

## SEMANTIC RELATIONS IN TOPICAL SEQUENCES OF ENGLISH BUSINESS DISCOURSE

Vira Yushkevych

National Academy of Public Administration, Office of the President of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine  
vira.yushkevych@i.ua

The article presents the analysis of the content organisation of English business discourse, which can be hierarchical and linear. The overview of scientific papers demonstrates that only hierarchical organisation of discourse has been thoroughly studied, while the linear one is still the subject of investigation. The focus of this paper is the analysis of the linear-hierarchical organisation of the realised themes and topics in it and existing semantic relations between them. The linear-hierarchical organisation of the content in English business discourse is considered as a set of models: a monotopical one, which displays the realisation of the same theme and/or topic within the exchange, and a polytopical one, i.e. a content model that presents the unfolding of various themes and / or topics within the same exchange. The types of a polytopical model are identified as follows: first type demonstrates topical sequence, in which various topics belonging to one theme are combined; second type shows topical sequence, in which various topics belonging to different themes are combined. The types of semantic relations between the elements of the model are examined. The author has identified that in the monotopical model relations of generalisation, specification, modification, support and closing are realised, and in polytopical model – relations of digression and change. Topic change in its turn can be sharp/ incohesive or gradual / coherent.

**Keywords:** English business discourse; linear-hierarchical model; monotopical model; polytopical model; theme; topic; semantic relations; move; exchange.

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### Introduction

In current studies much attention is paid to content organisation in different types of discourse (Kudoyarova, 2007; Feshchenko, 2015; Kourchak, 2011). Content organisation corresponds to the notion “topic”, which is defined as the subject of conversation (Lötscher, 1987; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) and is structured hierarchically and linearly (van Dijk, 1981, p. 190; Dridze, 1984; Makarov, 2003). The discourse topic is formed of smaller thematic units (themes, sub-themes, topics) (Koleichyk, 2001; Bublitz, 1988, p. 35), which are connected with each other vertically and horizontally, thus forming a *hierarchical model* (Makarov, 2003).

The *linear model* is connected with the hierarchical one and is presented as a sequence of topics – content components of discourse, which are connected with certain types of semantic connection (Kudoyarova, 2007, p. 63), topical progression, thus forming the *linear-hierarchical model*.

The research of existing works on thematic models has shown that only a hierarchical model has been well developed (Kudoyarova, 2007), while the linear models have been studied within the scope of theme-and-rheme theory that focuses on the way the information is distributed in the sentence (Danes, 1974; Sknar, 2011).

There are different theories and approaches to the study of theme in the framework of functional sentence perspective, one of which was developed by the Prague linguists, in particular by Danes (1974), on “thematic progression”. By this term the scholar means “the choice and ordering of utterance themes, their mutual concatenation hierarchy, as well as their relation to the hyper-themes of the superior text unit (such as paragraph, chapter, etc.), to the whole text, and to the situation. Thematic progression might be viewed as the skeleton of the plot” (Danes, 1974, p. 114). Such a progression is concerned with relatedness: where themes come from, and how they relate to previous themes and rhemes. The scientist divides thematic progression into three patterns: *simple linear progression* (the rheme of the first clause becomes the theme in the second clause or utterance), *constant continuous theme* (the theme of the first clause becomes the theme of the clauses that follow), and *theme progression with derived themes* (the one general theme from which other themes are derived). These patterns / models can be used in various combinations in any discourse. But in his theory the theme is a part of functional sentence perspective. Referring to the theme as to the subject of conversation the linear models haven’t been yet worked out, thus giving us the background for their development.

