Teaching English
as a World Language
in the Information Age
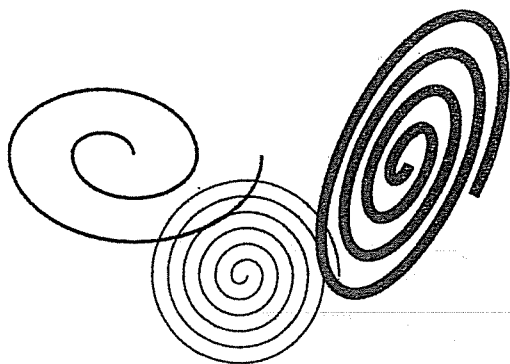
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Р е к о м е н д о в а н о Редакционным советом Минского
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Сборник содержит статьи по проблемам английского языка, методики
преподавания на различных уровнях образовательной системы,
литературыстрановедения и культуры англоязычных стран, которые были обсуждены
во время конференции, состоявшейся 3-5 ноября 2004 г. в г. Минске.

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BUSINESS ENGLISH—NEED TO KNOW

The work described here is new for us and different from what we have been doing all these years in its being first of all somewhat tangential to ESP in our specialism (International Law and International Relations) and taking a special place in the curriculum planned as a module able to be moved about to a reasonable extent.

It is also a joint project carried out in collaboration by the International Relations Faculty of Belarusian State University and the Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany.

The pun in the title of the paper was intentional, meaning there is a question of what kind of Business English and how much of it our students need to know and consequently to learn, always bearing in mind that it does not seem to be directly related to their specialism. However, in the jobs they actually fill after graduating certain business communication skills are obviously expected (commercial sections/departments of big corporations/ministries, international relations depts.),etc.

So that is *the first dilemma:* to teach them much (go the whole hog) or give them basics? But then most BE books are intended for students of Business or Economics or at least Management. With the notable exception of International Business English by Leo Jones and Richard Alexander, Cambridge University Press, 1989 which says that "most so-called business English is simply English used in business contexts" [1]. Or, else, they are very specialized (Banking, Accounting, Human Resource Management to name but a few). The objective of the textbook is usually formulated as the following: "(This textbook) is designed to help you to learn the English you will need for work. We hope ... it helps you in your business career" [2]; "... is a course for managers and students of business" [3]; "... is a course designed to help you to learn the English you need for your work in the world of business" [4]; "...focuses on giving business people what they really need from a language class" [5], So, obviously, a selection of relevant fields and situations is important; especially, because neither side (teachers or students) knows much about how business is conducted. That's *the second dilemma:* to teach what we know (or have in a textbook/can find a textbook for) or to find out together with them what they presumably need? The latter seems to be less presumptuous and has more credibility, But then, do we really mean the same when we say Business? It has become very much an umbrella term, where its original meaning has blurred. So has Management which we will also consider. Finally, we agreed that whatever the business the employers of our graduates work in it is likely to require certain skills which can be learned, but not necessarily on very consistent or sophisticated language material. We compiled a list of outlined areas which we need to cover (so we thought) and outlined tentative options for the structure of units. Obviously, they are bound to be different depending on the skills taught. We toyed with the idea of a simulation, but then agreed that neither our own Belarusian skills as teachers and material producers nor the requirements of students

make it really useful and efficient at this stage. Instead, we thought we shall let it grow as we go on and build it up together with the students. That's *the third dilemma;* to teach them a set course (closed, as it were) which is easier on us or an open, varied, go-with-the-flow one? - one which teaches the students learning skills, especially for the designated areas of experience.

It should probably be mentioned that new information technologies are involved here at various levels. Quite a lot of the discussion of the project is done via e-mail; we have experience of setting and monitoring tasks via e-mail; syllabi can be found on our home pages; Internet research will be expected of students; commercial video- and audio materials will be used, etc. Students are also expected to have two files when they complete the module: the hard copy and the soft copy with the glossary of the vocabulary for each unit. It will be indispensable, especially, in the case of team work when they complement each other's work.

