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BACK TO REALITY: IMPLEMENTING THE CASE METHOD IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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The paper discusses development, delivery, and outcomes of the implementation of the case method in teaching Business English. The main focus is on the way case studies contribute to the development of intercultural communication skills. Incorporation of case studies into the Business English curriculum keeps conceptual classroom discussions well grounded in reality. Case studies provide students with a valuable way to practice coping with real issues of business people working in real business settings. Rich not only in specific business content, but also in cultural content, cases provide students with the cultural input essential for learning the value of openness, tolerance, and acceptance, which help them meet the challenges of intercultural encounters in business.

Key words: Business English, case method, intercultural communication skills

INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades, issues regarding the relevance of intercultural communication for managing the problems of everyday business life have been on the upswing. This is primarily due to the fact that today's business world is largely influenced by an ongoing globalisation that affects both business and corporate cultures, but also the process of communication between businesses and society in general. This has led to the upsurge of approaches to the development of intercultural skills, both as an important segment of in-company foreign language courses, and as a part of the Business English curriculum at the faculties of economics and business administration. Primary aim of intercultural training in the language teaching process is cultivating awareness and understanding of one's own culture, as well as of other cultures. The underlying target of such training is to foster tolerance towards diversity and to make students aware of their cultural biases and their accustomed conduct which may not be appropriate, accepted, or shared in different cultures (Trompenaars, 1993). Based on a model of foreign language teaching that provides learners with linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences, it has been pointed

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out that a foreign language learner has to become an intercultural speaker without aiming at achieving a near-native capacity (Byram, 1997; Byram and Cain, 1998). Although the catalogue of objectives outlined by the authors includes skills, attitudes, knowledge, and educational factors in teaching intercultural competence, it is an all-encompassing model and as such it cannot easily fit into most European foreign language curricula. Other attempts to assess intercultural learning aim primarily at describing methods of teaching intercultural communication suggesting, for example, the use of informative authentic texts (Tomalin and Stempleski, 1993), involving learners in ethnographic projects and case studies (Byram and Cain, 1998), or suggesting the use of literary texts in the classroom (Schewe, 1998). But, however refreshing those models appear, the objectives remain vague, leaving teachers at a loss as to what to expect from their learners, how to structure the lessons, and how to assess the learners' achievements.

With that regard, the principle aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the case method can be applied in the BE classroom as a part of the intercultural training process. The purpose is to prove that the use of real–life business cases significantly influences the way students understand the notion of 'cultural differences', while at the same time enhancing and reinforcing the overall set of skills needed for managing successfully the intercultural business encounters.

In the first part, the paper establishes the significance of the close relationship between 'culture learning' and language learning. The second part focuses on the concrete outcomes of implementing cases in BE teaching, in particular those related to developing intercultural communication skills. The third part develops the methodology for implementing cases in the BE curriculum and demonstrates it with the examples of cases aimed at enhancing intercultural communication skills.

1. CULTURE LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Now, more than ever before in human history, people are coming into contact with cultures different from their own. According to Gibson (2004), there are many reasons why this is happening. First of all, technology enables people to communicate in real time and to establish contacts with unknown people across national boundaries. Secondly, the international labour force is more mobile, especially business people who are globally active working on international projects. Thirdly, many organizations increasingly employ multicultural workforce in order to encourage diversity in the workplace. This is believed to encourage a spirit of creativity and competitiveness, both of which positively reflect on business. Finally, companies that wish to grow and decide to outsource or export to a foreign market will need to adapt their products and services. For that purpose, they will have to negotiate with partners abroad and try to understand and adapt to their ways of doing business, i.e. to their culture.

When coming in contact with a different culture or with a different "system of beliefs and values" (Storti, 2001:15), we have to adjust our behaviour so that it does not annoy or confuse the people coming from other cultures. If these adjustments are not made, we cannot expect to be wholly functional and effective in a multicultural setting.

