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**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication**

**TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH (TBE) AND BUSINESS FICTION: METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL**

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*Abstract*

Business fiction has been underestimated by ELT practitioners and Business English teachers at large. It is therefore important to accommodate business fiction within the teaching methodologies elaborated for numerous groups of learners with their varying needs. This will expand the range of authentic material as well as the range of approaches, methods and techniques employed systematically and on an ongoing basis. The balanced and methodologically sound mix of classroom activities allows the teacher of Business English to transform and translate the arbitrary order imposed by the creative literary author into the much-needed intrinsic diversity of both terminological and non-terminological language use for business purposes. Several lexical strata (core business terms, industry-specific terms, General English words, formal vocabulary items, business idioms, high-frequency phrasal verbs, etc.) are to be singled out and subjected to a step-by-step examination, reorganization, expansion and acquisition for the learners' better understanding of the world of business and their increasingly firm hold over the language used in business settings and situations across national and corporate cultures.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Business English: the theory**

Teaching Business English (TBE) is one of those areas of inquiry which centre on the indissoluble unity of theorizing and theoretical insights, on the one hand, and extended methodological practices with elaborate sets of techniques, on the other hand. In search of both, a researcher of Business English and a teacher of Business English can turn to some of the better-known titles available in the field of English language teaching (ELT) in general and teaching Business English (TBE) in particular (Donna, 2000; Ellis & Johnson, 2009; Frendo, 2005). At the Lomonosov Moscow State University, Business English has been researched thoroughly and step by step since the early 1990s. Business English has also been taught actively to the students across departments and faculties within the university curricula and learner-oriented syllabi.

Several theoretical points have been clarified over the course of time and gradually incorporated into a wide range of learner-centred and learner-oriented teaching programmes tailored to the entry level of General English proficiency of Russian-speaking students intent on learning Business English. First, the succinct definition of Business English as the language used for business purposes (the language used in business settings or the language used in business situations) has been redressed to accommodate all the functional uses (or functionally defined varieties) within Business English – Socializing for business purposes, Telephoning for business purposes, Business letter-writing, Business meetings, Presentations (both informative and persuasive) in business settings across industries, Negotiating, and the English of the business media (Nazarova, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2013). Second, resolving the problem of understanding was identified and convincingly shown to be at the foundation of effective Business English teaching courses and sustained learner engagement (Nazarova, 2006, 2009, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020). Third, two types of business terminology were uncovered and accounted for as assisting the language teachers and the language learners in resolving the problem of understanding – core business terminology (the centripetal force) that functions across industries and knits them together through a host of core business terms denoting key business concepts, and industry-specific terminological systems (the centrifugal force) that embrace the terms of a given primary/secondary/tertiary industry (Nazarova 2012, 2014) Fourth, the vocabulary of Business English was stratified with 15 lexical and terminological strata highlighted and accounted for from the point of view of their functions and respective cognitive (and/or communicative) load (Nazarova, 2020). Fifth, the theory of translation was further elaborated and expanded to include translation for business purposes with units of translation identified on both planes – the conceptual (cognitive) one and the communicative one (Nazarova, 2019).

### **1.2. Business English: from theory to practice**

The five contributions to the theory behind Business English adduced above as researched and systematized at the Department of English Linguistics, Faculty of Philology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, have not exhausted the whole of the range of theoretical insights into the nature and functioning of the language used for business purposes. Given the limits of the present paper, I have purposefully confined myself to a short selection of five subheadings only. My next step, however, is to demonstrate how every contribution to Business English theory summed up above has improved our awareness of how Business English is to be taught to varying groups of students whose mother tongue is Russian. In this case

