

On Introducing Business Linguistics

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Abstract

The paper suggests acknowledging a separate sub-discipline within the framework of Applied Linguistics – Business Linguistics, a complex, interdisciplinary field for researching the use of language in business and verbal specifics of business communication. The author initiates the exploration of Business Linguistics, defining its sources, key areas and practical purposes. The discursive approach adopted is intended to provide the basis for investigating this promising sphere, therefore a complex definition of business discourse is proposed. The author investigates the field of Business Linguistics by researching the dominant semantics of corporate web-discourses of a few American, Asian and Russian companies.

Key words – Linguistics, business discourse, business communication, corporate discourse, web discourse.

1. Introduction. Why Business Linguistics?

The recent accelerated technological development of society has caused a greater interdisciplinary interaction of separate fields of knowledge and has stimulated a new perspective of cross-border disciplines appearing in these zones of contact. In the linguistic sphere, examples of such cross-border disciplines are Media Linguistics, Political Linguistics, Judicial (or Legal, or Forensic) Linguistics, and Ethno-linguistics. By searching on the Internet, we have also detected Environmental Linguistics, Medical Linguistics, Military Linguistics, and even Sports Linguistics. 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.

The opponents will ask, «But isn't the language of business the same as the language in general? Do businesspeople speak another English (French, Italian, etc) – different from 'ordinary' English (French, Italian, etc)?» The incorrectness and fallacy of such criticism are clearly revealed with asking similar tricky questions – Do politicians or jurists speak another language – different from the 'ordinary' one? No? Still, nobody questions and doubts the existence of Political Linguistics or Forensic Linguistics and their necessity. And business communication does deserve equal linguistic focusing.

The really true answer to these questions is «No and Yes», without any internal contradiction: No – because Business English is still English, that is, the language is the same (precisely, almost the same – the terminology is specific, that is why we speak of the professional sublanguages); Yes – because the *use* of the language is different (see

the famous Ferdinand de Saussure's dichotomy 'langue/language – parole/speech' (Saussure 1916/1977). It is speech (discourse, the use of language in specific environment) what is really different. Business discourse does have its own communicative, pragmatic, lexical, syntactic, textual, composite, visual-graphic, normative, genre-stylistic and other peculiar features. And many researchers have noticed that business texts possess specific characteristics distinguishing them from other kinds of texts - scientific, publicist, fictional, etc. (Karasik 2000; Tomashevskaya 2000, Guryeva 2003a, 2003b; Nazarova 2007; Shiryayeva 2008 – the Russian linguists are referred to here because in post-socialist Russia, where business is only about three decades old, the difference between 'the language of the business era' and 'the language of the no business era' is especially clearly seen).

The most obvious peculiarity of business discourse is 'essence enlargement' – the meaning intensification in semantics, correlating with phonographic, morphological, syntactic, stylistic, and para-verbal devices typical of this discourse, which are employed to provide its pragmatic purposes realization (Daniushina 2010). Such *multi-level discursive intensification*, with increased argumentative or manipulative potentials, can be most easily traced in the language of advertising, brand slogans and corporate missions and mottos, which all constitute a substantial segment of business discourse (e.g. in phrases like *connecting people* or *feeling the difference*, etc). The following metaphoric comparison illustrates the point – just like added value is created in business, additional essences are created in business discourse.

Certainly, one can try to search for the explanation of all the phenomena of business discourse and communication in the separate fields of Lexicology, Syntax, Styles, Applied Linguistics, Organizational Communication, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), LSP (Language for Specific Purposes), and even NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) - trying to see the whole picture through all the separated and mixed pieces of patchwork... But the only way to grasp the whole multi-dimensional picture, with its complex interrelated ties and correlations is in creating a joint multidisciplinary *synergy* able to join all the puzzle pieces into one complex. These reasons seem sufficient to introduce 'Business Linguistics' as a separate field within the framework of Applied Linguistics, and to initiate the development of its methodology and scientific apparatus.

2. The Research Scope of the New Discipline

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.),

- Language of PR, advertising and marketing, the special language techniques for sales and marketing (including methods of psycho-verbal manipulation and neuro-linguistic programming),
- 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 feedback,
 - Documentation such as 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. Business Linguistics intersects and *interacts* with many related above-mentioned areas – with Media linguistics (in researching the language of business media), Juristic Linguistics (in exploring the language of corporate, contract and property law), and Political Linguistics (in investigating the language of socio-economic relations). 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 discourse analysis, content and 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 partially overlapping with those of the above-mentioned sister disciplines. Various types of linguistic data can be used as *material* for research – authentic, simulated or experimental data, as well as their combinations.

The emergence of Business Linguistics has been determined by the *socio-historical preconditions* and by the new *demands of business*. In the 21st century society has reached a new stage in its history – we can metaphorically define it as «the consumption society in the information epoch». 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.

