NEEDS ANALYSIS OF THE IMPORTANT COMMUNICATIVE FEATURES AT DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY

Fenty L. Siregar

De La Salle University-Manila

ABSTRACT

Article analyzed the needs of communicative competence and gather information on the features of communicative competence that are believed to be important by selected foreign graduate students studying at DLSU. The features consist of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, and intercultural competences. Data were obtained by giving questionnaire to 33 foreign students, consisting of 11 male and 22 females and were analyzed qualitatively. The findings suggest that all features of communicative competence are crucial. In addition, the linguistic competence and strategic competence are considered to be the most essential features of the communicative competence. It can be concluded that the foreign graduate students learn English to achieve their communicative competence and it is used to communicate among students.

Keywords: communication, linguistic, communicative competence, communicative features

ABSTRAK

Artikel menganalisis kebutuhan kompetensi komunikatif dan mengumpulkan informasi tentang fitur kompetensi komunikatif yang dianggap penting bagi sejumlah mahasiswa asing yang mengikuti program master dan doktor di DLSU Manila, Filipina. Fitur kompetensi komunikatif terdiri dari kompetensi linguistik, sosiolinguistik, wacana, trategis, dan antar budaya. Data diambil dengan memberikan kuesioner kepada 33 mahasiswa asing yang terdiri dari 11 pria dan 22 wanita, dan dianalisis secara kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa semua fitur komptensi komunikatif adalah penting. Di samping itu, kompetensi linguistik dan strategis juga dianggap fitur yang sangat penting dari kompetensi komunikatif. Disimpulkan, mahasiwa asing belajar bahasa Inggris guna mencapai kompetensi komunikatif dan untuk berkomunikasi dengan sesama mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: komunikasi, linguistik, kompetensi komunikatif, fitur komunikatif

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process in which there is an action of attributing a meaning to an object, event, situation, or behaviour (Irving, 1984). Moreover, a real communication consists of two essential needs: namely, functional needs or the desire to convey messages without misunderstanding, to carry our transaction efficiently; and social needs or the desire to use the language which is socially acceptable and enables the learner to integrate satisfaction with the second language community (Littlewood, 1984). In addition, intercultural communication requires one to have the ability to compose a message that not only crosses the language boundary but also culture differences. Therefore, communicating in a foreign language might be problematic for foreign language learners, especially for those who study aboard because when they attempt to communicate inside the class or in the society, they are required to use the language that is not only structurally correct but also has a socially appropriate meaning in social interactions.

The appropriateness of a language closely relates with communicative competence. In other words, there is a need to gain communicative competence to successfully send an intended message. With regards to communicative competence, it can be defined as the learner's L2 ability to use the language system appropriately in any circumstances that regard to the function and the varieties of language as well as shared socio cultural supposition (Mora, 2006). According to Canale and Swain (1983), communicative competence consists of four components; linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. First, linguistic competence concerns how to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language. Second, sociolinguistic competence deals with how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. Third, discourse competence concerns how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole. Fourth, strategic competence is about how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language in context.

Fatt (1991) studied the importance of communicative competence for university students in Singapore. He found that even though university graduates are structurally competent in English when they entered the job market, most of them soon found themselves communicatively incompetent because they have no other features of communicative competence, such as sociolinguistic competence or discourse competence. In addition, Kasper and Kellerman (1990, as cited in Nunn, 2005) stated that foreign language learners should develop strategic competence since it has already been highlighted as an important aspect of "communicative competence" and also an inevitably worthy mean required for intercultural communication.

