

PRIMARY LEVEL OF VERBAL INTERCHANGE IN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS

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The basic activities involved in any business, from simply making introductions or phone calls to small talks or presentations, due to the specific business vocabulary, though restricted, add some peculiarities and specificities to the panel of basic elements comprised by the primary level of standard language for ordinary, person-to-person interaction. Thus, even if most frequently quite unproblematic when teaching or learning them, these types of communicational elements are worth assessing and classifying, for best organization of material when approaching the teaching of Business English communication.

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1. Introduction

From the level of personal needs, of facing the societal evolution and being able to relate and communicate with the other individuals, to the more elevated levels implied in the areas of the various professions, particularly in the economic fields, English is broadly used. Thus, it tends to become a general communicational tool in the modern environment.

Communicational elements of a primary level involvement in business activities can be classified according to the latter. At the same time, they can be further assessed by the degree of proficiency needed to acquire the respective communicational skills⁴²⁶. Thus, we may distinguish three large areas of basic activities with their specific language, as listed below in the increasing order of the degrees of difficulty, even though just from elementary to intermediate:

- receiving people, making acquaintance and introducing oneself and others;
- telephoning or receiving calls and taking or giving messages through the phone;
- making presentations, introducing and describing graphs or diagrams and presenting reports.

2. Receiving People

Receiving people refers to enumerable situations encountered in the domain of business, when somebody, by the nature of the job (secretary, assistant managers, receptionist, shopkeeper etc.), has to welcome people (partners, new company members, tourists, customers etc.), to assist them, introduce them to other people, have a small talk with them.

Table 1 presents some expressions⁴²⁷ that can be learned and used in some of the circumstances mentioned, and some assertions possible to come from the person received are also listed:

	person receiving:	person received:	
welcoming	<i>Welcome to... My name's ...</i>	<i>Hello, I'm ... from... I have an appointment to see</i>	arriving
offering assistance	<i>May I help you? Can we do anything for you? Can I get you anything?</i>	<i>Could you get me...? Could you help me ...? Can you recommend... ?</i>	asking for assistance

⁴²⁶ V. Communication Skills, 2nd edition, Careers Skills Library, New York, Ferguson, Facts on File, 2004.

⁴²⁷ Simon Sweeney, English for Business Communication, Student's Book, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.7.

	<i>Would you like a? If you need ... just say. Do you need ...?</i>	<i>I'd like to There is one thing...</i>	
introducing	<i>This is... she\he is ... Can I / I'd like to introduce you to ... , our</i>	<i>Pleased to meet you. It's a pleasure.</i>	meeting

Table 1. Receiving and being received

A short conversation might come as appropriate in certain situations, a sort of a small talk or socializing attempt, involving quite simple lexical elements and structures such as:

- *How was your / Did you have a good trip / flight / journey?*
- *How are things in ...?*
- *How long are you staying? Is this your first visit to ...? I hope you like it.*

3. Telephoning

People may, on one hand, be in the situation of having to call a company in order to make certain arrangements or to complain about something and, on the other hand, they may be, by virtue of their jobs, the ones answering the phone, having to take messages, to offer information, to handle problems. The caller and the person answering may use structures⁴²⁸ such as seen in table 2, for the particular situations illustrated there.

Caller	Answerer
introducing oneself	
<i>Hello, my name is ...calling from...</i>	<i>Good morning / Hello, this is ... from...</i>
stating the reason for calling	(not /) putting through
<i>I'd like to speak to ...please. Could I have the... department, please? Is ... there, please? I'm ringing to ... / about ... I'd like to... I need some information ...</i>	<i>Just a moment/ hold on... I'll put you through (to ...). Sorry, ... is not available / is not in / is in a meeting / is away... Can anyone else / I help you? Would you like to speak to ...? Shall I ask ...to call you back?</i>
leave a message	take a message
<i>Please tell / ask ... to... Could you give ... a message? Can I leave a message?</i>	<i>Would you like to leave a message? Can I take a message? May I ask for a number where ... can call you later?</i>
explaining problem and decision	handling problem
<i>There seems to be .../ We haven't received.../ The ...doesn't work The quality is below standard... The characteristics are not in accordance with our specifications. This is the ... time/ It's not the first time this has happened, you assured us... If it is not resolved...the consequences could be very serious / we'll have to reconsider / renegotiate...</i>	<i>Could / Can you tell me (exactly)...? I'm sorry to hear that / about the problem / mistake... I'm afraid that can't be true / that's not quite right. I think you are mistaken. No, I don't think that can be right.</i>
making arrangements	(not) agreeing, confirming
<i>Could we meet...?</i>	<i>That would be fine</i>

