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The Use of Bilingualism in Business and Commerce: A Study of Multilingual Communication Strategies in Global Organizations

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Abstract

In the current business environment, currently characterized by increased globalization levels, the ability of multilingual communication has become one of the most basic attributes that must be incorporated into any successfully operating business entity. This paper is written against the background of using bilingualism in business and commerce, with special reference to the approaches deployed by global corporations in their bid to ensure multilingual communication. The study was conducted through case studies and exhaustive literature review of the topic under research. From the research, it is evident that bilingualism in business can be of many benefits, like the improvement of communication, increased customer satisfaction, and facilitation of building international partnerships. Even more, those companies that have been able to implement multilingual communication strategies to success have seen an added advantage in performance and a competitive edge in the global market.



KEYWORDS

Globalization, multinational businesses, multicultural businesses, language barriers, effective communication



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In the current business environment, currently characterized by increased globalization levels, the ability of multilingual communication has become one of the most basic attributes that must be incorporated into any successfully operating business entity. This paper is written against the background of using bilingualism in business and commerce, with special reference to the approaches deployed by global corporations in their bid to ensure multilingual communication. The study was conducted through case studies and exhaustive literature review of the topic under research. From the research, it is evident that bilingualism in business can be of many benefits, like the improvement of communication, increased customer satisfaction, and facilitation of building international partnerships. Even more, those companies that have been able to implement multilingual communication strategies to success have seen an added advantage in performance and a competitive edge in the global market.

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Introduction

Following the principles of globalization, it resulted in the growing of multinational and multicultural businesses, certainly giving birth to the need for effective interlingual communication. According to Zhu and Yan (2012), language barriers may lead not only to miscommunication and misunderstandings but also to business failure on the international market. Therefore, communication in different languages has been considered an all-important factor for success in international business.

On current trends, bilingualism in the business world is fast emerging, since the level of bilingual fluency guarantees the potential of businesses to communicate with clients, customers, and partners from different cultural backgrounds (Yu & Chen, 2017). This means that, since business is dealing with foreign customers, employees can obtain detailed and rather deep information for the purpose of better exploration of their needs and better service accordingly; this is because they can be able to communicate in two languages (Zhu and Yan, 2012). Moreover, perhaps it can increase the rate of communication with customers—who, mostly, are abroad-based customers—or perhaps also be able to increase customer satisfaction so that businesses are also run well. This is to an extent that organizations which have implemented bilingual communication strategies. On the other hand, Yu and Chen (2017) reveal that the language services department at Marriott International contributes positively toward customer satisfaction and increment of

revenues. Similarly, the language academy has enabled Deloitte to increase the level of its scope of operation to the international level and improve organizational efficiency through an appropriate way of communicating with the clients and partners from other countries (Yu & Chen, 2017).

The present wave of globalization has led to a great increase in multinational and multicultural businesses that require effective communication in several languages as a prerequisite for their successful conduct of international business. It was an important trend for business. Bilingualism usage helps firms have the way to relate to their clients, customers, and partners coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study is going to investigate the strategies put in place by global organizations regarding the enhancement of multilingual communication, the benefits of bilingualism in a business context, and how organizations can take up bilingualism in the quest to become more competitive and out

Literature Review

Culture is the mixture of language, religion, culinary art, social habits, music, and arts; it is the identity for some groups and influences in private but also in professional life. These are not only the social institutions, but also the belief systems, value systems, and material products that collectively frame a person's cognitive perspective and enable functioning within the social and environmental context (Hofstede, 1980). This is because the nature of the workforce has become globalized. This will, therefore, be a literature review emphasizing the importance of recognition of cultural differences of other people at the workplace, globalization influences on intercultural communication, and ways of increasing cross-cultural communication competencies. Awareness of cross-culture in a workplace is very important, as most of the occasions when there are misunderstandings that are brought about by culture diversities, they will work to the organizational disadvantage. The fastest wave of globalization requires an internal communication capacity to withstand external threats. Hence, the significance of cross-cultural effectiveness in communication. Hilton (2007) provides the view that cultural proficiency essentially involves the ability to listen, seek help if necessary, and communicate with others, showing actual cultural sensitivity while accomplishing success in the practice of global business. Thomas and Ravlin (1994) have subscribed to this view and argue that it is largely fruitless in trying to homogenize the cultural behaviour of multinational firms because, as suggested from their research, it was identified that there were individual differences that could be recognized and used for innovation rather than conform to an identity of culture. This perception becomes a very important one while trying to understand the dynamics of relationship that exists between managers and subordinates across different cultures, when perceived as similar or different, bearing great consequences for the organizational

