

TILTM 2020
Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

**THE ROLE OF FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS IN TEACHING
ENGLISH TO ECONOMISTS**

Alexandra V. Radyuk (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) RUDN University, 6, Miklukho-Maklaya st., Moscow, Russia, radyuk-av@rudn.ru

Abstract

The article is devoted to the problems of teaching a foreign language of business communication in the paradigm of functional linguistics. Based on the theoretical postulates of functional synergetics, the author describes a model of functional analysis of discourse. The author notes that the semantic system of any finite utterance demonstrates systemic properties, that is, it is logically ordered, has elements (propositions, pragma-semantic, and logical-semantic relations), strives to a functional attractor, and mobilises all its means to move towards it. It also has inherent spontaneous (emergent) properties, manifested under the influence of its interaction with the environment. A communicative situation or the consciousness of communicants, interacting with this system, pushes its evolution and forwards development in a new direction. As the experiment showed, students perceive such an approach as further enhancing their speech rhetorical skills. Finally, the author clarifies how strategic speech tools participate in the formation of pragmatics of economic discourse and what properties may be useful to specialists in the field of economics and business. The results of the study may be useful to teachers and specialists in business and corporate communication.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Business discourse, pragmatics, communication strategies, pragmatic effect, functional analysis.



1. Introduction

Functionalism in linguistics explores the actual use of multilevel language means in speech and predetermines the choice of these means for the communicative purpose of interlocutors. The functional approach in teaching a foreign language is used quite widely. It lies at the heart of communicative, intercultural, and translation competencies (Bhatia, 2019; Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Khramchenko, 2019; Ponomarenko et al., 2020; Radyuk & Khramchenko, 2014). At seminars in a foreign language, working with authentic language materials, students realise that the functional aspects of verbal communication come to the fore, combining lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and pragmatic components. Soft skills have become an element of ESP coursebooks. Being able to work in a team and work out a compromise cannot do without a proficient language level. Effective methods of teaching the abovementioned skills are still under way, moreover, they require systematisation and consolidation (Parshutina & Gabets, 2017).

2. Problem Statement

The issue studied in this article is preconditioned by the necessity to develop a comprehensive view on linguistic phenomena among students. It is necessary to highlight the functional and pragmatic aspects of professional interpersonal and mediated communication. Many language instructors today realise the need to teach not only grammar and vocabulary, but also to give the students the repertoire to manipulate the whole range of speech tools, adjusting the shades of modality, categoricalness, politeness and impoliteness, formality and informality. When working on speech planning, it is important to adjust the extralinguistic parameters of communication and draw students' attention to the appropriateness / inappropriateness of the particular wording, evaluate the consequences of what was said to build further mutually beneficial relations with partners, teach them how to bargain, make concessions, and be flexible.

3. Research Questions

Research questions that we would like to answer in this article are as follows:

- how useful is the application of functional analysis to students of economics;
- what is the scheme of functional analysis of a discourse excerpt;
- how this method works in groups with different language proficiency level.

4. Purpose of the Study

The article aims to discuss the main principles of applying functional approach in business English classes and improve the model of functional analysis of business text.

In this regard, the following tasks are solved:

- theoretical foundations of functionalism and functional synergetics are considered;
- the scheme of functional-synergetic analysis of discourse is described;
- practical aspects of applying this scheme in ESP training are analysed.

5. Research Methods

The theory of language as a system (F. de Saussure, A. I. Baudouin de Courtenay) was used to describe the levels of language. At the same time, with the development of semiotics (Ch. Pierce, W. Morris), close attention was paid to the functional side of speech (V. Mathesius, N. S. Trubetskoy, R.O. Jakobson). Pragmatics and pragmalinguistics (H. P. Grice, G. Leach) introduced such concepts as the pragmatic level of language, pragmema, communicative intentions, illocution and perlocution. The social aspects of discourse are thoroughly studied in the works on discourse analysis (Colombo et al., 2020; Cotton et al., 2019; Johnson & McLean, 2020), on institutional and professional discourse (Izquierdo & Blanco, 2020; Ledeneva, 2017; Malyuga et al., 2019).