Thus, when preparing young business leaders of tomorrow to communicate interculturally, we have to be aware of different dimensions involved in the process of development of intercultural communication skills. Firstly, it presumes raising the students' awareness of their own character features (sense of humour, empathy, flexibility, interests, curiosity etc.). Secondly, it groups together three different aspects of social interactions – ability to maintain relationships with colleagues and friends, ability to communicate with a minimal loss of meaning in the communication process, and ability to cooperate with other people for the purpose of realising common goals. Thirdly, it requires focus on three interrelated areas: knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In this category, 'knowledge' implies understanding how social groups and social identities function, both one's own and other people's. 'Skills' refer to the ability of 'intercultural speakers' (Byram *et al.*, 2001) to see how misunderstandings can arise, and how they can resolve them. By putting ideas, events, and documents together, and seeing how each might look from another perspective, intercultural speakers can see how people might misunderstand what is said, written or done by someone with a different social identity. This means that the skills of comparison, interpreting, and relating are crucial for the intercultural speaker.

The foundation here, however, lies in the 'attitudes' of the intercultural speaker which imply curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own. *Intercultural attitudes* presume a willingness to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, without assuming that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones.

Such categorisation implies that, apart from the business vocabulary and business skills that BE learners have to master, it is essential that they develop a complex set of sociolinguistic skills as a basic prerequisite for successfully participating in intercultural business encounters.

Many attempts have been made to define the specific nature of such skills. Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), for instance, identify three skill areas: skills related to the maintenance of self (stress reduction, feelings of self-confidence), those related to fostering a relationship with host nationals, and finally, cognitive skills that promote a correct perception of the host environment and its social systems.

Practice has proved that focusing on the development of intercultural communication skills encompasses at least three areas, such as behavioural flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Behavioural flexibility is the ability to select appropriate behaviour in diverse contexts, interaction management entails dealing with the procedural aspects of conversation, such as the ability to initiate and maintain a conversation, while social skills refer to empathy and identity maintenance. Therefore, a competent communicator is expected to be able to deal with diverse people in different situations (Jandt, 2004).

Since language is used in social exchanges, feelings, attitudes, and motivations of learners in relation to the target language, to the speakers of the language, and to the culture will affect how learners respond to the input to which they are exposed. Seliger (1988) rightly states that those affective variables will determine the rate and degree of second language learning. Some other authors also regard personality factors as influential in the process of culture learning and language acquisition (McDonough, 1981, Krashen, 1981, McLaughlin, 1987, Littlewood, 1981). While welcoming the idea that culture learning is inherent in language learning itself, they rightly maintain that linguistic proficiency is the overall aim of communicative competence.

Teaching intercultural communication entails teaching students to manage their behaviour so that it harmonizes with that of a different culture (Bennet, 1997). We maintain that this encompasses the following goals: *cognitive,* which means adding to the students' existing stock of knowledge, *affective,* referring to developing the students' openness, tolerance, acceptance and awareness, and lastly, *behavioural* goal as a part of which students learn the 'dos and don'ts' of the new environment. The three tasks that have to be analysed in order to achieve those goals are: the *'what'* of facts, descriptions, figures and real–life situations, the '*how*' of appropriate behaviour in particular situations, e.g. the rules of address and conduct, and the *'why'* of cultural phenomena – all that by using knowledge of the particular target culture.

If the cognitive approach is applied, the teacher adopts methods such as lectures, reading activities, and classroom discussions. If, on the other hand, we opt for a more experiential approach to intercultural training, the students' emotions and interpersonal skills come into play. This approach entails methods such as simulations, role plays, games, and case studies.

2. ADVANTAGES OF USING CASE STUDIES IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

Cases available to BE teachers come in different forms, from a simple *„What would you do in this situation?"* type of case to an elaborate role-playing scenario in which students must resolve complex questions based on real-world data and documents. Regardless of its form, every case includes three key elements:

1) Real-life scenario – cases are generally based on real-world scenarios although some facts are usually changed to simplify the case or to protect 'interested parties' that took part in the actual situation (common practice in BE course materials);
2) Supporting data and documents – effective case studies provide students with real-world artefacts which they analyse in the course of their work on the case. These can range from data tables, charts, graphs, links to real URLs, and quoted statements or testimonies;
3) Open-ended problem – case assignments require students to answer an open-ended question or develop a solution to an open-ended problem with multiple solutions. Requirements normally range from a one-paragraph answer to a fully developed action plan, proposal or decision.

