

# **EFFECT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH ON EMPLOYEES' PROMOTIONS IN CELLULAR COMPANIES OF PAKISTAN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The current study aims at ascertaining the effect of communicative competence on employees' promotion in cellular companies of Pakistan. Linguistically Pakistan is a complex society. Though Urdu is mostly used for verbal interaction, the trend of speaking English is increasing making competence in English a pre requisite in almost all the managerial level positions in corporate sector but there is a scarcity of research in this area. To study this trend, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used, using questionnaire and interviews as research tools. The analysis of the questionnaire and interviews, exercised on all the cellular companies of Pakistan indicates a strong relationship between employees' communicative competence and their promotion through ranks. More specifically, the findings shows that the communicative competence of the employee is a strong predictor of the employee' promotion through ranks.*

**Keywords:** *Communicative Competence; Employees' Promotion; Functional English*

## **INTRODUCTION**

English has become the lingua franca for people involved in trade and commerce with the emergence of global multinational corporate culture due to technological advancement, satellite links, Emails and the latest computer applications (Feely & Harzing, 2003). Competencies, on the other hand, in corporate sector are assessed and used in recruitment interviews and in the appraisals used for employees' promotions. One of the competencies is employee's ability to communicate in English. Knowing English is thus, considered as one of the cornerstones of success in the corporate sector. Now the role of language in most of the multinational organizations is not seen as simply a technical issue; rather due consideration is given to it at the time of appointment and promotions of the individuals. However, in career research, until recently, there is a dearth of academic investigations. In the world of global business on the other hand, companies are devising their language strategies and choosing their language as a medium of interaction and many companies prefer English as their corporate language.

Global corporate culture has influenced Pakistani corporate sector as well. Though Urdu is mostly used for verbal interaction, and the trend of English speaking is increasing, competence in English is a pre requisite in almost all the managerial level positions. Not only the recruitment interviews have a segment for assessing communicative competence but employees' promotions

through ranks are also decided on the bases of their competence in English. Due to this growing demand of the communicatively competent employees in English in industry and the corporate world, universities have introduced courses such as Technical English, Functional English, Business English and Oral communication in English even at the undergraduate level. A four years bachelor's degree now includes these as compulsory subjects both for Business and Engineering degrees.

In spite of all these changes in the corporate culture and the subsequent changes in the curriculum, there is still a lack of research in this area in Pakistan; no analysis has been done so far to find out the current trend. The current study is the analysis of the effect of communicative competence in English on employees' promotions. However for analysis, only the employees at the managerial level of the cellular companies from telecom sector of Islamabad region have been selected. Yet another reason of this research is increasing contribution of the telecommunication sector in almost all the fields of life in Pakistan. Due to this, there has been a growing trend of research being carried out in this area. The researchers have been interested to see the impact of telecommunication on society, economy, management, business and vice versa. Researchers, in other words, from the fields of social sciences, management sciences, finance and economy have been conducting research in their respective fields in relation to telecom sector. The researcher believes that the role of language in career enhancement is significant and to have a deep insight into the topic, the point of view of both organization and the employees is studied. This has enabled to see actual impact of communicative competence on employees' promotions.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Organizations these days have employees of diverse skills and knowledge; the organizations, which are able to coordinate these skills, outperform those which lack coordination. Coordination of these skills requires communication through a language (Lagerstrom & Andersson, 2003). Luo and Shenkar (2006) also presented the idea of business in multi-cultural setting, with headquarters operating in non-native country. The managers in such settings are required to have a language choice, for purpose of balancing international integration with local adaptation. In organizations relationship grows out of effective communication while effective relationship is essential for the survival of organizations (Harris & Nelson, 2008). Similarly Communication has a relationship with global team performance as well. Global team characteristics include demography, skill and culture while language is an essential component of culture (Chen, Gulyukins & Choi, 2006). Marschan (1997) finds that staff with good language expertise is able to develop strong personal links within the multinational organization (Tsui & Tollefson 2008) signify the perception of the policy makers regarding English language as multinational tool that helps in achieving national goals and serves as central resource for personal development.

