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## Universal Strategies in Foreign Language Communication

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### Abstract

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The practical value of English used in business engineering relates to the mastery of language resources that can be achieved by professionals (and students) in business administration, management, economics, PR, advertising and marketing, since language is produced by thought and produces it, thus, creating and modifying reality. Communication strategies are universal, transferable and, sometimes, inter-changeable, therefore all participants in the global dialogue can benefit from the communication competence of specialists and entrepreneurs, consequently increasing the efficiency of exchanging business ideas. On the other hand, we all are consumers of goods and services (produced and provided by business), and many people are also either stakeholders or investors; therefore, knowing the specifics of language and communication in business will help everyone understand the deeper inner meaning implied in socio-economic, corporate and advertising discourses, so as to identify the manipulative mechanisms and techniques influencing public opinion. Argumentative and persuasive linguistic potentials create a positive corporate image and improve company and product positioning in the public consciousness, with potentially increased numbers of customers and shareholders.

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## 1. Introduction

Various aspects of intercultural business discourse and business communication in the national tongues are analyzed nowadays so as to: design the theoretical model of intercultural business communication; compare countries in point of business communication; suggest discursive strategies for multicultural business meetings; propose dialogue models for multicultural workplaces with tips for communicating with representatives of European, Asian and other cultures; explore intercultural communication worldwide (Amernic & Craig, 2006, p. 182).

Language is a vital factor in multinational management (Bargiela-Chiappini, 1997, p. 157) and complex ranges of business discourse issues need to be acquired. Business communication is studied by combining descriptive and prescriptive targets so as to better understand its mechanisms, and provide students and business people with the means of effective communication (including skills in foreign languages).

In studying the specific business engineering language in tertiary education, learners need a shift from simulated data to naturally-occurring corporate idioms (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2007, p. 165). Acquisition of business lexis, functional pragmatics of intercultural business communication, cognitive models of business discourse, and analysis of customary economic discourse in intercultural teams and corporations constitute the focus in current teaching by professors at academic levels of education.

## 2. New literacies

The advent of IT has presented professors of all languages and subjects with both challenges and opportunities relating to new forms of information, graphic, visual and media literacies, and how to integrate these with more traditional forms of literacy teaching activities.

Similarly, the invading internet communication (particularly the social media) has triggered (Cismas et al, 2015a, p.78) an explosion of new and different interactive text-types as well as written genres.

The situation today is radically different from the one few decades ago, with people constantly communicating in writing through a whole range of interactive platforms. This writing revolution can be exploited by professors in seminars in order to raise awareness on critical aspects such as register, appropriacy, dialogic achievement, conveying messages, informational and communicative context & content, differences in formats and organisation, and discrepancies between the spoken and the written language (Cismas et al, 2015b, p.134).

It's not just new literacies that represent an opportunity and challenge – it's new text-types/genres too:

- E-mail
- Texting
- Blogging
- Tweeting
- Posting
- Instant messaging

- etc. ...

A veritable Writing revolution: all purposeful text-types/ audiences/ contexts teens will engage with in real life.



**Fig. 1.** New literacies and corresponding approaches to write coherently

**Table 1.** Coherence: putting it together

Main ideas	Language for developing ideas
Shameful lack of government investment in research.	<b>cause and effect</b> This leads/has led to This can impact on As a direct result, economies
Renewable energy is a security as well as an environmental issue.	<b>explanation</b> This is obvious if you consider.... What this means in reality is... Thus, today ... The situation is/has been made worse
Fossil fuel resources are rapidly depleting.	<b>evidence</b> One/another example of this is ... Approximately/Only around 10% It is estimated that ... You only have to look...

Communication strategies are employed by learners when their own linguistic competence in the target idiom is insufficient. It includes making themselves understood in the foreign language and having others help them understand if necessary. Students use communication strategies (Cismas et al, 2015c) to offset any inadequacies they have in grammatical ability and, particularly, in vocabulary. Communication strategies aid learners with participating in and maintaining the flow of ideas and in improving the quality of communication.

This, in turn, enables them to have increased exposure and opportunities to use the target idiom, leading to more chances to test their assumptions about it and to receive feedback. Without such strategies, learners will avoid foreign language risk-taking as well as specific topics or situations.

### 3. Universal strategies for foreign language communication in writing

Language strategies are defined as particular actions, behaviours and thought processes that learners consciously use to enhance their own communicative competence and language learning outcomes (Cismas et al, 2015d). Seminar work for better writing skills in business engineering focuses on outlining processes leading to the assembly of adequate documents in the corporate formats required today. Students manage document drafting according to the cycle in the figure below, improving their skills in relation to the broad criteria achievement categories of content, communicative achievement, organisation and language (Campbell, 2006, p. 101).

