



# Needs analysis of English for mechanical engineers in Vietnamese context

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**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/10063/6973>

**Date:** 2018

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## Abstract:

This study examines the English language needs of mechanical engineers in Vietnam. A high demand for proficiency in English is increasing in ASEAN countries, including Vietnam. Vietnam in general and the field of mechanical engineering, in particular, attracts many foreign investors and multinational organisations and this creates plurilingual and pluricultural workplaces where English is used as a lingua franca.

Drawing on sociolinguistic theory, this pragmatic mixed method needs analysis study examines the English language communication needs of Vietnamese mechanical engineers at four workplaces in Vietnam. It investigates the kinds of real-world English skills required by Vietnamese mechanical engineers to function effectively in the workplace, the social factors that affect the use of English and the effects of breakdown issues in communication in English. It draws on needs analysis models which have evolved from English Specific Purposes, including those devised by Munby (1978) and more recently by The Common European Framework (CEF) Professional Profiles to establish key communicative events. To answer the study's research questions about language use for practical purposes in the lingua franca, plurilingual and pluricultural workplace it also borrows from the theoretically eclectic model of the Wellington Workplace Project, a project grounded in the first language context (L1), and other more sociological studies of the relationship of language and power in international workplaces.

The study employed questionnaire, semi-structured interview and observation for data collection. Questionnaires were completed by 22 managers of mechanical engineers and 71 professional mechanical engineers. Based on the initial questionnaire analysis, 12 participants from the two groups took part in a follow-up semi-structured interviews. Observations in four worksites provided rich data about the real-world use of English.

The findings indicated a high frequency of English language use and the range of real-world English re Vietnamese mechanical engineers for a range of communicative events including ordering spare parts, interpreting technical drawing and bidding for contracts. Mechanical engineers needed plurilingual and pluricultural competence to negotiate a range of accent, intonation and idiom in the lingua franca and plurilingual context. Minimal use of functional occupational language was sometimes sufficient for communication for the purpose of 'getting things done', but not always. Communication issues had fin consequences for the company, sometimes disastrous ones. Looking at the findings through the lens of communication issues helped to reveal some of the underlying power relationships in the workplace a negative impacts on workplace solidarity.

These findings demonstrate the urgency of the need for increased English language skills for mechanic engineers in Vietnam and for the wider economy of Vietnam. English was found to function as a source power' and in a wider implication this revealed a hidden or 'shadow' power structure within the workp affected by English language proficiency. People were empowered when they possessed a good level o which could help them save not only their own face but also the face of the company.

More positively adaptive communicative strategies helped both mechanical engineers and their manag communication issues. Adapting language for the purpose of 'getting things done' in turn interacted wi high solidarity relationships. There was arguably an acceptance of a level of rudeness or abruptness in workplace contexts. A high tolerance for the need to negotiate meaning in what could be described as n lingua franca but also a 'poor English' workplace context was sometimes observed. This tolerance som not always extended to the mobility of plurilingual repertoires such as code-switching, and some code into Vietnamese was also observed on the part of long-term foreign managers. Humour also emerged a dimension of high solidarity longer-term workplace relationships between Vietnamese mechanical eng and foreign managers, even when all parties had limited English.

The study argues that understanding why mechanical engineers needed specific types of English and th the social dimensions of this language could help lessen issues in communication. The consequences c miscommunication should be addressed in the English-language training process. Students should be strategically prepared to meet the the high communication demands of the lingua franca and pluriling workplace which requires both English for technical communication and English for social communica

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