'Buslish' in East/South East Asian Business – A Role for Continuing Education?

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Abstract

Purpose:

The aim of the research, in the East and Southeast Asia context, is to explore the advantages and problems of Buslish (business facilitation English) for managers and to generate suggestions for maximising the use of Buslish as a critical resource in organisational effectiveness, including potential educational support and its required technology.

Design:

Data aimed to explore the issue were collected from a multi-country sample of 31 non-native English speakers, using a semi-structured questionnaire, plus in-depth interviews (10) with some respondents. Data were analysed using a mixture of descriptive statistics and logical argumentation.

Findings:

We found strong agreement that Buslish is important in the chosen setting but that there are problems in practice. Views on the importance of style and precision of the language actually used varied considerably. A key practical implication is that there is a role for English CPD courses.

Practical implications:

Firms should support the development of English language skills of employees, certainly at management level and perhaps also at shop floor level. Suitable courses could be offered in firms' CPD programmes. Employees who are native speakers should be encouraged to enunciate clearly for non-native speaker colleagues, not to use slang and not to speak too quickly. While we encourage the use of contemporary communications technologies (e.g. virtual classrooms), we maintain that these should be supplementary in nature, supporting, rather than replacing, face-to-face formats.

Originality:

A key aspect of the originality of the work is derived from the location specific, primary data collected and the creative nexus of the initial issue and its educational requirements including technologies.

Keywords

Introduction

Life is a learning process. Although most people do not undertake formal study for qualifications beyond their mid-twenties, smart people still keep learning from their experience and observation of others, keeping abreast of the latest technological and pedagogical tools and techniques as they go along. They are experiential learners, see for example Taras and Gonzalez-Perez (2015). One increasingly common form of support for one's experiential learning is in-service training be it supervised route-learning for the train driver; training in the use of a new bit of kit in a factory setting; or what is known in the professions as CPD, continuing professional development. In some professional settings, it is a mandatory requirement to retain one's practice certificate. Such training may involve a range of educational delivery technologies.

In the increasingly international arena which is the setting for much of the world's business, the employees of even quite small firms must often talk to others whose native tongue is not the same as theirs, co-workers, customers or suppliers. As we shall see a, if not the, common solution is the adoption by all parties of English as a common language. In the setting we outline here, we use the term 'Buslish' to connote English used as a means to enable communication in a business setting between parties who speak different native languages. 'Buslish' is quite simply an amalgam of the two words 'business' and 'English'. It is also worth noting that not only may the actors have different native tongues they may also come from differing cultures, increasingly so even within one country.

Of course, English is not the language spoken by the largest number of people in the world, that is almost certainly Chinese or undoubtedly the family of Chinese languages of which Putonghua or Mandarin Chinese is the most common. However, English, or again a family of derivative forms, is arguably the most widely spoken in international or transnational business dealings (Fredriksson et al, 2006; Henderson, 2005). The main point here is that, if two business managers wish to 'talk' (in person, on the telephone, or in writing) and neither speaks the other's language, English is very often the chosen vehicle. This is a matter not only of direct observational truth to us as authors but is also a widely recorded view of others, see e.g. Neeley (2012), Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013).

From personal experience, we have seen non-English speaking actors discussing business in English, perhaps imperfect in form, because they did not speak each other's languages. Another example of the use of English as a medium of transaction in business is its use by hotel staff in many Asian countries, when they address foreign guests – no matter the customers may be French, Dutch, German or whatever. Furthermore, some multinationals whose bases are not anglophone countries use English as the company language (e.g. Rakuten of Japan, Nokia of Finland, and Renault of France) and it is used by air-traffic controllers for safety reasons. In sum, to quote the English writer Robert McCrum (2010, p. 11), "There is hardly a transaction in any city in today's world that is innocent of English, in some form".

That English has become widely used as a common language in business is by no means a novel phenomenon. Indeed it is sufficiently well embedded that it has acquired its own acronyms such as ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) and, even more pointedly, BELF (English as a Business Lingua Franca) (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Nevertheless, although widely seen as a source of convenience and corporate unity, it should not be assumed that the universal use of English eliminates problems of miscommunication.

