Abstract: The article reviews basic functional features of business discourse with focus on verbs denoting communication, their functional properties being illustrated in the register of negotiations minutes. The functions attributed to the verbs in question are: 1) verbal interaction control and modeling; 2) propositional cohesion and coherence; 3) distribution of the communicants’ roles in a speech act; 4) contribution to discourse pragmatic evolution. The authors conclude that the proper use of these verbs enhances the rhetoric efficiency of speech; while the inappropriate use may lead to communicative faults.

Key words: Business English, discourse, functional analysis, minutes of business negotiations, verbs of communication, verbs of speech.

Introduction

The business communication sphere is a full-fledged system of mechanisms and tools tailored for working out professional solutions as well as influencing people’s consciousness on business matters. Broadly speaking business communicative interaction can be described as a kind of data exchange among entrepreneurs and other professionals by means of the verbal semiotic system that aims to resolve particular challenges of cooperation as social action in business contexts [1; 2; 3]. The verbal sign system accepted and implemented by both the addressee and the addressee gives the chance to transfer and interpret the meaning of the initial message quite adequately; thereby speech acts as a source of information as well as a way of influencing the partner. These functions have to be assured by a whole complex of the relevant linguistic and extralinguistic devices that allow to bring the author’s intentions to life [4].

Consequently, in the light of all benefits and shortcomings of a particular situation, the communicants’ capability to shape their speech properly shall promote the partner’s kind disposition, openness and readiness to accept counterarguments, and that is the main goal of business interaction. At the same time on the part of the message receiver an interpretation of the speech flow and a peculiar kind of revitalization of the sender’s idea is carried out, i.e. the process of message recontemplation in which the addressee correlates the
“pattern” of individually decoded meaning with the realities and behavior models of the interlocutor. Thus, a conclusion can be drawn that in many respects communication efficiency depends on a successful decoding process in the recipient’s mind, but primarily it is related to the choice of effective speech units, with view of psychological, cultural, rhetorical and other integrative features of communication and the partner(s) identity. Linguistic means enhancing the adequacy of the decoding process deserve special attention, one of them being verbs denoting different aspects of communication, which makes the object of analysis presented in this paper.

**Contemporary trends**

Owing to the present-day situation in the world the cross-border business communication is mostly performed in English within a number of registers determined by purposes, functions, social roles of communicants, such as socializing, business documentation (business correspondence), presentations, phone talks, agreements, contracts and negotiations [5; 6].

In his famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* Dale Carnegie referred to J.D. Rockefeller who considered the ability to deal with people “as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee” and expressed his readiness to “pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun” [7, 9]. The fundamental principle of business negotiations is mutually beneficial cooperation. The degree of success of the communication process in poly-cultural business interaction is pledged in the simultaneous operation of business communication forms and genres which, as a rule, are conventional and regulated, regardless of communication forms (oral or written, dialogical or monological, interpersonal or public, face to face or distant) [8; 9].

Still today a certain trend to Business English stylistic, lexical and structural deconventionalization (as reflecting the general social, political and cultural democratization) is under analysis in linguistics. A few decades ago serious business periodicals could never think of publishing things like, for instance, the following statement in the *Forbes* official website: *Have you ever noticed that your co-workers tend to fall into two categories? First, you have the idiots – those lovely, well-intentioned people that don’t seem to have a clue what they’re doing. Second, you have the jerks – the people who are difficult to deal with, stubborn and always wrong* [10].

No doubt, such trends need to be properly assessed and taken into account by not only scholars, but also teachers of Business English. Thus, we have to develop our students’ communicative skills proceeding from the possible rhetorical effects and aftereffects their speech may cause. In this respect some adapted form of the functional analysis have proved to be helpful. In this article the authors plan to show how it can be applied to communication verbs.

