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Business linguistics and business discourse Linguística de negócios e discurso de negócios

ABSTRACT – The paper suggests establishing a separate branch of Applied Linguistics – Business Linguistics, a multidisciplinary synergic field for researching the use of language and communication in business. The author begins the exploration of Business Linguistics, defining its sources, key areas and practical purposes. In this way, the definition and functional typology of business discourse are designed by the author. The discursive approach adopted is intended to provide the basis for investigating this promising field.

Key words: linguistics, business discourse, business communication.

RESUMO – O artigo sugere o estabelecimento de um novo ramo de Linguística Aplicada – Linguística de Negócios, um campo sinérgico multidisciplinar para o estudo do uso da linguagem e da comunicação nos negócios. A autora inicia a exploração desse novo ramo definindo suas fontes, áreas-chave e objetivos práticos. A seguir, apresenta a definição e a tipologia funcional do discurso de negócios. A abordagem discursiva adotada pretende fornecer as bases para a investigação nesse campo promissor.

Palavras-chave: linguística, discurso de negócios, comunicação de negócios.

The recent accelerated info-technological development of society causes a greater interdisciplinary interaction of separate fields of knowledge and stimulates a new perspective of “cross-border disciplines” appearing in these zones of contact of sciences. In the language studies’ sphere, they are Medialinguistics (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008; Wyss, 2008), Political Linguistics (Bell, 1975; Zatushevski, 2001; Ells, 2004; Chudinov, 2008; Political Linguistics Conference, 2009), Judicial (or Legal, or Forensic) Linguistics (Nerhot, 1991; Kniffka, 1996; Conklin, 1998; Gibbons, 2003; Olsson, 2004; Mattia, 2006), and Ethno-linguistics (Kindell and Lewis, 2000). By searching on the internet, we have also found Environment Linguistics (Wang, 2008), Medical Linguistics (Bruzzi, 2006; Aronson, 2007), Military Linguistics (Kruzel, 2008), and Sports Linguistics (Soccerlingua, 2005, Sports Linguistics, 2007).¹

Meanwhile, business is no less important a sphere of human activity – it concerns almost everyone. And the sublanguages of business and business communication have their specific properties that require linguistic examination. Many researchers have noticed that business text possesses specific characteristics distinguishing it from other kinds of

text (scientific, publicist, fictional, etc.). Business discourse reveals its own communicative, pragmatic, lexical, syntactic, textual, composite, visual-graphic, normative, genre-stylistic and other features.

These reasons seem sufficient to introduce “Business Linguistics” as a separate discipline within the framework of Applied Linguistics, and to initiate the development of its methodology and scientific apparatus. Thus, *Business Linguistics* is a field that explores the specific functioning of language in a business context, investigates the use of language resources in business activities, and studies verbal and para-verbal aspects of business communication. The spectrum of its interests is based on a multidisciplinary synergetic approach and includes the following *key areas*:

- Business discourse, organizational, corporate and managerial communication;
- Oral, written and technically mediated communication in business, its typology and genre classification;
- Professional sublanguages of business sectors (e.g. those of banking, trading, accounting, manufacturing, administration, etc.);

¹ Those research papers and books directly cited are included in References, the other authors and works mentioned are listed in Complementary References.

- Language of advertising and marketing, public relations (PR), the special language techniques for sales and marketing (including methods of psycho-verbal manipulation and neuro-linguistic programming);
- Lingua-pragmatics in a business context and Business Rhetoric (including specifics of a leader's speech, argumentative and persuasive communicative strategies for carrying out presentations, conducting meetings and negotiations, as well as the application of language resources in motivating, problem-solving, brainstorming, teambuilding, selecting personnel and its appraisal, (in)formality and (in)directness of business speech, formulating and conveying the meaning, building trust and rapport, and getting the feedback;
- Documentation (Document) linguistics: business correspondence and drafting contracts;
- Instructional (teaching) and academic language of business, economics and management, used in textbooks and research, academic publications, lectures, case studies and training, consulting and coaching on business topics;
- Business lexicography (systematizing business terminology and composing thesauri of business vocabulary);
- Language of the business media;
- Intercultural business communication (including teaching / learning foreign languages for business purposes, as well as language in the workplace in multinationals, and language assessment).

The *origins* of Business Linguistics as a new interdisciplinary field can be traced in the synergy of Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics, Text linguistics and Functional styles, Pragmatics, Discourse studies, Cognitive and Communication Theory, Theory of organization (Organization Studies), Organizational psychology and Organizational Communication, Management Studies, as well as in applied research of teaching and learning Language for Specific Purposes (LSP).

