Linguo-Stylistic Properties of Business English Discourse

Eva Minasyan[1*], *Venera* Midova[1], *Kira* Trostina[1] and *Liya* Torosyan[2]

[1]Department of Foreign Languages №1, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, 117997, 36 Stremyanniy per., Moscow,
[2]Department of Foreign Languages №2, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, 117997, 36 Stremyanniy per., Moscow,
Russia

Abstract. In this globalized business environment, businessmen attach great importance to establish long-term and friendly relationship with partners and clients through business communication. The primary aim of the paper is to investigate the linguistic and stylistic properties of Business English, mainly metaphors, euphemisms and idioms as core figurative elements used to enhance and enrich business speech. The authors of the article have made an attempt to analyze the use and functions of figurative patterns in Business English, to reveal their realization through lexical and grammatical patterns and illustrate implied meanings. The research methods include comparative study and classification the lavish use of stylistic devices in business discourse with the reference to the conceptualization of abstract notions from source domains bound to human behaviour, personality and actions, sports and competition, nature and disasters, military and other tangible notions. The particular linguistic point made by figurative language is proved to be common not only in poetry and prose, but also in nonfiction discourse, in this case in business.

1 Introduction

It seems worthwhile to give a brief characterization of business discourse, which is ultimately focused on operating a business and communicating in a business context. On the global business level, it is assumed that business language should be clear, direct and unambiguous, as there are often financial implications in the way communication is conducted. However, it can contain metaphors, idioms, euphemisms and other figurative elements which cause confusion and difficulty in implementation among people, in our case pre-experienced foreign learners, who are not familiar with their deeper meaning or cultural sense.

2 Methods and Materials

It is commonly known that business texts have unique vocabulary from an area of business they specialize in, for instance, management, marketing, finance, accounting, etc. Each area of business expertise is full of specific technical words which are quite far from daily usage and general comprehension. Besides its professional nature, business discourse is marked by the frequent use of euphemisms, metaphors and idioms taken form literary works or daily exchanges to create striking and unusual pictures of abstract phenomena and events in people's minds. As Frendo Evan claims, 'The language of business English includes what some people might call everyday English. So, business English is an umbrella term for a mixture of general everyday English,

general business English, and ESP. It is not limited to words or phrases that only appear in some special business world. For example, a quick glance at the language of advertising soon shows a wonderful variety of metaphorical language, such as the health drink with more muscle, or diminishing the direct and offensive meaning of the phrase by using euphemistic language, e.g. been economical with the truth (lied). And popular business books borrow from a wide variety of literary sources, including Winnie-the-Pooh and Shakespeare' [1].

Many scholars and experts have studied the linguistics peculiarities of the Business English discourse and underlined its prominence for building better and long-lasting relationships. Jiang Yanxin (2014) declares that "in business circle, companies use more appropriate language to get a better understanding of each other... to learn the importance of understanding the features of Business English and the necessity of using it appropriately" [2]. E. V. Ponomarenko and E. Malyuga highlight the significance and efficiency of business language accuracy as "Doing business with the view of complex economic and political processes in the world requires specific abilities for sophisticated communication in different communicative registers, especially being in contact with foreign businessmen" [3]. Other researchers' views on this issue argue that "Besides understanding the partner's incentives and some individual properties, indispensable for successful communication is also the speaker's competence in matters of intercultural interaction, as it is common knowledge that being persuasive in your own culture

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[*] Corresponding author:Minasyan.ET@rea.ru

does not guarantee being persuasive in other cultures" [4], [5]. Consequently, the knowledge and implementation of basics of linguo-stylistic functions of a foreign language make a good instrument that helps reveal what lies behind this or that way of formulating people's ideas and positions in certain circumstances and within certain cultural contexts.

At the start of theoretical studies a great number of scholars have made an attempt to discover more effective approaches of teaching and learning foreign languages for specific purposes, mostly triggered by global trends in economic, educational and other spheres. Another group of researchers, Martin, J.R. (1997), Whittaker R., McCabe A., O'Donnell M. (2006), Castel V. M. (2007) and Schleppegrell, M. J. (2012) have proved that acquisition with further application of linguistic and stylistic fundamentals of a foreign language increases learners' overall literacy and communication effectiveness [6], [7], [8], [9].

The initial choice of these linguistic devices is that the line of separation is rather thin between them and their usages overlap in business context, which is supported by examples. Further, we try to explore how euphemisms, metaphors and idioms are defined and differentiated. Thus, in this comparative analysis these linguistic tools are investigated separately in business discourse, and then parallels are drawn on the level of their application and importance for business communication.

