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Conceptualizing Constructs of English in International Business Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to investigate how English users in international business workplaces use English to communicate with their business partners in Korea-based international business companies. Adopting the *Global Communicative Competence*, perceptions regarding the necessary abilities in international business workplaces were investigated through semi-structured interviews with 16 informants who were working for international businesses in Korea. Three themes were identified: *Communication in business*, *cultural understanding* and *business knowhow*. The finding of the communication in business illustrates the communication challenges the participants encountered in their workplaces, their coping strategies to deal with the challenges, and important aspects in international businesses they perceived. Furthermore, themes of cultural understanding and business knowhow pertain to other important aspects for successful international businesses such as understanding business partners' cultures and business manners. It was found that English constructs in international business workplaces had complex dimensions beyond the linguistic capacity for businesses, as linguistic and non-linguistic factors were found. These findings contribute to learning and using English language for international businesses, e.g., understanding different varieties of English accents and using a range of communication strategies.

KEYWORDS
communication challenges, communicative strategies, English as a lingua franca, Business English as a lingua franca

1. Introduction

In international business workplaces, English has been the dominant language for international businesses over the past few decades (Ehrenreich 2010, Louhiala-Salminen and Charles 2006); thus, English is used as a lingua franca (ELF), often referred to as Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) specifically in business contexts. BELF is one particular context of ELF where the language is also used for specific purposes like many other ELF contexts (Widdowson 1997). Seidlhofer (2011) defined ELF as "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (p. 7). This definition broadens the scope of English language users from the native English speakers to any English language users in the world. BELF users are English language users who work for business engaging in specific business settings, who communicate with people from various language and cultural backgrounds and who also engage in the same or similar businesses. In addition, BELF refers to English communication related to business along with contextual factors such as employees' professional roles, knowledge shared with clients, varying expectations and time constraints (Louhiala-Salminen 2002, Poncini 2002, 2007).

While a substantial amount of research of BELF has been conducted in European contexts, relatively less research has been done in other contexts. Furthermore, there are limitations about the conceptualization of BELF which Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) proposed. With regard to this there is a need to investigate whether the features described and discussed in European contexts can also be applied to other contexts and how BELF can be conceptualized in the contexts. The aim of this paper is to explore those communicative features found in a Korean business context and to make the conceptualization of BELF clearer.

2. Literature Review

Earlier studies of ELF were conducted by pioneering researchers including Jenkins (2000), House (2002), Meierkord (2002), and Seidlhofer (2001). Canagarajah (2013) makes the point that that there are two traditions in ELF. More traditional studies focused on codifying syntactic and phonological linguistic features of ELF (e.g., Jenkins 2006). Harding and McNamara (2017) on the contrary see ELF from more practical and pragmatic perspectives. They consider the comprehension of different varieties of English and abilities to use communication strategies such as meaning negotiation and accommodation. Studies focusing on such pragmatic skills and accommodation include Bjørge (2010), Firth (1996) and House (2003). The communication features often discussed in BELF are in line with those practical and pragmatic approaches.

Two areas of literature are reviewed for this study: studies discussing features of BELF are looked at first, and then a communicative competence model for international business workplaces known as Global Communicative Competence is discussed, which was proposed by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) based on the findings of research projects on communicative features conducted between 2000 and 2002 and between 2006 and 2009 in European contexts.

2.1 Studies on the Features of BELF

Studies have been conducted to identify the features of BELF in terms of communication features and modality of communication in BELF. To identify the features of BELF, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) conducted an online survey of 987 and in-depth interviews with 27 business people working in the context of European

multinational companies. The features found in the study include directness, simplicity, clear delivery (clarity), attenuating speech rate and delivering expected information for communication features of BELF, and a hybrid of discourse practices (e.g., the use of English and participants' first languages), shared terminology use in business domains and professional expertise, and interactional relationship (e.g., identifying each other's needs and business manner), including the length of relationship for modality of communication in BELF.

