

# Strategic implementation of verbs of communication in English business discourse

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**Published in Training, Language and Culture** Vol 2 Issue 3 (2018) pp. 86-96 doi: [10.29366/2018tlc.2.3.6](https://doi.org/10.29366/2018tlc.2.3.6)

**Recommended citation format:** Parshutina, G. A., & Popova, K. V. (2018). Strategic implementation of verbs of communication in English business discourse. *Training, Language and Culture*, 2(3), 86-96. doi:

[10.29366/2018tlc.2.3.6](https://doi.org/10.29366/2018tlc.2.3.6)

*The study explores verbs of communication in terms of their functional and practical implementation in business negotiations, interviews and political debates. The study relies on corpus data and appeals to componential, comparative, contextual, semantic, pragmatic and functional methods of analysis to consider verbs of communication as a developing functional system. The authors suggest that verbs of communication act as strategic drivers of English business discourse and are involved in not only nominating speech acts, but also in generating contextually relevant interaction whereby a statement is placed in a wider context of external communicative settings. The study concludes that verbs of communication can help control and model verbal interaction, provide coherence of propositional structure, comprehend the distribution of roles, and create pragmatic dynamics of narration, which is why they present an integral part of the business discourse system and function as integrating components of a set of communicative tactics foregrounding diverse communicative strategies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *business discourse, communicative strategy, verbs of communication, functional analysis, pragmatics*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

While language in general functions as an integral part of a compound mechanism of social and interpersonal relations and invariably affects the way this mechanism is built and regulated, English, viewed as a lingua franca, appears most influential in maintaining and customising cooperation in times of globalisation. In the context of complicated political, economic and cultural headwinds, special emphasis is placed on the ability to use language intentionally and efficiently in order to achieve the intended effect

while addressing vital professional tasks (Schnurr, 2012; Hurn & Tomalin, 2013; Malyuga & Orlova, 2018). A sensitive matter in this respect has to do with the sociocultural implications of cooperation patterns within a certain society extending to gender, age, role, psychological, professional, and social parameters (see, for example, Covarrubias, 2002; Coates, 2015; Giles & Clair, 2018; Pennycook, 2017).

Addressing the issues of business discourse implies identifying cause-and-effect relations of efficient

and inefficient language behaviour, exploring the features of the communicative setting, and looking into the interconnection of communication results and the specific means of expression used to achieve them. This, in turn, generates interest in the study of strategic patterns of communication in business rhetoric (see, for example, Argenti, 2017; Meredith, 2012; Poncini, 2007; Ponomarenko & Malyuga, 2015; Radyuk & Khramchenko, 2014).

Following the ongoing evolution of mass media and information technology, the world is faced with the lack of time resources and information overload, which is why business skills extend, among other things, to efficient time management and productive use of language resources.

One of the key issues of efficient business communication is strategic planning of speech. While the notions of 'strategy' and 'tactics' are closely interconnected, they are not to be considered interchangeable.

A communicative strategy is implemented through a complex system of verbal and non-verbal means to achieve short- and long-term communicative objectives. A strategy involves understanding the communicative situation in its entirety including its external and internal factors, possible development trajectories, the key communicative aim, and a potential for revaluation and adjustment depending on the context. A strategy in

some way resembles a patch board housing a set of interchangeable constituent elements that might be modified or replaced for the purposes of a particular goal. Such modifications or replacements in the course of communication are what Van Dijk (2006) refers to as 'communicative moves', i.e. functional units of action sequence addressing local or global tasks within a single strategy. Thus, a communicative strategy is flexible in that it can change its structure as the parties move towards their communicative aims against the backdrop of changing contextual requirements. The pursuance of communicative goals will also imply creating a certain pragmatic space – the combination of notional and emotional components that, ultimately, inspire a specific response in the recipient's consciousness (Kasper & Kellerman, 2014).

