

ORGANISATIONAL THEATRE IN THE ESP CLASSROOM: A ROMANIAN ACCOUNT

Ana-Magdalena PETRARU

“Al. I. Cuza” University, Iași, Romania
alina.petraru@gmail.com

Abstract: *This paper draws on our work with the 2nd year students at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania; in our Business English seminars, we brought into play the speeches of Shakespeare’s characters, namely King Henry’s in Henry V as played by Kenneth Branagh on screen and Mark Anthony’s in Julius Caesar by Marlon Brandon, respectively. Overviewing international and national perspectives on organisational theatre and establishing a relation with CLT, in general and ESP, in particular, we will tackle the activities meant to help our pre-experience learners (Ellis and Johnson, 1994; Frendo, 2005) develop their presentation and public speaking skills with the help of the two speeches mentioned above, i.e. the persuasion and the motivational one as coined by literature (Sharma et al., 2010).*

Keywords: CLT, Business English, organizational theatre, Shakespearean speeches, public speaking skills

1. Introduction

As announced from the abstract, the present paper is inspired by our experience as an associate assistant of ESP with the 2nd year students at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. We have been working with such undergraduate students since 2008 so, in our approach, we agree to the postulate that the ESP teacher is more than a ‘traditional’ language teacher; this is because s/he has to display some knowledge of the subject matter to be taught (the field of economics, in our case). Thus, we consider ourselves to be a regular ESP teacher who is not even a native English speaker in most cases; as discussed in our previous research [1], such a teacher should be able to “discern the particular vocabulary, discourses and processes that are essential to the ESP training of students within a specialised context” [2]. In our study, we were also inspired by communicative language teaching (CLT) as

understood by the latest developments for the new millennium. Such advances in the field of CLT plead for the development of communicative competence in its sociocultural dimension, strategic discourse and grammar. This should happen against the background of the “students’ ability to understand and to express themselves in a foreign language” [3]. Among other aims advocated by CLT, the following should be mentioned: “fostering students’ positive attitude towards communicating in a foreign language and heightening their interest in language and culture, thus deepening international understanding” [*ibidem*]. Furthermore, we draw on CLT for the approach to the four language skills and apply it in our classroom: if speaking and writing were previously dealt with in traditional language teaching as active and listening and reading as passive, they are nowadays seen as productive and receptive, respectively [3, *passim*].

When developing our business students' skills via organisational theatre, we also keep in mind that we are mostly dealing with pre-experience(d) learners who distinguish themselves from low-experience or job-experienced ones, as argued in ESP literature [*cf.* 4; 5]. We do not deny that, at the undergraduate level, there may be students who have jobs but these low experience learners are few, hence the syllabus design for pre-experience learners and their (three kinds of) needs: getting ready for exams in English or in their native language, developing their reading and listening skills, focusing on the vocabulary of the subject matter and preparing for their working life in business which lies ahead of them [4, *passim*].

Last but not least, we also have in view that our students' knowledge is rather theoretical, than practical, i.e. mainly acquired from their specialty courses at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. To put it in the words of ESP theorists and practitioners, "they will be less aware of the language needs in terms of communicating in real-life business situations, and their expectations of language learning will be moulded by their experiences from school..." [4] However, they will also be "more open-minded than those who are already well ahead in their careers, and this has implications for what can be done in the classroom (...), they may lack confidence in their ability to deal with business subject matter" and "need to be given a lot of information from which to work." [*ibidem*] It is particularly this feature we aim at exploiting by means of organisational theatre and its techniques, as will be shown in the subsequent sections of our paper.

Regarding theatrical training, despite the fact that drama and its virtues were brought into play from ancient times for educating either adults (e.g. Socrates' maieutics) or children (as in the case of Plato who used to make children learn by means of dance and improvisation), drama-based training as we know it today only started to be developed

at the beginning of the 20th century due to John Dewey in the US who pleaded for a type of 'learning through making' and the psychologist Jacob L. Moreno, the founder of psychodrama; the latter showed that behavioural changes in individuals or groups can be made through various dramatic means, a principle which was later extended to business drama classes (as shown by St. George, Schwager and Canavan [6]). Thus, there are many companies that provide drama classes for other categories of professionals than future actors, both in-house and out-house, most of them being founded by professional actors. Such an instance is NV Management that makes available actors to its customers so as to help them improve their bespoke skills, role play, etc. The 'therapeutic' power of such courses was acknowledged to help clients against suicide and diminish crime rates; moreover, Nicola Berry and Thomas Verrall's company was so successful that it was employed by Her Majesty's Prison Service which required 40 actors for recruiting officers during working days. The efforts of the professionals led to the employment of no less than 20 000 people [7].

