ON CERTAIN SEMANTIC AND FUNCTIONAL FEATURES OF BUSINESS DISCOURSE

LILIT HAKOBYAN

Armenian State University of Economics, Chair of Languages
PhD in Philology, Associate Professor

lilithakobian@gmail.com

VICTORIA MURADYAN

Armenian State University of Economics, Chair of Languages
PhD in Philology, Associate Professor

muradyan.viktorya@ysu.am

SHUSHANIK GHAZARYAN

Armenian State University of Economics
Chair of Languages, Lecturer

shushanghazaryan1983@gmail.com

Abstract

Contemporary linguistic literature offers a range of definitions for the term *discourse*. Particularly significant is the cognitive–communicative perspective, which views discourse as a complex phenomenon encompassing both process and product, integrating linguistic and extralinguistic dimensions (Fairclough, 1989).

This study is anchored in the concepts of *discourse*, *business discourse*, and *corporate discourse*. While these terms are often used interchangeably within certain linguistic frameworks, there is a growing tendency to differentiate them more precisely. This article attempts to characterise and explore these notions in greater depth, with a special focus on business discourse as a distinct communicative domain.

Research findings suggest that business discourse differs from corporate discourse in important ways. These differences stem from transformations in the modern business environment, where communication, shaped by a host of linguistic and extralinguistic factors, plays a pivotal role.

The study examines the key types and subtypes of business discourse, their defining characteristics, and the primary verbal and non–verbal tools that contribute to crafting impactful, persuasive, and goal–oriented communication in business contexts. Examples illustrating the structural patterns and rhetorical

strategies of business discourse are drawn from the public speeches of prominent business figures such as Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates, whose discourse practices provide rich material for analysis.

Keywords: Discourse, communication, business discourse, public speech, verbal communication, extralinguistic factors.

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lilithakobian@gmail.com

ՎԻԿՏՈՐՅԱ ՄՈՒՐԱԴՅԱՆ

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բանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու

muradyan.viktorya@ysu.am

ՇՈՒՇԱՆԻԿ ՂԱԶԱՐՅԱՆ

Հայաստանի պետական տնտեսագիտական համալսարանի
լեզուների ամբիոնի դասախոս

shushanghazaryan1983@gmail.com

Համառոտագիր

Արդի լեզվաբանական գրականությունը ներկայացնում է «խոսույթ»-ի (discours) տարբեր սահմանումներ: Նշանակալի է խոսույթի բացատրության կոգնիտիվ–հաղորդակցական մոտեցումը, համաձայն որի՝ այն համապարփակ երևույթ է, գործընթացի և արդյունքի ամբողջություն, որը ներառում է ինչպես լեզվական, այնպես էլ արտալեզվական հայեցակետեր (Fairclough, 1989):

Խոսույթ, գործարար խոսույթ, բիզնես խոսույթ․ այս հասկացու– թյունների վրա է հենվում սույն ուսումնասիրությունը: Այս հասկա– ցությունները լեզվաբանական որոշակի շրջանակներում նույնացվում են, բայց կա նաև դրանք հստակորեն առանձնացնելու տեսակետ: Նշված հասկացությունները հնարավոր է բնութագրել և ուսումնասիրել առավել համակողմանիորեն:

Հետազոտության արդյունքները ցույց են տալիս, որ բիզնես խոսույթը որոշակիորեն տարբերվում է գործարար խոսույթից: Սա պայմանավորված է ժամանակակից բիզնես աշխարհի զարգացումներով, որտեղ կարևոր դեր է կատարում հաղորդակցումը՝ լեզվական և արտալեզվական մի շարք գործոններով:

Ուսումնասիրության շրջանակում անդրադարձ է կատարված բիզնես խոսույթի հիմնական տեսակներին, ենթատեսակներին, դրանց առանձնահատկություններին, լեզվական և արտալեզվական հիմնական միջոցներին, որոնք նպաստում են բիզնես հարթակում տպավորիչ, ազդեցիկ ու նպատակային խոսք ձևավորելուն:

Բիզնես խոսույթի ենթատեսակները ներկայացնելիս, տարբեր օրինաչափություններ քննարկելիս՝ օրինակները մեջբերվել են գործարար աշխարհում հանրահոչակ Մարկ Ցուկերբերգի, Ջեֆ Բեզոսի և Բիլ Գեյթսի տարբեր ելույթներից, որոնք առատ և հետաքրքիր նյութ են տալիս տվյալ ուսումնասիրության համար:

Բանալի բառեր՝ խոսույթ, հաղորդակցություն, բիզնես խոսույթ, բանավոր ելույթ, վերբալ խոսք, արտալեզվական գործոն:

Introduction

In today's complex world, communication manifests in a wide variety of forms. However, language remains the central medium through which meaningful interaction occurs. As such, the strategic use of linguistic resources has become a key area of study in the quest for effective communication. Investigating the characteristics of business discourse is essential for understanding and anticipating developments in the business sector.