Our research is built on the basis of conversation analysis theory, where content plays an important role. The conversationalists point out that “general organisation of talk is directly related to the topic of conversation” (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 298). In this theory a typical conversation consists of a two-move exchange (the adjacency pair), comprising the initiating move, the one that introduces a new proposition for negotiation, and the responding move, which further develops an existing proposition (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992), some scholars also identify a follow-up move, that is a response to the previous utterance – together they make a three-move exchange structure (Tsui, 1994, p. 12; O’Donnell, 1990). The material of our research gives the examples of both types of exchange. In conversation analysis scholars use the notion of “a head move”, which manages the flow of conversation, determining the topic

and the next moves, which are organised in a sequence (Schegloff, 2007). The next move or moves that follow the head move perform, in terms of content organisation, different functions. Thus the scientists identify such relations between the elements in topical sequence as: *generalisation* – summarising of the head move topic in the next moves; *specification* – contrary to generalisation – specifying of the head move topic in the next moves; *modification* – realisation of speakers' different points of view on the same subject, *support*, where the introduced topic is retained by the next speaker; *closing*, where the introduced topic is terminated in the next move(s); *digression*, where the introduced topic is temporarily suspended within the exchange and *change*, meaning the replacement of the previous / old topic by introducing a new one within the exchange (Bublitz, 1988; Hobbs, 1990; Tsui, 1994; Linell, 1998). Thus, **the subject** of this article is semantic relations in the linear-hierarchical model of English business discourse.

It is worth mentioning that a mental communicative activity affects the content of the conversation. We've focused our attention on the economic sphere as it affects the life of all people in the society in one way or another. It helps people to make decisions in different fields, including finance, governance, administration, marketing and others. Economic and social conditions make people improve their communicative competence. That's why the focus of our research as well as of other modern scientists (Naumenko, 2015; Oliynyk, 2015; Derik, 2016) has become *business discourse*, which corresponds with economic sphere. There is a close connection between content of business activity and content organisation of the business discourse, which proves the importance of studying the latter.

**The objective** of the present paper is the analysis of semantic relations in the linear-hierarchical model of English business discourse.

### **Material**

The material we have analysed is fragments of talk / episodes, which represent English business discourse through the live-action films. "An episode is a bounded sequence, a discourse event with a beginning and an end surrounding a spate of talk, which is usually focused on the treatment of some "problem", "issue" or "topic" (Linell, 1998, p. 183). "Most episodes are focused on, attend to and move within some kind of "topic" (p. 187). The minimal unit of our analysis is the *thematic utterance*, in which semantic relations are studied.

### **Methods**

The theoretical background of the research and the corresponding methods include: text linguistics, method of text interpretation; reference theory in its traditional and cognitive interpretation; theory of structural semantic analysis; theory of dialogue and corresponding method of conversation analysis.

### **Results and Discussion**

We have studied that in English business discourse hierarchical content organisation is presented at three levels – themes ("FINANCE", "ENTREPRENEURSHIP"), subthemes and topics which form the matrix of content elements, where "ENTREPRENEURSHIP" elements prevail (Yushkevych, 2013a; 2013b).

Linear-hierarchical content organisation is based on a *scenario*, being either a monotopical or a polytopical one. The complex of scenarios forms the linear-hierarchical model of the English business discourse.

The *monotopical scenario* represents the development of the same theme and topic within the exchange:

Extract (1) exemplifies the realisation of theme "FINANCE" topic "*investment*", where the speaker is talking about the amount of investment:

(1) – *It'd be good if we could get another \$100 million. We could pick up maybe six months on our schedule.*

– *A hundred million dollars? As long as the price of oil stays high, we'll get the money* (Wall Street. Money Never Sleeps).

In the following fragment theme "ENTREPRENEURSHIP" topic "*production of goods*" is realised. The speakers are discussing the problem of manufacturing facilities, particularly they are looking for means of production:

(2) *Daggy Taggart: I have engines I ordered two years ago and still have not received.*

*Henry Rearden: There was a company that made terrific engines years ago they might have machine tools and parts that you can use. I can look into it for you* (Atlas Shrugged).

The *polytopical scenario* demonstrates the realisation of various topics and / or themes within the exchange.

