Business English as a Lingua Franca - BELF in the Swedish Pharmaceutical Sector

A study of the needs of the Business English speakers when used as a Lingua Franca.

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Abstract

Multinational corporations operating in Sweden often use English as their official corporate language. The employees are expected to communicate using English both internally and with external business contacts. English used for communication between people with different mother tongues is commonly referred to as ELF, English as a Lingua Franca, and when used in business contexts it is referred to as BELF, Business English as a Lingua Franca. This study was conducted to explore how BELF is used in the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden and what elements of BELF are challenging or necessary for successful communication. In the study five informants were interviewed about their experiences. The study showed that the informants use BELF for all types of communication and are comfortable with English as a lingua franca yet often switch over to Swedish if there are only Swedish speakers present. It was also found that clear, somewhat simplified English with focus on content and getting business done was preferred over grammatically correct and native sounding English. The respondents viewed an industry specific vocabulary as highly important bordering to a pre-requisite. The findings of this study support previous research in the field indicating that there is little difference when it comes to BELF for the pharmaceutical industry compared to other industries.

Keywords

BELF, Business English as a Lingua Franca, English as a Lingua Franca.
Contents

1. Introduction and background................................................................. 1
   1.2 Literature Review............................................................................... 2
2. Aim and Research questions................................................................. 5
3. Method .................................................................................................... 5
   3.1 Choice of Method................................................................................ 6
   3.2 Questionnaire design......................................................................... 6
   3.3 Participants and setting .................................................................... 7
   3.4 Procedure and data analysis.............................................................. 8
4. Findings.................................................................................................. 8
   4.1 What, how and with whom is BELF used ......................................... 8
   4.2 What works and what is challenging .................................................10
5. Discussion...............................................................................................14
   5.1 How Swedish professionals working in the pharmaceutical sector use BELF at work .................................................................14
   5.2 The BELF competence required to be successful in the Pharmaceutical sector in Sweden.................................................................14
   5.3 The major challenges of BELF communication within the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden.................................................................16
6. Conclusion .............................................................................................17
References..................................................................................................19
Appendix A ..................................................................................................21
Appendix B ..................................................................................................24
1. Introduction and background

“Despite being welcomed by some and deplored by others, it cannot be denied that English functions as a global lingua franca” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). Lingua franca is specified as language use in situations; “when English is chosen as a means of communication among people from different first language backgrounds, across linguacultural boundaries, the preferred term is ‘English as a lingua franca’” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339).

In order to get deeper into the investigations of this study, the terms used for the discussion need to be clarified. ‘Lingua franca’ in its strictest form is “equated with a pidgin being a language with no native speakers” (Rogerson-Revell 2007, p. 104). When referring to English as a Lingua Franca, very often it is implied to be between non-native speakers (NNSs) of English. The English spoken in international settings is shaped by its users (Seidlhofer, 2005), and when taking into account that only one in four is a native speaker (NSs) of English (Crystal, 2003) and 90% of the spoken English takes place between NNSs of English (Charles, 2006), it becomes clear that ELF is mainly shaped by NNSs of English. In spite of the NNSs dominance of the usage of English “there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339).

English as a lingua franca, ELF is used in a wide variety of contexts and when used in a business context, it can be described as BELF (Business English as a lingua franca) rather than ELF (English as a lingua franca) (Jenkins, 2000, Seidlhofer, 2000). Stemming from ELF, the term BELF is described as: “a ‘neutral’ and shared communication code for the function of conducting business” (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005). Integral contextual features of the BELF discourse are: “the shared business domain, the shared professional expertise, and the length of relationship” (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010, p. 392). Previous research also shows that there are three characteristic features that define proper BELF, namely; “simplified English, specific terminology related to business in general and the professional expertise in particular and a hybrid of discourse practices originating from the speakers’ mother tongues”(Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010, p. 392).
Furthermore, “The dominance of English used as a lingua franca in international business contexts is now seemingly beyond dispute” (Nickerson 2005, p. 367) and several multinational companies (MNCs) operating in Sweden have English as their lingua franca. Professionals working in MNCs in the pharmaceutical sector are more or less expected to communicate with colleagues and business partners from all over the world in English. For someone whose first language is not English, what language skills are fundamental in terms of Business English in order to be successful in communicating with others. What kind of issues emerge because of the language.

In this study the informants are non native English speakers but interact with both native English speakers as well as non native English speakers when using BELF. For the purpose of this study the term BELF will be used to include both kinds of communicative interaction. This study will investigate how professionals working in the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden communicate in English at work. What do they find integral for success and what is challenging. In trying to find some answers to this I will in the following section begin with presenting the the aim and research questions. Thereafter, section 3 describes the method used for this study. It is followed by section 4 presenting the findings, a discussion in section 5, and finally section 6 will present conclusions from the study.