In addition, Scollon and Scollon (1995) point out how an overemphasis on cultural differences can further lead to the overgeneralization and stereotyping of the same. Stereotyping, according to Samovar and Porter (1991), develops over time and can serve to be obstacles within the communication process, thus leading to misunderstandings. Understandably, a wider framework of when to be culturally responsive is being able to understand the subtleties of a culture, such as those in the high-context versus low-context communication by Hall (1976), for good intercultural communication. The challenges of cross-cultural communication are not bound within the aspects of verbal interaction, because non-verbal cues play a fundamental role in passing on messages and differ dramatically among cultures (Mehrabian, 1972). Proxemics, individual versus collective behaviour, silence, and the meaning of gestures clearly are pretty good pointers of how difficult it is for intercultural communication (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Developing intercultural competence is thereby an important solution to these challenges. Intercultural competence refers to the condition of sensitivity and awareness, accompanied by adroitness with which one can productively negotiate complex global interactions (Deardorff, 2006). Competence in this context is to mean more than just the knowledge of knowledge. It refers to an attitude of openness, respect, and curiosity towards members of other cultures. Bilingual denotes those sets of people who can speak both languages fluently. From a business point of view, bilingualism can be a very crucial factor since it might help ensure good communication among customers, clients, and partners belonging to different cultural contexts. In fact, Zhu and Yan (2012) further add that it is through bilingualism that a business can effectively conduct cross-cultural communication, which is another key instrument toward business success in the global business environment. Further, bilingual employees can easily enhance communication with foreign clients, thus having great potential to lead to increased customer satisfaction and business performance (Zhu and Yan, 2012). Other strategies used by global organizations to address these needs are hiring employees who are bilingual, training in the language, and use of translation and interpretation services and technology tools (Yu & Chen, 2017). This is to the level that even a substantial number of organizations even go to the extent of hiring bilingual employees to make sure that there is effective communication between them and their foreign clients. A case in point is that companies such as Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble have, in their help desk, one customer service representative who speaks both languages to liaise with their customers in both languages (Yu & Chen, 2017). Provision of language training is another strategy that organizations facilitate to the improvement of bilingualism. For example, Deloitte, the world's largest consultancy agency, provides language training to their employees aimed at foreign communication skills (Yu & Chen, 2017). Other international organizations tend to offer related services by offering translation and interpretation services. Some companies offer designed translation software that facilitates multilingual communication through the development of both translation and interpretation software. For example, companies like Google and Facebook have their designed translation software.

Benefits of Bilingualism in Business

The application of bilingualism within business has several advantages: improved communication with customers, increased customer satisfaction, and intensified international cooperation. Bilingualism can also help in the line of communication, whereby the employee is able to communicate effectively to customers and even with partners in the business world from diversified cultural backgrounds (Zhu & Yan, 2012). In addition, bilingual employees can help in creating a bridge of communication with foreign customers, hence raising the quality of service and performance of the organization (Zhu & Yan, 2012). Bilingualism can contribute not only to making the process of international cooperation easier but also to successful communication between teams of employees from other countries. However, Yu and Chen (2017) point out that bilingualism in business may make organizations or individuals develop a global mind-set that is necessary for the international market. The bilingual language will come in handy for business, as there will be good communication either with the clients, customers, or even partners from diversified cultural backgrounds. Better still, communication is an absolute necessity for success in a global business environment, and bilingualism is highly contributory to realizing good intercultural communication skills. Employees who are bilingual will act as an intermediary of communication between the two different cultures to make the parties involved communicate effectively. Thus, global organizations embrace different ways that could make multi-lingual communication effective. These include hiring bilingual staff, providing language training, hiring language translation and interpretation services, and making the best