When deciding to introduce the case method into the classroom, it is essential to know that we will not get much out of hearing the class discuss the case we had not read beforehand, and that we will not be able to contribute anything to the discussion if we do not develop reasoned thoughts concerning the case before it is actually introduced to the students. In other words, the teacher's goal in preparing the case should be to come up with a sound, well-supported analysis of the situation and a sound, defensible set of recommendations about the actions that need to be taken as a result of the case study analysis. Thus, whatever solutions and recommendations students come up with at the end of the case study, the teacher is able to discuss various options and give objective opinion in order to assist students in deciding on the best action plan.

Since case studies are rich both in business content and in language content, they provide students with the opportunity to consolidate previously acquired knowledge and to practice specific business and language skills. Moreover, it has been proved in practice that the use of case studies largely contributes to solving a dilemma that teachers of Business English are often faced with. Namely, language level of BE students in most teaching situations varies from intermediate to advanced within the same group. Although this means that for the most part the students feel at ease when using English, they still have certain lexical, grammatical and pronunciation problems that are not easily dealt with in a limited time scope available in one semester. Furthermore, the students of economics and business administration need to be exposed as much as possible, particularly in their BE courses, to the activities that will increase their understanding of what business people should or should not do in guiding a business to success. They need to practice building their skills in sizing up company's strengths and weaknesses and in conducting strategic analysis in a variety of industries and competitive situations. Such activities will also enhance their sense of business judgment, as opposed to uncritically accepting the authoritative crutch of the teacher or „back-of-the-book" answers.

Therefore, the case method

- is a surrogate for personal experience in learning about real-life business situations and as such provides students with the opportunity to gain experience in problem solving and business decision-making;
- helps students understand the relation to their own goals since it helps them connect theory and practice;
- enables students to develop and practice critical thinking and reflective learning which gives them advantage over traditional lectures;
- improves the students' organizational, logical, and analytical skills by making them select and condense various types of information into logical sequences, and using that information to clearly understand the problem at hand;
- develops language and communication skills – students are required to collaborate in small groups in order to reach an agreement and as a follow-up they are required to produce a written assignment;
- allows for the practice of specific managerial skills, such as holding a meeting, negotiating a contract or giving a presentation;

- encourages collaborative learning and team-working skills essential for functioning successfully in the business environment;
- enables the development of skills needed in diagnosing complex business problems and exploring multiple perspectives;
- provides students with the opportunity to integrate what they have learned in their BE curriculum and apply that knowledge to real situations;
- offers, in a hands-down approach, an insight into the ways of clearly and concisely presenting conclusions and giving recommendations;
- offers an opportunity to uncover and practice different culture-specific ways of doing business worldwide and different methods of dealing with cultural differences;
- helps in raising the awareness about how to avoid stereotypes about different cultures and encourages the changing of views in the light of what one observes;
- gives students an opportunity to discuss the qualities that companies today look for when they select people to work internationally – openness to other ways of thinking, cultural adaptation, flexibility, ability to work in a team, patience, sensitivity, professional excellence, and the ability to deal with potentially stressful situations.

There are various sources of field-specific case studies, both in textbooks and on-line. One possibility is implementing cases which can be easily obtained either from the web pages of business schools, business magazines, and journals worldwide (see Appendix 1). Another, more accessible option, is using textbooks designed for classroom use. Such publications offer simulations of real-life business roles (Utley, 2001) and integrate mini case studies at the end of each chapter that focuses on a particular area of economics.

Since the case method normally puts emphasis on interactive nature, we have identified two distinct types of cases: those that provide students with targeted content input to enable them to recycle specific skills such as handling meetings, telephoning, negotiating, problem-solving, and decision-making; and those that allow for a wider interpretation and require the teacher to select the preferred methodology for their implementation. Whichever method the teacher opts for, there should be at least four stages in the case study implementation on which we will focus in the following chapter.