As Henderson (2005) argues, non-native speakers of English tend to draw upon interpretive mechanisms from their mother tongues. In other words, a linguistically diverse team of employees or negotiating partners, relying on English, are susceptible to 'hearing different messages', which creates transactional complications. It is therefore imperative to understand the challenges and limitations associated with the use of Buslish and to consider possible remedies including education.

In line with this, our paper has three objectives: (1) to explore the advantages and problems Buslish generates for managers; (2) to examine the perceived importance of aiming for grammatical accuracy and a good writing style; and (3) to generate suggestions for maximising the use of Buslish as a critical resource in organisational effectiveness in an increasingly globalised, yet linguistically divergent, business environment, including educational and technological support. The first two parts are addressed using questionnaire response data and interview data derived from managers in East and Southeast Asia, where Buslish is widely used not only in international business but even domestically in some organisations. The third objective was approached primarily on an a priori argumentation basis.

One of the conclusions from answering the third question is that there is an important role for in-company education (or CPD) as a means of helping staff in internationally focussed businesses to improve their own Business English (Buslish) skills and hence improve overall communication within the businesses in which they work.

Before looking at our own empirical data, we have a section which provides a brief background and literature review.

Background and literature review

The challenges posed by linguistic diversity in international business are well established (Tenzer et al, 2014). Less acknowledged are the problems surrounding intra-language communication hurdles which arise when some or all interlocutors lack native proficiency. On the face of it, resorting to a universal language system like English is the solution to communication obstacles that have long hindered cross-border business (Feely and Harzing, 2003; Jonsen et al, 2011). The trouble is that, not only is the English language constantly evolving (Crystal, 2006), but it also comes in varying forms (British English, American English, etc.) – although one can reasonably argue that only the first named is really English - and 'hybrid' forms (Manglish -Malaysian English-, Singlish, Spanglish, etc.) are often too far removed to be considered an official and acceptable variation of the language. The emergence of these hybrid variants is perhaps understandable given that English remains a non-native language for most, despite being a core feature of educational curricula across the world (Bunce et al, 2016; Dalby, 2003). In fact, for more than 95 per cent of people alive today, a language other than English serves as their mother tongue (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016). Nevertheless, for better or for worse – and for numerous historical and socio-political reasons (McCrum, 2010; Pennycook, 2014) – the notion of English as a common language, or lingua franca to use the Latin phrase which has been adopted within English, is now fairly well established.

According to Jenkins et al (2011), English has been used as a lingua franca, for trade inter alia, in at least parts of the world, since as early as the sixteenth century. Other languages

have similarly served over past periods as facilitators of trade, including Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Portuguese (Ostler, 2005), but today, there is no denying the global power and influence of English. The end of the Cold War, the rise of the Internet, and the corresponding dominance and spread of British-American culture, academia, and ideology have culminated in linguistic hegemony in the political and economic spheres.

An obvious question to arise now is whether the fact of English's status as a lingua franca in the business world is broadly a good thing. On the positive side, some studies have shown a beneficial aspect in that the very existence and use of a lingua franca, namely 'Buslish', has a democratising effect on performance because it allows all parties to a situation to contribute (Steyaert et al, 2011; Vaara et al, 2005). In their paper, Reiche et al. (2015) find support for their first hypothesis that 'shared language among subsidiaries and HQ managers will be positively related to subsidiary knowledge inflows from HQ': it appears the authors are trying to say that having an intra-group lingua franca (English) will make knowledge transmission from HQ to subsidiaries more effective. They also explore how a number of mediating factors may influence these kinds of centrifugal knowledge flows. Thus they argue that having a group language helps to make companies more effective in their business.

Erlang's (2014) survey of prior empirical studies in South Asia found that, although the linkages could be quite complex in different contexts, all agreed that there was a positive correlation between English language learning and economic gain. If this is so in South Asia it seems reasonable to speculate that the same will be true in other parts of Asia.

Meanwhile, Cuypers et al (2015) state in their abstract, "We theorize and find that acquirers take lower equity stakes in foreign targets when linguistic distance and differences in lingua franca proficiency between them are high, and take higher stakes when the combined lingua franca proficiency of the parties is high." This suggests their subject investors were cautious in making their investments because they feared the dangers of linguistic distance and/or the lack of or weakness of a corporate lingua franca. A corollary to this could be that would-be investors should prioritise rich proficiency in common language skills across their groups, if they are to invest in companies from different linguistic traditions.

