



## JURNAL EDUPEDIA

Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo

<http://studentjournal.umpo.ac.id/index.php/edupedia>

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### AN INVESTIGATION OF BUSINESS ENGLISH CONVERSATION MASTERY BY INDONESIAN COFFEE AND COCOA RESEARCH INSTITUTE EMPLOYEES IN JEMBER

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#### *Abstract*

The concept of English for Business purposes has endured substantial shifts over the last few years which caused by numbers of development, such as behaviour change of the customers, improvements in technology, and the coming together of Business Communication and English for Business Purposes. Due to this current situation, companies need to improve not only the quality of their product but also the quality of the human resources. This research is intended to investigate the extent of Business Conversation mastery by ICCRI employees in 2019 and examine further the factors that may be related to it, such as (1) the teaching process carried out by teachers, and (2) the employees' perceptions of the importance of Business. Speaking test and a questionnaire is used to answer problems of the research.

**Keywords:** Business communication, English conversation, English for Business Purposes.

**How to Cite.** **How to Cite :** Indah Werdiningsih (2020). An Investigation of Business English Conversation Mastery by Indonesian Coffee and Cocoa Research Institute Employees in Jember. *Jurnal Edupedia Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo*, 4(2): 93-102.

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ISSN 2614-1434 (Print)

ISSN 2614-4409 (Online)

#### INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the biggest forms of appreciation in a relationship; both in social life and in the workplace. When communication is well established, it will also provide a good feedback. For an employee, English is needed not only to communicate between individuals, but also to conduct transactions or international business that has been done by the company where they work. There are two main problems in this study: (1) How well is the

mastery of the Business Conversation by the ICCRI employees? And (2) How are the learning factors that have been experienced by the employees and their perceptions of the importance of learning speaking likely related to their mastery of the Business Conversation? Related to the formulation of the research problem above, this study aims to clearly describe the mastery of the Business Conversation of ICCRI employees in 2019 and clarifies the learning factors that have been experienced by these employees

and their perceptions of the importance of learning speaking which are likely related to their mastery of the Business Conversation.

### **A THEORETICAL STUDY OF CROSS-LANGUAGE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

One of the factors believed to influence the difficulty level of learning a foreign language is the difference or similarity that exists in the first language with the foreign language he is studying. This hypothesis was first put forward by Lado (1957), which was later known as the hypothesis of contrastive analysis (Contrastive Hypothesis). However, along with the rapid study of teaching and learning of language, the notion of contrastive analysis gradually questioned its validity. Whitman & Jackson (1972), for example, are two of the few experts in language teaching and learning who criticize the claims put forward by the notion of contrastive analysis. Based on the results of their research, Whitman and Jackson stated that contrastive analysis, as represented by the four analyzes tested in their research projects, is not sufficient both theoretically and practically to predict problems related to linguistic interference in the process of learning foreign languages (Whitman & Jackson, 1972: 40).

The background of the linguistic system that exists in the first language can be a foundation stone to the development of their grammar mastery. In other words, the original language of the student might be the basis for the student to learn the linguistic system that is in the foreign language he is studying (Odlin, 2003; Kellerman, 1995; Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith, 1986). For that reason, related to the learning process of business conversations in English as a foreign language, employees who have a background in Indonesian native language and culture are likely to encounter confusion at the conceptual level which will then have an impact on the ability to use business conversations in accordance with the method as used by the native English speakers. Allen (1974: 74) states that employees of English as a foreign language who have studied for quite a long time can indeed speak fairly fluent, in this matter, in terms of business communication. However, the overall mastery of communicative competence still seems to not be sufficiently understood in months of study time even within a few years.

Difficulties in mastering communicative competence, especially in English which are indeed quite complex, may be closely related to the method of communicative competence which is very

conceptual (abstract). Comrie (1993: 7) argues that: *“the idea of locating situations in time is a purely conceptual notion, and is as such potentially independent of the range of distinction made in any particular language”*. Therefore, Indonesian employees who in their linguistic systems do not have similar equivalents, especially those related to communicative competence in English, may be able to understand this matter by building a new conceptual domain in order to be able to use business conversations in the discourse of English as a communication tool.

Despite the difficulty of understanding and using the communicative competence in business conversations, lots of employees in Indonesia still have to struggle to master the concept because communicative competence is important in mastering the business conversation, which is also a part of communicative language competence.

