

# AT THE CROSSROADS

In vielen Unternehmen heißt es heute: Firmensprache Englisch. Doch reichen die Englischkenntnisse der Mitarbeiter dafür oft nicht aus. Ian Badger erklärt, was weiterführende Englischkurse beinhalten müssen, um die Belegschaft sprachlich auf den Berufsalltag vorzubereiten.

medium

The business world has gone through dramatic changes in the past decade, many of which have been intensified by the recent recession. Firms are streamlining their management teams, integrating new acquisitions, transforming supply chains and implementing standardized systems. Key functions are being outsourced and jobs are being relocated — often abroad.

The ability to work across borders is now essential, and the lingua franca of cross-border communication is usually, though not exclusively, English. In many companies, English has become the (or an) official language (see *Business Spotlight* 6/2006). New structures and systems demand a higher level of language proficiency from employees at all levels of an organization. Also, new projects often require highly specialized English vocabulary, which has to be learned quickly so that staff can take active roles. All of this has considerable implications for the way English is used and taught in companies.

## Not good enough

The reality, however, is that staff often do not have the level of competence needed to cope with changes in English. In many firms, too little attention is paid to training them to do their jobs effectively in English.

The need for effective training is important not only for older employees, who have experience in their jobs but often lack the language skills. “Younger employees, whose high level of ‘school English’ means they

can list their irregular verbs standing on their heads, still need to learn business communication skills, such as how to lead a meeting in English,” says Karen Adam-Bohley, an English trainer at the international car supplier Brose, in Coburg.

If firms introduce systems that demand levels of English beyond the competence of staff, they risk demotivating their personnel as well as expensive communication breakdowns. In a recent example of this, a leading forest-products company relocated its European IT support centres to Poland and Estonia. Before that, staff could get IT help in their native language. After being relocated, the help-desk language was English. Making it even more difficult for workers to get their IT problems solved was that the English was often spoken by Poles and Estonians with unfamiliar accents.

Similar language problems are being experienced as firms increasingly develop systems for company-wide usage in English, in areas such as HR, invoicing or order processing. Staff with inadequate language skills find it hard to cope with the new demands of their jobs. ►

<b>acquisition</b> [ˌækwiˈziʃən]	übernommene Firma
<b>appropriately</b> [əˈprɪəpriətli]	in angemessener Weise
<b>complaint</b> [kəmˈpleɪnt]	Beschwerde
<b>consultant</b> [kənˈsʌltənt]	Berater(in)
<b>cope with sth.</b> [ˈkəʊp wɪð]	mit etw. zurechtkommen
<b>Estonia</b> [eˈstəʊniə]	Estland
<b>expertise</b> [ˌeksɜːˈtiːz]	Sachkenntnis(se)
<b>HR (human resources)</b> [ˌeɪtʃˈuː]	Personalwesen
<b>implication</b> [ˌɪmplɪˈkeɪʃən]	Folge, Auswirkung
<b>industry</b> [ˈɪndəstri]	hier: Branche
<b>invoicing</b> [ˈɪnvɔɪsɪŋ]	Rechnungsstellung
<b>language proficiency</b>	Sprachkenntnisse
<b>order processing</b> [ˈɔːdəˌˈprəʊsesɪŋ]	Auftragsabwicklung
<b>outsource sth.</b> [ˈaʊtsɔːs]	etw. auslagern
<b>reach</b> [riːtʃ]	Reichweite
<b>relocate sth.</b> [ˌriːləʊˈkeɪt]	etw. verlagern
<b>streamline sth.</b> [ˈstriːmlaɪn]	etw. optimieren, etw. straffen, etw. rationalisieren
<b>supply chain</b> [səˈplaɪ tʃeɪn]	Lieferkette