To implement a strategy, one requires a number of tactical options, which inventory expands as a person's communicative experience grows. Communicative tactics thus refer to a combination of communicative and behavioural patterns implemented at a certain stage of a particular conversation for the benefit of the chosen strategy (Wilson, 2001). Adequately chosen, communicative tactics can help attract attention, establish contact and influence the addressee. Experienced speakers should be able to change tactics as the conversation progresses. Thus, communicative tactics are a part of a smaller

communicative process, i.e. they correlate not to the ultimate aim itself but to a set of communicative intentions that are usually reflected in verbs of communication (VoC).

VoC generally denote conveying and/or transferring a message or a piece of information to someone. While a typical act of communication involves at least three components, which are the speaker, the addressee and the issue addressed (Fellbaum, 1990), VoC differ subject to the nature of the message and the way it is communicated as they typically encode the speaker' intentions (e.g. confess, examine, preach, etc.) or the medium of communication (e.g. fax, e-mail, phone, telex, etc.). VoC have the capacity to promote such implications of the pragmatic-semantic potential which is important in pursuing specific communicative purposes (Rajendran, 2006).

Strategies can be classified per various criteria: type of intention (general vs specific), type of communication (cooperative vs argumentative), function (compensatory, organisational, or rhetorical), the level of manipulation transparency (strategies of transparent influence vs manipulation), etc. The number of criteria testifies to the existence of a wide range of classifications.

Studies show that depending on their communicative aim (creating favourable atmosphere; transferring new information;

changing the opponent's point of view; gaining reputation; destabilising or provoking the opponent into taking some actions; warning against rushed decisions; buying time; forcing events, etc.), interlocutors can organise the conversation in such a way so as to achieve effective results by applying the following strategies:

- cooperation (encouraging joint activities, providing consistency, success and efficiency);
- compromise (resolving differences by means of mutual concessions);
- adaptation (only one party sacrifices its interests in favour of the other party);
- suspension or exit (neither party makes concessions or imposes views);
- challenge or opposition (prevents understanding and harmonious cooperation) (Zeldovich, 2007).

Thus, strategic planning will call for registering the general vector of interaction. A harmonious way to do it lies in implementing 'good' strategies and its tactics, and this study argues that VoC can be instrumental in addressing this challenge.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theory of functional linguistics argues that any speech act is based on the speaker-listener interaction. Arutyunova (1999) considers that the

verb 'tell', as in '*I tell*', has diverse shades of meaning depending on its particular form. VoC refer to the most frequently used lexis of language expressing these shades of meaning and filling up the pragmatic and semantic field of discourse. Due to semantics that characterises various aspects of communication, they structure speakers' speech activities. In addition, appropriate implementation of these verbs effectively improves understanding between partners, while inappropriate use can translate into failed interaction.

The functional (pragmatic and semantic) potential of verbs expressing specific aspects of communication is prominent in business discourse, as institutional communication initially assumes conventional regulations of partners' cooperation. VoC are frequently used in the business discourse of in-company representatives not least because negotiations are held on behalf of the company's owners. However, experienced negotiators consider that the potential of VoC is richer and more functionally productive than just the expression of somebody's will.

Due to extensive pragmatic and semantic potential extending to the characteristics of the communicative act, naming of feelings, evaluation and a wide range of emotional shades, VoC can function not only as equivalents of other functional parts of speech thus allowing the speaker to avoid repetitions and scale up

figurativeness, expressiveness and specificity, but also as units highlighting the volume of meaning required to achieve the communicative objective.

Looking into capacities of VoC will require resorting to linguistic analysis to comprehend the logical, factual and contextual contents of the message, as well as intent-analysis to restore the speaker's subjective take on a certain communicative purpose (intention). The methods of functional analysis can also be instrumental seeing that these treat language as (1) a functional system of expressive means applied to pursue a particular purpose; (2) a means of cooperation realising diverse pragmatic and semantic functions; (3) a means of extending goal-oriented rhetorical impact; (4) a tool that organises and systemises a person's mental activity (Ponomarenko & Malyuga, 2012). As functional linguistics moves from functions and goals of linguistic means to their actualisation in language, the methods of functional analysis can prove especially instrumental in analysing VoC as tools contributing to the strategic planning of English business discourse.

