BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLE IN A HUNGARIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Abstract: Since English has become the most frequently used lingua franca of the world of business, it is the responsibility of business schools to prepare students for conducting business both in English and in the mother tongue. Stakeholders need fresh graduates who can use English in a wide range of unpredictable situations, while legal requirements and school curricula still force teachers and students to learn English in order to be able to pass high-stake exams. This qualitative case study aims to explore and understand how three business English teachers in a Hungarian business school see their professional role and how they cope with the challenges of fulfilling curricular requirements on the one hand and meeting student and stakeholder demands on the other. The results show that the participating teachers consider the roles of creating a safe learning environment and offering emotional scaffolding the most important in order to be able to bridge the gap between what they are compelled to do and what they feel they should do.

Keywords: business schools, curricular requirements, teachers' professional roles, English as a Lingua Franca, emotional scaffolding

1 Introduction

The aim of higher education (HE) is to prepare students for becoming members of a professional community. However, the nature of tasks and situations students will encounter during their working life is less and less predictable. Today's students can expect to change professions at least two or three times during their career (Davidson & Goldberg, 2009). What is more, employers need people who can perform a variety of tasks and are able to learn new things. They seek graduates with good communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration skills (Loch, 2017; see also Stillar's 2012 review). Therefore, there is an increasing external pressure on HE institutions to change their current educational practices of passing on facts to the students to fostering the development of transferable skills (Stillar, 2012).

The responsibility of HE institutions to prepare students for their working life cannot be underestimated. It is especially true for language education in business schools where the aim is to enable students to become members of a business community. Given the increased internationalisation of businesses, it is crucial for future business professionals to be fluent in

languages, especially English, as it has become the lingua franca of business communication (Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Kankaanranta et al., 2015; Rogerson-Revell, 2008). Although the range of opportunities for learning English has widened tremendously in the past decade due to technological changes and the growing importance of the social media in students' lives (Trinder & Herles, 2013), the formal courses that provide specialist knowledge and skills are still essential for students to prepare for becoming professionals. The success of this venture, however, rests largely on the teachers. They have been found to be "the major players in the education process" (Hattie, 2012, p. 22). Moreover, according to a 2007 report prepared for the OECD about the best-performing education systems, teachers are the ones who exert the greatest influence on the effectiveness of education (McKinsey & Company, 2007).

Teachers exert their influence through what they do in the classroom which is determined by their beliefs about their role and the commitments they make (Hattie, 2012). As teachers are constrained by curricular and school requirements which may go against their beliefs about their role, it is necessary to ask them about their perceived role and the contextual constraints that affect their work. However, so far very little has been written about Hungarian Business English (BE) teachers' professional orientation and perceived professional role. The studies available are either concerned with the identity formation process of BE teachers in HE in Hungary (Bereczky, 2012), or about competencies in-company BE teachers are expected to have (Mészárosné Kóris, 2015). In order to fill this gap this study sets out to investigate how teachers of BE see their professional role and face the challenges posed by changing circumstances, student needs and stakeholder demands. In the following, first a review of the literature on teachers' roles will be provided, which will be followed by a group case study of three BE teachers on how they see their role.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 The professional role of language teachers

According to Dörnyei and Murphy (2003), "role as a technical term from sociology refers to the shared expectation of how an individual should behave […]; roles describe what people are supposed to do" (p. 109). Beck (2008) describes a teacher's role along three dimensions. Firstly, cognitive scaffolding entails facilitating the students' cognitive development. Scaffolding here means helping students to become more autonomous learners. The second one, as – based on Kolb's (1984) model of learning – Beck (2008, p. 468) explains, facilitates learning by combining convergent, divergent, assimilative and accommodative learning styles. Finally, the teacher's role is to provide emotional scaffolding. As learning is situated in a "socio-psychological field" (Beck, p. 469), the classroom is a place where, through interacting with other students and the teacher, the students learn about themselves, their motivations and develop their identity. In this process the teacher is an important person who functions as a "mirror to reflect [the learners'] own motivations and self-image" (ibid.).

However, what teachers actually do in the classroom is shaped by the interplay of several factors, such as teachers' language learning experience at school (Borg, 2003; Korthagen, 2004; Pajares, 1992), the current practices of language teaching methodology (Borg, 2003; Harmer, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), the context in which they work

including the curriculum and the form of assessment, the nature of the subject, and the demand of stakeholders (Borg, 2003; Porter & Freeman, 1986). Although all of the above are important in shaping teachers' views of their role, for the purposes of the present study, the role of the prevailing language teaching methodology, BE as a college subject and stakeholders' demands will be investigated in more detail.