In Romania, Augusto Boal's forum theatre as non-formal method of education found its application in the work of various associations and foundations set up to help gypsies, poor people and villagers [8], on the one hand and develop civic competencies, critical thinking, team working and public speaking skills in high school pupils through drama-based training, on the other hand [9].

2. Material and Method

In our approach, we start from the premise that theatre and its techniques are extremely useful in the learning process; in fact, studies show how it may be applied from kindergarten to primary and secondary education [*cf.* 10, 11], not to mention their quintessential role in educating disabled children; in the latter category, theatrical techniques are extremely useful to the

improvement of children's perception and problem solving [12].

Against the background of developing students' communication skills, in general and presentation ones, in particular, with stress falling on public (be)speaking and persuasion skills, we used activities, oral expression exercises included, designed to help students in life and their (future) jobs. The material consists in parts of chapter 4, "Voice and Visuals" from Powell's *In Company* (2010) and we chose it to teach our students how to give a speech, analyse their voice in presentations, give feedback on them, use visuals, and analyse their voice while presenting. We agree to the authors of the teacher's book who claim that "giving competent and confident presentations is a vital skill for many business English students" [13]. The activities were employed to help students work on their communication skills, in general and productive ones, in particular. To develop their receptive skills, they read articles on voice and visual impact, listened to presenters giving information in different ways, to a radio programme dealing with drama for business and two of Shakespeare speeches. Also, "the language practised is useful for all students and for addressing both small and large audiences" [*ibidem*].

As mentioned above, we brought into play drama-based techniques to help students work on their business English communication skills, in general and public (be)speaking skills and persuasion, in particular. Consequently, our students were asked to choose one of the two speeches by Shakespeare in modern English. The former was Mark Anthony's persuasion speech as rendered by Marlon Brandon in the film adaptation of *Julius Caesar*, act 3, scene 2: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, listen to me./ I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him./ The evil that men do lives after them;/ The good is often buried with their bones./ So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus/ Has told you Caesar was ambitious./ If it was so, it was a serious fault;/ And seriously has Caesar answered it!/ Here,

with permission of Brutus and the rest – / For Brutus is an honourable man./ So are they all, all honourable men –/ I come to speak at Caesar's funeral./ He was my friend, loyal and fair to me,/ But Brutus says he was ambitious;/ And Brutus is an honourable man./ He has brought many prisoners home to Rome./ Whose ransoms increased the wealth of all./ Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?/ Whenever the poor have cried, Caesar has wept:/ Ambition should be made of stronger stuff./ Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;/ And Brutus is an honourable man./ You all saw on the Feast of Luperca/ I three times offered him a royal crown,/ Which he three times refused: was this ambition?/ Yet, Brutus says he was ambitious,/ And, sure, he is an honourable man./ I do not contradict what Brutus said,/ But here I am to say what I do know./ You all did love him at once, not without reason./ What reason prevents you from mourning him?/ Have we turned into wild beasts/ And men quite lost their minds? Bear with me./ My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar;/ And I must pause till it comes back to me."

[14] The latter was the motivational speech in *Henry V*, act 4, scene 3 as uttered by Kenneth Branagh who played King Henry on screen: "If we are going to die, we are enough/ To cause our country loss; and if to live,/ The fewer men, the greater share of honour/ This day is called the Feast of Crispian./ He who survives this day, comes safely home,/ Will hold his head high when this day is named/ And stand up at the name of Crispian/ He that shall live today and see old age/ Will celebrate it yearly with his neighbours/ And say: Tomorrow is Saint Crispian./ Then he'll roll up his sleeve and show his scars/ And say: 'These wounds I got on Crispian's Day'./ Old men forget; yes, all will be forgotten;/ But he'll remember all too well/ What he achieved that day./ Then will our names:/ Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,/ Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,/ Be between cups of wine newly remembered./ This story will the good man teach his son;/