Others argue that there may also be dysfunctional effects, as for example when native speakers of English benefit unduly from what Neeley and Dumas (2016) term 'unearned status', which can afford undue control over the communication flow to the detriment of players with weaker, linguistic skills (Marschan-Piekkari et al, 1999; Harzing and Pudelko, 2013; Neeley, 2013). Henderson (2010) claims to find evidence both for and against dys/functionality in the context of international teams in MNCs which use English as the common or shared working language and concluded that language barriers in teams both foster and hinder trust.

Looking particularly at the situation in Southeast Asia, there is a range of evidence to hand. Kachru (2005) includes a description of his diffusion model comprising three 'rings', inner, outer and expanding. The rings essentially refer to the degree to which English is developed and embedded in a given country. In terms of this model, Vu (2012) proposes that Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines lie in the outer ring and other Souteheast Asian countries fall in to the 'weakest' performing, or new adopting set, in the expanding ring. Lazaro and Medalla (2004) reviewed the situation in the 2000s in APEC which of course includes a number of countries in East and Southeast Asia. They note that for many of the developing countries of their region the adoption of English as a desirable second language is common,

and in Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines is an official language. Buslish is important for cross-border trade, financial sector dealings is a key benefit for tourism, which is important for most Southeast Asian countries. Honna (2005, p.73) by contrast argues that, "a plausible way of managing the multiculturism of Asian English is not standardization but intercultural literacy."

Vu (2012) found that English is particularly the Asian lingua franca of choice. She notes that, while many commentators talk of the emergence of 'new Englishes', this idea is not something she found to be welcomed by Southeast Asians. She notes the particular and growing importance of English in the education business. Similarly, Baker (2012) describes English as being the 'de facto second language' for communication with other countries in the region, globally and to some extent internally in Thailand. He goes on to note that, despite this growing importance, its penetration into the Thai community is patchy and is especially weak in the poorer, rural regions.

Research methods used

As noted in the Introduction, our project has three objectives: (1) to explore the advantages and problems Buslish generates for managers; (2) to examine the perceived importance of aiming for grammatical accuracy and a good writing style; and (3) to generate suggestions for maximising the use of Buslish as a critical resource in organisational effectiveness in an increasingly globalised, yet linguistically divergent, business environment, including educational support.

We address the first two parts using questionnaire response data, augmented by data from a number of in-depth interviews. The target population is business managers in East/South East Asia, who are involved in some way in transnational business activity, including players within the education sector. The sampling method is convenience sampling capturing respondents known to the authors in some capacity or accessed through their personal networks. We tried to extend the sample by 'cold-e-mailing', but sadly no-one replied. Hence, there may be a bias in the sample but there is no reason to suppose that the eventual respondents are atypical of the desired population. There were 31 responses from the questionnaire from three main venues, China (8), Thailand (8) and Malaysia (8, Malay, Chinese and Indian), plus 4 Japanese, 2 Koreans, and 1 a Singaporean permanently resident in Hong Kong. 10 of the respondents also gave detailed interviews.

The questionnaire included background data on subjects; dichotomous questions about possible usages; several rating questions using 7-point Likert scoring scales concerning types of usage and grammatical features; and some open questions aimed to allow respondents to say what they think is really important. The more detailed interviews were focussed around the open questions contained in the questionnaire but other matters were included depending where discussion of the individual subject led to.

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview data comprised: descriptive statistics of the nominal data and the rating data and textual analysis of the opinion data from the open questions and interviews.

Analysis - meeting the objectives

Questionnaire numeric data

First, we note that all respondents were employed, or had been employed, in at least junior managerial positions in a wide range of types of organisations with business interests ranging from shipping to computer games; from (being proprietor of) an English language school to PR Agency for deluxe brands; from engineering manufacturing to HR/recruitment consultancy. The oldest respondents were 73 and 70 (but still active) and the modal age band was 30 to 40 years old. The set of 31 comprised 13 men and 18 women.