For students in professional academic institutions, mastering the nuances and principles of business discourse is both timely and beneficial. Such knowledge equips them with the analytical tools necessary to decode, interpret, and apply communicative strategies effectively within business environments.

This article aims to introduce the target audience to current theoretical approaches to business discourse, providing a comprehensive understanding of its structure and function. The goal is to foster informed use and anticipate future trends.

Over the past few decades, the term *discourse* (from the French *discours*—speech, reasoning) has gained prominence not only in linguistics but also across a range of disciplines that engage with language functions, including literary studies, psychology, sociology, law, and political science. The widespread use of the term has led to multiple interpretations, and no single, universally accepted definition has emerged.

Nevertheless, *discourse* is most frequently associated with language in use. Contemporary linguists tend to view discourse in close relation to *text*. While *text* is typically considered the product of either written or spoken language use, *discourse* encompasses both the process and the outcome of communicative activity.

Literature Review

In the work *On the Concepts of Discourse and Discourse Analysis in Contemporary Linguistics*, the author defines *discourse* as language in use (Kubryakova, 2000, p. 6).

In his book *Linguistic Circle: Person, Concepts, Discourse*, Russian linguist V. I. Karasik outlines eight interpretations of the term *discourse* as proposed by Swiss linguist P. Seriot. These definitions generally equate discourse with a linguistic unit that exceeds the scope of a single utterance or sentence (Karasik, 2002, p. 190).

In modern linguistic thought, the concept of discourse is closely linked to that of *text*. Its emergence is associated with the expansion of text analysis beyond surface structures. A *text* is typically seen as the outcome of either written or spoken language use, while *discourse* refers to both the process and the product of communication (Kibrik & Plungyan, 1997, p. 307). According to Arutyunova, discourse is a text (spoken or written) characterised by distinct pragmatic, sociocultural, and psychological dimensions (Arutyunova, 1990, pp. 136–137). In this sense, discourse is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that, in addition to its textual and linguistic elements, incorporates extralinguistic factors that shape both interpretation and function.

An essential step in discourse analysis is the classification of its types. Differentiating discourse types allows for a more precise description of their unique linguistic and extralinguistic features. This review will focus specifically on the distinctive features of *business discourse*.

Practical – or business – communication is one of the most critical components of the contemporary world. It plays a key role in establishing and sustaining effective professional relationships. The terms *practical communication* and *business communication* are either used interchangeably or interpreted hierarchically, with one viewed as a subset of the other. In a broader sense, practical communication encompasses all domains of human interaction, including business, education, culture, politics, and economics. Consequently, business communication manifests in numerous forms and functions.

As a foundation for professional relations, this type of discourse is commonly employed in areas such as production and its financing, the sale and purchase of goods and services, insurance, product promotion, and

negotiations in all the above–mentioned areas (Shiryaeva, 2008, pp. 12–13). Participants in business discourse include economists, business executives, advertising and marketing professionals, entrepreneurs, customers, and others. To achieve their communicative goals, these actors employ various tools—both linguistic and extralinguistic—without which effective communication would be unattainable.

This leads to the conclusion that *corporate discourse* refers to verbal communication that unfolds within status– and role–defined contexts: within organisations, between organisations, or between organisational representatives and individuals. A clear structure and specific linguistic features govern this type of discourse. Parameters such as communicative tactics, underlying values, and textual characteristics help define it. Tactics include tools such as negotiations, interviews, and training sessions. The core values of corporate discourse include establishing partnerships, generating profit, and managing operations effectively (Shiryaeva, 2008, pp. 12–13).

One of the defining characteristics of this form of communication is its capacity to direct recipients toward specific, goal–oriented actions.

The broadening scope of business communication has contributed to the development of standardised linguistic patterns that are consistently applied across both spoken and written formats of business discourse.

Within the linguistic literature, a meaningful distinction is drawn between *corporate discourse* and *business discourse*. F. Bargiela–Chiappini and C. Nickerson offer a widely accepted definition: business discourse is verbal or written communication between individuals who are directly involved in business interaction, to advance their own or their organisation's interests. This occurs within relationships that are clearly defined by roles, statuses, and responsibilities (Bargiela–Chiappini & Nickerson, 2002, pp. 273–276).