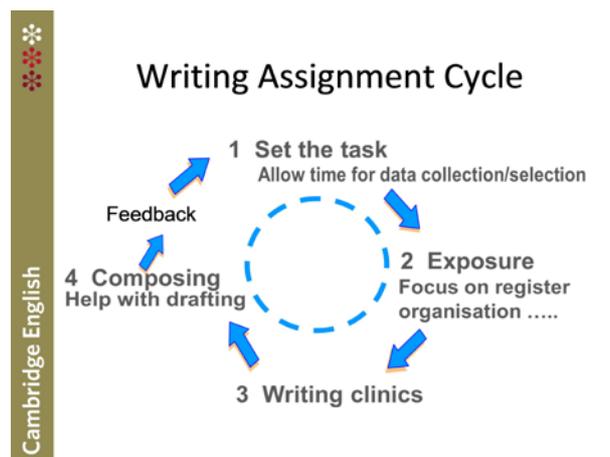


Fig. 2. The writing assignment cycle

When writing, L2 learners need guidance with every step of the process:

- Data collection
- Selecting
- Planning
- Draftin
- Crafting
- Editing
- Rewriting
- Proof-reading.

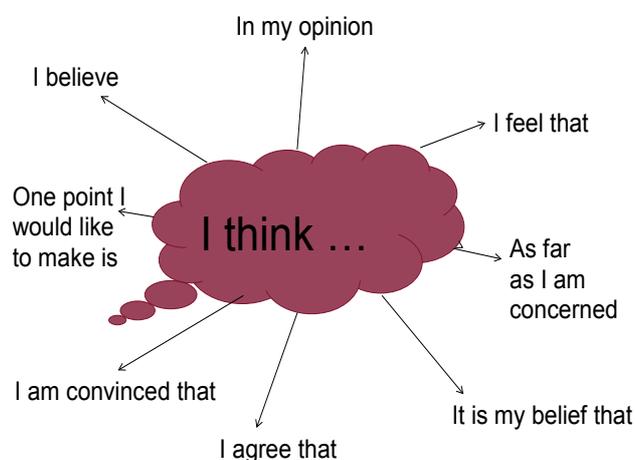


Fig. 3. Text markers

Any assignment cycle needs to begin with the clear setting of and exploring the dimensions of the task (Firth, 1995, p. 326). There are numerous aspects to consider: learners' level of familiarity with the communicative context of the task and their awareness of typical functional content implied by it. Test writing tasks request a clear text-type: letter, e-mail, review, essay, story, article, and a clear communication context.

Learners need to be kept focused on the task. Many students, even tertiary-level ones, at any proficiency level, do not seem to have individual viewpoints or questioning minds when interacting in the target idiom. Generally, they do not appear to be inquisitive, but, instead, they are rather passive, lacking enthusiasm, so they rarely ask (Gotti, 2005, p. 397) for clarification or confirmation in artificial teaching settings.

However, this aspect may be explained by the fact that academic language teaching and learning will always encourage individual competition, so competitive students who want to reach their goals effectively may prefer the types of communication strategies that allow them to think and work alone rather than collaborate with others, especially in cultures (Hagen, 1993, p. 124) where team-work is unfair or less productive.

### Areas to focus on in class

- react to the question – answer it
- brainstorm third content point
- expand on all content points
- plan effectively
- look at essay structure
- essay conventions
  - opening and concluding paragraphs
- language
  - give opinions,
  - agree or disagree
  - linking words or phrases



Fig. 4. Techniques for logical writing and paragraph drafting in business engineering communication I.

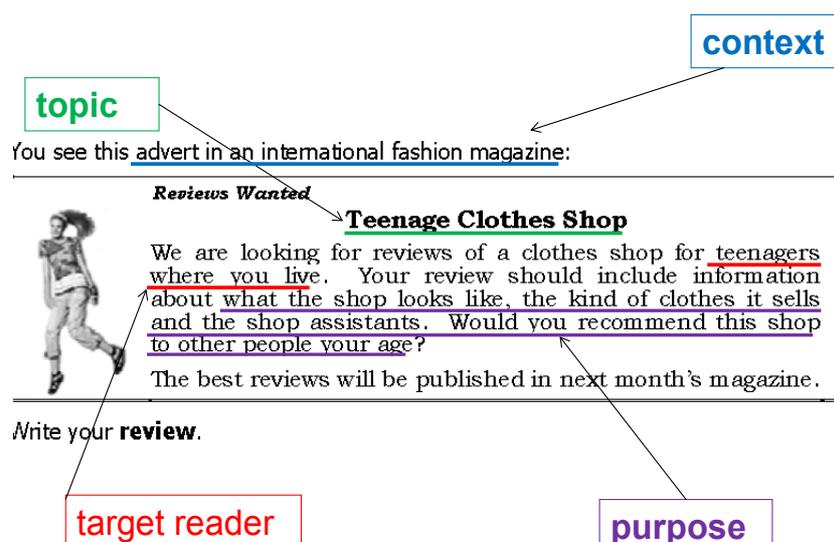


Fig. 5. Techniques for logical writing and paragraph drafting in business engineering communication II.