Geffner (1998) considers competence in English as a marketable skill at the workplace, necessary to cope up with the speedy technological advancement. With more sophisticated communication tools, information is transmitted and utilized at a speed that was unimaginable only a few years ago and the future seems to be even more unimaginable. Mastery over Business English thus adds one more skill to individual's resume. Muukati (2008) talks about necessity of competence in language for certain positions. Insufficient competence in language may hamper a person's progression to a higher level position. Trimborn (2010) also considers English as a key language of the Internet; at least a basic know how of English is a pre requisite to carry out online business. Talbot (2009) almost presents similar idea because of the fact that it is not only the language of commercial communication but also a language used for trade and acquisition of knowledge. Luo and Shekar (2006) also point out that English language has acquired the position of lingua franca because of multinational corporations working across globe dealing with different cultures and most of time not sharing the language, for example the language of Company's Headquarter.

This is true of the telecommunication sector industry working in Pakistan and all have their headquarters in non-native countries. The reason is the more you grow at the upper tier of the management the more is the need for competence in English. Rao and Tombs (2010) view the relationship between language proficiency and employability with a different angle. They view expertise in English language particularly a specific accent of English language as a matter of social distinctiveness and characterization. Related to language translation in international business Harzing and Feely (2008) presented a model according to which failure to communicate effectively may result in anxiety, mistrust and uncertainty that at times produce misattribution and differences. Here it is pertinent to discuss the notion of communicative competence as well. The concept of communicative competence initially started with Chomsky (1965) who regarded competence as the knowledge of the rule of grammar as well as the linguistic knowledge of the language user. Hymes (1972) on the other hand defined communicative competence as a broader term associating it not only with the knowledge of the grammatical rules or linguistics as such but the appropriate use of language.

Light's (1989) proposed definition suggests communicative competence as a "relative and dynamic, interpersonal construct based on functionality and adequacy of communication and sufficiency of knowledge, judgment and skill in four interrelated areas comprises linguistic competence, operational competence, social competence and strategic competence. Linguistic and operational competencies refer to knowledge and skills in the use of the tools of communication; social and strategic competencies reflect function knowledge in interaction". Spitzberg (1988) as cited by Lane, defines the term as "the ability to interact well with others" (p.68). He explains, "the term 'well' refers to accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness and appropriateness (68)." Communicative competence in a nutshell is a person's capabilities in

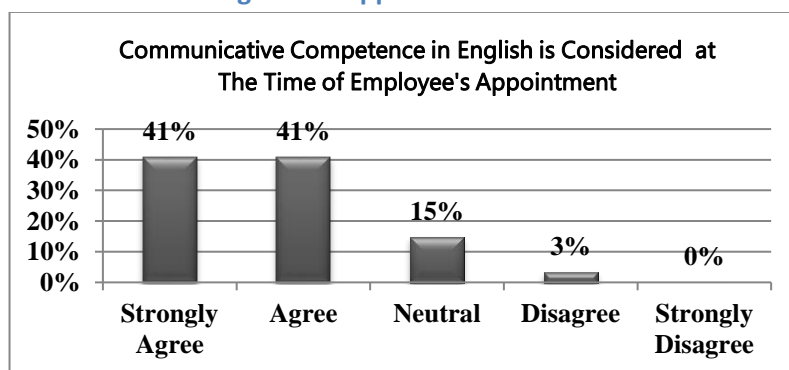
terms of tacit knowledge and capabilities for language usage. For the current study, the communicative competence is taken as appropriate use of language.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used for the effective and reliable results of the study. For quantitative analysis, a questionnaire was designed and the results were subsequently analyzed through tabulated as well as graphical illustration using MS Excel. The questionnaire was administered both to the professionals working in the human resource department as well as in the other departments such as marketing, finance, management, etc. of the mobile phone companies in Islamabad region. In order to validate the data, semi structured interviews were also conducted from the experts in the relevant fields. These experts include human resource managers and business managers. As described earlier, study was carried out in the five cellular companies operating in Pakistan. However, the sample was collected only from Islamabad region because of the fact that the major head offices of these cellular companies are located in Islamabad. Secondly regional offices located in different provincial capitals are not included due a different linguistic scenario in each province as employees tend to use regional languages along with the official and national languages. A total 250 questionnaires were distributed among these cellular companies out of which 176 were returned.