3. METHODOLOGY FOR USING CASE STUDIES IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Implementation of the case method as a tool for developing intercultural communication skills in the BE classroom was tested on the students of Economics at the Faculty of Economics in Split. The primary aim of implementing the cases revolved around the combination of two types of criteria – abstract and objective ones. Such an approach has several advantages. Firstly, it enables students to participate actively in various life-like tasks and recycle relevant vocabulary while engaging in lively interaction. Secondly, it allows the teacher to objectively evaluate the students' attempts at solving various tasks. Finally, at the end of each task, in a meta-phase, it allows students to look back at their achievement and discuss with the teacher their own progress as well as the learning process itself in the context of intercultural training.

To ensure the best possible ratio between the time spent on a case and the realisation of desired outcomes, the implementation of the case method should have five stages:

1) Introduction and lead-in stage focuses on establishing the case background. The focus is on introducing the purpose and the methods suggested for approaching the case analysis. It may be worthwhile to establish some discussion guidelines, especially for more complex cases. There are different ways of introducing the case study to the class. Since case studies are normally presented with background information about a case in order to establish the facts, the teacher can ask a group of students to prepare s short PowerPoint presentation outlining the basic facts about the case study beforehand. If a case revolves around a specific company, the background information includes the company name, its headquarters, its market share, products, number of employees, turnover, profits and current problems it is facing. These will be the object of case study analysis in subsequent stages. Another possibility for introducing the case is to provide students with ready-made input on the method of analysing the case. The aim of this method is to lead students towards a logical and analytical approach to the case by offering them a set of possible stages to follow. Here is an example of the suggested stages:

- read the background to the case study;
- define the main issues concerning the company;
- set out the company's objectives;
- identify the company's options;
- select criteria for evaluation of the identified options;
- implement the procedure of selecting the best options;
- decide how the options should be implemented;
- discuss the advantages and the drawbacks of such a selection;
- draw up an action plan for the implementation of the chosen solutions.

There are various methods to get students more involved at this stage of the case:
One possibility is directing them to consult the Faculty's library and look for the information about the target area in the available journals, textbooks or specialised magazines.
Another option is brainstorming key concepts regarding the target skill, e.g. negotiations – types of negotiations, people usually involved in the negotiating process, different methods of negotiating, what one might expect when negotiating in other countries or continents, etc. When opting for this approach, mind mapping is the best way to organize the ideas generated during introductory discussions and to move onto the next stage of the case.

With lower level students, we can introduce a case by providing them with ready-made examples of set phrases and typical language used for a particular area being practiced (e.g. phrases used to open negotiations or chair a meeting, inviting contributions during a meeting, agreeing or disagreeing, interrupting, closing negotiations or meetings). With this approach, there are normally one or two implemented pair work exercises in order to reinforce the target language.

With more advanced groups of students that are already familiar with a wide business language corpus, real-life business documents are distributed and discussed in terms of their purpose. These include minutes from meetings, agendas, memos, and reports. They provide students with a vast array of business vocabulary that is not often found in BE course books. This approach offers some room for comparing and contrasting various types of business correspondence while at the same time raising the students' awareness about registers and levels of formality.

Finally, the most demanding approach requires forming teams beforehand and assigning different research tasks to each student for the following case session. This method works well, especially with large mixed-level classes. The research assigned to students can be focused on different segments of the case that will be introduced, and it can be either content-based (connected with a particular business area involved or company background) or language-based (forming glossaries for the particular vocabulary area, using on-line dictionaries to hunt for as many words as possible pertaining to a specific skill or specific types of words, etc.).

2) In the second stage of case analysis, the **case study teams** are formed. There are normally four to six students in each team and they are assigned the same set of tasks regarding the case (e.g. studying sales figures, analysing fluctuations in share prices, comparing company annual turnover for the observed period, etc.). The cases analysed should have at least two or three different problem areas that have to be discussed by different teams. Each team gets the same material needed for analysing the case, from the case description to the data they analyse and roles that they assume within their teams. The roles are always connected to the business context, which means that within a group there will be e.g. a project manager, a marketing manager, a financial adviser, and similar roles that vary from one case to the other. This makes the subsequent confrontation between teams challenging and dynamic since every case team will approach the issue in a different manner. The fact that all the teams are analysing the same case provides a logical link between the teams, enabling them to compare and contrast their findings and action plans with those of other teams. The criteria for forming case teams should vary in order to avoid having the same group of people working in the same team every time a business case is introduced to the classroom.