From the perspective of pragmalinguistics, successful achievement of a particular communicative aim relies on three principles, which are consistency, rhetorical efficiency, and compensation. Logical construction of discourse at the preparatory stage and communicative variation

*‘Imposing an opinion, implicit or explicit threat, encouragement and persuasion, countermotion constitute issues of verbal interrelation of opponents’ rhetoric’*

in the negotiation process include discussion and choice of the negotiation topic, the establishment of speech time limits, possibility and methods of partner’s interruption, change of topic, and choice of alternatives. Imposing an opinion, implicit or explicit threat, encouragement and persuasion and countermotion constitute issues of verbal interrelation of opponents’ rhetoric. In cases where discourse moves in an inappropriate direction, it is possible to correct speech errors, specify, generalise or differentiate viewpoints and discussion topics, search for compromise, and call for action (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009). However, even if the speaker gives consideration to the entire set of factors underlying proper perception of intentions and thoughts, misunderstanding can still take place, especially in the context of intercultural communication. Intercultural peculiarities can often make communication rather complicated, which is mostly evidenced in linguistic, behavioural and sociocultural aspects contributing to misunderstanding or even conflict. While linguistic errors are not considered by native speakers as something disrespectful or

offensive, the situation is quite different as far as behavioural and sociocultural errors are concerned.

While intercultural professional communication typically takes place in the context of distinct national and cultural mental and behavioural stereotypes, the problems that occur in such communication are especially specific and complicated. In order to ensure successful intercultural business communication, it is essential to perceive and interpret peculiar features of business language adequately within its communicative frameworks. Business vocabulary, in particular, can be of scientific interest from the point of view of its systematic structure, sustainability and variability of the linguacultural component as well as with regard to applied goals.

Correspondingly, in studying intercultural business discourse it is vital to focus on both the language proper and its communicative aftermath, i.e. its interpretative value and behavioural sociocultural peculiarities involved. This can prove helpful in distinguishing the most effective communicative strategies and rhetorical means instrumental in achieving specific communicative goals in business discourse.

### **3. STUDY AND RESULTS**

VoC act as operators that help implement communicative intentions by distributing

information in a strategically opportune manner, including via speech encoding to optimise (i.e. control) the interaction process. Training of qualified representatives of business communities should include the acquisition of these vital functions, especially those that are involved in interactive activities (cases, business games, etc.) (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012).

Obviously, understanding of the fundamentals of effective communication is sounder when theoretical conclusions are supported by practical results or at least can be analysed on the basis of relevant language material. That is why we suggest analysing several peculiar examples of business discourse from the point of view of the role of VoC as basic components of speech strategies using elements of functional analysis.

In the article *Try These Salary Negotiation Scripts* published in Time Magazine, Aubrey Bach (2016) gives advice for those inspiring to successfully pass a job interview with a potential employer and get the desired position with the desired salary:

*'If you have already been given an alternative offer with a higher salary: Thank you so much for the offer! I am really excited about the company and the role. However, as you know, I **have been talking** to other employers and do have another offer. If you're able to move the pay to [insert your number], **I'd be eager to accept**'* (Bach, 2016).

The author offers to implement the strategy of adaptation by persuading the employer to compromise and hinting at the previous conversation during the interview that can be seen through the usage of the Present Perfect Continuous. At the same time, the candidate would express the intense longing to 'accept' the offers in case of concession. Nevertheless, the contradiction sounds quite logical and is presented consistently due to the implementation of Continuous (it shows that parallel negotiations are still in process and they are not finished) as well as the communication verb 'talking' that also helps hide the manipulative impact – the creation of phantom competition considering the candidate's relevance in the labour market.