Next we consider the possible reasons for use of English by our non-native speakers of the language. The frequency data are shown in Table 1. Usages 1 and 2 were most frequently cited: this is unsurprising since they relate to the issue of bridging the transnational gap between persons of different phonological groups. Usages 3 and 4 were cited less often mainly because the PRC Chinese saw less relevance in them. It is interesting to note that even (as compared to their other views) the Chinese found importance for English in the context of writing contracts. One Thai woman, who works as a 'volumetric analyst' for an oil major, selected the unique language for contracts option but of course she is in an MNC, whose ultimate HQ is in the USA. In contracts dealing with some complex settings, such as undersea transmission cables, not only are contracts written in English but it is also not uncommon for English Law to be mandated to be the reference point for all parties to such a multi-lateral contract. Evidently some common standard is required to avoid complex bickering along the line of the cable.

Table 1 – Nominal task usage data

Potential usage	Frequency of nomination					
	Chinese (8)	**Thais (8)**	**Malays-ia (8)**	**Sing & Korea (3)**	**Japan. (4)**	**Total (31)**
1.To discuss/work with transnational contacts from English speaking countries	7	8	7	3	3	28
2. To discuss/work with transnational contacts from all countries whose language is not your mother tongue	6	8	7	2	3	26
3. To discuss/work with transnational contacts in your own country even if English is not the official language of your country	1	5	8	2	2	18
4. To uniquely write contracts for transnational business	2	4	6	2	2	16
5. As one of two languages in which a contract is written (e.g. Malay or Thai and English)	5	6	5	2	1	19

Turning to the ratings, questions 4 and 5 of the questionnaire, averages for these are found in Table 2.

Table 2. Rating data from questions 4 (Contextual Utility) & 5 (Linguistic Facets)

Subject Flags	Chinese Ave	Thai Ave	M'sian Ave	Japan Ave	Other Ave	Overall Ave
4a. Utility Domestic	3.75	5.38	4.75	3.25	3.67	4.35
4b. Utility Transnational	7.00	6.75	7.00	6.75	6.67	6.87
5a. Grammar accuracy	6.50	5.63	6.25	6.75	5.00	6.10
5b.Spelling accuracy	6.63	6.13	6.63	6.75	5.33	6.39
5c. Stylishness of writing	5.25	5.75	4.88	5.25	3.33	5.10

In question 4, the fact that the averages for transnational usage were systematically higher than those for domestic usage is unsurprising. Perhaps the only surprise in regard to Q4 is that Malaysians rated English's domestic utility lower than did Thais. That the average for the Chinese was even less than for the Malaysians is interesting. It seems to suggest that Thai and Malaysian business is international in a very real sense at which China has yet to arrive. By contrast, the Chinese respondents did feel that, if one is indeed going to use English, then linguistic precision and style are important. For those who rate such matters lowly, one might interpret this as saying something like, "as long as the message gets through, linguistic accuracy is optional." While sympathising with the travails of the non-native speaker, the problem with that view is that the 'receiver' may think they understand but may get the wrong message (i.e. not that intended) because of the linguistic shortcomings. This view resonates with soft data from the open questions, to which we come in a moment.

We are not surprised that respondents rated stylishness of written English the least important facet of the three considered in question 5 but should wish to encourage even non-native speakers to aspire in that direction. Just as the smartly dressed applicant makes a good initial impression at interview, we should argue that prose written with good style may well get the reader immediately open to receive the message therein.

Another issue is that audio media in countries such as the UK and the USA are replete with examples of incorrect grammar from people who are both native speakers and, one guesses, think themselves to be educated and somewhat intelligent. In some cases, despite the errors the meaning is clear. In others they say things which they think mean X but in fact if accurately linguistically interpreted mean Y. A simple example of the former category is the following, which one of the authors heard on BBC radio while writing this manuscript. "There is a number of things you can do to combat this problem." The error of course is that the speaker used the singular for of the verb ('is') when he should have used the plural form ('are') because the verb relates to a plural noun phrase. The problem is that if we the native speakers can't speak our own language accurately how can we expect foreigners to manage so to do?