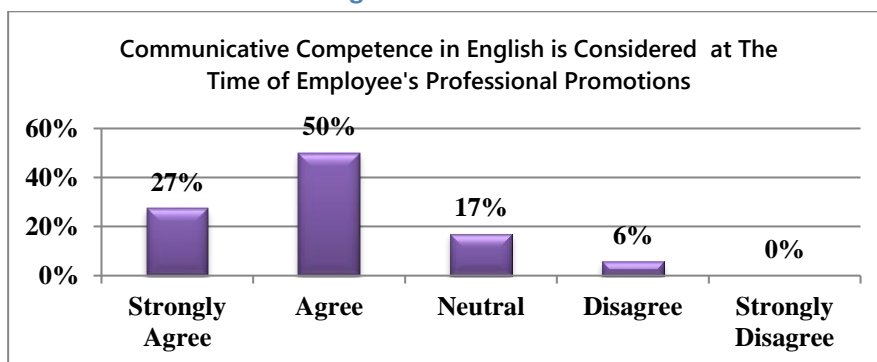
As discussed before that in order to validate the data and also to have an in depth and detailed analyses of the study, semi structure interviews were conducted from numerous experts in the fields. These people included managers, assistant managers, and directors of the studied cellular companies. Questionnaire was administered in terms of the selected organizations the detailed analysis are undertaken based on departments. In this case, the responses of the HR department of all the organizations are analyzed separately. Similarly, all other departments such as marketing, management and finance are grouped in one category and investigated together. Both of these HR responses and the responses of the other departments were then analyzed accumulatively. Finally, an accumulative analysis of all the department of all the organization is done comprehensively. For current research paper, only the accumulative analysis of all the cellular companies is used.

### English for Appointments



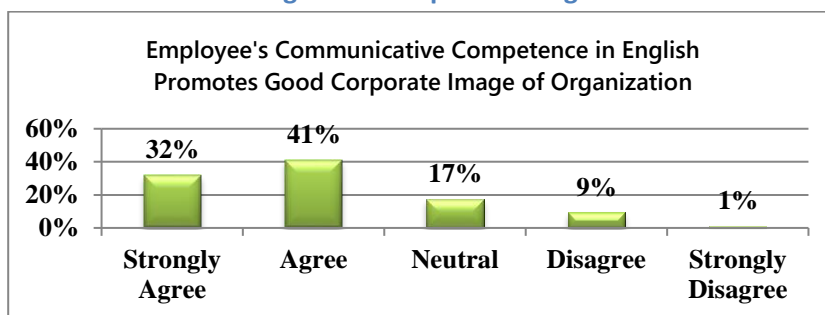
To the question of whether CCE is considered at the time of employees' appointment 41 % of the participants strongly agreed while similar number i.e. 41 % agreed. Considering the above analysis, it may be stated that CCE is considered at time of employees' appointment. Response rate in accumulative by all the cellular companies has been 82 % which is a considerable percentage. The interviews responses have also been unanimous for this question; majority of the respondents stated that CCE is considered at time of employee's appointment. However, there is no system in place to formally assess the candidate's English. The HR manager of Zong on the other hand, when asked, replied that Zong is in process of devising strategy to gauge a candidate's competence in English at the time of appointment.