As for the communication features of BELF, directness pertains to explicit and issue-oriented talk (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010) in business settings. Indirect talk may lead to ambiguity and to "slow down business, particularly in contacts with Asian counterparts" (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010, p. 397). Simplicity and simplification refer to using simpler structures and vocabularies for interlocutors to be able to understand when he or she has lower level of English language proficiency. Clarity in BELF communication may be the term to include directness and simplicity. Delivering messages should be clear with being direct (i.e., explicit) and simple (i.e., not using complex words and structures). BELF highly focuses on effectiveness of communication. As Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) pointed out, clarity and directness are the necessary components for an effective communication in business settings. Ehrenreich (2010) also conducted 24 interviews in a multinational company in Germany to ask about the role of English in the company. Ehrenreich (2010) illustrated the challenges the informants encountered in communication with interlocutors. The challenges and problems they encountered happened when the interlocutor did not speak English at all, and interlocutors had varying ranges of English language proficiency levels. The informants had to use coping strategies such as "comprehension checks, asking for clarification and repetition" (p. 422) and others. When facing challenges, the use of communicative strategies is necessary.

Needs in English communication and characteristics of English use in international workplaces were studied in Norway by Nielsen (2019) through interviews with nine business professionals working in six multinational corporations. Some features of BELF were found in the study: accommodation and simplification for clarity. Regarding accommodation strategy, native speakers of English adjusted and accommodated their speech for the informants in some cases because they knew that they were talking to non-native speakers of English.

As for the modality of communication in BELF, in a study of Kankaanranta and Lu (2013), it was reported that Finnish speakers had often difficulty in understanding Chinese speakers' English because of their indirect speech style. In this case, understanding of business partners' cultural characteristics in manner and communication style may be required to communicate, which also is a feature of BELF, specifically the modality of communication in BELF. Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) noted additionally that in BELF communication, the mix of English and interlocutors' first languages is used, specifically in European contexts. For example, a German speaker use English and German when the interlocutor speaks German as well. This is featured as a hybrid of discourse practices (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010) in international business workplaces where translanguaging happens (Nielsen 2019). Additionally, in BELF communication, shared terms for things are used, which facilitates communication effectively and efficiently. Unlike ELF communication, BELF highly focuses on business relationships including business manner and politeness.

Of these features listed, shared terminology use and professional expertise are notable. One of the participants said "Jargon, content and vocabulary is where you get the differences between disciplines, in English too […] what's important for effectiveness is sharing the jargon and content" (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010, p. 394). This shared repertoire is a facilitating factor in the business communication. In the study, most interviewees mentioned that sharing business relevant vocabulary, specific jargon used in their industry and expertise is necessary for successful communication. If the specific knowledge is not shared, one should translate or paraphrase the knowledge to the other business partners "using accommodating, paraphrasing, and comprehension-checking strategies in BELF" (ibid p. 394) as background knowledge and language proficiency levels are not the same.

Another example of modality of communication in BELF is evident in Ehrenreich (2010). It was found that with regard to using Standard English, following correct form of English (i.e., Standard English) was not perceived necessary in the company, but the "pragmatic attitude" toward English was found effective except for the written texts which required to follow Standard English. Shifting language to content is the notable phenomenon in BELF communication as the use of so-called correct forms (i.e., Standard English) is not perceived important, but the content of the messages in business communication is considered important.

In addition to this, Ehrenreich (2010) described the power dynamics in communication with native English speakers. The informants often felt inferior when facing inconsiderate interlocutors (i.e., native speakers of English) because the interlocutors spoke so fast and used a wide range of vocabularies. They even felt they showed their weaknesses when they asked for repetition and clarification to the native English speakers. Previous research also reported that native speakers (NSs) of English could make non-native speakers (NNSs) feel inferior and they could use their linguistic advantages for exercising their power over NNSs (Cogo 2016, Henderson and Louhiala-Salminen 2011) and NSs are less skillful to accommodate various speakers than NNSs (Cogo 2016, Sweeney and Hua 2010) adapt their language. In international business settings, the use of these communicative strategies may not work properly due to the different power relationships. Takino (2020) investigated factors that influence empowerment and disempowerment in business communication by listening to stories of 34 Japanese BELF users in international business settings. The business people felt disempowerment because of their relatively lower English competence due to the limited chances to acquire English compared to native speakers of English, but when they were in superior positions such as buyers (i.e., economic relationships) and technology transferrer, they felt empowered. Consequently, the way English is used is different depending on the relationships (Takino 2020). Those, who are sellers, for example, try to convey their messages clearly to the Japanese business people using accommodation and simple English. As such, the use of accommodation strategies depends on power dynamics.

