

COMMUNICATIONAL NEEDS IN THE MODERN WORK PLACE. MEETINGS.

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Abstract

English has become the international language most used in industry and economy. Multinationals and foreign companies enter the new free markets and the needs brought about include English communication abilities. One of the most common activities, the meeting, employs certain vocabulary and specific phrases for each particular situation. The study deals with the acquisition of these lexical elements. The classifications performed on the lexical material presented, the models provided and the patterns introduced allow better understanding, facilitating assimilation.

1. Preliminaries. Developments and openness

Nowadays entrepreneurial field in emergent countries faces an intake of foreign members, besides having to cope more and more abruptly with foreign competition.

Multinational companies develop and foreign companies move their business in or adopt loan system.

Commercial changes, international trade evolving outstandingly, have come to represent significant parts in most societies' activities.

Circulation of labour force implies itself a new kind of openness, contacts abroad extend from the level of the individual to that of entire firms.

2. A solution for the new communicational needs

Such new developments concerning work environment bring about a particular need, a primary necessity to find a common means of communication, an international language. English seems to have become the lingua franca both of international affairs agreements or negotiations and within multinational or foreign companies building a business in emergent countries.

The situation requires a good mastering of the language by those with key functions and it has proved to be a must for the high ranked. It is these representatives who have to stand for the company in negotiations with foreign partners, assemblies with competitors, meetings with foreign employees, presentations, sessions with prospect clients or future members of the corporation etc.

Employees in their turn will need not only plain English to be able to communicate properly with their foreign peers and superiors but also business vocabulary and intercultural knowledge to successfully deal with the challenges of a job at the level of a multinational, for instance.

3. The language of meetings

Considering only this particular level and focusing on an activity most common in the life of any enterprise, the meeting, one can identify a series of aspects that have to be considered in order to grant an effective session of problem solving, brainstorming, future agenda presentation or informative meeting a.s.o.

First, there are two basic major types of meetings that companies hold: problem solving and brainstorming. Leading the former implies establishing clear set, exposing the

objectives and sticking to the agenda, following the track and cutting irrelevances, focusing on the problem at hand and finding a solution. At contrast, for the sessions of brainstorming, even the seemingly irrelevant thoughts should be allowed to surface, not rejected and not judged, active participation of all the people convened should be ensured, eliciting everyone's opinion and idea, encouraging the shy and not allowing the assertive and dominant members to monopolise the floor, as any humble idea could be the seed of the best solution, leading to the most relevant discussion.

A relevant aspect concerns the degree of participation in the meeting, i.e. the role and position of the people involved, as seen in figure 1.



Figure 1. Participation in meetings

From the point of view of the personal degree of participation they may be participative (merely requiring a degree of involvement from one's side) or performative (one being the centre of attention, the main performer). Although the degree of activeness may differ from person to person, passiveness is excluded; people involved have to get to 'communicate'. [3, p. 77]

Another aspect refers to the activities that are to be accomplished along the meeting, which depend on the type of session. However, for keeping a meeting on track and all participants informed, agendas are essential. They shall list one or more objectives stating the purpose of the meeting. Only the necessary people should be asked to participate to meetings in order to keep the group focused and active. The persons leading meetings shall previously "ensure that appropriate supporting information is circulated in time to be useful" and, all along the meeting, "assure participation of all participants", avoiding dominance. [1. p. 28]

Next, but of utmost importance would be the communicational aspect. Certain standard phrases for particular situations can be of much help. Thus, a classification of the useful vocabulary according to the criteria above (of participation and activity) proves effective and relevant.

As for the behavioural communicational rules, some basic ones are seen as follows. When leading a meeting, one should speak with energy, tone variability, and hand gestures. Speakers must maintain eye contact with their listeners. Participants have to listen carefully and completely before preparing to disagree with someone. At the end of the meeting, chairpersons will have to summarize all the actions or decisions that were made to be sure everyone is in agreement. [cf.5, p. 124-125]

The tasks the chairpersons and the other participants in meetings have during it can be classified according to the stages the former has to introduce and conduct and to the actions taken by the latter during the session. The lexical elements used in meetings [4, pp. 88,94] are specific to these steps and actions.

