

Global Business Languages

Volume 22

Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Gonglewski, M., & Esseesy, M. (2022). Introduction. *Global Business Languages*, 22, i-iv.
Available at (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.4079/gbl.v22.1>

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Introduction

Just a short time ago, the global community had high hopes that the worst of the Covid pandemic was coming to an end, only to discover that the incessant mutations of the virus imposed tempered expectations for taming the pandemic and instead delivered one new variant after the other. Adding insult to injury, another overlapping consequential crisis—Russia's war against Ukraine—erupted violently, shocking Europe in February this year, with far-reaching political, economic, and military impacts being felt beyond Europe itself.

In the wake of these two crises, the globalized economic system has been tested. Interdependence has been questioned, and, as a result, some trade relationships have been severed and alliances have shifted. Increasing levels of punishing sanctions have been imposed in direct response to military aggression against a sovereign state, while simultaneously expanding and strengthening liaisons with states that share the same goals, such as preserving freedom and safeguarding democracy.

Generations of world citizens grew up trusting and having faith in globalization and the positive outcomes it promised. There are many benefits globalization helps achieve, e.g., reducing barriers to the flow of goods and services, forging fruitful partnerships across borders, and, above all, meeting the various needs and desires of consumers around the globe. At this perilous juncture, restructuring of relationships among nations based on self- and mutual interest, self-reliance and preservation, and a host of other principles, inevitably will result in significant alteration of the world, the shape of which is still being configured.

A word of caution is in order here against the perception of globalization's demise through complete global fragmentation at this inflection point. There are clear signs of strengthened bonds, expanded trade, and economic and military ties that had already endured numerous challenges after World War II, offering hope for the potential for stability and peace. The will to pay the price of preserving freedom and democracy, evident in the face of military conflict in Europe, is exhibited by countries that opened their borders for refugees fleeing the pummeling assault. Similar fervor can be seen in the corporate world. A large number of multinational companies are demonstrating an unprecedented firm stance in the face of injustice and military aggression by sacrificing monetary gains for what they deem to be moral and just. An arsenal of economic measures has been deployed in the fight against military aggression, which then increases the price paid by the perpetrator.

As an academic journal with a global perspective, *Global Business Languages (GBL)* strives to contribute to examining, analyzing, interpreting, reflecting, and addressing the enormous challenges in the globalized world. Not surprisingly, then, the articles in this current volume connect to the larger issue of globalization on various levels. Some refer to concrete problems of the moment, such as the supply chain disruption caused by the grounded cargo ship *Ever Given* in the Suez Canal in 2021 and the state interference with certain media outlets in Russia over the past several months. Others tackle broader issues, such as the appropriate development of language and culture skills of current and future workers in the globalized marketplace. Regardless of the country or language being discussed, all articles presented here give us food for thought on constructive ways to approach teaching and learning about this complex globalized world.

In this volume, three articles take as their focus the disparities between required workplace language proficiency and competence on the job and actual language use in the work environment. Surveying 208 schools offering international business programs for their world

languages requirements, Thomas Hanson finds language training is either not required or not enough. In his article “Language Requirements in the International Business Curriculum,” Hanson uncovers an apparent misalignment between curricular content and actual (eventual) employers’ needs. Arguing that business transactions within the international business domain necessitate multilingualism, Hanson also finds that undergraduate programs in international business often lack interdisciplinary collaborations between language and business faculty members in academic institutions. He, therefore, calls for increased collaborations between business and language instructors within and beyond the classroom, as these are critical for the development of specialized Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs as well as translation and interpretation (the latter dubbed the ‘fifth skill’) curricula that are integrated closely with business content and adequately meet the mounting demand for a multilingual workforce in today’s globalized interdependence. The model for the future that he proposes would establish a curricular sequence such that LSP courses are offered at the slightly lower (i.e., intermediate) level rather than at the more advanced levels and translation and interpretation at the next higher level. Among the notable foreseeable benefits of this model is increased awareness about the work of translation and interpretation professionals, and equipping graduates of international business programs with the language skills and practical tools that ensure efficient carrying out of business transactions across the globe.

Similarly, Jim Davie’s article “The Workplace Development of Language Professionals after University: A United Kingdom Case Study” examines the underappreciated knowledge and skill gap among students specializing in language on the job. In his focus on the post-graduation context when the graduates are actually on the job, he identifies a discrepancy between the knowledge/skills (in linguistics and related fields, such as sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, etc.) of these graduates and the demands of the workplace in the public sector in the UK. The model he used for bridging the gap was having senior staff (with advanced degrees and more years of experience) train the junior staff in the division in a three-stage training containing modules covering a broad range of subject areas, such as language policy and tools, discourse analysis, and basic linguistic analysis of interrelated sub-linguistic areas, such as phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics. This on-the-job professional training not only increased academic knowledge and the workers’ motivation, but also it enabled senior staff to reinforce their own knowledge in the field. It furthermore created a community of participants engaged in mutual support and operating in a more cohesive workforce.

