being only a foreign language given the lowest coefficient as a school discipline in the case of sciences and applied sciences at school and even at university. Many multinational companies organize English courses for their employees. BP/SH/Statoil Joint Venture; the present paper's case of study, provided in-company English courses since the launching of its activity in 2004 hoping to palliate to the problems the Algerian engineers confront.   However, these courses focus on general English which does not help apparently the engineers to really improve their English within their professional domain of use. Language teachers hired for this purpose including myself, had the opportunity to observe the major language proficiency problems in terms of skills, i.e. which language skill they need most to perform better and communicate efficiently in their jobs.

1. The Problem:

The major problem seems to be in speaking. It is the mostly used skill since they are entailed to attend daily meetings which are a face to face case of language use and require the mastery of the speaking skill. They are also required to make short presentations during these meetings to explain issues and processes. ***The major problem encountered in the delivery of presentations, is*** the discomfort in using English and the occurrence of linguistic mistakes which affect the presentation itself. The engineers, using English in front of their managers and colleagues or even subordinates, experiences a situation of insecurity in using English as a foreign language which is a term within the field of psychology known as the linguistic anxiety in public speaking. According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) in their model of foreign language anxiety; this is called the communication apprehension which is concerned with public speaking. It appears in four distinct areas: cognitive, emotional, physiological and behavioral. The latter is our subject of study where the English language is a behavioral component to be measured.

2. The Hypotheses:

The source of the engineers' linguistic anxiety in public speaking might be their low level of English proficiency. Beside other possible psycholinguistic sources that can contribute in

the engineers' linguistic anxiety, the most palpable source of this feeling of insecurity is the low language proficiency level. Because speaking requires that users must master all the rules governing the target language, a questionnaire was elaborated to investigate about the language problems the engineers confront in delivering a presentation, so as to elaborate a syllabus which enables them to develop the speaking skill focusing on oral business presentation destined to SH/BP/Statoil context. Thus the investigation will take into consideration the engineers' needs in terms of the necessary linguistic register required and the development of the oral presentation skills.

In fact; two questions are raised to achieve the above objectives:

(i)   What are the engineers learning lacks in terms of language and skill in the speaking monologue?

(ii)   What components should the syllabus contain to meet their lacks?

3. The Objective :

The objective of the study is to design an oral business presentation syllabus based on a combination of three approaches: a task-based, an integrated skills-based and a genre-based approach. A quantitative method is employed in this study to collect the data using the questionnaire strategy.

4. Theoretical Background

4.1 Business English in Algeria

It is important to discuss the Business English teaching contexts in Algeria in order to have the full picture of its background in the country. There are many attempts to the teaching of Business English thanks to the disclosure the country is going through which led to the expansion of the foreign investments and installation of many multinational companies. Thus, Business English turn out to be an imperial need in the Algerian business world. However, it is still not figuring officially in the educational systems.

General English is introduced in intermediate schools and maintained till the secondary school level in all its branches of specialty (technical, science and nature, economy and literature & arts). There is no appearance to the Business English teaching before university level. This explains why students in universities have no knowledge in Business English. At the level of the University of Literature, Languages and Arts, Algeria considered the "classical license" as a degree for teaching English, preparing the students to teach in middle schools, in high schools and even in universities, but with the recent change to the LMD

system (License, Master, and Doctorate). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as part of this LMD project was introduced in some universities. It represents only one module that involves the history and development of ESP and its teaching whereas Business English has no concrete place in the new system. It is also taught in Universities of Economy but with no approval from the Ministry of Education i.e. it is a self-developing program from the English teachers working in those universities considered as personal efforts.

On the other hand, the four Chambers of Commerce in Algeria (Algiers, Oran, Annaba and Laghouat) attempted to start Business English by organizing Business English training for the teachers they hired. In addition, the Chambers of Commerce together with the

British Council takes a run at setting up four high standard schools in the four regions to introduce business English courses. But until now the English courses offered by the British Council and the American Embassy are but General English courses given to their non-native staff to improve communication.

Private language schools also, participate in the teaching of Business English in Algeria. These schools are not submitted to any official control when it comes to the teaching of the language. They use ready- made textbooks available such as "In Company", "Market Leader", "Direct English" which are designed to respond to the learners' needs in terms of general business purposes. Multinational companies worrying about their staff in terms of English language proficiency often hire the teachers of English to organize business English courses for them within the company while others may register their staff in private schools , i.e. teaching happens in the private school.   By way of illustration, the multinational painting company "Sigma Coatings" uses the services of the private school "Intuition" while the multinational Gas Company BP/SH/Statoil uses those of "Language Solutions Algeria" school.

4.2   Non-Native Users of EBP: The Case of Algerians

Business English is used as a language of communication across the cultural differences between business people in Algeria. In their daily use of business English, Algerians working for multinational companies interact both with native speakers of English and L1 speakers of English. English raises as the only business lingua franca, for example, an Algerian working for the company 'Sonatrach' and a Korean working for 'Sonatrach' subcontractor company will necessarily communicate using English to negotiate a contract. Thus, the mastery of Business English is crucial for those who will certainly work in the field

of business o r any domain where the services of the English language are important. Ellis and Johnson (1994: 15-17) identifies two broad groups concerned with learning Business English: pre-experience, moving job learners and job experienced learners.

Pre-experienced learners are the newly university and college graduated students who gained knowledge of business theoretically and have no practical competence and thus have no idea about the

needs in terms of language used in real life working situation. Some of them need business English for their post-graduation studies for resources are mainly available in English, others may need it for their professional career depending on which professional sector they are hired in. Both groups have reasons to develop their skills and language use corresponding to their field. As regards Mark Ellis and Christine Johnson (1994:16) "In general, pre-experienced learners will be more open-minded than those who are already well ahead in their careers, and this has implications for what can be done in the classroom. However, they may lack confidence in their ability to deal with business subject matter." Within this line of thought, Dudley- Evans and St John (1998:56-57) suggest that English for General Business Purposes courses are usually for "pre-experience learners or those at the very early stages of their career... such courses tend to teach a broad range of English through business settings than English for specific purposes."

It is quite frequent among Algerians working in Gas and Oil domain, for example, to move abroad for higher salaries and better professional life. Whether in South or North Algeria, employees holding a technical background postulate to get hired in Gas and Oil companies in Golf countries such as Arabic United Emirates and Qatar. However these employees have modest information about the new job and lower language proficiency level to maintain an interview. The only language used in work spheres is English, starting from the job interview to giving instruction to the employees or explaining issues and processes in the plant. Therefore, mastering English is a mandatory condition in hiring people from around the world. Algerians desiring to join the Golf countries consider learning Business English a high ranked priority, and this explains their high motivation toward learning Business English. Another gategory of business english learners are those who are constantly moving jobs to work in other countries or those who seek for jobs in foreign countries .

Job experienced learners need to learn Business English to achieve specific objectives. As they are experienced learners, they tend to bring the same standards of their business environment to the language training. They are often curious to know the objectives of the language training tasks. They might be fastidious to their own performance or even to the trainer's performance. They have also generous awareness of time, as they can pressurize on the course in case of an intensive course where they use their life time to improve their proficiency level in English.

4.3   The Impact of Linguistic Anxiety on the Language

Linguistic anxiety is not only "a feeling of tension and apprehension..." as defined by (McIntyre and Gardner, 1994: 284), but rather "a distinct complex of self perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviors..." Therefore, it is detected in four parts: cognitive, affective, behavioral and physiological. First, the cognitive part which rests on the low self-esteem, the perception of inferiority, the linguistic incompetence and the worry about the self image in front of the others. Second, the affective part and it entails the riot of emotions overcoming: tension, discomfort, uneasiness. Third, the behavioral part which implies the clumsiness, gestures and language disorders. The last part is the physiological part; it includes the apparent changes in physiology that is generally related to linguistic anxiety such as blushing, sweating, trembling, and freezing.