4. The chairperson

As a researcher noticed, “Much of the language used to control the meeting is very stylised, so that the identical words are used on all occasions”. [2, p. 119] Thus, the possibility to classify and assess and the didactical approach to the lexical aspect of the meeting come natural.

Generally, the head of a department, the team leader, the manager, the executive or any higher ranked or person in charge with a certain activity will undertake the task of a chairperson when it comes to meetings. In this quality there are several chronological steps to be taken and actions to be performed within, as presented in figure 2. Each requires specific vocabulary, as the standard phrases provided below [4, p. 88], in order to ensure proper communication and efficiency of the session.

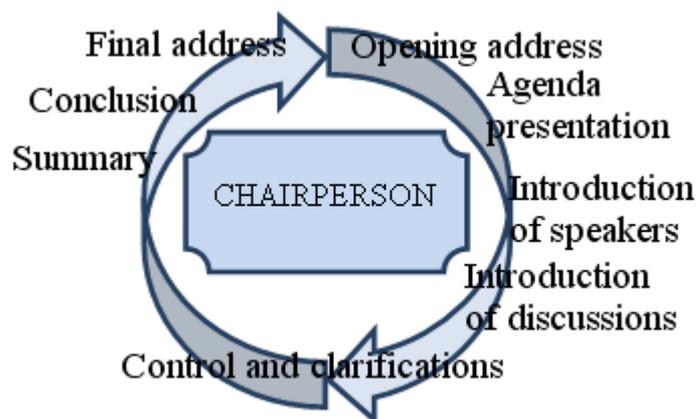


Figure 2. Activities of the chairperson along a meeting

Opening address:

- *Thank you for coming. We've received apologies from... It's ...o'clock. Let's start.*

Agenda presentation:

- *We're here today /*
- *Our objective /*
- *What we want to do is /*
- *there is/are ... main item(s) to hear / discuss / consider / to find a solution....*

Introduction of speakers:

- *Can we hear ...? /*
- *I'd like to ask ... to tell us /*
- *I know ... has prepared to explain ... to us.*

Introduction of discussions:

- *The issue /*
- *(background to the) problem /*
- *point is (about)...*

Control:

- *Well / Er / Sorry, ..., we can't talk about that / can we let ... finish?*
- *Can we /*
- *Let's move / go on to the next point / think about....*

Clarification:

- *Could you explain that.../ be more specific?*
- *This means... /*

- *To explain this in more details... /*
- *I wanted to say ...*
- *Is that clearer / okay now?*

Summary:

- *So, the main point is... / you mean... / just to summarise...*

Conclusion:

- *I'd like to go over the decisions we've taken... / to conclude... we've agreed... .*

Closing:

- *We should end here.*
- *Can we leave this / postpone the decision until ... ?*
- *We need more time to consider this...*
- *I think we can close the meeting now / we've convened everything.*
- *That's it, next meeting will be...*

5. The participants

As for the people taking part in a meeting, there are, again, diverse actions they shall be involved in, along the session, in accordance to their tasks as speakers, presenters, debaters, or simple listeners and to their feature of being more or less assertive or dominant, more or less entitled to opinions on the matter at stake. Figure 3 presents the actions participants may take along the meeting session.