In addition to these characteristics of BELF, the mode of communication is also a distinct feature in BELF. Evans (2013) investigated workplace discourses in business sectors in Hong Kong using surveys and interviews with 2,030 and 28 business professionals respectively from three different ownerships of the companies (i.e., Hong Kong owned, China-owned, and foreign-owned). When asked about the perceived importance of languages used in the three different types of companies, "written English" had the highest means (ranging 4.85 to 5.21 in the six-point scale) while the means of "spoken English" ranged from 4.65 to 4.97. The author also found that written communication via email is the dominant mode in their workplace settings.

Based on these features of BELF through some projects, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) proposed the Global Communicative Competence of business professionals, a communicative model for international business workplaces as follows.

2.2 A Communicative Competence Model for International Business Workplaces: Global Communicative Competence

Based on two large projects conducted in European contexts, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland based multinational companies, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) proposed the *Global Communicative Competence* of a business professional (see Figure 1 below). The global communicative competence of a business professional is at the core in the model and consists of three layers: multicultural competence, competence in BELF, and business knowhow. Multicultural competence requires listening and accommodation skills (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991) and an understanding of different accents and varieties of the language" (Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011, p. 259) to manage "communicative situations with representatives of different national, organizational, and professional cultures" (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen 2013, p. 28). Competence in

BELF refers to the ability to use the core English in international business situations such as asking questions, and repeating and paraphrasing utterances focusing on clarity, brevity, directness, and politeness. Business knowhow refers to business-specific knowledge, including business strategies on how to operate businesses. BELF goes beyond the traditional conceptualization of English language proficiency in a language test, that is, mainly linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Elder, McNamara, Kim, Pill, and Sato 2017), to include non-linguistic factors such as professional knowledge (i.e., experience) and interaction (i.e., co-operation) in ELF communication.
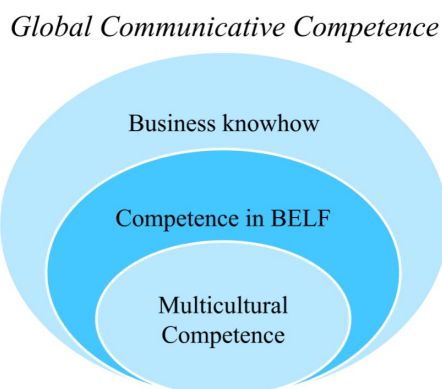
Figure 1. Model of Global Communicative Competence
(Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011, p. 258)

However, there are still limitations about the conceptualization of BELF. For example, the label *multicultural competence* may be limited to the awareness of cultural differences only related to the use of English. Furthermore, *business knowhow* has not been clearly and specifically defined. That is, it is unclear what kind of business knowhow is required for successful communication. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate BELF in different contexts. This calls for a more thorough investigation of the characteristics of international business workplaces.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

All participants are Koreans and worked for international business in Korea-based international companies. Sixteen participated in the interviews (six employers and ten employees). Six employers were recruited from six different companies for interviews. Their lengths of work experience at their present departments were from two to nine years ($SD = 2.94$) with at least 10-years work experience for international businesses. Ten employees who use English in oral and/or written business communication and work in international companies were recruited from nine companies for interviews. Most of them worked for large companies in terms of the number of employees and the sales of products. Their length of work experience for international businesses ranged from two to 15 years ($SD = 5.38$), and on average, 7.8 years. They ranged from staff members to deputy general managers (for further details, see Appendix C).

3.2 Instruments

Semi-structured Interviews (see appendices A and B for interview questions) were used with six employers and ten employees individually to give flexibility to the participants' responses and to elicit related responses to the questions, probe for details, and discuss issues derived from the responses. Questions regarding personal and work-related information and the use of English in their workplaces were asked.

3.3 Data Collection

Table 1 illustrates the data collection procedures for types of data, sources and methods, and time periods.

Table 1. Overview of Data Collection

Data (type)	Sources and methods	Time period
Interview data	Face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with employers and employees.	December 2017 to March 2018

Data were collected for interviews with six employer and ten employee participants. To recruit subjects, I contacted the person in charge of managing the intranet or correspondence to ask that person to distribute a recruitment email to employers and employees of the company. In addition, I contacted an acquaintance working in the company to find potential employer and employee participants. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Korean and audiorecorded. The interviews took from 30 minutes to 60 minutes with an average of 45 minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

All the interviews were transcribed in Korean and were analyzed in both inductive and deductive ways using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Categories developed by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) were based (i.e., deductive approach) along with a data-driven approach (i.e., inductive approach); that is, themes were also developed by repeatedly visiting the transcripts. Main themes with subthemes in each main theme are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. English Constructs in Interview Participants' International Business Workplaces

Findings
Theme 1: *Communication in business*
Subtheme: Communication challenges
Subtheme: Coping strategies to deal with the challenges
Subtheme: Important aspects of communication in international businesses
Theme 2: *Cultural understanding*
Theme 3: *Business knowhow*

Data from interviews conducted in Korean were analyzed using Korean, and themes identified from the interview data were translated into English. The English translation was reviewed by three researchers who were proficient in both Korean and English and were doing or had completed their Ph.D. in linguistics.