Furthermore, according to Cortazzi and Jin (1999) since English now has a status as a lingua franca, the communicative competence should no longer be composed only of four elements but it should include intercultural competence as the fifth element. Intercultural competence is the ability to negotiate meaning between cultures. That ability itself consists of four elements: "1. Intercultural knowledge or the ability to see the differences between the relevant cultures, 2. Intercultural understanding or the ability to perceive the situation from the perspective of the other cultures, 3. Intercultural appreciation or the ability to appreciate the unfamiliar behaviour in its cultural context, 4. Intercultural action competence or the ability to use one's knowledge for solving problem" (Intemann, 2006:1). Moreover, should a foreign language learner of English want to truly become inter culturally competent, they should be exposed to non-native varieties of English since according to writers in the fields of World Englishes (WE) such as Kachru, Rajagopalan, and Widdowson (as cited in Cortazzi & Jin, 1999) English is no longer "owned" by any particular culture but it belongs to the world at large (p. 198). Subsequently, a wide array of Englishes are spoken and used worldwide and it cannot be assumed that the knowledge of American or British culture will be relevant in many international

contexts. In other words, knowing the cultures of traditional bases of English is not enough for they also need to be aware of varieties of English. On top of that, David Crystal (1997) states that currently numerous countries employ English as their official language resulting in more numbers of non-native speakers of English than the native speakers of English. This suggests that it is important for English foreign learners to be familiar with the non-native varieties of English because there may be more chances to engage in English communication with non-native speakers of English than with native speakers.

De La Salle University has numerous master and doctoral foreign graduate students who come from different Asian countries: namely, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Taiwan. In order to be able to communicate and socialize with their classmates from different countries and join classes that employ English as the medium of instruction, those foreign students are required to be able to send messages that can traverse culture. In other words, they have to gain communicative competence so that they can conduct an intercultural communication well without having a communication breakdown. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the communicative competence need of selected foreign graduate students at De La Salle University and to gather information about what features of communicative competence are believed to be important by the students. Moreover, this study may lead to the following benefits, such as the development of students' awareness that communicative competence of English is important for pursuing master's and doctoral degree and the development of students' awareness that there are different types of English's in the world.

DISCUSSION

Methodology

Participants

A total of 33 foreign graduate students participated in this study- 11 of them were males and 22 were females. The students came from six different countries in Asia: namely, Thailand, Myanmar, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Their average age was between 23 and 52. They were either pursuing their master's degree or doctoral degrees at De La Salle University.

Instrument

In order to gain data about what features of communicative competence are believed to be important by selected foreign graduate students studying at DLSU, I employed a two- page questionnaire. The questionnaire (see appendix) consisted of two sections: namely, profile of the respondents, features of communicative competence and the varieties of English.

Data Gathering Procedure

Need analysis questionnaires were distributed in two weeks to selected foreign graduate students. It was done from 10 March 2007 until 24 March 2007. Each respondent took about 10 to 15 minutes to answer the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

To answer the research question about what features of communicative competence are believed to be important by selected foreign graduate students studying at DLSU, five features of communicative competence, namely, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse

competence, strategic competence and intercultural competence were included in the questionnaire. Also, some information about varieties of English was included to support the data of intercultural competence. In addition, all data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using the theoretical review mentioned in the introduction.

Statistical Treatment

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed and coded. The scores ranged from 1 to 4. Thus, the strongly agree statement would be 4, agree statement would be 3, disagree would be 2, and strongly disagree would be 1. The statistical analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 presents the graduate foreign students' opinion about what features of communicative competence are important for intercultural communication. The mean score of each competence reveals that the students believe that all features of communicative competence included in the questionnaire are important. Moreover, linguistic competence and strategic competence are chosen as the most important features. Their average scores that nearly reach 3.4 suggest students' belief of the crucial role of linguistic competence and strategic competence for intercultural communication. According to Nunn (2005), it is crucial to acquire linguistic competence in any language learning since every communication requires linguistic competence. In addition, having strategic competence will be beneficial for one who has limited resources of linguistic competence to keep his or her conversation going well (Mariani, 1994). In other words, strategic competence plays an important role in communication as it can make possible the person who is less competent in linguistic competence to understand or be understood by his or her speaking partner. Furthermore, the fact that three features out of four features of intercultural competence: namely, intercultural knowledge, intercultural understanding, intercultural action competence attain at least 3 for their mean scores and only one feature, intercultural appreciation, gains a little lower than 3 suggests that the respondents agree with Cortazzi and Jin (1999) that state intercultural competence is essential for intercultural communication.
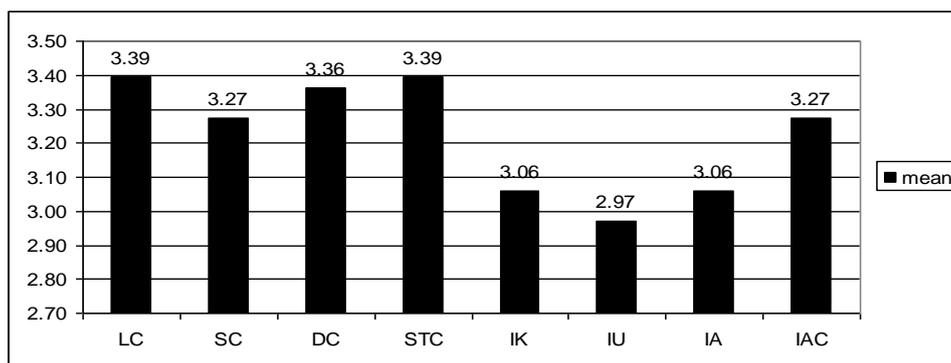

