GOAL SETTING STRATEGY IN ECONOMIC DISCOURSE: PROSODIC PECULIARITIES AND LINGUODIDACTIC ASPECTS

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Abstract

In teaching future economists professional English functional analysis of speech is becoming an important element of training. The need for such skills is explained by the necessity of identifying the means of speech influence and their further application. Speech strategies reflecting the general intention of the speaker are such means. The object of present research is one of common business discourse strategies – the strategy of goal setting.

The aim of this article is to analyse what particular tools implement the goal setting strategy; to identify the role of prosodic organisation of speech in general pragmatic impact; to describe how these facts benefit to foreign language training.

As research has shown, the strategy of goal setting can be realised by the tactics of request, inquiry, order, offer et al. Then the lexical, grammatical, stylistic, syntactic and phonetical peculiarities of these tactics were singled out. The tactics of request and inquiry use the gradually ascending scale while the tactics of order and offer are pronounced with descending intonation. Final tones can be high or low fall depending on energetic and emotional or calm and serious colouring of the utterance.

The authors highlight that such analysis teaches students to distinguish between the elements of positive and negative pragmatics and understand how they interact. The experiment has shown that the skills of functional and auditorial analysis are both useful and interesting for students. They become aware of the fact that the choice of appropriate combination of segmental and supersegmental means is an indispensable component of professional communication.

Further study of strategies applied in economic discourse can benefit to more effective practical cooperation in this sphere. It also helps students to master regulation of the pragmatic effect of their speech, choose an adequate degree of influence and adhere to the business style of communication.

Keywords: English for specific Purposes, teaching effective communication, supersegmental means, prosody, intonation, strategies and tactics.

1 INTRODUCTION

The linguistics of professional communication is actively studying the spectrum of speech means which makes it possible to harmonize the professional communication process. In this paper we analyze how this tool can be used in the language training of international level specialists. The functional-pragmatic analysis of English economic discourse draws the attention of the student to the correlation of practical problems and the selection of appropriate rhetorical means and often contributes to the correction of communicative errors. This skill forms an important part of communicative competence [1], [2].

Modern English economic discourse belongs to a wider category – business discourse – which is considered as a language of social interaction in a business context, and also as a set of special skills for achieving business goals. A natural way for a teacher of professional English is the issue of teaching such set of skills, because today it requires learning not only the language, but also the pragmatics of discourse [3], [4], [5]. This means the ability to develop a general theoretical discourse plan (speech strategy) and to choose particular practical means of implementing this plan (speech tactics). Another important requirement is that the effectiveness of communication implies cooperation - the process and the result of constructive interaction of communicants' points of view.

Therefore, in teaching of professional English, in particular to economists, an important element of training is teaching functional analysis of speech in order to recognize the means of speech influence and their further application in practice [6].
The problems of speech planning, impact, and effectiveness of verbal communication are inextricably linked with the process of functioning of various units in speech, beginning with vocabulary and ending with more large-scale categories (text, discourse) [7], [8]. Functionalism in linguistics is the theoretical approach, explaining the linguistic forms by their functions. The function is understood as the role (use, purpose) of a language in human society. An important function is the function of consciousness formation [9]. Transformation of thought into a verbal form is understood as a functional process. Communication includes the function of structuring and forming a person’s consciousness.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysed material includes oral speech of the representatives of the economic world - Philip Hammond (Chancellor of the Exchequer, Great Britain), the heads of international economic organisations Jim Yong Kim (World Bank President), Christine Lagarde (IMF Managing Director), Jose Angel Gurria Trevino (OECD Secretary General) et al. The work was carried out by methods of continuous sampling, functional and auditorial analysis. In the course of English for Specific Purposes classes students were suggested to analyse various excerpts of the empiric material from the point of view of pragmatic means.

3 PROSODIC PECULIARITIES OF GOAL SETTING STRATEGY

An important role in functioning of the strategy of goal setting in economic discourse belong to prosodic organisation of speech.

The issues of prosodic design of speech, including economic discourse, remain not fully researched due to their polyfunctionality and dependence on the emotional-volitional aspect of human activity. Complex analysis of such components of intonational design as melody, pausation, stress, rhythm, loudness, tempo, timbre, still poses a certain difficulty. Nevertheless, the identification of regularities in this area can be useful in terms of increasing the effectiveness of professional communication. The phonetic component of speech remains one of the most important channels of speech influence in negotiations, meetings, presentations and other registers of economic discourse.