428 Ibidem, p.24,34,42.

<i>When would be a good time ...? Would ...suit you? / What about ...? We have an appointment for...I'm afraid I can't come ...could we fix an alternative?</i>	<i>Sorry, I can't make it/ am too busy then So... Can I check that...?You said... to confirm that... Can I/ you confirm that by ...?</i>
asking for repetition, acknowledging	
<i>Sorry, I didn't understand /hear/ catch that... could you repeat? I understand / see, thank you.</i>	<i>Sorry, can you repeat your name/ company name/ number? / Could you spell (that), please? Ok, I got it.</i>
ending call	
<i>Right, I think that's all. Thanks very much for your help. Good bye.</i>	<i>Do call if you need anything else. We look forward to welcoming / hearing / seeing /meeting... you.</i>

Table 2. On the phone

4. Making Presentations

Presentations are among the most common activities in business, being a very useful means of dissemination, information, marketing, promotion, advertising, introducing reports, displaying performances a.s.o.⁴²⁹ Being extensively used, the method has gained importance, and has become a must in the preparation of prospect members of business companies. Apart from the physical preparation, the formal dressing and the extra attention to be paid to the nonverbal messages the body language can transmit, the person that has to make a presentation also needs training in the art of orally exposing things - certain findings, results of research, given facts, promotional material or his own ideas - in a persuasive, tactful and trustful manner, so that the audience would take the steps the presenter intended.

Focusing only on the communicational side of making presentations, we shall look closer into the language specific to the phases of the presentation.⁴³⁰

At the beginning, after addressing the audience and greeting (*Good ..., ladies and gentlemen...*), there are some specifications, some mentions that should be made, about the subject of the presentation and the way of organizing it – the structure, the duration, the discussions. The communicational elements met in this part would range from the following:

- *I am going / plan / would like to talk about / to give you an overview of / to say a few words about...*
- *The theme / subject of this presentation / my talk is...*
- *I've divided it in... parts. (In the) First (part)... . (Then in the) Second (part).... Next... Finally...*
- *My presentation will take about...(there will be a ... break / we'll stop for...)*
- *If you have / there are any questions, feel free to ask / please interrupt / we'll have ... minutes for discussion after my talk / there will be time for them at the end...*

A presentation is now unconceivable without visual support. Most commonly a laptop and a video projector, projecting the presentation slides on a screen, will do. Still, other devices might be used, such as: OHPs (for transparencies), flip chart, whiteboard. The material presented should be schematised as much as possible, especially in business, words are mostly to be said, as explanations of charts, diagrams, pictures, graphs, rather than written and read from the material prepared. Still, the vocabulary that will be used at this point is again important, from introducing the visual to describing the images shown or comparing the data presented:

429 See Colleen McKenna, *Powerful Communication Skills*, Career Press, 1998, chapter 5.

430 Simon Sweeney, op.cit., p.50,60-61,71,78-79.

- Have a / Let's look at this... Here we can see... I'd like to show you... This ... shows / (re)presents...;
- increase / climb / rise / go up / improve / get better / recover \leftrightarrow decrease / decline / fall / go down / get worse;
- reach a peak / a maximum \leftrightarrow hit bottom / reach a low point, stabilise / level out / stay the same \leftrightarrow undulate / fluctuate;
- Let's compare the... This compares ... with ... here you see a comparison between the trends in ... and

As connectors, moving to following parts in the presentations, we may use:

- To begin with.... We can see some advantages and disadvantages. As for advantages, one is... another...
- Let's move to the... part, which is about.... Now I want to turn to / describe... / we come to... / the next part.
- There are ... things / different stages to consider / steps involved. On one hand, ... on the other hand... First / At the beginning ... Second / Then / Later / Next... Finally / Last (but not least)...
- This completes / concludes... This is / That's all (on...) for now.

Dealing with the questions from the audience will imply the use of structures like:

- It is not an easy question to answer here briefly, but in my opinion / experience... / it could be / I would say
- I don't think I'm the right person to answer, ... (maybe our PR manager might help here), it is not my field / I do not have much experience in...
- I'm afraid that is outside the scope of this presentation / I'll come to that later (in my talk / during the break) / you'll have to discuss that with...
- Sorry, I didn't catch / I'm not sure I've understood... Are you asking...? / Do you mean...? Could you repeat..?
- Is that okay now? Does this answer your question?

For ending the presentation, some closing structures like the following might come handy:

- I'd like to end / finish by emphasising (... / the main points) / with some observations / recommendations / conclusion / a summary.
- There are... conclusions. Right, that ends my talk. Thank you for listening. Now I would like to hear / invite your comments.

5. Conclusions

The widened sphere of human interaction requires, first of all, a single language, as much as possible, so as to ease communication between individuals within the extended community. Modern languages of international circulation come thus into force, from which English appears to be overriding, having gained priority in most domains of activity, in what establishing communication between speakers of different languages is regarded.

An overview on the specificities of the language of the professions that have become the most developed and flourishing in the new environment, but at the same time the most demanding in terms of communication, those in the fields of economy, cannot but prove very useful for and welcomed by the 'newcomers', the 'fresh' inhabitants of the young global or single market environment.

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