



Anglicisms in Romanian - a barrier to effective communication

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Anglicisms in Romanian - a barrier to effective communication?

Communication, a two-way process where the roles of both the sender and the receiver of the message are equally important, may be hindered by certain factors which act as barriers to its effectiveness. Language with its variations or dialects is among the barriers which must be overcome so that people should be able to understand the exact meaning of the message and the risk of misunderstanding, due to misinterpretation of information, be removed.

The use of jargon which has lately abounded in anglicisms and xenisms is a linguistic barrier to some beneficiaries of different services in Romania, irrespective of the field of activity.

This is the issue the present paper approaches, with direct reference to business where the overuse of anglicisms and xenisms may act as “noises” that distort the message and render communication inefficient.

Key words: barrier, communication, jargon, anglicisms, xenisms



Introduction

An interdisciplinary concept, communication is a process that involves the systematization, selection and transmission of symbols in an appropriate manner in order to ensure the recreation, in the mind of the listener, of what the communicator intends to transmit.

In a simplistic manner, the purpose of communication is to inform, but enlarging upon the topic, communication also aims to: (1) *inform* and *instruct*, (2) *motivate* and *justify* - it entails reactions to situations, people, facts, things, changes and justifies behaviours, attitudes, feelings, deeds; (3) *convince and encourage* - the stimulation of various interests is achieved by communication, as the case stands with commercial advertisements, electoral speeches, discussions with a specialist who uses persuasive techniques to determine certain facts; (4) *establish social contacts*; (5) *express feelings, needs, desires*.

Barriers to effective communication

Effective communication - a two-way process where the listener is as important as the person who sends the message - requires proper conditions and means for the message to reach the receiver as intended by the sender. Any disturbing factor - a) everything that hinders the natural ability to express, transmit or capture ideas easily, b) those situations that cause disruptions of any kind in the free movement of ideas - is an obstacle, a barrier that arises between the sender and the receiver and diminishes communication efficiency. Having effect at physical, mental, emotional and psychological level, the different types of communication barriers intertwine, mutually influence each other, hamper active listening and potentiate the response, disturb the receiver's attention, lead to severe distortion of information, impair or even block communication.

Among the barriers that may impede the

achievement of effective communication, the language ones play a crucial role. Raised by one or both participants in the communication process, language barriers - related to the language in which message is worded and transmitted - render the difficulty to understand unfamiliar words belonging to the same language or to different languages.

Technical, complicated language specific to certain professional categories, characterized by the abundance of pretentious terms, collocations, acronyms commonly borrowed from foreign languages - jargon in a word - alongside slang, regionalisms, abbreviations, youth language - particularly the type of spelling incurred by the explosion of communication in virtual space - the lack of knowledge of the language used by the sender of the message all represent insurmountable language barriers to effective communication.

Therefore, the appropriateness of the language level to the type of communication that individuals are engaged in, at a given time, remains important.

Anglicisms as Language Barriers

"Every perception of the world is language bound and language is the mediator between reality and each individual"¹. Whether vernacular or foreign to the actors involved in communication, language may be a common cross cultural barrier likely to be overcome only if "the sender and receiver of the message have a minimum set of jointly defined vocabulary"².

As there are "no precedents in human history for what happens to languages, under such circumstances of rapid change" when nations need "to talk so much to each other"³, languages had to accommodate themselves to the global dynamics characteristic to the latest decades. The phenomenon of internationalization noticeable at all levels led to intercultural communication⁴ mostly performed in English in all communities from academic world to business.

The major changes multinational companies brought about within the framework of organizational culture also manifested at communicational level. The massive use of loans and linguistic calques after English words or phrases became a representative feature of corporate way of speaking in Romania as in any other country. The educational system, which supports the study of English early enough, from the time children begin their full-time education and maintains it continuously⁵ by universities curricula - some universities even added English as a teaching language - benefited corporations employees who have a good command of the language. The lack of the English language knowledge was not in the least an impenetrable barrier to effective communication inside or outside Romanian organisations as the case stands with other languages⁶ which share no common features

with English.

The advantage anglicisms brought in the field of business lies in the fact that at managerial level, and not only, they use an internationalized jargon that the Romanian experts have assimilated. But to use jargon, necessary to create understanding between co-workers, outside the company in everyday life - because this is the issue under discussion - and to "forget that the public can hardly understand it is a dangerous habit"⁷.

The levels of training, education, intellectual capacity and context influence the understanding of the proper meaning of a language whether native or foreign, therefore translating from one language to another "bears the risk of confusion."⁸ The hasty, inaccurate translations, that "betray their origin"⁹ by the numerous English words maintained in the translated texts, constituted one of the sources from where anglicisms but also xenisms spread to other contexts or fields despite the acceptable domestic available alternatives.¹⁰ They were appropriated and used in conversation by a part of ordinary people as a token of education, prestige, fashion and connection to modern times.

After all, given these realities, English is not blameworthy because the domestic corporate world takes part in the linguistic "revolution" where language is recklessly tortured, in all fields, by surrealist translations of some common words into some kind of *Romglish*. It is the fault of the stylish, autochthonous young gentlemen and young ladies who can hardly speak Romanian, let alone English, but find it more efficient, more globalist to express themselves in a variegated language, replacing the wooden tongue with a tongue of tin which sounds empty"¹¹.

