

ВЕКТОР ПОИСКА VECTOR OF SEARCH

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Danyushina Y.V.

GOVERNANCE AND BUSINESS
COMMUNICATION**Danyushina Yulia Vladimirovna,***Doctor of Philology, Professor of the Department of National Security*

Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration,

82/1 Vernadsky Ave., Moscow, 119571, Russia; E-mail: juliadaniushina@mail.ru

АБСТРАКТ

The paper suggests establishing a separate sub-discipline on the crossroads of Applied Linguistics and Communication studies – Governance and Business Linguistics – a complex, interdisciplinary field for researching the use of language in governance and business, and for exploring the verbal specifics of institutional communication. The discursive approach is adopted to provide the basis for the investigation, and the multi-level critical discourse analysis is used as its key research method. “2.0” implies the specific new opportunities given for improving institutional communication efficiency by modern IT, the Internet (Web 2), new, telecommunications, social networks, multimedia.

The author starts exploring the field by investigating the corporate websites and blogs of the leading US companies – the paper explores the language of the corporate governance, leadership, internal and external specifics of the corporate communication. The paper argues that all companies can be classified into 4 discursive types identified by the author on the basis of the four types of social implications in their discursive rhetoric.

Key words: business; communication; discourse analysis; governance; linguistics; management.

Данюшина Ю.В.

УПРАВЛЕНЧЕСКАЯ И ДЕЛОВАЯ
КОММУНИКАЦИЯ**Данюшина Юлия Владимировна,***доктор филологических наук, профессор кафедры национальной безопасности*

Российская академия народного хозяйства и государственной службы,

проспект Вернадского, 82/1, г. Москва, 119571, Россия; E-mail: juliadaniushina@mail.ru

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье предлагается выделить отдельную суб-дисциплину на стыке прикладной лингвистики и коммуникативистики – управленческую и деловую лингвистику как комплексную междисциплинарную область для исследования языка в управлении и бизнесе и для изучения вербальной специфики институциональной коммуникации. Дискурсивный подход принят как основной, а многоуровневый критический дискурс-анализ используется в качестве ключевого метода исследования. «2.0» подразумевает особые новые возможности, предоставленные для повышения эффективности институциональной коммуникации современными ИТ, Интернетом («паутиной второго поколения «-Web 2), новыми телекоммуникационными средствами, социальными сетями, мультимедиа.

Автор начинает исследовать данную область, анализируя корпоративные сайты и блоги ведущих американских компаний. В статье рассматриваются язык корпоративного управления и лидерства, внутренние и внешние особенности корпоративных коммуникаций. В итоге все компании подразделяются на 4 дискурсивных типа, определенных автором на основе четырех типов социальных импликаций в дискурсивной риторике компаний.

Key words: business; communication; discourse analysis; governance; linguistics; management.

The recent accelerated informational and 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. 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 (Chinese, German, etc) – different from 'ordinary' English (Chinese, German, 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 deserves more than equal linguistic attention.

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 2003; Nazarova 2007; Shiryayeva 2008; Danyushina 2009 – 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 (Danyushina 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 inter-related ties and correlations is in creating a joint multidisciplinary synergy able to join all the puzzle pieces into one complex – Business Linguistics.

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 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; language in the workplace in multinationals, and language assessment).

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. 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.

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, p. 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 – CDA [van Dijk 2007, Fairclough 1993, 2001, Wodak & Chilton 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, e.g. economic discourse, corporate discourse, discourse of negotiations, etc.

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].

In the following part of our research we are going to trace the social dominants in the semantics and rhetoric of corporate web discourses.

Corporate websites and blogs have now become a popular form of corporate communication, as well as an efficient tool for corporate advertising, marketing and public relations, especially when corporate web-communicators and bloggers apply socially appealing rhetoric in their discourses. Business has already acknowledged the importance of electronic media and web discourse in creating and maintaining (or improving) the reputation of the company, by means of formation of a "special" relationships with existing and potential customers and investors.

In this part of our research, the social implications of public corporate semantics and rhetoric in web discourse will be investigated. The material for our study are electronic corporate media (corporate websites and blogs) of leading global corporations, originated in the US and belonging to different industries and sectors. Our preliminary study has shown that one can classify several groups of companies active in the field of web communication:

a) directly related to the development of information and communication technologies, telecoms, information search and processing, manufacturing computer and communication equipment (i.e. producing "high-intellectual products"),

b) manufacturers of consumer goods (mass market food and beverages, hygienic and cosmetic products),

a) financial sector companies, especially banks that at least partially distribute or deliver their products or services through the Internet,

d) large multinational corporations and B2B companies that maintain their websites and/or blogs mostly for the sake of prestige (e.g. big oil companies).