1.2 Literature Review

Previous ELF and BELF research seems to agree that there is a vast difference between the English used in international communication situations and the English used between native speakers of English. Jenkins’ research shows that neither pronunciation of sounds described as particularly English nor grammatical correctness are important factors for successful ELF communication (Jenkins, 2000). Similarly, Seidlhofer argues that the English necessary for successful and intelligible communication in ELF is based on general language awareness and communication strategies rather than “striving for mastery of fine nuances of native-speaker language use” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 340).
Kankaanranta and Planken describe BELF as a simplified language based on “simple and clear English” (2010, p. 392) with little or no “idiomatic expressions, complicated phraseology or complex sentence structure” (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010, p. 392). Their study further showed that grammatical errors were common but of little consequence and that the interviewees had a positive attitude towards the simplified version of English used (2010, p. 392, 393).

Business communication experts would probably agree that BELF matters to the success in business. Kankaanranta & Planken (2010) argue that “competence in BELF communication is an integral part of business knowledge and expertise” (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010, p. 383). Similarly, Nickerson concluded that “experienced business people are strategically competent despite the fact that they may not have high levels of proficiency” (Nickerson, 2007, p. 353). Furthermore, Ehrenreich reports in her study that the speakers of BELF adopt a pragmatic and flexible approach to the language use (Ehrenreich, p. 426). This is similar to the findings of Louhiala-Salminen et al; that the effectiveness is dictating the use of language rather than linguistic correctness (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005, p. 418). Yet little research has focused on which factors are key in order for BELF communication to be effective in the multinational pharmaceutical sector.

Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen conclude that; “a grammatically and lexically “correct” message doesn’t necessarily do the job, but a message with many “mistakes” may do so” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2007). Also Charles (2007, p. 277) found that although the discourse of BELF may vary from the native English-speaker discourse, the business at hand gets done. In other words, the focus of BELF is communication to conduct business rather than communication in correct, native-like language. According to Charles, this has also been seen in research approaches to the ELF and BELF concepts, where previous ELF research has focused on language and BELF research has focused on communications (Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELF</th>
<th>BELF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful interactions are created through…</td>
<td>NS-like language use and linguistic competence.</td>
<td>language use appropriate for the needs and requirements of the communicative event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The speaker aims to…</td>
<td>emulate NS discourse.</td>
<td>get the job done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture is…</td>
<td>the national cultures of NSs.</td>
<td>the diversity of the globalized business community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The aim of linguistically oriented communication research is to…</td>
<td>increase understanding of deviations from NS-like English language and discourse, and reduce linguistic anomalies.</td>
<td>increase understanding of the different Englishes and discoursed used to conduct global business, and encourage the development of situationally appropriate communication skills.</td>
</tr>
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Furthermore, the study by Rogerson-Revell (2007) gave inconclusive results when it came to the question whether the informants found it easier to communicate in English with NSs or with NNSs. In the study there were “43% stating that they found NNES(NNSs) and NES (NSs) equally easy to communicate with, 33% stating a preference for NES and 24% finding NNES easier” (Rogerson-Revell, 2007, p. 115). On the other hand, the informants of Ehrenreich’s study (2010) described the communication with NS as often being more problematic, especially in situations of conflict. The informants were more hesitant to ask clarification questions to NS than NNSs and felt at a disadvantage in situations of conflict or negotiations. However, the communication with NSs was seen as less problematic when there was not a competitive threat involved (Ehrenreich, 2010).

Several previous studies point to cultural differences as an important factor in communication. This study will not look further into the cultural differences that affect ELF and BELF but rather will touch upon and acknowledge them as one factor in the development of ELF and BELF.
2. Aim and Research questions

The aim of this study is to explore how English is used by professionals in the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden. The purpose is to find out what they think makes them successful when communicating using BELF and what hurdles they have experienced. It aims to establish what this particular group of professionals identifies as the key success factors and greatest challenges. This could potentially be an important insight in designing an ESP course specifically for professionals working in the pharmaceutical sector.

In this study I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Swedish professionals working in the pharmaceutical sector use BELF at work?
2. What is the BELF competence required to be successful in the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden?
3. What are the major challenges to overcome in order to ensure successful BELF communication within the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden?

For this study, it is presumed that the key success factors and challenges will resemble those of professionals working in other industries, perhaps with an added importance of the industry-specific vocabulary.

3. Method

The study was conducted in and around Stockholm, Sweden during November-December, 2011. Participants were interviewed about their usage of Business English as a Lingua Franca in the workplace. Specifically, they were asked about what they found successful as well as what they found to be troublesome in communicating in English. The results were then compared to previous research to find out if there were any indications that the professionals working in the pharmaceutical sector have the same or other key success factors and problems.
The research for this study is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five informants, all native Swedish speaking professionals working in different multinational pharmaceutical companies in Sweden.