*'One more classical situation is when you want to agree upon bonus payments: Thank you so much! This role is really exciting, and the salary looks great. I would like **to follow up on** a couple of details though. How flexible are you with [name the benefit]? The written job offer included [details about the benefit], but I would like **to request** [the level of benefits you want]'* (Bach, 2016).

The candidate shows in a polite way that he/she 'would like to continue the discussion' and 'would express the desire' to have a certain bonus. Here, as in the previous examples, the speech is logical and coherent partly because of the use of locutionary verbs, which systemise the functional

prospects of discourse and develop the pragmatics of motivated investment in the discussion of labour conditions. Due to the tactics of contacting (implementation of politeness formulas and setting the stage for communication) and weakening of the pragmatic impact – in particular politeness and courtesy – a candidate has a chance of success.

These examples are samples of the strategic planning of speech, intermediates that can be used to organise bilateral negotiations on the topic the candidate is familiar with in reference to the labour conditions. However, the candidate understands that in terms of real-life conversation there is a possibility that something can go wrong, so it will be essential to adjust as the occasion demands in accordance with the aims and external circumstances.

It is no easier to perform speech activity unilaterally when each communicative action is to be considered, and each speech unit is to be carefully selected as in, for instance, public speeches, addresses, reports and presentations (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). An extract from Donald Trump's speech when he was a presidential contender can be considered as an example. In his speech, he aligns with the strategy of pragmatic impact strengthening by means of tactics of appeal to the generally accepted standards and personal experience of each individual as well as a straightforward judgmental

assessment of President Obama's activities that clearly demonstrates the desire to present himself as an informed, interested and fair candidate.

*'Do you **remember** when the president made a long and expensive trip to Copenhagen, Denmark, to get the Olympics for our country, and after this unprecedented effort, **it was announced** that the United States came in fourth – fourth place? The president of the United States making this trip – unprecedented – comes in fourth place. He **should have known** the result before making such an embarrassing commitment. We **were laughed at** all over the world, as we have been many, many times'* (Trump, 2016).

During each new round of the discussion, the speaker implements verbs of speech activity: *'Do you remember'* – the personal address to each listener/viewer and the call to bring back to mind images of previous events together with visual and auditory images that is aimed at strengthening the effect of the following message. The use of the verb which transfers the nomination of the communicative act in a neutral and generalised way in combination with passive voice *'it was announced'* deprive the following message of subjectiveness that is a perfect example of implementation of the strategy of subtle influence with the help of euphemisation.

*'We **were laughed at** all over the world'* – a kind of

'cherry on top' after the weakening of the pragmatic impact – is an affirmation of a grim fact of disrespectful evaluation of the whole nation due to the actions of one representative. How is it possible not to be imbued with the respect for the speaker and not to be disappointed with the object of criticism?

VoC also take part in the formation of the general notional and pragmatic systemacity of discourse that is an integral feature of an experienced orator's speech. It is well-known that communication and mutual understanding between different people including communication between different generations would not be possible (Gaballo, 2012), and VoC take part in maintaining discourse systemacity as a regulator of the communication process. As far as their semantics reflects various characteristics of communication between the participants, these verbs in some way structure interaction channels between partners, infuse harmony to the functional prospects of speech and optimise the process of linguistic persuasion of a recipient, i.e. encourage cooperative strategy. For instance:

*'The middle class were growing stronger. Economists' theories echoed these changes. They wrote about the division of labour. They discussed the problems of population growth. They influenced thinking about social classes'* (Raitskaya & Cochrane, 2007).

Multiple uses of VoC in a structured system create the impression of the constant address of scientists to the current issues and persistent transfer of crucial ideas to society. Lexical and syntactic parallelism (*they wrote – they discussed – they influenced thinking*) strengthens the structural and semantic 'net' produced by means of verbs. It realises the systemacity of functional prospects of speech that intentionally form a particular notional and pragmatic effect. Systemacity means not only the consistency (frequency of implementation) but also the purposefulness of the developed functional prospects of discourse, the concurrence of the components' movement towards the intended communicative aim and the regulatory role of VoC in this movement.

