Mentality Shifts in Business English Communication

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Abstract

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The paper investigates the mentality shifts generated by the wide use of English communication in the modern global world. It is an emerging multidisciplinary topic researching the applied use of international idiom patterns in business engineering nowadays. Accelerated technological developments in society trigger inter-disciplinary interactions of separate knowledge fields thus stimulating new perspectives and cross-border disciplines. Hence we discuss about media-linguistics, legal linguistics, ethno-linguistics, and even environment linguistics, which discretely reflect regional cultural features and concerns. Meanwhile, business, an important sphere of human activity, with its sublanguages and communication strategies, will display specific properties that require close examination. Such texts, distinct as compared to others like scientific, publicist, or fictional, reflect the mentality they stem from. The business discourse reveals its own communicative, pragmatic, lexical, syntactic, textual, composite, visual-graphic, normative, genre-stylistic and cultural features, which will be out-lined and delineated in this review.

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Keywords: mentality shifts; worldwide entrepreneur English; communication; business discourse types.

1. Outlines

Nowadays applied linguistics deals with business discourse and operates in the multidisciplinary field of research on the use of language and communication for economic targets and functional dialogues (Angelmar & Stern, 1978). The info-technological progress in society has generated enhanced interdisciplinary interaction of distinct subject areas, stimulating new perspectives on cross-border disciplines in contact zones among sciences. Hence, in the language studies (Bell, 1975, p. 97), many new domains have appeared, such as media-linguistics, political linguistics, judicial or legal/forensic linguistics, and ethno-linguistics. Besides them, experts also encounter environment and medical linguistics, as well as military and even sports linguistics.

Correct implementation of business communication sublanguages is paramount, as the globalised world relies on various '*Englishes*' (Boden, 1994, p. 268) and on linguistic interaction among sub-species in order to facilitate economic performance. Business texts possess distinct characteristics connected with the specific functioning of language in production and trade activities. Linguistic resources in business activities are dedicated to clear objectives and circumstances (Cismas et al, 2015a, p. 78-88), and they are distorted by verbal and para-verbal communication aspects to a limited extent. The range of multidisciplinary impacts includes:

- Business discourse, organisational, corporate and managerial communication;
- Oral, written and tech-mediated communication in business;
- Professional business sector sublanguages (banking, trading, accounting, manufacturing, administration);
- Communication strategies of psycho-verbal manipulation and neuro-linguistic programming for advertising, marketing, sales, (Cismas et al, 2015b, p. 134-142) and public relations;
- Lingua-pragmatics in business contexts;
- Business rhetoric (leaders' speech, argumentative &persuasive idiom strategies in presentations, conducting meetings and negotiations, as well as the application of language resources in motivating, problem-solving, brainstorming, teambuilding, selecting and appraising personnel, (in)formality and (in)directness of business speech, formulating and conveying meaning, building trust and getting feedback;
- Documentation linguistics: business correspondence and drafting contracts; instructional/teaching language of business, economics and management, used in textbooks and research, in academic publications, lectures, case studies and training, consulting and coaching on business topics;
- Business lexis (systematizing business terminology and composing thesauri of business vocabulary);
- Language of the business media;
- Intercultural business communication (foreign idiom acquisition for business purposes, workplace language (Cismas et al, 2015c) in multinationals, and language assessment).

2. Business discourse as an interdisciplinary domain

Business discourse as interdisciplinary field has inputs from sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, text linguistics & functional styles, pragmatics, discourse studies, cognitive & communication theories, organization studies, organisational psychology and organisational communication, management studies, as well as applied research in teaching and learning language for specific purposes. This domain interacts with related ones, such as media linguistics (analysing the language of business media), judicial linguistics (exploring communication in corporate, contract and property law), and political linguistics (investigating the language of socio-economic relations). With the advent of globalization and the constant enhancement of international business contacts, this research subject will deal with theories and practical methods of acquiring foreign languages for business purposes, primarily business English as the lingua franca of worldwide economics (Cismas et al, 2015d).