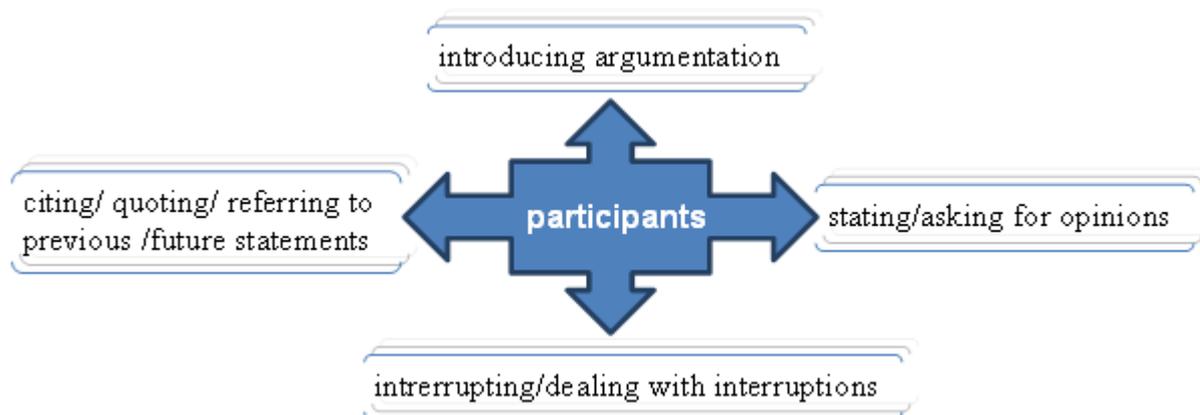


Figure 3. Tasks involved by taking part in meetings

Considering these aspects there is another classification that can be performed with respect to the lexical material employees in the aforementioned situations should master and make use of. Broken down on types of actions specific to each category of the major two, speakers and listeners, some standard phrases [4, p. 94] can be noted, as presented underneath.

Opinions:

stating

- *It seems to me...*
- *I would say...*
- *I think / believe / feel... .*
- *In my opinion / view... it's clear / obvious ... / there is no alternative / doubt ...*

asking

- *I'd like to hear .../*

- *What is your view / do you think?*
- *Do you have any comments / opinions about / views on...*

Interruptions:

introducing

- *Sorry to /*
- *If I may interrupt /*
- *Excuse me, may I ask for clarifications on this / but.../ could you tell...?*
- *Do you think so? /*
- *Is that so / possible?*
- *My impression is /*
- *I would say / think...*

handling

- *Sorry, please let me /*
- *If I may finish.*
- *Can I come to this later / we leave that to another discussion?*
- *That's not relevant right now.*
- *Yes, go ahead.*

Referring to other participants:

- *As ... has already told us /*
- *...we'll hear later in ... report...*
- *I'm sure is aware of / knows about...*

6. Importance of accessibility and relevance

Even elementary level English users shall find such vocabulary quite accessible to acquire and use. Being related and easily adaptable to the various situations facilitates understanding and should make the task of learning and assimilating it, one less difficult to embark on and accomplish successfully.

Obviously, employees of foreign and multinational companies are previously tested being selected on the basis of several criteria which include their knowledge of English as a capital one.

Much in the same way, working abroad in any profession supposes to have passed various language competence certifications, for the international language required.

Still, there are various other jobs that people can take abroad and knowledge of English will constitute an advantage not only in getting employed but, which is more, in coping with the foreign environment. At the same time there are many enterprises formerly comfortably activating and never forced to use other way of communication but the traditional one, their national language, which should soon need to use English as a means of communication for their everyday activities. There are various reasons for this new need. They may be just now embracing the idea of going global or have newly got the chance to extend and involve in relation with foreign environments or they consider joint venture or merging, or have been taken over.

7. Conclusions

Many reasons stand for the use of the international language at the level of enterprises managements and more and more often at the level of employees, as well, so

a neglect of this actual need can have dangerous consequences in the near future causing the company loss of opportunities to competitors better prepared in this respect.

Not knowing at least a bit of English nowadays can be rather frustrating at the level of individual too, an issue felt at times as a handicap. It can soon develop into a situation that may impede managerial performance and block the opportunities of the company, by and large. Thus, the usefulness of the current approach proves obvious.

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