



IDIOMS IN POLISH LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION – SURVEY RESEARCH

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The proposed paper is a presentation of the results of surveys conducted as part of a research project: “Idioms in Polish Language of Business Communication”. Subject of research project were Polish idioms typical for business communication. The aim of this study was to verify the current functioning of the particular idioms recorded by the lexicographic sources among participants of business situations. In addition, the study was to catch some new idioms which still enrich the lexicon of the language and have not been registered by the dictionaries so far. The study was carried out among various groups involved in business communication: company directors, managers, traders and others.

Keywords: Communication, Language of business, Descriptive linguistics.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present results of survey research on the functioning of the phraseology in business communication in the Polish language. These studies were conducted as a part of a doctoral dissertation entitled “Idioms in Russian Business Language and Their Polish Equivalents.” I decided to undertake this subject because of its topicality; the language of business is a vibrant and dynamic structure, and therefore interesting from a research point of view. Set phrases occur in business communication, making the texts more emotional, although the language of business appears to be formalized and extremely objective. This paper is devoted to the functioning and vitality of idioms in communication between the Polish-speaking participants of business situations.

Literature Review

Although in recent years this specific layer of the language is growing in popularity in linguistic researches, in most of the Polish studies the field of phraseology is omitted.

On the Polish ground there have been developed some comparative works and textbooks concerning Polish business language. The paper *Rosyjska i polska terminologia biznesowa jako środek kreowania obrazu świata*¹ is worth quoting. In 2010 there was published a dissertation *Ergonimy komercyjne w polskiej i rosyjskiej przestrzeni językowej*² by Maciej Szelewski. Worth mentioning is also a dictionary

¹ Baran K., *Rosyjska i polska terminologia biznesowa jako środek kreowania obrazu świata*; Konferencja: Język, literatura i kultura Rosji w XXI wieku – teoria i praktyka; Kielce, 2010.

² M. Szelewski, *Ergonimy komercyjne w polskiej i rosyjskiej przestrzeni językowej*, Zielona Góra, 2010.

comparing English and Polish informal language of business: *Slang, idioms and buzzwords in business. English-Polish dictionary*.³

Among learning books we find: *O biznesie po polsku. Podręcznik do nauki języka polskiego. Wprowadzenie do języka biznesu*⁴, *Polski język biznesu dla cudzoziemców*⁵, *Polski w pracy*⁶.

There has been also an Internet portal created, concerning business language (<http://pl.bab.la/zwroty/jezyk-biznesu/>). Its authors compare Polish language typical for the business situations with many other languages, e.g. English, German, French and Russian. The authors define the project as “phraseological dictionaries”; it has, however, rather basic dimension.

Materials and Methods

This paper is the result of surveys conducted among Polish businessmen in Wrocław. The survey was designed to verify the functioning and viability of particular idioms related to the broadly understood business, in the minds of participants of business communication.

The survey method was chosen, as for the assumed purpose of research, appeared to be the most appropriate: “with specific questions, we can reach the users' awareness of language, the connotations formally yet unfixed, to determine the degree of persistence of idiomatic expressions in the current social practice”⁷ (“za pomocą specjalnych pytań możemy dotrzeć do świadomości użytkowników języka, do konotacji jeszcze formalnie nieutrwalonych, ustalić stopień trwałości połączeń w aktualnej praktyce społecznej” [J. Bartmiński 1998: 66]).

The study involved 84 respondents. The largest group were specialists - 36 people, then as follows: managers - 12 people, traders / sellers - 9, the owners of companies - 7 persons. The other participants were: project coordinators, assistants, office administration staff, team leaders, quality inspectors and others (total number of 20 people). The research was strongly dominated by workers with university degrees - 63 people; 19 people declared secondary education, 2 – finished vocational schools. 43 to 41 was the ratio of female to male respondents. The largest age group consisted of respondents between 20 and 30 years old - 44 people, in the following age groups – 31–40, 41–50, 51–65 there were respectively: 23, 8 and 9 respondents.

Questionnaire consisted of four questions, both open and closed. The starting point for the construction of the survey were the lexicographic sources, texts of contracts.