it makes sense to offer another listing that presents the five resultant contributions to the teaching of Business English in numerous ELT classrooms and settings at the Faculty of Philology. The first theoretical input gave the teacher an opportunity to select out of the 8 functional uses identified within Business English those functionally defined varieties that were of utmost significance for the learners (there could be different combinations of registers depending on the interests and priorities of the group or groups one is teaching). The second theoretical input allowed the teacher of Business English to introduce core business terms to the students on a regular basis, following a set of techniques (naming the term(s), defining them in English, supplying the Russian equivalents of both the term and its definition, naming recurrent collocations with these terms, naming terminological synonyms and antonyms, naming derivatives) (Nazarova, 2006, 2009). The third theoretical insight highlighted the need for the teacher of Business English to not only instill core business terms in his or her students' underlying cognitive makeup but also bring in varying amounts of industry-specific information through the well-established and well-defined industry-specific terminological systems; in other words, the teacher of Business English is expected (and encouraged) to become better at selecting the particular industry (or industries) his or her students would be more interested in. The fourth contribution to Business English theory outlined above draws the attention of both language teachers and language learners to the inherent diversity uncovered in Business English vocabulary: 1) General English words, 2) formal vocabulary items, 3) core business terminology, 4) industry-specific terminologies, 5) terminological phraseologisms, 6) business idioms, 7) high-frequency phrasal verbs recurring across functionally defined varieties of English used for business purposes, 8) borrowings, 9) words and terms “with ancestry” (those which require additional background information so that they would be properly perceived and adequately interpreted), 10) neologisms and/or occasionalisms, 11) company names, 12) brand names, 13) names of outstanding business thinkers, 14) abbreviations, 15) connotative terms and terminological phraseologisms (Nazarova, 2019, 2020). These 15 lexical and terminological layers could help the teacher of Business English to select those strata (or combinations of different strata) which would lead to a learner-oriented lexical and terminological Business English syllabus. The fifth theoretical insight embodies the essentials of the author's conception of translation for business purposes and attempts to convince the teachers and the learners of Business English that both English-Russian equivalence and Russian-English equivalence are needed if we would like our Russian learners to become better communicators and better mediators in cross-cultural settings. This means that we either incorporate English-Russian equivalence into the Business English syllabus or we offer a full-fledged Translation for Business Purposes course (Nazarova, 2019) to our students thus preparing them for a more effective search for employment opportunities across industries and cultures.

## **2. Problem Statement**

### **2.1. Outlining the problems**

In view of the above presentation of the fundamentals of the Business English theory and the related learner-oriented methodologies, several problems can be outlined and detailed. The first problem is as follows: the range of registers (or functional uses) within Business English was expanded to include what is known as business fiction (Nazarova, 2019, 2020). However, very few people in our community of practice realize the purpose and significance of this relatively new subject and type of material. Some of

the frequently asked questions would be: What is fiction? Where does fiction come in? What is business fiction? Where does business fiction come in? I am going to answer these queries briefly, because without well-grounded answers to these essential questions the formulation of the research questions in the next subsection of the present article and the enumeration of the research methods, findings and conclusions in other subsections would make little or no sense.

## 2.2. What is fiction?

The first step in addressing the title question is to admit that fiction is not the same as facts. Fiction results from one's creative imagination, and it may contain facts and purposefully highlight various events through factual presentations, but it is not about, or in any way confined to, the purely factual element. Fiction is an imaginary representation of things, people, relationships and circumstances creatively simulating their actual counterparts or intentionally moulding their virtual extensions and analogues as products of one's artistic imagination.

Imaginative use or creation of imaginary counterparts, extensions and analogues is not the only constituent feature or facet of fiction. An equally important ingredient is the language which in some forms of fiction will strike one as too simple, plain and unimaginative (cf.: “language with no ancestry” / Evelyn Waugh in *English Novelists*), whereas in others it will attract, challenge and delight. Fiction of the type will strive to use the resources of the language to the utmost and will at times venture into language play, changing the meanings of words and deforming idioms, inventing new specimens of language use, creating memorable stretches and utterances accompanied by intricate configurations of sound and sense (e.g. the word *battlefield* becomes *bluddle filth* in the language used by James Joyce; *the zero state of his mind and heart* is a collocation coined by David Lodge, *the long winter of his obsession* is authored by Ian McEwan).

## 2.3. What is business fiction?

The compound term **business fiction** is fairly transparent and has resulted from a combination of the two high-frequency terms **business** and **fiction** (by analogy with **crime fiction**, **science fiction**, etc.). If and when defined briefly, business fiction means “business books written as fiction” (Nazarova, 2009, p. 137). What is meant is the kind of fiction that targets the world of business and is written by insiders – people with extensive awareness, knowledge and working experience in the numerous and increasingly diverse business settings, across industries, across national cultures, and, at times, across corporate cultures. Names and titles proliferate in the field attracting educated readers, motivating persistent literary critics and encouraging enthusiastic translators.

