《研　究》

# Meanings of words across businesses and cultures : The significance and limitations of BELF

Naoki Kameda

**Abstract**

　　Because English has become the "de facto" global business "lingua franca," a false belief seems to prevail in the countries of non-native English speakers that people need only to become fluent in English if they are to be effective as global managers. However, fluency is a complex concept that requires analysis and re-conceptualization. Language fluency is affected by both the country's and the organization's culture. These unique qualities of culture make accurate translation of the language of business and/or management extremely difficult and at times impossible. Often the scope of meaning of a given word is so varied that the meanings of the same word in two countries scarcely overlap, even though the words seem to be the same. Business practices also are different from country to country, and this too affects meanings. Global managers must assume duties as cultural integrators and communicators to successfully manage their foreign subsidiaries and to do global business with their foreign counterparts. A tool global managers need for this duty is the "language of business" or BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca). They must keep in mind the words of E. T. Hall, who said that, "culture includes the relationship of what is said to what is meant—as when 'no' means 'maybe' and 'tomorrow' means 'never.'"

## Introduction

People often assume that the recipient of a message attaches the same meaning to the message as the sender intended. As Berlo (1960) observed in his *The Process of Communication,* a bible for students of business communication, people are apt to assume that :

> . . . another person attaches the same meaning to a word that we do, that a smile by another person expresses the same internal state as does a smile by us, [and] that other people see the world in the same way as we do.

　　However, words do not have meaning in themselves ; they have meaning only in the context in which they are used by people. General semanticists claim that words do not mean at all and meanings reside in people. It is therefore difficult to transmit thoughts and ideas, as

intended, in words alone, particularly when they are exchanged across businesses and cultures. Effective communication requires the creation of a common purpose and understanding that transcends the barriers that exist between the self and the other.

English has become the international business language. No matter who uses it, this language must be used in modern international business to represent the writer or the speaker, and to express his or her will. Even if English is not the native language of the speaker, he or she can use his or her own English to bridge the gaps between nations and cultures as long as such English, namely BELF, is mutually intelligible. This paper will discuss the question of intelligibility of BELF when people having both different business aims and cultural backgrounds use this business language.

## I　Contextual features and significance of BELF

Having thoroughly explained what kind of English BELF is, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) give the three characters of BELF as follows :

> While the three contextual features seem integral to BELF discourse, that is, the shared business domain, the shared professional expertise, and the length of relationship, three features of BELF proper also emerged from the interview data. They can be characterized as simplified English, specific terminology related to business in general and the professional expertise in particular, and a hybrid of discourse practices originating from the speakers' mother tongues.

Thus, as Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) observed, "the discourse of BELF can be characterized as an interesting hybrid : a simplified, shared code whose basis is English with highly specialized vocabulary and a variety of discourse practices originating from the speakers' mother tongue practices, and as such, much like a pidgin or Creole language."

These characteristics of BELF remind us of some conventional versions of so-called simple English such as IBL (International Business Language), Globish (Global English), VOA Special English, Basic English, Plain English, etc. even though they are all somewhat different from each other. Yet, some of them have some commonalities. Globish and Special English both list 1,500 words as their limited number of basic words, while Basic English claims 850 words. Plain English doesn't mention the number of words to be used, but rather recommends the use of short sentences for clarity.

The term IBL is a coinage by Fenner (1989), a British linguist, who has described it in the following terms :

> . . . in a European context, IBL is the sort of English a Norwegian would use when trying to communicate with an Italian in Belgium. In other words, it is a lingua franca used between those for whom English is not their native language, but the only common language in which any sort of communication is possible. Its grammar and syntax vary, being modeled on those of the language of the person speaking in each case.

This common language in which communication is possible includes BELF, which is a version of English used as a means of communication among persons who do not speak each other's native language.

BELF is a convenient tool for intercultural business communication, and this convenience is supported by simplicity of study to master and efficiency of use. However, its basic function should be mutual intelligibility for mutually understandable communication between the sender and receiver of the communication. If this basic function were missing from BELF, it would lose its purpose for existence.

BELF can be seen as a pidgin in the absence of a code specifying definitions. A BELF pidgin would end up being something that has evolved and sometimes creates more problems than it solves. For example, in Papua New Guinea over two million people use Tok Pisin, which literally means "Talk Pidgin", an English-based pidgin, as a commercial and administrative language. However, a local pidgin English speaker would not be intelligible to many of us. When he encountered businesspeople coming from the outer world, they would not be able to communicate.

