

STEPPING OUT OF THE BOX – HOW TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY FROM OTHER FIELDS CAN MORPH INTO THE BUSINESS DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *The present article attempts to investigate how terms from various fields that are incongruous with the business discourse may carve their way in two types of business writing, namely in the report and the SWOT analysis. Even though these genres exhibit divergent features in terms of structure and purpose, they are nested within an economic context, abounding in a specific terminology. With this in mind, the paper expounds the way in which phrases imported from marriage, art, medicine and the military lend themselves to being used as synonyms for economic phenomena. For this purpose, we survey the assignments of students and conclude that technical expressions from the four areas breathe more life into the business language, as they provide a new framework within which the classical economic context can broaden its horizons, hence it better captures the most appropriate nuances. In this way, the metaphors stemming from other domains gain access to business texts, where they delicately complement, or explicitly reinforce essential information. Such qualities of the non-economic jargon help not only to skillfully convey specific messages but also to deepen the understanding of economic trends.*

Keywords: *technical terminology, business discourse, report, SWOT analysis*

1. Introduction

The description of economic trends in business employs the use of a specific business jargon. Economy can be hit by recession, production can slump, competition can be fierce, new manufactures can break into an industry, bad investment activity can lead to losses, a manager can yield to workers' requests, a product can be upgraded, a firm can merge with another one, or insider secrets can be leaked out. Alternatively, economy can be in depression, production can be in agony, the war or the fight can be fierce, bad investment activity can lead to injuries or victims, new manufacturers can invade, attack or conquer an industry, a manager can surrender or capitulate to employees' demands, a product can be resuscitated or revitalised, a firm can form an alliance or tie the knot with another one, insider secrets can come into limelight or a marketplace can itself turn into a battlefield.

As the aforementioned examples briefly illustrate, the technical terminology deriving from various areas has undoubtedly melted into the business discourse. Medical and military terms, relationship, marriage and art

related concepts gain visibility under the canopy of the business vocabulary and as such, even overtake the conventional economic phrases in certain settings.

The present study proposes to examine how the business discourse expands its boundaries and makes room for other non-economic expressions. It explores the possible correlations between business and the specific terminology of other fields, by pointing out the extent to which these realms may overlap, complement and compete with each other. In particular, the article evidences the modalities in which two types of business writing, i.e. the report and the SWOT analysis, may alter their texture and content if remodeled and reconstructed through terms analogous to medicine, military, marriage and art. To this end, in the practical part, we scrutinise the assignments submitted by undergraduate students majoring in economics and highlight the didactic dimensions of the subject. Moreover, the paper features the pragmatic role attributed to this topic and incorporates a reflective section on the part of the learners in an effort to better discern the phenomenon and raise awareness of the utility the indicated task may represent.

2. Literature review

The chapter below touches upon the hallmarks of technical and business jargon and ushers in the distinctive characteristics of the two genres of business writing: the report and the SWOT analysis. It is in the paragraphs dedicated to the practical section that we zoom in on how the professional terminology from other fields imbues both genres.

It goes without saying that each branch of science is embedded in a specific context, for which it has developed a specialised (Coleman 21), unambiguous (Irimiaș 9) register. In a very simplified approach, what distinguishes a specific language from everyday discourse is the existence of a definite semantic repertoire (Halliday 12), which entails the employment of technical terms (Fielding 196) pertinent to that specific field of study. According to Hoffmann (as quoted in Kovács, Savin 64) the technical vocabulary comprises the terms of technical communication (Kovács, Savin 64). As opposed to common speech, this dialect resorts to clarity and explicitness, uses factual metaphors, fixed morphological and syntactic patterns in order to render a more formal, objective, detached and concise style (Messer 27-31).

By and large, the same traits permeate the business discourse. Popescu defines the following facets of the business language: fixed lexical associations, politeness and formality, sociolinguistic and pragmatic orientation, a variety of metaphors and idiomatic expressions (Popescu 19-38). McComb advances that homonyms, created words, nonword identifiers and compounds stand at the very basis of the business vocabulary (McComb 44-

47). Kasatkina adds that the business discourse can be enriched through semantic, syntactic and morphological methods of word formation the most effectively (Kasatkina 8-9). Irimiaș underlines that both a specialist business knowledge and English language proficiency are of paramount importance in the work environment (Irimiaș 10).

