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Linguistic creativity in the English of business-oriented quality papers

Quality journalism offers its educated readers unsimplified linguistic usage which comprises standard collocations, phrases and utterances on the one hand, and occasional word-combinations, deformed idioms and quotations on the other. The former belong to the language system and reside in a variety of unilingual dictionaries, whereas the latter are confined to speech and have little chance of being registered by lexicographers.

Various types of media provide information **about** and **for** the business community. The distinction is between **print** media on the one hand, and **electronic** media on the other. The former cover newspapers, books, and magazines, whereas the latter include radio and television. They use written and spoken discourse respectively, and cover the events and developments in different business areas and industries. There are also **multimedia** or **integrated** services which combine sound, pictures, and text; they are accessed through networks such as the **Internet**.

Quality newspapers and magazines are an indispensable part of the world of business. Businesspeople read quality papers to keep track of the events and trends, to follow the stock market and international news. Reporters, journalists, columnists, and staff writers interview businessmen, inviting them to share their views on the state of different businesses and industries. Companies release information to the press through their press officers and public relations executives.

There are at least **four** reasons why foreign learners of Business English should read **quality press**. To begin with, the quality papers offer up-to-date information from different professional areas; this is what some people call “a clear window on facts” (The New Yorker, 17.06. & 24.06.2002, p. 52). It follows, then, that learners acquire proficiency in **retrieving information** from quality press. Information retrieval will gradually improve their understanding of the world of business.

Another reason for foreign students to read quality newspapers and magazines is that they provide immediate access to current usage, to something that lexicographers and English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals categorize as **real English** and **real usage**. Unlike fiction and intellectual monographs, whose time-to-market is somewhat long and unpredictable, quality newspapers and magazines follow a regular schedule. For example, “The Wall Street Journal” is a daily newspaper; “Business Week”, as its name implies, is available on a weekly basis. The kind of usage that foreign learners come across in quality press can also be referred to as **natural, authentic English**. In other words, it is unsimplified linguistic usage at its best that foreign students should take full advantage of in the ongoing extension of their vocabulary. Learners of English should acquire and cultivate the habit of carefully choosing and making their own as many useful ways of expressing things in Standard English as possible.

There are two other reasons why the quality papers should be part of one's study of Business English. Along with the rest of the media (television, radio, etc.), quality newspapers and magazines steadily reflect the pace and outcomes of **linguistic change**: more often than not, new meanings, new words and new terms enter the lexicon of the language through newspapers and magazines, TV programs, and radio broadcasts.

Linguistic creativity, or language play, concludes the list of reasons for foreign learners of Business English to read quality press: while putting together articles and reviews, writers, columnists and reporters not only inform their readers of news, events, and views, but also do their best to convey their individuality through an unusual phrase or memorable sequence of words. Sometimes they coin new words and expressions; they often play upon well-known and widely used quotations and idioms, changing their form and meaning to produce a certain impact on the readers through expressivity and individual creativity.

Business-related texts fall into two categories – the title of the article on the one hand, and the text itself on the other. Linguistic creativity pervades both. The title, however, is supposed to be short and provocative; it should also be expressive and memorable. Several titles from quality papers are analysed below.

In some titles, the actual wording suggested by the author can be traced back to a phrase, quotation, or name that is part of the English linguistic and wider cultural tradition. These are allusive titles that require a particular kind of philological background knowledge. The following three titles are based on classical sources:

The Wintel of Their Discontent.

Where Wintel Fears to Tread.

A Jekyll-and-Hyde Economy.

In *The Wintel of Their Discontent*, Wintel is a contraction of Windows and Intel, two products of two software companies – Microsoft Corp. and Intel Corp., respectively. The original phrase comes from the opening lines of Shakespeare's play *Richard III*:

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York.

Whereas Wintel (Windows + Intel) points at the former symbiosis in the Microsoft and Intel relationship, the deformed quotation *The Wintel of Their Discontent* reveals deep cracks: “While the duo (= duopoly – T.N.) still work together closely on the technologies for personal computers, from which they both derive the vast bulk of their revenues, the post-PC future is driving them apart.” (Business Week, 23.11.1998, p. 57).