The consensus about the language teaching method to be used in the classroom has an influence on how teachers conceptualize their role. Currently, the widely accepted approach is communicative language teaching (CLT) which adopts the view that language learning takes place through using the target language in communication (Littlewood, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The role of the teacher is to provide an environment for learners that facilitates communication and, thereby, language learning. In order to achieve that, CLT demands a switch from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred pedagogy (Littlewood, 2013), and that the teacher should assume the role of a facilitator, a group process manager, a guide for classroom procedures and a counsellor (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, as CLT was exported from English-speaking countries to the rest of the world without taking local contexts into consideration, its adoption has posed many challenges to teachers in many places. Teachers have feared that they will lose control, and that students will use the mother tongue instead of English. Teachers have also been concerned about losing their role as transmitters of knowledge (Littlewood, 2013).

Although the goal of CLT "to improve students' ability to communicate" (Harmer, 2001, p. 86) has generally been embraced by language teachers (Hiep, 2007), there has been consensus that the method of achieving that goal needs to be adapted to local contexts (see review in Littlewood, 2013). Kumaravadivelu (2003) proposes a three-dimensional system of what he calls 'post-method pedagogy' (p. 34) as a foundation that can be adapted to any context. His post-method pedagogy is characterized by the *particularity* of context, the *practicality* of "a teacher-generated theory of practice" (p. 35), and the *possibility* of "identity formation and social transformation" (p. 37). On this foundation he builds a macro-strategic framework that identifies ten macro-strategies which serve as guiding principles for teachers to create their own contextualized CLT (Littlewood, 2013). The strategies also function as teacher roles, of which the following are relevant for this study: maximizing learning opportunities, promoting learner autonomy, helping learners to engage in intuitive discovery, contextualizing the linguistic input, and integrating language skills (for the whole conceptual framework see Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

2.2 The professional role of Business English teachers

Methodology experts seem to agree that BE teachers are first and foremost language teachers (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). However, when investigating their role, the special context in which they work and the nature of the subject of BE also have to be taken into account. Therefore, first a description of BE as a branch of English Language Teaching (ELT) will be offered, followed by a description of the subject of BE and the roles of BE teachers.

2.2.1 Business English: specialist vocabulary, specific skills, or communication in a specific context?

Business English is categorized as belonging to the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) branch of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). ESP has traditionally been a field that concerns itself with teaching English for specific domains, such as academia, business, medicine and law (Widdowson, 2003), and has been characterized by content-based teaching methods (Belcher, 2006) which focuses on the specialized vocabulary, the contexts of language use and the relevant genres of these fields (Belcher, 2006; Widdowson, 2003). Contrary to the views of Ellis and Johnson (1994), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) or Basturkmen (2006), Hutchinson and Waters (1987) do not see ESP as fundamentally different from General English (GE). They see it as "an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need" (p. 19). All in all, what ESP methodology experts seem to agree on is that ESP course design starts with the analysis of the needs of the learner with regard to the types of situations and contexts in which they are likely to use the language, and this clearly distinguishes ESP from GE (Basturkmen, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Frendo, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Moreover, ESP is different from GE in its content and educational aims. ESP has been conceptualized as a field that helps learners become accepted members of a community of professionals (Basturkmen, 2006). Basturkmen (2006) lists five educational objectives for ESP: "to reveal subject-specific language use, to develop target performance competencies, to teach underlying knowledge, to develop strategic competence, and to foster critical awareness" (p. 133). Historically, the focus has been on teaching subject-specific language use. First, it was register and the grammatical features of the registers belonging to the specific areas of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Later, the focus shifted to the underlying competences learners needed to develop in order to be able to carry out the tasks of their profession (Basturkmen, 2006). This objective entails a thorough assessment of what competencies and skills are needed in the target situations, therefore target situation analysis forms the basis of syllabus design (Basturkmen, 2006; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The teaching of underlying knowledge has been an objective especially in higher education contexts where students have little, if any, work experience. Hutchinson and Waters (1988) claim that students first need some background knowledge in their professional field, and the objective of ESP is to teach the concepts of the field and develop language skills at the same time. Developing strategic competence has also been an objective of ESP. It refers to the ability to mediate "between the external situational context and the internal language and background knowledge required to the communicative situation" (Douglas, 2000, p. 38).

Today, BE is an umbrella term given to a variety of courses that differ in their context and educational objectives. BE courses are offered in different types of schools, e.g., language schools, higher education institutions and at companies as well. There are BE courses with a general focus (English for General Business Purposes) for students without any job experience (pre-service learners), e.g., in language schools, and there are BE courses with a more specific content (English for Specific Business Purposes) offered to in-service learners at companies. There are courses whose aim is to train people in certain business-related skills, such as presentation skills or correspondence, and there are courses that aim to educate students with the aim of familiarizing them with disciplinary concepts and the underlying competences of their profession. According to Ellis and Johnson (1994), BE "implies the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kinds of communication in a specific context" (p. 3). More recently, BE has been viewed as "the major language of

commercial communication" (Talbot, 2009, p. 9) and as "the name given to the English used for dealing with business communication in English" (ibid.).