Drafting business writings in English requires, among many other aspects, the usage of a specific economic terminology. In what follows, we bring two documents into discussion, the report and the SWOT analysis. In so doing, we shed light on their structure and content through the lenses of the business discourse. The main question is whether the report and the SWOT analysis may permit the influx of other technical terms (apart from business ones) and to what extent they prove to be resilient to this change.

The business report is, in general, a formal document (Sharma, Mohan 128) addressed to a group of people, to the management of a company (Borgulya, Somogyvári 217) or to other authorities, serving as an essential medium in the correspondence of a corporation with both the external and internal environment. The report is intended to provide a detailed account of activities and arrangements which need to be carried out (Honffy 124), investigated or tackled. Since it displays factual information and data, it should be drafted accurately and succinctly (Langer, Raátz 75) with great emphasis on an objective and impersonal style (Plăcintar 79) along with a polite tone (Chilver 37).

Regarding its typology, reports may vary from large-scale formal reports to short formal and short informal ones (Plăcintar 80). From this categorisation, however, we restrict our attention strictly to the short formal version and refer to it, hereinafter with the generic expression “report”.

The report includes several headings and subheadings (Petruț 114) mostly labeled as title, introduction, findings, conclusions and recommendations (Wood, Sanderson, Williams, Rosenberg 89). While the introduction places the core message into context (Greenhall 51), the findings comprise the methods, the results and the assessment of the situation (Petruț, Irimiaș 61). The conclusions observe the outcomes of the research (Plăcintar 80), hence the recommendations hint at measures to be taken in the future (Comfort, Rewell, Stott 43).

The SWOT analysis, on the other hand, is a technique applied by companies to gauge the factors from both their inside and outside environment (Bartek-Lesi, Bartók, Czakó, Gáspár, Könczöl, Pecze 129). It lays the basis for marketing, strategic management (Constantinescu, Ungureanu, Ghenciu, Dimofte, Breban 129) and organisational planning and it constitutes a key element in the formulation of strategies necessary for the establishment of company objectives and it is an a priori step for the decision-making process (Verma 49-50). Consequently, it forms the nucleus for performance appraisal,

in that it portrays the strengths, the weaknesses of a business unit, the opportunities a company may capitalise on together with the threats it can be exposed to (Hayward 141).

More precisely, in this formula, the strengths encompass the resources or other competences, which may represent an advantage and undoubtedly a competitive edge, helping a company to gain superiority over its rival entities. Conversely, to the weaknesses belongs the deficit in resources and competences, affecting performance in a negative way (Antal-Mokos, Balaton, Drótos, Tari 108). Opportunities appertain to the effects of the external environment and involve the so-called favourable circumstances and situations. The fourth element is similarly determined by outside factors, yet threats denote potential perils and hazards companies may be confronted with (Căprărescu 130). From Sarsby's perspective in case of the SWOT analysis, one can talk about internal, external, helpful and harmful factors. Here the strong and weak points of a business unit equal with internal factors, whereas opportunities and threats speak for the external ones. Otherwise, strengths and opportunities are viewed as helpful, while weaknesses and threats as harmful factors (Sarsby 8).

In light of this, the SWOT analysis becomes a prominent qualitative tool for the management of an enterprise due to the fact that it pins down the guidelines for the evaluation of a company (Constantinescu, Ungureanu, Ghenciu, Dimofte, Breban 129). Still, it is prone to some limitations. The mere itemising of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats without an in-depth analysis of the situation or the too generalised presentation of the information can deprive it of an accurate and realistic diagnosis (Bartek-Lesi, Bartók, Czakó, Gáspár, Könczöl, Pecze 134).

Within this conceptual framework we study two business documents of apparently different genres. The report relies on a relatively fixed structure, has to comply with a range of standards and most importantly, it is a means of communication used in the correspondence of a company with its internal and external members. It has to be concise, formal, courteous, objective and clear. Unlike the report, the SWOT analysis does not have to observe stringent norms in its compilation from a linguistic standpoint. In fact, in accordance with the bibliographical sources, a SWOT analysis arranges information in the form of a table divided into quadrats or sections (Căprărescu 130). Moreover, it enumerates information without necessarily organising it in simple, compound or complex sentences (Bartek-Lesi, Bartók, Czakó, Gáspár, Könczöl, Pecze 131). In this way, we can agree that the only structural restrictions imposed on are that it has to consist of the four headings (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) mentioned earlier.