Thus, business discourse represents a specific form of communication in which business relations serve as the overarching framework, shaped by the expectations and interests of the business environment.

Unlike corporate discourse, business discourse cannot rely solely on formal, institutionalised genres. Such genres are primarily suited for internal communication within an organisation—typically between management and staff—or for external negotiations and contractual agreements. However, they are not applicable in interactions involving product presentations, customer engagement, or the marketing of services. For these reasons, business and corporate discourse must be distinguished, even though they may intersect or overlap in certain cases.

At its core, business communication is closely tied to the initiation and development of professional relationships. Verbal communication has existed since the earliest forms of human interaction, although its specific forms and

functions have evolved. As an academic field, communication studies began to emerge in the early 20th century. In this regard, E. B. Atrushkevich notes the following:

"The development of communication theory began in the early 20th century with scholars such as Harold Lasswell and Claude Shannon, who aimed to construct mathematical models of communication. In the 1950s and 1960s, Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis focused on the influence of mass media on society. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault began to explore the relationship between communication and power."(Atrushkevich, 2023, p. 6)

Research Methods

This research applies both descriptive and analytical methods. The descriptive approach enables the structural examination of texts typical of business communication, identifying the communicative functions of specific linguistic units within their contextual frameworks.

The use of discourse analysis provides an opportunity to examine speech in various social contexts. This study allows for an in–depth analysis of texts characteristic of business communication.

Through the combined application of descriptive and analytical approaches, it becomes possible to uncover a range of communicative phenomena, including the function, meaning, intention, orientation, influence, and practical use of speech. These methods also help reveal the essential linguistic tools employed by prominent speakers to achieve impactful, influential, and engaging communication.

Three such renowned speakers were selected based on their relevance, communicative effectiveness, and resonance with audiences. Real examples of business discourse were chosen across a variety of genres and communicative settings, allowing for the study of both internal and external diversity within business speech.

The article examines lexical features in the speech of the selected speakers, as well as the linguistic and structural elements present in their discourse. It provides a comprehensive account of business discourse—both structurally and functionally—based on the analysis of diverse textual materials. The findings are of practical relevance for linguists and professional communicators alike.

Analysis

In this area of study, particular attention is given to the vocabulary of specialised speech genres, such as presentations, negotiations, corporate and commercial correspondence, interviews, and advertising. The research encompasses both the process and the product of business communication, including intercultural business exchange, corpus–based studies of professional

discourse, and the role of business communication within media and cultural contexts. Rhetorical strategies and their application to business communication are also explored.

Business discourse encompasses a range of subtypes, shaped by fields of usage and the nature of services or products involved. Brown suggests narrowing business discourse into five core functional domains: production and placement, marketing, management, finance, and accounting (Brown & Clow, 2008, p. 101). These subtypes are further classified based on their communicative context.

This article focuses specifically on the spoken dimension of business discourse, analysing its linguistic and extralinguistic features. Emphasis is placed on key linguistic units, contextual patterns, and external elements commonly employed in this discourse type.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Human communication can be broadly divided into verbal (spoken/ written) and nonverbal forms. Both are essential, and effective communicators skillfully integrate them to reinforce their message.

Key principles of verbal communication include:

– Engage in dialogue, not monologue; avoid lecturing.
– Consider the interests and perspective of the audience.
– Use facial expressions, particularly smiling, to build rapport.
– Break certain unspoken social taboos when necessary to address important but neglected topics. (Skazhenik, 2005, p. 46)
– Nonverbal communication encompasses a wide range of expressive tools that complement verbal content and significantly enhance emotional resonance and audience perception. The most common and widely accepted types include:
– Kinesics (from Greek kinesis, meaning "movement"): facial expressions, gestures, body posture, gait, and eye contact.
– Haptics (tactile communication): handshakes, pats on the back, physical touch.
– Proxemics (spatial communication): physical distance, orientation, and seating arrangements.
– Prosody and extralinguistics: intonation, tone, volume, pauses, laughter, crying, coughing, sighing.
– Interpersonal space: a critical factor in regulating interaction. (Karasik, 2002, p. 20)

These categories may be further subdivided depending on the context and communicative needs. Importantly, verbal and nonverbal communication occur simultaneously, complementing each other. Neither is complete without

the other, as they represent different manifestations of the same communicative intent.

Examples from Jeff Bezos's Speeches

Prominent examples include well–known statements and interviews by Jeff Bezos, whose language frequently features formulaic expressions and clichés typical of business communication, structured through clearly defined rhetorical models.

Let us examine several statements from Bezos's discourse and provide linguistic commentary (Princetonacademics, 2010):

1. "We are stubborn on vision. We are flexible on details."