Soft data analysis

Turning to the soft data, what do people find difficult? A common theme was coping with 'strange' or heavy accents. Indian accents were cited several times as being hard to fathom, including by a number of interviewees from Malaysia, which has a significant minority ethnic Indian population. A Chinese Malaysian process engineer recalled a lengthy telephone conversation with a counterpart in India whose accent he simply could not understand. The reason the call was so lengthy was that he had to ask the Indian to spell out just about every word which he uttered! After half an hour, they both accepted that it would be better to just e-mail each other.

Another problem is slang, which some groups are more prone to use than others, particularly Australians and Americans. A touch ironically, a Chinese woman, who speaks excellent English, wrote on her questionnaire, "slang is a pain"! A Chinese Malaysian noted that she feels the difference in accents between British people and Americans can be hard to handle, which of course reinforces the issue of whether Americans speak English or the derivative language of American.

One of the issues raised in the questionnaire is whether problems are more or less severe in oral or written forms. Interestingly, opinion was very much split on this. On the one hand, the view was expressed that oral communication is easier or less problematic, provided one is speaking face to face, because one has the benefit of visual cues, be they purveyors of supplementary nuances or simply facial indications of comprehension or otherwise. On the other hand one Chinese Malaysian engineer reported that she always uses e-mail with Indian nationals because she finds their accents so hard to decipher. Similarly a Thai technology manager, talked about the issues he has with a Singaporean programmer in his team (based in Bangkok). Sometimes they just cannot get over a difficult or subtle point to each other in English. Their solution is to establish roughly what is needed and then to write computer code which will be in English based logic statements. He will tell the man, 'write the code, plug it in and let's see if that works as needed.' Mostly it does or the error messages help to home in on what the misapprehension leading to 'wrong coding' has been. This is now a standard resolution approach between them.

'Pat', a highly articulate Thai woman, who works in a PR firm promoting international brands, doesn't find speaking English with colleagues difficult but thinks that often such problems as there may be are more about culture than language per se. To illustrate she explained as follows. She thinks that the HK and Singaporean people, with whom she has regular dealings, tend to go straight to the point. She doesn't mind that but many of her Thai colleagues find this 'saying it as it is' hard to bear. They would prefer a gentler, more elliptical style. They live, as much as they can, in a 'world of Thainess' and moan "why can't others do as we do?" – of course they are ignoring the obvious, HK people and Singaporeans are not Thais!

Another illustration of her view may be found in the next vignette. Pat has regular e-mail (and sometimes phone) conversations with a colleague from HK, a woman. Whilst understanding what the woman wrote, or said to her, she felt initially that the tone of the writing was often rather 'aggressive'. Why so aggressive, she wondered? Then she was despatched to HK to meet the team there. Once there she found that she and the 'aggressive' lady got on absolutely fine and she determined that her colleague was actually really nice. This meant that the meetings were easy and, once she was back in Bangkok, she read

subsequent e-mails from the woman with a sort of filter applied, knowing the woman did not mean to be unpleasant. Our own view is that Cantonese people can often seem rather aggressive, not least in the way that Cantonese is routinely spoken. Many easy going, and even well-educated, Cantonese deliver their native tongue at volume in a fairly staccato style – but interestingly this style, while very common is not universal.

Below is a selection of comments about the difficulties which arise from Buslish's use.

"Misunderstanding--people of different mother tongues start to 'modify' English using grammars or styles of their own languages, thus makes it difficult to properly understand, in terms of pronunciation, grammar and meaning of the words." (C2)

"I read some documents that were directly translated from Chinese to English using a translation software-- and it was a torture: no grammar and completely meaningless." (C2)

"The Chinese find the legal phrase 'reserve the right to' suspicious and unacceptable in some contractual cases." (C3)

"Some [people] can't bear using the word 'please' or [are prone to] saying things too straightforwardly, while some just can't say the thing they would like to convey straight away and that might cause the miscommunication still." (T3)

"Yes, very much, [problems can be severe] especially in spoken form." (T4)

"Written is more accurate e.g. easier to understand each other than when speaking (so written confirmations are important)." (T6)

English provides greater 'formality' to [him] than Mandarin. When speaking Mandarin, it is usually perceived in a casual way, but English gives the conversation/discussion a greater sense of seriousness and formality. (M6)

"As an engineer, many of the terms with which I and other engineers around the world are familiar are English, so when discussing technical issues, English is the 'go-to' language." This from (M6) again, even though, on a general scale, he is not as fluent in English as he is in Mandarin.