The pragmatics of business discourse in terms of communicative strategies is aimed at productive cooperation, improvement of partners' relations, the convergence of goals and positions (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007) that creates a certain linguistic-cognitive model of human behaviour. In order to accomplish communicative intentions, it is necessary to choose and distribute linguistic means in speech in such a way that all trajectories of the verbal and cognitive process are aimed at achieving the intended goals during the communication process. It requires a particular delicacy in the formation of the informational structure of discourse; as a result, general functional space of a text is supplemented by



explanatory components.

The potential of VoC from the point of view of the increase of rhetoric influence on the recipient is rather extensive as within the framework of business communication it is assumed that the speaker and the addressee not only provide a friendly environment for the joint activity but also express emotional perception of a situation (as in *'Abe's remarks struck me as total disorder of time and space, making no sense at all'*), try to induce a certain reaction (as in *'We feel sure you will agree this is a fair settlement, and shall appreciate your sending us a credit for \$10,000'*), defend personal interests (as in *'We have carefully examined your claim and we insist that the delay in submitting the documentation occurred through no fault of ours'*), etc.

The semantic potential of VoC covers nomination of speech, mentality, feelings, expression of will, etc. to implement diverse communicative and pragmatic functions (as in *'I would argue 90 percent of Americans don't have jobs'*).

In the conversation about the worry of Americans over the economic situation in the country, the information is questioned and the choice of verb 'argue' is determined to show the disagreement and determination of the speaker, however, the grammatical part – subjunctive mood (*would argue*) – modifies the subtlety of reaction of the

complaining person and the categoricity of the statement.

As for the verbs of mimicry, gestures, movement and onomatopoeia in this particular sphere of communication (classified as an institutional sphere), the preference is given to the neutral typical lexis:

*'Brooks mouthed 'thank you' after she was cleared of all charges, and exchanged a glance with Carter, standing next to her in the dock'* (U.K. phone hacking, 2014).

The verb 'mouth' expresses the articulation process of acknowledgements; thereby the recipient feels the tension of the situation as far as in the courtroom Rebekah Brooks cannot express her overwhelming feeling in a loud voice. Such semantic diversity or semantic overtones of meanings of VoC in English business discourse is connected with the generation of diverse shades of meaning. Intentionality, or in other words speech act orientation, expresses speaker's intentions, implies willingness to persuade, arouse interest, sound confident, express approval or sympathy that is revealed with the help of the corresponding verbs and verbal constructions (McCarthy, 2006). The success of business communication in a foreign language is not only contingent on the knowledge of lexis and grammar; the integral role in such interaction is given to the functional

component, i.e. the ability to act in accordance with the communicative intentions to activate verbal means to realise certain functions and format the speech adequately, which is impossible without the implementation of VoC.

VoC do not just state the speech act, but also allow the speakers to reorient the discourse, identify the communicative aim, ensure consistency in presenting available information, inform about the emotional state, indicate the level of upbringing, knowledge, previous experience, contribute to the emergence of notional augments which go beyond the pure nomination of partners interaction, act as means of interaction regulation and include the discussion of external circumstances influencing the communication process within a wider context.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Today, it is not enough just to acquire and apply

professional knowledge and skills wisely or just to possess the abilities and personal qualities of a businessman. Successful business communication requires focusing on operating objectives and a wide range of behavioural and speech models. The speaker should not only use them correctly but also identify them in the interlocutor's speech that, in its turn, influences the level of linguistic competence of a speaker, leads to the increase of relativity level, flexibility and adaptability of the discourse system.

In terms of business communication, VoC can help control and model verbal interaction, provide coherence of propositional structure, comprehend the distribution of roles, and create pragmatic dynamics of narration. These functions reflect the ability of VoC to model communicative activity, manage it and organise it in a particular way that is essential to the formation of competencies for the strategic planning of speech.

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