

COMPLEX INTERRELATIONS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH COMMUNICATION

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Business English shall at a point imply introduction of more specific material not as much in what the linguistic part is concerned but more precisely in concurring some language structures with the particular activities involved by the sophisticated business interrelations such as negotiations or meeting. Accordingly, the steps, the phases and the respective contributions of participants in the said types of interaction will call forth special approaches in the use of the business vocabulary and a certain communication style. Thus, an overview upon and categorisation of the linguistic material to be taught in the typical circumstances involved in these two complex communicational situations might come at hand for teachers and learners of Business English.

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1. Introduction

When involved in various business activities communicational skills prove essential.⁴³¹ Those activities can be, in what encountering is regarded, telephone conversations or face to face: from regular, problem-solving meetings or brainstorming sessions - that you have to take part in or maybe lead, as a chairperson -, to negotiations or presentations your firm has sent you to hold. Such activities will require certain lexical structures.⁴³²

From the point of view of your personal degree of participation they may be participative (merely requiring a degree of involvement from your side) or performative (you being the centre of attention, the main performer). Although the degree of activeness may differ from person to person, in business, passiveness is excluded; people involved in this field have to get to 'communicate'.

2. The Language of Negotiations

The phases that together form the process of negotiation require, each, specific vocabulary, distinct structures. For each of the main stages of the negotiation we can identify certain expressions⁴³³ that can be useful in producing our communication.

First, in the stage of relationship building we may make use of structures such as:

- Welcome to...
- Make yourself comfortable / Please, have a seat / ...
- Would you like (a cup of coffee /) ... ?
- I'm convinced / sure we will have a useful / productive meeting.

In the phase of the preparation for the meeting, when we turn to business, the following can be found useful:

- We would like to reach agreement on ...
- We have reached an important stage...
- Previously we have agreed on...
- Today we have to think about...

431V. John A. Doorbar, Business English, 10 best communication secrets, München, Gesellschaft für Wirtschaftsinformation, 2002, p.23.

432 See Simon Sweeney, English for Business Communication, Student's Book, Cambridge University Press, chapters 2-5.

433 Ibidem, p.110,119,129.

Stating the objectives, preparing for exposing your proposals and bidding, would require linguistic elements such as:

- *I'd like to begin with a few words about ...*
- *We want to / May I clarify / outline our positions / aims / objectives...*
- *There are ... specific areas we would like to discuss.*
- *We have to decide...*
- *It is important for both of us that we agree on...*

Then, when bargaining, in the phase of negotiation proper, there are more structures that can be used:

- *That's not acceptable unless / without...*
- *We can (only) agree to that on condition that / if*
- *Would you be interested in... ?*
- *We could offer... provided ...*
- *If you could / on condition that we agree on / so long as we could agree / consider / accept / offer ...*

Next, there are the acceptations or the refusals that have to be expressed and dealt with.

The positive answers are really unproblematic: *That's probably all right./ It seems acceptable. We agree;* and the positive approaches are tactful and considerate: *We should focus on the positive aspects / look at the benefits / at the points we agree on... /Could you tell us why you feel like that?/ What do you think is a fair way to resolve that?,* while the negative ones might go from simple rejection: *Unfortunately, I don't think it would be sensible / possible for us to .../ I'm afraid we are unlikely to / can't...* to adjourning or breaking the negotiation: *It's a pity / I'm sorry / I believe / Unluckily... we couldn't / I don't think we are going / we appear unable to... agree/ reach agreement/ settle....*

Finally, when the negotiation is successful, the stage of confirming and summarising the discussions and the resolutions will come concluding the deal. In this phase, negotiators will probably use phrases like:

- *I'd like to / Can we / Let's summarise / go / run through the main / important points / proposals we've talked about / we've agreed / of our offer...*
- *I think this is a good moment / I'd like to check / summarise the progress we've made / the main points / what we've agreed /said...*
- *It's been a very productive / useful meeting, we look forward to a successful partnership.*

3. Meetings

There are two basic major types of meetings that companies hold: problem solving and brainstorming. Leading the former implies establishing clear set, exposing the objectives and sticking to the agenda, following the track and cutting irrelevances, focusing on the problem at hand and finding a solution.

At contrast, for the sessions of brainstorming, even the seemingly irrelevant thoughts should be allowed to surface, not rejected and not judged, active participation of all the people convened should be ensured, eliciting everyone's opinion and idea, encouraging the shy and not allowing the assertive and dominant members to monopolise the floor, as any humble idea could be the seed of the best solution, leading to the most relevant discussion.

For keeping a meeting on track and all participants informed, agendas are essential. They shall list one or more objectives stating the purpose of the meeting. Only the necessary people should be asked to participate to meetings in order to keep the group focused and active.