3 Discussion

It is noteworthy to start by defining linguistic elements and their peculiarities which are classified as figurative language in this paper. In general, figurative language is marked by the use of words and expressions with a meaning quite different from the literal interpretation. It often includes the use of a specific word or word meaning, like metaphors, along with unusual construction or combinations of words that provide a new perspective on the word, for example, idioms. Both a metaphor and idiom are words, expressions or phrases conveying meanings different from their lateral and dennotational ones in a nonliteral and imaginative way; nonetheless, the former is a stylistic device or a figure of speech, whereas the latter belongs to lexicology, mainly a phraseological unit. As opposed them, euphemism acts as a mediator to express diverse opinions, requests, demands and proposals in an indirect and mild way, mostly used in negotiations. Widely and masterly applied euphemistic language helps to avoid showing unwillingness, discontent or forceful tone of the message in business communication.

3.1 Metaphors and Idioms Exploited in Business Discourse

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which an object is described by comparing it to something else. So, a closer look at the stylistic term metaphor reveals the core meaning and usage of it as a device for aesthetic and rhetorical purposes predominantly occurring in the language of poetry and prose. As Zhukovska describes 'Metaphor (Gk carrying from one place to another) denotes expressive renaming based on likeness, similarity or affinity (real or imaginary) of some features of two objects. Metaphor is usually used in the predicate group, because it aims at individualization and characterization of the object' [10]. And an idiom is a group of words that has a special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word.

A brief overview of the application of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions in poetry and prose tries to state their overwhelming recurrence. The British poet Shakespeare is notably a writer of metaphors and he used metaphors to describe more abstract notions as life, time, and the universe. His plays are rich in original metaphors and idioms, especially those relating to animals, war, fencing, hunting, fishing, music, food, clothing and other familiar pastimes. In the famous lines from 'As you like it' [11].

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

The world is described by taking attributes from the stage. The overall idea of the metaphor conceptualizes the 'seven ages' of humans from birth to death, with the implied meaning of living on a stage, being simply actors, playing any parts during our lifetimes. Due to Shakespeare's worldwide fame and literary heritage, the above given phrase All the world's a stage is regarded nowadays as an idiom with the implied meaning of 'life is a stage and each individual plays several roles dictated by circumstances or age requirements'.

Hence, in any type of discourse metaphors and idioms, as types of figurative language that express a comparison between two entities without using any comparison term, such as like, as, similar, alike, resembling, are used to disclose deeper meanings, convey complexity and add appeal. People regularly speak about time is money, life is a fairy tale, rosy dreams, black or white stripes of life, being at a crossroads in their relationship and so on. As we hear these phrases in context, we understand that they are about time, fortune, success, life and love. And the speaker wishes to convey these meanings through the connotational meaning of 'money' as expensive, valuable; 'fairy tale' as fantastic, imaginary and awesome. In other words, we conceive and characterize an abstract reality in terms of concrete ones. These examples serve as evidences that metaphors and idioms are used not only by famous people and poets, but as well as by ordinary humans in their everyday conversations to express profound meanings and emphasize hidden emotional shades of their thoughts.

In cognitive terms, the metaphors originated from Shakespeare's play All the world's a stage…They have their exits and their entrances, include the elements of birth and death, life illustrated as a play, individuals depicted as passengers tasting all phases of life. Through

perceptive thinking we recognize the important role that metaphors and idioms play in our understanding through basic concepts of our world, like birth and death, life and love, thought and society, etc. The cognitive linguists argue that 'metaphors are not just superfluous, though pleasant rhetorical devices, but an indispensable property of our thinking and conceptualization' [4]. So, conceptual metaphors create associations between two domains through deciphering the concrete concepts of the world (health, illnesses, human body, war, sport, games, machines, etc.) onto the target domain of abstract notions (emotions, ideas, politics, economy, time, events, human relations, communication, etc.).

Another closer look at idioms would help us understand the difficulty to draw a clear line of differentiation between idioms and metaphors, as we make a step to prove that they are interwoven in their use. As it is commonly defined, idioms are linguistic expressions whose overall meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of constituent parts. And according to Zoltán Kovecses and Péter Szabcó 'although there is no complete predictability, we suggest that there is a great deal of systematic conceptual motivation for the meaning of most idioms' [12]. Since most idioms are based on conceptual metaphors and metonymies, systematic motivation arises from sets of 'conceptual mappings or correspondences' that obtain between a source and a target domain [13]. Therefore, idioms similar to metaphors are overflowing in our daily speech, like frequently used expressions 'under the weather' meaning ill, 'full of beans' is lively and energetic, and the abstract notion of being happy is expressed idiomatically 'to be on the top of the world'.