In *Where Wintel Fears to Tread* another quotation is needed for a better understanding of the implications. The original saying reads as follows: *fools rush in where angels fear to tread*; it comes from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711); it is used to refer to people with little experience or knowledge who attempt to do more difficult or dangerous things than wiser or more experienced people (Longman Dictionary of English Idioms, p. 119). The title refers to the new Apple iMac's design: “[...] the teal-and-white iMac represents a clean break with the past. The conservative, Microsoft/Intel-dominated PC industry would never have tried such a departure.” (Business Week, 14.09.1998, p. 19).

A Jekyll-and-Hyde Economy (Business Week, 03.08.1998, p. 30) points to the good and the bad news in the overall economy:

It's the economy with two faces. The Asian financial crisis is knifing through U.S. manufacturing, cutting exports to the bone and slashing commodity prices. Companies such as Polaroid are curbing shipments until swelling inventories can be sold. Profits are harder to come by. Yet service companies are scrounging for help: Manpower Inc. says white-collar hiring leaped 13% in the spring. Wages are up smartly, as are incomes. The stock market is booming, interest rates are low, and Americans are buying – producing happy retailers and the biggest housing boom in a decade.

In Modern English, *Jekyll and Hyde* means a person who has two different natures and can change from one to the other. It comes from the story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, in which the main character has one good nature (Dr. Jekyll) and one evil nature (Mr. Hyde). The *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* gives several illustrative phrases: *He's a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde./a Jekyll-and-Hyde character* (ibid., p. 703).

The Citi That Slept (Business Week, 02.11.1998, p. 94) is the title of an article about Citigroup Inc. – the product of a merger of Citicorp and Travelers Group – that has inherited a tangle of money-laundering accusations: it was a private bank within Citibank, a unit of the former Citicorp, that had transferred protection payoffs from drug traffickers. The title could be traced back to at least two sources: the 1953 film *City That Never Sleeps* and the line *I want to wake up in the city that never sleeps* from Frank Sinatra's famous song *New York, New York*. Whatever the source, the writer played upon something that educated readers around the world would almost certainly recognize and enjoy. For foreign learners of English, allusive titles of business articles are a challenge that stimulates their ability to discover the source, establish the difference and reflect on the implications.

Divorce, Italian-Style (Business Week, 17.05.1999, p. 54) is borrowed from an Italian film of the same title. In the article, the break between two Italian banks – Mediobanca and Lazard – is discussed: one of Europe's most durable business alliances falls apart. Since alliances between businesses are thought of as marriages (“The bitter end of a long marriage”), split-ups are looked at as separation (“the messy separation”) and divorce (“The divorce is the latest example of the upheaval that's rocking Europe's former financial champions.”).

Microsoft Under the Microscope (Business Week, 14.09.1998, p. 18) attracts the readers' attention because of the partial orthographic and phonetic similarity between the two key words. The article reviews a book called “The Microsoft File”. The latter pursues a serious purpose: “to show that Bill Gates, the CEO, and his company Microsoft Corp. have engaged in predatory business practices that all but destroyed competition in the PC operating-system market and now threaten to do the same with the Internet and electronic commerce.” The title of the review playfully juxtaposes the name of the company Microsoft and the phrase *under the microscope* (= examine very carefully) that well reflects the essence of what had been done by the author of the book, Wendy Goldman Rohm, who spent years poring over documents and interviewing hundreds of government lawyers and computer industry leaders.

In the next title *Rainwater. Can He Recoup?* (Business Week, 30.11.1998, p. 113), alliteration is not the only device. The article is about a legendary dealmaker Richard E. Rainwater, whose holdings – in real estate, energy, and health care – are experiencing difficulties (“headed downriver”). In the following quotation from the article the name of the businessman is intentionally juxtaposed with a business term: “Rainwater's empire is a mess. His reputation as a rainmaker is at stake.” *Rainmaker* means *an influential person who brings significant amounts of new business and wealthy customers to a financial or legal services organization*. The associative link between the name Rainwater on the one hand, and the term rainmaker on the other, is further complemented by another term, dealmaker, used in the text.

Conclusion

The English of business-oriented quality papers is an indispensable part of the multi-strand syllabus at Moscow State University. Intermediate and advanced students are encouraged to read quality press with several long-term goals in mind: keeping track of standard business usage, identifying new meanings and uses, singling out occasional collocations, expressive utterances, deformed quotations and idioms.

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