Business Linguistics intersects and interacts with many related above-mentioned areas – with Media linguistics (in researching the language of business media), Judicial Linguistics (in exploring the language of corporate, contract and property law), and Political Linguistics (in investigating the language of socio-economic relations). Besides, with growing geo-economic globalization, with the constant rise in the volume of international business contacts, Business Linguistics should deal with theories and practical methods of teaching and learning “foreign languages for business purposes”, primarily Business English as the lingua franca of international business.

The *subject* of Business Linguistics is the study of language functioning in business and the linguistic component of business communication. The *methodology* of this new discipline should involve traditional research methods of discourse and of text as its result, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, empirical-descriptive and comparative techniques, cognitive, pragmatic and genre-style analysis, etc. The *terminology* and the scientific apparatus of Business Linguistics are still under construction, but they obviously could be built on the basis of those of the above-mentioned sister disciplines. All types of linguistic data can be used as *material* for research – real or experimental, authentic or simulated data, as well as their combinations.

The *practical value* of Business Linguistics 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. Business Linguistics can benefit the communication competence of specialists and entrepreneurs, and contribute to their understanding the nature of communication processes in their professional activities and consequently increasing the communication efficiency of businesses. On the other hand, we all are consumers of goods and services (produced and provided by business), many people are also either stakeholders or investors; therefore, knowing the specifics of language and communication in business will help everyone to understand the deeper 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 Business Linguistics can help businessmen to use hidden argumentative and persuasive linguistic potentials, create a positive corporate image and improve the positioning of their company and product in the public consciousness, to build and maintain a rapport with both existing and potential customers and shareholders. A bright example of the effective use of linguistic tools in business practice can be seen in the increasingly active work of corporate web-sites and the blogs of many global companies. According to many business gurus, R.Scoble and his colleagues from Microsoft have radically changed the company's image by means of a corporate blog, i.e. by means of linguistic tools and correctly organized business discourse on the web. Later, Scoble and Izrael (2006, p.3) described this work in their bestseller *Naked Conversations*, arguing that “blogs are changing the way businesses talk with customers”. Another illustration of the perfect practical application of the Business Linguistics laws is the Coca-Cola blog, which arranges a weekly competition for the best caption to the photo depicting a life scene – with the obligatory positive

emotional connotation and indispensable presence of their product. Obviously, psycho-cognitive laws of linguistics are activated when people are asked to verbalize their arising associations, and – through it – are led to create (in their consciousness and sub-consciousness) a steady positive verbal-cognitive association of the product with pleasure, happiness, fun, rest, etc.

The emergence of Business Linguistics has been predetermined by the *socio-historical preconditions* and by new *demands of business*. In the 21st century society has reached a new stage in its history – a “society of consumption” in the era of information. Market relations and business ideology (business mentality) have spread in the republics of the former USSR, Eastern Europe and the countries of the so-called “emerging economies” – China, India and Brazil. Throughout the world, business has become one of the most powerful engines of social development, taking up an increasing role in people’s lives and creating new areas of social thought. Business has required some applied discipline to serve its verbal and communication needs.

Meanwhile, in the West, in the 1980s (mainly, within the framework of management and organization theories – Management Studies, Organization Studies, Organizational Communication) there appeared an applied field focusing on the study of business communication and the business sublanguage (researching “bargaining communication” by Angelmar and Stern (1978), “language at work” and “language of business” by Johns (1980, 1986), “communicating at work” by Adler (1983), “negotiation interaction” by Donohue and Diez (1985), “language of business negotiations” by Lampi (1986), etc.). Later, it grew into a wide field of research, although we did not find the term “Business Linguistics” in academic writing, in spite of a thorough examination of the problem². The only mentioning of this notion we managed to find on the internet was a link to some commercial companies providing translating services for business. Therefore, we believe, we should initiate the term and suggest officially establishing the branch itself in academic research, because only the complex approach will bring the synergy and multi-dimensional vision of the problem. We suppose it is time to introduce this concept and accept Business Linguistics as a full sub-discipline, a separate complex branch within the framework of Applied Linguistics.

Business itself requires researchers (including linguists and communication theorists) to suggest methods of improving its efficiency through optimizing communication. The vital role of communication (communicating information) in business and management

is widely recognized. When working, people will inevitably establish communication relations with each other – vertical (the hierarchy of management in the company) and horizontal (in teamwork, communication with colleagues). Business is interested in enhancing the effectiveness of communication, including the following formats: the dialogue of superiors and subordinates, the potential and received meaning, feedback, organizational climate and corporate culture, prevention and resolution of conflicts, consensus and disagreement, influence and persuasion, public speech of the leader, team communications, communication barriers, the interviewing, selecting and appraisal of the personnel, reporting, the workplace language, communication assessment and others.