This statement conveys the idea that while the company remains steadfast in its long–term goals, it remains adaptable in its approach to achieving them. The phrase contrasts strategic clarity with operational flexibility, forming a memorable juxtaposition that has since become a strategic cliché distinguishing vision from tactics.

2. "Your brand is what other people say about you when you are not in the room."

This aphoristic expression is memorable and widely quoted, often cited as a concise definition of branding. It highlights the role of public perception in reputation–building, emphasising that brand identity exists outside the company's direct control, rooted in what is publicly communicated.

3. "It is always Day 1."

This has become an iconic slogan representing Amazon's internal culture. Here, "Day 1" is symbolic—expressing the motivational mindset of constant reinvention. It reflects a corporate ethos centred on innovation, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and the perpetual energy of new beginnings.

Examples from Elon Musk's Speeches

Now consider several notable statements from Elon Musk, presented with structural and functional analysis (TED, 2017):

1. "Failure is an option here. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough." Built on paradox, this statement challenges conventional business thinking by positioning failure not as a threat, but as a necessary condition for innovation. It serves as a motivational tool, encouraging risk–taking over fear–driven caution.

2. "I think it is possible for ordinary people to choose to be extraordinary." This phrase expresses belief in human potential, democratising the concept of excellence and success. Musk's message is particularly directed at a younger audience, inspiring them with the idea of building the future. The linguistic strength lies in the verb "choose," which places agency in the hands of the individual.

3. "Some people don't like change, but you need to embrace change if the alternative is disaster."

This statement underscores the necessity of adaptability, especially in the face of environmental or technological crises. Structurally, it follows pragmatic logic: resistance to change is riskier than change itself.

Examples from Bill Gates's Speech

Bill Gatesalso provides powerful examples of business–oriented discourse. Consider the following (TED, 2015):

1. "If you are born poor, it's not your mistake, but if you die poor, it is your mistake." This statement is built oncontrast and responsibility, advocating for personal development, education, and opportunity utilisation. However, it may provoke debate due to itssocio–political undertones, depending on the cultural and economic context.

2. "The world won't care about your self–esteem. The world will expect you to accomplish something before you feel good about yourself."

This statement contrasts societal expectations with personal emotional needs. It emphasises theprimacy of achievementover self–perception, serving as a call to action—urging individuals to act, not merely to prepare.

3. "Be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one." With humour and foresight, this phrase encouragesrespect for intellectuals. In a single sentence, it subverts social stereotypes and has become a widely quoted, upbeat business "meme."

In business discourse, one of the primary objectives is tocommunicate essential information quickly, persuasively, and concisely. As a result, speakers use vocabulary and structures that make it easier for the audience to extract key information and stay engaged with the message's most critical points.

These texts also often adhere to the principle of strategic scripting. According to Skazhenik (2005), an effective speech opening is essential for achieving the intended outcome. He outlines the following core techniques:

Effective opening strategies:
– Evoking empathy
– Introducing a paradox
– Asking an unexpected question
– Offering an intriguing description
– Presenting an interesting or unusually framed fact
– Quoting an original source
– Complimenting the audience
– Using a vivid example
– Telling a joke
– Appealing directly to the audience's interests (Skazhenik, 2005, p. 54).

If a speech fails to capture attention from the outset, it risks losing its audience entirely, rendering the remainder ineffective.

Let us illustrate this with an excerpt from Jeff Bezos's 2010 Princeton Commencement Speech (Princetonacademics, 2010):

"When I was five years old, I watched the Apollo moon landing. I remember my grandfather telling me: 'Jeff, one day, you'll see people going to space routinely.'"

This opening demonstrates *empathy through personal memory* — a childhood moment that can resonate with the audience emotionally. Later, he poses a philosophical and unexpected question:

"What kind of person do you want to be?" – prompting reflection in a business–oriented setting.

In his 2015 TED Talk titled *"The next outbreak? We're not ready,"* Bill Gates surprises the audience (TED, 2015). Initially anticipating a speech about war, listeners instead hear this:

"If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it's most likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than a war. Not missiles, but microbes."

This paradoxical opening redefines perceived threats. At the time (2015), the idea was still novel and later gained profound relevance during the COVID–19 pandemic.

Elon Musk, speaking at TED Dubai (2017) in *"The Future We're Building – and Boring,"* employs a striking, sensory metaphor (TED, 2017):

"Starting a company is like eating glass and staring into the abyss."

Initially humorous, this unsettling imagery immediately captures attention, while also authentically reflecting the harsh reality of entrepreneurship. It even carries a layer of self–directed irony.

