



Original Contribution

LINGUISTIC BARRIERS IN ORAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Iv. Nikolova^{1*}, Y. Ivanova²

¹Department of Foreign Languages, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

²Dept. of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

Linguistic difficulties are some of the biggest barriers in communication between various cultures. The first level of potential problems is that related to the basic meanings of words. The second level is that caused by the connotation of words, i.e. their specialized, expanded meaning and the developed word polysemy. Phraseological units – idiomatic expressions – are another source of confusion. The third group of potential linguistic barriers is the differences in intonation in speaking. Paralinguistics plays an important role in the successful overcoming of linguistic barriers in business communication. If one can learn to manage the impression one creates by one's body language, like facial expression, voice, outer appearance, then one can convey to one's interlocutor the impression of competence, reliability and dynamism. Overcoming linguistic barriers requires adequate knowledge of both the foreign language as a source of new terminology and specialized lexis and the Bulgarian language as a recipient. After discussing the barriers in using a foreign language (lexical, grammatical, syntactic, paralinguistic), conclusions are made that refer to the next level of a scientific applicable study related to the need for training on communicative behaviour as an element in "life-long training".

Keywords: communicative competence, non-verbal behaviour, paralinguistics, connotation, conversion.

INTRODUCTION

In modern communication theories the message is viewed as a cultural semiotic structure, which makes it possible to describe the multilayer process of production and translation of the meaning. Moreover, society is a self-reproducing structure, which owes its entire nature to the strong communication links amongst its members. "Society only looks like a static sum of social institutions: in fact, day after day it revives or creatively reproduces itself by means of certain communication acts taking place among its members" (1). These words by the famous scientist Sapir in the 1930s are a starting point of theoretical reasoning about communication in the 1980s and 1990s. At the beginning of the 21st century the theoretical achievements about successful verbal communication find more and more specific application in the multifunctional activities of various social

groups.

In modern society activity oriented towards understanding (communicative activity), has a dominant position and prevails over activities oriented towards achievement of goals, adhering to a norm, intentional expression. This means that social processes – of integration, socialization, institutionalization, *etc.* – necessarily take place in the cultural and communicative sphere (2).

For successful business, communicative competence and culture are increasingly becoming the determining factors. When business messages need to be sent, speaking is used more frequently than writing. Important activities in business are participation in press conferences, presentations of new products and services; giving instructions, conducting interviews, work in small groups, attendance of meetings, delivering speeches. Managerial communication is always purposeful and has its managerial context – achieving a specific result: an interview of a job applicant, successful negotiations, preparing and delivering a presentation. Well trained and educated managers know the rules of efficient

* **Correspondence to:** *Ivanka Nikolova*
Department of Foreign Languages, Trakia
University, Student Campus, Stara Zagora 6000,
Bulgaria, Tel.: +359 42 699450; E-mail:
ivnikolova@hotmail.com

communication related to:

- communication goals set;
- selected communication style (autocratic or democratic);
- assessment and enhancement of reliability;
- selection and motivation of the audience;
- determining the strategy of the message;
- overcoming linguistic barriers;
- using suitable non-verbal behaviour (3).

In the present report we propose our arguments on the last two conditions for successful business communication – overcoming linguistic barriers and the accompanying function of non-verbal communication.

Quite often experts remind that efficient communication is a bilateral process. Business specialists devote more time to receiving information than to sending such. And in order to do that successfully, they need to have good reading and listening skills (4).

Linguistic difficulties are some of the biggest barriers in communication between various cultures. Following the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, expansion of international business contacts and the opening of Bulgarian economy for foreign investments have become realities that presuppose mutual acquaintance with various cultures. Conducting business in a foreign language creates various problems. Hence, it is recommended and in many cases it is mandatory to learn the language of the country in which the businessman is going to implement partnership programmes or investments. That refers to the so-called ‘small languages’ as is the case with the Bulgarian language. The advantages of such an approach are predominantly psychological: certain vulnerability and isolation are overcome; better connections are created, more business contacts are established.