Communication competence has become an integral feature and a prerequisite of a successful businessman and leader. Being a strategic manager implies being a “communication manager” (Klikauer, 2008). The role of the communication characteristics of the leader in the company’s overall success has been determined, and a model for effective communicative behavior of the leader has been designed (Campbell, 2006) based on the classical theory of speech acts. According to this model, an effective manager should use direct or indirect language, depending on how threatening their message is for the internal “I” of the subordinate, and should use specific linguistic means to involve subordinates in the process of “active listening”.

Many prominent scholars and researchers have explored the field of Business Linguistics (although, not using the term yet). Significant achievements in the field of business language and business communication have been made by (in the alphabetical order) F.Bargiela-Chiappini, L.Beamer, V.Bhatia, Ch.Candlin, A.Johns, C.Nickerson, A.Pennycook, G.Poncini, L.Putnam, C.Roberts, P.Rogers, H.Spencer-Oatey, J.Swales, I.Varner, L.Yeung and others. By the end of the 1990s the subject of the study – “how business uses language to achieve its goals” – and the basis for its methodology were determined by Ehlich and Wagner (1995), Firth (1995), Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997a, 1997b), Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (1999). The link between business context and the language was traced and a gap “between contextual business approach and linguistic textual approach” filled (Charles, 1996, p. 20).

In our opinion, investigation of the language functioning in business should be based on a *discursive approach*, which implies a deep speech penetration in life. Business discourse is supposed to be the *object* and the center of study for Business Linguistics. Discourse in general is a multi-dimensional and polysemantic

² We would appreciate the corrections, if any.

phenomenon. One of the first mentions of business discourse can be found in Johns (1980) (she also was one of the first to introduce the term “the language of business” into academic writing: Johns, 1986). What exactly is business discourse? Bargiela-Chiappini defines it as “all about how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations to get their work done”, as “social action in business contexts” (Bargiela-Chiappini *et al.*, 2007, p. 3).

Following the concepts of discourse by van Dijk (2007), Fairclough (2001), and Wodak and Chilton (2005), we can define business discourse as the *verbalization of business mentality, realized in the form of an open multitude of thematically correlated texts on a wide range of business issues, considered in combination with their extra-linguistic contexts*. The concept of business discourse is wide and encompasses some “thematic subspecies”, for example “economic discourse”, “corporate discourse”, “discourse of negotiations”, etc.

We offer the following *functional sub-classification* of business discourse types (it is important to note that the sub-types are often transitional and mutually overlapping with other discursive fields):

- Training and academic business discourse (in textbooks, manuals, research of various aspects of business, economics, management and entrepreneurship, as well as in lectures, case studies, training, business consulting and coaching) – it performs an *educational* function;
- Ritual-public business discourse (e.g., meetings, reports and speeches of corporate executives to the shareholders and staff, presentations, discourses of PR and advertising, etc.) – it performs an *argumentative-influencing* function;
- Document business discourse (internal and external business correspondence, corporate documents, regulations and charters of companies and organizations, articles of incorporation, etc. – mainly, written discourse) – it performs a *regulative* function;
- The discourse of business media – it performs an *informative-polemic* function;
- The discourse of professional business communication (in negotiations, communication with clients, colleagues, including production/manufacturing and technical discourses, as well as business slang and argot, for example, a specific sublanguage of exchange traders – mainly, oral discourse) – it performs an *instrumental-persuasive* function.

It is also important to note that the traditional 20th-century division into oral and written discourses is becoming obsolete. Indeed, one of the most obvious

criteria for discourse classifications is the communicative channel used. According to the type of channel there were traditionally distinguished (and often opposed) *oral and written* discourses. The difference in the channel of transmitting information causes different characteristics of the two types of discourse (Chafe, 1994): in oral discourse generation and understanding of the message occur almost synchronically, while in written discourse these processes occur consecutively. Therefore, oral discourse is generated by fragments (“quanta”, intonation units). In written discourse predications are integrated into complex sentences, and complex syntactic constructions. Furthermore, in oral discourse (as opposed to writing), there is a temporal and spatial contact between the interlocutors, which gives them a deep involvement in the situation, while written discourse implies a removal (keeping away) of the speaker and the addressee from the information described in the discourse, and that is reflected in the different use of lexical and grammatical resources.

But with the development of information and communication technologies such a binary opposition of oral and written forms of discourse does not seem so obvious any longer. A question arises – whether communicating via instant messengers, e-mailing, chats and forums should be considered as a technically-mediated form of oral discourse (lacking such important non-verbal and para-verbal characteristics of a conversation as facial expressions, voice tone and volume, gestures, etc.). And what if such communication on the internet is accompanied by an exchange of images of the interlocutors, instantly made by web- or photo-cameras and immediately sent by the computer, smartphone or any other type of communicators? Which type should it be ascribed to? What about an exchange of short textual messages (SMS) or e-mail messages with emoticons, which actually are pictograms, meaning emotions and facial expressions?

