DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND BUSINESS ENGLISH

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Abstract

This paper outlines possible contributions that discourse analysis can make to the study of business English. It first explains the differences between business English and casual conversation, resulting in the need for the linguistic description of business English. A model of business discourse analysis (Bhatia, 2004) is explained. Three example research strands of business discourse analysis, including genre analysis, relational aspects of interaction and business English used by non-native speakers, are explicated. Implications for language teaching are then discussed.

Key words: Discourse analysis, business English, genre analysis, relational language, intercultural communication

A. Introduction

English has long been an important language of business and commerce. The importance of English has grown very fast, especially nowadays when international business plays a pivotal role in the economy of every country. In consequence, the teaching of business English is an important part of English language teaching around the world. With globalization and computer-mediated communication, the importance of business English continues to paramount

Despite the importance of business English, it was not until recently that research on business English was conducted rigorously (Chakorn, 2002). It has been noted that material writers of business English often rely on their ideas of how language is used in the business contexts instead of investigating authentic language use (Koester, 2010). Studies have shown that language taught in business English textbooks and authentic language used in business contexts are different (Bargiela-chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2007).

In consequence, there is an evident need to investigate language use in the business contexts, which can then inform material writing. In fact, in recent years there have been studies that investigated such language use (cf. Bhatia, 2004; Handsford, 2010; Koester, 2010). Among these studies, discourse analysis plays a key role in the description of business English, such as genre analysis (Bhatia, 1993, 2008) and the relational aspect of spoken business discourse (Koester, 2010).

This paper outlines how discourse analysis furthers our understanding of business English and how to apply this knowledge in the teaching of business English. Section B explains what discourse analysis is and why it is useful for describing business English. Section C introduces some of the research strands of business discourse analysis. Section D discusses implications for language teaching and issues related to how findings from business discourse analysis can be applied to language teaching.

B. Discourse analysis and business English

There are various definitions of discourse analysis as it is a multidisciplinary field and has several schools of thought. However, according to Jones (2012) there are some key main points and commonalities which can be summarizes in the following points.

One of the most important characteristics of discourses analysis is that it investigates authentic, naturally occurring language. This is in contrast to Chomskyan paradigm of linguistics which relies on native speaker's intuition and normally uses introspection as a method of research. Discourse analysis involves collecting naturally occurring data, such as recording of spoken interaction and written documents in order to perform linguistic analysis. Second, discourse analysis looks at linguistic units larger than a sentence level as instances of language use often extends beyond one sentence. In terms of linguistic unit, discourse is larger than syntax. Third, discourse analysis pays attention to how contexts influence language use. Contexts here involve social, institutional, professional and communicative situations. These variables index the role and power relation between interactants, which then shapes the way these interactants communicate with each other.

These features characterize the study of discourse analysis and these can be applied to the study of business discourse which is about:

"how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations in order to get their work done... business discourse as social action in business contexts." (Bargiela-chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2007: 3)

Based on these points of departure, there are two main contributions that discourse analysis can make to the study of business English. Firstly, discourse analysis can shed light on how people in commercial organizations use language to fulfil their goals in organizational work and relationship building. Secondly, findings can be used to inform the writing of business English teaching materials.

To analyze business English from the perspective of discourse analysis, Bhatia has proposed a four-space model which conceptualizes the levels of analysis that discourse analysts can undergo. The four-space model consists of: 1) textual space: discourse as text, textual knowledge; 2) tactical space: discourse as genre, genre knowledge; 3) professional space: discourse as a professional practice, professional expertise; and 4) social space: discourse as social practice, social and pragmatic knowledge (Bhatia, 2004: 19)

According to Bhatia (2004: 19-21), textual space is "surface-level properties of discourse, which include formal as well as functional aspects of discourse, that is, phonological, lexico-grammatical, semantic, organizational (including intersentential cohesion) and other aspects of text structure (such as 'given' and 'new', 'theme' and 'rheme') or information structure (such as 'general-particular', problem-solution, etc.)... At this level, researchers may only focus on describing the patterns of a business text. This can be in terms of, for example, a grammatical feature or generic structure.