3.1 Choice of Method

Qualitative research was chosen as a way to work “with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 145). Through the qualitative interview one can get access to the informants’ thoughts, ideas and attitudes. Furthermore, through personal interviews, the level of ambiguity can be decreased to a minimum as clarifying questions can be asked; compared to when questions are answered solely in writing.

3.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed with three sections of questions. The first section contains questions about communication in the workplace: who the professionals communicate with, how often, when misunderstandings occur etc. The second part of the questionnaire contains questions about previous business English courses/education and what they would like to learn/improve in terms of business English communication. By asking what they would like to learn and improve, their answers are expected to reflect what they find problematic as well as provide information for future research on how to design an ESP course specifically for the pharmaceutical industry. The last part of the questionnaire contains questions of general information character, i.e. age, sex, level of education and so on. These questions were left for the end in order to avoid making the informants uneasy by asking personal and interrogative type questions in the beginning.
3.3 Participants and setting

The informants all hold middle to upper management positions within multinational pharmaceutical companies operating in Sweden. The informants were found through personal contacts but chosen based on seniority and their use of English in their profession. Furthermore, they were all native Swedish speakers and in the age group of 35-45 years old. These aspects were important in order to be able to better compare their answers.

The participation in the study was anonymous and in order to ensure the informants anonymity each participant was given an identification code ranging from A to E. These codes are used in the study to identify and distinguish the informants from each other when analyzing the results.

Informant A is working as a communication manager at AstraZeneca in Södertälje, Sweden. The informant has formal secondary education from Högskola/Universitet and has taken a business English course in high school.

Informant B is working as a Quality Assurance Manager at Shire Human Genetics in Stockholm, Sweden. The informant has formal education from University, MSc Pharmacy and has previously taken two different Business English courses.

Informant C is working as Sales Manager for Scandinavian Biopharma Distribution. The informant has a formal education and a degree from University and has previously taken a course in Business English.

Informant D is working as a Clinical Trials Manager at Novartis, Stockholm, Sweden. The informant has formal education from University and a degree, MSc Pharmacy and has never taken a Business English course.

Informant E is working as a Manager Application Development at Shire Human Genetic Therapies. The informant has a degree in MSc Pharmacy and has never taken any business course.
Because of the small number of participants, conclusions based on the study are not statistically proven but rather contribute to a broader understanding of the field in question which can be used as a basis for further research.

### 3.4 Procedure and data analysis

Four of the five interviews were conducted in person and one over the telephone. The interviews were recorded, with the permission of the informants and transcribed immediately after the interview. Furthermore, the interviews were performed in Swedish since it is the mother tongue of all the informants. This was to ensure that they could fully explain how they felt about the issues brought up in the questions. The questions were asked in the same order as they were written but sometimes the answer to a later question was automatically answered in the discussion of an earlier question. When transcribed the answer was moved to the right question number or a reference was made referring back to the answer of previous question.

After transcribing the interviews the answers were first analyzed one by one, and then organized into themes to obtain an extensive overview of the results. By putting all the informants’ answers together under each question, a better view of what kinds of results each question had generated appeared. Correlations and disagreements for each of the questions became more visible.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1 What, how and with whom is BELF used

BELF was used in all forms of communication, i.e., for meetings, e-mails, other written genres, telephone, interpersonal communication as well as conversation for other/social purposes. There was no clear dominance of one form over the others. However, as seen in Table 2 below, the amount of English used for informal/social communication varied greatly between the respondents.
When asked how much of their work is conducted in English, all the informants answered that they speak or write English almost all the time at work. However two of them said that if there are only Swedes present the communication is conducted in Swedish. (A, E) Even with Danes and Norwegians they sometimes speak what the informant referred to as ‘Scandinavian’ “även med danskar och norrmän talar vi ibland nån slags skandinaviska.” (A). One respondent said; “Vi brukar skoja och säga att vi jobbar på engelska och dricker kaffe på svenska” (A) [We say that we work in English but drink coffee in Swedish] (my translation). Similarly informant B said that they speak English during coffee breaks only when the English-speaking IT-support is there, every other week. Only one informant said that they always use English, for informal and social purposes as well (E).

The study showed that there is a wide variety of nationalities with whom the informants communicate, but most of the communication was conducted with people from the US, the UK and all of the European countries. Only one informant specifically reported communicating with people outside of Europe or North America, namely India.
4.2 What works and what is challenging

In order to identify some important skills for successful BELF, the informants were asked to grade the importance of different communication skills (Table 3). As can be seen in Table 3, all the informants seemed to agree that possessing an industry-specific vocabulary was important. For the other skills, speaking, writing, listening and social competence the answers were somewhat more varied. However all skills seems to be graded as fairly important with the exception of one informant who perceived social skills to be of little importance.

![Bar chart showing the grades of different communication skills for each informant.](chart.png)

Table 3. How important are these qualities for communication in English to work well? (1-not important, 5 – very important)

When asked which nationalities they found it easiest to communicate with, the response was split. Informants A, B and E thought that NSs were easier to communicate with partly because the conversation flowed better. They were easier to understand and also, as one informant said, they can figure out what I want to say.

