

PHILOLOGY

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DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES AND TACTICS IN INTERCULTURAL ECONOMIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The article deals with issues of functional pragmatics of English economic discourse. The author states that the phenomenon of speech planning in conflict situations of professional communication still needs further research. It is highlighted that peculiarities of discursive strategies actualization can be the clue to effective professional interaction regardless of cross-cultural barriers such as attitude to time, authority, interpersonal distance. The article aims at describing some tactics realizing discursive strategies intended for harmonizing international economic discourse.

Keywords: discursive strategies and tactics, economic discourse, pragmatics, cooperation, conflict

Introduction

In modern circumstances of intensive global economic relations cross-cultural competence is of great importance as the actors of economic discourse (economists, officials involved in economic policy, representatives of business circles etc.) have to interact effectively i.e. for mutual benefit in spite of national differences of communicative behaviour. These differences may hinder effective discourse in various situations and correspondingly speech registers: negotiations, meetings, commercial correspondence, reports, news, press conferences, interviews etc. In

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addition to economy being a sphere of practical interests' clash conflict or misunderstanding can occur in verbal communication at external level (between companies and institutions) as well as internal one (inside organizations employing multicultural staff). Hence the necessity of harmonizing economic discourse, linguistic analysis of verbal tools influencing practical and speech effectiveness and their systematizing.

Economic discourse is treated as a type of institutional discourse restricted by a certain professionally oriented topic (particularly – economic one) [1] – a heterogeneous unity of communicative events producing economic texts. At that researchers note that it is a broad field that may be actualized in industrial, commercial, administrative or managerial communicative spheres. That is why some linguists identify it with business discourse or consider it to penetrate into business, political or scientific discourse.

The issues of effective communication are studied in the framework of rhetoric, argumentation theory and pragmatics. The latter associates speech impact mechanisms with the notion of discursive strategies and tactics [2, 3]. In linguistic pragmatics discursive strategies are tools which control the result of verbal and practical activity along with the transition of theoretical aims to their practical implementation. In comparison with these discursive tactics are particular practical tools realizing the general theoretical plan of speech interaction (strategy). The aim of this article is to describe the strategies peculiar to economic discourse and the way they help to avoid conflict in cross-cultural communication.

Materials and methods

Works on pragmatics, functional linguistics and rhetoric [4, 5], economic discourse [6, 7], cultural studies and conflict theory [8, 9, 10] constitute the theoretical basis for research. Around 700 samples of oral and written discourse of economic, financial and commercial spheres have been analysed. Empiric material has been selected from mass media, authentic business English courses, Internet resources and fiction depicting the life of professional circles. The pragmatic properties of discursive strategies are revealed by method of discourse analysis combined with methods of linguistic description, component and context analysis.

Results and discussion

It is common knowledge that respect and understanding the values of one's counter party enhances trust, introduces lucidity in communication, opens new horizons and strengthens contacts. But speech interaction with colleagues and clients representing a different culture may not always be effective enough. It can be

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impeded by inability to adequately perceive an “alien”, aptitude to stereotyped thinking and ethnocentrism. Common human barriers such as power abuse, manipulation, irritation, mistakes add to this.

For example, the following comments show how historic disputes hinder present economic relations between Greece and Germany.

*“Why did Greece not try to negotiate this question when they entered the Eurozone **by cheating** the European Union and the European Central Bank?” <...>*

*“Germany and **especially** the German taxpayer is **showing solidarity** with a **difficult** situation in Greece and in the end they will **send us a bill** for something **far away** in our history and **definitely** solved”. [11]*

A representative of one of German parties makes remarks on Greek demands to take into account after war reparations when giving financial help during recession. All verbal means highlight that these claims are considered groundless: tactic of accusation (*by cheating*), tactic of affront (interrogative form of sentence), tactic of opposition (*showing solidarity – will send us a bill*). Adverbs intensify the degree of indignation (*especially, far away, definitely*). Periphrasis (*send us a bill – demand, away in history – in the past*) makes the discourse more figurative and emotional.

