



Aalto University
School of Business

BELF as the language of global business: implications for teaching?

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Aalto University / School of Business /Department of Communication

Research and Programs

- Master's Program in International Business Communication

- Master's Program in Finnish Business Communication)

→ in 2013, **MSc in Corporate Communication**

- Doctoral program**

- Research**

(3 professors, 13 other faculty, 10 doctoral students)

Multilingual Business Communication

Offers courses of business communication in 10 languages

(20 lecturers)

International Business Communication (IBC)

The IBC Master's Program focuses on the strategic role of communication in the global operations of multinational corporations and other organizations.

Courses, e.g.:

Managing Corporate Communication

Organizational Communication

Crisis and Media Communication

Corporate Social Responsibility

Intercultural Business Communication

BELF as the language of global business: implications for teaching?

- 1 English as a Lingua Franca, ELF
- 2 English as a Business Lingua Franca,
Business ELF → BELF
- 3 Research project on Global Communicative Competence
- 4 Implications for teaching English (for business purposes)

1

English as a Lingua Franca, ELF

Lingua Franca as a concept

- “lingua franca” originates from a language variety used on the South-Eastern coast of the Mediterranean from the 15th to the 19th century
- enabled trade between people who did not share the native language
- examples:
 - Latin as the language of the Roman Empire
 - French as the language of European diplomacy
 - English as the language of globalization today (ELF)

ELF research

- active research for the past ten years
 - pioneers: e.g. Jenkins 2000; Knapp & Meierkord 2002; Mauranten 2003; Seidlhofer 2004
 - more recently: e.g. Ljosland, 2011; Dewey, 2007; Björkman, 2011; Cogo, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2012 ; Jenkins et al 2011 (review)
- today: regular conferences; ELF Journal in 2011
- focus of research has shifted from identifying linguistic features to examining the situation specific functions of ELF

Motivation to examine ELF in the business context

- my own professional background (business and applied linguistics)
- years of teaching English business communication and company training & consulting for non-native speakers of English
- supervising PhD projects within organizational contexts; lingua franca issues emerging
- continuous structural and technological changes affecting business communication
- two large research projects enabling further elaboration

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English as a Business Lingua Franca, Business ELF → BELF

Global business context

Multicultural

- with different backgrounds connected via cross-border mergers, acquisitions, partnerships, networks

Multilingual

- with different native tongues working together

Multimodal

- communicating via various advanced communication technologies



Need for a shared language!

”Merger project” in 2000-2002 (1)

- examined in-house communication in Finnish/Swedish mergers
- funded by the Academy of Finland
- communication survey (approx. 1000 F/S respondents)
- analysis of discourse in meetings carried out in Swedish, Finnish, & English and emails written in English by F/S

"Merger project" in 2000-2002 (2)

Findings related to the use of English

- a pragmatic choice depending on e.g. the target group
- perceived as a neutral code
- used among Finns and Swedes at work
- reflects the cultural/native language 'norms' of Finns and Swedes (e.g. linguistic behavior of "discussive" Swedes vs "few-worded" Finns)

→ BELF introduced

The concept of BELF (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005)

- used as a **shared** and **neutral code** between **non-native English speakers** in **global business** contexts
- used by **business professionals** at work to **do their work**
- used both in-house and with partners
- reflects the **various cultural backgrounds** of its speakers (i.e. 'linguistic masala')

EFL →→ ELF →→ BELF

1. EFL = English as a foreign language
 - terminology, buyer/seller interaction, native speaker focus
2. ELF = English as a Lingua Franca
 - shared communicative resource; power implications; multicultural 'masala'
3. BELF= ELF in the context of business

EFL vs BELF

CRITERION	EFL	BELF
Successful interactions require	NS-like <u>language</u> skills	<u>business communication</u> skills & strategic skills
The speaker/writer aims to	emulate NS discourse	get the job done & create rapport
NNSs are seen as	learners, 'sources of trouble'	communicators in their own right
Main source of problems	inadequate language skills	inadequate business communication skills
'Culture'	national cultures of NSs	business community culture(s) & individual cultural backgrounds
English is 'owned' by	its native speakers	nobody – and everybody

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Research project on Global Communicative Competence (GCC)

Research project on GCC

To increase our understanding of the role of BELF in global communicative competence

Questionnaire survey: 987 respondents

Follow-up interviews: 27 interviewees

Respondents and interviewees

Respondents

- N=987
- represented 31 different native languages and more than 20 countries
- native language Finnish for 40%; west European languages dominated
- 80% of the respondents had a university degree
- 60% < 40 years of age; 75% male