Each language, even each area of social contact has its own phraseology, its own idioms which vary greatly and tend to enrich any discourse. In the case of business communication such idioms as 'rat race' and 'red tape' are perceived and used by a large audience of professionals and common people steering the desired hidden meanings of 'the unpleasant situation in business and life in which people are always struggling to compete against each other for success' and 'official rules that seem complicated and unnecessary and prevent things to be done quickly and easily' [14].

At this point, coming to the primary aim of the paper, we would try to examine how metaphors and idioms are used in business discourse and why they are so challenging for ESP learners to understand and use them. The initial source for the examples of metaphors and idioms introduced in this analysis is the coursebook Business Advantage (Advanced), 2012. The choice of the material is justified by the wider usage and popularity of the published coursebook meant both for pre-experienced and job-experienced Business English learners. Another reason is the language level of learners which is between B2-C1 allowing them not only to have passive perception of the meaning of metaphorical or idiomatic expressions, but as well as their implementation in written and oral communication.

After working with the mentioned coursebook over some years it is observed that metaphors and idioms are abundantly used not only in daily or literary sphere of

human existence, but as well as the business environment is oversupplied with these literary devices. A perfect evidence of this serves the article entitled Keys to Success in Managing a Black Swan Event [15], where the very title proves the whole metaphorical essence of the issue and justifies frequent occurrence of metaphors in business language. Idioms and metaphors are used to make the message more cooperative and perhaps indirect, in some cases even more or less conflictual. The further classification has taken a diverge route and ordered the examples according to predicate groups or action verbs and concrete notions, supplemented by categorization based on concept groups, like war, sports, health, nature, etc.

3.2 Metaphors Conceptualizing Human Actions or Behaviour

Following the above mentioned ideas, the human actions and behaviour are considered as common source areas in conceptual metaphors and idioms. By drawing parallels between economic processes and human activities business discourse adopts a straightforward way to deliver the information and convey the desired effect in our understanding through implications and inferences. In the phrase 'do an icebreaking' (generally a short 5-10 minute activity which has many purposes as energizing the group or helping people get to know each other) (BA, p.16) the process of breaking ice is compared with small talks meant for starting a conversation and establishing rapport with business partners. Metaphorically human activities or procedures occurring in the environment are understood as economic deals or how economic system functions and they are presented by underlying idiomatic expressions. i.e. 'to breed' is to nurture, grow, 'have an appetite' stands for desire or needs, 'be welcomed up and down' – accepted or excluded, 'to bow to pressures' – to be stress-resistant and flexible. As we can see human attitudes and actions can serve as source domains in the cognitive analysis of abstract expressions used in the business communication, namely in management, finance, logistics, marketing and overall economics. These are the cases demonstrating how predicate groups deliver metaphorical meanings.

- Quantity breeds quality (the more ideas, the better) (p.16)
- How much of an appetite for risk do you have in your personal or professional life? (p. 36)
- Business software that lives on the net (p.40)
- This has changed the weighting of China on the world's stage. (p. 40)
- Break the situation into manageable components (p. 47)
- Free up capacity to run day-to-day operations (p. 47)
- Dive in. Grab a chair. (Please sit down) (p. 47)
- You must be welcomed up and down the country (p.53)
- Turnaround situation (abrupt unexpected change) (p.55)

- One thing that really has hit home to me is that women are hampered in their careers… (hindered) (p. 59)
- Women have to bow to external pressures far more than men do. (p. 59)
- Government budget cuts mean that money from this source is drying up. (p.59)
- Maya, could you update us on…(p. 70)
- Think outside the box, 'jump' you out of your 'mental tramlines' (p.95)
- Switch providers (p.72)
- Fall short of managers expectations (p. 73)
- Rush to enter the relationship with the outsourcing provider (p.73)
- Rumors were fueled by the fact…(73)
- Things started to go sour as the third party logistics provider did not live up to expectations (p.73)
- If it (economy) moves, tax it. (p.100)
- Organizational climate can influence financial results (p.55)