2.2.2 English as a Business Lingua Franca

The shift from teaching specialised vocabulary and specific skills to teaching business communication has been further strengthened as a result of the emergence of a new research field, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). BELF refers to how English is used in business contexts where people with different mother-tongues are present (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Since the context in which BELF communication takes place is by definition intercultural and often such where native speakers (NS) of English are not present, BELF communication has been found to show little regard for NS norms (Charles, 2007). Instead, interlocutors in BELF communication need to work out the norms for themselves in the given context (Kankaanranta et al. 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Therefore, skills which enable interlocutors to make themselves understood, e.g., accommodation skills, cooperation and creativity, as well as the relational functions of language use, such as creating rapport, and engaging in small talk are seen as vitally important by business professionals (Ehrenreich, 2010; Kaankanranta et al., 2015; Kaankanranta & Planken, 2010; Meierkord, 2000; Pullin, 2010; Ranta, 2010).

What is more, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) claim that communication know-how in English in lingua franca situations is such an important skill in business that competence in BELF communication has become "an integral part of business know-how" (p. 205). Their Model of Global Communication Competence shows that it is not enough for business professionals to know the ins and outs of their profession, but they also need to be able to function in multicultural environments, and learn to become competent users of English in lingua franca situations (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). What all the above entails for ESP education is that a more general capability of using the language should be developed in order to provide learners with "the capability for further learning as they exploit and extend this competence as and when this is functionally necessary for different communicative purposes in different contexts of use" (Widdowson, 2012, p. 24).

2.2.3 Business English as a college subject

Within ESP, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) make a distinction between English for Occupational Purposes and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In their view, BE courses in HE, including business schools, fall in the category of EAP for two reasons: firstly, the courses are offered to students with no work-experience, and secondly, students learn BE as a college subject. In many countries (including Hungary), BE courses in business schools are offered as college subjects similarly to professional subjects which are conducted in the learners' mother tongue (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Due to contextual factors, however, one of the basic tenets that ESP – and within that BE – courses are based on needs assessment may be difficult to realize in higher education. First, the fact that these courses are offered to adults who are only preparing for their future career entails difficulties in designing a course that matches their future needs (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Consequently, the curriculum may reflect the educational policies of the country and the educational institution rather than the contexts in which students will find

themselves during their careers (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Frendo, 2005). Second, BE courses offered in business schools are often influenced by exam requirements which determine the objectives and the scope of the course and the type of assessment (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Frendo, 2005). Again, the result is that the course may not prepare students for using the language in real life contexts (Frendo, 2005). Third, as a consequence of globalisation and the lingua franca use of English in business situations, it is impossible to predict the contexts in which students will use English during their career.

2.3 Stakeholders' demands

As a consequence of the nature of BE as a college subject, stakeholders find that in the current educational system fresh graduates are not prepared well for their working life. A study conducted among Hungarian employers and language teachers working in a major business school has shown a gap between what fresh graduates know and what employers need (Loch, 2017). Loch's study reveals that employers seek people who can accommodate to international work environments, work in collaboration with others in a team, communicate effectively and manage conflicts. Although fresh graduates lack such competencies, they are open and able to accommodate, which enables them to acquire these skills on the job. However, what fresh graduates are found to be wanting the most is language skills and more general personality traits, such as patience and willingness to learn.

It is important to note that in Loch's (2017) study the participating language teachers' opinion regarding the needs of fresh graduates is comparable to that of employers. Prioritizing, higher order thinking, effective communication skills, collaboration, conflict management, willingness to learn, and digital skills are some of those skills that teachers mention in the interviews. However, they also consider it important to raise students' intercultural awareness, and to educate them in history, culture and religion. Similarly to employers, teachers think that students need to develop general personality traits, such as self-confidence, openness, self-reflection, tolerance and creativity.

2.4 The Business English teacher

There is general consensus among researchers that BE teachers need both knowledge and skills in language teaching (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Frendo, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). However, there is disagreement as to what extent BE teachers need specialist content knowledge of their students' specific field of study in order to be effective (see review in Bereczky, 2012). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that there is no need for a BE teacher to have specialised knowledge, it is enough if they have "a positive attitude towards the ESP content" and "a knowledge of the fundamental principles of the subject area" (p. 163). On the other hand, Bell (1999) argues that the teacher must possess content knowledge in order to enhance the effectiveness of EAP education and to establish credibility with the students. In line with Bell's ideas, Frendo (2005) also suggests that for the sake of credibility the BE teacher also needs "an awareness of the business world" (p. 5). However, regardless of the amount of specialist knowledge they think is required of BE teachers, all of them seem to agree that teaching an ESP course involves constant learning on the part of the teacher. Therefore, ESP teachers have to be researchers (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 17) or professionals who are "willing themselves to learn" (Frendo, 2005, p. 5).

As pointed out earlier, the needs of employers and the contexts in which English is used for business purposes have changed, creating a gap between what students need to know and what they learn in BE courses. Since teachers are the key players in the educational process, before any changes are implemented, it is necessary to explore the BE teachers' perspective of these changes and take into account what they think about their professional role. To the best of my knowledge, the problem of how BE teachers see and cope with the discrepancy that exists between what they believe would benefit their students in the long term and what exams and school requirements compel them to do has not been investigated before. Through providing an insider's perspective, this case study aims to gain a deep understanding of the challenges three BE teachers face in a Hungarian business school and to present insights that might be transferable to other similar contexts.