4. Findings: English Constructs

Overall, findings demonstrate three themes in black rectangles, as illustrated in Figure 2, below: (a) *communication in businesses*, (b) *cultural understanding*, and (c) *business knowhow*. In the following sections, findings from the three themes are reported sequentially.
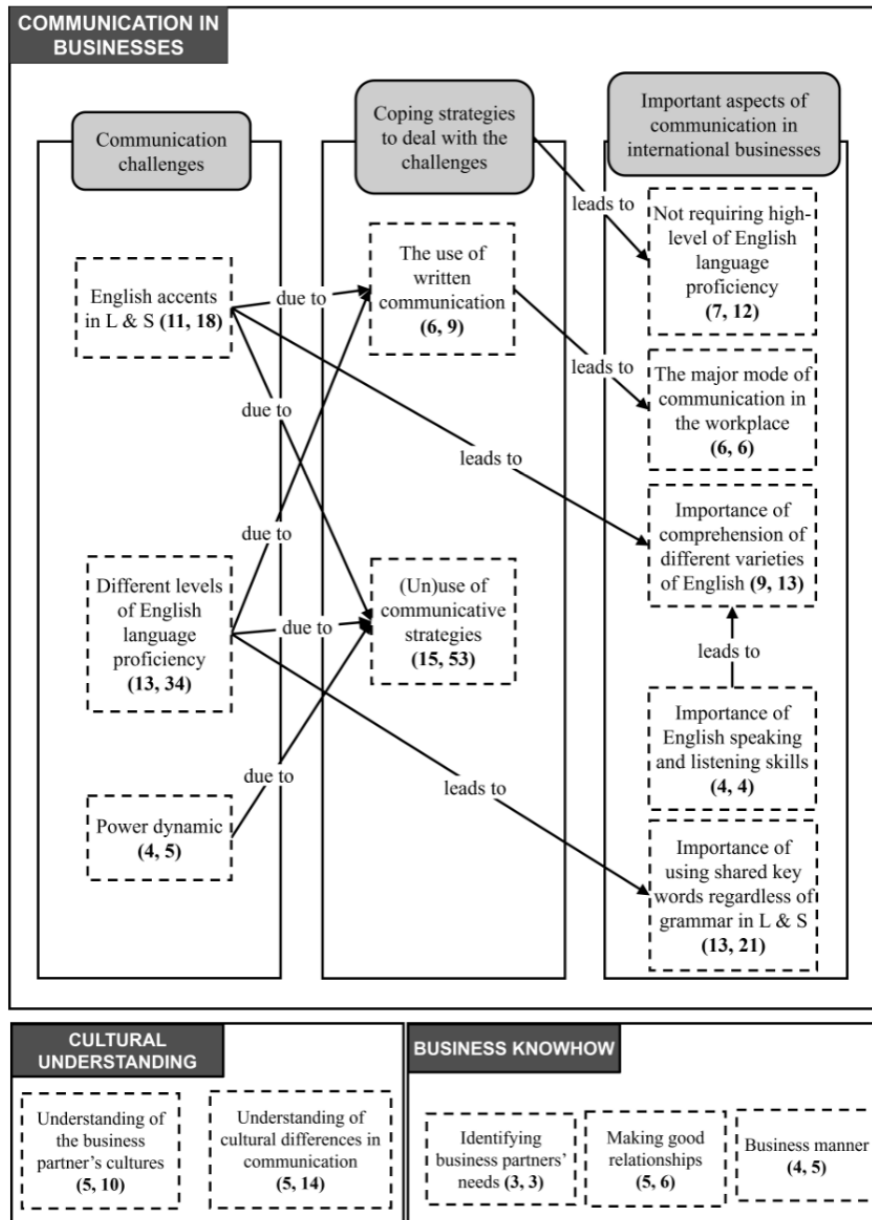
Note. L: Listening; S: Speaking. Dotted rectangles = codes; gray squircles = subthemes; and black rectangles = themes. Numbers with parentheses indicate the number of participants out of 16 and the frequency of the code mentioned.