An ethnic Indian Malaysian (M7) worked in a German owned MNC where her development team comprised Malaysians, Germans and PRC Chinese, hence in her opinion English was just necessary for intra-team communication.

"Especially when I make overseas phone calls in English to new business partners/ customers, I very often become very nervous to be honest, since I am *not* a native English speaker." (K1)

"English is necessary and helpful when no other alternative language is available for efficient communication." (K2)

From when he worked for a shipyard company in Singapore, "[English] helped greatly when dealing with Arab and European countries because even the Arabs had enough

> basic English, engineering vocabulary to get the service they required thousands of miles from their home base." (S1)
>
> "If I could work using my mother tongue, my reading, writing and speaking speed would be faster." [she works for an overseas US Trade body] (J1)
>
> "I'm working at an English conversation school, ……. That's why we can't work without English skills." (J3)
>
> "English has helped us to increase the internationalisation of our institution" (J4)
>
> C~ PRC Chinese, T~Thai, M~Malaysian, K~Korean, S~Singaporean, J~Japanese, and so for example K2 refers to the second Korean respondent

These snippets confirm or illustrate some of the earlier summative points and in the case of M6 and S1 add the important point that a lot of technical language – in their cases engineering terms – is rooted in English. Of course certain other languages have a rich and full technology vocabulary, German in particular, but even for the speakers of such languages they may have to resort to English when away from the base of their own language. Examples personally experienced by the first author include a German engineer working on a factory set-up, using German plant, in China; and, a French naval engineer, who told me, "Norwegians and South Africans speak English: if we want to build ships for them we have to speak English too, however it may hurt some people's French pride."

Maximising the potential of Buslish – objective three

The third question (or objective) is addressed essentially by creative interpretation of the data already scrutinised above. One way in which the benefits of Buslish might be optimised concerns how native speakers (particularly British, Americans, etc.) communicate with non-native speakers. As we have seen already, slang was identified by a number of our respondents as an impediment to their understanding. Hence we advise that native speakers should avoid using slang, especially locally specific slang and complex colloquialisms, when dealing with counterparts whose first language is not English. As examples, things like humour, 'big words' and proverbs have been mentioned to one of the authors who works in Malaysia. The view was expressed that many native speakers do not realise how difficult it may be to understand colloquialisms and humour. An important point to be borne in mind when considering the avoidance of slang in teaching business English is the role of e-technology. Several authors advocate the use of such technology in the learning process (see for example: Brown, 2005; Teodorescu, 2015) but it is a fact of modern life that many users of electronic communication platforms routinely use slang or sloppy sentence constructions when using such platforms. It is therefore important that, where so-called mobile learning (m-learning) is used as part of the learning technology mix, teachers emphasise the importance of clarity of exposition and sound grammar.

On the other hand care must be taken not to avoid all polysyllabic words simply because that is their character. Sometimes one big word says succinctly and more clearly what the speaker intends than do a slew of small words, e.g. 'simultaneously' rather than 'all at exactly the same time.' On the matter of humour, care is definitely required. This is underscored by the fact that there is regularly confusion between British people and U.S. Americans in this regard. As the saying goes, 'Americans just don't get irony', as has been our own experience.

A second issue concerns accents. South Asian accents were cited by respondents in more than one of our sample countries as seeming to be troublesome for non-native English speakers to understand. The obvious solution here would seem to be for fluent speakers to speak more slowly and take care to articulate words clearly. Most people don't really want to keep asking, "What did you say?" lest they appear impolite. One of the authors was indeed embarrassed, when, more than thirty years ago, he had to ask a booking clerk at a railway station in Australia to repeat himself three times. The problem was the clerk's very poor, sloppy diction. Imagine how much worse the problem might have been for a tentative, second language listener. Strong accents may prove difficult, not just South Asian accents, but if speakers 'think diction' this may be the best solution. A woman may have a deeply ingrained accent from which she cannot easily desist but everyone can aim for clear diction. When users of Buslish are offered additional learning opportunities, the real value of face to face learning comes into focus. Explaining why the sounds are not as they should be and offering advice on the formation of the right sounds is much more easily accomplished in a face to face setting than through the somewhat depersonalising influence of e-communications. Apart from anything else, a friendly smile may soften the blow to the student's self esteem of being told that their sounds are not very good. Put another way, body language, widely construed, is a key teaching technology aid.