## 3. Research Questions

### 3.1. More information about the learners

Let me now turn to the questions that are at the core of the research carried out at the Department of English Linguistics at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. There are several questions in fact but they are all tailored to the needs of the kind of learners I have in mind: a) the language learners in my case are native speakers of Russian (and, as a result, English is the foreign language they are after, and more often than not they will have studied it for an average of 8-10+ years before they meet me and take on

Business English as a new subject within the university curriculum); b) they are professional linguists and, by extension, philologists, i.e. they are professionally concerned with language, speech, communication, culture, intercultural communication, literature studies, lexicography, terminological studies and terminography; c) in general, their knowledge of the world of business is rather limited with a minimum or practically no real-world exposure to the life and activities of business organizations in the Russian Federation and outside the country; d) some of them would like to apply for jobs and hopefully find a job in the world of business because they gradually discover for themselves – through their Business English studies – something appealing and even intriguing in the origin, growth and development of different types of business; e) on graduating from the Lomonosov Moscow State University, some of the students are ready, willing and able to set up and run businesses of their own, and in due course become part and parcel of the dynamic commercial environment both within and outside the country.

### **3.2. The questions to be researched**

Which of the existing samples of business fiction is the teacher of Business English to select and accommodate within the syllabus? How is this accommodation to be effected? What are the methodological principles to go by? What are the techniques to be used in class and outside the classroom? How often can one resort to business fiction given the standard work load (for example, I teach three groups of 4th-year students once a week for 90 minutes, and I have an average of 18 weeks (=36 hours) in the first term – from September to December plus another 10 weeks (=20 hours) in the second term – from February to the beginning of April)? Is there any room for self-study after the course is over? What are the transferable skills embedded in the course? Have I managed to give my students something of lasting value?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is twofold: to begin with, the study dealing with a particular type of learners in mind should result in a convincing step-by-step methodology which could be incorporated in full or adjusted as needed in numerous other more specialist or less specialized contexts; the study in question should also outline a set of techniques to be demonstrated using authentic material and proven to be of relevance both in class and outside the classroom, both within the curriculum (and the syllabus) and after the language learner graduates and immerses himself / herself in the world of work and continues to grow and develop professionally in the workplace.

## **5. Research Methods**

The methods employed in the study undertaken for the purposes of the present article are numerous and, most importantly, interconnected in such a way as to account for the underlying approach. The underlying approach is a blend of the cognitive and the philological approaches, i.e. aimed at providing all the much-needed underpinnings for the overall objective to be reached, and the overall objective is to make sure that the language learners' understanding of the world of business improves and their hold over the language used for business purposes is increasingly firm and well-grounded from both the theoretical and the practical points of view. First comes **the method of cognitive modelling** (Nazarova, 2018, 2020) – the

problem of understanding is resolved as students are taught to perceive and make their own all the key concepts and core business terms which are integrated in their syllabus and acquired by the language learners on an ongoing basis. The second method is known as the **linguostylistic** method – philologically-minded students of Business English are expected to be good at dealing with the language of literature, they should be able to analyse linguostylistically the actual texture of the work of literature they are reading (the meanings of words and complex word-equivalents, the uses they are put to by the literary author and the connotations acquired through stylistic foregrounding as speech becomes more evaluative, more emotional and more expressive). The third method to be applied is the **linguopoetic** method which encourages the learner to find and show the link between the literary text and its linguopoetically significant elements (from the smallest unit, e.g. the word, to the longest and more intricately structured ones – the sentence, the utterance, the supraphrasal unity or sets of supraphrasal unities), on the one hand, and the intention of the author, and his attempt at producing a certain amount of aesthetic impact on the reader, on the other hand. The fourth method is **the method of stratification** which is somewhat similar to (and overlaps with) the functional stratification mentioned earlier with regard to Business English vocabulary; it allows to isolate the various layers of language use in a given sample of fiction and to accommodate them within the syllabus and lesson plan elaborated for the given type of language learners. Several other methods are more traditional, but one can never survive in English language teaching (ELT) at large without them – the lexicographic method, the quantitative method, and the corpora-based method.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Stages 1 and 2 detailed

On having worked out a step-by-step methodology and a set of techniques to go with it, I would like to share the findings with a particular emphasis on the principles elaborated and applied at different stages in the research project carried out at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. The very first stage consisted in selecting a good sample of business fiction – a short story called “The Luck of Kokura”, authored by Gary Shteyngart and published in *The NEW YORKER Magazine* (June, 2018). It is here that linguists and philologists can apply the range of criteria instilled in them by the professional community of practice that has educated them: the author and his antecedents, the plot, the theme, the setting, the characters, etc. get as much attention as possible and encourage the language learners to conduct a search for first-rate types of authentic information in traditional sources (books and the rest of the print media) and numerous online dictionaries and encyclopedia, web-sites and blogs. The next stage is the actual reading of the short story in question to be effected by students independently before their first formal inquiry initiated by the teacher in class.

