

STANDARDIZATION VS SPECIFICITY: A STYLISTIC APPROACH TO CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN ENGLISH BUSINESS DISCOURSE

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The globalized world necessitates effective communication across business landscapes. This paper explores the interplay between standardization and specificity in written business discourse, focusing on English. While globalization fosters a convergence of communication styles, national peculiarities can still influence language use. The article investigates stylistic features of written English business discourse. It examines the concept of Institutional Business Discourse (IBD) and its core characteristics, including formulaic expressions and adherence to status roles. The provided analysis delves into the stylistic use of passive voice and modal verbs, revealing a shift towards active voice in English business discourse for a more assertive tone. A significant attention is paid to the growing trend of gender-neutral language in English business communication, employing gender-neutral pronouns and avoiding gendered nouns. This reflects the evolving social landscape and legal recognition of non-binary identities. The paper further explores commonly used verbs, participles, and phraseological units in both languages. It emphasizes the importance of clarity and precision in business discourse, highlighting the limited use of jargon and emotionally charged language. The key findings of the research are as follows: convergence in communication styles due to globalization; persistence of national specificities in vocabulary and phraseology; written business discourse as a form of IBD; shift towards active voice in English business discourse; rise of gender-neutral language in English business communication; importance of clarity and precision in the English language. The article also offers valuable insights for effective cross-cultural business communication, highlighting the need to navigate between standardized business language elements and its national specificities to ensure clear and professional communication.

СТАНДАРТИЗАЦІЯ VS СПЕЦИФІКАЦІЯ: СТИЛІСТИЧНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО КОНВЕРГЕНЦІЇ ТА ДИВЕРГЕНЦІЇ В АНГЛОМОВНОМУ БІЗНЕС-ДИСКУРСІ

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Ключові слова: ділова англійська мова, діловий дискурс, стилістичні особливості, міжкультурна ділова комунікація, стилістика.

Глобалізований світ вимагає ефективної комунікації в бізнес-середовищі. У статті досліджено взаємодію між стандартизацією та специфікацією в письмовому діловому дискурсі, зосереджуючись на англійській мові. Хоча глобалізація сприяє зближенню стилів спілкування, національні особливості все ще можуть впливати на використання мови. У статті досліджуються стилістичні особливості англійського письмового ділового дискурсу. Розглядається поняття інституційного ділового дискурсу (ІДД) та його основні характеристики, зокрема шаблонні вирази та дотримання статусних ролей. Представлений аналіз заглиблюється у стилістичне використання пасивного стану та модальних дієслів, виявляє зсув до активного стану в англійському діловому дискурсі для надання йому більш ділового тону. Значну увагу приділено зростанню тенденції до гендерно нейтральної мови в англійському діловому спілкуванні, використанню гендерно нейтральних займенників і уникнення гендерно маркованих іменників. Це відображає еволюцію соціального ландшафту та юридичне визнання небінарних ідентичностей. У статті також досліджуються загальноживані дієслова, частки та фразеологічні одиниці в обох мовах. Наголошується на важливості ясності та точності в діловому дискурсі, підкреслюється обмежене використання жаргону й емоційно забарвленої лексики. Основні висновки дослідження: зближення стилів спілкування внаслідок глобалізації; збереження національної специфіки в лексиці та фразеології; письмовий діловий дискурс як форма інституційного ділового дискурсу; зсув у бік активного стану в англійському діловому дискурсі; зростання гендерно нейтральної лексики в англійському діловому спілкуванні; важливість ясності та точності в англійській мові. Стаття також пропонує цінні поради щодо ефективної міжкультурної ділової комунікації, підкреслює необхідність балансування між стандартизованими елементами ділової мови та її національною специфікою для забезпечення чіткої та професійної комунікації.

Introduction. Business discourse is considered to be one of the most relevant types of discourse and is actively studied in modern linguistics. It is the subject of study of linguistic schools of different countries. The leaders among them are the USA, France, the Netherlands, and others. Numerous approaches and methods of analyzing English business discourse are

formed within cognitive linguistics, linguocultural realm, intercultural communication, speech act theory, psychological linguistics and many others.

As a rule, the communicative space of English business discourse is considered by linguists within the framework of official communication, in which “communicative processes related to the implemen-

tation of the regulatory function through official business texts dominate”, in other words, the emotive and conative functions of language become dominant.

