

Vietnam. <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2010/12/in-service-training-courses-mushrooming-despite-criticism-on-quality.html>

"In-Service Training Brings Bread to University Lecturers." (December 17, 2010). VietNam.Net. <http://en.www.info.vn/science-and-education/faculty/16026-in-service-training-brings-bread-to-university-lecturers.html>

"Ministry Seeks to Improve Quality of Evening Classes." (January 10, 2011). Viet Nam News. <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/Social-Issues/207485/Ministry-seeks-to-improve-quality-of-evening-classes.html>

Phong, Tien. (January 28, 2011). "Students Are Not Graduating University, Why?" Vietnam.Net Bridge. <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/en/education/4433/student-are-not-graduating-university--why-.html>

Runckel, Christopher. (2009). "The Education System in Vietnam." Business-in-Asia.com. http://www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam/education_system_in_vietnam.html

Tu, Uyen. (December 10, 2010). "Many Businesses Say 'No' to In-Service Training Graduates." Look At Vietnam. <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2010/12/many-businesses-say-no-to-in-service-training-graduates.html>

Tu, Uyen. (December 18, 2010). "Evaluating In-Service Training, Why Not?" Look At Vietnam. <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2010/12/evaluating-in-service-training-why-not.html>

UniversityofWashington.Professional and Continuing Education. <http://www.pce.uw.edu/degrees/>

"Vietnam Begins 2011 With Critical Political Decisions." (Winter, 2011). Vietnomics: US--Vietnam Partnership Advisors. <http://www.vietnomics.com/update-winter11.pdf>



Speaking English or Writing English?

DR. ROD JENSEN

*International Consultant for
University Continuing Education*

"A UEF Education is Beyond the Obvious"

During the last week of 2010 I had the enviable opportunity to visit with a class of second year students at the University of Economics and Finance (UEF), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Without benefit of translation these well-trained students were able to converse with me in English and only exhibited confused looks when I occasionally rambled on about

my educational philosophy. I thoroughly enjoy moments of conversation and discussion with these students whose unique perspectives provided me with something new to think about. One 'something new to think about' moment occurred when a young lady asked me an insightful question that I am still contemplating. "When working for an international firm in Ho Chi Minh City, would it be more

important for the Vietnamese college graduate to excel at English speaking or to excel at English writing?”

The simple but evasive answer to her question was and is, yes. It is important to excel at both English writing and English speaking. But the reality is that most learners of English will tend to spend different levels of

some data on the use of English as the language of the company workplace in Vietnam. The growing dominance of English in Vietnamese businesses is primarily reflected in the percentage of companies who use this language during interviews with potential employees. “According to a recruitment agency based in Hanoi, 48%

Chi Minh City.

The continuing popularity of Foreign Direct Investment throughout Vietnam and particularly in Ho Chi Minh City, using programs such as International Joint Ventures (IJV’s) and Enterprise with 100% Foreign Capital (EFOC), will result in an increased presence of international business interests.



time mastering either speaking or writing with the consequence being a personal dominance in one skill set. The original question still remains to be answered and it should be determined with input provided by Ho Chi Minh City businesses and industries which will someday employ UEF graduates (or other Vietnam university graduates).

Unfortunately there appears to be a scarcity of specific research and/or data from Vietnamese businesses and industries on the workplace preference of either English skill. There is however

of Vietnamese companies and 91% of foreign ones conduct interviews in English” (VietNam. Net Bridge, April 5, 2008). The implication is that if such high numbers of companies use English as a tool to screen and select future employees then it is likely that English is also extensively used during everyday communication at the workplace. In lieu of conducting a workplace communications pattern analysis the growing value of occupational English can in part be determined by the evolving characteristics of the economic environment in Ho

A recent article in Vietnam. Net Bridge noted that Foreign Direct Investment is increasing within several different markets in Vietnam and particularly within real estate and banking. “Though the global real estate market cooled down after the economic crisis, international real estate developers have still been pouring their capital into Vietnam. This explains why real estate remains the sector which has been attracting most of the foreign direct investment” (Vietnam. Net Bridge, December 12, 2010). “Two years after



the (global financial) crisis, foreign investors have overcome difficulties and are trying to seek new investment opportunities, once again eyeing Vietnam's banking sector" (Vietnam.Net Bridge, December 13, 2010). As international participation in the Vietnamese economy increases, the reliance upon workplace or occupational English as the common tool for communication will also likely increase.

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is a sub-set of English language instruction under the heading of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). While EOP "is not necessarily related to a specific discipline"... it "is likely to be used with adult learners although it could be used with young adults in a secondary school setting" (Gatehouse, 2001). The value of EOP in the Vietnamese workplace is threefold (Gatehouse, 2001).

1. The ability to successfully communicate in the workplace using occupationally specific jargon/terminology.

2. The ability to communicate through writing correspondence, conducting research or responding to emails/memos.

3. The ability to use the informal English/slang of the everyday workplace.

EOP is often included in the academic curriculum of a specific occupation (such as health care, hospitality, or engineering), but it is also likely to be a focus of occupational training programs in companies through continuing education. Occupational English can be taught to beginners but

it is better if students first attain a basic understanding of the language. Once a student has determined his/her career it would then be practical to begin focusing upon the English of their occupation and attempt to master its vocabulary.