3 Method

The aim of this study is to explore, describe and understand how teachers make sense of their profession through adopting an emic perspective. As the professional role of BE teachers cannot be interpreted without the context in which they work, a case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher "to study complex phenomena within their contexts" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). An exploratory study cannot – by definition – yield generalizable findings, yet a detailed description and interpretation of the participants' views may help the reader to make "similarity judgements" (Davis, 1992, p. 606) and to decide whether the understanding gained from the study can be transferred to their own contexts (Davis, 1992; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). Thus the results of this study are expected to be transferrable to other contexts, too. In order to gain a deep understanding of the perspectives and sense-making processes of BE teachers, the case of three BE teachers was examined by observing their classes, through conducting semi-structured interviews with them and by analysing relevant documents of the place of work.

3.1 Participants

The participants were selected by way of purposeful sampling in order to "obtain a sample that possesses certain characteristics relevant to the study" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 383). They are all female teachers who in the following are referred to by pseudonyms as Melinda, Judit and Szilvia. They fulfil the following criteria: they have been teachers of BE for at least 15 years, and they have been working for the same business school for at least 10 years. It was important for the participants to have at least 15 years of experience in BE because the aim of the study was to explore the views of BE teachers who had long completed the process of becoming a BE teacher and therefore had for a long time identified themselves as BE teachers.

Melinda, Judit and Szilvia have been working for the business school, although not for the same faculty. Judit and Melinda work at the same faculty. While Szilvia works for another one, the aim and content of the BE courses they teach are the same. All three of them started to teach BE in the same institution. Judit and Melinda have never left their current workplace, while Szilvia took a three-year break. During this period she continued teaching BE at a number of companies and language schools before returning to the same business school. They all have a degree in teaching English and a second degree in a business-related field. They started their career teaching GE in high schools and only later did they become teachers

of BE. All of them are native speakers of Hungarian. The participants' biographical data and professional background are summarized in Table 1.

	Judit	**Szilvia**	**Melinda**
Age	61	48	56
BE teaching experience	20 years	15 years	18 years
Prior language teaching experience	high school	high school	high school
Native language	Hungarian	Hungarian	Hungarian

Table 1. Summary of the participants' biographical data and professional background

The HE institution where the study was conducted is one of the major business schools in Hungary. Its three faculties educate professionals in the field of economics, management, finance, accountancy, tourism, and catering. In each of these professional fields, foreign language competence is seen as a must by employers (Loch, 2017). Therefore, all three faculties offer foreign language classes as part of the curriculum to all students: in two faculties the requirement is to complete three semesters of language studies in two languages, and in one of the faculties three semesters in one language is compulsory. Moreover, in order to get a degree in HE in Hungary it is mandatory for all students to have a good working knowledge of one or two foreign languages as evidenced by a language exam certificate at B2 level or above, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR[1]). At the institution where the study was conducted the requirement is that students must obtain a language exam certificate that proves language skills in the professional field related to their studies, e.g., Business English, or English for Accounting.

Although the business school makes BE or business communication courses in other languages compulsory for the students, these language courses have little weight in the whole curriculum. Most programs require students to obtain 210 credits throughout their studies, of which only 12 credits have to be earned from completing language courses (for a minority of programs the ratio is somewhat higher). With the exception of a few programs, the language of instruction is Hungarian. Foreign languages are offered as additional courses to core subjects related to the students' chosen field of study.

3.2 Instruments of data collection

Data collection was carried out during the autumn semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. Data was collected from four sources: semi-structured classroom observations of one lesson conducted by the each of three participating teachers, semi-structured, individual interviews with the teachers, the researcher's journal and the documents of the institution. The fact that the researcher also works as a teacher of BE at a higher educational institution in Hungary permits an insider's knowledge of the context, but it might also pose a threat to the credibility and the dependability of the research. In order to avoid these pitfalls the guidelines of Davis (1992), Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Lazaraton (2003) were followed: data was obtained from four different sources for triangulation, while dependability was ensured by member checking when the participants were asked to read the interview transcript and add comments and provide clarifications if they felt necessary.