Now I would like to introduce a brief definition of idiom. Because the study concerned the Polish-speaking cultural area, I decided to use the definition developed by Polish linguists, Andrzej Lewicki and Anna Pajdzińska. “Fixed phrases are socially established connections of words, which are characterized by irregularity in some respects, e.g. their composition may be formed with words or words' forms, that do not usually create syntactic expressions; the meaning of idioms is not understood from the meaning of their components; the collocation rules may be somehow affected”⁸ (“Frazologizmy są to społecznie utrwalone połączenia wyrazów wykazujące nieregularność pod jakimś względem, np. w ich składzie występują wyrazy lub formy wyrazów nie wchodzące w swobodne związki składniowe; znaczenie frazeologizmu nie wynika ze znaczeń komponentów; naruszone bywają zasady łączliwości wyrazów” [Lewicki, Pajdzińska 2010: 315]).

I would also like to introduce the concept of “frazem”, because its representations often appear in business communications. “Frazem” is a “fixed combination of words, whose meaning consists in the range of meaning of the word semantically dominant, although the whole connection is irregular in

³ Kozierekiewicz R., *Slang, idioms and buzzwords in business. English-Polish dictionary*, Warszawa, 2010.

⁴ M. Kowalska, *O biznesie po polsku. Podręcznik do nauki języka polskiego. Wprowadzenie do języka biznesu*, Kraków, 2008.

⁵ A. Butcher, A. Dunin-Dudkowska, *Polski język biznesu dla cudzoziemców*, Lublin, 1998.

⁶ A. Jasińska, A. Szymkiewicz, M. Małolepsza, *Polski w pracy*, Kraków, 2010.

⁷ Translation by D.D.

⁸ Translation – D.D.

meaning.”⁹ (“Frazemy to utralone połączenia wyrazów, których sens mieści się w zakresie znaczeniowym wyrazu doinującego semantycznie, jakkolwiek całe połączenie jest nieregularne znaczeniowo” [Lewicki, Pajdzińska 2010: 319])

I will also try to define what I mean by business communication. Let me start with quoting the definition of a businessman, as the participant of business communication. In the Dictionary of Polish Language we read: “businessman – a man running wide businesses; entrepreneur, industrialist, salesman”¹⁰ (“biznesmen – człowiek prowadzący rozległe interesy; przedsiębiorca, przemysłowiec, handlowiec” [Mały Słownik Języka Polskiego, 1997: 53]).

As we can see, this definition is very broad and includes the whole range of types of participants of communication. Bartosz Czajkowski notices in his article about the language of business users, “Defining the typical user of business language is very difficult, if at all possible, because nowadays everyone, regardless of age, can run a business and be a businessman [...] Running business is not just talking about money, banks, but also about the subject, which is a branch, in which a company prospers. We can not keep the company profitable, without the specialist knowledge of branch, on goods or services that we provide.”¹¹ (“Określenie więc typowego użytkownika języka biznesu jest bardzo trudne, o ile w ogóle możliwe, gdyż w dzisiejszych czasach każdy, niezależnie od wieku, może prowadzić działalność gospodarczą i być biznesmenem [...]. Prowadzenie interesu to nie tylko rozmowa o pieniądzach, bankach, ale też o przedmiocie, jakim jest gałąź, w jakiej dana firma prosperuje. Nie można przecież prowadzić firmy przynoszącej zysk, bez znajomości wiedzy, i to bardzo fachowej, na temat dobra lub usług, które świadczymy.” [Bartosz Czajkowski, 2009 :22]). We can see, however, that the language of business, consisting of wide range of topics, has common features, which are typical and distinctive for this field of language.

Results

Let me, therefore, discuss survey results.

1. In one of the questions, respondents were asked to list the set expressions or collocations, which include the lexeme “pieniądze” (money). I decided to examine the expressions with this word, because the question of “money” occurs in most of the business situations. The aim was to point out the most popular set phrases. Respondents were suggested the following semantic fields:

1.1. Characteristics of Money

Respondents named almost 50 attributes, which describe the money. 30 of them appeared once only. Statistics was used as the verification procedure; the characteristics were distinguished due to the number of indications. The most frequently mentioned were: (*f* - number of people indicating particular characteristic)

(*f*)

45 brudne (dirty)¹²

25 łatwe (easy)

15 duże (big)

10 ciężkie (heavy)

10 szybkie (fast)

9 ciężko zarobione (hard-earned)

⁹ Translation – D.D.