5.1. Functional approach and linguosynergetics

One of the branches of functional pragmatics is functional linguosynergetics (Kharkovskaya et al., 2020; Radyuk, 2016; Radyuk et al., 2019; Radyuk & Khrumchenko, 2014), which went on to consider the pragmatic level of language as a system. According to Ponomarenko (2018), in terms of functional linguosynergetics, discourse is defined as “a self-organising system of senses formed in a text by an aggregate of all verbal means, which synergistically mobilizes their functional potential in order to actualise the speaker’s communicative purport” (pp. 501-505).

Analysing discourse as an open nonlinear self-organizing system, the linguosynergetic method takes into account the pragma-semantic relations between utterances. When considering a separate speech sample, it is viewed as a system (an ordered object that exists in the external environment according to the laws of self-organisation). Its elements function inside the system. In the case of discourse, this is the global intention of the author (functional attractor) - the area of attraction of the pragmatic potential of multi-level speech tools. For example, a functional attractor in negotiations with foreign partners is concluding a mutually beneficial deal. The speaker’s chosen speech tools (pressure strategy, flattery tactics, threats, appeals, the use of direct address, imperatives, the use of high intonation) and extralinguistic factors (non-verbal signals) are elements of this system aimed at making a deal.

It is important that the system is constantly undergoing the process of internal changes (speech behavior is corrected, the interlocutors make concessions) and external influence. The source of external fluctuations can be the consciousness of communicants, the communicative situation (for example, the transfer of negotiations to the territory of the opponent).

5.2. Functional model of discourse analysis

The linguosynergetic model of discourse reflects both the structural and systemic nature of the language and explains its dynamic properties, including the pragmatic level (which is quite abstract) in the general system. The dynamics of discourse evolution provides for its non-linear properties. In the course of linguosynergetic analysis, special attention is paid to semantic increments, that is, to elements whose semantics spontaneously arise from the non-linear addition of meanings (Ponomarenko, 2016). This property allows to explain such phenomena as implication, the influence of context, the meaning of irony, and others.

Dynamic and systemic properties of pragma-semantic links of discourse (which form a limited number of semantic combinations) are singled out. This is how the external environment of the discourse system (the interests and intentions of the interlocutors) arrange the speech resulting in a new state of order (and leading to the fact that the communicative goal is fulfilled).

5.3. Experiment procedure

We conducted a survey among the 3rd and 4th year students at the Faculty of Economics (15 people in each). The students of economic specialties were instructed about the method of functional analysis, based on the linguosynergetic approach.

In the study, the students were asked to determine the communicative purpose of an utterance (its functional attractor) and verbal means by which it reaches that target (the elements of the pragma-semantic system), and to conclude, if the goal was reached.

The language material is analytical articles from the high-quality press (the Economist, the Telegraph, the Financial Times), resources of international economic organizations (OECD, IMF, World Bank). For the study, 17 excerpts were selected and offered for analysis in two focus groups at the Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate levels.

The students had to analyse the means by which speech affects the reader. In addition to this, they singled out the aim of the excerpt, the verbal constituents of style, lexis, syntax and pragmatics (Radyuk & Khranchenko, 2014). They also assigned functions to particular speech tools. The analysis was preceded by an explanation of self-organising processes, while directing all verbal means and using the influence of extralinguistic parameters to achieve the attractor at the pragmatic level.

Then we compared how well students of different language proficiency levels coped with the task.

6. Findings

For example, analysing a fragment from the article “An adjustment programme. The IMF undergoes structural reform” (Economist, Feb 15th 2020), students identify the overall communicative goal of the article – informing.

*The IMF is familiar with **unwelcome edicts**. Its job as the world’s lender of last resort often involves demanding reform. But its staff may be discovering the unpleasantness of being on the receiving end. Kristalina Georgieva, the fund’s boss, is reorganising the institution.*

*Ms Georgieva took over as the IMF’s managing director in October 2019 **on a wave of good publicity**. As the first boss from an emerging market, **she regaled** audiences with her own experiences of an IMF programme — in the 1990s she saw hyperinflation in Bulgaria **wipe out her mother’s savings** in a week.*

Next, the lexical units underlying the communicative tactics of a positive or negative assessment were examined. The following positive and negative colored lexemes introduce fluctuations in the functional layer of discourse: negative - *unwelcome edicts, unpleasantness, wipe out her mother's savings*, positive ones – *on a wave of good publicity, regaled*.