3) Case study meeting is the stage of the case when the teacher assumes the role of an observer and a facilitator. Within each team a chairperson is selected to chair the meeting and to make sure that an agenda is drawn up. This approach to analysing the case strongly influences the students' subsequent interaction since a very competitive atmosphere is created in the classroom and lively discussions take place. The important thing that students learn at this stage is that problem-solving in the real business environment often means working without all the necessary input, and that finding ways around it without help from 'above' is going to be their professional reality once they become a part of the business world.

Since this is the central stage in the case, it can go on for 20 minutes or longer, depending on the difficulty level of the case, size of the class, and the students' language level. The teams stop the work on the case about half an hour before the lecture normally finishes allowing for the presentation stage to begin. The main advantage of this stage of the case is that it offers an opportunity even for the weakest students to share their views since they feel a part of a small team of equals participating in a joint effort. This is something that is not very easily achieved when using more traditional approaches to tackling business topics, like reading articles out loud or working on ready-made vocabulary exercises. Since this stage involves students in a small-scale interaction, it is an invaluable opportunity for quite students to develop language and business skills that they normally have problems with.

4) Following the three key stages, the **presentation and discussion stage** gives students an opportunity to present their team's action plan and compare them with those of other groups'. Their oral presentations have to be clear, concise and coherent, and delivered within an allocated time slot. All the students within a group are required to participate in the discussion and they have to be prepared to offer arguments for their team's proposed action plan. This not only enables the students to enact real-life business meetings where everybody has to state their opinion on the problem, but is also necessary for the final evaluation of each student's performance which either immediately follows the activity or is postponed for the following lecture.

One of the methods of presenting action plans is role playing in which students assume roles of their choice in a simulated business meeting scenario. If teams were given some authentic business documents at the introductory stage, the 'in-tray diagnosis' method might be applied for teams' presentations. This method requires the teams to study the documents that are somehow related to the case and to offer reaction or 'diagnosis'. The method is called '*in-tray* diagnosis' because the documents are typical ones, found in everybody's office desk in-trays. The aim at this stage is reaching a consensus on the main points raised in teams' presentation. Such elaboration on each team's work facilitates the writing task following the case study.

The teacher's contribution at this stage is directing open-ended questions to students with the aim of prompting them to use as much of the target vocabulary as possible. Also, questions on the teams' produced action plans should explore and challenge their underlying assumptions about how they view the case issues. To encourage problem solving, students are encouraged to enter into dialogues with each other on different issues instead of merely answering the teacher's questions. After all the teams have presented their action plans, they are given a written assignment. The written materials produced for each case are collected in a Portfolio throughout the semester and students are required to present their Portfolio tasks at the oral exam. This is, therefore, another opportunity to discuss the topics and issues raised in each case study, and it serves as an objective criterion for the evaluation of students' language skills for a particular semester. For the teacher, the Portfolio creation, as a follow-up to the cases and a requirement for the exam, presents an invaluable opportunity to check how the cases implemented functioned and if any of them failed to produce the desired outcome as far as the mastered skills are concerned.

5) At the **feedback stage**, possible language problems are brought forward by the teacher, primarily the way business vocabulary was used, and the way materials available were incorporated within the case. Finally, each team's performance is evaluated without

passing judgements on who had the 'best' solution. This is one of the most important aims of implementing the case method. Namely, by simulating real business situations, students learn how to handle diverse issues that arise in meetings, negotiations, socialising or project planning. The aim is not to deliver the ideal solution, but to discuss and decide different solutions and action plans that, supported by arguments, would produce the best outcomes. Evaluating whether one team's action plan is better than the other's is not the focus of the approach. On the contrary, it can be demotivating and discouraging for weaker students or those that were possibly less creative in the process. The focus is on delivering different views and on sharing the pros and cons of each contribution.

When addressing the mistakes that the students have made, examples should be given to illustrate the mistakes in context. When the focus of the case is on developing intercultural communication skills, various issues can be raised, such as rapport building in cross-cultural interactions, maintaining eye contact, handling social interactions in different cultures as well as different culture-specific approaches to meetings or negotiations.

