

## The Place and Significance of English in Business Communication in India

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### ABSTRACT

*Nowadays in India, multilingualism has become a trend with English language gaining popularity alongside the existing language (Hindi). English is regarded as a situation for flourishing amalgamation into the global economy and becomes a priority of the nation guiding principle. The purpose of this paper is to show that English is at present principally used at a workplace and for specific purposes such as emails, writing a business letter, memo etc. In terms of motives of learning English, development and personal growth have been mentioned as the most common reasons for English proficiency among Indian business professionals. It discusses at length how English is indeed the language of the corporate world. Ranging from business meetings to negotiations across India, English is used for everything. Last but not least, it lays stress on the main reasons for the need of English at present stage of India's development and how English proficiency is a must for a professional profile.*

**Keywords:** Business Communication, Business English, English Language, Indian English

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language remains an indispensable component of our lives. Humans communicate through language code. It is a channel by which a person communicates his/her thoughts and feelings to others. It is the instrument with which he/she conducts business in society. A language survives in a community as long as people speak it. The life of a language depends upon its use by the people. If a language is spoken by a majority of people, its survival chances are higher. A language attains its status in a society because of the people who use it. Language serves society. Languages change from domain to domain. In a domestic setting, a particular code is used while in a practised setup, a particular code is being used. From the marketplace to educational setups and organisations, different forms of languages are being used.

English is the language of the present generation. It is the language of the business world, the language of the globalised world. It has become the language of international business. Of course, the spread of English around the world is rather a divisive topic. English proficiency is an important condition for entry into the world community, at the same time, the rise of the English language is associated with the fall of native tongues. The importance of English cannot be refuted in the Indian context. English language expertise remains an important requirement to study abroad and is vital for young Indian professionals – both at home and market. It has become a language of communication among business professionals in India. In a region where there are people hailing from different culture and speak different indigenous languages, it becomes difficult to converse in different regional languages. Therefore, English acts as a common tongue among people. English should continue to remain in use besides other languages in India.

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The main objective of this paper is to investigate the role of English language in the present Indian business society based on the findings conducted in national, international and foreign companies in India. This paper attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What is the role of English in Indian society among business professionals? (2) What is the main motive of learning English by Indian business professionals? (3) What business situations that most commonly used English in the context of Indian business communication?

Structurally, the paper will be presented in the following manner: Firstly, a literature review of the earlier work conducted in the realm of this topic is presented. This will be followed by the role and place of English language in Indian society. Further, research methodology and findings of the observed data of regional, national and international companies among Indian business professionals are presented. Last but not least, the section focuses briefly on the usage of Business English on vocabulary and topics used in the world of business, trade and finance. In short, the first half of the work deals with the position of English in India with the data provided by the respondents of this research. The latter half of the work deals with the significance of teaching communication skills which lead to the reduction of unemployment in the nation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There have been limited studies related to the relevance of English language for business communication in India. These studies are simple and general and do not include any kind of research-based work. Therefore, the present work not only presents the importance of English language but also served to prove the significance of language. A few of the works in this area are presented below as a part of the literature review.

For most of the business organizations, the first criterion for recruitment is to have a good command over language and proficiency in English (Latha, 2018). The organizations require skilled manpower that is proficient in English language. The article briefly discusses the importance of English in business transactions.

In another study by Abida Begum, there is an attempt to discuss the relevance of English language in India. It simply highlights the importance of English language in today's Indian society. Another study by Hariharasudan (2018) analyses the need for Business English communication for the Garments Industries in Tirpur, India. It shows that people do their business communication in English only and the need of Business English communication is high for running a successful garments industry.

Other than the role of English in India, English also plays an important role in international interaction. International interactions include economic relationship among nations, international business relationship, worldwide trading, and others. In terms of international interactions, English chiefly acts as a global lingua franca (Sneddon, 2003).

## **3. PLACE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGLISH IN INDIAN SOCIETY AND IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN INDIA**

Undoubtedly, English has become a must-know language for being in a foreign nation and young generation desires to learn it for increasing chances of job opportunities and enhancement. English is the governing business language and it has become almost a requirement for people to speak English if they wish to enter a global workforce (Clarke, 2012).

In India, English is socially perceived as a must for a modern citizen proficiency. When a person has to travel outside or work within the premises of national, international or foreign companies;

sound skills in English communication makes a huge impact and increases one's chances of advancement and growth. According to the 2011 Census report, 2,59,678 first language speakers use English, 83 million used English as a second language and 46 million as English as their third language. English enjoys a strong place in India among other indigenous languages.