Figure 2. Three Themes of English Constructs in International Business Workplaces

In Figure 2, the numbers with parentheses in dotted rectangles indicate the number of participants out of 16 and the frequency of the code mentioned. For example, in the code of English accents in L & S (Listening & Speaking) within subtheme of communication challenges around the top left of Figure 2, numbers 11 and 18 with parentheses indicate that 11 participants mentioned the code 18 times. Details of the findings are reported in the following sections.

4.1 Communication in Businesses

Under the theme of communication in businesses, there are three subthemes – gray squircles – (a) *communication challenges*, (b) *coping strategies to deal with the challenges*, and (c) *important aspects of communication in international businesses*. Subtheme of communication challenges at the top left of Figure 2 refers to the challenges that employer and employee participants encountered in their international business workplaces. This subtheme consists of the following codes: (a) *English accents in L & S* (listening and speaking), (b) *different levels of English language proficiency*, and (c) *power dynamic*.

Most employers and employees in this study commonly stated that they encountered communication challenges due to a variety of English accents in listening and speaking and different levels of English language proficiency between the participants and their business partners (codes: *English accents in L & S* and *different levels of English language proficiency* in Figure 2, above):

> The most challenging thing in communication with business partners is difficulty in understanding business partners' pronunciation. […] Because people in Asian countries have their own English accents, when I talked to engineers from Japan, China, and India, I had difficulty in understanding what they said. (Employee 6)

> I had cases when my intention was misunderstood by business partners. But many business partners are not good at English. They do not understand what I said. (Employee 7)

In addition to the communication challenges regarding linguistic aspects, non-linguistic factors also led to communication challenges. Interestingly, four participants mentioned five times that communication challenges happened due to the power dynamic (code: *power dynamic* in Figure 2). The participants stated that their business partners did not accommodate their speech when they had power over the participants in international business workplaces. Specifically, although the participants had difficulty understanding because of the business partners' English accents or rapid speech, the business partners were inconsiderate to the participants. Employee 9 shared an interesting story, indicating that external factors affect communication:

> When we supply products, carriers in a certain country have power over us. In this case, the carriers naturally speak without considering our English language proficiency, and they do not rephrase or accommodate at all. (Employee 9)

Coping strategies deal with linguistic challenges that were reported in codes of *English accents in L & S* and *different levels of English language proficiency* in Figure 2. Six participants reported that they used written communication when they could not clearly understand their business partners' words, by asking them to send emails about what they said (code: *the use of written communication* in Figure 2). Employee 3 reported:

I usually use the application called 'Whatsapp' or email instead of phone calls in case I can't understand what my business partners said to me, due to their English accents. (Employee 3)

Employee 3 further pointed out that this mode of communication in international business workplaces is widely used to prevent business issues, for example, regarding the price of a product. In addition, linguistic challenges led participants to use communicative strategies (code: *(un)use of communicative strategies* in Figure 2, the most frequently mentioned by the most participants), such as asking for repetition and clarification and accommodation through slowing down their speech, using simpler words, and paraphrasing utterances for successful communication:

When I talked in long sentences, the business partner didn't get it, but if I just used words or phrases in communication, the partner understood. So, I talked to the partner that way. (Employee 4).

I speak slowly, with a consideration of the business partner's level of English language proficiency, and I ask for repetition when I don't get it, because English is not a native language to both of us. (Employer 4)

However, as reported earlier, challenges due to the power dynamic (code: *power dynamic* in Figure 2) sometimes resulted in the *unuse of communicative strategies*, as the business partners were inconsiderate to the participants.

