

BELF: Still Relevant or Fading Out?

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Conversations about BELF
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BELF recent research

Sociolinguistic aspects	Cultural aspects, power, identity	Pedagogical applications
<p>-Request strategies in business emails (Hofweber and Jaworska 2022)</p> <p>-Communication Strategies and Meaning-negotiation (Cogo and Vettorel 2019)</p>	<p>Professional identities (Karhunen, P., Kankaanranta, A. & Räisänen 2023)</p>	<p>Decolonizing business English in the classroom, revisiting the news (Banister 2023)</p> <p>-Linguacultural competencies (Peltonen and Hu 2025)</p>
<p>Explaining strategy in business meetings. participants move to explain even in the absence of a request for an explanation (Kaur and Birlik 2021)</p>	<p>the issues of English nativeness and the use of soft power in BELF in Bangladesh (Roshid and Chowdhury 2023)</p>	<p>-Analysis of Business English Materials (Frendo 2019)</p>

BELF recent research: references

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-Banister, C. 2023. Decolonizing business English: exploring classroom ideologies, *ELT Journal*, 77/2, pp.166-175, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccac043>

-Frendo, E. 2019. Business English Materials. *ELT Journal* 73/4, 463–482, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccz037>

-Karhunen, P., Kankaanranta, A. & Räisänen, T. 2023. Towards a Richer Understanding of Language and Identity in the MNC: Constructing Cosmopolitan Identities Through “English”. *Manag Int Rev* 63, 507–530. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-023-00504-6>

-Hofweber, J. and Jaworska, S. 2022. "Polite impoliteness? How power, gender and language background shape request strategies in English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) in corporate email exchanges" *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 11/2, pp. 223-253. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2022-2085>

-Kaur, J. and Birlik, S. 2021. Communicative Effectiveness in BELF (English as a Business Lingua Franca) Meetings: ‘Explaining’ as a Pragmatic Strategy. *Modern Language Journal*, 105/3: 623-638. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12717>

-Peltonen, L. and Guangwei Hu, 2025. Addressing linguacultural competencies in business English pedagogy, *ELT Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaf017>

-Roshid, M. and Chowdhury, R. 2023. Power Dynamics in Business English as a Lingua Franca Discourse. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly* 87, 432-61.

BELF research so far

- emphasis on content, more important than correctness (according to ENL model)
- clarity, more important than correctness, i.e. negotiation of meaning
- linguistic aspect: research on (B)ELF pragmatics
 - > shift away from NS models
 - > variability and complexity of (B)ELF
 - > linguistic diversity, cultural decoloniality

However, assumption is that international business is only in English – neglect for the multilingual

- Language perceived only “as a tool” (Kubota 2016) – neglect for power and ideologies

Multilingual aspects in BELF

Translanguaging in BELF

- Translanguaging is when people use all their language skills together—mixing and blending languages—to communicate, learn, or make sense of the world. (Li Wei, Ofelia García)
- People fluidly draw on their full **linguistic repertoire**
- Translanguaging challenges both the monolingual and the plurilingual (used in the numeric/countable sense) approaches to language
- Highlights the creativity of language and its users.

Cogo 2012,2020; Frendo 2023; Takino 2020;Tsuchiya 2020;

Translanguaging in BELF

Why It Matters?

- It **reflects how multilingual people actually use language** in real life, including BELF
- It **supports learning** by allowing people to use all their language resources.
- It **challenges the idea** that languages should always be kept separate in schools or workplaces

Example: Translanguaging in BELF (Cogo 2012)



P: <L1sp>bueno<L1sp> okay so we have to try to do it in the way she says (.) like you have the first position (.) number bla bla bla (.) and then the second position (1)

M: [<L1sp>si<L1sp> y xx

P: [you see? so she want to put the <LNde>versand<LNde> as another article (.) you know what she's doing?