They will also have a complete portfolio of their work so that the authentic tasks and materials can serve later as the guide for the job tasks.
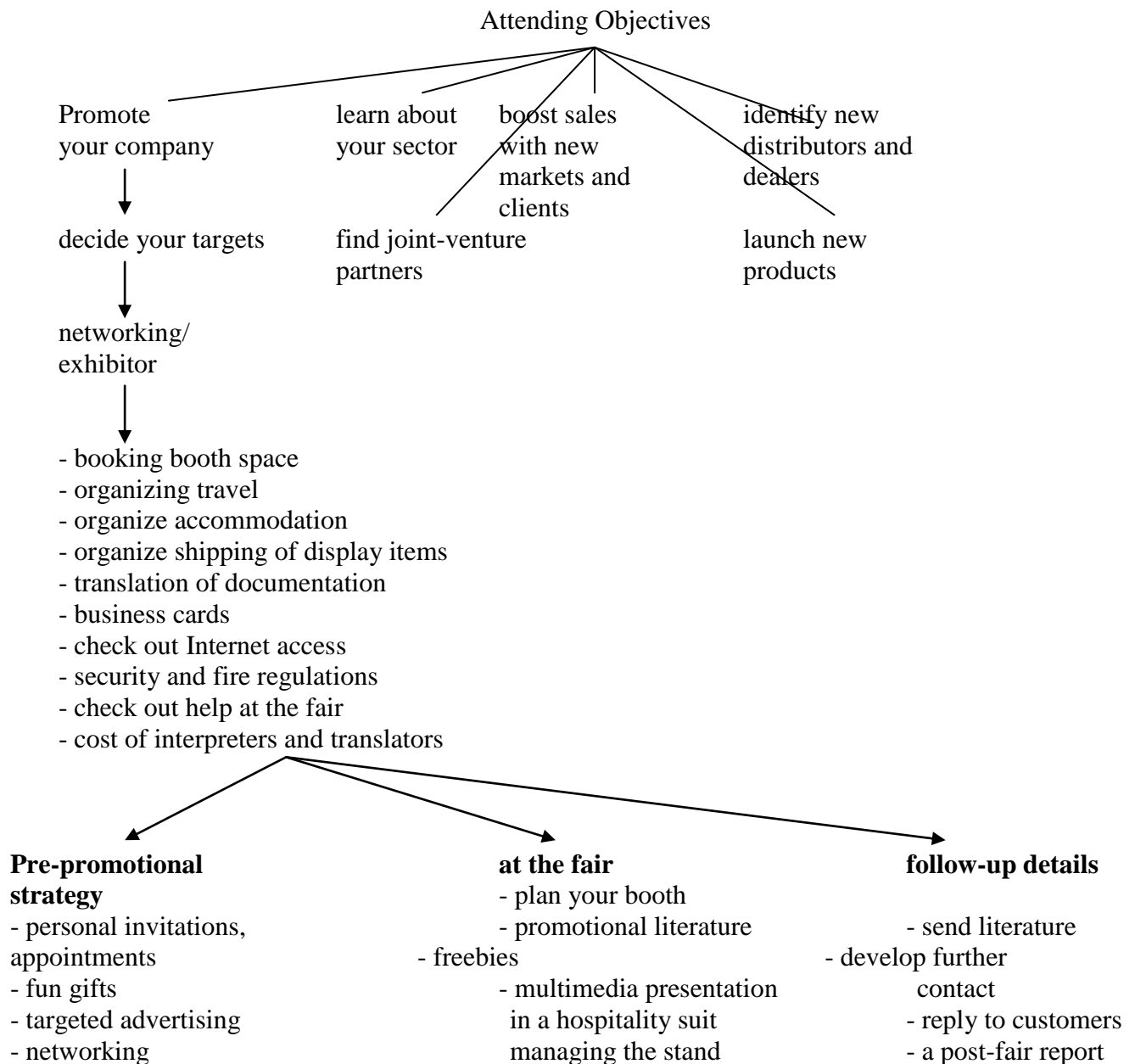
It may seem rather unstructured at first sight, but in fact there is an organized systemic approach to inner lexicon building underlying it [6]. In part, it is schemata, charting (or web-plotting) in the form of initial brainstorming and then developing and completing it after some research and vocabulary study at home (the so-called independent work). Language tasks also include training whatever linguistic means predominate in the area: persuasion rhetoric devices and emotional vocabulary for presentations, certain word-formation models for presentation papers, synonyms in advertising, etc. Communication functions are also specified. Eclectic though it may be, combining notional-functional, communicative and cross-cultural methods of witching, but it promises to be effective because we hope our students will achieve a certain degree of language awareness and build up a mechanism for specialist language acquisition.

Some of the above-stated can be demonstrated on the approach to the unit about *Wending a Trade Fair.*

Two units relating to this topic discuss preparation and planning as well as participation and follow-up. They open with some brainstorming and priority ordering tasks, so that quite a lot of the relevant vocabulary can be suggested at the Swum and drilled further independently. A semantic map outline for a brainstorming exercise is suggested below. Some authentic materials like fair calendars, hotels planners is etc. and real-life tasks such as finding out information, registering for the trade fair, writing promotional literature, contacting possible customers, making presentations, etc. create the necessary motivation and open various lines along which skills can be trained and specialist vocabulary studied in depth to the extent required bystudents for their particular jobs whenever necessary. Thus, the Need to Know will be finally defined by the students themselves.

Attending and Organizing Fairs

Study the semantic map and develop the areas you need. Follow the example in A.

Attending Objectives

Promote
your company

learn about
your sector

boost sales
with new
markets and
clients

identify new
distributors and
dealers

decide your targets

find joint-venture
partners

launch new
products

networking/
exhibitor

- booking booth space
- organizing travel
- organize accommodation
- organize shipping of display items
- translation of documentation
- business cards
- check out Internet access
- security and fire regulations
- check out help at the fair
- cost of interpreters and translators

**Pre-promotional
strategy**
- personal invitations,
appointments
- fun gifts
- targeted advertising
- networking

at the fair
- plan your booth
- promotional literature
- freebies
- multimedia presentation
 in a hospitality suit
 managing the stand

follow-up details

- send literature
- develop further
 contact
- reply to customers
- a post-fair report

References

1.*Jones, L, Alexander, R.* International Business English. CUP, 1989.
2.*White, G., Drake, S,* Business Initiatives. Longman, 1992.
3.*Hollett, V.* Business Objectives. OUP, 1996.
4.Business Circles. Nelson, 1988.
5.Business English Recipes. Longman, 1995.
6.*Thomsen, K, Payne, J., Wessels, D.* Topics in Business. Verlag Europa-Lehrmittel,2004.