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[1] http://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/

Data collection began with classroom observations which provided valuable insights into the way the teachers put their beliefs about their role into practice and the general atmosphere of the classes. In order to observe as many things as possible, the researcher adopted the role of the observer-as-participant. It must be noted that it is not possible to draw conclusions from one observation as it can only provide a snapshot of the way the teacher and that particular group work together. Still, the observation data proved a valuable resource for designing the interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews and for the interpretation of the interview data. In order to minimize the observer's bias, detailed field notes were taken, which were expanded into journal notes immediately after the observation (Cohen et al., 2000; McDonough & McDonough, 1997). In the field notes, observation data and their interpretation were kept separate (Cohen et al., 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; McDonough & McDonough, 1997). An observation schedule was used in order to focus the researcher's attention on certain phenomena, such as the signs of cooperation between the teacher and the students, the nature of communication between them, the students' attitude towards the teacher and learning, as well as the different roles adopted by the teacher during the lesson.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted within two weeks of the classroom observations. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for the interviews with the teacher participants. The interview guide was based upon data obtained from the observations and was validated in two phases: first through peer-checking and also through a pilot interview with a teacher from the same business school. It was designed to gain a deep insight into the participants' views about learning, teaching, students, the context and status of the BE as a college subject, and the role of the BE teacher (for the translated version of the interview guide, see Appendix A).The interviews were conducted in Hungarian, lasted from 30 to 70 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The documents reviewed from the point of view of how they match the requirements of the current situation of English language use and the status of BE in the business school included the curriculum, the syllabi of BE courses, the course books, the Principles of Staff Evaluation, and the Institutional Development Plan of the institution.[2]

3.3 Method of data analysis

The aim of the study is to explore and understand how BE teachers see their role and the reality in which they work. This called for a method of data collection that yielded qualitative data in the form of texts. The task of the qualitative researcher is to describe and interpret the phenomenon under investigation (Friedman, 2012), therefore, the data analysis is an interpretative process in which "the researcher's own *positionality* [emphasis original], or subjectivity, is always present" (Lazaraton, 2003, p. 3).

The analysis of the data began during field work and was carried out in several phases in a cyclical manner (Friedman, 2012; Patton, 2002). The data obtained from the classroom observations and the researcher's expanded field notes were analysed and registered in the researcher's journal. The themes emerging from the observations and the field notes were used in drawing up the semi-structured interview guide. After the interviews had been

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[2] The names of the school documents in English appear in the researcher's translation. The original documents are available at the business school's website but are not referred to here for ethical reasons, in order to preserve the anonymity of the institution.

conducted they were transcribed verbatim and analysed with the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The emerging themes from the observations and the interviews were complemented with the findings from analysing the school documents mentioned above. The aim of the document analysis was to provide an additional angle to the teachers' perception of the status of BE in the curriculum and to establish whether the participating teachers' perceptions about the importance of their work is reflected in the stated aims and strategic plans of the institution.

4 Results and discussion

The description of the way Judit, Szilvia and Melinda understand and cope with the difficulties of bridging the discrepancy between the requirements set by the school, the mandatory language exam and what they believe to be benefitting their students can be organized around themes that emerged from the interviews, the classroom observations and the field notes. The following themes are presented below: creating a supportive learning environment, catering for individual needs, the ideal situation versus reality regarding the course content, the prestige of the subject, the subject of BE itself, and fostering learner autonomy. The excerpts from the interviews are presented in the researcher's translation.

4.1 Creating a supportive learning environment and catering for individual needs

For both Szilvia and Judit the priority in teaching is offering emotional support to their students. Both teachers think that creating a good relationship with the students is key to the teaching-learning process. Judit believes – in line with Kumaravadivelu (2003) – that one of her roles is to maximize learning opportunities, and in order to do that, she has to build trust. Building trust is crucial in making the students believe that what they are learning will benefit them, and in creating an atmosphere of cooperation:

> To some extent I try to adjust to their style, interests, and needs, etc. I take the first step towards them and it pays off 100 per cent. When I feel that I have managed to build trust towards myself, I can make them 'swallow' almost anything, sorry for the expression. But then, I can say 'I hope you believe that this is going to be very important for the exam, and in general, if you would like to …' […] It is not a burden for me, it is not that I made it an objective for myself, but I believe that if I did not have that relationship with the students, it would hinder the process of teaching. (Judit)

Similarly to Beck's (2008) view of the teacher's role, emotional scaffolding is also important for Judit in order to help her students understand the world and develop their identity. Melinda also thinks she needs to provide emotional scaffolding, but from a different perspective. By striving to become a role model for the students, she hopes to help them become responsible professionals.

In fact, creating a supportive learning environment goes hand-in-hand with noticing and catering for the students' individual needs. Judit emphasises the importance of getting to know her students so that she can give personalized feedback. Sometimes she notices that students have difficulties with learning and she gives them advice or sends them to the dyslexia centre of the institution. Szilvia places a great emphasis on praising and encouraging her students and is convinced that this is the way she can motivate students to learn. At the

same time, it is important for her to notice the individual voices of the students. To describe teaching, she does not like the metaphor of the *conductor* (Arnon et al., 1999 as cited in Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Oktay & Vanci Osam, 2013). She prefers the metaphor of the *tour-guide* because she believes that the conductor's job is

> to create harmony and things are not tailored to the individual in an orchestra […] the conductor is too much of an opinion-leader. The tour-guide is better, because in this case it is possible to set a time when the group has to meet, but until then the tourists are free to go wherever they want to. (Szilvia)

It is obvious that she keeps to this philosophy. When, following the lesson observation, the researcher inquired about the reason why Szilvia had not called on two female students, she said that it was because the students had asked her not to call on them yet as their level of English was lower than the group's level. Still, the two students were actively, although silently, participating in the lesson.