Dissimilar as they may look, the two documents display some common features. Although both rooted in research, the report sketches the results of

research, whereas the SWOT analysis is intrinsically knowledge-based research. As they both originate in the business context, they use the business jargon and are characterised by accuracy and a certain degree of formality. Unquestionably, under the careful examination of their linguistic resources, we will detect a wide spectrum of fixed lexical associations, metaphors and idiomatic expressions, in short, the aforesaid attributes of the economic discourse.

In view of this, our principal concern is to unravel how susceptible the classical business metaphors and idioms prove to be to a terminology residing in other fields, in our case, in the military, in medicine, marriage and art. Can non-business lexical items convey complementary messages? Can they become proper substitutes for the traditional economic jargon? In what manner can they be congruent with business terms? And above all, how will the report and SWOT analysis manage this change in vocabulary? These will be some of the directions of the empirical research.

3. Practical Study

The section below is dedicated both to the observation of the collected data and to the assessment of its outcomes. It embarks on the presentation of the subjects, of the corpus and research methodology. It proceeds with a descriptive analysis and discussion meant to illustrate and then to interpret the obtained results. Finally, supported by a brief introspection on the part of the students, it ponders the didactic scope of our research findings.

3.1. The subjects, the corpus and the research methodology

The participants in the research are first-year students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), majoring in “Marketing” and “Finance and Banking” from the Romanian and the Hungarian lines of study. The subjects learn business English at B1 to B2 levels and were present in an approximate number of 250 in the study.

The research corpus is built upon the home assignments elaborated by the respondents, who were divided into two halves and were requested to make up a report and a SWOT analysis based on particular situations. Their tasks were as follows:

The assignments for the first group: a) Your company wants to merge with a small furniture business. Your manager has asked you to carry out some research on the furniture business to find out whether a merger is possible or not and what advantages and disadvantages it may bring to you. Write a report (of 200 words) in which you describe the situation and present your recommendations. Use a vocabulary related to relationships and marriage. b) Write a SWOT analysis (of 200 words) about an imaginary product or service you want to launch into the market. Describe the strengths, the weaknesses of

your product (service) and present the opportunities and the threats of the market, referring also to your competition. In your analysis use as many medical expressions as possible.

The assignments for the second group: a) Your company wants to merge with a construction business. Devise a report (of 200 words) about a merger, including phrases related to arts and b) Write a SWOT analysis (of 200 words) about an imaginary product or service with words imported from the military language.

At this point we have to mention that our students were instructed to put their notes into full sentences under the four variables or factors (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) in their SWOT analyses. In this way, they could better make use of their business vocabulary and enhance their writing skills.

As far as the research methodology is concerned, we endeavoured to capture the non-economic lexicon provided by the students through a qualitative approach, by identifying and interpreting the observed phenomena.

3.2. Descriptive analysis and discussion

The subsequent passages rest on two pillars. On the one hand, they present a list of expressions the learners blended into the two business documents, the report and the SWOT analysis. On the other hand, the discussion part focuses on demonstrating how the business lexicon resonates with the adjustment, enrichment and refinement occasioned by these borrowings from medicine, the military, art and marriage.

3.2.1. Descriptive analysis

With the descriptive analysis in mind, we make an inventory of the non-economic terms employed by the students. These are lined up under the following headings:

Expressions and phrases connected to relationships and marriage, from the texts of reports: “strategic alliance”, “to grow as a bigger and stronger company together”, “this marriage will last”, “to continue on separate paths”, “to have better relationships with”, “to form a long-term relationship”, “a match made in heaven”, “to take the plunge and make an advantageous combination”, “the proposal to merge”, “to tie the knot”, “a merger looks rather attractive”, “loyal”, “a really close bond”, “not to give them any chance for a happy marriage”, “willing to make the sacrifice”, “to break up”, “to hand the divorce papers”, “to propose to them”, “to say ‘I do’[...]”, “the logistics and chemistry between the employees”, “our couple will flourish and prosper”, “to promise a lot for the future”, “like any engagement it takes responsibilities and mutual effort”, “to court”, “to continue on the same path”, “to be ready for the wedding”, “to live in peace and love till death separates us”, “to get involved

in a complicated marriage, which is destined to fail”, “not to be the one for us”, “a marriage of convenience”, “the spouses are not compatible”, “to pop the question”, “to leave the [...] company at the altar”, “due to some issues in the pre-nup”, “not to settle down for now”, “to keep the relationship open”, “to celebrate the golden anniversary”, “not to get divorced”, “to reach a decision before the big day”, “to instantly fall in love with their style”, “to begin a new chapter for both businesses”, “to split up”, “perfect partner for the marriage”, “to close ties with the company”, “unification”, “to unite the destiny”, “to lead to a painful separation”, “to make such a big compromise”, “to leave traces which are difficult to heal”, “love at first sight”, “to be on the rocks”, “to meet the needs of consumers is as important as the engagement ring”, “healthy relationship”, “to make things work”, “to sign the union”, “love affair”, “to begin the relationship with online dating”, “honeymoon”, “to reflect upon the relationship status”, “age is only a number”, “to live our happily ever after”, “crucial for our future together”, “some commitment issues from the other half”, “not to have an ugly divorce”, “to go on a date with the company director”, “perfect candidate for our marriage”, “to hang out with the whole family before proposing”, “to take their hand in this business”, “to be into it”, “to take the relationship to the next level”, “both partners will suffer”, “to spend the whole life together”.

Semantic structures linked to arts, arising from reports: “to put the construction company [...] in the spotlight”, “a layout [...] of the picture”, “to bring a company [...] with a great perspective to the stage”, “the problem behind the scene”, “to bring a better image”, “it is the teamwork which makes the company look like a real masterpiece”, “to be very reliable like an old brush on a new canvas”, “to enchant the viewers”, “to go on the backstage”, “to put on the scaffolding”, “to shape the behind-the-scene events”, “to paint this issue in a good light”, “to see the bigger picture”, “to put us in the picture”, “to work with a blank canvas”, “to give a reliable and true picture”, “to work with a blank slate”, “to have a strong foundation”, “not to be clean as a whistle”, “to prepare for every scenario”, “to get the picture”, “the opposite of a perfect picture”, “art is long and life is short”, “to be on the same page”, “state-of-the-art equipment”, “to have something down to a fine art”, “to have [...] the same vibes”, “to reach a bigger audience”, “pretty as a picture”, “to shape it”, “the profit [...] would be of a blockbuster amount”, “to paint the interests with a broad brush”, “a crowded stage”, “a colourful palette”, “to add a background colour to the whole process”, “the future is [...] bright”, “to come into the picture”, “the backstage work”.

Medical terms, coming to the fore in the SWOT analyses: “the market is dying”, the product [...] will revitalise the mobile gaming market”, “to be sick and tired of”, “to be a bitter pill to swallow”, “the market is depressed”, “a suffocated world”, “the best treatment”, “an actual surgery is needed”, “our

products are sustainable and would be like a painkiller”, “the life expectancy of the materials”, “to run some tests”, “to put a bandage on this already bleeding world”, “to resuscitate their image”, “for the [...] business [...] to go strong”, “diagnosis”, “to bring back to life a depressed market”, “lifeless products”, “to be as fit as a fiddle”, “to go viral”, “to have to go under the knife”, “sick as a dog”, “the delivery services turned out to be the perfect medicine”, “to get sicker”, “to fix the epidemic of plastic”, “a healthy and thriving market”, “cure”, “to die in a heartbeat”, “weak area”, “a newborn product”, “to keep the market healthy and stable”, “to spread across countries like a virus”, “to prevent the final treatment”, “statement of death”, “to cause discomfort”, “to soothe”, “feverish market”, “to revive”, “to spread as a disease”, “to be painfully greater”, “to take the project to heart”, “the examination results show”, “no blood loss when it comes to IT”, “a rigorous radiography”, “to monitor the depressed market”, “to cause a splitting headache”, “the business is suffering”, “the marketing department is severely affected”, “the wounds this activity is carrying”, “to keep the business alive”, “vulnerable”, “clean bill of health”, “to look green around the gills”, “acute shortages”, “side effect”, “the marketing strategy must be catchy and therapeutic”, “abnormal service policies”, “to overcome the collective amnesia”, “a cause of death”, “to save [...] from certain death”, “to infect”.