**Verbs of Communication: Functional Approach**
In terms of functional linguistics successful attainment of a certain communicative effect is achieved through an adequate combination of linguistic means which synergically form the desired semantic and emotional discourse space. The synergy of discourse elements is often treated as the so-called “emergent structure” generated by blending processes: composition, completion, elaboration [11]. In practice of communication it is reflected in the phenomenon of the general sense of a speech act exceeding a mechanical addition of language units meanings. Due to this phenomenon human speech is so saturated with figurative language units, various connotations, etc.

Thus, from the angle of structural analysis, the following aphorism presents a chain of complex sentences, each containing a subject, a predicate and a subordinate clause with a syntactic function of an attribute: Those who can – do. Those who cannot – teach. Those who cannot teach – administrate [12, 66].

When approached from the functional linguistics position, the utterance is characterized as a piece of ironic discourse making up a complex of semantic relations (contradiction, succession, inference); their functional interplay with syntactic parallelism results in an evident enhancing effect and emerging pragmatic meanings, like sense shift and even confusion due to the combination of ill-compatible semantic units and incongruent conclusions. So, this emergent structure of linguistic means eventually produces a compact but rhetorically effective pragmasemantic system of discourse. Thus, functionalism reveals semantic and pragmatic loading of speech as a complex system of interacting elements and their interrelations [13].

In case of discourse movement in the (rhetorically) undesirable direction, language mistakes correction, positions of the partners and subjects of discussion adjustment, generalization or cultivation of the views, seeking compromise, even a call for help are available and possible. Similar techniques are actively used both in institutional and in fiction discourses [14; 15; 16, etc.]. Nonetheless even when the speaker considers all the factors necessary for actualizing his/her intention and adequate perception of the message, there can be partial misunderstanding. In view of the above arguments, when studying a cross-cultural business discourse it is important to concentrate on the statements wording and on those properties that are urged to make the required impression on the communicants.

In particular scholars’ attention has always focused on the problem of verb functioning, as the verb is considered to be the organizing ‘nerve’ of the utterance. Verbs of communication possess a special place, as their leading function is that of regulating the partners’ discourse (sub)systems buildup and optimization of the elements functional (i.e. pragmasemantic) interaction between and within each of the (sub)systems. For example, one of US President’s Office mailouts contains the following preamble:
Two weeks ago, President Obama asked you to write and tell him how you’re doing. And I can tell you, as one of the people who helps sort through the mail here at the White House, that a lot of you answered. You told us how you’re feeling about your family, your community, and our country. You shared stories about what’s been going well, and what you wish was better. So if you were wondering if those letters actually get read, the answer is yes [17].

The occurrence of communication verbs in every sentence produces a demonstrative rhetorical impact: the message makes an impression of firm links between the country leader and the citizens. Firstly, it emphasizes the President’s readiness for dialogue and consideration to the public opinion. Secondly, it reveals people’s active involvement in communication with him and trust in his commitment to social needs. Consequently, manifold and systemic use of the verbs of communication in the given discourse forms a persuasive pragmatic effect of the authorities’ and citizens’ constant interaction and shared interests. Thus the regulating semantic function of these verbs evolves into the pragmatic function of generating new sense components.

A notable feature of the verbs in question is that due to their semantic potential they may be related to a number of laconic means of structural contraction with a simultaneous semantic enveloping [18]. Business negotiation minutes can be given as an example of a situation of a relative “shortage” of communication components. A minute taker is a passive business negotiation participant whose task is to depict the course of the communicants’ discourse movement in the most precise and capacious way. The output of his job is of great concern for the subsequent negotiation stages, as a competent way of minutes taking and observing all lexico-structural norms, allows not only to protect negotiators from unforeseen and embarrassing situations after negotiations, but also produces possibilities for polite manipulation and increase in further negotiations and meetings efficiency.