3.3 Business Challenges as Health Issues

In other cases human body or health conditions, as wellbeing or illnesses, are used for representing such target concepts like economic barriers, appropriate or inappropriate environmental conditions, strength or weakness of partners. The following examples illustrate the abstract notions of economic welfare or indigence.
- It was just a pain getting down here (p. 80)
- Just get through pain barrier, you'll see the end and be OK. (p.93)
- Monitor and review the health of trading partners. (p.103)
- What about environmental or ecological health? (p.119)
- New ideas are the lifeblood of Dyson (p.94)

3.4 Business Competition Equals to Sports

In general, the entire business performance and competitive sports are regarded as identical procedures, where business environment is imagined as 'a playing field', limitations on rules and restrictions are conveyed through 'barred holds', and fighting against problems like 'wrestling with measures'. Nowadays, the relationship between business and sport is so deeply intertwined, that sport activities are widely implemented in companies for training team-playing skills, for succeeded in negotiations just by learning the rules of football, etc.
- No holds barred (p.16)
- Reverse innovation bandied around in boardrooms (hockey) (p.84)
- Environmentalists wrestled with measures of, and frameworks for, sustainability (p.119)

3.5 Business Environment is a Battlefield

In the following cluster of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions business is conceptualized as a battle. These types of transfer of concrete and abstract concepts are used to deal with negotiations. When we imagine a war, we associate it with battles, battlefields, fronts, soldiers, weapons, etc. Viewing from the point of cognitive terms, they serve as source domains, whereas the target domains encompass market shares, promotion and advertising policies and strategies applied in business.
- In the international marketing battlefield (p.12)
- There are a number of fronts on which we are competing. (p. 45)

3.6 Idiomatic Expressions Conceptualized via Abstract or Concrete Notions

In this final clutch of examples we have made an attempt to collect the phrases, words and combinations which frequently occur not only in business discourse, but in daily communication just being overused and gained wide popularity. They are metaphoric phrases implied in idiomatic expressions and deliver various concrete and abstract ideas through concepts referring to binary choices as 'a two-way street', inability to focus and think widely as 'tunnel vision', new industry sectors and start-ups as 'infant industries'.

There are investigated as well as a range of idioms referring to such source domain notions as leadership styles and management, dealing with crisis events and conflicts which are decoded through target domains, like 'Black Swan Event' which is a symbolic of ignorance and symbolizes an unknown event, 'investment horizon' related to the length of time investors expect to wait before they get their money back or '… ploy will succeed', which is a clever way of tricking someone to get an advantage. Underneath are extracted examples of metaphors and idioms from the materials under study [15].

Table 1. Abstract notions vs. Concrete notions.

Abstract notions	Concrete notions
Cold-calling potential customers (p. 25)	One of the network companies under the Alibaba *umbrella* (p. 40)
If you are going *to skin a cat*, don't keep it as a house cat. (p. 42)	It is not *rocket science*. (p. 47)
Numbers do not lie (p. 47)	To expand overseas amid the declining *labour pool* at home (p. 68)
To *give breathing room* to leadership (p. 47)	Just *around the corner* is where the solution will *happen* (p.93)
The rent's *stupid.* (p. 47)	Stock market *crash* (p.101)

3.7 The Role and Implementation of Euphemisms in Business Discourse

In this part of study the significance and appliance of euphemistic expressions in business English is analyses. Some scholars link this increasing abundance with the most countries opening to the outside business world and development of foreign trade. In business communication euphemism acts as a conciliator to express different opinions, requirements, demands and proposals in an indirect and mild way. By use of euphemism it is feasible to avoid showing reluctance, dissatisfaction or commanding tone of the message. The due application of euphemism can create good rapport among business entities or clients; can build fruitful business atmosphere and long-lasting relations with customers. Therefore, effective use of euphemism in business discourse can be a route to harmonious business environment, to faithful customer base and mutual benefits.

The word 'euphemism' originates from the Greek meaning 'good speech'. It is a word or phrase that is used to avoid saying an unpleasant or offensive word. 'It is a kind of implicit and indirect expression used by the speaker under a certain situation in daily communication', states Wang Y. [16]. According with above definitions it becomes clear that euphemism is mostly used to replace unpleasant and direct words with weak and blunt ones. Further the article investigates the examples of euphemisms taken from Business English materials based on linguistic analysis where euphemistic phrases help to communicate negative information in a positive light.