Military expressions from further SWOT analyses: “to destroy the marketplace”, “to cause a rage”, “minefield”, “the terror of communication”, “to explode”, “army of people”, “power”, “to outrun the war”, “battle”, “to invade the market”, “to attack the market”, “explosive devices”, “enemies of the market”, “opponents’ soldiers”, “invasion”, “social media with [...] landmines”, “to detonate”, “to maneuver”, “to reciprocate war”, “fight”, “to withdraw from the market”, “to blow up the market”, “to be an atomic bomb for the market”, “to knock out the customers”, “a revolutionary [...] technique”, “to target”, “to be in danger”, “the company is dominant”, “to survive [...] and stand out”, “to be in full force”, “to be ready to overcome the difficulties”, “to be hard to win this war”, “to break forward”, “to take the bullet for my people”, “to devise a plan of action”, “to bombard the market with the latest”, “to strengthen the status on the battlefield”, “to gain ground”, “to fly under the radar”, “wrong move”, “to evacuate [...] from the market”, “to be no man’s land in the service sector”, “to raid this corner”, “to end up on the front lines”, “to conquer even more customers”, “to bite the bullet”, “arsenal”, “setup”, “to be in a leading position”, “the frenzied war”, “to ward off any attack”, “winning position”, “to emerge victoriously”, “to kill our business”, “unbeatable products”.

3.2.2. Discussion

The discussion part contemplates the output of the students by outlining how successfully they managed to use the terms and thus prepare the report and the SWOT analysis.

First and foremost, the abundance of examples provided stand as concrete evidence for the ingenuity and creativity of the learners, as the vast majority of the above metaphors and idioms brilliantly seeped into their business writing. Expressions like “marriage”, “alliance”, “combination”, “bond”, “unification”, “proposal”, “divorce”, “separation”, “picture”, “backstage”, “depression”, “treatment”, “cure”, “diagnosis”, “suffering”, “wounds”, “side effects”, “attack”, “invasion”, “war”, “battlefield”, “explosion” prove to be appropriate substitutes for economic terms. These metaphors from other disciplines and areas even attach different connotations to the classical economic ones, making them sound subtler, more precise, scientific, powerful or in certain contexts more aggressive. They also contribute not only to better visualise but also to easier grasp diverse business phenomena delineated in the reports and the SWOT analyses.

From this perspective, the vocabulary items related to relationships and marriage allegorically represent the potential stages of a merger and/or acquisition from inception to termination. Verbs, such as “to flourish”, “to prosper”, “to promise”, “to sacrifice”, “to propose” together with phrasal verbs as “to break up”, “to split up”, “to get involved”, “to get divorced”, “to settle down”, “to fall in love” and idioms like “to tie the knot”, “a match made in heaven”, “to pop the question”, “to close ties”, “to leave somebody at the altar” sensitively yet skillfully emphasise the ups and downs of corporate alliances. Likewise, the idioms borrowed from arts (e.g. “clean as a whistle”, “to put somebody in the picture”, “to work with a blank canvas”, “to paint it with a broad brush”, “to see the bigger picture”) add symbolic nuances to the core messages of the texts. No doubt that the medical terms: “dying”, “depression”, “life expectancy”, “feverish”, “to soothe”, “healthy”, “wounds”, “acute”, “suffering”, “to infect”, “suffocated”, “diagnosis”, “radiography”, to name but a few, coupled with idioms, including “a bitter pill to swallow”, “as fit as a fiddle”, “to go under the knife” help to deepen the understanding of the situations. Also, they will take a more detailed look at the characteristics of the described problems by exhibiting a specific imagery in relation to economic trends. Otherwise, military expressions, for instance, “to bombard”, “to detonate”, “to outrun”, “minefield”, “to cause a rage”, “to raid”, “to conquer”, “arsenal”, etc. induce more force, violence and aggression, turning the traditional marketplace into a hostile environment, presenting competition more ferocious or illustrating a strategic move more hazardous than the conventional phrases would do.