Regarding subtheme of important aspects of communication in international businesses, the use of coping strategies compensates for low English language proficiency, for example, the use of written communication for clarity, as reported above. Regarding the code, *not requiring high-level English language proficiency* at the top right of Figure 2, employee 5 noted, *"High-level English language proficiency is not required for international businesses. Communication can be done with only a few key words."* Employer 2 further confirms, *"You don't have to know all the vocabularies and grammar for international businesses if you have an adequate level of English language proficiency."*

Alternatively, communication challenges due to various English accents and levels of English language proficiency led to the use of written communication as an alternative to deal with the challenges. In fact, the major communication method in international business workplaces is written communication, such as messenger applications and emails (code: *the major mode of communication in the workplace* in Figure 2). Using written communication facilitates interactions, and it helps to have recorded evidence to deal with business issues. Although about six participants mentioned in the interviews six times, this use of written communication is common in international business workplaces. Below are representative quotes from the participants:

I communicate with business partners over 50% via a messenger. Using a messenger is faster and more accurate for international businesses." (Employee 5)

I usually do not use phone calls to communicate, but emails to have recorded evidence, except for the cases that I need to solve some sensitive issues with the business partner on a phone call. (Employee 1)

Even though participants had an alternative to deal with communication challenges, most employer and employee participants emphasized the importance of understanding different varieties of English in international business workplaces (code: *importance of comprehension of different varieties of English*) in Figure 2: *"In my*

opinion, there is nothing more important than understanding the business partner's accents." (Employee 1). This emphasis on understanding diverse English accents may be because participants communicated with their business partners through phone calls or in person at conferences (code: *importance of English speaking and listening skills* in Figure 2) in international business workplaces. Employer 1 stated:

> Listening and speaking skills in English are the most important skills in international business workplaces. […] Speaking and listening happen instantly, without enough time. If you do not have English language proficiency in speaking and listening, there may be many issues. (Employer 1)

However, as reported earlier, international businesses do not require high-level English language proficiency. What employers and employees did was to use shared key words to communicate with their business partners (code: *importance of using shared key words regardless of grammar in L & S* in Figure 2). When communicating with business partners through phone calls, business partners' varying levels of English language proficiency may require both the participants in this study and their business partners to use shared key words during communication. In international business workplaces, in each industry, there are several terms shared with business partners, such as product ingredients, shipping methods, and price. Because some business partners had low English language proficiency, 13 participants commonly stated that using the key words or share terms is very important for successful communication, regardless of grammar:

> For example, main items in my company are polyol (chemical compound) and TDI (Toluene Diisocyanate: chemical compound for polyurethane). Some business partners asked 'polyol, price, how much?' on phone calls or through emails. I said: what about five zero ($50)? Because the business partners can count from one to ten, certain shared words are important to make business deals. (Employer 5)

Participants in this study frequently used key words in speaking and commonly stated that using key words is efficient and useful to understand what their business partners said to them:

> Without focusing on grammar, I communicate using key words." (Employee 6)

> If you only use frequently used terms without making full sentences, you can communicate with your business partners. […] Although you had difficulty in understanding what the business partner said, you can easily figure it out based on the key words they used. (Employee 8)

4.2 Cultural Understanding

Besides communication dimensions of participants' international business workplaces, non-cognitive and non-linguistic factors were also reported as important aspects for international businesses. The theme of cultural understanding at the bottom left of Figure 2 stresses the importance of *understanding a business partner's cultures* and *understanding cultural differences in communication*.

The theme of *cultural understanding* in Figure 2 delineates two codes: importance of *understanding business partner's cultures* and *understanding of cultural differences in communication*. Code, *understanding business partner's cultures*, in Figure 2 relates to general aspects of cultures regarding everyday life settings, while code,

understanding of cultural differences in communication, in Figure 2 pertains to the business partner's communication characteristics in international business workplaces.

Five out of 16 participants, as shown in code, *understanding business partners' cultures*, reported that, in international businesses, an understanding of cultural characteristics, such as foods, working time, holidays, and etiquette, are required for international businesses. Employee 3 clearly explained: *"You need to understand business partners' cultures. In some countries, people have breaks on Fridays and Saturdays, and work on Sundays. You should know the countries' holidays as well, not to be rude to the business partner."*

In addition to a business partner's culture, five participants also noted that they needed to approach their business partners in a culturally appropriate manner during communication. This aspect of understanding cultural differences in communication might represent the communicative aspects of international business contexts. However, the participants described the approaches to business conversations with their business partners, depending on the culture of the country. For example, Employee 9 said, *"People from a certain country tend to ask only what they need, but people from another country like to start with casual conversations in communication."* Employee 6 further elaborated: *"People from some countries do not usually ask directly what they want, but indirectly do so. During communication, I should consider the cultural aspects of the country to figure out what they need."*

As reported thus far, understanding various cultures and approaches to business conversations may be one of the most important business skills to make business deals. Companies that understand distinct cultures may be able to have global marketing strategies and expand their business, making it easier to move outside their domestic market.