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 the «bargaining communication» by Angelmar and Stern 1978, «language at work» and «language of business» by Jones 1980 and 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 the term «Business Linguistics» was not used in academic writing (at least, we did not find it anywhere in spite of our thorough examination of the problem). 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, the academic use of the term should be introduced now and the new synergic field officially established. We think it is high time to accept Business Linguistics as a full sub-discipline, a separate complex branch within the framework of applied linguistics. A difference between this field and the term/concept of 'Business Communication' should be also clarified: the former focuses on the language (speech, discourse) itself, while the latter embraces structural, organizational, informative, technical, psychological, social and other extra-verbal (extra-linguistic) dimensions. Actually, business communication is a phenomenon, a reality – not an academic discipline itself. Business Linguistics is supposed to explore business communication like Economics explores economy. The same reasons suggest the answer to another potential question from our opponents – why introduce Business Linguistics if we already have LSP: first of all, because LSP is *Language* for Specific Purposes – language, while Linguistics is its study. Besides, LSP includes all kinds of specific sublanguages (including the language of politics – researched by Political Linguistics, and the language of law - researched by Forensic Linguistics), meanwhile it has already been proved that the use of language in business, i.e. business discourse differs from that of literature (fiction discourse), science/arts (academic discourse), religion, pedagogy, philosophy, etc.

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 itself requires researchers (including linguists and communication theorists) to suggest methods of improving its efficiency through optimizing communication. 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). Business Linguistics can benefit the communication competence of specialists and entrepreneurs, and contribute to their understanding of the nature of communication processes in their professional activities and consequently increase the communication efficiency of businesses.

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: 8). The link between business context and language has been traced and a gap «between

contextual business approach and linguistic textual approach» filled (Charles 1996:20). 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 and 1997b, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 1999.

Many scholars and researchers have explored the field of Business Linguistics (although, not using the term yet): organizational communication and business discourse are at the centre of research in the collections edited by (in alphabetical order) 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 Flyvholm Jorgensen 2005, Amernic and Craig 2006, Clampitt 2000, Fendt, J. 2007, Garzone 2004, Greatbatch and Clark 2005 research managerial discourse ('CEO-speak'). The nature of corporate communication, the dialogue in negotiations, transactions and meetings, the language of business correspondence and intercultural deals are investigated by Argenti 2005, Beamer and Varner 1994/2005, Cross 2001, Feely and Harzing 2003, Garzone 2005, Gimenez 2006, Hagen 1993, Koester 2004, Livesey 2002, Louhiala-Salminen 2002, Marschan et al 1997, Nelson 2006, Perkins 1999, Piekkari and Zander 2005, Ponchini 2004, Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2005, Stubbe et al 2003, Swales and Rogers 1995, Thomas 1997, van Riel 1995, Varner 2000, Vine 2004, Yeung 1999 and many others. In Russia, the study of the language of business and business 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), K. Tomashevskaya (analysis of the national economic discourse), Y. Daniushina (manipulation in business communication) and others. Thus, Business Linguistics already exists 'de facto' and we suggest acknowledging it 'de jure'.

In our opinion, investigation of the language functioning in business should be based on a *discursive approach*, which implies a social orientation of research. 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 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? F. 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, Nickerson and Planken 2007:3). Following (and integrating) the concepts of discourse by N. Fairclough, T. van Dijk, R. Wodak and applying their methods of discourse analysis – specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk 2007, Fairclough 1993, 2001, Wodak 2005) – to exploring the use of the language in business, we can define business discourse as the *verbalization of business mentality* (and of business itself), 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.

With the development of information and communication technologies, the traditional binary opposition of oral and written forms of discourse does not seem so obvious any

longer: web discourse (or Internet discourse) combines the elements of both spoken and written types. 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 promising for research. A properly organized business discourse (including that on the Internet) can help corporations and businessmen 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 the business guru T. Piters, 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. Scoble and Izrael have described this work in their *Naked Conversations* (Scoble and Izrael 2006).