“Det blir bättre flow när man talar med de som Engelska som modersmål,” (A) [There is a better flow when speaking to those with English as a mother tongue] (My translation) “Lättare med de som har engelska som modersmål. Dom kan räkna ut vad man vill saga.” (B) [Easier with those that have English as a mother tongue. They can figure out what I want to say.] (My translation)
However, informant E also said that NSs use words and phrases that are difficult and speak fast and expect you to follow at their pace.

“Det är ju lättare att förstå Amerikaner och Britter men ibland är det svårt att förstå vissa ord eller fraser. Dom talar ju också mycket fortare och tar för givet att man hänger med.” (E) [It is easier to understand Americans and Brits but sometimes it is hard to understand certain words or phrases. They also speak much faster and take for granted that you follow.] (My translation)

Furthermore, informant A mentioned cultural differences as a factor of misunderstandings when speaking to NSs. She said that when speaking with people from Nordic countries she can make up her own words when needed and although the communication becomes ‘choppy’ they can still understand each other.

“Det blir ett bättre flow när man talar med de som har Engelska som modersmål, men kulturella skillnader kan ibland göra att det blir fel. När jag pratar med personer från Norden så kan jag hitta på egna ord men konversationen kan bli lite hackig, flyter inte så bra. Men vi förstår varandra ändå på nåt sätt.” (A) [There is a better flow when speaking with people who have English as a mother tongue, but the cultural differences can still create problems. When I speak to a person from the Nordic countries I can make up my own words, but the conversation can get a bit choppy, does not flow as well. But we understand each other some way, somehow.] (My translation)

Informant C also pointed out that although he often finds the Finns English to be poor, they do not use difficult words and are therefore easier to understand.

“Finnländare pratar ofta väldigt knackig engelska, men inte så svåra begrepp, så dom är lätta att förstå.” [Finns often speak very poor English, but they don’t use difficult terminology so it makes it easy to understand them.] (C) (My translation)

When asked if they think about how they sound when speaking English and if they feel a difference when speaking with NSs, two informants said that they did not think about their accent/pronunciation. The other three informants all reported that they did think about it. Informant B reported that she felt at a disadvantage when in conflict or negotiations with NS.

“Jag tänker inte direkt när jag talar engelska, men man är ju mer begränsad. Diskussioner som man vill vinna känner man sig lite handikappad när man talar med personer som har engelska som första språk” [I don’t really think when I speak English, but I am more limited. When there is a discussion that I want to win, I feel a bit
handicapped when speaking to a person that has English as a first language.] (My translation) (B)

Both informants C and D proclaimed to have better confidence when communicating with NNSs, from for example Finland.

“Jag har bättre självförtroende när jag talar med någon från Finland t.ex. … men jag låter nog likadant.” [I have a better confidence when I speak to someone from Finland for example, but I probably sound the same] (My translation) (C) “När jag talar med en fransman t.ex. känner jag att jag har bättre självförtroende, känner mig inte så osäker på språket.” [When I speak to someone from France for example I feel that I have better confidence, I don’t feel as insecure about the language] (My translation) (D)

Informant D confessed to being more careful when speaking to NSs.

“Nej uttalet känns inte så viktigt, men jag är nog mer noggrann när jag talar med såna som har Engelska som modersmål.” (D) [No the pronunciation does not feel very important, but I think I am more careful when I speak to people with English as a mother tongue.] (My translation)

When asked which situations they experience that misunderstandings often occur, two respondents said that e-mail was problematic. They both pointed out that they were sometimes seen as blunt or arrogant by NSs because of a more direct style of writing. Both informant B and E said that although e-mail was easier in the sense that one has time to think about what to write, it is also hard to get the tone of the message right and that misunderstanding can happen because of it.

“amerikanare upplever att man är stöddig utan att man haft för avsikt att vara det.”(B) [Americans can find you boastful without there being an intention.] (My translation) “Jag upplever det som att vi svenskar kan framstå som lite ‘blunt’ och stötande då vi är ganska rakt på sak jämfört med Britter som lindar in budskapet lite mer.” (E) [My experience is that we Swedes can come across as a bit blunt and offensive with our direct style compared to Brits who is less direct] (My translation)

One respondent did however prefer e-mail over oral communication where she felt like she was more often misunderstood.

"Mail är bättre än tal, för det är mer tydligt. Men i tal kan jag ofta känna mig missförstådd.” (D) [Mail is better than speach, because it is more clear. But when speaking I often feel misunderstood] (My translation)
Three informants said that telephone communication was a source of misunderstandings. They mentioned not being able to hear what everyone in a big telephone meeting says, the limitations to comprehension when not face-to-face, as well as poor pronunciation as reasons.