For those who may not know what Tok Pisin is like, let me introduce some examples introduced by Kobayashi (1989) as follows :

- haus kuku （＝house cook） for a kitchen
- haus siku （＝house sick） for a hospital
- glass bilong lukluk （＝glass belong look-look） for a mirror
- man bilong long-way ples （＝man belong long way place） for a foreigner

In a similar vein, we could say that Chinglish, Singlish, Hinglish, Japlish, Spanglish, etc. are all pidgin English if they are unintelligible to native and non-native English speakers as well when pidgin speakers employ an English much different from so-called Standard English.

## II　Possible obstacles to mutual intelligibility

Here are pidgin-like characteristics that would possibly mar mutual intelligibility when BELF is used :

1. Different pronunciations,

2. Different rhetorical styles,

3. Different idiomatic expressions based on the local cultures,

4. Different meanings given to particular words according to localities, and

5. Different positions of the meaning of words on a cultural and business spectrum.

You may call these barriers the pitfalls of BELF. The fact that English is a common language does not always guarantee that it will become easier for people to realize mutual understanding. These pitfalls occur in the use of emails, faxes, letters, phone conversations, and in face-to-face meetings across nations and cultures, even if we use BELF.

### 1. Different pronunciations

When people from different regions in the world speak English, they are usually much influenced by their local tongues as far as sounds are concerned. Moreover, some languages have no same or even similar sounds to each other. For instance, the Japanese have no difference between R and 'L' sounds, and have no sounds like F, V, and TH. Therefore, such expressions can be heard among Japanese speakers of English as "Za (for *'the'*) principle food of the Japanese is lice." or "We are still sinking about your proposal. Please wait whore a while."

Some Indians pronounce "north" as "nord" such as "We will wait for you at Nord Station tomorrow morning." Nigerian businesspersons often say "We will look forward to the fushore development of our mutual business" instead of "the future development." A Philippine man may say, "Here are infor-rumations you have asked us at our last meeting." If you go to Singapore and wish to rent a car, you will hear a typical Singlish such as "Please wait at Kapa (for *'car park'*). Our car is soon coming." If you would rather like to enjoy an MRT train ride, you will need to buy a "fare card" which sounds exactly same as a "Haircut." So, an old saying "So many people, so many minds" also serves to describe people's English pronunciation, and we can say "so many people, so many tongues and mouths."

## 2. Different rhetorical styles

Although we see no major rhetorical differences among European languages that more or less share Greek or Aristotelian logics, we can easily find differences between European languages and Asian languages, for instance :

English    Semitic    Oriental    Romance    Russian
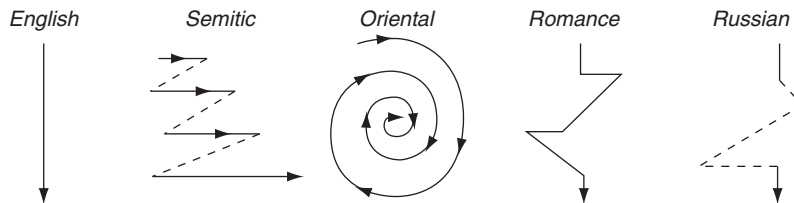
This is the frequently reproduced diagram originally drawn by Kaplan (1966) who analyzed the organization of paragraphs in ESL student essays. Kaplan identified five types of paragraph development for five different ethnic language groups. Kaplan's work suggested that Anglo-European expository essays follow a linear development. In contrast, paragraph development in Semitic languages is based on a series of parallel coordinate clauses. Essays written in Oriental languages use an indirect approach and come to the point only at the end. In Romance languages and in Russian, essays are permitted a degree of digressiveness and extraneous material that would seem excessive to a writer of English.

The Oriental language pattern may be classified as following a roundabout, implication or suggestion pattern, in which a conclusion usually comes at the end, or sometimes even no conclusion comes at all. We can classify this pattern as a rhetoric skipping over the minor premise in a syllogism. This is likely due to a communication style that developed in a homogeneous culture in which it is reasonable to assume that people share a large amount of common knowledge with their counterparts.

Here is a typical example of Japanese business English that many Japanese managers are apt to write or speak :

- A new regulation has started in China against exporting rare earth. I will go to Kazakhstan.