Figure 1 Communicative Competence

Figure 2 shows the awareness of selected foreign graduate students of varieties of English. It can be noted that they are aware that British English and American English are not the only Englishes (English varieties that are available). Slightly over 65% of the students agree and a little higher than 20% of the students strongly agree that there are other varieties of English, such as Philippine English, Singapore English, Malaysia English, and Indian English. On the other hand, only ten percent of the students seem to have less awareness of varieties of English.
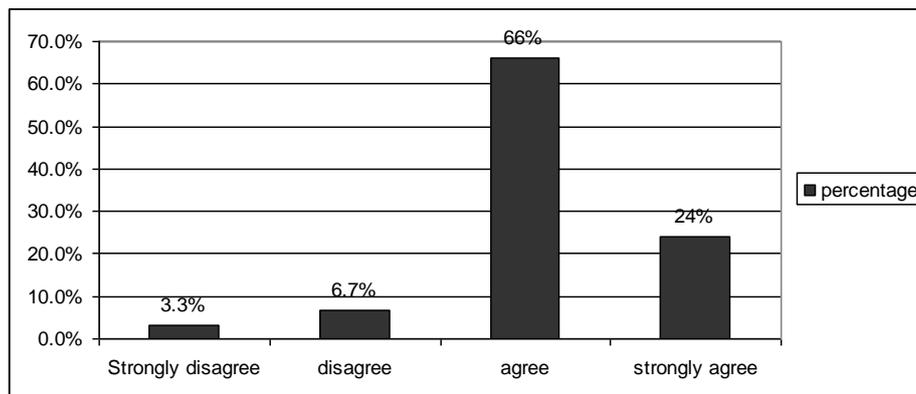
Figure 2 Awareness of Varieties of English (AE)

Crystal (1997:22) states that "the speed with which a global language scenario has arisen is truly remarkable". Currently, there are more than 750 million EFL speakers and there are only 375 million native speakers of English and 375 million who speak English as their second language. In other words, there is a big possibility that EFL speakers might have more chances to engage in English communication with non-native speakers of English than with native speakers of English. Figure 3 presents students' awareness of the situation mentioned above by Crystal. It can be seen that slightly over 45 % of the students show their agreement of the necessity of knowing varieties of English to be able to communicate well in English with non-native speakers of English. In addition, exactly 30% of the students are strongly agree or are really aware of the situation. It can also be noted that less than 25 % of the respondents confirm their disagreement. These findings suggest that most of the foreign graduate students realize that they will likely have intercultural communication during their study at DLSU.
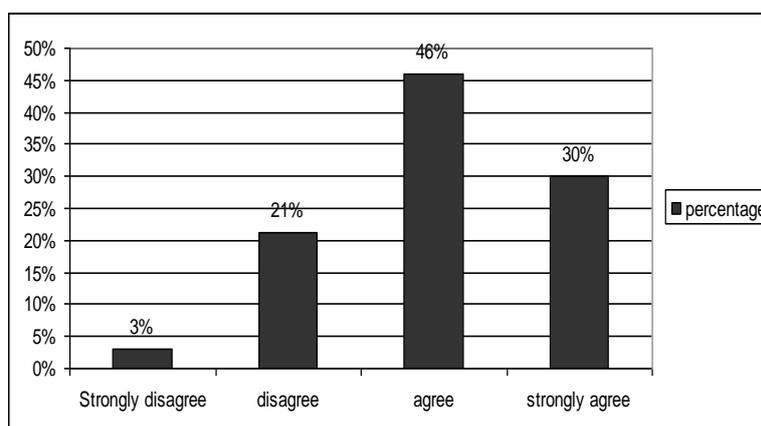