4.3 Business Knowhow

The theme of business knowhow at the bottom right of Figure 2, as non-cognitive and non-linguistic factors, pertains to business strategies to make business successful, highlighting the importance of *identifying the partners' needs and making good relationships* with business partners, and being aware of *business manners*, besides the cultural understanding reported in the previous section.

This business knowhow is the key to making business deals and further delineates that international businesses require non-cognitive and non-linguistic aspects that extend beyond the measurement aspects of English language proficiency such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC).

Employer 1 mentioned that one of the most important aspects of international businesses is to identify the business partner's needs, and this strategy facilitates a good relationship with the business partner:

> The important thing is to catch what others want and to provide it to them. […] I directly ask the buyer what he wants and how I can support him. When he asks for something, I answer that I can deal with almost everything he wants, and I will take full responsibility. From this conversation, the buyer will begin to trust me. (Employer 1)

Starting from this kind of business conversation, Employer 1 emphasized the importance of building good relationships in international businesses:

In international businesses, making a good relationship should not be like saying, 'Hi' or 'How are you doing?'. You should not just inform your business partners of the details of the product, but should build a good relationship with them and for them to get interested in what you have. (Employer 1)

Employee 2 pointed out why making a good relationship is important because, depending on relationships, other companies can steal one's business:

If you do not have a good relationship with your business partner, you cannot get any business deals. For example, a business partner said to me, 'The price of your product is good. Its quality is good, but I have a strong relationship with the other company. So, I make a business deal with that company.' That is why businesspeople lobby so hard to attract their business partners. (Employee 2)

Another way to make an optimal relationship with business partners is to start business conversations with good manners. Employee 1 gave an example:

Politeness is also important. For example, when you send a follow-up email, 'Why didn't you reply to my email?' and 'I was wondering if you've had a chance to look at my last email; could you please follow up?' sound quite different. Although you might not like a business partner, you shouldn't offend the partner. (Employee 1)

Business is a person-to-person activity. Besides the linguistic aspects of business communication, other surrounding non-cognitive and non-linguistic factors, such as cultural understanding and business knowhow (the two themes in this study), need to be considered in international business workplaces.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to explore communicative features found in a Korean business context. One of the main features of BELF found in this study is the use of communicative strategies which is consistent with the previous studies (e.g., Ehrenreich 2010, Kankaanranta and Planken 2010, Nielsen 2019). In this study, it was found that the use of communicative strategies is the most frequently mentioned (15 out of 16 informants 53 times) by the most participants and it was derived from linguistic challenges such as difficulty understanding different English accents and different levels of English language proficiency as well as power dynamics. The use of communicative strategies is the essential for international businesses because not every business partner has the high level of English language proficiency and they have different English accents affected by their first language. This is the abilities which Harding and McNamara (2017) defined in relation to the use of communication strategies, such as meaning negotiation, intelligibility, appropriate pragmatics, accommodation, and repairing breakdowns in communication. This concept includes the most communication features discussed in literature review such as directness, clarity, simplicity, clear delivery, attenuating speech rate, and the use of coping strategies.

In addition to communication features, the findings of this study are consistent with the modality of communication in BELF from previous literature: Importance of English speaking and listening skills (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010), the use of written communication (Evans 2013), importance of using shared key words regardless of grammar in listening and speaking (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010), power dynamics (Cogo 2016, Ehrenreich 2009, Henderson and Louhiala-Salminen 2011, Takino 2020) in the theme of the

communication in business; understanding of the business partner's cultures (Kankaanranta and Lu 2013, Roshid, Webb and Chowdhury 2018) in the theme of cultural understanding; and identifying business partners' needs and business manner, and making good relationships (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010) in the theme of business knowhow. More specifically, the findings of this study support the concept of Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen's (2013) Business English as a lingua franca, which refers to the use of English in international business workplaces, and they defined the necessary abilities as *global communicative competence*, which consists of three dimensions: (a) multicultural competence, (b) competence in BELF, and (c) business knowhow.

However, the findings of this study showed differences. As described in Figure 1, the three dimensions of multicultural competence, competence in BELF, and business knowhow are interconnected. Nevertheless, the findings from interview data provided three individual dimensions of the skills needed for international businesses: communication in businesses, cultural understanding, and business knowhow (three themes in Figure 2). The theme *communication in businesses* may correspond to competence in BELF in Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011). However, the theme elaborated more in depth English constructs in international business workplaces by reporting the relationships between communication challenges, coping strategies to deal with the challenges, and important aspects of communication in international businesses (see Figure 2). The relationships from this study explain how and why international business workers use English in their workplaces.