Evaluating the notion that English is becoming the global business lingua franca, Steven Sacco and Christiane OHIN-TRAORÉ’s article “*Englishnization* in Francophone Africa? Insights into Workplace Language Use” tests this notion empirically in the supply chain and logistics sector in Francophone Africa. “Englishnization,” a term invented by Hiroshi Mikitani, CEO of the Japanese e-commerce company Rakuten, refers to the policy of requiring the use of English as the first language of business within the company within a country in which the main language is not English, such as in Japan. The authors’ empirical findings reveal that French still is the most dominant language in the sector they studied within Francophone Africa, among survey respondents from 94 companies. Moreover, they find that in multilingual corporations where English is an official language, it is not the sole language used. The self-reported data from employees across a vast number of supply chain corporations in this study show the growing importance of English as a co-dominant language, but not as a language that is likely to fully supplant French, as shown in the varying degrees of its use in the workplace in the responses of the surveyed employees. Workplace language research, as exhibited in this study,

could benefit the LSP field by ultimately realigning academic course content and goals with the demands and reality of the workplace.

As we recognize the importance of preparing future workers to function effectively in this interwoven global economy, we cannot overemphasize the value of teachers. Teachers play a vital role in preparing the next generation to navigate the uncertain terrain effectively, but especially those educators who facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities to maneuver through and manage the increasingly complex demands of communicating across borders, whether those borders be intra- or international. Two contributions to this volume center on teaching approaches for taking on that twenty-first century challenge directly in the language/culture classroom: one in a Business German course and the other in a Russian Media course.

In her article titled “Applying the Country of Origin Effect in Teaching a German-Austrian Business Case,” Amanda Sheffer focuses on a case study that thematizes significant cultural differences across two countries (Austria and Germany) that share a language (German). The case study, which she developed and piloted along with extensive self-created teaching materials included in the article’s appendices, describes how the Austrian company Austrian Air was acquired by German Lufthansa. Differing perspectives shine through in language use: in the Austrian press the merger was labeled a “*Fusion*” (merger) and in German media it was called “*Übernahme*” (takeover). Equally important to the development of language skills while working with the business case is the opportunity for students to hone cultural competence. Sheffer walks us through the unit that first alerts learners to their own impressions (including stereotypes)—both negative and positive—about nations and the people living in them, and then moves students into examining and questioning the validity of these false assumptions. Yet countering stereotypes is particularly challenging when companies flaunt them as a tool to market their products or services and capture the positive aspects from so-called “nation-branding.” They draw on the positive (even if inaccurate) associations that consumers have in order to impact sales, and by doing so they potentially reinforce stereotypes through this powerful “country of origin effect” (COE). Sheffer’s case and accompanying tasks aim to heighten students’ awareness of the COE and the way it is used and misused in business. Through this learning experience students may become stronger critical thinkers in business, not to mention better informed consumers.

Richard Robin’s article “A Dual-language Approach to Teaching a Russian Media Undergraduate Course” offers an innovative solution to a recurrent challenge faced by small language programs with low enrollments in upper level LSP courses and with limited resources to address this challenge: melding courses offered in English—to draw in larger numbers of students, albeit sans language abilities—with the option of bringing in authentic Russian language sources and tasks for those students with the ability and desire to take on second language (L2) texts and tasks. Robin’s proposed dual-language approach allows teachers to capitalize on the abilities that each student brings to the table, whether that is a heritage language learner’s native-like proficiency or a classroom learner’s knowledge of grammar or training in L2 writing. These groups can be set up to help one another fill in their respective knowledge or skill gaps by collaborating or mentoring each other on class assignments, such as on presentations or papers. With his proposed approach the topic is Russian media, however, the approach could be used in other domains and with other languages.

The current volume follows through on the *GBL* mission to cover a wide array of LSP fields including business (e.g., marketing, supply chain management), but also beyond business

fields (e.g., media, translation and interpretation), in addition to raising issues relevant to both the private and public sectors. The diversity in language coverage continues in this new volume as well. While three articles focus on a single language (French, German, Russian) and cultural questions particular to them within LSP, two contributions address broader topics that encompass innovations in curriculum and professional development relevant for all languages, regardless of their intended “specific purpose.”

Also in this volume, we branch out into new territory for *GBL* at the George Washington University with the publication of a book review. Reviews serve as a valuable source for information on—and critique of—works in the realm of LSP, and these may include textbooks in any relevant field (e.g., Spanish for the medical professions, Latin for lawyers, etc.) and individual books or edited volumes presenting LSP research. Our first offering is a review of a recent business Korean textbook published by Routledge, and we look forward to hosting additional reviews in coming issues.

Even as we wrap up the work from the past year on this volume, we are oriented decidedly towards what’s to come. At the top of the list is the announcement of next year’s special volume of *GBL* with the theme “The Future of LSP: Rooted in Research.” This theme echoes one of the focal points of this year’s successful International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes (ISLSP) & Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) Business Language Conference, hosted at the University of Chicago thanks to the hard work of Darcy Lear (Lecturer in Spanish, University of Chicago) and Cathy Baumann (Director of University of Chicago’s Language Center). We welcome Professor Lear as guest co-editor of *GBL*’s 2023 volume and we eagerly await submissions from colleagues near and far who have new LSP research to report. We encourage LSP scholars interested in submitting their work to consult our website for further information and submission guidelines.

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May 2022