This statement lacks an obvious "cause-and-effect" relationship. A listener or reader will wonder how the two apparently unrelated sentences are connected. No clear-cut explanation or reason is provided for going to Kazakhstan. To a Westerner, it is strange that Japanese people can apparently bridge the gap between a major premise (A new regulation in China against

exporting rare earth) and a conclusion (I will go to Kazakhstan).

Japanese people can easily bridge the gap between major premise and conclusion. People from more heterogeneous cultures like the US might say Japanese people have a special and mysterious talent to figure out the unsaid part or "warrant" when only the "claim" and "data" are given and to connect these claims and data.

People in heterogeneous cultures will have to give the minor premise or the warrant to have their counterparts understand what they want to say, as follows :

- Because there is a new regulation in China against exporting rare earth, I will have to check other suppliers. I have heard that Kazakhstan has an abundant source and I will therefore go there.

This communication follows an implication or suggestion pattern. The following dialogue, exhibiting a spiral or explanation first pattern, shows the response of a Japanese subordinate to his American boss, who has invited him to a BBQ party next Sunday at the boss's home [1] :

- (American Boss) : Why don't you come to our party next Sunday?
  (Japanese subordinate) : We have a memorial service for our relative on that day. So, we're going to have to go to Tokyo. You know, my wife's parents' home is in Tokyo. All the relatives will gather. So, I'm afraid I can't skip it. I'm sorry.

  If he were a Westerner, he would reply in linear or conclusion-first pattern as follows :

- I wish I could, but I have another appointment. Thank you for your inviting us.

## 3. Different idiomatic expressions based on the local cultures

Different idiomatic expressions can be based on the local cultures and customs. They can be identified as possible pitfalls of BELF. There are, for example, colloquial expressions relating to baseball and automobiles in the US, as well as unique expressions peculiar to local languages, cultures, and customs in other countries.

―――――――――――――――

1　I came across this sample of dialogues between an American boss and his Japanese subordinate some twenty years ago in a magazine or a book, but cannot remember its name nor the author's name.

Here are some of the expressions relating to baseball and automobiles in the US[2] :

Baseball :

- Hit singles, not homers—perform steadily, not erratically
- Warm the bench—not be used much (applies to persons)
- Strikeout—failure
- He fanned—he failed to do the task or did it badly
- Bush league (minor league) —not first-rate

Auto :

- Rev up—speed things up
- Put the pedal to the metal—get going faster on the job
- My tank is empty—I'm tired
- Use your headlights—use your eyes
- Shift gears—work harder (or slower)

While the above are examples from an NS (Native Speaker) country, the USA, the following are from an NNS (Non-Native Speaker) country, in this case Singapore :

- I like hot curry very shink (terrific, beyond description)
- You can drop here (you can get our here)
- Big bluff, man, he! (he's just a show-off)
- My name, you write it with three alphabets (letters) not four
- Stop shaking legs and do some work (*Shake legs,* a direct translations from Malay, means to be idle)

These local English examples are classified as Singapoream English or Singlish in *The Story of English* (1992).

## 4. Different meanings given to particular words according to localities

Special meanings are apt to be given to particular words that only local people mutually understand. All of the meanings of such words are quite different from their original meanings in English. These special meanings are not available in standard dictionaries.

Wallraff (2000, p.60) cited what Anne Soukhanov, the American editor of the *Encarta*

─────────────────

2　These samples were given to me by Jeremiah J. Sullivan, an emeritus professor at the University of Washington : personal communication 3 March 2011.

*World English Dictionary,* had explained on the Internet in 1999, "Some English words mean very different things, depending on your country and region. In South Asia, a *hotel* is a restaurant, but in Australia, a *hotel* is an establishment selling alcoholic beverage."

Michael Skapinker (2000, p.11), a columnist for *Financial Times,* also introduced a similar story in his column with the caption of "The tongue twisters," "Although Australian or South African English are generally understood throughout the English speaking world, thousands of their words are not. Ask for directions in South Africa, for example, and you might be told : 'Turn right at the next robot.' This is not an instruction to watch out for a mechanical figure with flashing lights on its head. 'Robot' is South African for traffic light. The South African English dictionary contains 10,000 words that are not used anywhere else."

In Singapore, when the locals say "Let's have lunch at a coffee shop", they don't mean to have some sandwiches with a cup of coffee or English tea at an air-conditioned coffee or tea house, but simply mean to have a quick bite of noodles or fried rice at a local open air food court.