The primary function of euphemisms is to make thinking and facts milder, warmer and sound pleasant in order to minimize the degree of vulgarness and directness of speech. As Mirabela P. A. says, '…euphemism implies an attempt to soften something harsh' [17]. Below given examples illustrate some aspects of company activities expressed euphemistically in order to avoid conflicts or negative impact [15].

Table 2. Euphemisms eluding conflicts.

Application	Implication
I'm afraid that the company is going to have *to restructure*	*make employees redundant*
Our CEO is leaving *to pursue other opportunities*	*has resigned*
We're afraid that you *are overqualified for this job*	*too old*
We think that you have *been economical with the truth* on your application form	*you have lied*
We think that your *youth and enthusiasm* would be better suited to another role	*inexperience*
We have experienced a lot of *customer churn* over the last year	*complaints*

The vagueness and mildness of these expressions is revealed in verb structures, like 'to restructure', 'to pursue' and passive voice of 'be overqualified', as well

as in various parts of speech, as 'economical', 'youth and enthusiasm' or 'a lot of customer churn'.

The masterful application of euphemisms is of utmost importance for managers in case they intend to communicate negative or bad news. It is vital to choose the positive phrases and pass the message with pleasant language, tone of the voice and body language. For example, the expression 'let somebody go' means 'fire somebody'. The former sounds quite neutral and creates calm relaxed mood, whereas the latter causes aggression and has negative impact.

Other examples from business discourse reveal more shades of euphemistic expressions used for the purpose to convey positive and quite vague ideas. The following samples are based on predicative and adjective noun phrases which hide the unpleasant tone of the utterance by replacing tough words with literary and blear ones [15].

Table 3. Euphemisms providing more positive alternatives.

Application	Implication
The department is *thin on the ground*.	*there is an insufficient number of staff in the department*
We've got some *real challenges*.	*we are facing some real difficulties*
They will be *tough doors to knock on*.	*it will be hard to attract these customers back*
The chemical sector is a really *complex set of customers*.	*a group of difficult customers*
You've really got *to focus on* in how we look after that sector next year.	*try harder*

4 Results

The analysis of the bountiful occurrence of metaphors and idioms, as well as euphemisms in business discourse exploited in the coursebook Business Advantage has justified that the former ones serve not only as rhetorical and poetic devices, but powerful language tools in business discourse bearing critical, belligerent, assertive and concessive implications, whereas euphemisms are applied to foster partners' relations and create rapport. The great range of patterns of metaphors and idioms in business communication provides deeper understanding of some abstract notions of business world through conceptualization of human activities, natural phenomena, health issues, sports and even war. The demonstrated ample use of metaphoric and idiomatic expressions in the language of business makes the communication more professional, even technical, by eliciting straightforward comprehension of business concepts, like 'red tape' or 'cold calling'. What refers to euphemistic language, it is a powerful stylistic tool with cultural implications, which skillfully hides the negative shades of any discourse and leads to mutual benefits in communication, as in phrases 'tough doors to knock on'

or 'got real challenges'. Nevertheless, the issue of using frequently euphemisms shares controversial opinions. For some people in business using euphemisms and making excuses carry risks as they prefer that managers show a more frank approach, being direct and straightforward in their massage.

5 Conclusion

The language of business sounds either quite cooperative and direct, or conflictual and indirect by adding diverse emotional shades to the message. This abundance of metaphors and idioms helps to enrich the learners' foreign language skills and foster conceptual thinking. It is noted that mostly learners with upper and advanced level language competencies benefit from easily deciphering and implementing spontaneously metaphors and idioms in business communication, therefore succeeding to disclose all emotional undertone of their thoughts.

Yet euphemistic words are used as lexical tools to express positive thinking and pleasant emotions in business communication through affirmative, mild and somehow ambiguous expressions to create good atmosphere and strengthen communication between both sides. Moreover, euphemistic language carries cultural significance, discloses preferred styles of communicating, implied tone and intonation of dealing with business issues [18].

Consequently, in language teaching and learning process both educators and learners need to focus on the role of euphemisms, metaphors and idioms in business discourse, to reveal their implications and comprehend cases of application to achieve the preferred, mutually beneficial effects in business transactions. No less useful are linguo-stylistic properties for enhancing eloquence, as they develop a more profound and delicate linguistic feeling with students and help them elaborate a more systemic and meaningful perception of speech – both their own and the communicating partner's. Introducing elements of linguistic and stylistic into teaching materials, we show students the multisided semantic and pragmatic interconnection of definite linguistic elements comprising a discourse unit.

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