Problem statement. English business discourse is a purposeful speech behaviour in accordance with conventional norms and rules of communication accepted in a certain business community. Due to the process of globalization and the development of mass communications, the rules of English business communication are becoming universal, the national peculiarities of business discourse are gradually levelled out, although there are still differences between business discourse (in terms of linguistic means, forms of speech impact, composition and text structure).

The **relevance of the topic** is determined by the need for a holistic description of English written business discourse, a comprehensive study of its linguistic characteristics, taking into account its stylistic, social and cultural features of communication in English culture. With the expansion of business contacts, English business discourse is increasingly penetrating into the communicative space of modern society, but still there is an insufficient number of works devoted to the linguistic component of English written business discourse and few studies of its extralinguistic features (socio-, cultural-, personality-related). The interest to this topic is also dictated by the changes that have been taking place in a contemporary society over the last few years, both in social, cultural and linguistic realms.

The **aim of the research** is to identify, describe and systematize key stylistic features of English written business discourse.

In accordance with the goal, the following **tasks** were defined: to analyze conceptual aspects of the research problem on the basis of generalization of contemporary theoretical approaches; to describe institutional business discourse from the point of view of modern discourse linguistics; to reveal the national-cultural specificity of English business discourse; to identify and describe stylistic, social and cultural features of English written business discourse in English culture.

The **object** of the study is English written business discourse as a type of business communication. The **subject** of the study is social, cultural, lexico-grammatical and stylistic features of English written business discourse in business communication.

The paper is based on the following hypothesis: English written business discourse is a type of institutional business discourse. Its basic properties are ritualized and clichéd phrases, the choice of which is conditioned by the pragmatic functions of Ukrainian and English languages.

The **methodological basis** of the research is formed by the fundamental issues presented in the works of leading scholars, devoted to the notions

of discourse, business discourse and intercultural communication: E. Benveniste, P. Serio, M. Stubbs, R. Lewis, T.A. van Dijk, G. Hofstede, E. Hall, etc.

Discussion. Business discourse, both in Ukrainian and English communication, applies a wide range of discursive strategies and speech means, the use of which is the main factor in the formation of certain communicative styles. Speech means are understood as the use of certain speech acts, syntactic constructions, and lexicon. Let us consider how speech means are used in English business communication, and what communicative style is formed in this case.

Institutionality is one of the most important parameters of discursive interaction. Institutional discourse is, first of all, a communication limited by the framework of status-role relations and possessing its own sub-language or a system of professionally oriented signs. Its main system-forming features are considered to be the purpose of communication and communicators. Institutional-discursive space covers both the language system, text and speech activity. At the moment, the following types of institutional discourse are distinguished: business, legal, political, diplomatic, scientific, advertising, military, administrative, pedagogical, medical, mass-informational, etc. [8, p. 141].

Among the listed types, the personal component is least characteristic of business discourse. Institutional business discourse (IBD) is a multidimensional formation with a number of features, including: templates, status-role relations, clichédness, certain conditions of communication in which participants interact. IBD is understood as a status-role speech activity that pursues a clearly defined goal and which participants follow the norms and rules of business relations. The common goal of the participants of business discourse is to find a balanced mutual benefit, i.e., their interests related to the sphere of business. Participants of modern business discourse most often become specialists in the field of business, economics, management, marketing, advertising, trade and others. Consequently, the IBD discourse functions in the sphere of selling and buying goods and services, production, financing of productions, insurance, commerce, granting of money loans, etc.

Just as importantly, IBD is subdivided into spoken and written discourse, which are used both in communication between individuals and within and between organizations.

Apart from that, the main system-forming parameters of English business discourse are: social purpose, presence of addresser and addressee, presupposition, illocutionary and perlocutionary content, text and a particular linguistic picture of the world. The named parameters are correlated in a special way, which indicates functional meanings peculiar only to the institutional business discourse [3].

Scholars also distinguish such system-forming parameters of IBD as: specific values, specific strategies, specific general picture of the world. The first ones include: creation and strengthening of partnership or business relations, effective management, profit/benefit, selection and training of personnel, monitoring of the competitive environment. Specific strategies are considered to be: trainings, interviews, negotiations, presentations, articles in special media [1; 3; 8; 10].