When leading a meeting, one has to speak with energy, tone variability, and hand gestures. Maintenance of eye contact with the listeners and carefully and completely listening before preparing to disagree with someone prove necessary. At the end of the meeting, the chairperson

shall summarize all the actions or decisions that were made to be sure everyone is in agreement.⁴³⁴

The tasks the chairpersons and the other participants in meetings have during it can be classified according to the stages the former has to introduce and conduct and to the actions taken by the latter during the session, as we can see in figure 1.

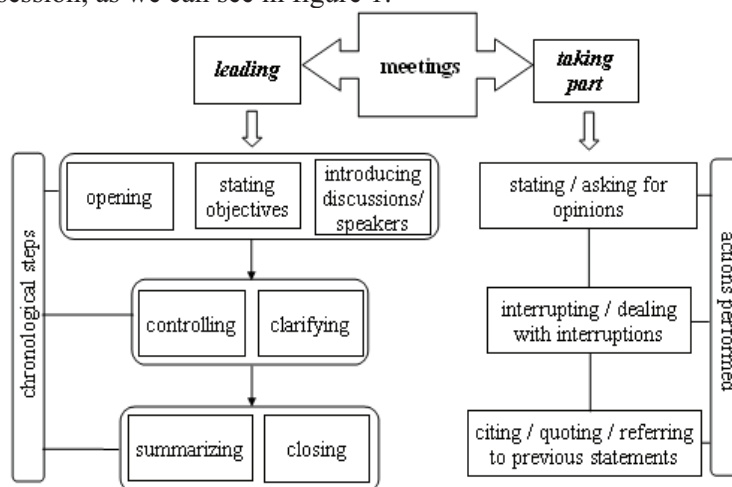


Figure 1. Participation in meetings

The lexical elements⁴³⁵ used in meetings are specific to these steps and actions and respectively exemplified below.

Opening:

- *Thank you for coming. We've received apologies from... . It's ...o'clock. Let's start.*

Objectives stating:

- *We're here today / Our objective /*

- *What we want to do is / there is/are ... main item to hear / discuss / consider / find a solution....*

Introducing:

- *The issue / (background to the) problem / point is (about)...*

- *Can we hear ...? / I'd like to ask ... to tell us*

- *I know ... has prepared to explain ... to us.*

Controlling:

- *Well / Er / Um / Uh / Sorry, ..., we can't talk about that / can we let ... finish?*

- *Can we / Let's move / go on to the next point / think about....*

Clarifying:

- *Could you explain that.../ be more specific?*

- *This means... / To explain this in more details... / I wanted to say ...*

- *Is that clearer / okay now?*

Summarising:

- *So, the main point is... / you mean.../ just to summarise...*

- *I'd like to go over the decisions we've taken.../ to conclude... we've agreed... .*

Closing:

- *We should end here. Can we leave this / postpone the decision until ... ?*

- *We need more time to consider this...*

434Deena R. Levine; Mara B. Adelman, Beyond Language - Intercultural Communication for English as a Second Language, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1982, p.124-125.

435 Malcolm Goodale, The Language of Meetings, Thomson Business Press, 1998, p.20-21 and Simon Sweeney, op.cit., p.85,94,103.

- *I think we can close the meeting now / we've convened everything.*
- *That's it, next meeting will be...*

Opinions:

- *It seems to me... I would say... I think / believe / feel... .*
- *In my opinion / view... it's clear / obvious ... / there is no alternative / doubt ...*
- *I'd like to hear .../ What is your view / do you think?*
- *Do you have any comments / opinions about / views on...*

Interruptions:

- *Sorry to / If I may interrupt / Excuse me, may I ask for clarifications on this / but.../ could you tell...?*
- *Do you think so? /Is that so / possible? My impression is / I would say / think...*
- *Sorry, please let me / If I may finish.*
- *Can I come to this later / we leave that to another discussion? That's not relevant right now.*
- *Yes, go ahead.*

Referring to other participants:

- *As ... has already told us / we'll hear later in ... report...*
- *I'm sure ... is aware of / knows about...*

4. Conclusions

To successfully participate in and perform activities such as negotiations and meetings, one is compelled to master an adequate vocabulary and make good use of the specific expressions besides possessing a good knowledge of the Standard English in general and complying with the requirements of the etiquette in each procedure involved.

Some samples of useful standard phrases for typical situations such as the ones aforementioned, shall prove useful both for users or learners and teachers of Business English communication, helping the former in organising their self-instruction and the latter in assessing the material to be taught to students of various levels of proficiency and in deciding what methods and activities would be best for each.

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