*She arrived with a reputation for **being able to manage** large bureaucracies, having previously been chief executive officer of the World Bank....*

*Mr Lipton's reputation for **diligence and technical expertise** meant that the news of his early exit—his term had been due to end in August 2021—was not well received by staffers old and new. ...*

Highlighting the pragma-semantic and logical-semantic relations in this article, the students managed to notice that the image of Kristalina Georgieva is formed discursively as a positive one, she is a responsible leader, a capable manager, the press is friendly to her. A functional attractor is the concept of reform (*involves demanding reform, being on the receiving end*).

It was also noted that the pragmatics of such an utterance as the following, based on the stylistic means of pun, is synergistically formed.

A few months in, she has managed two senior deputies out.

Using prepositions with the opposite meaning, the author of the article contrasts the semantics of the two components of the sentence, as they do not belong to the same phrase, but are parts of different syntactic structures (participle and predicate). *A few months in* refers to Georgieva's tenure, while *manage out* refers to the dismissal of two officials. Thus, the speech means (prepositions) used in the tactic of opposition in the general communicative strategy of creating an image are embedded in the general pragma-semantic system of this discourse and contribute to the implementation of the communicative aim (functional attractor).

The students' task was to find means of realising the goal of informing in the form of a communicative image-building strategy. They succeeded in singling out the speech tactics and stressed that they were used to present the facts in a certain light. Moreover, it was noted that some speech means are not normally used in formal economic discourse but they add to the expressiveness of the utterance.

Turning to the analysis of classwork, we schematically display its results in Table 1. To collect statistics, we took the final work based on the results of the term, during which a functional analysis of 17 passages of articles on economic topics with preliminary theoretical training was carried out.

The final analysis was evaluated according to the following criteria. Is the communicative purpose of discourse defined? Are speech strategies highlighted? Are speech tactics highlighted? Are speech tools that implement these tactics listed? Are factors of influence on the system from external environment named? Were the students able to determine if the communicative goal was achieved?

Statistical analysis allowed us to identify the proportion of students who coped with a particular section of the analysis. Most easily they managed to single out the functional attractor and the success / failure of communication. Of greater complexity was a more detailed analysis of speech means aimed at achieving a communicative goal. Among those who did not cope with this task, there was a lack of understanding of the practical difference between general and private speech means.

This fact indicates the complexity of the perception of writing in a dynamic, voluminous aspect.

It was rather difficult to determine the factors that influenced the discourse from the external environment. This is due to insufficient background knowledge or consideration of press materials as a "dead impress" of speech.

In general, higher results and understanding of the processes were shown by a group with a higher level of language proficiency. This is quite natural, since it allows to go to the pragmatic level of analysis, without concentrating mainly on vocabulary and syntax. Some students managed to dispel an illusion that

the mechanical ability to speak and understand a foreign language is the limit of learning (Radyuk et al., 2016).

Table 01. Task result

Task	Intermediate group, number of students who gave a correct answer	Ratio of students who gave correct answers to the total number of students (1st group)	Upper-Intermediate group, number of students who gave a correct answer	Ratio of students who gave correct answers to the total number of students (2nd group)
Define the communicative purpose of discourse	12	80%	14	93%
Define speech strategies	10	66%	14	93%
Define speech tactics	7	46%	11	68%
Single out speech tools	8	53%	15	100%
Name the factors of influence from the external environment	6	40%	9	60%
Find out if the communicative goal has been achieved	12	80%	15	100%

7. Conclusion

So, in this study we tried to justify the need for teaching functional analysis of discourse. As a result, it was found out that this method can complement and continue the study of the language for specific purposes at advanced levels. The results obtained do not exclude the need to introduce studying the functional side of speech in lower-level groups.

Often in the students' minds it is fixed that institutional communication is something stereotyped, built on patterns and following strict stylistic standards. Moreover, great flexibility in choosing pragma-semantic relations, communicative strategies, the use of semantic increments would undoubtedly enrich the communication skills of future economists. Evidently, the heterogeneous nature of discourse is predetermined by the variety of logical and semantic relations, consequently the evolution of discourse provides for self-regulation and achievement of the author's intent. Understanding these facts adds to rhetoric potential of economists which can be applied both in academic and professional life. This approach also serves as an additional incentive for a deeper study of language and enrichment of a personal arsenal of pragmatic means.