### **COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN BUSINESS CONVERSATION**

Grammatical competencies are related to mastery of linguistic systems which include, for example, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic aspects. Sociolinguistic

competence refers to mastery of understanding and using language in accordance with social and cultural contexts. Strategic competencies in foreign use refer to communication strategies, both verbal and non-verbal, to anticipate the death of communication channels which are usually caused by a lack of ability to understand and / or express communicated ideas (Canale & Swain, 1980). Communication here is not only related to the ability to 'convey' messages or ideas verbally and appropriately, but also related to the ability to 'understand' the messages or the ideas conveyed. Therefore, the mastery of communicative competence is very important to be able to do the business conversation well.

### **BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH**

Communication in business is potentially crucial. When there is no good communication between producers, distributors and consumers, the entrepreneurial activities will not be effective. This is where the knowledge on English communication is needed in order to improve the business. Mastering English can bring many benefits to anyone who intends to become a businessman. Businessmen have to equip

themselves with communication skills. Narration is needed so that consumers can feel the attachment to the products offered. Not only that, they can also work together with businessmen across the globe. By mastering English, they do not need to be confused when meeting foreign businessmen.

### **English is a Language of Business**

It is undeniable that English is the language used in business and commerce in the world. Around 375 million traders and businesses in 54 countries use English, starting from Europe, Africa, America, Australia and Asia. Therefore English is often called the language of business. In this globalization era, businessmen in Indonesia must be prepared to collaborate with anyone, regardless of the country or language.

### **English is a Language of Technology**

The 4.0 Industrial Revolution brought many changes in the business and economic sectors. One of the striking changes is the use of technology as a means of data analysis and production activities. In fact, all technologies is currently using English. Certainly not only doers or business owners, employees as part of the company are also required to be able to master English so that the company's business can run well. Most clients are foreign companies too, so mastering English is a necessity.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is included in a type of case study research that aims to uncover a phenomenon that exists in a particular unit or group (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, Razavieh, 2010:454). The phenomenon associated with this research are (1) The mastery of the Business Conversation of ICCRI employees, and (2) the learning factors that have been experienced by the employees and their perceptions of the importance of learning speaking likely related to their mastery of the Business Conversation.

To get answers to the two phenomena above, the research method applied is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods related to the use of numbers in analyzing a phenomenon, while qualitative methods are more related to the description through words to explain the nature of a phenomenon (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003).

Quantitative research methods are used to find answers to the first research question, "*How well is the mastery of the Business Conversation by the ICCRI employees?*". The research instrument used at this stage was a test. To find answers to the second research question, "*How are the learning factors that have*

*been experienced by the employees and their perceptions of the importance of learning speaking likely related to their mastery of the Business Conversation?'*", the instrument used is questionnaire.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Business Conversation Mastery

Data obtained from the implementation of speaking test related to business conversation mastery shows that the majority of ICCRI employees do have adequate mastery. It is shown that seven out of the 10 employees (70%)

who took the test got scores between 70-79 (good), and 20% got 80-100 (excellent). Only one got score below 70 and categorized as failed. Based on the score criteria used in this study, the mastery of the concepts in English for the employees was included in the good category because — for the simplest reason — the employees have been learning English for a quite long time, approximately 6-10 years. Most of them were able to pass the speaking test (70% of the total number of employees) but only 20% can be categorized as excellent.

**Table 1: The Speaking Category Scores**

Score Category	Interpretation	Frequency	Note
80-100	Excellent	2	Passed
70-79	Good	7	Passed
60-69	Fair	1	Failed
40-59	Poor		Failed
0-39	Failed		Failed

From these criteria, it is also known that this *passed* category also varies. This variation is related to the top category, which approaches adequate value (good), up to the highest category (excellent).

There are seven employees who achieve grades that are in the adequate category (good) with their respective values: 70, 70, 70, 74, 74, 74 and 77. From this value distribution, it can also be seen that this adequate category also varies, and of the 10 employees who took part in the business conversation mastery test in English, there were only two

student who were able to reach the excellent category with the score of 80 and 87.

The overall results of the implementation of the above tests can be said to have given a reflection of the business conversation mastery as part of ESP. From these results, it can be concluded that the answer to the first question in this study is: the mastery of business conversation by ICCRI employees in 2019 can be considered adequate in the field of speaking but they

still need to learn more about business vocabulary in order to speak excellently.

Based on the results obtained from the questionnaire that has been distributed to the employees, one item on the questionnaire asked the following question: "Do you think it is important to learn business conversation (speaking)?" and "Why?" From these questions, 100% of the participants stated that in the job field it is very important to master business conversation. Two of the employees provided the answer of the question "why" as stated below:

"Learning business conversations is very important because when we learn English at school, we have not been taught specific vocabulary about business. So when working, the vocabulary is important to understand and we need to learn English business as in ESP".