Even with excellent command or translation the foreign language creates at least four types of problems:

Barriers caused by the semantics of the words. The first level of potential problems is that related to the basic meanings of words. Some words are non-translatable literally. For example, in Finnish the word “sisu” is non-translatable. It means something like fierceness, doggedness or fury and it relates to the two-century-old historical struggles of the Finns. It is a serious problem on the semantic level, when foreign words are used in the communicative process, more specifically in the Bulgarian language. The invasion of

foreign words with a status of loan words not only in scientific terminology, but in wider communicative professional contacts is obvious, especially in the sphere of economics and business. For example, actively used are term words and phrases formed with them, like: ефективност (efektivnost), регулация (regulatsia), маркет (market), маркетинг (marketing), мениджмънт (management); имидж (image) – имиджмейкър (imagemaker), рейтинг (rating) – рейтингова скала (reitingova skala), рейтингово проучване (reitongovo prouchvane); лизинг (leasing) – лизингодател (lizingodatel), лизингополучател (lizingopoluchatel), лизингова политика (lizingova politika); PR (пиар (piar) – пиармен (piarmen), пиарка (?) (piarka); роуминг (roaming); клъстър (cluster) – хоризонтален клъстър (horizontalen cluster), вертикален клъстър (vertikalen cluster), клъстърен подход (clustaren podhod); одит (odit) – одитор (oditor), одиторски контрол (oditorski kontrol). Sometimes their use is quite random and it disturbs the intelligence of the verbal message. Very often a reason for such problems is the unawareness of the grammatical system and the syntactic structure of the language that provided the lexis. For example, a word that has been accepted since long time in the linguistic practice ”оферта” (oferta) as a noun basic term should not be used as a source for formation of a verb naming a specific proposal – and in written texts we have expressions like “оферираме Ви ...” (oferirame Vi), instead of “предлагаме Ви...” (predlagame Vi...).

It is well known that in English conversion is a basic method of word formation (5) However, it has systemic nature including rules that determine the scope and potential of the phenomenon. In contemporary English most cases of conversion are related to the noun and the verb, less to the adjective and still less to other parts of speech. The position of the word in the syntactic structure determines its semantic function – as a noun or a verb (for example: hope – to hope, in Bulgarian “надежда - надявам се” (nadezhda – nadyavam se); sack – to sack – “торбичка за храна – уволнявам” (torbichka za hrana – uvolnyavam); treat – to treat – “почерпка – третирам” (pocherpka – tretiram)). In English it is acceptable to say: The boss decided to give him the sack, but in Bulgarian: “Шефът реши да му даде торбичката.” (Shefat reshi da mu dade torbichkata). It is inadmissible even for the spoken style. “Linguistic

arbitrariness” of this kind is quite frequent and it is time philologists take more active part in restricting the pseudo competency that hampers bringing the message to the specific addressee.

The second level of lexical problems is caused by the connotation of words, i.e. by their specialized, expanded meaning and the developed word polysemy, (the specifying word takes the meaning of the specified object as well), which is specific for each language and is completed in context. For example, the word “manana” in Spanish is translated as “tomorrow”, but its connotation is “some time in the future, afterwards”. In Japanese the word “hai” is translated as “yes”, but its connotation is “yes, I am listening”, and not “yes, I agree”. In Polish “nie ma” (two words) is translated as “there isn’t” or “we don’t have”; the connotation is “there hasn’t been for a long time and probably there won’t be” (For more examples see (6)).

Phraseological units – idiomatic expressions – are another source of confusion.(7) If, for example, a businessman who had studied in England and in the USA talks to his Bulgarian partners about a certain product that “it doesn’t cut the mustard” the chances to be understood are minimum. It is known that the sum total of the meanings of the constituting words is equal to the meaning of the idiom. The Bulgarian phraseological counterpart of the English idiom “to be in the red” is “на червено съм” (na cherveno sam). The English phraseological unit “a feather in one’s cap” is translated in Bulgarian with the phrase “голям успех” (golyam uspeh) or “голямо постижение” (golyamo postizhenie); in a more special communicative situation it could be rendered by the idiom “перла в короната (на...)” (perla v koronata (na...)).

These semantic and word formative inaccuracies result in other violations of the linguistic norm as well: the borrowing of syntactic structures, stylistic and graphic peculiarities specific for the source language (in most cases English or German), creates ambiguities – the aim of the message is disturbed – to cause specific action on behalf of the addressee. For example, imaginable, presentable, visible, which are adjectives, but by meaning these are quite close to participles and can be used after a noun, especially in literary English; however, that is untypical of Bulgarian. They correspond to present passive participles ending in -им (-im), -ем (-em) that are regarded as adjectives and cannot be after a noun since in the Bulgarian sentence

these are agreed attributes. In most cases they are translated by a subordinate attributive sentence which is preferable.(8) Under the influence of the English language very often in Bulgarian one can see a syntactic structure of a separate unit introduced by a present active participle of transitive verbs, which is not very informative. For example: The report presentable to your attention... Отчетът, представящ се на Вашето внимание... (Otchetat, predstaviasht se na Vasheto vnimanie), instead of the correct rendition: Отчетът, който се представя на Вашето внимание... (Otchetat, koito se predstavya na Vasheto vnimanie). It is known that loading syntactic structures by participle structure is a sign of poor language.

