

Teaching english in the modern multilingual workplace research papers examples

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The workplace of today is very different from what it was a few decades ago. Today, globalization and technological advances mean that a lot of companies have transnational business and have businesses and centers spanning the whole globe. The complex immigration patterns and the increased movement of people across national and international borders for professional reasons mean that there is a lot more diversity at the workplace. Therefore, the typical twenty first century workplace sees a wide range of ethnicities, cultures, races and linguistic capabilities in its workforce. With such diversity, it has become increasingly important for workplaces to have uniformity in their language of communication and business. English has become one of the most commonly used standard languages in workplaces across the globe, because even in the multilingual twenty first century workplace, English still has global recognition (Britt-Louise, 2013).

It is also becoming increasingly recognized that there is a need for formal language instruction in the case of teaching English to non-English workers in the same organization. Despite working with colleagues whose first language is English, empirical research suggests that there is clustering of first language culture groups and intercultural social and language skills are difficult to pick up without explicit guidance and instruction (Newton & Kusmierczyk, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary for workplaces to combine education in English along with work for their non-English speaking employees. Thus, there have been both formal efforts by workplace organizations to teach English to non-native speakers in a formal setting and many classes and after hours courses have sprung up to achieve a minimum

language competency that is necessary for functioning professionally. Along with the advent of formal English instruction in the workplace, there has been a body of literature looking at the effectiveness of these methods and seeing what approaches work better in the teaching and learning of English in a work setting.

For teaching English in workplace, the focus and scope is slightly different from that of teaching grammar and composition to middle school students.

For English teaching in the workplace, the purpose is to acquire oral communication skills and be able to function in task oriented situations without any linguistic barriers between the members of a team. Basic writing skills also fall under most workforce English requirements, so the English teaching needs to be geared towards the effective attainment of these goals.

In fact, English teachers are themselves beginning to introspect about their teaching methods and seeing if they are preparing their students for the challenges and requirements of the workplace (Bernhardt, 1992). Indeed, one of the challenges is that many non-English speaking workers have had English instruction in their primary education, but it fails to equip them with the sort of workplace literacy that is necessary. Even college educated workers sometimes feel that the English they used in their college courses was ill equipped to prepare them for the professional English that they need in the workplace. Whether it is drafting business letters or professional emails, academic writing requires a very different sort of English. One worker commented that even though she spent so much time reading and quoting Shakespeare for college assignments, it was of no good for her in her English writing during a secretarial job (Garay & Bernhardt, 1998).

Indeed, teaching English in the workplace is very different from teaching it in an educational institution and the courses that are taught in the professional setting are also appropriately tailored. Several essays written by academic English professors working in universities have been analyzed and even university professors agree that English teaching is changing and that they need to foray out of the academic domain and get involved in vocational training (Jeffrey, 1999). Other issues that have been noticed with teaching English in the workplace besides the shortage of qualified teachers is the fact that most of the English teaching materials are obsolete and are not relevant to what is used on a daily basis in the workplace (Liu, 2012). The teaching materials that are used in many workplace courses use passages which are translated word for word by rote memorization and are grossly inadequate to prepare the non-native English speakers for the oral and written communication that is needed in the busy working environment. Traditional language education has always been disconnected from the real working world, so the emphasis on the vocational uses of English has always been little. All of these deficiencies are now being addressed through the modern vocational English courses in the workplace and evidence based methods are being used to effectively impart the language skills to the workers.

In countries like China, there have been several researchers who have looked into the topic of teaching English to non-native speakers at a vocational level so that they are adequately prepared for the workplace. Some of the researchers advocate using a teaching model that is geared towards the business or professional line the worker belongs to. So, the teaching materials for a worker in the international business field versus the

tourism sector would be different from each other and the vocabulary and lessons would be geared to reflect that (Hongliang, 2012). The emphasis would be that the English taught would be solely keeping in mind what the worker uses practically at the workplace. Other approaches on teaching workplace English focus on strategies to equalize the status of the non-English speakers and the English speakers. Some approaches are specifically geared to help workers transition into a phase where they are fully participating in team activities in the workplace, even when they are surrounded by counterparts who speak better English (Newton & Kusmierczyk, 2011). Another option is that of appreciative inquiry, where it helps workers integrate into the culture around them and helping them feel comfortable even though there are stark intercultural differences.