(M translating to H)

M: <L1sp>que esta<L1sp> <LNde>sie macht versand als ein artikel manchmal<LNde>

H: <LNde>ja <LNde> <LNsp> bien <LNsp>

P: <LNde>das normal? <LNde>

M: <L1sp>esta mirando unas eh facturas <L1sp>

The image shows a screenshot of a 'Sales Invoice' template from PandaDoc. The template is light green and contains various fields for invoice details. At the top left is the PandaDoc logo. To the right of the logo are fields for 'Sender First Name', 'Sender Last Name', 'Sender Street Address', 'Sender City', 'Sender State', 'Sender Postal Code', and 'Sender Phone'. Below this is the title 'Sales Invoice' in a large, bold font. Under the title, there are fields for 'Invoice No.', 'Invoice Date', 'Payment terms', and 'Due date'. To the right of these fields is the 'BILL TO:' section, which includes fields for 'Client First Name', 'Client Last Name', 'Client Street Address', 'Client City', 'Client State', 'Client Postal Code', and 'Client Phone'. Below the 'BILL TO:' section is a table with four columns: 'NAME', 'PRICE', 'QTY', and 'SUBTOTAL'. The table has one row with the following values: 'NAME' (empty), 'PRICE' (\$0.00), 'QTY' (1), and 'SUBTOTAL' (\$0.00). Below the table, there are fields for 'Subtotal', 'Discount', 'Tax', and 'Total', all with values of \$0.00. At the bottom of the invoice, there is a section for 'Signature' and a field for 'MM / DD / YYYY'. A small note at the bottom right states: 'This sales invoice reflects hours worked by [Sender First Name] [Sender Last Name] for [Client Company] under [Invoice Contract]'.

1. Translanguaging as a Meaning-Making Resource

The speakers fluidly move between Spanish (L1sp), English, and German (LNde).

“versand” embedded in English to enhance clarity and precision

2. Collaborative Negotiation of Meaning

P seeks confirmation and understanding “das normal?”

M acts as a **mediator**, translating and clarifying for *H*

3. Task Orientation and Progression

participants move the task forward by pooling their linguistic resources and ensuring mutual understanding.

4. Full Use of Linguistic Repertoire

Fluid and strategic use of multilingual resources

Power and ideologies in BELF

The concept of English: tension...

Figure 1. *Linguistic manifestations of English in international business(es)*

<p><i>common corporate language (English)/“official English”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• top-down management policy• oriented to Standard English norms• used for official external & internal communication <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• shared & hybrid; inherently potentially multilingual, including professional & functional languages• performative/constituent of interactional processes and relationships• emergent & ad hoc language practice <p><i>English as a business lingua franca (BELF)/“working language”</i></p>	
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Komori-Glatz (2018:8) Figure 1

Emphasis on power relations

- Ehrenreich (2011) power relations are multidimensional
- Otsu (2019) Japanese professionals show ambivalent attitudes to English = prefer more native-like language use in BELF communication with speakers in higher positions and authority. They believed that conformity to NS norms can project their professional competence and have more advantages for job success.

Translanguaging (Cogo 2012)



P: I try to adapt the the (.)the programme to that (.)
okay?

M: <L1sp>ya para te estoy mandando ahorita
una<L1sp>

P: bu-but why if it's the same just don't don't bring it

M: <L1sp>es si otro esta mas ordenado que el nuestro
para que veas<L1sp>

H: <LNsp>el dice <LNsp> he says seven percent tax
on (.) the the line ninety you see that what my-

P: -yeah yeah yeah yeah I have it in front of mine I I
print it so

1. Language Choice as a Power Strategy

P consistently uses English and *M* Spanish (maintaining control; creating linguistic boundaries)

Conversation as a site of power negotiation

2. Limiting access to information

language can gatekeep information—when explanations are not reciprocally accessible, it can reinforce asymmetries in decision-making.

The interaction shows how **translanguaging is not always symmetrical or empowering**—it can be constrained by institutional norms, individual choices, or power dynamics that privilege one language over others.

In the classroom...

- Translanguaging perspective = appreciation of diversity (of English and multilingualism), so including different linguistic resources in the classroom but also taking a decolonizing stance
- Decolonizing attitude = shifting power away from English / NS / centre
- Making other languages visible, using local sources (in English)
- Include reflections on power relations / ideologies
- Including critical discussion of inclusion/ exclusion

BELF: Still Relevant or Fading Out?

Overall rich developments in BELF research

- Need for more work in sociolinguistics, especially business negotiations
- Need for more work on power and ideologies of international business

ELT Journal 80th Anniversary
Reader Survey



ELTJ survey

<https://forms.office.com/e/YyzKBmSgy4>

What do you think?

1. What kind of BELF research would you need for your BELF-aware teaching?
2. What kinds of materials or activities would support BELF-aware teaching?

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Thank you!

Grazie

Merci

Ευχαριστώ

धन्यवाद