Interviewees

- 15 Finns, 8 Dutch, 2 Portuguese, an Italian and a Brazilian (N=27)
 - 85% of the respondents had a university degree
 - 55% < 40 years of age; 60% male
-

Main findings related to communicative competence

1/4 Language use at work

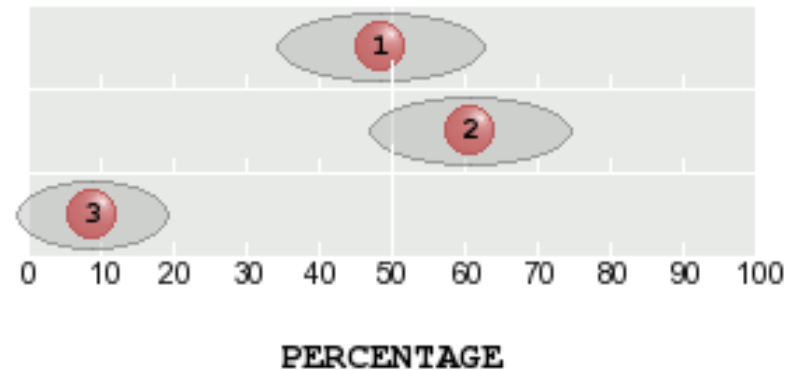
2/4 Communication with native/non-native English

3/4 Components of BELF competence

4/4 "Success factors" in BELF communication

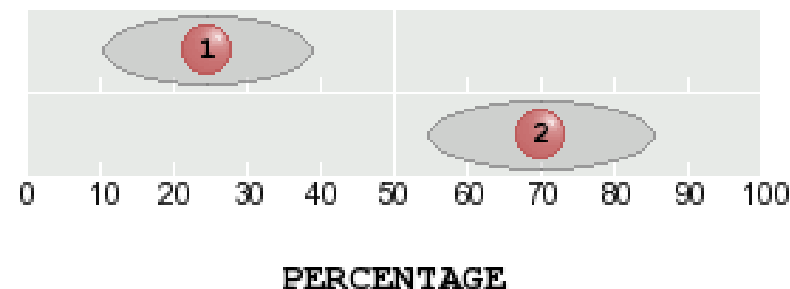
1/4 Language use at work

- English (1)
- Native language (2)
- Other (3)



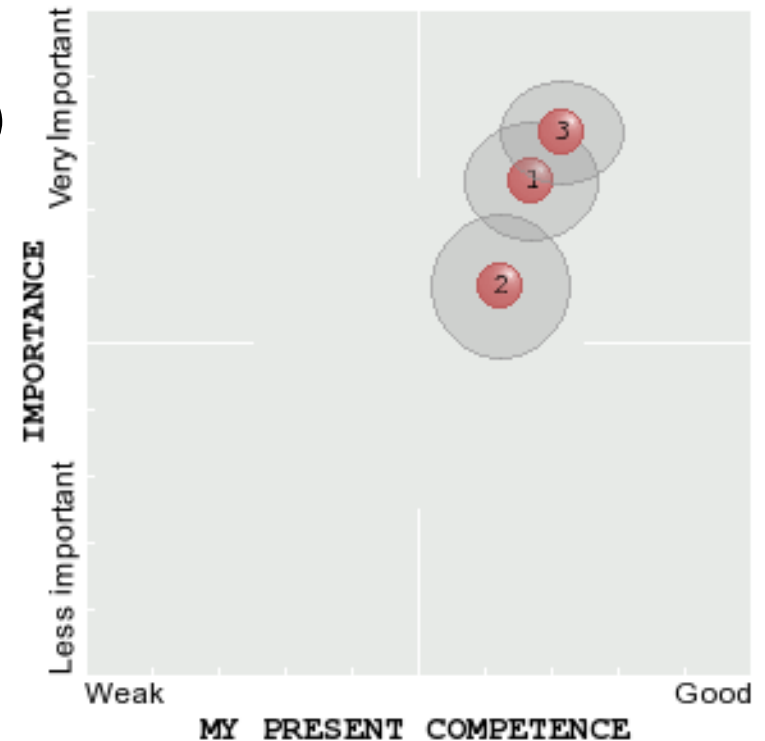
2/4 Communication with native/non-native English speakers

- Native English speakers (1)
- Non-native English speakers (2)



3/4 Components of BELF competence

- Business-specific discourse (3)
- Wide general vocabulary (1)
- Grammatical correctness (2)



4/4 'Success factors' in BELF communication

- (a) Getting the facts/content right
- (b) Getting the tone/ 'politeness' right
- (c) Getting the discourse right

(a) Getting the facts right

I always check and double-check.