#### English for Promotion



To the question of whether CCE is considered at the time of employees' professional promotion, 27 % of participants strongly agreed while 50 % agreed. To this question, 17 % of the participants remained neutral while 6 % showed disagreement. The accumulative analysis, hence clearly suggests that CCE is an important factor that is considered at the time of employees' promotion. Regarding this, when asked from the Managers working in different organizations, almost all of them were of the view that CCE of the employees is considered at the time of employees' promotion. Although there is no system in place for the assessment of the employee's CCE as such, the factor of competence in English is considered based on general observation.

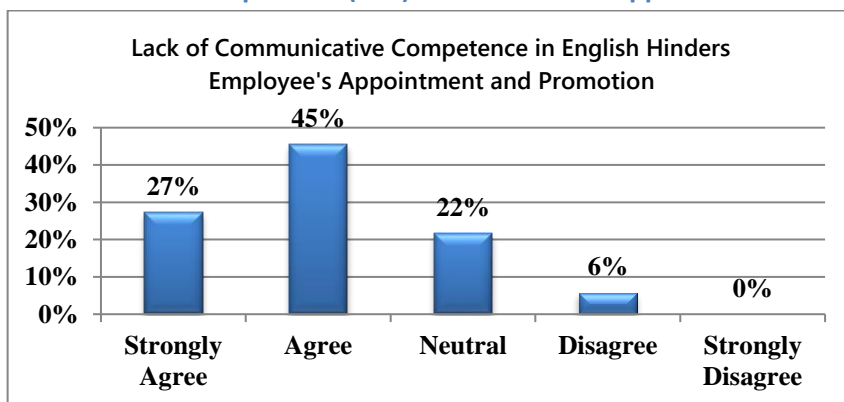
#### English for Corporate Image



32 % of the respondents strongly agreed and 41% agreed that CCE of the employees plays its role for the image building of organization. For this question, 17 % respondents remained neutral while 9 % showed disagreement and 1% strong disagreement. The response rate in agreement

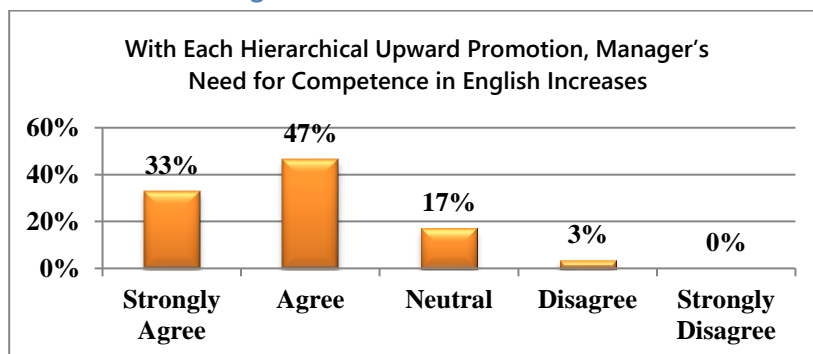
remained to be 73 %. This is low as compared to the response rate for the relationship between English and other reasons. This might be because of the fact that the image of the organization is dependent upon number of other factors especially services provided by organization. However, the response rate still indicates a strong relationship between English and the image of the organizations. In this regards when asked during the interviews, majority of the respondents stated that image of the organization is dependent upon a number of factors; however in the departments such as marketing and customer care, it does have its effect on the image building as well.

#### Lack of Communicative Competence (CCE) as Hindrance in Appointment and Promotion



Yet another angle to see the relationship between CCE and employees' appointment and promotion is whether lack CCE hinders them or not. The overall response rate in this case also shows that there is a strong relationship between employee's promotion and CCE. Majority of the respondents i.e. 72% from all the organizations agreed that lack of CCE hinders a person's appointment and promotion. This further strengthens the proposition of link between promotion and employees' competence in English.