The results of our analysis have shown that the linear polytopical model of English business discourse consists of two types of scenarios:

– **1<sup>st</sup> type** demonstrates a topical sequence, in which various topics belonging to one theme (“FINANCE” or “ENTREPRENEURSHIP”) are combined;

Extract (3) illustrates the development of theme “FINANCE” topics “*losses*” and “*reorganisation*”. The interlocutors are talking about losses at first, namely bankruptcy of the company, then about reorganisation, particularly getting profitability back:

(3) – *You got losses of \$20 to \$30 million, dividends cut to zero, and you’re being squeezed to death by the majors. Present management may not be the worst scum, but they’re the guys that put you on this course. <...> if they throw Bluestar to Chapter 11, which I think they will, then they’ll use bankruptcy laws to break your unions, your contracts, and throw you guys off the property.*

– *What’s to prevent you from doing the same damn thing? Because I got a way around all of this, a way we can make money and make the airline profitable* (Wall Street).

The following extract exemplifies the development of theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topics “*business relations*” and “*goods / services properties*”. The speakers are discussing business relations first, in particular business fraud, then goods / services properties, namely quality of transportation services:

(4) *Ellis Wyatt: I came here today because I was hoping someone in this business still had a brain. If you and your brother try to undermine me or go to the government like you did to destroy my best friend, Dan Conway...all I want from you is dependable transportation.*

*Dagny Taggart: You will get the transportation you need, Mr. Wyatt* (Atlas Shrugged).

– **2<sup>d</sup> type** of polytopical model shows a topical sequence, in which various topics belonging to different themes (“FINANCE” and “ENTREPRENEURSHIP”) are combined.

In extract (5) we observe the development of theme “FINANCE” topics “*accounts management*” and “*funds transfer*” and theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topic “*accumulation and growth of material resources*”. At first, the speaker is talking about accounts management, in particular opening an account, afterwards, about funds transfer, at the end of the talk the next speaker brings up the topic of accumulation and growth of material resources:

(5) – *On settlement day, open an account for Mr. Gekko under the name Geneva, Roth Holding Corp. Transfer it to this account in the Cayman Islands.*

– *You’re going to make a lot of money, pal* (Wall Street).

The carried out research has shown that in English business discourse monotopical scenario prevails – it forms two-thirds of all the sequences; the rest forms polytopical scenario. In monotopical model both themes are realised, with little quantitative benefit of theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP”. Among the types of polytopical model realisation the 1<sup>st</sup> type prevails, which demonstrates the combination of topics belonging to different themes. Both scenarios possess a specific set of semantic relations between the elements.

The analysis has also revealed the relations of one / different types between elements of monotopical scenario. Realisation of one type of the relations completely prevails.

In monotopical model of English business discourse we have distinguished the relations of *generalisation* (extract (6)), *specification* (extract (7)), *modification* (extract (8)), *support* (extract (9)) and *closing* (extract (10)).

In the following example theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topic “*starting a business*” unfolds: in the initiating move the speaker is talking about the problem of getting a license, required to start a business, in the responding move the next speaker generalises, stating that managing the gaming business one doesn’t need a license:

(6) – *I don’t know if I could do this even if I wanted to. The Gaming Commission would never give me a license.*

– *You don’t have to have a license to work in a casino* (Casino).

In the next extract theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topic “*product sales*” realises: in the initiating move the speaker is talking about the enlargement of customers’ circle, in the following moves the speakers specify who exactly the product had been sold to:

(7) – *Mr. Naylor’s here to see if we can’t get cigarettes into the hands of somebody other than the usual RAVs.*

– *RAVs?*

– *Russians, Arabs and Villains* (Thank You For Smoking).

The next episode displays the unfolding of theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topic “*personnel policy*”, where in the initiating move the speaker is talking about personnel policy, namely promotion at work, which

he was promised but deceived, in the responding move the next speaker modifies information, stating that it wasn't a deceit but motivation for getting a promotion:

- (8) – *For months you've been hinting I was in line for that promotion. You were just lying to me?*  
– *Lying? No, Nick, motivating. I mean, look, we're all part of the same team here* (Horrible Bosses).

The following example shows the unfolding of theme “FINANCE” topic “*profitability*”, where in the initiating move the speaker is talking about the amount of profit, which he wants to gain, in the following move the next speaker sustains the idea:

- (9) – *We got to start talking about billings figure. I want 20 millions from these monkeys right away.*  
– *Yes, big chief Rainmaker* (Casino Jack).