The second case of this category can be found when a foreigner uses English and gives his or her own locally prevailing meanings to an English word, meanings which don't exist in the usual usage of the word. According to Yashiro et al. (2006), the fact that English is a common language does not always guarantee that it will become easier for people to realize mutual understanding. There are unexpected pitfalls in the exchanges of emails, faxes, letters, phones, and in face-to-face meetings across nations and cultures, even if we use the "global language" of English. The following sentences illustrate these points :

- You ought to report the result of your research to Mr. Toyota.
- Please tell Mr. Honda to call me by two o'clock.
- You had better talk this matter over with Mr. Suzuki soon.

The first example is from a discussion between an American manager and his Japanese subordinate over exchanging emails. When the American manager uses this type of expression, with the phrase "ought to" he often receives an unexpected and excessive response from his Japanese subordinate. He finds that the Japanese seems to receive this utterance as a very strong order that must be obeyed by all means, even though the American only intended it to be a simple and friendly proposal.

The second sentence was used in an email by a Japanese businessperson to his American colleague. The American later suggested to his Japanese coworker that it would be far better

to say, "Please ASK Mr. Honda to call me up by two o'clock." He explained that "tell" in this manner sounds like a stern order. The Japanese person had thought it would be a polite expression simply because he used the word "please."

The third expression is often used by Japanese people who believe it to mean something like "wouldn't it be better for you to . . .?" In fact, however, native speakers of English perceive the expression "you had better . . ." as a threat. A safer expression would be "why don't you . . .?"

The speaker in each example probably thought that he and his counterpart had understood each other very well, simply because they had both used English. Through the use of a common language, BELF, they may have erroneously felt relieved to talk with each other so that they could avoid possible misunderstandings.


## 5. Different positions of the meaning of words on a cultural and business spectrum

Different positions of the meaning of words on a spectrum give different meanings depending on local cultures and their business practices and customs. At one end of this language spectrum, a word defines a particular object. At the other end of the spectrum, the word is vague in its reference. Between the two poles, convention or custom exerts a variable effect on the meanings that are attached to words in given situations. The first pole is represented by scientific jargon, whereas the second might be represented by poetic imagery.

We should remember that the same word might have different connotations in other languages.  For example, as often said, the English word "difficult" has a positive connotation that is not present in its equivalent Japanese "muzukashii." The word "difficult" means "difficult but possible" to the Americans, but it means "difficult and impossible" to the Japanese.

In some cultures, particularly those in Asia, persons are reluctant to say a direct and emphatic no, even when they mean it.  So, when a Japanese negotiator, in response to a proposal, says, "That's difficult," he is clearly indicating that the proposal is unacceptable. American persistence in pressing a proposal in this situation would be viewed by the Japanese as overly aggressive and even hostile behavior.

Here is another example. Often, the same word has an entirely different connotation when translated into an Asian language. The Japanese might describe a suggestion or proposal as *mondai,* a problem. The English word "problem" has a negative connotation that is not present in *mondai,* which means simply, "something that will need further study." Before registering a negative emotional reaction to words and phrases, Westerners should consult their interpreter for help in understanding the words' connotations (Engholm, 1991).

People in Indonesia say *besok* to mean tomorrow in their language. However, the time span of this "besok" seems a little longer than the English word "tomorrow," the Japanese word "Asu," or the Chinese "Míngtiān," particularly when Javanese, the largest group of the natives, use the word. It means sometime in the future, later on, etc., not just the next day. Think of a manager who will be waiting in vain for an electronic transfer remittance from Jakarta, which is to reach him *besok,* according to his Indonesian subordinate (Kameda, 1996).

In the Arabic language the equivalent word for tomorrow is reported to be *bokra.* But, again, this word's time span is much longer than its counterparts tomorrow, "asu" in Japanese, and 'Míngtiān' in Chinese. When you hear or read this word *bokra,* it is said that you have to understand it often means at least "in one week's time." Thus, the meanings really reside in people and also cultures, but not in words themselves.

## III　Meanings of words across businesses and cultures

We will now explore the issue of business-based differences, namely different meanings given to business and trade terms such as "delivery," CAD, CIF, etc. International business may be hindered in situations in which two persons (such as a superior and a subordinate, or a merchant and a customer) do not share an understanding of information. This results in obstacles to essential work arising from mistrust, discord, and friction in human relations—either between members of the same organization, or between members of different organizations. If both parties proceed with business even though they unknowingly assign different meanings to some business terms, it is likely that time (and possibly money) will be lost.