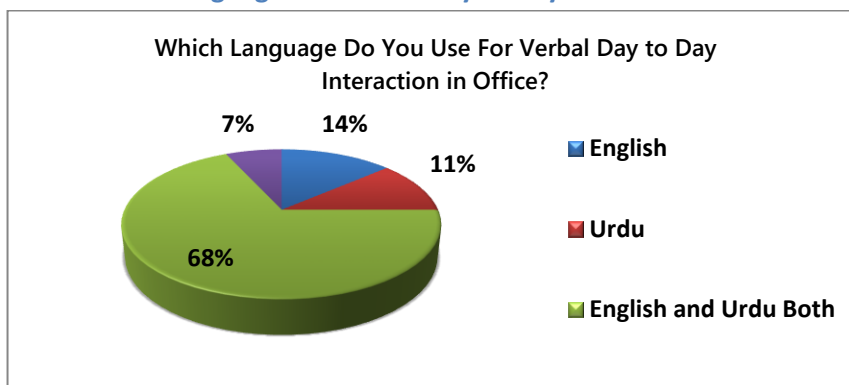
#### Managers' Need for CCE for Promotion



As discussed in the literature review that organizations prefer employees with competence in English because of the requirement especially at the upper level of management. Considering this factor in mind, this question was designed to assess the need for English at the higher tier of management and subsequently its relationship with promotion.

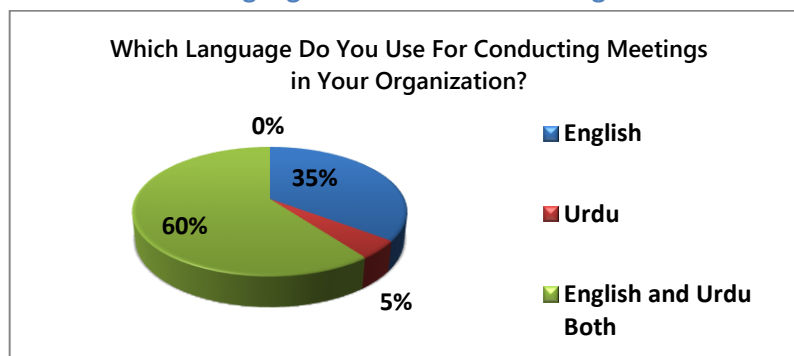
Related to this, 33 % of the employees strongly agreed that with each hierarchical upward promotion, manager's need for competence in English also increases. 47 % of the respondents agreed to this question while 17 % remained neutral. To this question 3 % participants disagreed while no respondents disagreed. During the interviews, all the respondents showed a strong consensus. However, this question was specially asked from Director Marketing of Zong, who is at a strategic level position and is in close contact with the nonnative executive managers. His reply was that expertise in English at times at higher level of management becomes unavoidable, as interaction is impossible without it.

#### Language Preference day to Day Interaction



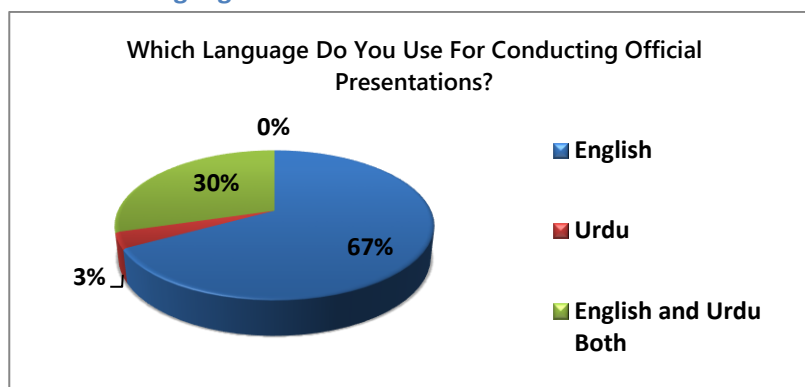
Having discussed the analysis of the relationship between CCE and employee's competence in English, in this section the analysis will be done of the use of English in organization for different purposes. The Accumulative analysis for the use of English in terms of organization is almost similar to the analysis of department. In organization, 14 % of the participants replied that they use English for day-to-day interaction 11 % replied that they use Urdu while 68 % of the respondent stated that they use English and Urdu both. For this purpose 7 % replied that they use English, Urdu and regional languages simultaneously for the purpose. The analysis in this case clearly depicts that, in cellular companies, even for unofficial daily interactions also, 89 % of the respondents use English sometimes unaided and sometimes simultaneously with Urdu and regional languages.