“När man talar telefon med de som inte har engelska som modersmål så blir det lätt missförstånd.” (B) [When speaking to someone who is not a native English speaker, misunderstandings easily occur] (My translation) “Telefonmöten med många personer inblandade, då är det svårt att höra vad alla säger … i såna stora möten säger man inte stop när man inte förstår…”(C) [In telephone meetings with many people involved it is hard to hear what everyone says…in big meetings you just don’t say stop when you don’t understand] (My translation) “Vi har outsourcat vår IS/IT support till Bangalore, Indien. Det är nästan helt omöjligt att förstå något, det blir stora problem. Deras accent är så stark att man liksom inte fattar nåt.” (A) [We have outsourced our IT support to Bangalore, India. It is almost impossible to understand anything, it creates big problems. Their accent is so strong that you sort of don’t get anything] (My translation)

Several of the informants mentioned the fact that asking clarifying questions can be hard or they hesitate before doing it, especially in communication with NSs.

”Ibland känns det också jobbigt att fråga så många frågor – speciellt till de som talar Engelska som modersmål.” (A) [Sometimes it is hard to ask so many questions – especially to those who have English as a mother tongue] (My translation)

Furthermore, two respondents pointed out that conflict, delivery of bad news, and negotiation/argumentation were challenging situations where misunderstandings often occurred.

“När man har meningsskiljaktigheter eller konflikter kan det vara lättare att missförstånd uppstår. Även vid dåliga nyheter…och argumentation.”(E)

”Diskussioner som man vill vinna känner man sig lite handicappad när man talar med personer som har Engelska som första språk.” [In discussions that you want to win, you can sometimes feel like you have a disadvantage when speaking to someone who has English as a mother tongue] (B) (My translation)

The findings show that all the informants said that they use English almost all the time at work and the nationalities of those they communicate with varied. Having a good industry specific vocabulary was identified by all the informants as highly important. However when communicating with NNSs words could be made up, and at the same time the informant felt more confident when communicating with NNSs. The informants found it both easier to communicate with NSs but also challenging as it
sometimes was hard to follow the fast pace and they were hesitant to ask clarifying questions. The informants also confessed to be more conscious of their accent and pronunciation when speaking to NSs. As well, they often felt at a disadvantage when in situations of conflict or negotiation with NSs.

5. Discussion

5.1 How Swedish professionals working in the pharmaceutical sector use BELF at work

The study shows that the informants use BELF during the greater part of their workday. However the study also indicates that although English dominates the work related communication, it seems as if Swedish is the preferred language for social interaction when there are no non-Swedish speakers present.

Several of the participants pointed out that getting the message through and getting business done as more important than grammatical correctness or native-like pronunciation in line with Kankaanranta and Planken’s (2010) and Jenkins’ (2000) research. As shown by Kankaanranta and Planken, the informants of this study similarly had a positive attitude towards simplified English and, in spite of the fact that several informants explicitly said that communication often flowed better when speaking with NSs, several of them still preferred the simpler and more direct communication with NNSs, although it could be choppy at times. This finding is in line with the research done by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010).

5.2 The BELF competence required to be successful in the Pharmaceutical sector in Sweden

Kankaanranta and Planken identified three things necessary for BELF communications to be successful: facts, clarity and relations (2010, p. 396). This finding correlates to this study, as some of the important ingredients for successful communication identified by
the informants included clear and simple language with fewer difficult words as well as a well established relationship with the counterpart. However, as seen in the Section 4, all the informants found a well developed industry-specific vocabulary as highly important. So at the same time as the language should be simple with few difficult words, this study indicates that there is a need for a solid knowledge of the industry-specific words in order for BELF to be successful.

One informant specifically said that she could make up new words when communicating with other NNSs of BELF and they could still understand each other somehow. So by using their mother tongue and inventing new words communication is made possible. This clearly corresponds to the report by Ehrenreich (2010) that speakers of BELF adopt a pragmatic and flexible approach to language use. Several informants claimed to make up words, which correlates to Eherenreich's findings concerning BELF speakers adopting a flexible and pragmatic approach (2010, p. 426)

None of the informants believed that native-like or good pronunciation was of great importance. One informant did however mention that she had a problem with the pronunciation of the outsourced department in Bangalore India. This could indicate that although pronunciation is not very important, the closer to standard American or British it is, the easier and clearer it is because we are more used to it.

As seen in Section 4, the informants also highlighted the importance of live communication by specifically pointing out communication in person as much easier than through mail or telephone, as misunderstandings more often occur then. Several of the informants further mentioned being more comfortable communicating with Scandinavians or other Europeans. This could be an indication of a common bond or inherent relationship they have as “non-native speakers”. Furthermore, Scandinavian languages and culture have many similarities which could also create an instant relationship, making it easier to communicate.
5.3 The major challenges of BELF communication within the pharmaceutical sector in Sweden

One of the major challenges for NNSs when communicating with NSs is to avoid being perceived as blunt or rude. The direct style that on one hand seems to work well between NNSs, on the other hand seems to cause misunderstandings in communication with NSs. As seen in Section 4, several informants point out that they are sometimes perceived as rude or blunt when they really had no intention to. The different styles of communicating are recognized as well by Rogerson-Revell as a source for miscommunication; “different ways of speaking or interacting can lead one party to believe that the other is either intellectually incompetent or deliberately uncooperative or combative” (2007, p. 118).