It has been said that Indians have made their own variety of English referred to as 'Indian English' which is a kind of neutral variety of English. Thus, English pervades the Indian sub-continent. But the question arises- will English lead to the damage of the Indian languages? The new generation of students does not read books written in their mother language. They are losing their interest in learning their language and forgetting their culture. Therefore, on one hand, English gains superiority and on the other hand, the indigenous languages are facing risks of endangerment.

The increasing number of English-speaking professionals and translators in India is prevalent in current times and English serves as the lingua franca in intercultural business communication between local and foreign specialists. The activities of embassies and representative offices of foreign countries, foreign enterprises and representative offices of international companies require English in Business communication.

To communicate across national borders and maintain the association with overseas business parties or professionals, English is crucial. English is important for higher education and specialized training. English is important for getting a good job and better salaries. Multinational business organisations and many international corporations ask for people who have sound knowledge of English. English is the need for a variety of jobs.

Advancement and growth in business often depend on communication, and most of it happens in English. More and more multinational companies in India use English as the common corporate language - *Microsoft, International Business Machines Cooperation (IBM), Nestlé, Procter and Gamble, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, CITI Group, Hewlett Packard (HP), Apple Inc., Google, Cognizant* and a few more. English occupies an important role while communicating in the offices of these multinational companies. The code of communication is English in the offices of these countries set in different parts of the country.

#### **4. METHODS**

In the present study, a set of questions were designed about the use of English in Indian companies and data was observed and noted. A few of the company officials were approached and questioned based on a questionnaire and findings were drawn based on observation.

The researcher laid emphasis on the secondary data resources and questions were framed. Questionnaires were prepared to extract answers from the respondents and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The initial investigation was conducted through semi-structured interviews that allowed the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the Indian business context. The survey was conducted among Indian business professionals to identify the extent of the functioning of business English in various fields of Indian business context. This research attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What is the role of English in Indian society among business professionals? (2) What are the main motives of learning English by Indian business professionals? (3) What business situations that most commonly used English in the context of Indian business communication?

In total, 70 business professionals participated in the study. Around 6 to 7 business professionals from 10 different companies were selected as interviewees and contacted by the researcher.

Some of these companies were in Patna and New Delhi. A few of these were *Jai Mata Di Infra or JMD* (regional), *R K Corps* (Regional), *National Highways Authority of India or NHAI* (International), *Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation or HSBC* (International), *Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited or BHEL* (National) and *Indigo Airlines* (International). The questionnaire survey was participated by 35 male and 35 female business professionals with age ranging from 26 to 40. Survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted through emails and telephonic interviews. The researcher also made use of secondary resources through internet information. Questions were designed involving the active use of English in business sphere.

**Table 1** Participant details

Total no. of business professionals	70
No. of male professionals	35
No. of female professionals	35

In India, three financial, three manufacturing and four service companies from a few cities were selected for the survey. The main questions were concerning spheres and specific cases of the use of English at the workplace and the main motives of learning English.

**Table 2** Company details

<i>Financial</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>Service</i>
HSBC	BHEL	R K Corps
ICICI	HMT	JMD
SBI	Tata Steels	Indigo Airlines
		SIS Securities

In the background information section, questions were prepared concerning the company name, department/team name, company type, work experience, and language proficiency. Further, the survey participants were asked questions regarding the place and role of English in the context of the language-related situation in India, for example, which language is used as everyday communication, business communication, language of culture, media, etc. Afterwards, the respondents had to indicate their main motives and reasons for learning business English as well as they had to express their approach towards the English language in general.

Some of the questions in the questionnaire and semi-structured interview are as follows:

- i. Which language is used in writing emails?
- ii. Which language is used in preparing reports and memos?
- iii. Which language is used in preparing minutes of meeting?
- iv. Which language is used in everyday communication?
- v. Which is the language used for informal communication within organizations?

## 5. RESULTS

### A. The place of English language in Indian society among business professionals

The first thing to examine was the level of English proficiency among the respondents. English proficiency was high among respondents. 70.4% of respondents indicated that they speak fluently, write, and read in English. Whereas, 28% of respondents said that they speak, read and write in English with some difficulties. Moreover, nearly half of respondents indicated that they had passed the international tests of English language proficiency, such as IELTS, TOEFL, BEC,

etc., and so on. This indicates a high level of keenness towards achieving proficiency in English. Some respondents indicated a high amount of need for English, while some stated necessary but not everywhere.