We suppose that their discursive rhetoric should be based on the characteristics of the target audience of each group, and hence should meet the needs of their client groups, respectively,

(a) "intellectual" consumers,

(b) "somatic" mass consumers,

(c) knowledgeable specialists, individuals belonging to at least the middle class and have a bank account, interested in social stability, and

(d) the broad strata of society as a whole.

Thus, we can speak of various social implications in their corporate semantics and rhetoric. Let's see how our hypothesis is corroborated in the practice of corporate electronic communication. A bright example of the first type of companies in our classification is Google, which has a whole myriad of sites and blogs. In their web discourse, the following points dominate:

– High level of professional / technical expertise combined with the personalized style of messages about new products and services of the company,

– Emphasis on "distinctive" nature of their customers and their belonging to the "special circle" of "googlers", with advanced intellect and social consciousness,

– Image of a socially responsible company, keeping people informed about its social (charity and philanthropic) projects, and initiating nationwide debate on socially significant topics.

Therefore, in addition to information about new products, which is expectedly the main theme, the Google's blog-sites often become a civil forum for the expressing public opinion, for example, in discussing the initiatives of the U.S. President Obama on reforming the national healthcare system, and as a tool of the civil society, for example, the company's projects aimed at opening a broad public access to documents and information systems of federal and municipal authorities. Of course, this stimulates approval from intellectuals who feel positively about the company's activity first as humans and citizens, and then as customers and clients.

A typical post in the Google blogs emphasizes the social dimension of the new company's program for homeless veterans under the meaningful headline "Care" that will help them in getting employment and medical help, as well as communicating with family, etc. (hereinafter we underline the key indicative semantics):

Bringing Project CARE to veterans in Washington, D.C. 1/22/2010

...Project CARE is a program to provide free Google Voice phone numbers and voicemail ac-

counts to homeless individuals. The Google Voice team has been offering this program in the San Francisco Bay Area... and we're excited to bring Project CARE to a new city. On Saturday, Google Voice will join dozens of other Washington, D.C. organizations at the Winterhaven Homeless Veterans Stand Down at the D.C. Veterans Affairs Medical Center to try and make life a little easier for hundreds of veterans in the Washington, D.C. area. We will be handing out Project CARE cards and helping attendees set up unique phone numbers and voicemail accounts, which they can use when applying for jobs or filling out medical forms, or share with family...

A brief analysis of post headlines depicts the scope of socially relevant themes discussed in the company's blogs: participating in civil society development (Media and citizens meet in the YouTube Reporters' Center. 6/29/2009 10:50:00 AM), preserving national ethno-cultural identity through stimulating work in native languages (Toolbar, now with advanced translation. 6/30/2009), providing people in poorer countries with an access to information (Extending Google services in Africa. 6/29/2009), help to schools and pupils (Google heads to grade school: New resources for K-12 teachers and students. 6/30/2009), company's projects on improving transparency of the governmental information and on promoting civil rights to express opinions (Greater transparency around government requests 4/20/2010), ecology issues and preventing famine (Eating our way through Earth Day. 4/22/2010). The readers can't help feeling that the company cares of the public well-being and works towards increasing citizens' consciousness and stimulating community cooperation.

The second type of companies and of discursive rhetoric may be represented in our typology by Coca-Cola and its blog www.coca-colaconversations.com, whose discourse is aimed primarily at consumers which we classify as "somatic" – those for whom consumerism has become a life philosophy and consumption has become a new quasi-culture. The fans of sweet sodas are mostly interested in unpretentious things like movies, pop culture, all kinds of mass entertainment), so these topics are combined with a glorification of consumerist philosophy symbols. The brand is presented as something epochal in time and space – here we can see "the world of Coca-Cola", "the history of Coca-Cola", etc. and they ap-

pear alongside with the notions of culture, cultural heritage, change:

July 01, 2009. Coca-Cola Inspired Fashion

Coca-Cola is always adapting to the ever-changing culture of our society...The fusion of Coca-Cola and the fashion industry has historically been and will continue to be an agent of change... I wanted to make you aware of some other ways that you can connect to learn more in the digital world about the heritage of The Coca-Cola Company and its brands...