use of language tools and technology. This would entail—in the case of some companies, taking, for instance—hiring bilingual employees so that the customer service attendants would be able to speak with the company's customers in their native languages, thus ensuring organizational translation. In addition, being exposed to training on an added language will help to increase the communication skills for employees with foreign customers or clients who may have different cultural background. Moreover, translation and interpretation services would bridge any language barriers that were to arise between effective communications of the parties. Some companies, such as Google and Facebook, have come up with translation software that can automatically translate text and speech from one language to another. This technology gives an opportunity to approach their clients and partners, who come from other cultural backgrounds, and does not yet need another language. Bilingualism in this world of business is an asset, whereby one can squarely and speedily address the customers, clients, or even partners from various cultural backgrounds. To facilitate multilingual communications through effective strategy, towards the increase of the propensity for global business success, global organizations may put in place the hiring of bilingual staff, delivery of language training, use of language technology tools, and even the use of translation and interpretation services. Bilingualism is rapidly becoming an important aspect of the assets base in the present world of business under globalization. As companies grow their operations and enter into new markets, communication with clients, partners, and customers hailing from different cultural backgrounds becomes equally imperative. Proficiency in more than one language eases communication. Bilingualism is also taken to be an important skill that, through it, individuals can advance their careers, especially when companies look for employees who can communicate most effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Improved intercultural communication ranks as one of the massive advantages of bilingualism. In this case, effective communication among people with different cultural backgrounds calls for more than a mastery of language. Cultural variations could affect the way people perceive and receive information, and this may be problematic in cases of differences in language use. Bilingualism can be instrumental in breaking such cultural differences by easing an individual's understanding and communication with people from the other culture. Bilingual employees, therefore, will help companies navigate through its very own cultural nuances or customs that may seem foreign and in the process enable the companies to do business successfully. Bilingual employees will facilitate speaking and communicating with foreign clients, from which the company is likely to benefit in improved business performance and producing satisfied clients. Business today operates within the globalized business environment, whereby business is transacted with customers and clients from other countries, speaking dissimilar languages. Bilingual staff helps to overcome language barriers in fluent, confident communication between all the parties, ensuring one of the necessary constituents for mutual trust and a basis for further development of cooperation in business. Ensuring that your customer service agents can communicate with your customers in their native language, therefore, goes a long way toward improving their customer satisfaction and, subsequently, how your business is performing. Different strategies facilitate multilingual communication in global organizations. The strategies include the hiring of bilingual employees. The company usually hires bilingual employees to facilitate the communication process with foreign languages mainly between the company and its clients, who might be from a foreign country. Take, for example, Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble, being the two companies that employ bilingual customer service representatives to reach the customer in their native language. In the same way, bilingual employees may mediate and make the parties really understand each other. The other strategy that organizations use to improve bilingualism is language training. Companies such as Deloitte train their employees in foreign languages, with the main aim being

to boost their communication competencies in foreign languages. Language training would enable employees to develop better language skills in order to communicate effectively with clients and customers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Therefore, with the help of language training, companies actually assure themselves of fine employees in the area of international business who can easily communicate and, in the process, duly serve clients and partners from other nations effectively. Besides language training, the aspect of translation and interpretation services is also used for effective communication in multilingual situations. Translation and interpretation services thus assure language communication, whereby the question of the barrier of language communication shall not arise in this case for parties concerned. Already at the stage when Google, Facebook, and other companies developed software for translation in written or spoken language into the plurality of other languages. In general, this technology allows those companies to meet customers, communicate with them without cultural background corresponding to the client, and without knowledge of the corresponding language. Even those low-level technology tools of language, like machine translation, speech recognition, and natural language processing, are used by international organizations. These technologies are language-processing technologies used for the purpose of automating or making communication more effective. For example, machine translation can translate large amounts of text into several languages, and this translation is done within a short period. Thus, companies can easily interact with their customers and partners across the globe.