I need to follow up and confirm in writing – I don't need to do that when working in Finnish.

(b) Getting the tone right ... what Finns said

First you say something nice, then you give the facts, and then you close by saying something nice again.

*You should just behave in a **non-natural way** and realize that it works!*

(c) Getting the discourse right ... clear, brief & direct

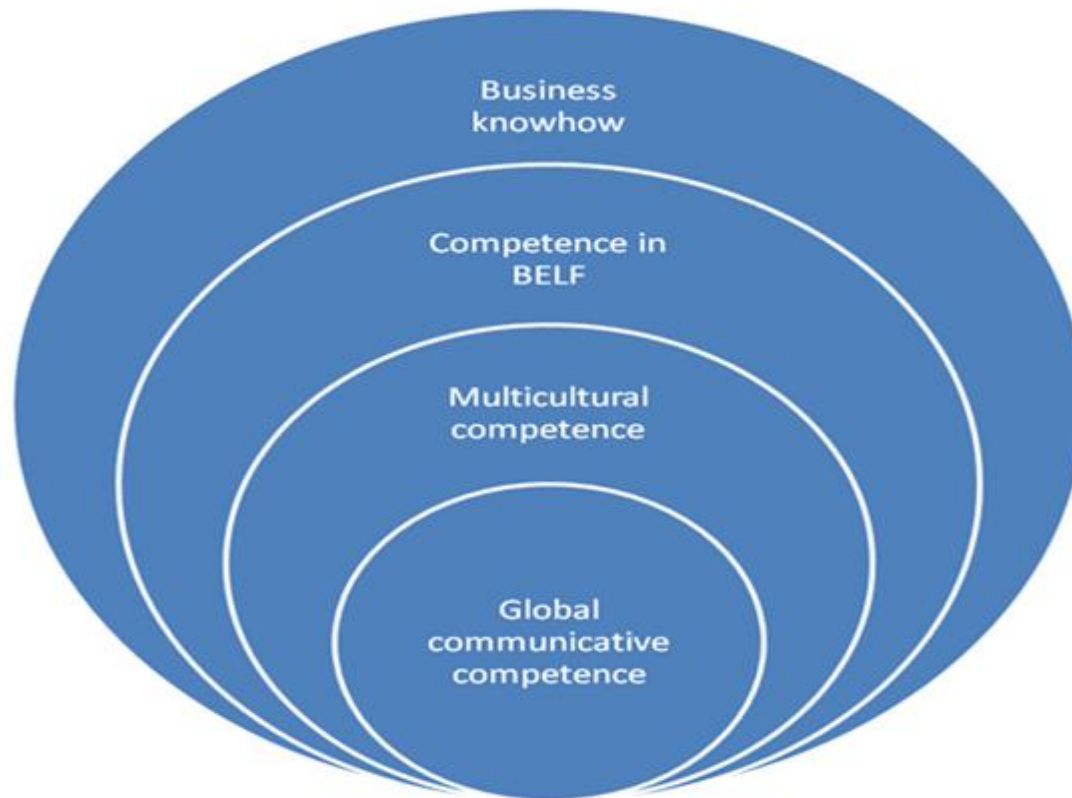
- Logical progression & organization
- Explicitness
- Readability
- 'Simple', i.e. without complicated words & structures
- Key information front-loaded
- Use of layout devices



It gets the job done!

Model of Global Communicative Competence in business context

(Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011)



Competence in BELF

- knowledge of English 'core' and business-specific multimodal genres
- knowledge and skills in business communication strategies, i.e. the 'success factors' (clarity, brevity, directness & 'politeness')
- strategic competence, e.g.
 - connecting on the relational level
 - asking for/providing clarifications
 - making questions
 - signalling (non)comprehension
 - paraphrasing, etc.

Multicultural competence

= managing communicative situations with representatives of different national, organizational, professional cultures

- tolerance towards "different ways of doing things"
- accommodation skills
- knowledge of foreign languages, i.e. multilingual competence

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Implications for teaching English (for business purposes)

Implications for teaching English (for business purposes)

- change of paradigms: from EFL to (B)ELF
- shift of focus: from formal/grammatical accuracy to interactional skills and rapport/trust building
- importance of "traditional" business communication skills
- emphasis on strategic skills
- tolerance of different accents, discoursal patterns, 'ways of doing things'; flexibility
- significance of multilingual competence for intercultural competence



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