Tactical space (ibid.) 'incorporate context in a broader sense to account for not only the way text is constructed but also for the way it is often interpreted, used and exploited in specific institutional or more narrowly professional contexts to achieve specific disciplinary goals. That is, researchers can investigate the process of production and consumption of business texts to assist the interpretation of the linguistic features. They may want to know what the text producers have in mind when they write a text or what the reader feels or looks for when they read a text. Here researchers try to describe competent text producers' knowledge of genres within business communication contexts. That is, the conventional linguistic patterns and how these patterns can be manipulated to achieve a communicative purpose.

Professional space is about professional knowledge and experience of professional practice. Different professions may have different expectations and conventions. Such differences can result in different linguistic realization of a genre.

Social space refers to broader social contexts of interaction such as national culture or the socio-political context which can influence the way texts are written. In Bhatia's word this level of analysis involves looking at "the changing identities of the participants, the social structures or professional relationships". To master the knowledge of social space, members/ text producers need "social and pragmatic knowledge in order to operate effectively." (Bhatia, 2004: 24). That is, they have to know the social conventions that govern the way people use language and their social interaction.

The four level of analysis are not mutually exclusive. Different degree of emphasis can be placed on different levels. These can be considered different aspects of business discourse that can be investigated. While one may focus on the linguistic features of business discourse, others may also want to investigate how other socio-political factors can influence linguistic realizations.

The reasons why this model is needed is because everyday conversation and business conversation is sharply different from each other. Koester (2004) compares everyday communication and business communication with a focus on: goal, structure, turn-taking, allowable contribution (what are the speakers allowed to talk about), and power relation between the speakers. She found that everyday casual communication often has no specific goal evidenced in the interaction. There seems to be no clear structure and the topics under discussion can change very suddenly with frequent overlaps, which can signal competition to take the floor or collaboration to indicate agreement. There is no restriction on the allowable contribution. Furthermore, there are frequent uses of colloquial language with incomplete sentences. The relationship between interlocutors is generally equal (but other contexts may involve asymmetrical power relation as well).

Business conversations, on the other hand, often have a clear goal. The turn-taking is more systematic than casual conversation. When one person speaks, the other stops to listen attentively and provide some minimal response to show cooperation. Interlocutors clearly focus on the topic. Each utterance is more complex and more polite. There is a clear overall structure. There is metalanguage such as 'I've got a couple more queries' which indicates the purpose of the conversation. In terms of power relation, the communication often takes place between people with asymmetrical relationship. In most cases, the interaction is shaped by the acknowledgement of power differentials between the interlocutors.

Based on these observations, discourse analysis can come into play in the description of business English in many ways. The goal oriented nature of business communication result in clear structures. There are genres used to perform a particular action to achieve the goals which often have patterns. Discourse

analysts can identify genres in business discourse and analyze the generic structures in terms of moves. The asymmetrical power relation leads to language use for interpersonal relation such as politeness, speech act, turn-taking, etc. Furthermore, language use in business contexts is closely tied to the social and cultural contexts in which it is produced. Discourse analysis can incorporate the analysis of how social and cultural contexts shape discourse e.g. intercultural communication, critical discourse analysis, etc. The section that follows will exemplify discourse research strands that have made contributions to business English.

C. Research strands of discourse analysis

Discourse research on business English is extensive and due to space limit this section introduces only three research strands in business discourse analysis and provides illustrative examples of each research strand. These three research strands are: 1) genre analysis, 2) relational aspect of business interaction and 3) business English used by non-native speakers.

One of the key frameworks of discourse analysis that have been widely applied to the study of business English is genre analysis (Bhatia, 2012). Genres are:

"recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community" (Bhatia, 2004)

Looking at a particular genre, we can find regular patterns characterized by stages of communicative acts. The communicative acts are called "move" and within a genre there are often a series of moves that regularly occur across texts of a genre in question. Genres are generally conventionalized because they reflect the cultures and society in which they are situated. However, genres can be manipulated in order to achieve a certain rhetorical effect. One of the main aims of genre analysis is identifying a recurrent pattern of a genre. This paper provides some illustrative examples of studies that analyze the rhetorical structure of business genres.