## Write your answer in **220 – 260** words

in an appropriate style on the separate answer sheet.

- 1 You have listened to a radio discussion programme about facilities which should receive money from local authorities. You have made the notes below:

<p><b>Which facilities should receive money from local authorities?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*museums</li> <li>*sports centre</li> <li>*public gardens</li> </ul>	<p><b>Some opinions expressed in the discussion:</b></p> <p>"Museums aren't popular with everybody!"</p> <p>"Sports centres mean healthier people."</p> <p>"A town needs green spaces – parks are great for everybody."</p>
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Write an essay discussing **two** of the facilities in your notes. You should **explain which facility it is more important** for local authorities to give money to, **giving reasons** in support of your answer.

You may, if you wish, make use of the opinions expressed in the discussion, but you should use your own words as far as possible.

**Fig. 6.** Techniques for logical writing and paragraph drafting in business engineering communication III.

The use of accuracy-oriented strategies for writing activities means that students focus on correct use of English, seeking to improve grammar accuracy by self-correcting the mistakes. A comparison among the number of words students produce, the number of grammar mistakes, and the number of attempts at self-correction in learners' responses to the problem-solving written tasks reveals that the high-ability students employ this type of strategy more than their low-ability counterparts.

Grammar mistakes are rare for high-ability learners (less than one per 100 words). All mistakes they make in their drafts are corrected as soon as they are noticed. In contrast, low-ability students do not sense their own errors. High-ability students self-correct more than those at a low ability level.

All in all, a high use of accuracy-oriented strategies reflects the ability to notice and correct language mistakes, positive attitudes towards mistakes, and the ability to monitor the production of language.

#### **4. Universal strategies for foreign language oral communication**

Practical advice and speaking language tasks should be provided in seminars for business engineering professionals and entrepreneurs. When students face communicative problems, they will use nonverbal language to express themselves, implementing gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact to give hints. As nonverbal strategies are behaviour aids to the verbal output, content analysis cannot be used.

Less competent speakers rely heavily on paralinguistic knowledge.

Cultural values influence the choice of communication strategies as certain cultures consider too many gestures as impolite. In other cultures, younger people are considered rude if they wave hands to signal denial or refusal: such things are supposed to be expressed verbally, by yes/no. Help-seeking strategies occur in situations where speakers try to solve communicative problems by asking for

assistance directly or indirectly. Not only may they ask for repetition, clarification, and confirmation, but they may also use rising intonation or pauses to signal a need for help from their partners

The speech may not be perfect, the interlocutors may not know every single word or concept used in communication, but strategies to compensate for such difficulties need to be acquired, and speakers must be armed with a plan for what they are going to say to help in this situation.

A brief list of universal strategies (Koester, 2004, p. 76) used in foreign language communication includes:

- When the exact word does not come to mind use general lexis or examples of items in that concept category.
- Build relative sentences to provide a description of the object (a person who ... / thing that ... / place where...).
- Describe the purpose or function the object has (It's used to + infinitive / for + -ing).
- Use synonyms or antonyms. This strategy works well with adjectives.
- Employ approximations (It's a kind of ... / It's a sort of ...).
- Use expressions to give your opinion and ask for your interlocutor's opinion.
- Agreeing, disagreeing and partly agreeing. It is a good idea to justify your opinions (explain your reasons).
- Show that you are interested in what your partner is saying and ask for clarification if necessary.
- Make suggestions and/or respond to them: why don't we ... (+ verb without 'to')? Shall we ... (+ verb without 'to')? Would you like to ... (+ verb)? Let's ... (+ verb without 'to') What/How about ... (+ -ing)?
- Take turns with your interlocutors because you all need to participate in the discussion.
- Use example to illustrate your ideas and get your message across.
- Avoid silence and play for time to get some moments for putting your ideas together. In English-speaking cultures long silences or pauses are avoided. By looking at the interlocutor(s) one shows that s/he is listening and indicates the wish to speak or use expressions to keep their turn.
- Use gestures and body language that can assist the communication (mime, nod, keep eye contact).
- Combine communication strategies and lexical development to overcome limits of idiom reception/production.
- Activities to combine strategy practice with vocabulary development.

In many spoken encounters, like workplace activities or everyday situations, English language learners often face unfamiliar words and phrases that inhibit comprehension. Some other times they experience situations where their English language limits prevent them from expressing messages effectively or accurately. Electronic dictionaries, with their ubiquity, ease and speed of use, have become an easy remedy to this problem. However, by relying on such tools speakers do not really improve their communicative competence, but rather deny themselves the opportunities to put their language to use.

## 5. Conclusion

Teaching communication strategies is an effective way to improve students' dialogic competence. It is also a practical way of preventing them from over-relying on exterior means during communicative activities. Strategy practice can readily be combined with activities to aid the development of students' lexis. Learners are then provided not only with tools to communicate effectively, but also with opportunities to expand their vocabulary; at the same they will become proficient in using dialogue strategies for business engineering goals.

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