### 6.2. Stage 3 detailed

The third stage is introduced, explained and supervised by the teacher who draws the attention of the learners to the main characters as **situated agents** – people working in the world of business, in particular professional areas and particular professional functions. Here, the language learners are encouraged to find in the authentic text under analysis the several strands of business vocabulary that come in useful for the well-organized, directed and controlled process of cognition: they isolate the core business

terms used by the author to situate the two characters within the world of business; they also isolate the industry-specific terms selected by the author to situate the two characters within a particular industry. The techniques mentioned above are employed systematically as every business term is defined, translated into Russian, defined in Russian, supplied with collocations and contexts, terminological synonyms and terminological antonyms. These techniques (and concrete classroom activities) instill the core business terms gleaned from the authentic text in the students' mental lexicon.

### 6.3. Arbitrary order vs Intrinsic diversity

From the methodological point of view it should be emphasized by the teacher that the limited range and the bare minimum of core business terms selected by the literary author embodies what is known as **arbitrary order**. Knowledge of Business English, however, requires the very opposite – a firm hold over **intrinsic diversity**, i.e. many more core business terms organized systemically (e.g. genus proximum vs differentia specifica) and thematically (e.g. the core business terms in a wide range of business-related themes like company structures, types of business, people in business, recruitment, setting up and growing a business, the life cycle of a business, mergers and acquisitions, going public, globalization, primary/secondary/tertiary industries, etc.). It means, then, that the movement initiated by the teacher in class and explained to the language learners from the outset is to be necessarily characterized by directionality – **from** arbitrary order **to** intrinsic diversity.

Let me demonstrate how it works and leads to the students' better understanding of the world of business through the use of an authentic piece of literature. The list of the core business terms from the short story in question includes (in order of appearance): management, employer, investor, employee, dealer, customer, shareholder, team. Their definitions and Russian equivalents are dealt with in due course so that there would be no misinterpretation or confusion. The next activity calls for the reorganization of this list with three core business terms isolated and sequenced to reflect the three groups of people a typical company is made up of: shareholder(s), management, workforce. This list is to be further expanded to include the regionally marked terminological synonyms (and abbreviations), for example: shareholder / AmE stockholder (cf. company / AmE corporation; share / AmE stock, sole trader / AmE sole proprietor, registration / AmE incorporation, Managing Director (MD) / AmE Chief Executive Officer (CEO), etc.).

It is obvious from the above that the short list of three core business terms has grown and diversified. The activities, however, are far from exhausted because there are other techniques to be applied in class and in self-study. We could pass on to the second term **management** and expand the range of its terminological and non-terminological links, for example: management, senior management / senior managers, company officers, top management / top managers; middle management / middle managers; line management / line managers. CEO, COO, CFO, CIO, CKnO, CSO, etc. We could then move on and focus on the third term in the above short list, i.e. **workforce** and name all the terms that could be grouped under this heading: employees, executives, front-office workers vs back-office workers, white collars (white-collar workers) vs blue collars (blue-collar workers), staff, etc. We could then isolate the verb **employ** and test it for derivatives: employ – employer – employee – employed (by) – in the employ of – employment – unemployment – employed by – unemployed – self-employed – employable – employability. Our next step would be to group the synonyms: employ – recruit – hire – take on. Antonyms are also to be taken into account: dismiss, fire, sack, give someone a sack (cf.: make someone redundant, make redundancies, lay

off, give someone an axe, downsize, etc.). We turn to the theme of Recruitment, and this allows the students to further expand their knowledge of the world of business and their understanding of the language used for business purposes: job ad, applying for jobs, letter of application, motivation letter, covering letter, cover letter, curriculum vitae (CV), resume, job interview, the interview process, interviewer, interviewee, applicant, candidate, recruitment agency (AmE search firm), headhunters.

The movement detailed and demonstrated above is **from** arbitrary order (the terminological items selected by the creative literary author for his artistic purposes) **to** intrinsic diversity – the numerous terminological and non-terminological items in and through their natural groupings in the terminology of the world of business and, wider, in the language used for business purposes.

## 7. Conclusion

The material assembled for the purposes of the present article was gleaned from the short story “The Luck of Kokura”. The main idea was to show how a work of business fiction can be selected, studied and tailored to the needs of linguistically minded Russian-speaking students learning Business English as part of the university curriculum and learner-oriented syllabus.

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