The annoying overuse of anglicisms, xenisms and linguistic calques - imitations of English structures that "occur exactly where not needed"¹² - that monopolized the Romanian way of speaking irrespective of the domain¹³, is detrimental to language from at least two points of view: on one hand it may act as a barrier to communication for some people and on the other hand it alters the existing structures of the language, the combinations of words.

Literature identified jargon as a type of barrier to effective interpersonal communication in that it "(...) infers difficulties in transferring the meaning of information from one person to another (...) If jargonized words are used, the listener may have no idea as to the intended meaning of communication."¹⁴

Specialists tend to encode messages in a language that is understood by other specialists in the same field but less by the public. Immediately understandable by those in the know, when used in a professional environment, jargon is meaningless or misleading to those - outside that particular environment - who do not share the specialized knowledge, who misinterpret

the word or phrase and impose their own meaning on the jargonized vocabulary because of the urge to "make sense of what they hear."¹⁵ Language barriers can be related to both spoken and written language and the reception of the message transmitted in a specialized language, that uses less common words, may be a hindrance to communication.

This is the case with business ordinary customers or clients, newspapers' readers, talk shows viewers and so on. The existing gap between the level of knowledge of a professional, in his capacity of the sender of the message, and the receiver, unaccustomed with a certain field of activity, may be accentuated by the difference in language which becomes a blocking element itself, rendered more inaccessible and incomprehensible because of the overuse of neologisms of English origin, many of which meet all the defining elements of a barbarism. It is basically about neologisms that are incompletely or erroneously assimilated by (certain categories) of Romanian speakers, true xenisms or terms that are hardly necessary or useful from an "informational and functional point of view."¹⁶

Anglicisms used in banking, for instance, become, for some clients unaccustomed with the banking jargon - mostly made up of words of English origin -, barriers in the way of understanding the message or information. Such barriers are located both at the emitting end - a bank's staff uses terms belonging to financial jargon - *overdraft, discount, bonus, voucher, bond, leasing, cash-flow, bond, clearing house, wholesale banking, retail banking, mortgage loan* - and also at the receiving end - which is the ordinary client who may lack both specialized knowledge and banking jargon knowledge.

Notwithstanding that some of these loan words - result of an attempted cognitive simplification on the speaker's part, who tries to find the simplest linguistic strategy to name new things¹⁷ - were both adopted in the language, recorded by dictionaries and widely used, they still fail to communicate and persuade, they "kill the message"¹⁸ and "punish" customers, clients, beneficiaries of sundry services, "with intrusive, hype-filled, self-aggrandizing product literature."¹⁹

Serving the sender of the message not the receiver, technical language - that uses "ready-made designations"²⁰ - is almost never appropriate in direct conversation because it cuts off communication and has to be translated²¹ for most people that are not involved in that particular field²². Otherwise jargon and acronyms, very often used outside business or financial organizations, act as a barrier to communication for two reasons - business literacy and linguistic skills. For those who are not involved in a field of activity, the language specific to certain social categories is a *foreign language*, the worst enemy of plain, simple words²³.

One cannot suspect all those engaged in business

that they are more concerned with their own person than with clients who are supposed to understand what they are told, that they focus more on their professional prestige than on the client, that they sooner want to impress and not to inform²⁴. And yet there is an abundance of English terms in Romanian business publications - *segment de retail, sector office, birouri open-space, spații de co-working, finanțări cash/non-cash, segmentul de food&beverages, input-uri în agricultură, trend ascendent, credite overnight, comision upfront* - that are used to the detriment of the reader's understanding and function as serious communication barrier. The use of such phrases, where anglicisms and English xenisms cohabitation with Romanian lexemes is characteristic to business language, creates semantic gaps in the message²⁵, obstructs it and, therefore, information does not reach ordinary people who are beneficiaries of services. It is a kind of *linguistic complacency*²⁶ that must be given up by business professionals for the benefit of business, clients or customers.

Conclusions

We cannot overlook the beneficial influence upon the Romanian literary language of neologisms that replaced - necessarily for the "renewal, modernization and internationalization of the language"²⁷ - ancient words inherited from the peoples with which the natives were in contact over the centuries.

Nor do we advocate the absolute disavowal of some English loans which have the advantages of precision, breviloquence, expressiveness, international character. It is a phenomenon met in all languages around the world and the vast literature on the issue witnesses for this situation.

We, however, militate against their inappropriate, erroneous use, by anyone - and the problem is that a large percentage of those who use them can barely speak English - and at any time.

By our approach we join those men of letters or ordinary people who argue against that kind of "more elegant language", a type of vocabulary with "more pleasant to hearing terms"²⁸, a beyond comprehension jargon which unfortunately, by its pretentiousness, spoils the Romanian language.

The media played a major role and constituted one of the sources of anglicisms and xenisms spreading and, by their never ending journalistic mania of quest for synonyms, perpetuated their improper use.²⁹

Such a way of communicating - through which pervades the snobbery of those who use *timing* for *sincronizare*, *deadline* instead of *termen limită*, *team building* for *crearea spiritului de echipă*, or *workshop*, *business, design* for *afacere, seminar(atelier)*, *aspect exterior* but who forgot to speak Romanian correctly - not only raised communication barriers but also

generated, among many, a feeling of rejection towards any English neologism, perceived as intruders.

In our opinion the danger is not the linguistic loans - some necessary because of the lack of Romanian equivalents - but the negligence in the use of the language and the disregard for the quality of the language. After all, too much of anything is good for nothing.

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