The challenge of asking clarifying questions was brought up by several informants. This supports the findings of Ehrenrich’s study (2010) mentioned earlier, i.e. that NNSs are more hesitant to ask NSs clarifying questions. This is also connected to the challenges based on the ability to process fast speech identified by Rogerson-Revell (2007, p. 117).

The informants further mentioned experiencing that they are at a disadvantage in situations of negotiation, argumentation or conflict with NSs: this also correlates to Rogerson-Revell’s and Ehrenrich’s findings. Rogerson-Revell describes that “those who are linguistically less confident or those who are less comfortable with contention are more likely to comply with the demands of others” (2007, p. 118)

Contradictory to the findings by Jenkins (2000) and Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) concerning pronunciation being of less importance, one informant did say that she had serious problems understanding the IT-support workers located in Bangalore, India. Although the English spoken may be grammatically correct, a too unfamiliar accent may complicate or even prevent successful communication. So pronunciation is perhaps not important to a certain degree, but it still has to be comprehensible to the other party of communication in order for successful information exchange to take place.
6. Conclusion

This study examined in detail how five professionals in the Pharmaceutical industry in Sweden use English as a means of communication in their profession. The study gives insight into how BELF is used, what the major challenges and key success factors are. The results have shown that the BELF used by the professionals working in the pharmaceutical industry in Sweden participating in this study did not significantly differ from the BELF studied in previous research.

For BELF to be successful, mixes of components need to be included, simplified, pragmatic and flexible language being one. To master an industry-specific vocabulary is also identified as important, almost a pre-requisite. Furthermore, the relationship with the other party of communication matters. A good relationship seems to inherently improve BELF communication. Finally, there seems to be a good idea for NNSs of English to pay extra attention to preparation when it comes to negotiations, delivery of bad news and conflict as those situations were identified as problematic, bestowing a sense of being at a disadvantage in the informants. Furthermore, based on the findings of my study and those of Charles (Table 1), one could argue that BELF has achieved a unique identity with less focus on correctness of language and more focus on content.

From this study there are several points of interest for further research that have come to light. Further research should include a larger group of informants to improve the reliability of the results as well as exploring deeper the strategies to cope with difficult situations of communication. It would also be interesting to further study how NSs experience BELF communication. What do they find problematic and what do they find successful and how does this differ from NNSs.

The in-depth interviews have given plenty of material for analysis. However, there are limits to the qualitative study and therefore caution is to be taken when making generalizations. Furthermore, for this study no research into written forms of communication (emails, business letters etc), other than the verbal information given by informants was conducted. Being a qualitative study there are also obvious limitations as the number of people interviewed was limited to five. Nevertheless, the data collected is industry specific and depicts the views of professionals working in the Pharmaceutical sector in Sweden giving an exclusive view of their BELF experience.
References


Appendix A

Below is the form of questions used in the interview of the informants. The questions were asked in the same order as organized below.

Arbetssituation

1) Hur ofta kommunicerar du på Engelska på jobbet?
   Aldrig
   Sällan
   Ofta
   Alltid

2) Vad använder du engelska till på jobbet (Markera 1-5 där 1=sällan – 5=ofta)
   a. Möten
   b. E-mail
   c. Telefon
   d. Skrift
   e. Annat/socialt – specificera

3) Vilken nationalitet/modersmål har de som du kommunicerar med?

4) Vilka tycker du det är lättast att kommunicerar med?

5) Spelar det någon roll, eller påverkar det dig om de du kommunicerar med har Engelska som modersmål, hur?

6) Tänker du på hur du låter när du talar engelska, i så fall är det någon skillnad när du talar med någon som har Engelska som modersmål eller ej?

7) Vilka situationer tycker du att missförstånd pga. språket ofta uppstår?

8) Berätta om ett tillfälle när språket skapade ett missförstånd eller problem.

9) Hur viktiga är följande kunskaper för att affärskommunikation på engelska ska fungera väl i ditt arbete? (1-inte viktigt alls 5 – mycket viktigt)
10) Uppskatta din egen färdighet i följande:  
   (Sätt betyg mellan 1-5 där 5 är utmärkt, dvs nära moderstånd)

   a) Ordkunskap
   b) Tala engelska
   c) Skriva engelska
   d) Hörförståelse (engelska)
   e) Social kompetens

   Tidigare utbildning – Affärsengelska

   11) Har du tagit någon kurs i Affärsengelska, om ja, var och när?