The respondents believed that the use of English language was more efficient at work as compared to the internet, reading fiction, television, reading newspapers and magazines and in conversation with friends. The majority of the respondents also marked English as a language of business communication in Indian society.

## **B. The main motives of Learning English in by the Indian business professionals**

Questions were prepared on recognizing the motivation of learning English and identifying the main reasons for the need of English among Indian business professionals presently.

Some of these questions are as follows:

- i. Why learning English is important in today's times?
- ii. Honing LSRW skills will lead to enhancing confidence level. Shed light upon this.
- iii. Do you think effective communication skills will lead to a reduction in unemployment levels?
- iv. What is the importance of good interpersonal skills to work in organisations?

It was observed that practically all respondents showed that English proficiency was crucial for their professional profile. According to them, being fluent in English is an essential tactic in this era and to always be prepared for incoming challenges. It increases your probability of climbing commercial stepladder. If a person communicates in an effective manner with consideration and clarity, then that is linked to the level of empathy and interpersonal skills. The respondents believed that effective communication in English leads to success in business.

60 out of 70 respondents believed that English is a language that promotes their amalgamation into the global workforce, paves the way to various international companies, serves as a means of sharing each one's achievement, switch over of knowledge and encourage partnership with clients and foreign companies. They opined that knowing English fluently in contemporary times was a boon and helped a lot in interacting with clients from outside India too.

The rate and extent of business discourse in English in India has led to a situation in which the indigenous languages are under the strong influence of English (Clarke, 2012). English business communication is sophisticated and is more in demand (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014). There is a lot of enthusiasm among youth and professionals to acquire proficiency in English skills which will reward them with better job opportunities.

It was also suggested by the respondents that effective communication skills in English are the key to success in the corporate world. Good communication skills in English will help reduced the unemployability issue. These are essentially one of the most important life skills a person possesses. One should administer the art of good communication skills and gain expertise in honing those skills. The participants, in a nutshell, associated English with the ability to move forward in career and applying for an esteemed and highly paid job.

It is a noteworthy fact that many companies in India have started offering English lessons to their employees – both to executives and colleagues lower down the corporate ladder. Whether it is a matter of internal communication or external communication, all things happen in English. Many companies have initiated to create an English-speaking environment. A few of these are *Intuit India, American Express India, Google India, Adobe India, Pitney Bowes and SAP India*. Moreover,

the existence of a huge number of languages is incompetent in international economic cooperation.

Other than that, English is at the summit of topping the internet in the number of users and is also a language in technology. About 560 million people use English on the Internet (Danet & Herring, 2007). This ensures the widespread use of this language across the recent trend in communication technologies.

From a resume structuring to answering job interview questions, English pervades every nook and corner of the professionals. In this age of globalized businesses, there are many occupation opportunities out there where business English expertise is required for success.

In a study by Tsedal Neeley, it is shown that English is the global language of business. More and more multinational companies are mandating English as the common corporate language.

### C. Specific situations of Business English used at the workplace

The result of the present study showed that English was being used as part of the official duties among Indian business professionals. English was frequently used at the workplace among business professionals with customers and colleagues.

Furthermore, this study found out that the popular use of English in business communication is for jobs application and in the workplace. The results showed that more than 90% of respondents used English in writing a CV/resume, 80% in writing a cover letter, and 70% during the interview for their current position. Some of the respondents indicated that they also provided an international certificate of English proficiency (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL).

**Table 3** Business English Use at Workplace

Use of English	Percentage of Respondents
CV/Resume making	90%
Cover letter	80%
Interview	70%

Various kinds of business English situations are email, writing a business letter, business meeting, business presentation, writing a contract/agreement, business seminar, writing a report, writing a memorandum, receiving an order, dealing with claims and so on. It was observed that email, writing a business letter business seminar and business presentation were using English frequently in business settings.

**Table 4** Use of English for various purposes

<i>Use of English in various purposes</i>
Email
Writing a business letter
Business meeting
Business presentation
Writing agreement/contract
Business seminar
Writing a report
Writing a business memorandum
Receiving an order
Negotiations

Thus, emails and business letters in English topped the list. The Indian business professionals wrote emails in English principally to maintain the business relationship and to communicate with trading partners and customers and colleagues. The most frequent types of business letters were as follows: application letter, a letter of inquiry, request letters and commercial letter.