Figure 3 Awareness of Speakers of English (VOE)

However, although the previous findings in Figure 2 and Figure 3 illustrate the students' awareness of varieties of English and the need for knowing the varieties of English, Figure 4 presents a surprising result that contradicted students' preceding opinion. More than 80% of the students are interested in learning American English and slightly over 75% choose to learn British English. In other words, most of the students choose to learn British English and American English. Moreover, only a few students are interested in learning or knowing other varieties of English. As can be seen, less than 20% of students feel it is necessary to learn Philippine English although they study in the Philippines.
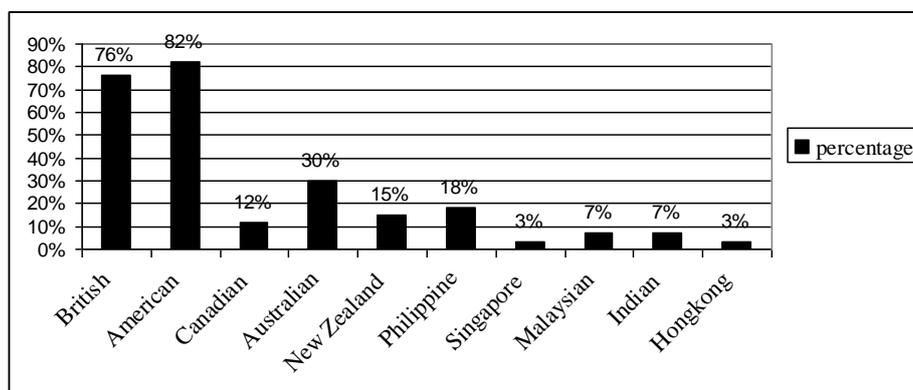
Figure 4 Varieties of English

The reasons why American and British English have become the most favourable varieties of English to learn can be seen clearly from some selected excerpts of respondents' reasons:

Respondent (R) 3. An Indonesian student said that they are "the most varieties used Indonesia".
R7. "Because they are the source of English", was said by another Indonesian student.
R8. A Taiwanese student explained, "Because in my country, we still follow the "standard" English as teaching subject especially American English, thus, English as foreign language in Taiwan, we have to focus on one or two English (in teaching)".
R9. "I would like to learn more knowledge", was said by a Chinese student.
R16. Another Chinese student stated, "It is useful and the most popular ones. I can get more opportunities in finding my future career".
R25. "Those are the standard English accepted all over the world", was stated by an Indonesia student.
R26. A Vietnamese student reasoned that, "…I think British English and American English are international English which every country have involved in study".
R28. A Cambodian student explained that, "If we learn "a" (British English) and "b" (American English) very well, it would be very easy to learn other varieties of English".
R30. An Indonesian student said, "Because a lot of chemical engineering book written in British English Indonesia".

The respondents' reasons above are in concordance with Crystal's statement (1997) that says English has been acknowledged as the medium of a large amount of the world's knowledge. In other words, English as a lingua franca plays an important role in education. Moreover, most of books are written in American or British English. Most teachers teach their students either American or British English. On top of that, those varieties of English have become the "standard" and numerous EFL learners want to gain communicative competence in them. In other words, it is common and understandable if EFL learners prefer learning American and British English rather than learning other varieties of English. For instance, a study of Friedrich (2003) on MBA students' attitudes toward English in Argentina also showed that most of the participants considered American English to be more favourable and useful than other varieties of English. The students share the same opinion with some respondents in this survey that said having communicative competence in American English will give her more opportunities in finding a job.