And Crispian will never go by,/ From this day to the ending of the world,/ But we shall be remembered for it./ We few, we fortunate few, we band of brothers;/ For he today he sheds his blood with me/ Will be my brother. However poor and humble,/ This day will make of him a gentleman./ And gentlemen in England, now in bed,/ Will curse the fact they were not here,/ And question whether they are really men,/ While anyone speaks who fought with us/ Upon Saint Crispian's Day!" [*ibidem*]

3. Results and Discussion

The warm-up part in which students discussed the quote "I do not object to people looking at their watches when I am speaking. But I strongly object when they start shaking them to make certain that they are still going" [14] gave them the occasion to reflect on what can be boring in presentations, namely, an uninteresting content, presenter, topic, overruns, lack of body language, etc. However, most of them did not find the quote funny and they said that they did not recall having any negative experiences in attending presentations. As lead-in, and according to the instructions in the teacher's book, they were also demanded if they had ever had to speak in public, how they felt, what makes a good speaker, if they were ever nervous or if they remembered the best presentation they had attended and why it was good. Then they answered questions such as what kept an audience interested in what they were saying when they stood up to speak in public, visual impact or vocal range, power point or natural presence. They agreed on the fact that presenters were made, not born and much practice was required. Most of them acknowledged that they feared speaking in front of large audiences (as much as they feared death); only few of them admitted that they liked to be admired, be the centre of attention, so public speaking was not a problem and they were used to it due to their work in students' organizations, high school presentations and debating contests. The issue of voice was also brought into play and the

importance of pause with it; the quote from the communication expert, Courtland Bovée on the power of pause made students acquiesce the role of pause in adding "emphasis and meaning to selected phrases and sentences" [14] since one "can insert a pause to allow an audience a moment to think about an idea, to indicate a shift to a new idea or to a new section (...) or to heighten anticipation" [*ibidem*] of one's next idea. Some of them even argued that pauses can make one's speech more dramatic, thus referring to the texts of voice and visuals they read and Obama's 'Yes, we can'.

Our business students' productive and receptive skills were also enhanced by listening to three presenters speaking in different ways and the activity in which they had to decide which presenter sounded fluent and confident, fluent but boring or hesitant. They did so, insisting on the monotony of the boring presenter and on what the hesitant presenter was doing wrong. A short debate followed: the quote by Jan Carlzon, Swedish businessman and former manager of SAS (Scandinavian Airline System), "All business is show business" [14] gave students the possibility to develop their communication skills, in general and speaking, in particular. They commonly agreed on the importance of dramatic and theatrical skills in motivating and persuading the audience to their purposes. Finally, we passed to the main 'Shakespearean' activity; to help students make their dramatic 'debut', we gave them the possibility to take turns as actor and director. Consequently, we asked them to practice the two speeches rendered above and make pauses where they considered necessary to do so, stress verbs and nouns, usually employed for emphasis, despite the fact that occasionally the stress may fall on pronouns and conjunctions when an increase of dramatic effect is sought. They were also given the possibility to highlight, by using different colours, parts of the text they really wanted to project, even shout, and also parts they preferred to utter quietly

or even whisper. They were afforded time to try the speech several times; if the actor was speaking, the director was giving advice and feedback. Students would then perform when they felt ready. Afterwards they listened to the two great actors, namely Marlon Brandon's playing Mark Anthony in *Julius Caesar* and Kenneth Branagh Henry V in the historical play, respectively to find out how the speeches in the famous movies actually sound like. They admitted that their performances were far from the originals, yet the activity proved to be extremely useful in developing their English communication skills and building stronger confidence before a potentially critical audience. Last but not least, to account for their knowledge and skills acquired due to the Shakespearean activities, they were asked to prepare a 90-second presentation on an essential business topic or work and preserve some of their power and drama from the previous speeches when presenting; students did marvellously, feeling less nervous than before, pausing when necessary, and making use of body language.

4. Conclusions

Based on the precepts of CLT, in general and ESP, in particular, in our research we showed how organisational theatre can be useful to undergraduate business students or pre-experience learners. Due to the techniques of drama-based training which can be successfully brought into play when dealing with other professional categories than actors at the workplace, and in education even from the most basic levels both abroad and in our country, as outlined in our paper, students became more confident when speaking before an audience, and felt less nervous during presentations. By solving the tasks from the chapter of the student's book we chose, 'Voice and Visuals' in Powel's *In Company*, and mainly by performing the two Shakespearean speeches in class, they improved their communication and public speaking skills.

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