The works on discursive linguistics state that phonetic phenomena are in direct connection with the context, i.e., research is focused on contextual meaning of intonation [10], [11], [12]. The authors emphasize the critical role of prosody in understanding the interaction between communicants and the meaning of the utterance.

In particular, linguists managed to establish the relationship between intonation and the content of the utterance [13], [14]. Analysing the prosodic speech characteristics of the communicants helps to enrich understanding of the interaction process.

Goal setting is verbalized in tactics of different level of categoricalness. As we found out, the tactics of request and inquiry use the gradually ascending scale. Request is the most gentle and polite instrument. It can be expressed with the help of

- an indirect question (Would you mind confirming that the order has been shipped?);
- modal verbs can, could (Can you please check and find out what happened to the order? Could you give me an update on the expected delivery time?);
- an uncategorical form of imperative mood (I'm a little concerned about the schedule, so please let me know the status of the shipment).

The tactic of request causes the addressee to act in a mild form, while the tactic of the request is more categorical. This can be expressed in

- address by name (What are the underlying causes of the problem? Anne, what can you tell us?);
- a direct question (Any suggestions? Perhaps we can begin by breaking down the problem? Who can start?);
- an affirmative sentence (We need to deal with this problem before it gets out of hand).

The tactic of inquiry expressed by the construction how + modal verb, also has the motivating potential:
How can we meet our deadlines without working overtime?
How should we approach this problem without offending anyone?

After analysing the empirical material it turned out that mostly the tactics of order and offer are pronounced with descending intonation.

The tactic of order is a direct command. Directness can be caused by the need for urgent measures, for example, in emergency situations. It can be expressed by

- a complex object (I need you to do exactly what I say. First, contact the CFO).
- indicative mood (Okay, this is the plan.) You're in charge of planning the sales presentation;
- imperative mood (Here's what you have to do. Start with last year's expense reports).

The tactic of offer can also reflect the tasks put in a rather non-categorical manner. This is due to the use of

- interrogative-negative sentences (Why can not we remove the threat by making the process simpler and more effective?);
- subordinate clauses of unreal conditions (How would you feel if we could reduce the amount of time it takes to get the products to customers?).

So, since professional activity is focused on the practical result, the formulation of goals and objectives is an important part of the tactical design of business speech [15].

Analysing the wider context of goal setting strategy in oral speech we managed to mark loner pausation to underline the seriousness of problems mentioned as in the following example.

'Mr. Speaker, ||
'We re’solve to’day to con’front those challenges head ´on.||
To pre’pare our ´country to ´seize the oppor tur nities a´head.||
And in ´doing so,| to ´build an e´conomy that ´works for ´everyone…| and ´where every ´corner of this U´nited ´Kingdom is ´part of ´our ´national su ccess.| |

Thematic statements (those challenges) and rhematic ones (the opportunities) are highlighted with stronger stress and higher loudness. The same is true for the words everyone and success which bear the main meaning and reflect the communicative aim of the strategy.

In another excerpt from the press briefing of Christine Lagarde such strategy-constituting words as all, growth, jobs, commitment, plans, G-20 sound louder. In contrast, additional information (reference to the communiqué lines) is pronounced faster and quieter.

With unem’ployment out´rageously ´high in many countries, | ´clearly ´all ´policies should be ´focused on res’toring growth and cre´ating jobs. || ´There are ´key com´mitments of the ´G-20, | inc´luding a com´mitment to es’tablish ´fiscal plans. || ´You will ´see that in ´paragraph ´three of the com munique which I sup´pose you have re ceived. || And ´prominently,| the G-´20’s of ´ourse. ||

The communicative goal of this discourse is to outline the tasks related to the G20's commitment to developing fiscal policy. The word commitment is repeated three times. It also intonationally marked. Persistent repetition highlights the main idea of the speech. The speaker highlights two tasks of G-20 - the formulation of policies and the introduction of common rules in the field of currency exchange (a commitment to establish fiscal plans, exchange rate). Functional relations of extension support the evolution of the narration towards the communicative goal, neutralizing switching to a different topic (I suppose you have received).