Focusing on specific aspects of the English language is also another way of approaching the teaching of English in a diverse workplace. Some look at speech acts in English, where the non-English speakers are given practice at making verbal requests from peers, superiors and inferiors in the workplace in a culturally appropriate manner (Newton & Kusmierczyk, 2011). Another way of focusing the materials used for teaching English is to look at intercultural communication skills. No matter where the workplace, even companies and organizations in non-English speaking countries often use English as the interpersonal form of communication. Therefore, learning the intercultural context in which English is taught is important and has to be individually tailored depending on where the organization is situated. Many studies report examples of intercultural differences arising from one non-English speaking group not understanding the other English speaking group

and feeling uncomfortable. One study talks about a German-British company where the German managers were unhappy about the fact that their British counterparts did not understand that the Germans' competence in English was lower than theirs and did not make attempts to make their English simpler and easier to comprehend out of respect for their non-English speaking colleagues (Britt-Louise, 2013). Another example of a social linguistics researcher in Thailand explained how the social hierarchy of the professional relationships in the country is important to maintain and preserve and can be difficult when spoken English is a second language for some workers (Yaoharee, 2013). Therefore, it can be seen that the challenges, the skill levels and the focus of teaching English should be taken in view of the cultural context and has to be tailored to the unique workplace where it is being taught.

Another method that is increasingly being explored when it comes to preparing non-English speaking workers for the professional environment is incorporating workplace relevant English into courses at vocational colleges or even the high school levels. Although some teachers feel that teaching English should not be a purely job oriented process, many are already thinking of creative ways to make their students more prepared for the real world. Creative solutions like including more tasks like writing memos, providing status reports on English papers and making reports on school activities could help students learn English in the classroom that might come in handy for them in the boardroom as well (Robbins, 2001). In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau has even prepared a resource package that deals directly with various practical aspects of English communication such as

business emails, business meetings etc. (Lam, Cheng, & Kong, 2014). It covers linguistic examples and provides a reference for the lexicon that is often used and can be referred to by workers confused with the language being used around them on a daily basis. Clearly, there are multiple ways to impart the knowledge of communicative English to non-fluent workers and workplaces and English teachers are already coming up with solutions to make the delivery of these linguistic skills better.

For any teaching course that attempts to impart English skills as a second language, the assessment of the progress of the individuals is equally important. Since usually, teaching English to non-native speakers is conducted with specific job oriented goals in mind, it is important to regularly assess the progress made in the achievement of these goals (Prince, 1984).

One way to do this is by frequent tests or assessments that can be in the form of a simple questionnaire or a more informal way. Even the participants in the course can provide feedback on how effective they thought the course was and whether they detect any improvement in their skills. However, the most effective way to check the efficacy of any English course is looking at the supervisor's or peer's feedback. The English speakers interacting with the non-native speaker should be able to detect an improvement in their colleague's performance and there should be a noticeable improvement in the way the colleague performs tasks requiring the use of English. Either way, goal directed assessment is an important part of ensuring that English lessons in the workplace are achieving their objectives. Although standardized tests may show only marginal improvement, some of the learning journals kept by the workers show marked improvements (Newton &

Kusmierczyk, 2011). Also, supervisors report increased efficiency and increasing improvement in measurements and overall accuracy as well, suggesting that teaching English is a worthwhile investment to make. In conclusion, most research and reports from the workplace suggest that simple language socialization is not enough for non-English speaking workers to pick up the professional language skills they need to perform their job efficiently. Therefore, the need for formally teaching English to non-speakers in the workplace has been long recognized and individual organizations have come up with their own solutions to the kinds of courses to teach along with the materials to use and the types of teachers to employ. Some of these experiments have worked better than others, but the need for identifying goals to chart the workers' progress has become clear. Overall, most workers and employers have both noticed a difference in the linguistic performance and efficiency after going through a structured course in written and spoken English that is designed for their place of work. Therefore, there is evidence that there is a clear benefit to investing time and resources into English courses for non-speakers in the professional environment. With more research and evidence, the art of teaching English the right way in the professional environment will be perfected and English teaching will no longer focus on obsolete or impractical skills that are useless in the workplace.

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