Acknowledgments

The publication was prepared with the support of the RUDN University Program 5-100.

References

- Bhatia, V. K. (2019, March-June). World Englishes in professional communication. In Special Issue, *Honoring The Life And Work Of Braj B. Kachru*, 38, 230-240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12362>
- Colombo, L. A., Pansera, M., & Owen, R. (2020). The discourse of eco-innovation in the European Union: An analysis of the Eco-Innovation Action Plan and Horizon. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 214, 653-665. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.12.150>
- Cotton, M., Barkemeyer, R., Renzi, B., & Napolitano, G. G. (2019). Fracking and metaphor: Analysing newspaper discourse in the USA, Australia and the United Kingdom. *Ecological Economics*, 166, 106426. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2019.106426>
- Izquierdo, M., & Blanco, M. P. (2020). A multi-level contrastive analysis of promotional strategies in specialised discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*, 58, 43-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2019.12.002>
- Johnson, M., & Mercer, N. (2019). Using sociocultural discourse analysis to analyse professional discourse. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 21, 267-277. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.04.003>
- Johnson, M.N.P., & McLean, E. (2020). Discourse Analysis. In A. Kobayashi (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 377-383). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10814-5>
- Kharkovskaya, A. A., Ponomarenko, E. V., & Aleksandrova, O. V. (2020). Language picture of the world: the Global Language Monitor project. In *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences EpSBS, LXXXIII*, 62-68. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.04.02.8>
- Khramchenko, D. S. (2019). Functional-linguistic parameters of English professional discourse. *Professional Discourse & Communication*, 1(1), 9-20. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2687-0126-2019-1-1-9-20>
- Ledeneva, S. N. (2017). Discursive features of advertisements. *Philology at MGIMO*, 4(12), 36-42. (in Rus.)
- Malyuga, E., Maksimova, D., & Ivanova, M. (2019). Cognitive and discursive features of speech etiquette in corporate communication. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(3), 310-318.
- Parshutina, G., & Gabets, A. (2017). Functional potential of verbs denoting communication as a tool for upgrading students' communicative skills. In *ICERI2017 Proceedings* (pp. 6229-6232). <https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2017.1616>
- Ponomarenko, E. V. (2016). Functional properties of English discourse in terms of linguosynergetics. In *SGEM2016 Conference Proceedings*, 3, 355-362. <https://doi.org/10.5593/sgemsocial2016/B13/S03.042>
- Ponomarenko, E. V. (2018). The notion of functional synergism in linguistics. In *SGEM2018 Conference Proceedings*, 5(3), 501-508. <https://doi.org/10.5593/SGEMSOCIAL2018H/31/S10.063>
- Ponomarenko, E. V., Magirovskaya, O. V., & Orlova, S. N. (2020). Introduction: Professional Discourse in the Focus of Functional Linguistics. In E. Malyuga (Ed.), *Functional Approach to Professional Discourse Exploration in Linguistics* (pp. 1-20). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9103-4_1
- Radyuk, A. V., Ivanova, M. V., Badmatsyrenova, D. A., & Makukha, V.S. (2019). Pragma-Semantic Relations in the Structure of a Business Microblog. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(60), 392-403. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n6p392>
- Radyuk, A., & Khramchenko, D. (2014). Teaching Business English: Cooperative Discursive Strategies And Tactics In *8th International Technology, Education and Development Conference (INTED) proceedings*, (pp. 6798-6803). Valencia.

- Radyuk, A., Banshchikova, M., Kogotkova, S., & Kazieva I. (2016). Problem Solving in English For Specific Purposes Teaching. In *8th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies (EDULEARN) proceedings*, (pp. 8905-8909). Barcelona.
- Radyuk, A. V. (2016). Criteria of English Business Discourse Effectiveness in View of Dynamic and Systemic Approach. *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta - Seriya 2 - Yazykoznanie*, 15(3), 196-205.