For example, the word "delivery" can be easily misunderstood. It can mean "loading of goods on a ship," "moving goods out the door of a factory," or "goods actually reaching a customer." The word "delivery" used in international trade practice is interchangeable with "shipment" unless otherwise specified. However, not everyone who does international business knows this definition.

The trade term CIF means "cost, insurance, and freight," and is generally understood to refer to the price terms, including ocean freight and insurance premium. However, CIF could be misunderstood by a party to mean "cost including freight"—which is actually rendered in international trade as CFR (cost and freight). An important fact here is in both cases CIF and CFR, the seller's delivery responsibility is over when the goods have passed the ship's rail (Incoterms 2000) or when the goods are loaded on board the vessel (Incoterms 2010) at the port of shipment, and all the risk is transferred to buyer after that. In case of CFR, the buyer

must insure the cargo he has purchased. In CFR, the buyer must bear all the risks of loss of or damage to the goods from the time they have been on board the vessel at the port of shipment.

The trade term CIF often causes problems when exporters conclude a contract with Chinese importers for, say, a shipment based on terms of "CIF Shanghai." When a problem such as damage to the contracted goods occurs before they reach Shanghai, the Chinese buyer often files a claim against the damage to the seller. This is wrong. The buyer should be responsible for the damage because the risk was transferred to him when the goods were on board the vessel. The reason for this often-reported problem seems to be caused by a wrong translation of the term CIF into Chinese some decades ago when it was introduced to China. It was translated into 到岸价格 (Dào àn jiàg) which literally means 'cost reaching the final coast (port) of destination', that is, covering all the costs and risks up until the vessel reaches the final port of delivery (Han, 2003).

CAD is also a business term causing confusion to international traders. CAD is often used in Europe for settlements. It means "cash against documents" and is essentially the same as the term "documents against payment" (D/P), namely, the payment should be made in exchange for the documents, including the most important title document, the Bill of Lading. However, there still are some business people who are apt to take CAD as "cash after delivery," which is much more lax term than the former.

As I have explained so far, there is no guarantee that, when decoding the message, the receiver will refer to the same code that the sender used to encode the original message. The receiver often uses his or her own code to decode a received message. This shifted position of a code is often the cause of misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver of a message.

A conflict has often occurred between Japanese traders and their American counterparts on the trade terms used in a contract (Trade & Investment Q&A, JETRO, 2005/01). In particular, the term "FOB New York" has caused misunderstanding. This is because Japanese referred to Incoterms, while the Americans referred to the Revised American Foreign Trade Definitions for the interpretation of the trade terms they used. There are six different definitions of FOB in the Revised American Foreign Trade Definitions, none of which are the equivalent of FOB in Incoterms, regarding the responsibilities and liabilities of both seller and buyer. Therefore, even though both parties use the same abbreviation "FOB," the meaning for each is quite different. This type of misunderstanding shows that the words used for sending and receiving messages represent only a part of the total concept to be communicated.

Suzuki (1978, p.108) compares these kinds of issues with an iceberg as follows :

The tip of an iceberg visible above the ocean is supposed to be about one-seventh of its total volume. The other six-sevenths are hidden under water. The part of reality which can be conceptualized by a word may be regarded as the tip of an iceberg rising above the water . . . . Even if there are two icebergs, A and B, more or less shaped alike above water, it does not necessarily follow, as one can easily understand, that their shapes under the water are also similar to each other.

## IV　Problems hindering mutual intelligibility and possible causes

The possible cause and reason for the above types of problems hindering mutual intelligibility are that both the sender and receiver of communication give different meanings to the same object. Suppose that here are two persons H1 and H2 who have completely different experiences in all their lives. A possible communication process works like the following :
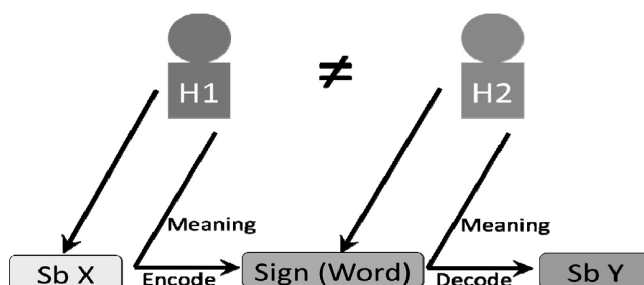


