

Interactional management and presentations skills in business contexts – Can discourse analysis contribute and how?

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Abstract

Modern business world is complex – not only are the interactions inside companies varied, due to the multiplicity of roles and tasks that employees have, but every business also has very complex interactional needs in relation to the outside world, frequently to their global customers.

Bookstores sell numerous business bestsellers which present exemplary cases, give overarching advice, and suggest successful strategies for company employees to manage the multiple situations arising in the global business world. Many of these books are written by experienced business people and tell us at first hand about the problems experienced, especially when carried out in cross-cultural contexts.

Yet, in spite of these instruction books on interactional management and presentation skills, ‘Learning by doing’ & ‘Learning from your mistakes’ still seem to be very common in the business world. Is it then the case that the instruction given does not reach the linguistic sophistication that is necessary for advising the novices in communication matters in the business fields. A short review of the instructional literature at least indicates a relatively simplistic handling of the linguistic and discourse awareness in these materials.

Could applied linguistic research and discourse analytic work on business communication contribute here, and how? This paper exemplifies some interesting work in the business contexts carried out by applied linguists and discourse analysts. Further, it discusses the educational and training implications of such research and the hurdles this research meets when trying to introduce this work on interactional management and presentation skills to business contexts. The paper searches for possible solutions whereby the field of practise and the theory could comfortably and successfully meet, in order to benefit those who are mere ‘beginners’ in the world of business interactions.