## Messages from the market

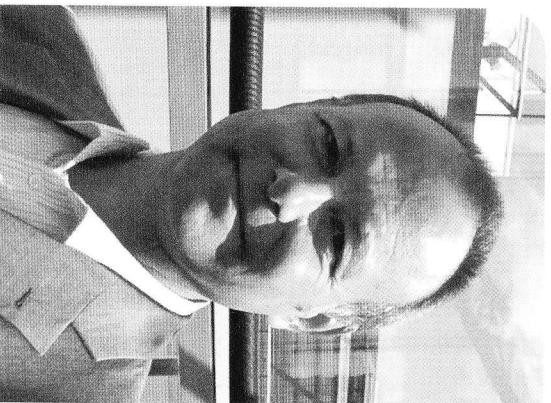
Business English consultant Ian Badger lists typical complaints learners have about trainers and what trainers need to do to meet current learning needs:

### Learners' complaints about trainers:

- they focus too much on British business transactions;
- they use irrelevant case studies and exercises;
- they focus too much on “fun”, often idiomatic, vocabulary and do not focus enough on the key vocabulary needed in people's work;
- they pay too much attention to “correct” grammar;
- they either do not have a business interest or a business background, or are business specialists without sufficient teaching skills.

### Trainers need to:

- acquire detailed knowledge of the sector(s) they are working in;
- develop relevant industry- and company-specific materials;
- use technology to increase the reach and effectiveness of their teaching;
- use technology appropriately and be aware of its limitations;
- develop new areas of expertise — for example, English for renewable resources or language and cultural awareness for native and near-native speakers.



## Interview

# “Training can also take place in the evenings or at weekends”

**HANS-DIETER DOLL**, manager of Daimler's general business training in Germany, talked to WICKI SUSSENS-MESSERER about his firm's changing English needs.

**What changes have influenced the way English is used at Daimler?**

Globalization and internationalization have increased the need for Daimler employees to communicate in English. Staff are increasingly involved in international cooperation and working together with companies, suppliers and customers abroad — for example, in the US, India and China.

**How has this changed the use of English in your firm?**

Working in virtual international teams and collaborating with non-native speakers of English is becoming more and more im-

portant. Thus, the need to speak fluently on the phone, to write emails and to have strategies for communicating with non-native speakers of English is becoming essential.

**What feedback have staff given about their language needs?**

The need to communicate with people all over the world, many of whom are non-native speakers of English, means that the employees need to have communication strategies for dealing with people using English as a second language. Cross-cultural competence is therefore an important skill, in addition to linguistic competence.

**What is the effect of the changes on your language training?**

The Daimler Corporate Academy offers language training over the phone, as well as the usual face-to-face training. The so-called *Telefon-Sprachtraining* enables learners to use phone and email for learning languages in a real-life context. This also makes it possible for learners to take lessons in the workplace, and also in the evenings or at weekends. In this sense, *blended learning* is becoming increasingly important.

## Communication channels

Non-native English speakers face many other difficulties. For example, even the most common channels of communication present challenges for employees:

- **Email** allows fast communication and is used by almost everyone employing English at work (see *Business Spotlight* 3/2008). But precisely this speed of communication can lead to misunderstandings, as writers fail to take the time to express their ideas clearly. Also, email etiquette varies across different cultures. If this is not taken into account, emails lose much of their effectiveness or can sound negative. “If the tone of an email inviting staff to a telephone conference is wrong, it can affect the tone of the rest of the communication needed for that conference,” says Gabriele Eilert-Ebke, corporate-learning manager for Henkel in Düsseldorf.
- **Telephoning**. An increasing number of people are involved in conference calls (see *Business Spotlight* 2/2010), videoconferences and conferences on the Web. These involve not only listening and speaking skills but also the use of instant messages. Yet, communication is often ineffective in virtual conferences, as speakers don't consider each others' English-language competencies.

## Natives and near-natives

Other challenges come from the communication between highly proficient and less proficient users of English. Training courses and consultancy services are often delivered by native or near-native English speakers. Trainees may find it difficult to understand their trainers because of the speed of their speech, or their strong national or regional accents.

More generally, proficient users of business English (whether native or near-native speakers) can cause a range of problems for their less able colleagues. For example, they may speak too quickly, use idiomatic and colloquial language (“I'm chuffed”) or use lots of business jargon and abbreviations. (For examples of jargon, see our test on page 58.) Proficient users of English need to be aware of these problems, and less skilled users need help to develop strategies for dealing with them.