The blog contains many reports on the works of pop art and pop culture, created under the inspiration of the Coca-Cola, which is called an "icon", and which is always surrounded with the eternal holiday:

June 26, 2009. Spotlight on The World of Coca-Cola – Artist Steve Kaufman

The New Art Exhibit in The Pop Culture Gallery at the World of Coke is entitled "Celebrating An Icon: The Coca-Cola Bottle in Contemporary Art"... Posted in Pop Culture, World of Coca-Cola

In general, the feast, celebrations, holidays and fun – these are the concepts that dominate in the corporate rhetoric of Coca-Cola. And its fans (the readers) in their responses and express themselves through characterizing the drink (often with misspells, lexical, grammar or style mistakes, attesting to their level of education and culture) with most positive definition: the best ever, changing the world, ruling the world, great taste, refreshment and "smooth". And those "somatic" customers often express their emotions with numerous exclamation signs, capital letters and emoticons:

happy b-day the BEST drink EVER!!!!!!!!!!!! be the best as THE ALWAYS!!! :) keep on ruling the world!! :***Posted by: berta

..."excellent", something that changed the hole world!!!Posted by: Mario

Happy Birthday Coca-Cola, the first 123 years are the toughest, the next 123 years will be like the great taste, refreshing & smooooooth! Posted by: go4coke88

In this blog, the positive corporate image is build by means of creating a sense of "eternal joy and celebration" associates with the brand, as well as by semantic reframing (or trans-framing): substituting negative associations (e.g. dental caries and obesity which can be results of habitual consumption of sweet sodas) with positive ones: fun, happiness, etc.

The third type of companies and corporate rhetoric is represented in our classification by the leading US bank – Bank of America. The public rhetoric of companies of the financial sector is of particular interest because the latest global economic and financial crisis started in this sphere, and financiers (bankers, investment bankers, brokers, and other “fat cats from Wall Street”) are often accused of receiving unreasonably high profits and paying themselves huge bonuses. The U.S. President has declared that it was time to put work and earnings of banks and financial agencies under strict public control. It is therefore extremely interesting to see how these companies are positioning themselves through their corporate websites and blogs, especially during the crisis and in the post-crisis time.

Future Banking Blog is a corporate blog of Bank of America, whose authors have understood the new requirements of society, and actively supported the “discourse of social anti-crisis upgrade»:

Mobile Payments: \$860 Billion By 2013?
03.13.2009, 4:05 pm Author: Jeff Carter

Still, the remaining challenges are real, and will need to be addressed jointly by a wide range of participants, including telecom, banking, regulators and governments (here placing banking among the synonymous row along with state regulators and governments “equalizes” them in importance, as if the main purpose of the banks activities were not profit but the concern for general social well-being, order and general prosperity). And this does not even touch the potential for wide ranging cross-industry collaborations (the author proposes the concept of “cross-industry collaborations” – with implication of inter-class social cooperation, thus implying the idea of social contract, a national wide, inter-strata unity) around mobile banking, media and health (again a number of synonyms “equalizes” mobile banking with healthcare, thus the author once again positions his branch at the level of universal significance).

The authors of this blog understand the destructive nature of total consumerism, of the philosophy of over-consumption, and call for saving costs with introducing a new slogan: “Spend as much to survive”:

“Sustainable Spending”...a new measure for the Economy? | Author: Jeff Miller

...I'd like to see the removal of a negative association with saving, and while we're at it,

let's add a qualifier when we speak of consumer spending. I give you “Sustainable Spending”... Most agree that we should not spend more than we earn on a regular basis. It's not sustainable, unless there is another expected source of earnings... It seems obvious... But this key message is competing with the “if you've got it, spend it” culture that has existed for decades with few interruptions. What are our children learning as they are exposed to this spending culture?...

In the feedback to this post similar concepts are offered: “a regular savings”, “smooth consumption”, etc. Thus, the discourse of the bank's corporate blog reflects the current phase of public consciousness, marked with the awareness of the need for change in the consumerist western civilization. More and more bloggers associate problems in the financial sector with the disease (the relative metaphors compare the financial risks with the risk to life, etc.) and advocate for an improvement of the banking, financial system:

Financial health for a more secure future.
12.05.2008, 11:59 am. Author: Hans D Schumacher | Quantitative Operations Executive

One lesson to emerge from the current financial crisis is the importance of setting, and adhering to, financial goals... The financial industry can do more to encourage people to treat financial decisions like the lifestyle risks they are, learn to set realistic goals and evaluate their progress along the way.