Furthermore, the following list presents some excerpts of respondents' reasons for having an interest of knowing other varieties of English beside American and British English are based on some reasons like:

R2. A Vietnamese student: "Learn varieties of English which help me integrating culture and language effectively and correctly".

R4. A Taiwanese student said that it is to be easily to "communicate with their people".

R6. "Different countries. Different accent, if I can learn more I will understand those different kinds of English accents more" was stated by a Thai student.

R14. "I'd like to learn Philippines English because of that I'm here in Philippines now…", was explained by a Chinese student.

R20. An Indonesian student said, "Because, there is great possibility that I will have an interaction with them".

The students' reasons above show not only students' interest of knowing varieties of English but also a need of knowing other varieties of English beside American and British English for intercultural communication. In other words, the finding implies the importance of intercultural competence to be truly competent in English language. In Europe, current efforts to develop communicative competence (especially intercultural competence) are conducted by increasing the quality and quantity of learning English across the national border or student exchange (Byram & Fleming, 1998). Thus, it can be said that by studying at De La Salle University, the foreign graduate students have a big possibility to develop their communicative competence of English since they are studying in which English is employed as the medium of instruction and has a status as a second language.

CONCLUSION

The vast majority of non-native speakers of English are learning English to gain communicative competence in using this lingua franca. In addition, they are not learning English with the purpose of communicating with native speakers of English but they intend to use English to communicate with other non-native speakers for example, Japanese and Korean, French and Germans, Finns and Swedes (Kramsch, 1998). However, the varieties of English that EFL learners usually learn are American and British English. In other words, the Englishes that they learn reflect "Anglo" cultural values. In real communication, however, English that can work to communicate among non-native speakers reflects no "Anglo" cultural values. That phenomenon of English was identified by Gordon Wu of Hong Kong's Hopewell Holdings and written in the Far Eastern Economic Review: "English is no longer some colonial language. It is the means [by which] we in Asia communicate with the world and one another." (Wu, 2000, as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2000:1).

Moreover, although awareness of the existence of non-native varieties of English is increasing in some Asian countries for example in Malaysia and China, it still appears that American and British English or native varieties of English are more preferable than non-native English varieties, especially among university students in China (Kirkpatrick and Xu, 2002). Therefore, conducting more research on students' awareness of varieties of English and foreign graduate students' attitudes toward the importance of communicative competence can provide more insight on how communicative competence and the awareness of varieties of English can support the students in pursuing their master's or doctoral degrees. Also, having more participants and including some questions about integrative and instrumental motivation for gaining communicative competence in the future research are advisable.

REFERENCES

Byram, M. and Fleming, M. 1998. Culture and language learning. In M. Byram and M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Canale, M. and Swain, M. 1983. *Approaches to communicative competence*. Singapore: Seameo Regional Language Centre.

Cortazzi, M. and Jin, L. 1999. Cultural mirrors. In E. Hinkel (Ed.). *Cultural in second language teaching and learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. 1997. *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fatt, J. P. T. July, 1991. Achieving communicative competence: The role of higher education. *Higher Education*, 22 (1), 43-62. Retrieved April 10, 2007 from http://www.springerlink.com/content/770637571503nn81/

Friedrich, P. 2003. English in Argentina: Attitude of MBA students. *World Englishes*, 22(2), 173-184.