Thus far we have focussed on the spoken word in this section. There are also ways in which the written form can help to promote the value of Buslish. In our earlier discourse we highlighted several instances of the written word being used as a clarifying mechanism. In business settings, it is not uncommon for meetings to be minuted. In the British Civil Service, it is an unswerving norm. The suggestion would be that more organisations should adopt the policy of 'making a note of the meeting' as the norm, even for informal meetings. This does not mean keeping verbatim transcripts but rather that parties note and share key points of agreement. Failure to do so, even if no failure of linguistic comprehension exists, leaves open the potential for two parties to later claim different 'recollections of agreements'.

We turn our focus now to the issue of whether to "accept a variety of derivative versions of English" or should we better argue for adherence to standard English as the correct grammatical form of Buslish. Our suggestion is to opt for the latter. The reason is simple. If such is the clear understanding then all parties, especially second language speakers, can have a standard reference point to help and guide them. This of course brings the issue of 'American' back into focus. The problem is that many citizens of the U.S.A. – but interestingly not all – plainly stated do not speak English; they speak American. American is clearly a derivative of English, but it differs in lots of ways from English and hence may be seen as 'another new language to master' and a source of confusion for non-native speakers in East and Southeast Asia.

A final usage issue, in the search for ways to help Buslish to enhance organisational effectiveness, is the question of whether native speakers should correct the grammar and pronunciation errors of non-native speakers of English. We propose that one should do this, in a sympathetic fashion, with people one knows well. Were one not to so help them, how else will they improve their language skills and would we have been good friends or colleagues had we not tried to help? If, as a result of helpful guidance, they do improve, this will cut down on future misunderstandings and wasted time, i.e. organisational efficiency will be improved.

The issues raised so far in this sub-section are concerned with the practicalities of Buslish's usage. From a developmental perspective, it would seem helpful if firms were to make English lessons available as an option on the HR department's CPD menu, from which employees often choose. Many large firms have policies of the kind "all staff must undertake at least 5 to 10 days of CPD per annum." It is most likely that CPD activity will be technically based but language skill is a great asset. In large firms, it may also be worth spending money on helping even shop-floor workers to acquire a smattering of English. Then, if the engineers from the suppliers of your new German machinery arrive to help with implementation, life will be that little bit easier. To reinforce this last point, we note that a friend of one of the authors, who works in the Faculty of Education at one of Bangkok's universities, has successfully run programmes in basic, English communication skills for Bangkok taxi drivers, see Thitivesa (2019). She found that, from tentative beginnings, these men, mostly, rapidly came to recognise the utility of the course content and then became enthusiastic participants, perhaps because she was an empathetic teacher.

The content of the English courses offered as CPD, for whatever level of staff, should clearly be guided and informed by the types of issues discussed in our response to objectives 1 and 2 above. Thus a course aimed at senior executive, non-native English speakers should certainly include the aim of improving students' linguistic style as well as grammatical accuracy. For shop floor workers by contrast a greater emphasis on what one might term functional literacy would seem appropriate. For all potential students, from any stratum of the firm, accuracy of pronunciation and clarity of diction should be a key learning outcome. This last aspect, often afforded inadequate importance even in English speaking countries, is critical to effective cross-cultural communication in Buslish, or any other language for that matter, as our data for this paper plus our own experience have highlighted.

Another possible training aid could be to highlight social norms and customs in other countries, this follows the call for improved intercultural literacy by Honna (2005). Thus when two people collide, one from a deferential, circumlocutory tradition, the other with a direct and economical style, miscommunication and frustration would not necessarily ensue for unintended reasons.