In this example, the strategy of goal setting is implemented in a rather categorical form. Affirmative sentences that do not provide a choice, but rather a statement of fact, are used. They end with low falling tones which reflects logic and thought-out structure of the speech. As we see, the strategy of goal setting prosody is formed both purposefully and subconsciously.
4 IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

In the process of teaching English for specific purposes at an advanced level students were offered various excerpts of the above empirical material for functional analysis.

It is necessary to teach students to distinguish between elements of positive and negative pragmatics and to understand how they interact with each other, what communicative impact cultural peculiarities make on discourse pragmatics [18], [19]. Thus, during the analysis of the speech of the Secretary General of the OECD, Angel Gurria, the students identified the lexemes which bear negative and positive pragmatic coloring. Already after graphic highlighting it became obvious that distribution of positive and negative connotations is not accidental.

The logic of the author’s argumentation is built with the constant interaction of propositions "existing problems" and "ways to solve them." This begins with a description of the present state of economic growth:

On the face of it, the numbers and stories from today’s Economic Outlook may look all too familiar. World growth is still stumbling along at around 3%, trade growth is slower still, and inflation remains in the OECD economies. Most of the signs of the low-growth trap that we have been talking about for a long time now are still there.

This excerpt reflects the state of economic system which is characterized by negatively colored lexemes stumbling, slower, inflation below target, near or even below zero. The low-growth trap metaphor is repeated four times in the speech of A. Gurria, which accentuates the audience's attention on the problem.

To balance them the elements with positive pragmatics representing the strategy of solution search are used (point of inflection, more active use, to escape, upturn in global growth, stimulus, easing, exiting from, a window of opportunity, magnify the gains, cushion the shock, adequate support et al.).

In the next excerpt, the effect of negative pragmatics elements is neutralized by lexemes with positive connotations.

This is not a blank cheque. If Othello “loved not wisely but too well”, we worry that some governments may do much the same with fiscal action. The OECD is calling for spending on high-quality infrastructure investment, education and skills. It should also be targeted to make growth more inclusive.

Negatively colored lexemes blank check, silly, worry, introducing destructive fluctuations in the functional space of speech, resist the stabilizing tendencies contained in the lexemes calling for, high quality, inclusive. Imaginary expressions (the metaphor blank check and a quote from "Othello") have a function of attracting attention.

The function of the whole speech is to persuade the audience in the necessity of action. The strategy of goal setting is realised by the tactic of appeal and expressed in the final words of E. Gurria:

Ladies and gentlemen, the message of this Economic Outlook is that if policy makers can avoid the pitfalls of protectionism and seize the opportunity for collective fiscal action at last escape from the low-growth trap. OECD’s motto: better policies for better lives [20].

Students come to the conclusion that the strategy of solution search was realised by tactics of appeal, contrast and metaphorisation. The prosodic side of the oral speech plays an important role in discourse evolution in the direction of the communicative goal [21].

In conclusion, positively colored elements predominate (avoid the pitfalls, seize the opportunity, reforms, escape from the low-growth trap, vindication, better), which gives the speech an optimistic character.

5 CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the skills of functional and auditorial analysis are both useful and motivating for students. They realize that the desire to choose the most optimal combination of verbal means is an indispensable condition for professional communication. Studying the properties of positive and negative pragmatic components can lead to more effective practical interaction in the economic sphere.
It should be noted that the peculiarities of prosodic realization of oral speech are preconditioned by the communicative situation, as well as by the social roles and psychological characteristics of its participants. Prosody together with lexico-syntactic means plays an important role in realizing the communicative goal of economic discourse. The choice of discursive tactics of goal setting strategy depends on the professional status of the speaker and the audience.

Further research in this field can include teaching skills of regulating the pragmatic effect of speech, choosing an appropriate degree of influence, developing an appropriate strategy and tactic.

The strategy of goal setting is an important tool peculiar to English economic discourse. Its prosodic markers enhance the expressiveness of oral speech. Mastering its usage helps students understand the communicative goal of speech at the planning stage, adapt the rhetorical means in the course of the speech implementation and also eliminate possible shortcomings at the stage of correction of the strategy.

REFERENCES