Furthermore, the theme of cultural understanding from the interview data in this study may correspond to the multicultural competence in Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011). While multicultural competence is located under competence in BELF and business knowhow in Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011), the themes found in this study stand alone as three individual dimensions of skills needed for international businesses. The findings (i.e., three themes) from the data do not show any relationships, but are individually located.

The findings of this study have implications in terms of teaching/learning and assessment. As the findings about English constructs in international business workplaces suggest, those (i.e., job seekers and employee test takers) who wish to work for international businesses may need to be exposed to a variety of English accents and to focus on communication strategies that the English language assessments may not fully reflect (Author and Cheng 2019, Jenkins and Leung 2014). While preparing for the tests, test takers may be able to learn the English language as a baseline of English language proficiency. While working for international businesses, they may need to spend more time understanding different varieties of English accents and using a range of communication strategies.

This study investigated how English users in international business workplaces used English to communicate with their business partners in Korea-based international business companies and explored communicative features found in a Korean business context. Three major themes were identified: Communication in business, cultural understanding and business knowhow, which include linguistic and non-linguistic factors for communication in international business workplaces. The findings delineate the complex dimensions of business communication in the workplaces and contribute to teaching/learning for those who wish to work in international business workplaces by the construct of English.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary

Appendix A

Interview Guidelines for Employer Participants

A. Personal and business information
1. What is the name of your company?
2. How many employees are there in international trading department?
3. What is your position?
4. How long have you been working in this position?
5. How often or how long have you been involved in hiring and promotional procedures?
6. Do you require TOEIC scores for hiring and/or promotion? Why (not)?

B. Business information & uses of English
7. What does your department do?
8. What and how many countries do you trade with?
9. What language do you and employees mainly use for international businesses?
10. How many new employees does your company recruit each year?
11. What language do you and your employees use for international businesses?
12. What ability in English communication do you think is necessary for international businesses? Could you share your experience with me regarding English communication with international partners?

Appendix B

Interview Guidelines for Employee Participants

A. Personal & business information
1. Which department do you work?
2. What is your role in your department?
3. What and how many countries do you trade with?
4. What language do you mainly use for international businesses?
5. How long have you worked in the company and your present position?

B. Uses of English
6. How do you use English at the workplace?
   a. How often do you use English during working hours?
   b. In which way between oral and written communication do you use?
7. Have you ever studied English in other countries?
8. What ability in English communication do you think is necessary for international businesses? Could you share your experience with me regarding English communication with international partners?

Appendix C

Profile of Employers and Employees in Interviews

Employer / Employee	Position	Industry	Size of the company		Length of working in the present department	Length of residence abroad
			Number of employees*	Sales of products**		
Employer 1	Deputy General Manager	Electronic	Small	Small	3 years	N/A
Employer 2	Deputy General Manager	Trading	Small	Small	2 years	N/A
Employer 3	Managing Director	Electric power	Medium	Large	3 years	N/A
Employer 4	Research Director	Semiconductor	Small	Small	7 years	N/A
Employer 5	Deputy General Manager	Trading	Small	Medium	9 years	N/A
Employer 6	Director	Health care	Small	Small	2 years	N/A
Employee 1	Manager	Vehicles	Large	Large	15 years	6 months
Employee 2	Deputy General Manager	Electronic	Large	Large	2.5 years	N/A
Employee 3	Assistant Manager	Chemicals	Small	Large	5 years	1 year
Employee 4	Staff	Health care	Small	Small	2 years	9 months
Employee 5	Manager	Oil/Natural gas	Large	Large	13 years	N/A
Employee 6	Staff	Machinery	Small	Small	2 years	6 months
Employee 7	Assistant Manager	Foods	Large	Large	5.5 years	6 years
Employee 8	Staff	Clothing	Small	Large	6 years	1 year
Employee 9	Manager	Foods	Large	Large	12 years	N/A
Employee 10	Deputy General Manager	Electronic	Large	Large	15 years	1 year

Notes. LR = Listening and Reading; S = Speaking; W = Writing; and N/A: non-applicable; * and **: Medium (# of employees between 1000 and 2000; and sales of products between 40 and 150 billion)