4.2 The ideal situation versus reality

The theme of the dichotomy between what teachers think they should do and what they have to do appears in various places in the interviews. Szilvia is the one who explicitly makes this distinction but it appears in the interview with Melinda and to a lesser extent with Judit as well. The teachers speak about this dichotomy in terms of the content of the course, the status of the subject, and unattainable requirements.

4.2.1 Course content: connection to real life

All three teachers mentioned at one stage during the interview that the content of the course could be more related to real life. Melinda partly blames the course content for the great number of unmotivated students. She explicitly spells out the discrepancy between what she has to teach and what would benefit students. In her opinion, this mismatch partly determines both her role and the students' motivation. She thinks that the most important part of her job is to convince students that what they have to learn is important, but

> what we teach may not be so important, after all […] the stocks and shares and I don't know what … so these are indeed not so important things that they will be able to use in real life. […] We should be dealing with topics which are not so difficult to prove that the students will need them. And not only to prove it, but that they will *really* need them. (Melinda)

According to Judit, the course content is too theoretical. In her view, similarly to Beck's (2008), catering for a variety of learning styles would enhance the effectiveness of learning. However, by integrating language skills and contextualizing the linguistic input – as suggested by Kumaravadivelu (2003) – she has found a way to make the learning material more accessible to learners and thus to increase the opportunities to learn. She gives two examples of how she uses current events in politics or the economy as illustrations of the learning material. Through the topic of Brexit she discussed the G20 countries and their economic power, some basics about the European Union, showed a video about the G20 summit and discussed summary writing with her students. On another occasion, when they

were learning about mergers and acquisitions, in order to relate the theory to real life she mentioned current examples and asked the students to think about which type of acquisition these fall into. It is a mission for her to show to students that what they learn during the BE course is not far from reality, "we only have to make an effort to look in the right direction" (Judit).

Szilvia's dissatisfaction with the learning material stems from the fact that it does not take the characteristics of the new generation into account. She finds the texts too long, outdated and boring; consequently, these texts are not suitable for engaging the students. Moreover, she is dissatisfied with setting the same book for every group:

> The students in my group cannot understand such texts. They even have problems understanding shorter and much less difficult texts. We should begin there. […] We should tailor the material to the group; my group's motivation is zero to read an A4-page-long text. […] With this zero motivation I cannot teach reading comprehension, although I should. But I cannot! (Szilvia)

The tension between the learning goal of the BE course as stated in the course description and its real content revealed in the syllabus can also be detected. The course description of the BE course states that besides developing linguistic skills, the course aims to develop pragmatic and socio-cultural skills in order to enable students to use the language in international work environments, to communicate in everyday situations, to formulate their opinion about economic issues and to understand and summarize authentic materials. In the syllabus, however, there are no hints as to how these aims are going to be achieved. The course content is organized around topics which are copied out of a course book's table of contents page and which correspond to the topics set as requirements for the language exam. In the syllabus, these topics are complemented with areas of grammar and sometimes page numbers in the course book.

The course books reflect the difficulty of preparing pre-service students to become members of a professional community and to pass a high-stake language exam, as well as that of preparing the students for the uncertainties of the contexts in which they are going to use English as a lingua franca. The former goal entails providing specialized knowledge and a huge amount of professional terminology, while achieving the latter calls for developing strategic skills, creativity, and cooperation. Judit, Melinda and Szilvia use two different course books as they work for different faculties. One is more than 15 years old and contains long, complicated texts with idiomatic expressions, its listening tasks do not feature different accents or non-native users of English; therefore, it does not cater for the needs of learners who are most likely to use the language in BELF situations. Moreover, there are very few tasks which could inspire the students to use English in meaningful communication as they fail to create a real need and purpose for students to communicate with each other (Harmer, 2001). The course book used by the other faculty is more modern with more motivating communicative tasks, case studies and problems for the students to solve. It also features different accents and non-native speakers of English. Still, the exercises and problems are both theoretical (e.g., advising the government on how to spend the proceeds of a certain tax) and unrelated to Hungarian BE students' life experience (e.g., deciding how many workers to lay off due to falling sales in a clothing manufacturer's plant, illustrated with a photo of workers in a garment factory in the Far-East). Both books are heavily content-focused with the main goal being building students' business vocabulary, which makes these books suitable

for preparing students for the language exam, but less suitable for preparing them for lingua franca communication.