There are also some students (40%) who believe that learning a business conversation is important to communicate with clients, as follows:

"Without speaking we cannot communicate and understand the intentions of our business partners. If we understand their language it will facilitate cooperation between foreign companies in different countries".

Broadly speaking, it can be concluded that the employees believe business conversation is crucial to communicate with business partners and build trust for further cooperation, because ICCRI does not only deal with

### **Employees Perception on the Importance of Learning Business Conversation**

domestic companies but also exports, deals in buying and selling products and cooperates with foreign companies as well.

### **Experiences in Learning Business Conversation**

Among the most and the least favorite methods referred by the employees in their response to the questionnaire are summarized in the following table.

<b>Most Favorite Method</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Conversation practice	50%
Using Songs as media	20%
Direct method	20%
Group discussion	10%

From the above table can be described some experience of the employees' learning process in conversation. Most of them likes to practice conversation in speaking, especially if it is based on the real life experience. Furthermore, in the next chapter we will discuss how this teaching and learning factor is related to the ability of the employees to speak English in general and more specifically about the concept of business conversation.

<b>Least Favorite Method</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lecturing	50%
Others	30%
Asking the students to practice without vocabulary drilling or pronunciation practice	10%
Recitation	10%

### **Teaching and Learning Factor**

Based on reports obtained from the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the learning factor is the main reason why the majority of them have adequate mastery of the business conversation. Most of the employees felt that learning to explore or to understand the use of business vocabularies in conversations at various meeting projects was very important to establish a connection with the client.

Learning outcomes are likely to be difficult to achieve if the teacher or lecturer is only limited to providing material to the students. Therefore, the teacher or lecturer in the learning process is encouraged to involve the students, for example by asking them to look for real problems related to the fields they are engaged in and then criticize them in order to find an explanation or solution to the problem (critically exposed). With the activities involving students as above, the students will likely be motivated to learn and participate in existing learning activities, especially in the conversation practice. As quoted from one of the employees' responses in the questionnaire:

"I really love when the teacher ask students to practice conversation (in pair or in group) especially if it refers to real

life situation or it is based on our own experienced."

In the context of learning speaking, students must also be given the opportunity to use language components that are being learned in the context of real communication. The three designs of language teaching above are teaching designs formulated by Harmer (1998) who seek to make language teaching in the classroom close to or even resemble the conditions of language learning in a natural context. Harmer stated:

"Like language learners outside schools, [classroom employees] will need to be motivated, be exposed to language, and given chances to use it". (1998:25)

Teachers and lecturers must also be active in providing meaningful feedback and guidance for their students so that their learning situation can be truly meaningful and useful, both in relation to the development of their knowledge about the business vocabulary they are studying and their skills in using language general. The principle of learning like this is a principle of learning that is in line with that proposed by the understanding of constructivist pioneered by Lev Vygotsky who states that:

"An essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the [learner] is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these

processes are internalized, they become part of the [learner's] independent developmental achievement". (Vygotsky, 1978: 90)

So from here it can be concluded that there is a special role that must be implemented either by the instructors and learners so that the process of achieving, developing, or strengthening knowledge and skills in foreign languages can be achieved more effectively.

### **Linguistic Factor**

The similarities and differences that exist in the first language with the target language they learn to some extent can affect the difficulty level of learning certain linguistic systems, such as grammatical structure in a spoken form. Ringbom (2007) based on the results of his study stated:

"The extent of congruence between grammatical categories is of special importance. When the L1 and L2 grammatical categories are largely congruent, the comprehension of lexical items (morphemes or words) is facilitated and the learner can approach the comprehension task without having to worry much about their syntactic relations". (p. 68).

Based on the above statement and observations done on the ICCRI employees, despite going through various stages of the English Speaking learning process both at school and at higher educational institutions, they are still unable to understand well and apply business vocabularies or phrases that

exist in the conceptual system in ESP. This difficulty is described by them as "specific purposes" concepts and therefore very difficult to understand as the teacher never teach them about it. The "specific purposes" felt by the students proved that they measured the linguistic system that existed in English with the language they used as their first language. Some of business English vocabularies and phrases that exist in ESP are as follows: *business plan, balance sheet, business forecast, USP (Unique Selling Proposition), marketing, Human Resources Development, Public Relations, invoice, investment and others.*

Therefore, without further learning about the business English and business conversations, students of English as a foreign language in Indonesia will find it difficult to understand and to be able to apply in real life situation accurately and appropriately.

### **CONCLUSION**

Back to the questions raised in problems of the study, it can be concluded that the business conversation mastery by ICCRI employees is quite good; the employees have an adequate speaking skill. The adequate mastery may be influenced by several factors, especially those related to the time of



study, the teaching and learning process and also some linguistic factors.

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