Finally, there is the issue of the delivery technology for any of this in-service training. Choices include: traditional face-to-face delivery ('personal oral technology'); live on-line delivery via a computer link with teacher and students distributed; and pre-prepared recorded packages that the student uses on their own. The last is likely to be the least successful we hazard because of the high level of personal commitment and effort required of the student. Our prediction is that face-to-face is likely to be the best, albeit 'old technology' because the teacher gets better soft feedback and so can quickly adjust their pitch to help the students, as Thitivesa (2019) reported privately. While on-line teaching has become much more common during the covid-19 crisis, our contacts tell us that class management is much trickier in this milieu. Another technology would be a mixed approach, teach face-to-face but video-record it so that students can then see themselves in action and learn from constructive feedback.

What do others report on the use of remote teaching technologies? Hass and Joseph (2018) reported that their university student sample had neutral perceptions about online courses, and that favourable perceptions of the on-line approach enhances the likelihood to take on-line courses. But, as these authors found, such positive outcomes assume a positive disposition by participants. However, with a more sceptical audience, or a less tech-savvy one, we conjecture that face-to face is more likely to be successful. The initially sceptical can

be coaxed and encouraged – as in the Bangkok taxi drivers example, Thitivesa (2019) – and, in an executive audience the personal interaction may also be an effective way to explore and overcome cultural difference, as in Pat's story in the *soft data analysis* sub-section. Similarly, Sabani et al (2016) emphasise the importance of a personalised approach in the context of 'Islamic pedagogy'. But, since we are all human beings, what works in that context may be thought equally valid in others.

Conclusion

Looking at our three objectives, the main conclusions are as follow.

Buslish, inelegant as the word may be of itself, is alive, well and kicking in East and Southeast Asia. Its major advantage is that it allows business to flourish, often between parties who do not share a common native tongue. No one to whom we spoke doubted English to be the lingua franca of East and Southeast Asia; this resonates with the view, noted earlier, of Vu (2012). Quite simply, it is perceived to be of value by business people of many ages. There are problems as we outlined – accents, slang and 'dodgy' grammar - but people persist with English because they believe that they must.

When it comes to the grammar and style of written English, our sample ranked the chosen aspects in descending order as accurate spelling, grammatical accuracy and lastly stylishness of writing. Essentially this seems to say that if you get the right, key words down then, with good will, other parties will be able to understand what you are trying to convey. This is important because several respondents commented on the role of written back-up to support spoken interactions. Beyond that we would argue that aiming for a degree of literary style has merit.

What then to do about suggestions to maximise Buslish's utility? We identified three major points regarding actual usage. First, native speakers should avoid using slang and complex linguistic forms: listeners are more likely to understand simple structures. Secondly, speakers must seek to ensure their *diction* is clear – diction and accents are not the same thing and should not be confused. Thirdly, we propose that, for the benefit of non-native speakers a single form of standard English be adhered to, giving non-native speakers an unambiguous reference point.

From a developmental perspective, it is proposed that firms should make English lessons available as an option on the HR department's CPD menu in large firms, from which employees often choose. In large firms, it may also be worth spending money on helping even shop-floor workers to acquire a smattering of English. Another possible training aid could be to highlight social norms and customs in other countries, i.e. Honna (2005)'s intercultural literacy. For smaller firms the same benefit could perhaps be realised by outsourcing such training to specialised firms, using a tightly framed brief, or to the applied languages section of the local university, as in the example of Bangkok's taxi drivers.

As we noted at the beginning, life well lived is a continuing learning process. A variety of electronic based technologies may be deployed to aid that learning, including online and social network approaches (Sozudogru et al, 2019). Having said that, business and commerce remain by and large interactive processes, necessitating regular and sustained dialogue between the managers and their employees, customers, suppliers and so on. As such we

contend that courses and workshops should attempt to mimic this quality as closely as possible by prioritising face-to-face classes, using 'distant education' tools like recordings and virtual conference platforms as supplements, rather than replacements, for the physical classroom. A good example of how such supplementation can be usefully deployed is offered by Sampath and Zalipour (2009). They suggest that when the student body being taught Buslish are pre-experience students, rather than CPD learners, technological aids can be valuable to help to offer illustrative contexts for the students.

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