Clearly it is time to accept the emergence of a *new* type of discourse – web-discourse (or internet discourse) that combines elements of both spoken and written discourses. Communication on the net requires a time contact (synchronization of information generating and perception) and provides a deep involvement in the situation with instant responding, typical of oral talk, although the “talk” is made in written (or quasi-written) form. Thus, a web business discourse is the reality of the 21st century, and we can anticipate it to be growing and ripe for research.

Now, let us turn back to a brief *review* of achievements in exploring business linguistics through analyzing business discourse. Over the past two decades, the techniques of conversation analysis, sociology and ethnomethodology have been used to draw a conclusion about the vital role of communication and discourse in business: communication is the “lifeblood

of all organizations”, which shapes and is shaped by the organizational structure (Boden, 1994, p. 8). Organizational communication and business discourse are at the centre of research in the collections edited by Bargiela-Chiappini and Gotti (2005), Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (1999), Ehlich and Wagner (1995), Firth (1995), Gotti and Gillaerts (2005), Gouveia *et al.* (2004), Hewings and Nickerson (1999), Putnam and Krone (2006), Putnam and Roloff (1992), Ramallo *et al.* (2009), Trosborg and Jorgensen (2005).

The culture of corporate discourse, transactional discourse and communication models of “management speak” are analyzed by Daft and Lengel (1984), Hagen (1993), Argenti (2008), van Riel (1995), Clampitt (2000), Cross (2001), Feely and Harzing (2003), Koester (2004), Vine (2004), Greatbatch and Clark (2005). Swales and Rogers (1995) see discourse of the mission statement as the projection of corporate culture. Thomas (1997) investigates the discourse in annual general reports. Yeung (1999), Garzone (2004), Amernic and Craig (2006), Fendt (2007) describe the CEO’s discourse, as a manifestation of power.

Many works focus on stylistic and semantic aspects of business communication – genre analysis research of written business discourse is done and styles of business correspondence are explored by Louhiala-Salminen (2002), Garzone (2005), Gotti and Gillaerts (2005), Gimenez (2006), the Semantics of Business English is investigated by Nelson (2006).

Various aspects of intercultural business discourse and business communication in the national languages are analyzed in works by L.Beamer, I.Varner, M.Al-Ali, E.Lavric, L.Yeung, Li Wei, Zhu Hua, Li Yue, Margie Li, Yuling Pan, Keiko Emmett, dos Santos Pinto, de Moraes Garcez and others: Varner (2000) designs the theoretical model of intercultural business communication; Kameda (2005) compares English and Japanese business communication; Ponchini (2004) suggests discursive strategies for multicultural business meetings; Piekari and Zander (2005) propose a conversation model for a multicultural workplace with tips for communicating with representatives of European, Asian and other cultures. Beamer and Varner (2008) explore intercultural communication in the global workplace. The language is treated as a vital factor in multinational management by Marschan *et al.* (1997), Perkins (1999), Stubbe *et al.* (2003), Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2005) and others.

A complex range of business discourse issues is presented by Bargiela-Chiappini *et al.* (2007) in their book *Business Discourse*. The authors provide a review of outstanding papers in the field, depict profiles of prominent researchers, and describe the methodology for researching and teaching the language of business.

The research *goals* of business discourse analysis follow the traditions of US communication theories and

West European training methods, combining descriptive and prescriptive purposes. Business communication is studied so as to describe and better understand its mechanisms, as well as to provide students and business people with the means and principles of effective communication (including skills in foreign languages). The *types of data / material* in business linguistics may vary depending on the researcher’s aim: we can come across experimental, simulated, and authentic materials and their combinations. Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini (2003, p. 155) note “the shift from [...] simulated data to naturally-occurring corporate language”. As for the *methodology* of business discourse studies, a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques is most typical, including methods of corpus linguistics with statistical data processing. One of the most frequently used method is the “case study” technique, especially when combined with critical analysis; for example, it is widely used by Livesey (2002 and other publications on corporate discourse of Shell, McDonalds and ExxonMobil).

In Russia, the study of the language of business and business discourse / communication is a young but very promising branch of philology. Some important research has been done by T.Nazarova (business vocabulary), E.Malyuga (functional pragmatics of intercultural business communication), T.Shiryaeva (cognitive models of business discourse), K.Tomashevskaya (analysis of contemporary economic discourse), A.Zinovieva and Y.Daniushina (intercultural business communication), and others.

Thus, Business Linguistics exists “de facto”. We suppose it is time to accept and establish it “de jure” as a separate integrative field within Applied Linguistics.

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