The following extract displays the realisation of theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topic “*personnel policy*”, where in the initiating move the speaker is talking about personnel policy, in particular employee's promotion, in the following move we observe topic closing (the next speaker is expressing appreciation for his supervisor's favor):

(10) *Mark Waterman: I mentioned your name to Teddy K. He liked what you did with cell phones. You're being groomed.*

*Carter: Mark. Thank you* (In Good Company).

The analysis has demonstrated that in English business discourse the most typical type of relations are *generalisation*, *support* and *closing*, while the less frequent are the relations of *modification* and *specification*.

In polytopical scenario we have distinguished relations of one type between the elements in topical sequence, namely *digression* and *change*.

The following extract exemplifies the relations of *digression*. The communicators realise theme “FINANCE” topic “*crediting*” and theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topic “*managing business*”, where in the initiating move the participant is talking about giving a loan, afterwards in this move, he digresses from the topic, telling how to manage business, particularly buying a decent part of a company; in the responding move the speaker supports topic “*crediting*”, stating that there are certain reasons which don't allow to give a loan:

(11) – *The Fed can lend to nonbankers under unusual and exigent circumstances. We're thinking of taking over 80 % of the company.*

– *A.I.G. has collateral. They have assets, Lehman didn't. We couldn't lend into a whole* (Too Big to Fail).

The analysis has shown that topic *change* can be:

– **sharp / incohesive**, i.e. shifting from one topic / theme to another, without old topic continuation within the exchange;

The following example demonstrates the realisation of theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” topics “*providing services*” and “*business meetings*”, where in the initiating move the speaker is talking about termination in providing services, in the following move the next speaker continues developing the same topic and afterwards, shifts to another topic (“*business meeting*”):

(12) – *I had to shut down the 93 run.*

– *Sorry, about it Dagny. Hey, remember the inn at Cold Spring Harbor? I have a meeting in the city tomorrow* (Atlas Shrugged II. The Strike).

– **gradual / coherent** (“coherent shift” (Svennevig J., 1999), “topic shading” (Schegloff, 2007)), i.e. a gradual transition from one topic / theme to another.

Extract (13) exemplifies the realisation of theme “FINANCE” topics “*losses*” and “*reorganisation*”, where in the initiating move the speaker is talking about bank bankruptcy, in the responding move the next speaker gradually shifts to another topic, insisting on reorganisation, namely working on the strategy of saving the company:

(13) *Neel Kashkari: Dow's falling off a cliff 400 points already. Goldman and Morgan Stanley are getting slammed by withdrawals. The Lehman thing's killing them.*

*Henry Paulson: I should talk to the President about how we'll contain the damage* (Too Big to Fail).

In polytopical scenario topic *change* prevails, which is often sharp / incohesive.

## Conclusions

The absence of studies on linear-hierarchical content organisation of discourse made us focus on this problem, namely on the basis of the English business discourse. The research has shown that the linear-hierarchical content organisation of the analysed discourse is based on two scenarios – monotopical, in which the same topic / theme is realised, and polytopical, where various topics that belong to (1) one theme

(“FINANCE” or “ENTREPRENEURSHIP”); (2) different themes (“FINANCE” or “ENTREPRENEURSHIP”) are realised. The analysis has demonstrated that in English business discourse monotopical scenario prevails – it forms two-thirds of all the sequences; the rest forms polytopical scenario. In monotopical model both themes are realised, with little quantitative benefit of theme “ENTREPRENEURSHIP”. Among the types of polytopical model realisation of the 1<sup>st</sup> type prevails. Both scenarios possess a specific set of semantic relations between the elements. The analysis also revealed that in topical sequence, which is based on monotopical scenario, relations of one / different types exist. Realisation of one type of the relations completely prevails. In the monotopical model of English business discourse we have distinguished the relations of *generalisation*, *specification*, *modification*, *support* and *closing*. In topical sequence, which is based on polytopical scenario, relations of only one type are distinguished, namely *digression* and *change* (the prevalent ones), the later can be sharp / incohesive and gradual / coherent.

The analysis of thematic models realisation in different communicative situations of English business discourse is considered as the *prospects* for further research.

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