Considering the specificity of the minutes taking the document usually does not include paralinguistic and nonverbal methods of communicants association; thus, for clarity and accuracy of depicting their discourse the author should address such language means as communication verbs. To give example, the below extract from the minutes of a meeting helps follow the way the author actively uses verbs of communication to render the logic of the course of communication: Steven Poon opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and explaining the objectives for the meeting, namely, to review the specifications required by the client, to respond to needs raised by the client, and to evaluate different solutions to the problems [19].

The given paragraph represents a remarkable example of effectiveness of “a discourse in a discourse” as, on the one hand, it reflects efficiency of speech of the described person and, on the other hand, it acts as metadiscourse which conveys it. Within a single sentence the author discloses the entire stage of a
business meeting including the host party’s greeting, the agenda covering the whole meeting announcement. In consequence of occurrence of the verbs of oral activity we can accurately trace the advance of the chairman’s discourse pragmasemantic system to the communicative purpose – to create a situation of constructive and promising collaboration of all members. Moreover, each of the verbs introduces some semantic accessories and quite specifically conveys the nature of communicative activity of this person in the given situation: opened (the meeting) defines the beginning of the discussion process; welcoming (everyone) emphasizes conventionality of business communication and at the same time indicates the participants’ favorable intentions towards each other; explaining (the objectives) demonstrates the desire to create the atmosphere of rapport and to help the partners clearly realize the forthcoming tasks; to review (the specifications) implies continuity of the participants’ professional functions and also a need to improve certain aspects of work; to respond (to needs) makes the impression of appropriateness and timeliness of the steps taken; to evaluate (different solutions) demonstrates an objective and critical approach to the solution of the tasks. This ability to express various pragmasemantic components of the communicative process so accurately, but concisely, can be successfully actualized just due to a proper combination of verbs of communication, and this fact confirms the idea of high functional reserve power of this lexico-semantic group. No wonder, numerous examples of this potential realization are found in minutes.

Among the minutes register characteristics, grammar points can not be ignored either. For instance, quite typical are passive constructions; usually such a tool is necessary in reference to decisions taken collectively. So, the expression “It was noted that..” usually sounds when communicants act without a special reason or in response to some events or circumstances; “It was decided that..” is used to announce the decision after a collective voting; “It was agreed that...” – in case of general approval; “It was recommended that...” – when the communicants are empowered only to express the judgment concerning the subject of discussion; “Sb. was assigned/asked to...” – when a junior/senior by position or rank is appointed by the body to execute some mission.

The fact that the potential of communication verbs in respect to rhetorical influence on the opponent is quite various can be supported by one more factor. Generally the process of business communication assumes the communicants to provide favorable conditions for their common activity, to avoid conflictogenic situations and for this purpose they should refrain from using dubious connotative words and other figures of speech. Still this case is clear to be ideal, and communicants as they are have to get in contact not only with good-natured and well-disposed partners, but also with competitors, opponents, whimsical clients or disrespectful colleagues.

Far from always there is an opportunity to express a critical opinion frankly or to oppose the other party behavior. In such cases the use of verbs of
communication is also beneficial, as they make it possible to trigger a certain reaction of the partner (1), to advocate one’s own interests (2), to express emotional perception of a situation (3), etc.:

(1) We advise you to place your order promptly, since we expect considerable response from other customers to this special offer [20, 93].

(2) We have carefully examined your claim and we insist that the delay in submitting the documentation occurred through no fault of ours [ibid., 314].

(3) Abe’s remarks struck me as total disorder of time and space, making no sense at all [21].

**Conclusion**

Summarizing the characteristic of communication verbs in the context of business interaction, the following functional and structural roles can be attributed to them:

1) verbal interaction control and modeling at every stage of discourse buildup;
2) formation and establishment of propositional cohesion and coherence;
3) distribution of the communicants’ roles in a speech act;
4) contribution to discourse pragmatic evolution.

These functions reflect the ability of verbs denoting communication to model communicative activity and organize it in a particular, purport oriented way. The proper use of these verbs will definitely enhance the rhetoric efficiency of speech; while the inappropriate use will inevitably lead to certain communicative faults.

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