4.2.2 BE is only a college subject

It seems that for Judit, Szilvia and Melinda the BE course illustrates all the problems the literature mentions in connection with ESP courses designed as college subjects. BE is only one of the many subjects offered by the business school, representing only about 5-10 percent of the curriculum for most programs. As it is difficult to predict pre-service students' future communicative needs, the syllabus reflects exam requirements, which explains why the BE course is seen only as a subject to pass in the students' eyes and a material to teach in the teachers' eyes. Szilvia formulates her problem as follows:

> … being able to speak a language is a necessity. It isn't like a subject. Here [in the business school] what I feel is that I need to teach a subject for this … *test*, and we are happy if the student gets 30 points [the cut-off score to pass]. (Szilvia)

For Judit, the problem is different. In order to maximize learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), she rejects the idea of spoon-feeding students:

> I told them they would have to do some research on their own on the Internet. And then students in two of my groups came to me requesting that we go through the exam topics one-by-one so that they can be sure what they need to speak about in relation to each of the topics, as if they were in high school, really. […] I think it was only laziness on their part, and not that they didn't know. (Judit)

In Melinda's opinion, treating BE only as a subject manifests itself in the students' lack of interest. Her attempts to supplement the compulsory material with a discussion of current issues in the economy often fail due to the students' lack of interest and background knowledge. She feels that "not all of them are interested in what is going on in the world, not even in their professional field" (Melinda). Moreover, she feels that teachers have to compete with mobile devices for the students' attention, but "they often fail to be more interesting than a mobile phone" (Melinda).

From Szilvia's account we can also learn what students' attitudes to the BE course are. When Szilvia asked her students why they did not consider language learning something ongoing and why they treated it only as a course to be passed, the students said that they had many courses and that if they studied as much as they should, they would not have time for anything else.

4.2.3 The low prestige of the subject of BE

There is consensus among the participating teachers that in the whole curriculum BE enjoys a rather low status and they mention several things to prove their point. Szilvia goes as far as to say that in fact BE

> does not matter at all. I think other departments and the leadership of the university accept that speaking English is a must and that's it. It's a must, so they've done their

job by offering three semesters of BE, which is good for nothing, it's only pretence. […] They think it's important for the students to speak English, but they don't think it is important to create the circumstances for it. (Szilvia)

The lack of good circumstances means similar things for the teachers. It is the low number of lessons per week, the unsuitable arrangement of the rooms, the unfavourable timetable (e.g., early morning classes on Monday), and the prestige of the teachers at the institution. In Judit's opinion, meeting the students only once or twice a week does not allow skills development or group work. Szilvia is struggling with helping the students meet the exam requirements which are the same for all groups, regardless of language level at the faculty she works for. She feels that the expectation of the other departments that students should be able to read professional material in English is unrealistic if students are admitted to the business school without sufficient knowledge of GE and with so few lessons in only three semesters. Her concern is shared by Judit:

> When I started here the English department was at the top. It was partly because the students had a higher level of English … and the BE courses weren't as superficial as they are now. I can say that gradually we have been reduced to a very low status with one or two 90-minute lessons a week and now we meet the students for three semesters instead of six. I could go on listing what has been taken away from us. (Judit)

The relative weight of BE courses in the curriculum, as evidenced by the low number of credits they earn for students, confirms the teachers' observations in many respects. First of all, it does not reflect the importance of helping students become competent users of English in lingua franca business situations, second, it shows no sign that the institution considers being a competent user of English to be part of the professional know-how of business people as emphasized by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010). What is more, the marginal status of BE in the curriculum creates insecurity regarding the future of language teaching at the business school. According to Judit, the language exam requirement is what has kept language education at the institution alive.

4.3 Fostering learner autonomy

With regard to learner autonomy, too, a tension can be felt between what the participating teachers think they should do and what they, in fact, do. This tension is the most conspicuous phenomenon in Szilvia's case. She considers fostering autonomy and enabling students to go on learning after graduating from university one of her most important tasks:

> It is important to teach the basics, I think, but we shouldn't go into a lot of details. They will learn those things if necessary but only if they have something to build on. We should give them a skeleton and it is their job to put the flesh on it. (Szilvia)

She feels that instead of helping students find their own way to learn the language and activating their capacity for intuitive discovery through trial and error – as emphasized by Kumaravadivelu (2003) –, she is compelled to give students ready-made answers and solutions so that they can pass the tests:

> In practice …sometimes …due to time and other constraints, I think I sometimes have to tell the students not to go in that direction. I have to push them or tell them that the easier way is this, go this way. What I do every day is more like spoon-feeding them. There is little opportunity for them to realize that *they* want to learn or that they can do it alone. (Szilvia)

The lesson that was observed as part of this research showed that as much as possible Szilvia tried to activate what the students know so that they can build the new information into their existing knowledge. Still, she was forced to do a lot of the work instead of the students in order to help them comprehend a text which was set as compulsory material in the syllabus, and which was a lot more difficult than what the students could handle.

Melinda's observed lesson showed few signs of giving learners autonomy. At the same time, during the interview she explicitly stated that teaching is about transmitting knowledge. During the observed lesson she used a lot of drills in order to practice grammar and vocabulary. After the lesson she said that she had devised this method of drilling because it had proved to be effective in making the students learn the material.