The first example is Handford's study on the structure of meetings (2010). He identified 9 moves in business meetings as follows: 1) Stage pre-2: Meeting preparation (optional), 2) Stage pre-1: pre-meeting, 3) Transition move, 4) Stage 1: Opening of meeting, 5) Transition move, 6) Stage 2: Discussion of the agenda, 7) Transition move, 8) Stage 3: Closing of meeting and 9) Stage 4: Post-meeting effects. (Handford, 2010: 69-75)

As for written genres, examples are Bhatia's (2004) analysis of sales promotion letters and advertisements as shown Table 3 below:

Table 1 Bhatia's (2004: 65, 97) move analysis of sales promotion letter and advertisements

Sales promotion letter	Advertisements
1. establishing credentials 2. introducing the offer	1. headlines (for reader attraction) 2. targeting the market
2.1 offering the product or service 2.2 essential detailing of the offer	3. Justifying the product or service -by indicating the importance or need of the product or service and/or
2.3 indicating value of the offer 3. offering incentives	-by establishing a niche 4. detailing the product or service
4. enclosing documents	-by identifying the product or service
5. soliciting response	-by describing the product or service
6. using pressure tactics 7. ending politely	-by indicating the value of the product or service 5. establishing credentials
	6. celebrity or typical user endorsement 7. offering incentives 8. using pressure tactics 9. soliciting response

Move structure of advertisements have also been investigated by Labrador, Ramón, Alaiz-Moretón, & Sanjurjo-González (2014) and the identification of the move is shown in Table 4 below. From the table, it is apparent that the moves identified are different from Bhatia's (2004). This may be because while Labrador et al. (2014) analyzed online advertisements of electronic products but Bhatia (2004) analyzed printed advertisements from various businesses. Consequently, the move structure in Labrador et al.'s work is more specific.

Table 2 Move structure of advertisements (Labrador et al., 2014: 41-42)

MOVE 1: <IDENTIFYING PRODUCT AND PURPOSE>	-Step 1. <referring to the manufacturing company>
	-Step 2. <naming the product>
	-Step 3. <stating the application>
	-Step 4. <illustrating the product with a picture>
MOVE 2: <DESCRIBING THE PRODUCT>	-Step 1. <objective characteristics>
	Substep 1. <listing features>
	Substep 2. <listing models>
	Substep 3. <listing data sheets>
	Substep 4. <listing extra options>
	-Step 2. <persuasive characteristics>
	Substep 1. <evaluating the product positively>
	Substep 2. <comparing the product with other similar products>

Apart from investigating the generic features of business English, it has been noted that the interaction in the business contexts often involves individuals with unequal power relation (Koester, 2010). Such differential power status is reflected in politeness strategies used in discourse. This is because business people need to accomplish both their task goals and maintain interpersonal relation with others at the same time. As a consequence, they need to do some face work in order to protect others' face.

The concept of face is developed by a sociologist Ervin Goffman (1981), who posited that face is a public self-image of a person. There are two kinds of face. First, positive face is a desire to be liked and to feel belong to a group. Second, negative face is a desire to be independent and not to be disturbed. During interaction, the participants' face may be threatened. For example, a salesperson has to persuade customer to buy a product, which threatens his or her negative face. Therefore, redressive strategies can be used to save the face. Conversationalists may use positive politeness, such as endearment term and joke, to create a sense of closeness which appeals to positive face. Alternatively, negative politeness, such as hedges, honorifics and other linguistic features displaying respect can be used to appeal to negative face.