Intemann, F. 2006. *Introduction to foreign language pedagogy*. Retrieved February 20, 2007 from http://www.anglistik.tu-bs.de/esud/intro-flp/session03%20part1_WS0607.pdf

Intemann, F. 2006. *Introduction to foreign language pedagogy*. Retrieved February 20, 2007 from http://www.anglistik.tu-bs.de/esud/intro-flp/session03%20part1_WS0607.pdf

Irving, K.J. 1984. Theory into practice. *Multicultural Education*, 23(2), pp.138-143. Retrieved January 23, 2007 from http://links.jstor.org/sici=0044-5841%28198421%2923%3A2%3C138%3ACAATEC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-E.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2000. *English as an Asian language*. Retrieved February 20, 2007 from http://www.macmillaneducation.com/Globaldebate/asia.htm

Kirkpatrick, A. and Xu, Z. 2002. Chinese pragmatic norms and "China English.". *World Englishes,* 21(2), 269–279.

Kramsch, C. 1998. The privilege of the intercultural speaker. In M. Byram and M. Fleming (Eds.). *Language learning in intercultural perspective*: *Approaches through drama and ethnography*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Littlewood, W. 1984. *Foreign and second language learning*. Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.

Mariani, L. June, 1994. Developing strategic competence: Towards autonomy in oral interaction. *Perspectives*, 20 (1) 1-22. Retrieved February 24, 2007 from file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/NEC/My%20Documents/academic%20writing/strategic%20competence.htm

Mora, J.K. 2006. *Communicative competence*. Retrieved January 23, 2007 from http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/NatApprTheory-Eng/sld003.html.

Nunn, R. September, 2005. Competence and teaching English as an international language. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7 (3) 1-15. Retrieved February 24, 2007 <u>from</u> <u>http://asian-efl-journal.com/sept_05_rn.pdf</u>

Savignon, S. J. 1983. *Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice*. MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.

APPENDIX

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

This questionnaire is written and distributed to determine the importance of gaining communicative competence and what features of communicative competence that are believed to be important by foreign graduate students at De La Salle University. I would appreciate it if you could complete this questionnaire, which should take approximately 10 minutes.

Personal Data and Language Background Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Nationality:
5. Major of study
6. Native language/L1:
7. How long have you been learning English?
8. How long have you been studying at DLSU?

For each statement, please indicate whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, (4) strongly disagree by marking the appropriate number on the table following each statement.

	As a foreign graduate student at DLSU:	1 (strongly agree)	2 (agree)	3 (disagree)	4 (Strongly disagree)
1	I should know what words to use, how to put them into phrases and sentences. (Linguistic competence)				
2	I should know which words and phrases fit a certain setting and topic, how to express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when she or he needs to behave like that, how to know what attitude another person is expressing. (Sociolinguistic competence)				
3	I should know how to put together words, phrases and sentences to create conversations, speeches, email messages, and newspaper articles. (Discourse competence)				
4	I should know what to do when someone has misunderstood me, when I have misunderstood someone's message, what to say then, how to express ideas if I do not know the name of something or the right verb form to use. (Strategic competence)				
5	I should know what the differences between my culture with other cultures are. (Intercultural knowledge)				

	As a foreign graduate student at DLSU:	1 (strongly agree)	2 (agree)	3 (disagree)	4 (Strongly disagree)
6	I should be able to perceive the situation from the perspective of the other culture. (intercultural understanding)				
7	I should be able to appreciate the unfamiliar behaviour in its cultural context. (intercultural appreciation)				
8	I should be able to use my knowledge for solving communication problem or breakdown (intercultural action competence)				
9	I am aware that American and British English are not the only *Englishes*, there are other varieties of English, such as Philippines English, Singapore English, Malaysia English, Indian English, etc				
10	I am aware that to be truly competent in English language, I need to know varieties of English since I might have more chances to engage in English communication with non-native speakers of English than with native speakers of English.				

11. If you have the opportunity to learn/know the varieties of English, which varieties of English you think it is important for you to learn or know? (you may choose more than 1 option)
    a. British English
    b. American English
    c. Canadian English
    d. Irish English
    e. Australian English
    f. New Zealand English
    g. Indian English
    h. Nigerian English
    i. Philippine English
    j. Singapore English
    k. Malaysian English
    l. Hongkong English
    m. other specify:_____

12. Why do you want to learn/know the varieties of English mentioned in question number 11? Please specify your reason: