

English as a Lingua Franca for Tourism: A Case Study of Hotel Receptionists' Trainees

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Abstract:

It is indisputable that English has become a global lingua franca in the world market. It is viewed as an instrument language serving as a means of communication between non-native speakers. English has been used as lingua franca of tourists and travellers worldwide. As the hotel operators communicate daily with guests from different lingua cultural backgrounds, comprehensible communication in English plays a significant role in facilitating hotel business. Communication is vital to the success of tourism business since it is only through the effective use of communication that tourism operators can offer higher service quality to customers. Thus, good communication skills can reduce misunderstanding, doubt, and conflict. In fact, misunderstandings often happen in the workplace especially with international visitors, and thereby neither good quality service is delivered nor the customer's satisfaction is achieved. To address this lack, the current study examines learners' attitudes towards the use of English as lingua franca as a corporate language in hotel reception curriculum. The study is an examination of teaching tourism practices and approaches currently used in Bou-Saada training institute. It probes the communication needs of the receptionists in the workplace.

1. Introduction

English is globally recognized as the language of international business communication. It is portrayed as the global lingua franca in world markets. The study of English as a lingua franca is relatively a new field of linguistic research, which has recently gained momentum interest. Communication is vital to the success of tourism business since it is only through the effective use of communication that tourism operators can offer higher service quality to customers. The term English as a “lingua franca” (Henceforth ELF) has increasingly been used as a concept referring to communication generally between speakers with different mother tongues (L1), and different cultural backgrounds. As the world is shrinking and as English is the dominant language, learners are striving to learn and acquire English to communicate effectively and succeed in their professional life. English is the almost working language and mostly used. It is a useful tool for achieving economic and social development. Thus, the global demand for English is still increasing. It is agreed that English as a lingua franca is not, to be viewed as a fixed and dominant language, but rather as a flexible communicative means for interacting with other speakers. The modern world today calls for higher degree of effective communicative skills in order to win the competition in all areas. Communication is then an essential skill for successful business and personal

relationship. The evolution of business and communication technology (internet, telephone) has revolutionized the field of English language teaching and has shifted the attention from teaching English for academic purposes to teaching English for other specific purposes. As a result, second and foreign language acquisition research into language teaching has led to a great interest in investigating the most effective methods of improving the ability of workers in using English for specific purposes in their workplaces. Tourism Management is currently contributing a lot to the overall growth of the economy of any country. Hotel management training is experiencing important innovations and changes, thus, the demand for qualified staff is increasing for this sector requires an often-diverse range of skills. While working in the hotel industry, a receptionist will come across many types of travelers. Some will be business guests whereas others will be tourists and visitors. Many of them will speak a different language than the receptionist's language. Plenty of the guests will speak English. The hotel Management and tourism institute in Bou-Saadais regarded as a prominent training institute in the hotel management and tourism in Algeria. It is designed to train learners to cope with the changing tourism conditions and provide both theoretical and practical approaches to the different needs of the hotel management. The training institute is supposed to prepare trainees for professional communication since

they will most likely be working with people from different parts of the world. This study serves as an analysis of different attitudes towards the use of English as a lingua franca in hotel reception curriculum. It is an examination of teaching tourism practices and approaches currently employed in Bou-Saada institute. It attempts to explore the trainees' attitudes towards the use of English as lingua franca in the workplace. The hotel reception trainees are not mere learners of English, but users since English is a means of interaction with different non-native speakers for different purposes. The study then was founded on two main questions:

- What are the trainees' attitudes towards English diversity in hotel management?
- To what extent does the curriculum content facilitate trainees' interaction with international visitors?

On the ground of these questions two hypotheses were proposed:

- the trainees were not exposed to English varieties, as a result misunderstandings often happen in the workplace especially with international visitors, and thereby neither good quality service is delivered nor the customer's satisfaction is achieved.
- The training of the future receptionists was not planned or designed on the learners' needs and wants.

2. Literature Review

Tourism has become a significant industry in the world. It is a source of foreign exchange revenues for many countries. It is a field of great importance in the economy of any country. Tourism is more than an industry that needs to be managed. *“It is an industry that continues to grow”* (Campbell, 1970).

In Algeria, Tourism is not yet at a world-class level, in relation to its wealth and strategic situation. Nevertheless, it is in the process of reexamination and construction. Education and training are now integral elements of tourism management strategies. Their focus is on the learner competency and effectiveness in the workplace. The role of any hotel management school is to produce an effective and operational element able to deliver better tourism services. Language is important to human's daily life in order to communicate with others. The main function of language is to facilitate interaction between people who are from distinct cultural backgrounds. Therefore, many people learn English because of the economic globalization. In today's business world, English is no longer viewed as a foreign language. It is the global and international means of communication.

English as a Communicative Language

English has become the international language of business. Thus, most English users in business are non-native speakers (NNSs) and the English they use is global

English, not that of native speakers (NSs). Communication is vital to the success of tourism business because it is only through an effective use of communication that hotel receptionists can offer higher satisfactory services to customers. The role of English becomes evident as a medium of communication to disseminate information.

English then, is the bridge between tourists and tourism operators. It is now used for various purposes as a means of international interaction. The use of the English language is considered as a requirement in many fields of business, mainly in tourism.

Today, communication in English is no longer a requirement; it is an obligation, particularly for training schools wanting to compete internationally. It is the most commonly language used and understood by almost everyone. Therefore, it is easier to communicate in English, as it is the best way to succeed in business field. Indeed, a better use of language is a step towards a better understanding.

English as a Lingua Franca Definition

English language has established itself as the global lingua franca that is to say vehicular language spoken by people who do not share a native language. In fact, ELF users are non-native speakers from different nationalities who communicate with each other as ELF speakers. English as a lingua franca has gradually been established

as the main term of what earlier was referred to, and occasionally still is, as '*English as an international language, English as a global language, or English as a world language*' (Seidlhofer, 2003, p. 210). Today, the majority of ELF users are non-native speakers. English is the lingua franca in many jobs, especially in science, technology, business management and tourism, and hospitality industry. The common language to communicate scientific technological and academic information is lingua franca which is a shared language of communication used between people whose main languages are different. English as a lingua franca is thus defined functionally by its use in intercultural communication rather than by its reference to native speakers' norms. It is obvious that speakers of English as a lingua franca are not learners of English, but users of the language in their daily lives for different purposes in different context and setting, '*English as a lingua franca however, has become a communicative tool of immense political, ideological and economic power*' (Kashru, 1996, p. 910). The purpose of using English as a lingua franca is the ability to create a common ground, willing to maintain real contact and the possession of the linguistic skills are necessary in any successful communication.

Communicative Competence

The term communicative competence is closely related to the second and foreign language teaching. Nowadays, one of the most important aims of foreign language teaching is the development of communicative competence within the current communicative approaches. Communicative competence is the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish goals of communication. The learning process requires the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does. It means that learners who have developed communicative competence in a foreign language are able to convey and receive messages successfully. These learners are then able to use a foreign language in everyday life and settings. Communicative competence is a linguistic term that refers to a learner's ability not only to apply and use grammatical rules, but also form correct utterances, and know how to use these utterances appropriately. The term communicative competence has received many different interpretations. It was introduced by Dell Hymes in 1966, reacting against the perceived inadequacy of Noam Chomsky's (1965) distinction between competence and performance. This means that Chomsky coined another term, communicative performance, '*Once communicative competence appeared [it] became synonymous with progressive, innovative teaching*' (Savignon, 2001), it has been

expanded considerably, and various types of competences have been proposed.

3. Research Methodology

The current research is a case study. Such research strategy is based on an investigation of a single group. It is an explanatory study used to explore cause and effect of communication breakdowns between native and non-native English speakers and the use of English as a lingua franca as a means of interaction in hotel management to minimize any communication failure. It is a study used to explain the situation of hotel receptionists' communication with non-native English speakers to apply solutions. One of the major reasons for adopting a case study is that the case study has already established itself in the area of second language acquisition and its suitability to small-scale investigation. The case study is based on a single group of second year hotel reception trainees in tourism training institute at Bou-Saada. The group was about twenty-two trainees all were males. It is a purposive sample used to corroborate both the research problematic and hypotheses. The sample represented the population of hotel reception trainees. The researcher used a random sampling procedure. It is a homogeneous group that consisted of adult learners from similar social backgrounds preparing to work in a business field and deal with business English that is an occupational and not an academic context. The data collection took place after

the trainees' entrance from their spring holidays i.e. in their final semester of second year. The access to the population sample was after obtaining access permission from the head of studies of the institute to conduct data collection.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of a set of closed-ended questions related to the study objectives. The questions were divided of three main sections. The first section stressed on the trainees' awareness about the importance of English language at workplace and their attitudes towards English diversity and how necessary is to learn English accents to overcome any miscommunication when interacting with native or non-native English speakers. As future hotel receptionists, the trainees were very motivated to learn English with its multifaceted accents to better their English communicative performance. The second section was parted into three main queries in which the researcher focused most on the learners' attitudes towards: first, the acquisition of any foreign language is complete only if culture is part of it. Second, how pronunciation can affect communication. To unveil the learners' wants, it was necessary to check into the ways and how they prefer to perform their English activities that is to say individually, in pair work, or group work. Finally, it was very important to shed light on the actual programme content and examine

whether it is congruent with the market's needs and demands. These participants were solicited to provide candid information.

4. Discussion

The collected data from the trainees' questionnaires, disclosed that almost all the participants under investigation are motivated and in favor of acquiring different English accents to overcome the global challenges and to be operational in the fieldwork. The findings show important lacks and deficiencies encountered by the learners in hotel reception training. It is now possible to determine teaching/learning objectives to urge a change in the training institute according to world challenges. The trainees were aware enough of the authentic role of English as lingua franca in the world markets as a work tool and main channel of communication between native and non-native speakers. Almost the majority of learners (86 %) justified their reasons to learn English. As the world has started to be a global village, this gave birth to the need and pressure of adopting a common lingua franca to ease communication and make it more practical for people of different linguistic backgrounds (Crystal, 1997, p. 10). English was accorded the privilege to be the language of international communication or international language. English as a lingua franca entails the idea of understanding various accents of English since the

purpose is to communicate in international situations. According to the current research results, 74% of learners claimed the prior exposure to a range of non-native accents. Being exposed to different varieties develops a *'tolerance of difference'* (Jenkins, 2007, p. 183). The findings of the questionnaires revealed that hotel reception trainees show positive attitudes towards non-native accents of English. The study suggested that exposure to non-native accents is even more important than exposure to native accents; because learners are more likely to encounter non-native speakers. Most scholars (such as Seidlhofer, 2003) seem to agree that learners need to be acquainted with different accents. The familiarity with different accents is a key issue in the current study was to find out to what extent learners were exposed to different accents. 73 % of learners reported that they had problems with pronunciation and that mutual misunderstanding generally happened due to pronunciation. There exists an urgent need to intervene in order to preserve mutual understanding as English is emerging. It is commonly argued that ELF speakers need to acquire some common phonological features essential for ELF understanding to be included in the learners' training syllabus. Pronunciation was clearly the most frequent and difficult barrier in any interaction between ELF speakers in workplace. Miscommunication in fieldwork happens very often especially with international clients. It is agreed that misunderstandings

lead to doubt about the real intent of the others and this may have a very negative effect on business. Hotel customers generally get frustrated when their questions are not answered properly. Without convenient pronunciation skills, the learners' ability to communicate is strictly limited. The learner needs to develop awareness and monitor skills. The teacher also has a special role to play in the communicative learning programme. Indeed, the challenge today is to move beyond the traditional teaching methods that is to say the teaching of grammar rules. However, it is preferable to distinguish between grammar as a means to the achievement of proficiency in a foreign language and grammar as an end in itself.

Culture is considered as the fifth language skill in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is assumed that learning a language implies learning its culture. The learning of culture gives the learner the mindset and techniques to adapt the use of English and understand the values and qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept difference. It is an attitudinal change that is expressed by language. Thus, cultural awareness is an interdisciplinary subject required to understand and work successfully in another culture. To raise learners' cultural awareness, a number of issues are to consider such as the curriculum, the materials and the appropriate way to base on. The challenge is to initiate debates on what and how to teach

to help learners develop as international citizens of the world, using English and their lingua franca.

5. Recommendations

Tourists mainly the foreigners need high service quality and hospitality to be satisfied. Therefore, hotel operators in general and receptionists in particular should be able to communicate effectively with their guests. Hotel management training institutes in Algeria need to innovate and develop new teaching and training techniques to enhance the learners' current job performance. English is much chosen for providing direct and smooth line of communication. In fact, the linguistic barriers are the consequence of inadequacy in English language teaching. Curriculum content, training manuals and lack of exposure to different English varieties are perceived to be major reasons behind the miscommunication. English language is the undisputed lingua franca of the world. It is the means of communication within and between international corporations, and it is the language of choice in most areas. Therefore, tailoring services to different needs is very important. With the current challenges, new reforms and perspectives are needed to improve learners' competencies in the face of globalization. However, the training institutes should provide learners with the opportunity to expand their knowledge in order to adapt to the demands of an ever-changing socio-economic

environment. It is necessary to develop training as a key element in quality management focusing not only on key technical and interpersonal skills, but also on organizational culture and objectives. English as lingua franca teaching would differ from teaching English as a foreign language or as a second language. One factor to be taken into account in this respect is the absence of a common ESP curriculum in Tourism and Hotel Management Institutes. It is important to develop a national ESP curriculum in different areas. In fact, textbook writers and syllabus designers must specify and classify the different uses and skills of English that are needed by different learners to make programmes and books for each option or specialty in hotel management. Teachers must be familiar with their trainees' specialty and learning needs.

Conclusion

Learning in a foreign or second language is a complex process that needs some basic skills and performances to achieve the target language. The communicative competence refers to the underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication. The learners do not simply learn the linguistic structure and grammar rules, but they have to learn how to use the language properly. Therefore, what interests most is not whether the learners learn how to use the language accurately, but whether they can get their message. To

communicate effectively in the workplace, it is necessary to concentrate more on both function and form of the language. It is argued that English holds a prominent position in certain domains generally and hotel management and tourism particularly. English is the language of international communication. It is an important channel of communication in the workplace. In Algeria, education and training face great challenges such as lack of materials, for instance the course book. In addition, the curriculum content is not compatible with the learners' needs. A major weakness of this approach is that it unifies the pedagogical goals and the learners' abilities that is the objectives, abilities and needs of learners are standardized and the specificity of each option or subject area is overlooked. Learners are expected to acquire skills in the same manner. However, research has shown that in the same class, there are different levels, objectives, attitudes and needs. The teacher alone can decide on the methods and materials that are suitable to his class. Thus, hotel management institute trainers need to innovate and develop the pedagogical teaching priorities and move away from a reliance on general English competence to English for specific purposes and performance to offer the learners an opportunity to develop and sharpen their skills and knowledge to enable them work independently at a professional level.

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