#### Language Preference for Meetings



As discussed before that just as the purpose of interaction gets formal, the use of English also increases. In this case of meetings also, the use of English increases just as the purpose changes from interaction to meeting and finally from meeting to official presentation. If we consider the use of only English, we find that there is a sizeable difference between the daily interactions and meetings. For daily interaction, 14 % replied that they use only English while for meetings, for the accumulative of the organization, 35 % responded that they use only English.

#### Language Preference for Official Presentations



The last question related to the use of language was for official presentation. For this purpose, 67 % responded that they use English while 3 % replied for the use of Urdu. In this case, 30 % respondents replied that they use English and Urdu both while no respondents replied that they use English, Urdu and regional languages. For official presentation, English in the case of organization has been the main language to be used. The overall response rate in this case for English has been 97 %. This clearly shows that for more official matters in organization, involving higher tier of management, CCE becomes almost essential.

## CONCLUSION

English language is an important element of Human Resource operations of cellular companies in Pakistan especially for the managers. This is because of the fact that at the managerial positions, organizational decisions, policies, and instructions are implemented after having been made at the headquarters located outside Pakistan. Language is thus considered as one of key competencies at the time of promotions and appointments of employees. However, currently there is no process in place to assess the language of the candidate through linguistic parameters. Selection is done on the basis of general observation. Similarly, employees' competence in English is considered at the time of promotion and lack of CCE might hinder their promotion. Employees, just as they grow further with their ranks through promotions, require to communicate more in English. They have to engage in multiple formal and informal ways of interactions such as meetings and presentations. Similarly, they have to have more interactions with the bosses who at times are non native. Use of English in this case becomes unavoidable. Moreover, in case if the manager/employee lacks CCE, there are chances of his promotion to be obstructed. Moreover, a manager



with technical expertise and better CCE is preferred over manager with same technical expertise but less CCE.

Furthermore, employees with better communication skills in English are preferred in the organization because it helps building the image. Employees with better CCE are specially preferred in marketing and customer care department where employees have a direct interaction with the Customers. English is used for almost all official purposes in these cellular companies. However, just as the function becomes more formal involving higher level of hierarchy, there is an increased use of English as well and so the employees with better CCE are preferred for promotions.

### **Recommendations**

Having concluded the thesis, following recommendations are made. These recommendations are based on the overall findings and analysis of the empirical data gathered.

- As discussed before that appointments and promotions are done on the basis of general observation considering the CCE of Employees. However, there is no suitable system in place in any of cellular companies to gauge the CCE of the employees at the time of appointments and promotions. These cellular companies need to establish a system for this purpose.
- It has also been observed that in the performance appraisal of competencies for promotion, there is no separate segment for competence in English though it is an important factor considered at the time of promotion. The cellular companies must include this aspect in the appraisal.
- At the policy making level or at the strategic level, the expectation regarding the CCE of the employees, at times, is observed to be higher than the expectation of the employees at the other departments that is the HR department expects more from the employees in terms of their competence in English. The HR department, therefore must communicate their exact level of expectation regarding employees' competence in English.
- Employees are trained on various technical aspects of their profession; however, there is no training given for the improvement of CCE. A number of employees who are technically sound, tend to have less chances of promotion. The cellular companies must also carry out training programmes for improvement of CCE of the employees. Similarly, the cellular companies must hire experts from the field of English language and linguistics to be placed in HR department to give input during the appointment, promotion and training of the employees.

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