Phraseological units consisting of a proper noun and a common noun as an apposition are a source of a number of mistakes in word order in translation and mostly in oral communication in Bulgarian. In English the proper noun is before the common one, while in Bulgarian the proper noun should be after the apposition. That linguistic rule is violated more and more often and the English structure is used in Bulgarian in the same order. For example, Anastasia syndrome is used in Bulgarian as Анастасия синдром (Anastasiya sindrom), instead of the correct rendition Синдромът Анастасия (sindromat Anastasiya); personnel manager is rendered as “персонален мениджър” (personalen manager) instead of the correct “мениджър по персонала” (choveshkite resursi) (manager po personala (choveshkite resursi)). Like this example of paronymy more and more often we can see translations that diverge from the meaning of the source text (8).

The third group of potential linguistic barriers is caused by the differences in intonation, i.e. the feeling that is conveyed by the speaker’s words. For example, in some cultures the tone is more formal and in others it is more emotional, in some it is more polite, in others more indifferent, in some more impersonal, in others more partial. A businessman has to choose on his own when and to what extent he can make corrections in the tone of his writing or speaking in communicating with representatives of other cultures. This is especially important for Bulgarian businessmen because as an element of the linguistic etiquette in communicative situation of the administrative business style, the selected tone means precision in the measure from politeness and respect to servility and sense of inferiority; from pride

and dignity to unjustified loftiness and arrogance.

Paralinguistics plays an important role for the successful overcoming of linguistic barriers in business communication. Knowledge of language and paralinguistics offer the effective communicators various means of expression to convey a given message (9). Writing or speaking they have to know how to link the words which will convey the basic meaning. They are obliged to have sufficient knowledge of non-verbal means of expression in order to reinforce what is said by gestures and actions: for example, to observe carefully the participants in the communicative process, to think about their feelings and needs; at the same time to study their reactions and not to miss the nuances in their replies conveyed through facial and body expressions. Experienced communicators perceive information as successfully as they convey it, skilfully relying both on verbal and nonverbal means. One of the barriers in the communicative process can be overcome by the skill to create trust and opportunity for leadership. If one can learn to manage the impression one creates by one's body language namely, facial expression, voice, outer appearance, one can convey to one's interlocutor the impression that one is competent, reliable and dynamic. As important as that is the "decoding" of other's nonverbal messages – a condition for more accurate interpretation of the implied meaning of the attitude and intention of the counterparty.

Another group of difficulties in linguistic communication results from the differences in perceiving the world. According to many linguists people who speak different languages look at the world in different ways. For example, Eskimos perceive the snow differently, because they have many words for it. The Japanese perceive responsibility in a different way because they have a grammatical form called "negative passive voice" used for announcing unpleasant news (3).

Overcoming linguistic barriers of the above type requires adequate knowledge of both the foreign language as a source of new terminology and specialized lexis and the Bulgarian language as a recipient; finding the exact lexical counterparts, specifics of the syntactic structure of the text, synonymy as a stylistic option for taking into account the specific communicative situation – in this way

efficient business communication will be achieved.

That serious issue about linguistic barriers – lexical, grammatical, syntactic, paralinguistic – in the cases when specialists and businessmen use more freely in their speech means expression from foreign languages which they have probably been trained at, implies the low level of usage of the native Bulgarian literary language. The more troublesome thing is that this fact is not taken into account, no linguistic self-control is applied, at least at the time being, and the rich linguistic opportunities for successful business communication are not used to achieve positive actions and results.

The main conclusion that is to be made from this brief overview of linguistic barriers in business communication is related to the need to introduce a training discipline in communicative behaviour in business for the economic majors at the universities, emphasizing the stylistics of the native language and sociolinguistics. For practising businessmen it is necessary to include thematic units on linguistic communication in qualifications under the European Life-long Training educational programmes.

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