All areas included in the institutional business discourse have their own, characteristic only for this area of communication goals and objectives, intents and strategies for their achievement, addresser and addressee, the environment of interaction, on the basis of which the spheres of communication are distinguished public institutional business discourse (dissemination of information about the activities of business community representatives), academic institutional business discourse (storage and reproduction of knowledge) and professional institutional business discourse (the process of professional activity itself) [3; 8; 10].

Professional business discourse occupies the central part of the IBD structure, as it corresponds as much as possible to the purpose of IBD. It should be noted that professional IBD is in close relationship with public IBD, which provides contact between members of the business community and people who do not belong to this institution.

Having analyzed the documents of the legal portal of the United Nations document base, we can state that business discourse in Ukrainian communication is characterized by a high degree of use of passive constructions. It is noteworthy that the degree of use of such syntactic constructions varies depending on the type of document. If we consider such documents as memoranda, court rulings and international treaties, we will see that it is memoranda that are marked by a low percentage of passive constructions among these types of business discourse documents.

Syntactic constructions of the passive voice are also widely used in English business discourse. This is due to the need to fulfil such communicative tasks as, for example, description of production processes or pragmatically significant withdrawal of the focus agent from the addressee's attention [4; 9; 10].

The use of passive constructions is most characteristic of protocols, since it is with the help of these constructions that collective decisions are usually communicated. Among the most frequently used expressions are the following: *it was noted that*, *it was decided that* <...>, *it was recognized that*, *it was recommended that* is often used to clarify some circumstances or in response to certain circumstances and events; *It was decided that* <...> is used when announcing a decision taken after a collective vote;

It was suggested that <...> is used only when the approval is universal; *It was recommended that* <...> is used to express the communicants' opinion about the discussed problem.

However, while the use of the passive voice continues to be a necessity for Ukrainian BD, in English BD it ceases to be an obligatory marker of the official business style. In modern BD, the use of the active voice is becoming preferable, which is considered to be an indicator of a more active and responsible position. This trend has found a particularly vivid expression in business writing. Let us analyze the extract of letter of the Ex-President of the United States of America D.J. Trump (2018):

“<...> *I have invoked section 2808 of title 10, United States Code, and authorized the Secretary of Defense, and at his discretion, the Secretaries of the military departments, to exercise the authority under that section to engage in emergency construction as necessary to support the use of Armed forces and respond to the crisis at our southern border* <...>” [11].

Having analyzed this official letter, we can conclude that the number of passive constructions is lower than the active voice dominates. This indicates that in English business discourse the use of the passive voice is no longer obligatory and ceases to be an attribute of the official business style, giving way to the active voice.

As a peculiarity of English business discourse, we can also highlight the wide use of modal verbs. It is worth noting that the modal verb *shall* occupies a special place in English business discourse and is one of the most frequently used in business discourse. However, this phenomenon does not apply to all types of documents in English business discourse. For example, in legal terminology *shall* is used very rarely. The fact is that common law style guides do not advise to use *shall* in legislation. There may of course be exceptions. One reason for using “shall” might be where the text is being inserted into an Act that already uses it. Exceptions are, of course, allowed. The verb “shall” may be used in cases where a new text is incorporated into a text of an Act that already uses the verb.

Having analyzed the texts of the draft laws of Australia, Great Britain, the USA and Canada, we are convinced that the degree of use of the modal verb *shall* is extremely low. We can also state that in the US draft laws *shall* is used in the narrow sense of “has a duty to”. One of the main reasons for not using this modal verb is its polysemantics, which contradicts the main characteristics of business discourse. As noted earlier, there are a number of general requirements for written business discourse. These requirements include precision and clarity, which are often violated precisely by the use of polysemous words.

It is not by chance that the American lexicographer and lawyer Brian A. Garner called *shall* a chameleon word, because in the English language of law it is possible to distinguish eight meanings of this word.

The use of passive constructions in English business discourse is most characteristic of protocols, as it is with the help of these constructions that collective decisions are usually communicated. However, if the use of the passive voice continues to be a necessity for Ukrainian BD, in English BD it ceases to be an obligatory marker of the official business style. As a feature of English business discourse, we can also highlight the extensive use of modal verbs.

One of the features of modern English business discourse is the use of gender-neutral language in official documents. There is a tendency to expand the use of gender-neutral vocabulary, including gender-neutral pronouns (they, them, their). In modern English business discourse, the gender-neutral writing style is realized through the following actions:

Refusal to use feminine or masculine pronouns (in English BD these pronouns are labelled by the term “gender-specific”);

Avoiding the use of gender-specific nouns:

Guests are cordially invited to attend with their wives. Guests are cordially invited to attend with their partners.