The following case study was implemented in practice with the second year students of economics, i.e. with groups consisting of app. 40 students. The specific aim of this case is raising their awareness of issues that can arise when working in multicultural teams, or when working on international projects where one has to adjust to different communication styles and different approaches to doing business. With Croatia entering the international business arena at a fast pace, students of economics and business have to be trained to face the challenges of working with foreign partners and embrace the differences that they will encounter, but also to communicate clearly and effectively in order to achieve a desired goal.

3.1. Case study: A Multicultural project

This case[1] centres on cross-cultural issues. Many companies' project teams today are composed of staff from different countries collaborating on the same project. This case, therefore, sharpens the focus on differences in working practises across cultures, which is particularly evident when there are tight deadlines involved.

The case is introduced with a cultural awareness quiz which aims at focusing the students' attention on cross-cultural misunderstandings in business. For a sample of quiz questions, see Appendix 2.

After offering and explaining their answers, the students are given correct ones and the discussion is prompted on issues relating to the diversity and the necessity to adapt to other value systems. This line of discussion continues with questions about the students' attitude towards time (punctuality, working habits). The students give their views about how they approach obligations and deadlines and how they think their culture influences the way people respect time limits. The students are encouraged to share examples from their experience in the context of their academic obligations. In the following phase, the discussion moves towards their attitudes to meetings and written correspondence. The students are invited to contribute thoughts on different types of documents circulated in business and on their purpose. The teacher distributes previously prepared samples of business correspondence[2] (memos, reports, minutes from a meeting) since the follow-up task will include producing such documents as a result of case meetings. Finally, the lead-in stage closes with a brief discussion on different culture-specific attitudes towards hierarchy in the workplace[3].

The students are instructed that the focus of the case will be finding the way around differences in working practises under time pressure. Also, key vocabulary is introduced in PowerPoint: hierarchy – hierarchical – flat (structure within a company); meetings – chairing – minutes – memos - agendas (referring to the central part of the case); time –deadline – milestones – to come in on time (referring to different cultural attitudes towards time).

At the next stage, the teams of six are formed with three pairs of students acting as project leader and project member from three different countries (Japan, Italy, France), meeting to discuss issues that continue to disrupt the functioning of their multicultural team.

Following the guidelines of their roles, the teams meet and try to reach an agreement on how to proceed collaborating together within their simulated project team. Depending on the skills of persuading and arguing for their views, different solutions are generated in different teams although they all have the same task. The teacher observes and takes notes to prepare for the feedback stage. If some of the team members are not contributing to the discussion, they can be prompted by the teacher with a question or two, but this type of intervention is kept to a minimum in order to allow the students to learn the value of taking responsibility for what they are saying and how they are developing their part within a team.

After the allocated time is up, each group's representatives present, point by point, their action plan or the findings of their team meeting.

One of our teams decided that deadlines were important but one must be flexible. If there were problems which caused delays, then the milestones would have to be changed. Another team thought that deadlines were absolutely vital and they must be kept. This team agreed that if the project did not come in on time, everyone would consider them as failures. In this team the 'Japanese' members had the strongest influence since this conclusion was in compliance with their roles at the meeting.

On the topic of hierarchy one of the teams concluded that the appointed project manager had been too lenient and that many members of the team took too much initiative on their own. They agreed to put one of the Japanese colleagues in charge since he seemed to have the most experience and influence within the team. Another team agreed that there were too many people who behaved as if they were in charge of the project. Since this team could not agree on who might be the project leader, they concluded that they should appoint different persons in charge of different stages of the project. If this did not function after a month, they would consult the management of the company and ask them to appoint an independent project manager.

The same diversity of conclusions happened with the other issues discussed as well. After all, the aim was to practice discussing, supporting demands with strong arguments, and showing the willingness to make a compromise in order to enable the project to proceed. After all the teams had spoken, the students were given a follow-up assignment – writing minutes from their meeting.