Usage of appropriate discursive strategies and tactics can be a way to overcome these difficulties. The role of discursive strategies is two-fold. On the one hand, their functional purpose is to accumulate the impact potential of separate speech means and result in practical outcomes. On the other hand, they reflect the pragmatic properties of the speakers’ discourse – their ability to realize their intentions and modify verbal behaviour of the opponent in the course of speech impact.

In view of this communicative situations are classified as cooperative, conflict and neutral ones. Communicative conflict is a result of verbal behaviour in which communicative intentions contradict communicative roles of the addressee and the sender. In such aggressive context discursive strategies are applied in case communicative aims of the participant(s) of communication cannot be realized.

Communicative conflict often positively affects movement of partners towards result. For example, it intensifies the process of mutual perception and boosts the ability to adjust to new communicative circumstances. General plan in such situations can be effected by means of discursive strategies of pressure, threatening, competition, avoidance, waiting and others. Corresponding

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discursive tactics are suppression (1), threat (2), discrediting (3), shift from the topic (4) and others.

(1) *So let's talk a little bit about the testing schedule. Time is short.*

(2) *You will be put behind the bars for that!*

(3) *It seems to me that we are pretty understaffed in the trading area.*

(4) *Would you mind if we took a few minutes to introduce ourselves first? [12]*

One should distinguish between primary and secondary discursive strategies. Primary strategies are used at initial stage of speech influence while secondary ones represent reaction to this influence. For example, in the following excerpt such types of strategies are used to settle some problems in cross-cultural communication at the meeting. It is held by a new head of research department in Brazil Tsao Ming who previously had the experience of working in the USA.

– *Good morning. My name is Tsao Ming and I'm looking forward to working with everyone. We've got a lot on the agenda today, so let's jump right in.*

– *Jump right in?*

– *Oops, I mean, let's get the meeting started **right away**. So we'll kick off, I mean, start.*

A member of the team, Carla, represents the conflict party in the dialogue. Min has to defend himself and follow the secondary strategy of cooperation. The manager makes a mistake using colloquial language and idioms appropriate for informal communication (*jump in, kick off*). Carla tries to avoid misunderstanding asking back and thus expressing the necessity of more lucid wording (*Jump right in?*). She resorts to conflict strategy of competition and tactic of discrediting. In the course of the meeting she imposes her own “rules” several times, asking back and interrupting Min.

– *Sorry, Doctor Tsao. But **would you mind if we took** a few minutes to introduce ourselves before we jump right in?*

– *Oh yes, by all means. And feel free to **call me by my surname**, Tsao, and my **first name**, Ming. You can **drop the Doctor**.*

– *Well, I am Carla Sova and I've been with the company for over 15 years, mainly in R&D...*

– *That sounds quite interesting. So let's talk a little bit about the testing schedule. **Time is short** and we need to... [Op. cit.]*

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Evidently, in some cultures networking is as important as the subject of discussion. For Carla it is more essential to get an idea of all the participants of discourse. She inquires some personal information (*would you mind if we took a few minutes to introduce ourselves*). Active steps showing initiative by the employee look unusual to the manager but he continues applying the cooperative strategy realizing it by tactic of permission (*You can drop the Doctor*). This way he modifies the system of business relationship explaining how to address him. He prefers informal address peculiar to American linguoculture.

In the course of conflict communication intentions are simultaneously realized through two channels: from sender to recipient and vice versa. So two discursive strategies in one speech act can be singled out. Both speakers or one of them may use the conflict strategy. In the second case one party has to surrender resorting to secondary strategy of concession. In situations of cooperative communication one discursive strategy uniting common aims of partners is applied.

A possible way of conflict strategies' neutralisation may be developing empathy in relationship with partners. For this purpose the following secondary strategies are used: active listening, establishing trust, avoiding the conflict matter, cooperation. Correspondingly, they may be actualized by tactics of repetition (1), periphrasis (2), politeness (3), compromise (4) and others.

(1) *I am the last of all here almost every night. – Aha, last one out every night.*

(2) *There might be issues in work you might not 100% be satisfied with.*

(3) *Yes, can I help you?*

(4) *As you know, a support position is budgeted and we are working on getting someone to help you. [Op. cit.]*

Another conflict subject is attitude to time in different cultures. Being late is not considered critical in some cultures. That is why in the following excerpt one of the members of the Brazilian team, Filipe Santos, appears at the meeting after its beginning. He expresses his simple attitude to this with the tactic of surprise (*Oh, you're all already here*). The American still sticks to the cooperative strategy, he uses the tactic of politeness (*Yes, can I help you*). His reaction to mistake in his name pronunciation is restrained (*The problem is off*).