To fulfil the first point, there are three main methods used in English-language documents:

1. Pronoun substitution.

2. Repeating the noun:

“<...> *earning s, in relation to a person, means sums payable to the person in connection with the person’s employment <...>*” [11].

3. Paraphrasing the sentence so that it is not necessary to use a pronoun or a noun.

The method of replacing feminine and masculine pronouns with the gender-neutral plural pronoun “they / them” is found only in English documents of recent years. In this method, the pronoun “they” denotes a specific person, i.e. “they” is used as a singular pronoun, despite the fact that it is a plural pronoun. This phenomenon is closely related to social processes and phenomena occurring in English countries, in particular the legal recognition of non-binary and intersex people. In Australia, New Zealand, Canada and in some states of the USA (Washington, New York, California, Oregon, Ohio). In addition to the ability to change the gender marker on documents, there is a separate gender marker (gender X) for non-binary or intersex persons. The gender identifier “X” stands for “indeterminate/unspecified” and since the pronouns *he/she* indicate a specific gender, the plural pronoun *they* is used to refer to these individuals. The use of *he /she* pronouns in relation to persons who prefer *they* pronoun is considered a violation of human rights in some US states.

The analysis has shown that among the most frequently used lexical units in English written business discourse are the verbs *to promote* (facilitate), *to exchange*, *to encourage*, *to undertake*, as well as the participles *wishing*, *recognising*, *reaffirming*, *highlighting*, and also the participles *wishing*, *recognizing*.

As noted earlier, one of the main properties of business discourse and official business style in general is clarity. This feature completely excludes the use of borrowings or inappropriate, excessive use of terms in documents or business letters. The exception is words with established meanings in the language. These are mainly Latin borrowings or borrowings from the French language, which are part of the stable pair synonyms together with the original English synonyms. Examples of such paired synonyms are, for example, *goods and chattels*, *terms and conditions*, etc.

Results. The analysis of BD phraseology allows us to identify some characteristic features, despite the fact that the use of phraseological units in documents and business letters is rather limited. In such documents there are no phraseological units with bright emotional colouring or phraseological units with positive/negative connotation. The use of phraseological units with reference to culturally specific realities/events, biblical stories, myths is also completely excluded.

The phraseological units used in business discourse can be called intra-stylistic, as they represent clichéd units with narrow meaning. The phraseological phrases used in BD fix a certain situation and are reproduced as formulas. *To enter in to an agreement (to enter into an agreement)*, *at a short notice (in a short time/at first demand)* were identified as frequently used phraseological units, *to proceed with the execution / to proceed an execution*, *by mutual agreement (by mutual agreement)*, *by common consent (by common consent)*.

One of the main characteristics of modern English-language business discourse is the use of gender-neutral language in official documents, which is achieved through various methods. The inclusion of gender-neutral vocabulary, including pronouns, is also expanding. Additionally, it was found that the most commonly used lexical units in written English business discourse include verbs such as “promote”, “exchange”, “encourage”, “undertake”, and participles like “wishing”, “recognizing”, “reaffirming”, and “highlighting”.

Conclusion. This study reveals several key insights regarding written business discourse in English. Globalization and communication advancements are leading to a convergence of business communication styles across languages. However, national peculiarities, particularly in

vocabulary and phraseology, still persist. Written business discourse can be effectively defined as a type of institutional business discourse (IBD). This highlights its focus on specific goals, adherence to status roles, and the use of formulaic expressions. The use of passive voice is prevalent in both Ukrainian and English business discourse. However, English is witnessing a shift towards the active voice for a more dynamic and responsible tone. Modal verbs play a significant role, with “shall” holding a special position in English legal documents (though its usage is declining). Modern English business discourse prioritizes gender-neutral language, employing gender-neutral pronouns and avoiding gendered nouns. This reflects changing social landscapes and legal recognition of non-binary identities. Adherence to clarity and precision remains paramount in business discourse. Jargon and emotionally charged language are generally avoided to ensure clear communication and minimize misunderstandings. This research emphasizes the growing standardization of business communication styles while acknowledging the persistence of national specificities. Understanding these stylistic, social and cultural nuances is crucial for effective communication across international business relations.

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