The Power of Closings and the Role of Sensory Appeal

The conclusion of a business speech must be clear, emotionally resonant, and motivational, as it is key to achieving the desired impact.

In spoken business discourse, deviations from standard norms are common. Speakers often shift into more interpersonal modes of communication, leading to changes in both vocabulary and grammar. Business success, defined by revenue and profit, depends significantly on effective interaction among participants.

Because people process speech through different sensory channels, public speakers must account for three perceptual types: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

In visual presentations, for instance, certain design and delivery principles make communication more impactful and less monotonous. According to D.

A. Sevostyanov's *Business Communication*, an effective presentation speech should follow these guidelines:

1. A sentence should contain no more than 11–13 words.

2. Speech pace should be 2–3 words per second.

3. Continuous speaking without pauses longer than 5-6 seconds reduces comprehension.

4. A speaker conveys only about 80% of the intended message; listeners perceive about 70%, and understand roughly 60%.

5. Under emotional stress, only one–third of perceived information is typically understood (Sevostyanov, 2015, p. 16).

For auditory learners, tone of voice, pitch, pauses, rises and falls in intonation, and deliberate tempo shifts all play vital roles.

For example, in Bill Gates's TED Talk "The next outbreak? We're not ready", his calm tone, intellectual style, and structured pauses define his delivery (TED, 2015). Note the phrasing:

"If anything kills over ten million people in the next few decades, it's most likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than a war. Not missiles, but microbes."

The slow tempo and the emphatic pause before "rather than a war" lead the audience to mentally anticipate the ending, creating suspense. The final contrast – "Not missiles, but microbes" –delivered in a lower pitch, solidifies the emotional and cognitive effect.

Elon Musk's speaking style, by contrast, is marked by shifting tempo, introspection, and vocal uncertainty. Consider this excerpt from TED Dubai 2017 (TED, 2017):

"Sometimes I think, well... maybe it's better that we are not in a simulation... because... that means reality is real. Which is... um, comforting... I guess."

His pauses, fillers ("um," "well," "I guess"), and unstable pitch create the impression of a reflective, vulnerable speaker. The hesitancy invites listeners to engage more attentively, amplifying the perception of authenticity–even if it occasionally evokes a sense of discomfort.

On Jeff Bezos's Speaking Style and the Role of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Jeff Bezos's public speaking is distinguished by stylistic variety, a confident tone, and dynamic modulation of pitch. A notable example is found in his 2010 Princeton Commencement Speech (Princetonacademics, 2010):

"Cleverness is a gift, kindness is a choice. Gifts are easy – they are given after all. Choices can be hard. You can seduce yourself with your gifts... but if you are not careful, it will be at the expense of your choices."

The rising intonation in the first line–"Cleverness is a gift, kindness is a choice"–creates a memorable contrast. The gentle drop in pitch in "Choices can be hard" signals a shift to a more serious tone. The slowed pace during "You can seduce yourself..." serves as a deliberate pause, allowing the speaker to gauge the audience's emotional response. When discussing values, Bezos frequently uses positive stress patterns and intentional pauses to create rhetorical weight.

To enhance impact and clarity, his speech demonstrates careful use of strategic silences, tempo variations, and intonational phrasing that strengthen key messages.

By contrast, monotone delivery can quickly disengage listeners, diverting their attention. Similarly, excessively high pitch may fatigue or irritate the audience, creating a barrier to effective communication. Conversely, too low a pitch might suggest a lack of confidence, requiring listeners to strain, which diminishes attention and can lead to repeated interruptions or disengagement.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

1. The concept of discourse is broader than that of a text, necessitating different methods of analysis and interpretation.

2. Business discourse is clearly distinct from formal/professional discourse; in today's world, business communication, driven by commercial goals, features specific linguistic and extralinguistic elements not typical of general formal communication.

3. The core aim of business discourse is to make speech accessible, impactful, and results–driven, contributing to success in business. Achieving this requires a diverse array of linguistic and extralinguistic tools.

4. Business discourse is a multilayered phenomenon, with distinctive lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and extralinguistic dimensions, guided by specific communicative goals.

5. Spoken business discourse, including interviews and public speeches, is rich in idiomatic expressions, memorable quotes, and cliché–like formulaic structures, especially in English–language settings.

6. Nonverbal factors such as facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, pauses, and silence play an equally important role, often enhancing the communicative impact more directly than words.

7. Despite ongoing research, the field remains partially defined, with many linguistic features and theoretical questions in business discourse still requiring deeper investigation.

8. The field offers a rich base of material and ample opportunities for continued linguistic exploration and applied research in the study of business discourse.

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