When giving feedback, the teacher suggested how some of the aspects of their communication style could be further improved (i.e. how they were reacting to other ways of thinking, how they stressed their professional competence, how they participated in decision making, how they dealt with pressure from other team members).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper demonstrated how the case method can be implemented in the BE curriculum with the aim of improving students' intercultural communication skills. In support of the method that brings reality of business life into the Business English classroom, the paper has argued that when developed and implemented effectively, with attention to detail, cases enable the reinforcement of lecture-based discussions on specific topics and ground them in reality. Experience shows that simply reading accounts of business situations from articles in journals or newspapers is not as effective for developing intercultural business communication skills as are fully developed cases that present students with a study of a real-life situation that practicing business people face on a daily basis. By framing alternative strategic actions and confronting the complexity of the practical world, case analysis provides immense power for the students' involvement with a personal learning experience. Advantages of implementing the case study method in the Business English classroom range from the fact that it requires from students to practice important business skills – diagnosing, making decisions, observing, listening, persuading, etc., it calls for realistic and concrete actions despite the complexity and partial knowledge characterizing the situation being studied, and, finally, it enables students to develop a general point of view in diverse business contexts and cultures. Since Business English is taught by putting both language skills and business skills in context, the intercultural factor cannot be ignored. In fact, it is crucial to the process. As it was proved in practice, the language and skills learnt have no practical purpose if they are not applied in the appropriate cross-cultural manner. In addition, by applying the case method, not only students, but the teacher as well, gains valuable insights into the essence and importance of intercultural competence, not only for future business people representing their country and their culture abroad, but also for us as members of an academic culture. If excluded from the teaching process, cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in the business context brings frustration and setbacks once students attempt to interact with business contacts coming from different cultures. What is more, the intercultural element incorporated within the Business English curriculum in the form discussed here, raises the awareness of the fact that one culture is not superior over another and that appreciating the value of compromise and collaboration brings greater advantages, both in business and in other social interactions between cultures further reinforced in the united European territory that promotes the motto 'united in diversity'.

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Appendix 1:

Selection of useful web sites of companies and publications that contain company and industry information adaptable for classroom use:

Business Intelligence – A comprehensive source of company information	www.hoovers.com
Stanford Business School – official web site	http://gsapps.stanford.edu/cases
CNN business network	www.cnn.com
CNN – financial news	www.cnnfn.com
Business week magazine	www.businessweek.com
International Business Resources – A Michigan State University site	www.ciber.bus.msu.edu/business.htm
Wall Street Journal – Interactive edition	www.update.wsj.com
BBC – Business News	www.bbcworld.com/business
On-line business resources	www.bizlink.org
Business Reference Services	www.loc.gov./business

Appendix 2:

Question 1
You recently started your new job as an executive of a bank in the Netherlands Antilles. One morning your colleague calls with the message that she won't be showing up for a few days because she is not feeling well.
What is your reaction?
☐ You promise to pass on the message to personnel and the management, and you wish her a quick recovery.
☐ You tell her that she is needed and that she should be back at her post soon.
☐ You ask her what is wrong and for what period appointments should be cancelled.
Question 2
As a salesman, you are used to watching your business partners closely, as their behaviour is often the key to your success.
You are approaching the Spanish market for the first time. Before your trip you have made some appointments with various potential clients. Unfortunately, not all appointments are kept, some people simply don't show up for the scheduled meeting.
But today you are lucky, the appointment is kept. Well, initially you have to wait some 15 minutes. But that's customary here, you say to yourself.
What bothers you more is that your business-partner does not seem very concentrated. The telephone rings regularly during your enthusiastic explanation of the possibilities of your product. Sometimes people drop in to ask questions which you don't understand. (Your Spanish is not that good.) Your business-partner takes quite some time for the conversations with the others.
How would you interpret this behaviour?
☐ This is a waste of time. You won't sell anything here.
☐ You are being tested. They want to find out whether you will get mad. Keep you patience.
☐ This is local business-culture and does not say anything yet about the success of your mission.

Source: author

<u>Question 1</u>: **You promise to pass on the message to personnel and the management, and you wish her a quick recovery.** (You may have the idea that questions with respect to someone's well-being show personal concern, but in other cultures people may have a different concept of what is shared among colleagues. Here, 'sickness' is a private issue, and as a colleague you are not supposed to ask for detailed information. So, when you come to a new environment, it is wise to find out what is discussed openly and what is considered 'taboo' (for outsiders). Of course, you can have a try and wish her a quick recovery. Maybe, if you are seen as a sensitive person, you may get further information on the issue.