– *Oh, you're all already here!*

– *Yes, can I help you?*

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- *I'm Doctor Filipe Santos. I'm the director of research chair in Koruteeba and you must be Doctor Cao.*
- *Yes, but actually my name is pronounced Tsao.*
- *Oh, I'm sorry. The spelling ...*
- ***The problem is off.** That's a common slip. Please, have a seat. We are discussing the testing schedule. Carla, what are your thoughts on that? [Op. cit.]*

One more conflict sphere in cross-cultural communication is authority distance. This dialogue depicts informal tradition peculiar to American linguoculture which appreciates initiative from inferiors, advice is welcome from every employee regardless of his/her post. More formal style dominates in Brazil. The whole project is considered to be designed by the boss and is not subject to discussion.

- *I suggest extending the testing period until February.*
- *Carla, **Doctor Tsao is running this project.** I'm sure he has the schedule all arranged.*
- ***Actually, no.** I'm new to this project, so **I welcome any ideas.** I'm interested in everyone's input. Carla, please, continue. [Op. cit.]*

Here Filipe's discursive strategy is aimed at restoration of subordination appropriate in his opinion to the framework of meeting. Min once more imposes an informal model of behaviour. It is simultaneously conflict (towards Filipe) and cooperative (towards Carla). Introducing his rules in atmosphere of cooperation and trust seems to Min more efficient. Thus, starting with cooperation he ends up with confrontation.

Interpersonal distance in communication also plays an important role. Too close or too far positioning is unfavorable. This factor can be traced in forms of address like in the following example where a British businessman is avoiding the unfavorable terms imposed on him by a Mexican agent.

'We are looking for an agent to represent the Graham Construction Company in Mexico, Mr. Perez, and you have been highly recommended,' said Sir Hamish, sounding unconvinced by his own statement.

'Do call me Victor.'

*Sir Hamish **bowed silently and shuddered.** There was no way this man was going to be allowed to **call him Hamish.***

In this dialogue the obvious disagreement in personal distance is reflected in the form of address (*Do call me Victor*). From the first words Victor Perez suggests using first names. Markers of

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distancing strategy are non-verbal here (*bowed silently and shuddered*). The British traditional notion of politeness doesn't let Hamish Graham use inappropriate address to almost unfamiliar partner in formal discourse. Moreover, his being late, untidy appearance and frivolous manner raise enmity in partners. Calling him by first name means intruding into his personal space (*There was no way this man was going to be allowed to call him Hamish*). As noted by cultural studies scholars, distancing is typical of British culture as it appreciates personal space and individualism.

*"I'd be pleased to represent you, **Hamish,**" continued Perez, 'provided that you find my terms acceptable."*

*"Perhaps you **could enlighten us as to** what those – **hm,** – terms might be," said Sir Hamish **stiffly**. [13]*

Distancing strategy is realized by the tactic of politeness (*Perhaps you could enlighten us as to*), emotion control (*bowed silently, – hm, said stiffly*), insincere agreement (*Perhaps you could enlighten us...*) at the same time including the rhetoric figure of irony. Intentional use of high-flown style and pausation accompanied by interjection "hm" shows unwilling to accept the familiar manner of the agent. The tactic of doubt is expressed by modal verb "might" and pronoun "those". Thus, distancing strategy allows at least to preserve the outer balance of relations with the undesirable partner.

Conclusions

As we see, discursive strategies accumulate all verbal and non-verbal means to achieve maximum result under the influence of external circumstances. The latter may be unfavorable (situations of cross-cultural conflict). Ethnocentrism and stereotyping should be replaced by ability to perceive partners in their natural communicative environment. To overcome this barrier it is important to understand how appropriate arrangement of speech tools multiplies their functional potential and intensifies the pragmatic impact. Such method can benefit to harmonization of global economic discourse as compromise is the only way to achieve mutually beneficial progress in this sphere.

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