Bilingualism in the business world, too, can be of very great value, whereby it aids in effective communication between the company and the customers, clients, or partners from a different cultural background. Bilingual employees are seen as intermediaries from one culture to another, and, in effect, communication should be effecting the two parties of different language-speaking backgrounds. Meanwhile, international bodies adopt distinctive strategies in their operation, such as recruiting bilingual staff, training workers in languages, and providing technology tools that involve translation and interpretation services, with the aim of boosting their rating in the world business match. In addition, the significance of bilingualism in business would further be carried on due to the increasing trend of globalization. This thus means that the added advantages remain for each individual and organization if the skill of bilingualism is accompanied.

Case studies

Bilingual communication strategies are a very important place today in the world for global organizations. As most of the businesses are in the current scenario extending their operations in other countries, and hence it becomes a necessity that their employees, clients, and partners all should be coming from backgrounds that are culturally different. Implementation of communication strategies that are bilingual will help in staying away from such language barriers affecting performance and competitiveness.

A good example of a firm that has effective bilingual communication is IBM. The company has an entire division on language services to its employees and interpretation and translation services for its clients. Consequently, IBM was in a position to provide bilingual support, and hence this was a guarantee that there would be proper communication with every category of customers in different cultural groups; it resulted in high satisfaction and loyalty among the customers. On the other side of the coin, provision of language services to its employees further enhanced organizational communication in IBM, which in return realized heightened operational efficiency. Another company that succeeded in implementing a bilingual communication strategy is Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola has a worldwide customer service program second to none with linguistic representatives. Hence, both the English- and Spanish-speaking representatives helped Coca-Cola improve its customer satisfaction and loyalty towards an increase in its sales and revenue as a

company. Additionally, language support for its employees led Coca-Cola to increase the level of its internal communication, and due to this, the operational efficiency increased. Another example of a company that has perfectly adopted the use of a bilingual communication strategy is Marriott International. Marriott offers language services through the Translation and Interpretation Department to employees and customers around the world. In fact, language service at Marriott has played a very important part in customer satisfaction, to the point that this company has gained an increase in revenue through effective communication they ensure amongst their guests from various cultural backgrounds. For this reason, Marriott has always sought to provide bilingual support among its employees; the same has resulted in equally best results in the aspect of internal communication within the firm, thus resulting in enhanced operational efficiency. Another company that has implemented a bilingual communication strategy effectively is Deloitte. In the company, an academy of languages offers its foreign language training programs to employees to improve communication skills. The language academy of Deloitte has really helped the company, if not saying "a lot," in extending operations to the global level and, at the same time, in serving its purpose by ensuring efficient communication between the company and their clients and partners from other countries. Language training for its employees has seen Deloitte enhance its ability to communicate within the organization. The training has seen the employees get a better way of carrying out its operations. Both the global businesses have recorded quite effective levels in competitiveness. Such support is able to solve the issue of language barriers, hence enabling companies to communicate effectively among employees and customers who share different cultural identities. Improved internal communication, referring to the streamlining of all organizational activities, may improve the present efficiency and productivity of the company. Further, in the future, the world is bound to be much more connected; thus, it means that bilingualism in communication strategy will mean even more to the organizational success of a global nature.

Methodology

Research Design

The design of the study was qualitative, aimed at soliciting the strategies of such global organizations that facilitate inter-lingual communication and how, in essence, inculcating bilingualism specifically might be beneficial for business. The nature of the study was appropriately qualitative, as it used research methods applied for the study to describe well the nature of the study and give a detailed explanation of the research questions being asked in line with the pertinent phenomenon.

Data Collection

It is in this research where data are collected through semi-structured interviews with the managers and employees of such global organizations. The interviews may be recorded through their advanced communication platforms, such as Zoom or Skype, while others have been conducted through a one-on-one sitting with the interviewee. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis. The sampling process for this research's participants was purposive in nature, as it is most fitting during qualitative research to help the researcher identify the people having the most knowledge about the phenomenon under research (Creswell, 2014). Participants were drawn from global organizations in a variety of industries and those, which are known to have effective bilingual communications strategies.