H1 judges SbX as he sees it, and gives meaning to by using a sign (a word) based on his /her experience. Thus, when a person assigns a meaning to a sign (a word), the process is called "encoding." When H2 hears or reads the sign (the word), he/she gives to it his or her own meaning acquired through his or her own experience, and arrives at SbY. This process of deciphering a sign (a word) is called 'decoding.' However, the result of this decoding will not result in equality between SbX and SbY. This is because H2 gives a different reference of his or her own which he/she has acquired through his or her experience, to the sign (the word) he or she has just received and so decoded (Kameda, 2003).

Because of this inconsistency, the following problems may arise when using BELF (Bloch and Starks, 1999) :

• 　Total lack of understanding—zero communications ;

- Distortion of the message ; it is understood only partly, which may lead to major errors and offense ;
- Inappropriate formulation and cultural insensitivity—the content is understood but the message is not presented in a way that is acceptable in terms of etiquette and politeness ;
- Insufficient vocabulary or use of idioms—the speaker knows more or less what to say and how to say it, but a vital linguistic element is missing.

Possible conditions to make the above SbX equal to or nearly equal to SbY so that we can avoid or at least lessen the damage from these problems are as follows :

- The level of shared experience is high, as one can see in the case of close relationships between spouses, twins, parent and child, etc.,
- The sender of a message tries to discard his/her own value judgments and to adjust himself/herself to the judgment yardstick of his/her counterpart.
- The meanings of signs (words, etc.) are required by some codes such as rules, dictionaries, etc.

## V   Suggestions to make managerial use of BELF better

As we have so far observed, international traders tend to use short expressions, such as CIF and FOB, to clarify the distribution of functions, costs, and risks related to the transfer of the goods from seller to buyer. But unfortunately misunderstandings frequently arise with respect to the proper interpretation of these expressions.

In the 1920s, the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris conducted a study on the interpretation of the more important trade terms. This study demonstrated that the terms were understood differently in different countries. Therefore, the outcome of a dispute between seller and buyer often depended on the place where the dispute would be resolved and the applicable law. This, of course, involved juridical risks for the seller or the buyer, which could create serious disputes and adversely affect future business between them (*Guide to Incoterms* 1990).

For this reason, it was considered important to develop rules for the interpretation of the trade terms that the parties to the contract of sale could agree to apply. Incoterms—for international commercial terms—constitute these rules of interpretation. These rules were first published in 1936 and their official title is "International Rules for the Interpretation of Trade

Terms."

In addition to a careful use of Incoterms, the following are some suggestions to make managerial use of BELF better, and to avoid misunderstandings :

## 1. Establish close human relations with business partners.

There is a saying that "successful business communication is 10 percent business and 90 percent human relations." These words should be kept in mind as an important maxim for all international businesspersons. One of the reasons I insist on the importance of interpersonal relationships between business people across cultures is because, as general semanticists claim, "meanings resides in people, not in words." The more one becomes friendly with a person, the more one comes to understand his or her words and phrases, and a shared perception can be achieved.

## 2. Try to put oneself in the other's position.

Generally speaking, our understanding of what constitutes a "fact" is highly influenced by images formed by perceptions acquired through education and experience within our own cultural spheres. Before seeing empirical facts as they really are, we are apt to form an image of what is seen through filtered lenses. When we communicate with other people in BELF, we should take off our own colored sunglasses and try to see the world from the perspective of others. If businesspeople are empathetic with their foreign counterparts, the message of both will become easier to understand. In communicating empathetically across businesses and cultures, the speaker should assume that the receiver of the message might have different images of the facts being communicated. The speaker should therefore empathetically expand the message by providing additional information to ensure that the speaker's view is shared by the listener.

## 3. Practice a standardized vocabulary system within and between companies.

It would be practical and effective as well for managers to design a rulebook or a dictionary to specify the meanings of the words used or to be used. It binds both parties such as sellers and buyers, bosses and subordinates, headquarters and subsidiaries to use the required or recommended definitions of words and phrases in their business dealings. By establishing such a code or convention to be observed, managers can assure themselves and their foreign counterparts of a more robust and shared understanding of the business terms in BELF.