Next to these, we can call attention to some genuinely inventive and inspired linguistic patterns. Metaphors as “to hand the divorce papers”,

“honeymoon”, “a marriage of convenience”, “surgery”, “to put a bandage on this bleeding world”, “statement of death”, “no blood loss”, “a newborn product”, “epidemic of plastic”, “collective amnesia”, “to fly under the radar”, “no man’s land”, “on the front lines” definitely account for the students’ vivid imagination. Elsewhere, we can also detect already fossilised examples of non-economic jargon, which perfectly merged into the texts. These encompass “loyal”, “to shape”, “palette”, “state-of-the-art”, “audience”, “viewer”, “healthy”, “stable”, “thriving”, “weak”, “vulnerable”, “to go viral”, “to destroy”, “power”, “to maneuver”, “to withdraw”, “to survive”, “to win”, “to target”, and so on. Last but not least, the insertion of non-economic vocabulary into business resulted in some forced and unnatural examples or formulations, such as “wedding”, “to meet the needs of consumers is as important as the engagement ring”, “love affair”, “to live in peace and love till death separates us”, “to begin the relationship with online dating”, “to go on a date with the company director”, “to hang out with the whole family before proposing”, “to spend the whole life together”, “art is long and life is short”, “sick as a dog”, “to die in a heartbeat”, “to cause a splitting headache”, “our products are sustainable and would be like a painkiller”, “to be painfully greater”, “the terror of communication”, “to be an atomic bomb for the market”, “opponents’ soldiers”, “to knock out the customers”. These colourful expressions seem to have the effect of exaggeration or dramatisation.

All in all, our students cleverly implanted the phrases from other fields in business texts and managed to use them interchangeably as suitable synonyms for economic concepts. With extensions from marriage, art, medicine and the military, they achieved a balance without diluting facts or directions in the writings. Apparently, both the report and the SWOT analysis greatly benefitted from the variations in terminology. These genres expanded their boundaries and sparked new meanings to business contexts, preserving their stylistic characteristics at the same time.

In this way, the phrases and notions from marriage, art, medicine and the military embedded in economic contexts revamped the traditional business discourse. They communicated messages in a clearer, exacter, finer, more specific or more descriptive way. On account of this, the technical terms from other disciplines and fields can supplement, replace, or even outperform the conventional economic ones.

3.3. Introspection on the part of the students

The reflective section below unveils the didactic utility of the assignment. In short, it offers insights into the students’ attitude and feelings regarding the tasks.

As the preponderance of the feedbacks suggested, the exercises presented several challenges. Many of the learners underlined the novelty of

the task and were open to apply medical, military, art and marriage related terminology to business settings. They viewed the exercise as intriguing, captivating, interesting, exciting, useful and creative, which however asked for intense concentration and thorough studying on their part. Some of them reckoned, at first sight, they saw little correlation between the fields. Nevertheless, after the completion of their work, they recognised the possible associations. Others encountered serious difficulties in implementing the terms from the four semantic fields in the corporate jargon.

Out of the two genres, they expressed preference for the SWOT analysis, which they considered easier to write than the report. Given the students' specialisation, the SWOT analysis seemed also of greater relevance to their future career. Eventually, a small number of students simply omitted to employ technical notions in their writings on the grounds that the task itself was too complicated or complex.

On the whole, the introspection benefitted students, as it increased their awareness of the teaching-learning process, in general, and of the business terminology in particular.

4. Conclusions

Injecting phrases and expressions from marriage, relationship, art, medicine and the military into reports and SWOT analyses can evidently reinvigorate the business jargon. Technical terms imported from other fields have the capacity to refine, model, draw up or intensify meanings and messages. As this experiment has demonstrated, incorporating phrases from other domains can produce new perspectives and enrich business terminology with more powerful and profound meanings.

Our paper has investigated how reports and SWOT analyses can adapt and respond to a non-economic jargon. For this purpose, we have scanned the assignments of our students and concluded that both genres are receptive to internal changes given by the context. With new impulses business writings can stretch their limits, allowing technical terminology to morph into their discourse.

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