3. Semantic Dominants of Corporate Web Sites (a case study in Business Semantics)

The application of vocabulary (lexical-semantic content) of a public corporate web discourse is of great interest for researchers, as it specifies the general sense of discourse and creates its macrostructure (‘topic’), according to T.van Dijk (Dijk 2007). The accuracy and credibility of the words used in the corporate web site determine the image of the corporation, the moral satisfaction of investors and the attitude of the general public, including potential shareholders. We have made an attempt to analyze the semantics of public business discourses in China, Russia and the U.S. To do it, we have used texts from the web sites of largest oil-and-gas corporations of the three countries, respectively: Sinopec, Gazprom and ExxonMobil, – all of them are included in the ratings of the largest – in terms of profit – global companies made by the *Fortune* magazine (the English language versions of the corporate textual materials were used for comparability). As a result, we have found that in all the three cases, the prevailing lexicon refers to the following conceptual semantic fields (the examples from the corporate texts are given in italics):

1) «great size, importance of the company, its leader position on the (inter)national scale»:

ExxonMobil (the U.S.) – *the world’s largest international oil and gas company, a leader in the energy industry, the world’s largest refiner, a long history of leadership;*

Gazprom (Russia) – *global energy company, the leading position among the global energy companies, the world’s largest gas company, a key player on the Russian oil market;*

Sinopec (China) – *advantageous position, its international strategy “to go global”, dominant in the market, a super-large group, China’s largest producer and supplier, an endeavor to become a multinational company;*

2) «social responsibility of the company»:

ExxonMobil – our company provides energy that helps underpin growing economies and improve living standards around the world, respect for human rights and to serving as a positive influence in the communities where we operate, good corporate citizens, social responsibility, a well-founded reputation for high ethical standards;

Gazprom – (the company) supplied gas to 79,750 population centers in Russia, “Gasification ” of Russian regions is a national-scale social project, energy safety reinforcement, rationally use substantial reserves, socially oriented project, the country's citizens starting to use natural gas, high-priority social project, the transfer of social and utility sphere objects to municipal authorities;

Sinopec – significant contribution to ... rapid social and economic development in China, (we) attach great importance to the corporate social responsibilities, new products (for space explorations) and for the Beijing Olympic games, the theme of “engaging with the masses and promoting harmony”, philanthropic events, (the company) donated money (to help the victims of the earthquake);

3) «innovation and technological leadership»:

ExxonMobil – a technology company, applying science and innovation to find better, safer and cleaner ways, technological innovations, innovative technology, proprietary technology;

Gazprom – implementation of scientific and technical advances, electric power saving equipment, and technologies;

Sinopec – promoting technology renovation, scientific technological innovation, fostering technological improvements, forward-looking research, (the company has) 2671 patents;

4) «the company’s green mentality and care for environment»:

ExxonMobil – climate control is an important concern, an environmentally responsible manner, to reduce emissions and minimize environmental impacts, energy-saving technologies, breakthrough innovations that could significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions worldwide;

Gazprom – environment protection and ensuring ecological safety, pollution reduction, environmental priorities, environment costs increased;

Sinopec – saving energy and reducing emissions, clean fuel (the third and the fourth groups are less numerous with Gazprom and Sinopec);

5) «success and reliability of the company, its high performance» (this semantic group turns out to be especially important with the American and Russian companies):

ExxonMobil – integrity, superior financial and operating results, outstanding performance, reliable supply of our products to our customers, responsibility and effectiveness, operational excellence, superior financial results to our shareholders, our success, exceptional people, disciplined capital investment, long-term industry perspective, accomplishments, achieving record earnings performance, exceptional results, the fundamental strength, strengths, with our outstanding and proven financial, managerial, technological, and operational capabilities, achieving sustained, industry-leading returns and growing shareholder value, best practices and deploy expertise globally, superior performance, Consistency, Integrity, Discipline, Reliability, and Ingenuity;

Gazprom – *(the company's mission) is to provide effective and well-balanced gas supply, safely implement long-term gas export contracts, effectiveness of Gazprom's business, confident about its future, reliable gas supplier, to substantially enhance the reliability and flexibility of gas supply to Europe, ensuring the long-term value growth, high level of reliability;*

Sinopec – *(the company's) strengths, its competitive positioning, precision management, the profit marks constant growth, engagement with investors, better managerial mechanism, fruitful results, remarkable performance.*

It is notable that the Chinese corporation (a collectivist culture) stresses its social responsibility but draws less attention to self-praising and self-promotion, while the American corporation (individualistic culture) emphasizes its successful results and achievements, and the Russian corporation (a mixed culture) keeps in the middle.

The following conclusions can be drawn from this case study:

(a) we have identified some dominant semantic constants in public business discourse that are intercultural, i.e. can be found in corporate web discourses of different national cultures – western, eastern, mixed (mediating);

(b) the public discourse of the corporate web sites of a few Chinese, Russian and the U.S. corporations reveals a thematic unity, with the main topic “our company and its success” embodied by the semantic key frames: great size of the company, the leader position, social responsibility, innovation and technology, success, reliability and high performance.

Thus, the appropriate accents and lexical semantic techniques create an image of greatness and leadership, a sense of corporate responsibility, its success and credibility – and hence it stimulates the company's attractiveness to existing and potential investors.

This shows only a tiny part of the opportunities that Business Linguistics can offer to both applied linguistics theory and business practice.

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