Judit, on the other hand, conceptualizes teaching as a more democratic venture. It is like "birds singing" (Judit), a two-way communication between the teacher and her students. She does not think that she needs to be the possessor of all knowledge; instead she feels that knowledge is "out there around and within us" (Judit). Similarly to Kumaravadivelu (2003), she believes that it is one of the roles of a teacher to encourage students to make discoveries and notice what is around us. The way she conducted the lesson was consistent with her ideas. She negotiated homework and classroom tasks with the students, and gave them the freedom to talk about a topic of their choice.

However, the three teachers agree that their students are not ready for more autonomy than what they enjoy today. Judit feels students need the security of being told exactly what they need to learn, either because this is the way of learning they are used to or because their level of English is so low that in order to prepare them for exams they need to be spoon-fed. Moreover, all of them agreed that if the system of language education changed and students were given a lot more autonomy in the form of, for example, project-based learning, most students would not be able to live up to the challenge. They think that students need milestones, clear objectives and outside control. Without those they would learn even less than they do now. In Szilvia's opinion they would feel they have not learnt anything, but now, "if students come to the lesson they feel they that by being physically there they have done their lot, and it doesn't matter what they do during the lesson" (Szilvia).

5 Conclusion

The outcomes of this research clearly show the controversial situation of the participating BE teachers. On the one hand, the results corroborate previous research findings that BE teachers identify themselves primarily as language teachers (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Frendo, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The findings of this study also support Kumaravadivelu's (2003) argument that a teacher's role is to maximize learning opportunities and Beck's (2008) view that a teacher plays an important role in helping the students learn about themselves in the world. The three participating teachers feel that they can only fulfil these roles if they create a supportive learning environment. Moreover, their views are similar

to Beck's (2008) in that they strive to provide cognitive scaffolding and promote learner autonomy, and they do their best to cater for different learning styles.

However, the results also show that they can identify areas where the educational practices regarding language education do not fully correspond to what students need for their future career. The emphasis on preparing students for the professional language exam limits the possibilities for skills development, promoting learner autonomy and activating students' capability for intuitive discovery, while these are the skills that employers seek but reportedly rarely find in fresh graduates (Loch, 2017). Nevertheless, it is the language exam requirement that offers some protection against further reductions in the number of language courses in the curriculum.

Treating BE as a college subject has implications for both teaching and learning. Many students meet the course requirements only to earn the credit but do not seize the opportunity to develop their language skills. The result is that they leave the business school with an insufficient knowledge of English (Loch, 2017). On the other hand, the teachers are pressured to meet the students' immediate needs and prepare them for school exams. As a result, preparation for exams takes priority over the longer term needs of students' to become competent language users and to be able to become members of the international business community.

The teachers' method of coping with the discrepancies between what they feel they need to do and what in fact they have to do is to provide a supportive learning environment and offer emotional scaffolding. As they cannot rely on content that is relevant, more pragmatic and less theoretical, they resort to their capability of convincing the students that they will benefit from what they are learning. In order to achieve this aim, they have to build a close relationship with their students. Therefore, creating a friendly atmosphere in the classroom is what they consider to be their most important role. This is how they can maximize learning opportunities, promote the students' self-esteem and autonomy and at the same time meet school requirements.

It can be concluded that although the participants are committed educators, they feel constrained by contextual factors and student characteristics, which determine the roles they fulfil. As it is the responsibility of the business school to prepare future business people for participating in the international business community, it would be very important for students, teachers and the larger community to have a system of language education in business schools that can offer much more than supportive teachers who can convince students to learn things the importance of which even the teachers doubt. The programme should be less focused on exams and cater more for developing creativity, independent discovery, autonomy, and for offering contextualized linguistic input, stimulating negotiated interaction, and raising cultural awareness (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). These require teachers to assume roles that so far they have not fulfilled and to be more assertive in fighting for what they believe students need. However, in order to be capable of that, teachers need to be more empowered to believe that regardless of contextual factors, they are the ones who can make a difference.

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APPENDIX A

The English translation of the interview guide

Preliminary questions:

(1) How old are you?
(2) How long have you been teaching Business English?
(3) How long have you been working at the Business School?
(4) Have you ever worked anywhere else as a teacher of English or Business English?
(5) What position do you hold at the Business School?

Main interview questions:

(6)   Where did you learn English?
(7)   What were the English lessons like?
(8)   Could you tell me about your teacher of English?
(9)   What does learning mean to you?
(10) What metaphor would you use to describe learning?
(11) What does teaching mean to you?
(12) What metaphor would you use to describe teaching?
(13) What is the role of the teacher in the language learning process?
(14) What is the most important task of a teacher of BE in a Business School?
(15) How do you think a teacher can influence the performance of his/her students?
(16) How would you describe today's students?
(17) Are they different from students of one or two decades ago?
(18) How would you describe the context in which you work?
(19) What is your perception of the status of the BE course in the curriculum?
(20) How important is the BE course for your students?
(21) How does the language exam requirement influence your work?
(22) What does a teacher of BE have to know?
(23) What do you like about teaching?
(24) If students were given greater autonomy in organizing their studies would they take advantage of the opportunity?
(25) Do you feel in any way disadvantaged that you are not a native speaker of English?