In general, we can note that the discourse in this blog sounds in unison with the public concerns that have spread all over the West, including the U.S., in the face of the global financial and economic crisis: more and more people have come to recognize the need to introduce government regulation and public control over activities of financial speculators and deals of “Wall Street fat cats”. Despite the fact that this is the blog of the largest US bank, its authors clearly understand that it is time to adjust the corporate rhetoric to the new requirements of society.

Finally, a fourth type of corporate rhetoric on websites and blogs is that of transnational “mineral” corporations (especially, dealing in oil), whose product is not directly consumed by the mass consumer, or like gasoline, is not uniquely associated with their particular brand. However, they maintain a public dialogue with the masses, because it is a prerequisite of their “global” status, as well as due to the need to self-present

themselves as “assistants of the civilization”. This results in the abundance of their discourse of semantics “providing the whole planet with energy” in combination with the environmental vocabulary, especially after the huge environmental catastrophes provoked by oil spills, etc. A bright example of such Big Oil public discourse is the website of Exxon Mobil. In its CEO’s speech (*The Future of Energy and the Role of Corporate Citizenship, April 19, 2010*), one can feel the linguistic expression of the opposition to the proposals to put big business under stricter public/governmental control:

For decades there has been a debate in the United States about the role of business in driving social and economic progress... The answer for some is more private enterprise and less government – while the answer for others is more government and less private enterprise.

In contrast to the voices of other sectors, the oil bosses make their choice in favor of the traditional “free market” in which, as expected, private initiative will accelerate the progress of society, and the risk and competition will lead to success:

By promoting free markets, free trade, and the rule of law, the United States fostered an atmosphere in which citizens and businesses could take risks, innovate, build, and achieve unprecedented success. The result was a dynamic, world-leading economy that delivered prosperity and progress for generations.

“Free market”, “competition”, “risk”, “private initiative” – these are concepts that abound in the corporate rhetoric in the Exxon Mobil’s website, and they seem to express the views of the “old time big capital” (as opposed to new, “high-intellect product” companies):

«...To achieve these goals, we must unleash the extraordinary power of private citizens to seize new opportunities in free markets. Industry can achieve this by taking risks, investing in the future, hiring new workers, expanding operations and making our economy more competitive. But we can only achieve this when government creates a level playing field for competition and upholds a stable policy framework conducive to long-term investments.

And these keystones oppose to public control and government regulation, the latter turning in the Exxon Mobil head’s speech into “over-regulation”:

... in tough economic times government can help by keeping a steady hand on the rudder. If the private sector knows that government will stay the course and resist the temptation to over regulate, it can invest with confidence.

However, the crisis is forcing to slightly modify even big oil bosses’ corporate style and take social needs into closer consideration:

Good corporate citizenship – focusing on how we conduct our business and how we interact with the communities where we operate – is critical to building trust in the private sector – the kind of trust that is necessary to strengthening our relationship with citizens and government. Simply put, we all have an interest in the shared effort to balance economic growth, social development, and environmental protection. And just as important, we all can contribute. At ExxonMobil, we are proud of our contributions in all three of these areas ... Here, the triple repetition of “contribution” of the company is designed, obviously, to give more weight to this contribution, as well as a further accentuation of this word, combined with the “help”, “security” “reliability” and “support”.

Thus, we have traced the specifics of social implications in corporate rhetoric of web discourse, and identified the four types of companies and corresponding types of discursive semantics and rhetoric:

(a) Google (“civil society through greater access to information and nation-wide socially relevant discussions”),

(b) Coca-Cola (“holiday and pleasure”, the philosophy of consumerism),

(c) Bank of America (discourse of the anti-crisis changes in the “society – big business” balance, based on the social inter-class cooperation) and

(d) Exxon Mobil («free market, competition, private initiative”, as well as the rhetoric of “caring for the environment” and “providing the civilization with energy”).

Therefore, our hypothesis is corroborated by the correspondence of the companies’ public discourse to the needs of their target audiences – their client categories.

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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