Business discourses deal with language functioning in economy and with the linguistic component of business communication, involving traditional focus on discourse and text, discourse and conversation analysis, empirical-descriptive and comparative techniques, cognitive, pragmatic and genre-style investigations. All types of linguistic data are used as research material, real or experimental, authentic or simulated (Cismas et al, 2015e), stand-alone or in combinations. The practical value resides in the mastery of language resources to be achieved by professionals and students in business administration, management, economics, PR, advertising and marketing, since language is produced by thought, and, in its turn, produces thought processes, thus, creating and modifying reality.

3. Business communication competence in entrepreneurship

Business discourse strategies constitute a benefit for the communication competence of specialists and entrepreneurs, contributing to their understanding of the nature of communication processes in their profession. Furthermore, consumers of goods and services (produced and provided by business), can become either stake-holders or investors. Therefore, by knowing the specifics of business communication, everyone will understand the inner meaning implied in socio-economic, corporate and advertising discourse, to identify the manipulative mechanisms and techniques influencing public opinion (including those used by unfair businessmen).

Experts in the field assist business people with using hidden argumentative and persuasive linguistic potentials, so as to create a positive corporate image and improve the positioning of their company and product in the public consciousness. Such communication approaches build and maintain a rapport with both existing and potential customers and shareholders. An example of the effective use of linguistic tools in business practice is seen in the increasingly active work of corporate websites and blogs of many global companies. For instance, Microsoft has radically changed its company image by means of a corporate blog, implementing linguistic tools and correctly organized business discourse on the web. Blogs are now changing the way businesses talk to clients and identify needs and future consumer trends. Another practical application is the Coca-Cola blog, with its weekly competition for the best caption to the photo depicting a life scene showing the obligatory positive emotional

connotation and indispensable presence of their product (Clampitt, 2000, p. 301). Psycho-cognitive linguistic laws are activated when people verbalize their associations, thus creating a positive verbal-cognitive association of the product with pleasure, happiness, youth, fun and relaxation in their conscious and sub-conscious mind.

Business discourse has always varied in step with the socio-historical conditions and the new business demands. The 21st century society is a consumers' world in the information era. Market relations, alongside with business ideologies and mentalities, have spread to the former communist states and to the emerging economies, becoming the most powerful engines of social development, hence taking up increasing roles in people's lives.

Business needs applied discourse rules to suit the communication objectives both inside and outside organisations. Within the framework of management and organization theories (Cross, 2001, p. 247), business sub-languages emerged, studying the bargaining communication, the language at work and the speech in economic deals and negotiations, of tele/video conferencing and corporate meetings. Business itself requires qualified staff beyond the mere level of translators and interpreters, because it is not only figures, foreign language and message to be conveyed, but also cultural codes and politeness clichés, opinion exchanges and constructive approaches to be implemented, so as to facilitate effective economic outcomes; linguists and communication theorists can thus suggest methods for improving efficiency by optimizing dialogues (Donohue, 1985). When working, people inevitably establish communication relations with each other, vertical in the management hierarchy of the company, and horizontal, in teamwork with peers.

Entrepreneurs are interested in enhancing communication effectiveness via practical formats: dialogues among superiors/subordinates (Ehlich, 1995, p. 116), potential vs. received meanings, feedback provision, the corporate culture and organizational climates, conflict prevention and resolution, consensus and disagreement, influence and persuasion, leaders' public speech, team dialogues, communication barriers, interviewing procedures, personnel selection and appraisal, reporting, workplace language, and communication assessment.

4. Business discourse intertwined with leadership discourse

Communication competence has become an intrinsic feature and a prerequisite for all successful businessmen and leaders. The impact of the leader's communication characteristics on the overall corporate success is quantifiable, and a model of effective leaders' dialogic behaviour has been designed (Feely & Harzing, 2003) based on the classical theory of speech acts. According to it, effective managers use direct or indirect language depending on how threatening their message is meant to be for the subordinate, and use specific idiomatic means to involve subordinates in the process of active listening. Starting with the 1990s people increasingly focused on the way business uses language to achieve goals. The link between the business context and the language used in it was traced and the gap between the contextual business approach and the linguistic textual approach was filled.