The component that seems to be measurable in Linguistic Anxiety, henceforth (LA), is the behavioral impact as it is about language which can be observed and assessed. The language of an anxious learner may be obviously affected and this could be seen in the reoccurrence of grammatical mistakes, the misuse of vocabulary, and the syntactic structure disorder. FL learners may feel anxious about using the target language in and outside the classroom for the reason that they lack the necessary skills and other competencies such as the linguistic, the socio-cultural competency.

Beside the Psychological factors; the Linguistic factor is a fundamental factor that contributes

Fig1. **Linguistic Anxiety in speaking**

in LA. According to McIntyre and Gardner (1994) the low level of English language proficiency is considered as a linguistic source of anxiety. "The apprehension experienced
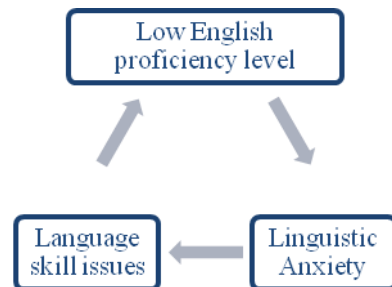
when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not full proficient" McIntyre and Gardner (1994: 5). Speakers are anxious to expose their English language imperfections in front of the others and are trapped within a triangular pressure of the three factors as represented in Fig1.

The impact of LA on language can be observed in all the language skills and mainly in the speaking skill. The speaking skill has gained instinctively the place of a key skill; FL learners tend to be called FL 'speakers' (Ur Penny, 2000). It is mostly found in the speaking skill "since speaking in the target language seems to be the most threatening aspect in second language learning" (Horwitz *et al*, 1986: 132). Moreover, the other language skills appear to be differently related to the LA because they do not share the same key feature with the speaking skill. On the other hand, the relation between LA and the speaking skill can be examined through the three foundations of LA cited by (Horwitz *et al*, 1986: 127). They explain that LA is distinguished in three performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The three anxieties are directly related to the speaking skill. Hence, the latter cannot be separated from LA.

Several language issues can be observed in all the language skill in EBP as a result of LA. The low proficiency level of Learners lead to LA and a feeling incapability since expressing themselves will be more difficult in the target language. In the same line of thoughts, LA in speaking in EBP constitutes one of the problems that have immediate impact on the language and thus on the effectiveness of the speech. The next section discusses the different language issues caused by LA in the speaking skill and more focus is put on the speaking skill.

4.4   Business Presentations and Linguistic Anxiety

The need for presentations in the English language in Business fields is now of a great demand. In addition to the technical expertise or the specialty required for employment and promotion issues, human resources managers are aware of the importance of the ability to communicate effectively. Many universities stress the need to integrate a multidisciplinary program of communicative skills including presentations in the engineering content. (Tenopir and King, 2004). Non- native speakers of English versed in the field of business daily experience what effective communication means to fulfill even routine work activities in the multinational companies. They constantly face language anxiety problems in varying degrees and at varying levels of the English language use

mainly in activities requiring oral use of the language, and each according to her / his level of proficiency.

LA in oral presentations is a manifestation of communication apprehension as mentioned earlier and it is specified as "stage fright" (Horwitz *et al*, 1986). Most researches argue the negative relation between LA and the language production. Tobia (1986) explains that the effect of language anxiety is observed in three overlapping 'stages' in language learning: input, processing, and output where the output 'stage', the performance of language, depends on the previous ones (McIntyre and Gardner, 1994). For Krashen (1982:32) LA is the result of the 'affective filter' *(figure 2).* An affect is intended to include motivation, attitude, self-confidence or anxiety. One way for accounting for the non-learning within the idea of the affective filter relates to the case in which learners do not receive comprehensible input sufficiently enough to engage the learning process. In such a case, the affective filter rises when learners are stressed, and lowers if the input is comprehensible thus learning takes place. In case of learners experiencing LA, the filter is activated creating a mental block that prevents the anxious speaker learner from performing an effective oral presentation.

Fig2. Operation of the "affective filter"

The present research focuses on the impact of LA on the language at the 'output stage'. In another way, it is about the language proficiency issues encountered by the NNSs in oral presentations. The following discussion is about three main key aspects in oral presentations where language proficiency issues can be noticed.

The study investigates the language proficiency issues triggered by the Linguistic Anxiety related to Business presentation. This study pays special attention to the engineers working in the hydrocarbon sector in Algeria. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to insure accuracy and in-depth data gathering and find out the engineers lacks in terms of language in Business presentations.

5.   The Methodology:

The first observation was that public speaking for the engineers constitutes a priority to be tackled. The second observation was that the Business English courses taught in the

company are English for General Business Purposes which does not target the business skills separately. In addition the content does not respond to the hydrocarbon context. In order to have an idea on the language proficiency problems encountered by the engineers in public speaking, a questionnaire is used to determine the lacks and wants of engineers.

The questionnaire was directed by the teacher working in the company which makes it easy for the engineers to ask for further clarification about the questionnaire. Another reason is that the teacher is involved directly as the study is concerned with her field of work. It was administered to the engineers who have key positions and are in constant contact with the English speakers. It was designed as a quantitative and a qualitative technique for collecting data. The quantitative questionnaire provides numerical results; i.e. the quantity of answers. Yet, the qualitative questionnaire gives information about the quality of the answer. The questionnaire used aims at investigating the English language needs in oral presentations for the engineers working in the company. Its focus is to seek information based on theoretical framework of the study, which covers grammar, Lexis and language of structure issues in oral presentations.

The questions in the questionnaire are the 4-point Likert- Scale with close-ended questions. But an open-ended vacant space is also formulated at the end of the questionnaire The 4-point Likert-Scale included measuring difficulty (1 = "a lot of difficulty"...4 = "no difficulty") (See Annex 2 page 97).

The samples chosen for the purposes of conducting needs analysis of the study were the engineers from different departments of the company, mainly; Technical support (TS) and "Département des Puits" (DEP) departments. There are 20 engineers in the two departments. Sixteen (16) engineers were selected for the questionnaire survey. They represent 80% of the total number which can reveal a significant representation.

5.1   The Participants:

The engineers working for the JV (British Petroleum/Sonatrach /Statoil) occupy key positions within the staff hierarchy. They constitute 60% of the total number of employees working for the company. The technical service in such a field is of a fundamental importance because it is connected straightforward to the production which is the primary goal of the company. These engineers are constantly interacting with the foreign technical staff when conducting inspections and maintenance activities. They are also required to fulfill other communicative tasks in English like writing e-mails and reports, attending

meetings, telephoning, teleconferencing as well as delivering technical presentations about their work.

5.2   The Instrument:

The instrument was designed as a quantitative and a qualitative technique for collecting data. The quantitative questionnaire provides numerical results; i.e. the quantity of answers. Yet, the qualitative questionnaire gives information about the quality of the answer. The questionnaire used aims at investigating the English language needs in Business presentations for the engineers working in the company. Its focus is to seek information based on theoretical framework of the study, which covers grammar, Lexis and language of structure issues in Business presentations.

The questions in the questionnaire are the 4-point Likert- Scale with close-ended questions. But an open-ended vacant space is also formulated at the end of the questionnaire. The 4-point Likert-Scale included measuring difficulty (1 = "a lot of difficulty"...4 = "no difficulty").

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5.3   Results and Interpretation:

The level of difficulty encountered in *grammar*, as the results show, is around the 40% representing the highest level, which is a considerable percentage that ascertains the hypothesis of the study. As far as *lexis* is concerned, almost 35% is found out in terms of difficulty, the engineers witness a significant difficulty that must be considered. Almost the same results go for *language of structure*. The results show that the participants face some problems ranging from having great difficulty to less difficulty in the three main areas of language proficiency in three main areas.
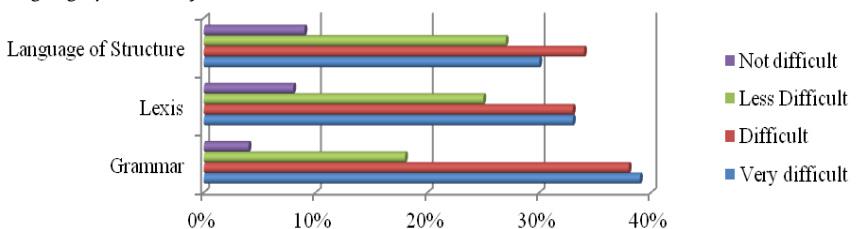

Fig3. Results

The study illustrated that there is a significant difficulty in language proficiency witnessed by the engineers in all the three main aspects except in three points in language structure (start the talk, state the topic and the purpose, and sum up the talk) they presented less to no difficulty. This analysis provided a good background for establishing the aim and objectives of the intended syllabus design.

6.   The Three Approaches Syllabus: A Compromise

Joining three approaches (Genre- based approach, Task-based approached, and Integrated-skills Approach) to constitutes a 'Business Presentation Syllabus' is one of the endeavors. The three approaches are used in the syllabus design at the units and activities levels.

The learners follow an explicit model for their presentations. Therefore the genre-based approach is used for the whole organization of the syllabus; i.e. the arrangement of the units. The business oral presentation genre is reflected in the units. That is to say, each unit examines one or two particular steps in the oral presentation. As the genre-based approach focuses on the learning product, the learner will be able to organize and produce a business oral presentation that reveals the steps learnt. Practicing is meant to lead the learners to be creative and to produce their own version.

The second stage focuses on the Task based Language Teaching (TBLT). TBLT is concerned with the learner's activity. At the end of each unit a task is performed which consists of delivering an oral presentation that focuses on the pre-determined genre steps of the business presentation. This task is concerned with getting the students to deliver a presentation accurate English. The teacher will supply different language knowledge activities during the unit which provide the learner with the necessary language to be integrated in the task. Thus the learner will be creative in using the language through the experiential learning approach. The learners should: 1) 'do' i.e., concrete experience; 2)' review', reflective observation,3) 'learn' ,abstract conceptualization, and 4) 'apply' , active implementation.

The language knowledge activities supplied by the teacher during the unit do not tackle the speaking skill in isolation but rather in conjunction with the other language skills. At this level the integrated-skill approach appears to be the most suitable approach to adapt. The Integrated skill approach involves the integration of the skills at the level of the different activities that end up with performing the unit task. A presentation activity requires that the

learner makes some readings to organize the plan of the presentation and attend oral presentation for observation.

Conclusion:

It is assumed that the engineers working in BP/SH/Statoil face concrete difficulties in the three key aspects of language proficiency (grammar, lexis, and language of structure) when delivering a Business presentation. Thus we aimed at designing a 'business presentation syllabus' that responds to their language lacks. Joining three approaches (Genre- based approach, Task-based approached, and Integrated-skills Approach) to constitutes a 'Business Presentation Syllabus' is one of the endeavors. The three approaches are used in the syllabus design at the units and activities levels.

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The aim behind designing such a syllabus is to provide the engineers with the basic structure of a business presentation and the required language accordingly and thus lower their Linguistic Anxiety and gain more confidence when speaking. The intention is not to eliminate the Linguistic Anxiety as it is not a therapeutic study but to decrease it by raising the engineer's language proficiency level for more effective presentations.

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