   12) Om ja; vad skulle du ge den för betyg;

      5) Utmärkt
      4) Bra
      3) Medel
      2) Inte så bra
      1) Dålig

   13) Om något, vad lärde du dig – mest värdefull insikt från kursen?

   14) Vad skulle du vilja lära dig om du tog en kurs i Affärsengelska nu - Varför?

   Allmän information & Utbildning

   15) Kön: Man Kvinna
16) Arbetsposition/titel:

17) Ålder:

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18) Utbildningsnivå:

- Grundskola
- Eftergymnasial Utbildning
- Högskola/Universitets examen
- Magisterexamen eller högre
Appendix B

Beneath is a transcript of the answers from the interviews. The questions are included in the transcript. Both questions and answers are in Swedish, but were translated when used in the sections above.

Arbetssituation

1) Hur ofta kommunikerar du på Engelska på jobbet?

   - Aldrig
   - Sällan
   - Ofta
   - Alltid

   A) Jag pratar engelska varje dag. Vi brukar skoja och säga att vi jobbar på engelska och dricker kaffe på svenska. Så en blandning av ofta och alltid.
   B) varje dag
   C) Kanske, ja mellan…eh 1-5 ggr per vecka.
   D) Varje dag på ett eller annat sätt. Men jag talar svenska med de som är svenska.
   E) Hela tiden, varje dag. Kanske nån gång ibland att man går över till svenska med nån svensk kollega om ingen annan är i närheten.

2) Vad använder du engelska till på jobbet (Markera 1-5 där 1=sällan – 5=ofta)

   a. Möten
   b. E-mail
   c. Telefon
   d. Skrift
   e. Annat/socialt – specificera

   A) a5 b5 c5 d5 e3
   Om det bara är svenskar så sker allt informellt på svenska, även med danskar och normän talar vi ibland nån slags skandinaviska. Men är det engelsktalande med så pratar vi alltid engelska. Fast jag mejlar faktiskt till svenskar på svenska – om inte nån annan ska ha kopia.
   B) a5 b5 c5 d5 e3

C) a4 b1 c5 d1 e1
Det blir mest telefon och möten inte så mycket skriftligt

D) a3 b5 c1 d5 e2


E) a5 b5 c5 d5 e5
Som sagt, till det mesta. Vi använder även engelska till informell social kommunikation för det mesta.

3) Vilken nationalitet/modersmåls har de som du kommunicerar med?

A) De flesta kommer från England men även norden, typ Norge, Danmark och Finland.


C) Holland, Finland, Danmark


E) Mest Amerikanare och Britter när jag kommunikerar internt. Men när det är externt till kunder så är det hela Europa.

4) Vilka tycker du det är lättast att kommunicera med?

B) Lättare med de som har engelska som modersmål. Dom kan räkna ut vad man vill säga om man inte pratar helt perfekt.

C) Holländare är väldigt bra på engelska. Finländarna pratar ofta väldigt knackig engelska, men inte så svåra begrepp, så dom är lätt att förstå.

D) Engelsmän och amerikanare talar fort, kan vara svårt att hänga med. När jag talar med en Fransman tex känner jag att jag har bättre självförtroende, känner mig inte så osäker på språket.


5) Spelar det någon roll, eller påverkar det dig om de du kommunicerar med har Engelska som modersmål, hur?

A) Se ovan

B) Nej, det är inget jag tänker på.

C) Jag tycker oftast att det är svårare och jobbigare att kommunicera med dem.

D) Se ovan


6) Tänker du på hur du låter när du talar engelska, i så fall är det någon skillnad när du talar med någon som har Engelska som modersmål eller ej?

A) Nej inte direkt, jag tänker inte på det, jag pratar på.

B) Jag tänker inte direkt när jag talar engelska, men man är ju mer begränsad. Diskussioner som man vill vinna, känner man sig lite handikappad när man talar med personer som har engelska som första språk.

C) Jag har bättre självförtroendemässigt när jag talar med någon från Finland tex...men jag låter nog likadant.

D) Nej uttalet känns inte så viktigt, men jag är nog mer noggrann när jag talar med såna som har Engelska som modersmål
E) Nej det tycker jag inte.

7) Vilka situationer tycker du att missförstånd pga. språket ofta uppstår?

A) Jag tycker kulturskillnader kan göra att det blir lite konstigt, och när saker översätts fel. Vanliga uttryck är också svåra – (idiomatiska) Då blir det på sätt och vis lättare med dom från Norden, för då blir det inte lika mycket missförstånd.

B) Både e-mail och telefon. Email för kulturskillnaden…amerikanare upplever att man är stöddig utan att man haft för avsikt. När man talar telefon med de som inte har eng. som modersmål så blir det lätt missförstånd. Jag tycker video konferens hjälper eller face to face.