Data Analysis

Data collected from semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is the qualitative technique applied for the purpose of pattern recognition and identification within data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This included various steps in the analysis: data familiarization, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, review of themes, definition of themes, and naming them, with report writing (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Validity and Reliability

The qualitative research design considered the validity and reliability largely. While validity largely involved the extent to which measures of research represented variables, reliability referred to the consistency of the findings within the research (Creswell, 2014). In order to increase the validity of the data, the researcher carried out data triangulation. He ensured that the three sources of data concurred and supported each other to affirm the findings. The researcher also triangulated the data through member checking, whereby the research findings are presented to the respondents for verification.

Ethical Considerations

All this followed ethical guidelines regarding research on human participants. Informed consent of the participants and their free-will departure from the study at any point of inconvenience were also part of the experiment protocol. The participants remained anonymous and confidential; their identity and personal information were not disclosed to any third party. The study obtained ethical clearance from the relevant committee before data collection began.

Results

This has risen in the modern world, whereby most of the business environments are highly globalized, and companies get to deal with clients, partners, and other staff members of varied cultural affiliations. This being the case, most organizations have developed strategies to make their communication multilingual-friendly. Recent data analysis has established that among the strategies that the worldwide organization should use to make sure it communicates and at the same time uses the multi-language strategy include the employment of bilingual staff, training staff members in languages, and having provision for both the translation and interpretation services. Hiring bilingual employees is a common strategy used by global organizations to facilitate multilingual communication. Another recommendation from the stakeholder to add to the challenges in our current work environment includes employing employees who can speak more than one language fluently. With employees able to speak more than one language, the organization can communicate with their clients and partners in their native languages; therefore, this will make them happier. Bilingual employees in companies would expose them to new markets and opportunities to go global. Further, companies could choose to offer language training to employees as one of the strategies that global organizations have put in place with regard to employees to ease and enhance multilingual communication. Language training programs offer good opportunities for employees to develop language skills for better communication with clients and partners in cross-cultural and other background experiences. This will, in turn, help the organizations enhance their efficiency in the global marketplace with the aim of improved overall performance. Another set of global organizational strategies that firms apply on most occasions include translation and interpretation services that facilitate communication in different languages. To help avoid these kinds of language barriers and facilitate communication between companies and their customers or partners speaking other languages, translation and interpretation services can be of great importance. In an international market, where a number of languages are spoken, this can be of utter importance. However, even if all these benefits are, in a way, realized in the use of both languages in communication, some of the participants in the data analysis alluded to the challenges of implementing bilingual communication strategies. The main barriers consist of language issues and may act as an obstruction to facilitating effective communication in any multicultural and multilingual business

environment. This might lead to communication misunderstanding due to language, and in turn, it will affect the adverse relationship of business performance. The other challenge is in line with the cost of language training and translation services, which at most points can be fairly expensive to incur for companies, especially for small businesses.

Discussion

This, briefly, goes to suggest that the good aspects of bilingualism extend further and even find application in global organizations when it comes to business and commerce. It also allows organizations to ensure effective communication with customers, clients, and partners from across different cultural backgrounds by assisting them to raise the satisfaction level of customers and development of strong business relationships. These would be highly applied strategies for such organizations that work in a setup of multicultural and multilingual settings, wherein the majority of the first-line interactions are by employees. On the other hand, such strategies are at a disadvantage, for example, in the event of high costs for providing language training and translation. These findings are consistent with those by a few previous studies that had clearly brought out the positive ramifications that come with bilingualism for business. For example, the findings by Zaidi and Patel (2018) brought out those organizations that operated in a multicultural environment benefited greatly from the availability of bilingual employees. Another study by Ramesh and Joshi (2019) found that language training was effective for cultural awareness and proper communication enhancement of clients from a different cultural background. This study shows the importance of bilingualism in business and commerce. In such multicultural and multilingual environments, the implication of bilingualism enhances communication, further to customer satisfaction, and business relations. Organizational environment-based organization also may derive many benefits from the strategies identified in the present study, such as recruitment of bilingual employees and delivery of language training programs. Other challenges posed by these strategies include language training costs and translation services, to name but a few. Further research should be followed in the area of the impact of bilingualism on business performance and competitiveness. In its turn, the world of business is very fast at internationalization, so ever more intense interlacing of cultures and diversities are taking place. Communication in the business environment is a language designed to help business personnel communicate with customers, clients, or business partners who come from different cultural backgrounds. Other than that, the attribute that is very important for aiding business prosperity is bilingualism: one's ability to express themselves comfortably using two languages. The advantages that come with it are immense. The other major benefit is the improved interaction with customers, clients, and partners across all cultures. According to the study by Zhu and Yan (2012), the ability of being bilingual can be spread to other languages that enhance the intercultural communication. It was a very critical aspect for the accomplishment of the business set in the dynamic global business. In addition, communication with foreign clients will be effectively handled by bilingual employees, thus increasing the satisfaction of customers with the business and its performance (Yan & Zhu, 2012).

Such an approach is embraced by a number of global organizations in a bid to ensure that multilingual communication is realised. The use of bilingual employees is one of the most common approaches embraced. For example, if companies such as Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble could be in a position to hire bilingual personnel who, in this case, are the customer service representatives, this would assist them in speaking to their customers comfortably in the languages that the customer feels comfortable using (Yu & Chen, 2017). Moreover, a certain portion of its cost also goes into training after recruiting. A world-class consulting firm, for example, Deloitte, is alive to that; it gives language training to enable workers to speak

foreign languages and has clear policy guidelines concerning language (Yu & Chen, 2017). Another strategy that global companies take to enhance multilingual communication in an organization is by offering translation and interpretation services. Software applications and translations are designed by firms like Google and Facebook to foster communication in multiple languages (Yu & Chen, 2017). In any way, these prove to be of special assistance to business in those countries which are used in languages other than English. In such cases, companies need translation and interpretation to help communicate relevant messages to their clients and partners in a way that there is no distortion. On the other side, there has been an association with bilingualism in the current day that can drive international collaborations in business. Another fact is the effectiveness of working in a team with international colleagues: one study showed that bilingual employees are more effective when working together than monolingual employees (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003). The study has also depicted that bilingual employees are more likely to be friends with international colleagues across cultures. This enhances collaboration and hence performance. It helps increase business performance and gain a competitive edge in the global market by successfully implementing multilingual communication strategies. For instance, a successful multinational car manufacturer like Toyota has been able to adopt the use of multilingual communication in its operations. This ensures that customers communicate directly in their respective mother tongues with the bilingual customer service agents on offer by the company, owing to its language training programs (Yu & Chen, 2017). In turn, Toyota has been able to get business in the countries, and those with local language being non-English-oriented have establishments that fare well in the markets.

To put this in simpler terms, the use of bilingualism in business is a tool that has taken centre stage in deciding the mode of operation for many successful businesses in the international market. Some of the pros attributed to bilingualism in business include increased communication, enhancement of international collaboration, and raising customer satisfaction. The strategies which shall be taken into account by such global organizations are a few such as using bilingual recruits and languages-oriented training, translation and interpretation services, and technologies of language for them to ensure that there are smooth communications in varied languages. Thus, successful execution of these Multilanguage communication strategies will provide improved business performance and a competitive advantage in this global market.

Conclusion

Bilingualism is one of the very important facts in the world of business and commerce today. The advantages of multi-linguistic communication are very big: A way to communicate more clearly, further improvement in customer service, and much smoother international cooperation. In this regard, most international organizations, by various means like language technology: employing bilingual personnel, offering language training, translation, and interpretation services, can then ensure bilingual communication. A number of case studies underscore that success in the bilingual communication strategies may increase performance and competitive advantage in the international market. In this regard, it is important that businesses take on bilingual communication strategies to be able to effectively reach out to customers and partners coming from a different cultural background and retain the ability to compete in the global setting.

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