## The role of technology

Technology developments have brought advantages and disadvantages for learners of English. In the past, less competent speakers of English had time to consult a colleague, look words up in a dictionary or get an interpreter. Today, most people in business have a mobile phone and use email, messaging services and (though less common in business) text, and they take part in conferences on the Web or by phone. These developments mean there is no hiding place: firms demand immediate responses in English.

Of course, these new technologies are not universal. While running a training course supporting the introduction of new IT systems in factories in France in 2010, I found that many workers and middle managers did not have their own laptops or easy access to email. And many firms block the use of non-corporate, web-conferencing tools or non-authorized software. The enthusiasm that business English (and other) trainers have for blogs, wikis and tweets may not be shared by the firm's IT management or learners.

The advantage of technology, however, is its enormous potential for in-company language learning. Trainers can easily and cheaply make video and audio recordings and create materials for specific needs. Moreover, despite the restrictions created by company firewalls, the opportunities for online training with file sharing and voice support are enormous. Portable applications, enhanced e-books and other new technologies will continue to help business learners to make the best use of their time. Hans-Dieter Doll, manager of Daimler's general business training in Germany (see

abbreviation	Abkürzung
access	Zugang
application	Anwendung
blended learning	integriertes Lernen
business jargon	Fachsprache
business unit	Geschäftsbereich
challenge	Herausforderung
channel	Kanal, Weg
chuffed	fröh, mehr als zufrieden
colloquial	umgangssprachlich
conference call	Telefonkonferenz
consultancy	Beratung
consultant	Berater(in)
corporate	Firmen-
credibility	Glaubwürdigkeit
enhanced	hier: mit multimedialen Inhalten ergänzt
etiquette	Etikette, Umgangsformen
face-to-face	persönlich
file sharing	Datenaustausch
fluently	fließend
instant message	schriftliche Nachricht in Echtzeit per Internet
interpreter	Dolmetscher(in)
keep abreast of sth.	sich über etw. auf dem Laufenden halten
legacy system	Altsystem
maintenance	Instandhaltung, Wartung
messaging service	Nachrichten(übertragungs-)dienst
middle manager	Manager(in) der mittleren Führungsebene
proficient	kompetent
take sth. into account	etw. berücksichtigen
text	hier: SMS-Nachrichten)
tweet	Twitter-Nachricht
voice support	Sprachunterstützung
willingness	Bereitschaft



Wherever you see this symbol in the magazine, you will find the text, a related interview or a language exercise on *Business Spotlight Audio*.

### Highlights in this issue:

- Listen to **Anne Koark** talking about her experience with **insolvency**. She gives tips based on what she's learned.
- Do you know the words "monetize" or "throughput"? Test your knowledge of **management vocabulary**.
- In our Business Skills section, learn about **ways to build trust** at work.
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interview on opposite page) believes that the future will bring more language learning in virtual classrooms.

### Pressures on companies and trainers

The dramatic changes in the business world, as well as the recession, have led many firms to cut training budgets and to focus on language training that is essential to their businesses. Indeed, it is often politically unwise for firms to pay for non-critical training at a time when employees are losing jobs, taking pay cuts and whole business units are being closed. Travel bans have also meant trainees find it difficult to get permission to attend external courses and, particularly, language training abroad. In this climate, the willingness to pay for general business English courses is falling. This makes it essential that trainers have the right business knowledge and skills. But there are few specialist business English teachers out there with a good understanding of everyday corporate life. This can lead to poor credibility with their clients. The following dialogue may be amusing, but it shows what can go wrong if trainers don't have enough knowledge of the company and sector in which they are teaching:

**Learner:** I work with CARL.

**Trainer:** Who's Karl?

**Learner:** What?

**Trainer:** Who's Karl?

**Learner:** It's our legacy system.

**Trainer:** Sorry?

Here, the trainer needs to know that "CARL" is a software package used in the maintenance industry, and that a "legacy system" is a "system from the past". As Catherine Leuz quite rightly said recently in the magazine *English Teaching Professional*: "Corporate trainers should be prepared to invest time and money in training to keep abreast of trends."



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### NEW elements

- The booklet includes all the spoken texts and dialogues from the magazine.
- We alternate texts and exercises with interactive activities.