A university, such as UEF, which provides a solid foundational English program for its students, could also provide the instruction of Occupational English for a variety of business interests in Ho Chi Minh City through their respective office of continuing education. Some international companies already incorporate informal or formal occupational training programs for their non-native English speakers. But it is often more cost effective for these businesses if university continuing education programs develop the occupational English curriculum and then schedule open enrollment classes for participating companies.

Understanding the potential of Occupational English is helpful for this discussion but it still does not concretely answer the question concerning the workplace importance of writing English or speaking English. Several years ago a research study was conducted in Thailand which examined how specific English skills effected the performance of an occupational workgroup--automotive engineers. "The Thai Group (the employer of the automotive engineers) recognizes that competence to communicate in English for the engineers is a crucial factor in operating a business internationally, and it

also realizes that their engineers lack substantial ability to communicate orally. Proficiency in English, particularly in oral communication, is a necessary requirement for global engineers and yet it is the biggest difficulty of non-English-speaking engineers" (Li and Rawung-Hart, 2008). This study did not diminish the importance of all forms of English communication but emphasized that speaking English well was of primary concern for the engineering profession.

Another study conducted in Malaysia surveyed the opinion of companies such as the Multimedia Development Corporation, JobStreet.com, and the Malaysian Employers Federation. The results of the survey indicated that "the key skill in communication, looked for by employers, is oral communication, especially the ability to deliver powerful and effective presentations" (Ali and Kassim, 2010. p. 172). Speaking well in English does seem to be the primary skill for many occupational groups. A 2005 study conducted in the country of Jordan indicated that the majority of people who were surveyed from the hospitality and banking industry--if given the choice--preferred to improve their English speaking skill (94% and 73% respectively). But fewer in either group either wanted to or felt the need to improve their English writing skill (78% and 49% respectively). "Even though the type of work has obviously influence on the two groups of workers, the banking workers,

no doubt due to their limited use of the language, appear to be lagging behind, showing lower percentages in their assessment of their proficiency of all four language skills” (Al-Khatib, 2005). Perhaps the perception of the banking employees is that they seldom have public interaction with English speakers so there is little need for improving their language skills. The hospitality workers on the other hand interact daily with tourists from other countries who would undoubtedly depend upon English as a common language. The occupational need of the hospitality workers reinforced their apparent need to become more proficient speaking English.

Even though the limited number of studies noted in this paper emphasize the value of speaking English in the workplace it is also evident that these preferences are occupationally related. For those occupations which require immediate or timely communication it appears that the spoken word is still dominant. But for those occupations which require a more contemplative examination of issues or the complete accuracy of data (accounting, contract law and architecture) written communication would prevail. In addition for those companies which depend upon collective work across the world’s time zones or even within a closed structure of an organization, written English may be their only common form of communication. “Colleagues often work in different cities,

countries, and continents, and, thanks to technology, even those working in the same building may not speak face-to-face for months or years” (Hallowell, 2010, p. 124).

Having the ability to communicate well in English is unquestionably a major asset for Vietnamese residents working for international firms in Ho Chi Minh City. Writing in English is an acquired skill which takes a considerable amount of time and effort to master and is less forgiving of error in interpretation. Speaking Occupational English well is also a labor-intensive task, but it is less dependent upon accuracy of phraseology as most listeners will accept reasonable attempts to communicate—regardless of the expanse of vocabulary or depth of accent. As vital as accuracy is to the act of communication, of perhaps even greater importance is the attempt to converse in a common language. “Engagement, research has shown, boosts performance, and a sense of connection in the workplace leads to engagement. So, establishing robust relationships at work should be a top priority. Small talk seems trivial, but it pays big dividends, building affinity and trust. Reach out to colleagues. Pay attention to everyone” (Hallowell, 2010, p. 124). Such advice will certainly benefit future UEF graduates as they enter the Vietnamese workforce in just a few years●

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Al-Khatib, Mahmoud A. (June, 2005). “English in the Workplace: An Analysis

of the Communication Needs of Tourism and Banking Personnel.” Asian EFL Journal. Volume 7. Issue 2. Article 11.

“Foreign Capital Returning to Vietnamese Banks”. (December 13, 2010). Vietnam.Net Bridge. <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/en/business/2498/foreign-capital-returning-to-vietnamese-banks.html>

“Foreign Direct Investors Return to the Real Estate Market”. (December 12, 2010). Vietnam.Net Bridge. <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/en/business/2598/foreign-direct-investors-return-to-the-real-estate-market.html>

Gatehouse, Kristen. (October, 2001). “Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum Development”. Internet TESL Journal. Vol. VII, No. 10. <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse-ESP.html>

Hallowell, Edward. (December 2010). “What Brain Science Tells Us About How to Excel”. Harvard Business Review.

Kassim, Hafizoah and Ali, Fatimah. (2010). “English Communicative Events and Skills Needed at the Workplace: Feedback From the Industry”. ScienceDirect. pp. 168-182. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/39097215/English-Communication>

Li, Lynne and Rawung-Hart, Pornpimon. (2008). “Globalization and Business Communication: English Communication Skills for Thai Automotive Engineers”. World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology. <http://www.waset.org/journals/waset/v48/v48-53.pdf>

“Tongue Tied”. (April 5, 2008). VietNam. Net Bridge. <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/education/2008/04/776883/>