Koester (2010) gives an example of a conversation between a supplier and a customer. The supplier arranged a meeting with a customer who is a manager of a printing company in hopes of gaining more business from the company. The analysis of politeness strategies used in interaction indicates that the supplier used negative politeness strategies, such as hedges and words which show tentativeness, more frequently than the customer. On the other hand, the customer used positive politeness strategies more frequently by making jokes and using colloquial language. In the light of politeness, it is evident that the customer has more power than the supplier, resulting in more frequent uses of negative politeness strategies by the supplier. The customer uses positive politeness to maintain the interpersonal relation with the supplier.

Another line of inquiry into the discourse of business English investigates language used by non-native speakers. There are main sub-strands: intercultural communication and business English as a lingua franca. While both involve looking at non-native speakers' use of English, they have strikingly different focuses and assumptions.

According to Scollon & Scollon (2001), intercultural communication investigates the communication between speakers from different cultural groups, which can potentially lead to miscommunication. The investigation is often focused on the communication that involves non-native speakers. Frameworks in discourse analysis have been applied to describing the linguistic patterns which cause communication problems. Two illustrative examples are Cheng (2004) study of hotel checkout staff and Chakorn's (2002) study on the comparison between persuasive correspondences by American and Thai writers.

Cheng (2004) investigated the interaction between hotel staff and customers during checkouts in Hong Kong. She found that the receptionists did not use negative politeness sufficiently. Therefore, the customers were not satisfied with the service because they expect the receptionists to show more politeness and respect.

Chakorn (2002) compares English business letters written by Americans and Thai business people. A number of differences were identified. For example, while letters written by Thais frequently provide background first before stating the purpose towards the end of the letter, the letters written by Americans are more straightforward, stating the purpose at the beginning. Consequently, while American letters focus on communicative goals, letters written by Thais focus more on establishing context and relationship.

While intercultural communication focuses on differences and potential miscommunication, business English as a lingua franca focuses on how non-native speakers use English to successfully interact with others with no misunderstanding (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). During interactions, participants seem to follow the 'let it pass' principle in which 'mutual understanding is assumed, unless otherwise demonstrated, and there is little evidence of repairs" (Koester, 2010: 124).

Research in this strand arises out of criticisms that intercultural communication research mainly focuses on miscommunication and overemphasizes national culture (Poncini, 2004). It has been noted that in the business contexts, the goal of English language use is not about using English like native speakers but using it simply as a tool for doing business successfully (Seidholfer, 2001). Indeed speech accommodation strategies, such as e.g. repetition, paraphrase, and code-switching have been found to be salient features of business communication (Connor, 1999). In fact, Connor (1999) studied business correspondence between a Finnish broker and his business partners and found that the Finnish broker simplified his language and even used ungrammatical construction to ensure mutual understanding with his trade partners.

D. Implications for language teaching

The main contributions of discourse analysis to the teaching of business English is that findings from discourse analysis can shed light on the description of business English. It shows how people use language when they are engaged in business and what linguistic features might learners need to know when they work. As such, findings can suggest what linguistic features should be included in the textbooks and how people use these linguistic features in context. In fact, some business English textbooks which are based on research findings of discourse analysis have already been published. For example, Handford, Lisboa, Koester, & Pitt (2012) have written a business English textbook called Business Advantage, which is based on research findings from discourse analysis and corpus linguistics.

It should be noted, however, that before findings can be used in teaching there are some issues to be considered. According to Koester (2010), authentic language use can be too difficult for students and sound quality can be problematic. Koester, therefore, suggests that the data could be simplified and the transcript of spoken discourse can be read in a studio to ensure the sound quality.

E. Conclusion and suggestions

This paper discusses the role of discourse analysis in the study of business English. The model of business discourse proposed by Bhatia (2004) has been explicated. Three example strands of discourse analysis of business English have been explained with illustrative examples. These three strands consists of genre analysis, relational aspect and business English used by non-native speakers. In addition, implications for language teaching as well as the implications have been discussed. Ultimately, this paper hopes to argue that discourse analysis can make wide ranging contributions to business English research and teaching. Given the heightened significance of business English nowadays, business discourse research could play an important role in equipping students with the knowledge they need for successful business communication.

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