Investigation of the language functioning in business should be based on a discursive approach, which implies deep speech penetration in economic life. Business discourse (Harris, 2003) is a multi-dimensional and polysemantic phenomenon. The language of business was introduced into academic

writing in the mid '80s last century as a result of the need of formalising and standardising how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations to get their work done; it is seen as a social action in business contexts.

The notion of business discourse encompasses thematic subspecies (Johns, 1986) as the economic discourse, the corporate one, the discourse of negotiations and transactions. Here are the business discourse types:

- Training and academic business discourses perform educational functions as revealed by textbooks, manuals, research, economics, management, entrepreneurship, lectures, case studies, training, consulting or coaching;

- Ritual-public business discourses perform argumentative/influencing functions and are seen in meetings, reports, corporate executives' speeches to shareholders and staff, presentations, PR and advertising discourses;

- Document business discourse performs a regulative function in internal and external correspondence on economic issues, in corporate documents, regulations and charters of companies/organizations, incorporation articles, and many others;

- The discourse of business media performs an informative-polemic function;

- The discourse of professional business communication achieves an instrumental-persuasive function in negotiations, communication with clients, colleagues, including all production, manufacturing, or technical discourses, as well as business slang and argot, like the specific oral sublanguage of exchange traders (Klikauer, 2008, p. 236).

Essentially, the business discourse is the verbalization of the business mentality, in the form of a multitude of thematically correlated texts on a wide range of business issues, considered in combination with their extra-linguistic contexts. Being a strategic manager implies being a communication manager.

5. Oral versus written business discourse

It is important to note that the traditional 20th-century division into oral and written discourses is becoming obsolete. According to the type of channel, people traditionally distinguished and often opposed oral and written discourses. The difference in the channel of transmitting information generates specific features: in oral discourse generation and understanding of the message occur almost synchronically, while in written discourse these processes occur consecutively. Therefore, oral discourse is produced and absorbed by fragments marked by intonation, whereas the written discourse message is integrated into complex sentences, and complex syntactic constructions. As opposed to writing, the oral discourse requires temporal and spatial contact between interlocutors, which results in deep involvement in the situation; the written discourse removes the speaker and the addressee from the information conveyed in the discourse, which impacts the use of lexical and grammatical resources.

With the development of information and communication technologies, the binary opposition of oral vs. written forms of discourse is no longer obvious. People still doubt whether communicating via instant e-mailing, messengers, chats and forums should be considered a technically-mediated form of oral discourse, lacking the important non-verbal and para-verbal characteristics of a conversation such

as facial expressions, voice tone and volume, or gestures. Additionally (Perkins, 1999, pp. 17-38), doubts increase if the internet communication is accompanied by interlocutors instantly exchanging images via web/photo-cameras or e-mails with emoticons, which are pictograms of emoticons and facial expressions. Hence it is time to accept a new type of discourse, the web/internet one which combines elements of both spoken and written types. Communication on the internet (Ponchini, 2004, p. 78) requires synchronization of information generation and perception and provides a deep involvement in the situation with instant responding, typical of oral talk, although it is performed in (quasi)written form. Thus, web business discourse is the reality of the 21st century, and we can anticipate it to be growing fast.

6. Conclusions

Over the past decades, the techniques of conversation analysis, sociology and ethno-methodology have been used to draw a conclusion about the vital role of communication and discourse in business: communication is the life blood of all organizations, which shapes and is shaped by the organisational structure. Organisational communication and business communication lie at the heart of the culture of corporate discourse, transactional discourse and communication models of management speech. The business discourse is the projection of the corporate culture and CEO discourses are a manifestation of power. Many focus on stylistic and semantic aspects of business communication and on genre analysis of business correspondence in order to get additional clues and corroboration to the main message being conveyed.

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