<u>Question 2</u>:**"This is local business-culture and does not say anything yet about the success of your mission."**(The concept of time which people use can differ widely. From a linear point of view, time is scarce and organized. It should be used wisely, should be managed, and in order to concentrate properly, you should do one thing at a time. In the synchronic perception of time, it is important that you are able to adapt to the current situation. Too much planning makes you inflexible, and this may be fatal, especially in surroundings in which unpredictable external factors are very important. Think of 'open' (small scale) economies, governments and civil servants, the changes of policy after elections, etc.)

Appendix 3:

Samples of roles assigned for team members in the analysed case.

Japanese members of the team:
Timing: Deadlines are absolutely vital and they must be kept. For you, the project will fail if it is not delivered on time.
Meetings: You think they are chaotic; they are not chaired well, nobody takes minutes and they seem to serve only for brainstorming without reaching any concrete conclusions. You feel that important decisions are made before the meetings. You are not used to that because in your country meetings are taken much more seriously.
Reports: You want all the phases of the project to be recorded in memos, agendas and project updates. You notice that some things are written down, others equally important are not, and you wonder why. You do not want to rely merely on telephone conversations.
Hierarchy: You believe some project leaders behave as they are in charge of the project and you never know who to go to for solving a problem. You think some members of the team regard themselves as more important than others. That creates chaos and disrupts communication. You are not used to this kind of behaviour where you don't know who is in charge.

French members of the team:
Timing: You think deadlines are important but project work requires flexibility. If there are problems which cause delays, then the milestones will have to be changed.
Meetings: You think that they are going well and that they are a good opportunity to discuss things and stay in contact with what the other members of the team are doing. You don't think that they have to be chaired rigorously because everybody knows what they are supposed to do.
Reports: You think that there is too much written communication and that it is a waste of time. You don't understand why every meeting has to be minuted, you all go to meetings, so why write extensive minutes. You also think memos are not as useful as face-to-face meetings.
Hierarchy: You believe that the project is a team effort and that there doesn't have to be a project leader. You also noticed that some of the other team members are taking too much freedom in decision making without consulting others. You wonder if this is normal in their business culture.

Bilješke

[1] This case study was developed from *Business English Meetings: Instant Agendas (see References)*. Roles were elaborated further to suit the specific needs of the topic – intercultural communication; more nationalities were introduced to make the teams more diverse and the discussion livelier.

[2] Samples of business correspondence are easily obtained from specialized websites, such as listed in the Appendix. That is the quickest and the cheapest way to get hold of the real material circulating in business. However, there are numerous publications available in specialized bookstores dealing primarily with business correspondence and material can be copied to help with class discussions.

[3] This stage of discussion was prompted by a collage of brief texts (about 5-6 lines) on how different cultures see hierarchy. The texts were obtained from different Internet sources and adapted for classroom use.

POVRATAK U STVARNOST: PRIMJENA METODE STUDIJA SLUČAJA U NASTAVI POSLOVNOGA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA

Sažetak

Rad razmatra razvijanje, primjenu i učinke metode studija slučaja u nastavi poslovnoga engleskog jezika. Uže područje razmatranja u radu su načini na koji primjena studija slučaja pridonosi razvijanju međukulturalnih komunikacijskih vještina. Rad kreće od hipoteze da uključivanje studija slučaja u nastavu poslovnoga engleskog jezika omogućuje smještanje teorijskih razmatranja u realni okvir te da omogućava stjecanje i razvoj komunikacijskih vještina potrebnih za efikasno sudjelovanje u poslovnome svijetu. Imajući u vidu uži kontekst razmatranja, u radu se tvrdi da su studiji slučaja relevantni za nastavu poslovnoga engleskog jezika i zbog kulturalnih činjenica kojima često obiluju te da kao takvi predstavljaju neprocjenjivu pomoć u razumijevanju važnosti tolerancije, otvorenosti i prihvaćanja kulturalnih različitosti kojima je obilježena suvremena globalna ekonomija.

Ključne riječi: poslovni engleski jezik, metoda studija slučaja, međukulturalne komunikacijske vještine