The email as well as writing a business letter in English is a formal means of communication. All kinds of business correspondence are conducted in English. Even for business presentation or writing a contract/agreement, conducting a business seminar, writing a proposal, receiving an order, dealing with claims, placing an order or purchasing, making a phone call, translation of a document, and, reading articles make use of English language. The emails and letters written in English are most frequently used in business settings. The high occurrence of using these types of business communication today is a general observable fact in most of the business companies around the world.

Most business documents in a company or an organisation are composed in English. The annual reports of a company are written in English. The memorandum or memo is a means of communication for internal communication within an organisation. A memo is different from a letter which can travel outside an organisation. According to the respondents, memo is also written in English and circulated internally within the organisations.

The respondents also stated that Business English is important for effective communication. One needs to speak in common tongue so that the thoughts and ideas can be translated into coherent sentences that everyone can understand and respond to. Moreover, English was a language used as the medium of communication by these respondents. For example, the respondents delivered PowerPoint presentations in English when in board meetings. The respondents also said that even the minutes of meetings were prepared in English. The regional languages were not used and therefore the importance of English was emphasised.

In addition, if one wishes to travel abroad and work in an international company, English will help them communicate with strangers. The language gives you an edge in other jobs as well. It also allows you to express yourself in a language that everyone understands. English is the lingua franca of the world due to westernization and globalization (Neeley, 2012).

The participants discussed numerous aspects that include identifying the motivation of learning English and identifying the major reasons for the need of English at present stage of India's development. They opined that English proficiency is a must for a professional profile. It provides novel information and promotes the progress of point of view, chances for career expansion, help in obtaining a prominent job, enhance the status of an individual, and creates a sense of confidence. English promotes incorporation into the worldwide community, opens doors into global companies, allows communicating with people from other countries, promotes association with clients and foreign companies and allows sharing peoples' achievements and exchange of experience. It is through this language that business dealings across boundaries are getting done in an effective manner.

English has become the identity of one's in an industry or within an organisation. Those who are affluent in English speaking skills make a huge impact among others. While those who cannot produce the language well suffer from lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Therefore, if anyone hones his communication skills then it will become natural for him to feel strong and motivated in language skills.

Presently, English has a lot of varieties ranging from Received Pronunciation to Indian English variety. The area of business communication is very appealing and covers a number of components which are applicable in an industrial environment. Ranging from e-mail writing,

memorandum and minutes of meeting preparation, negotiations and business meetings and presentations, all these are conducted in English language.

It is further stated that if we consider the status of English in India, then the majority will believe that English is completely a language of business communication, yet some section believes it is partially a language of business communication. On a general note, it is true that English is currently the language of business communication in India and other countries as well.

It is a well-known fact that English spoken with fineness will create a favourable personality in front of the people in the society. Personality will be further improved when it is collaborated with good communication skills in English.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the present study showed that in current years English is gaining popularity and occurrence in the different spheres of public life in India. The highest occurrence and need for English are observed only in specific areas.

Respondents observed that English is a good possibility for career expansion. English is a passport to success. The huge majority of people expressed their constructive outlook towards the extent of English in Indian society: it was the yearning for added study of the English language, including language for professional growth. However, a few respondents believed that English language has affected the other indigenous languages in negatively. The English language is usually used in business correspondence (emails, business letters, memo), as well as during business trips, presentations, conferences, negotiations, etc.

Business English centres around the expressions and topics used in the world of business, trade, finance and for others it refers to the communication skills used in the workplace, and focuses on the language and skills needed for typical business communication such as presentations, negotiations, meetings, small talk, report writing and many more. In both cases, it can be taught to speakers of English, for example, undergraduates and postgraduates whose preparing to enter job markets.

One learns language and strategies for successful negotiations and can plan a business event using negotiation skills in English. All these things are possible by taking up classes in Business English and increasing the chances of one's getting selected for a company or an organisation. Making effective presentations in English also enable one to get trained in language and presentation techniques.

The present study is a basic step in identifying the role and significance of the English language in business communication in India with special focus on certain regions. The language is of much relevance to a great fraction of the society while only a handful believes that it will dominate the indigenous languages. Indeed, the time has come that Indian business scenario is surrounded by the influence of English while having the other indigenous tongues at the same time. English has truly been significant in business communication in the Indian context.

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