A code may be included in a contract, which often starts with definitions of the terms

used in the contract. Or, it may be in the form of dictionary such as the *Prisoners of War Dictionary* designed by the U.S. State Department in the early 1970s. Mitsubishi Corporation, the largest trading house in Japan, also has developed the *MC Dictionary* and distributes copies among its foreign workers at their overseas offices. The *MC Dictionary* consists of many words and terms the Mitsubishi people often use exclusively inside the company and which are unknown to outsiders.

# Conclusion

In this paper I have thoroughly examined and discussed the question of intelligibility of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) when it is used by people having both different business aims and cultural backgrounds. The question is involved with the complex issues related to its relationship to cross-cultural communication. First, I soughtto give a definition and also significance of BELF by introducing its three characteristics. Then, I analyzed possible obstacles to mutual intelligibility when business people try to communicate with each other across borders of nations, cultures, and languages. I also introduced some actual cases in which words and expressions　cause problems because of the differences of meanings of words across businesses and cultures.

I assessed the problems hindering mutual intelligibility and also possible causes. When people from different cultural backgrounds use English for communication, it is quite possible that the meanings of the English words used are different. In conclusion I presented three suggestions to make managerial use of BELF better. They are (1) to establish close human relations with business partners, (2) to try to put oneself in the other's position, and (3) to develop and practice a standardized vocabulary system within and between companies.

I firmly believe that BELF is workable as long as it does not develop as a pidgin. It must emerge from careful thought and practice, as well as agreed-upon rules, rather than emerging haphazardly. I think a BELF pidgin that evolves over time might restrict BELF users to the BELF region. However, a BELF that is imposed or recommended by some authority (government ; public institution such as International Chamber of Commerce, which sets rules such as the Incoterms ; university ; corporate HQ etc.) would work outside the region.

### References
Berlo, D. K. (1960), *The Process of Communication,* Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. San Francisco, p.131.
Bloch, B. & D. Starks (1999), The many facets of English : intra-language variations and its implications for international business, *Corporate Communications : An International Journal,* Vol.4, No.2, p.84.

Engholm, C. (1991), *When Business East Meets Business West : The Guide to Practice and Progotocol in the Pacific Rim,* John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, p.121.

Fenner, A. (1989), "Lingua Anglica : the emergence of International Business English", *Language International,* Vol.2 No.1, p.14.

Han, J. (2003), *Chugoku Boeki Torihikihou no Genjo to Kadai [The status quo and some issues of the Chinese Trade Law],* Nunoi Publishing Co., Ltd., Tokyo, p.141.

Kameda, N. (1996), *Business Communication toward Transnationalism : The Significance of Cross-Cultural Business English and Its Role,* Kindai Bungeisha Co., Ltd., Tokyo, p.145.

Kameda, N. (2003), *Kokusai Bijinesu Komyunikeishon no Kenkyu (The Study of International Business Communication),* Bunshindo Co., Ltd., Tokyo, pp.43−44.

Kankaanranta, A., & Planken, B. (2010), "BELF Competence as Business Knowledge of Internationally Operating Business Professionals", *Journal of Business Communication,* Vol.47, No.4, pp.392.

Kaplan, R. B. (1966), "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education", *Language Learning* 16, pp.1−20.

Kobayashi, M. (1989), *Fukugou Minzoku Shakai To Gengo Mondai [Complex racial societies and language problems],* Taishukan Shoten Co., Ltd. Tokyo, p.56.

McCrum, R., Cran, W. and R. MacNeil (1992), *The Story of English,* new rev ed., Faber and Faber Limited and BBC Books, London, p.338.

Ramburg, J. (1991), *Guide to Incoterms 1990,* ICC Publishing S. A., International Chamber of Commerce, Paris, p.8.

Suzuki, T. (1978), *Words in Context,* Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, p.108.

Trade & Investment Q & A, JETRO, 2005/01, Retrieved January 25, 2007, from
http : //www.jetro.go.jp/biz/world/n_america/us/qa_02/04 A−010926

Wallraff, B. (2000), "What Global Language", *The Atlantic Monthly,* November, p.60.

Skapinker, M. (2000), "The tongue twisters", *Financial Times,* December 28, p.11.

Yashiro, K. et al. (2006), *Cross-Cultural Training : Living in the Borderless Society,* Sanshusha, Tokyo, pp.14−15. I have slightly modified each sentence such as names of persons and 'should' to 'ought to'.