D) Mail är bättre än tal, för det är mer tydligt. Men i tal kan jag ofta känna mig missförstådd.


8) Berätta om ett tillfälle när språket skapade ett missförstånd eller problem.


B) Nå….kommer inte på något specifik, lite smågrejer hela tiden…Det skulle väl vara att man skriver lite konstigt…du vet det blir liksom fel i uttrycket.
C) Kommer inte på nån just nu.

D) -Kommer inte på nåt direkt nu...men jag kan tycka att det är förvånande att ”natives” är så slarviga när de skriver mejl ibland. Dom kan uttrycka sig så att det blir otydligt eller tvetydigt ibland.

F) Kommer inte på nån på rak arm.

9) Hur viktiga är följande kunskaper för att affärskommunikation på engelska ska fungera väl i ditt arbete? (1-inte viktigt alls 5 – mycket viktigt)

a) Branschspecifik ordkunskap och ordförståelse
b) Utrycka sig väl i tal
c) Utrycka sig väl i skrift
d) Hörförståelse
e) Social kompetens

A) a5 b3 c5 d3 e1
B) a5 b4 c4 d4 e3
C) a4 b3 c3 d4 e4
D) a4 b4 c4 d4 e4
E) a5 b4 c5 d4 e4

10) Uppskatta din egen färdighet i följande:
(Sätt betyg mellan 1-5 där 5 är utmärkt, dvs nära modersmål)

a) Ordkunskap
b) Talas engelska
c) Skriva engelska
d) Hörförståelse (engelska)
e) Social kompetens

A) a4 b4 c4 d4 e5
B) a4 b3 c4 d4 e4
C) a2 b2 c2 d2 e4
D) a4 b4 c4 d4 e4
E) a4 b4 c4 d4 e4

Tidigare utbildning – Affärsengelska

11) Har du tagit någon kurs i Affärsengelska, om ja, var och när?

A) Nja, jag läste Affärsengelska på gymnasiet, det har inte hjälpit ett dugg.


Det var mycket konversation, personlig presentation av vad man arbetade med. Både i grupp och enskilt skulle man berätta om fingerade situationer som hade med ens jobb att göra. Det var länge sen, men ungefär så som jag minns det.

D) Nej

E) Nej

12) Om ja; vad skulle du ge den för betyg;

5) Utmärkt
4) Bra
3) Medel
2) Inte så bra
a. Dålig

A) 1
B) 4 för kursen på GE, 2 för kursen i Bristol
C) 5 I Cambridge var det ordentligt, man lärde sig en hel del– det var nog utmärkt skulle jag säga. 2 för lektionerna här i Sverige, det var 1 timme per gång var inte så mycket värt. Inte så bra tycker jag.

D) n/a
E) n/a

13) Om något, vad lärde du dig – mest värdefull insikt från kursen?

A) När man inte har någon erfarenhet av arbete eller livet har man ingen som helst aning om vad man behöver. Det är svårt att ta till sig då. Och så kanske man inte tränar för rätt sak heller…man vet ju som sagt var inte vad man behöver.

B) Inte haft nån nytta av den kursen i Bristol. Men kursen genom GE Healthcare var faktiskt jätte bra. Man fick många tips på sånt som Svenskar ofta gör fel, det är sånt som jag tänker på och använder nu också.
C) Hm, ja, det är nog att personer från andra länder inte heller är så bra…man måste inte kunna de svåraste begreppen, man klarar sig ändå.

14) Vad skulle du vilja lära dig om du tog en kurs i Affärsengelska nu - Varför?


B) Nja, jag känner nog inte att jag saknar nåt direkt. Det skulle vara att jobba mer med det skriftliga då i såna fall. Du vet skriva protokoll och rapporter men även e-mail.


D) Jag skulle vilja lära mig, eller träna på konversation. Farmaceutiska ord finns på internet, det är så lätt att slå upp, men jag skulle vilja bli bättre på att uttrycka mig i skrift också.

-För att kunna göra sig förstådd bra. Sen också, vi interngranskas och då vill man ju inte vara dålig på engelska.


Allmän information & Utbildning

15) Kön:  Man  Kvinna

Totalt tre kvinnor och två män

16) Arbetsposition/titel:

A) Communications Manager AstraZeneca
B) Quality Assurance Project Manager, Shire Human Genetics
C) Försäljningschef Scandinavian Biopharma Distribution
D) Klinisk Prövningsledare Novartis
E) Utvecklings Chef /Manager Application Development
Shire Human Genetic Therapies

17) Ålder:

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Samtliga deltagare är mellan 35-45 år.

18) Utbildningsnivå:

Grundskola
Eftergymnasial Utbildning
Högskola/Universitets examen
Magisterexamen eller högre

A) Högskola/Universitetsexamen
B) MsC Pharmacy
C) Högskola/Universitetsexamen
D) Msc Pharmacy
E) Msc Pharmacy