¹⁰ Translation – D.D.

¹¹ Translation – D.D.

¹² All the Polish fix phrases in the paper are translated literally into English to show their structure.

- 6 małe (small)
- 4 wielkie (large)
- 4 wyprane (washed)
- 4 śmierdzące (stinking)
- 3 lewe (left)
- 2 uczciwe (fair)
- 2 zgubne (fatal)
- 2 grube (thick)
- 2 marne (poor)
- 2 żadne (no)
- 2 czyste (clean)

9 of the above mentioned characteristics I considered to be typical idioms (dirty, easy, hard, fast, washed, stinking, left, thick, clean), the other ones - to be phrasems. Significantly, more than half of the respondents named idiomatic expression, standing for the money dishonestly earned or acquired (dirty). It is interesting that this set phrase is not registered in the Dictionary of Phraseology in the entry "money", it appears only in the entries "dirty" / "money laundering". In the Dictionary, in the entry "money", we find only the following descriptions: easy, difficult, expensive (not appeared in the surveys), large, heavy (and derivates from basic forms, such as thicker)

1.2. The excess and Lack of Money

Respondents indicated the following set expressions, which we use, talking about an excess and lack of money (a verification procedure was statistics):

1.2.1. Excess of Money:

(f)

- 11 spać/leżeć na pieniądzach (to sleep/lie on money)
- 9 mieć kasy/pieniędzy/hajsu jak lodu (to have as much cash/money/dosh as ice)
- 7 nadmiar pieniędzy (excess money)
- 3 Pieniądze szczęścia nie dają. (Money does not give happiness.)
- 3 być nadzianym (to be stuffed)
- 3 srać forszą/kasą (to shit with dosh/cash)
- 2 kąpać się w pieniądzach (to bathe in money)
- 2 przelewa się u kogoś (it overflows at someone's)
- 2 kupa kasy (a pile of cash)
- 2 mieć dużo siana (to have a lot of hay)
- 2 mieć pieniędzy w bród (to have money galore)
- 2 nie mieć co robić z pieniędzmi/nie wiedzieć co robić z pieniędzmi (not to have anything to do with money/ not to know what to do with money)
- 2 grubu/pełny portfel (a thick/a full wallet)
- 2 tonąć w pieniądzach (to drown in money)
- 1 opływać w dostatku (to overflow in abundance)
- 1 pełne konto (a full account)
- 1 gruba skarpeta (a thick sock)
- 1 mieć maszynkę do robienia pieniędzy (to have a machine for making money)
- 1 pełna kieszka (a full pocket)
- 1 mieć głębokie kieszenie (to have deep pockets)
- 1 góra pieniędzy (a mountain of money)

- 1 dużo kapuchy (a lot of cabbage)
- 1 robić duże pieniądze (to make big money)
- 1 wolna gotówka (free cash)
- 1 na nic nie brakuje (for nothing is missing)
- 1 pieniądz robi pieniądz (money makes money)
- 1 życie na kartę kredytową (life on credit card)
- 1 zasobność portfela (wealth of wallet)

1.2.2. Lack of Money:

(f)

- 8 być spłukanym (to be rinsed)
- 3 nie śmierdzić kasą/pieniężmi/groszem (not to stink with cash/money/penny)
- 3 zero kasy (zero cash)
- 3 dziura w budżecie (hole in the budget)
- 3 kasa się kogoś nie trzyma (cash does not hold to somebody)
- 3 być/zostać bez grosza/złamanego grosza (to be/become without penny/broken penny)
- 3 pusta kasa/pustka w kasie (an empty cash register/emptiness in the cash box)
- 3 pusty portfel/pustka w portfelu (an empty wallet/emptiness in the wallet)
- 2 bida z nędzą (misery and poverty)
- 2 klepać biedę (to clap poverty)
- 2 dołek finansowy (the financial hole)
- 2 ledwie wiązać koniec z końcem (barely make ends meet)
- 1 nie mieć floty (not to have a fleet)
- 1 pusta kieszeń (an empty pocket)
- 1 permanentny debet (permanent overdraft)
- 1 ciągły brak kasy (continuing lack of cash)
- 1 być pod kreską (to be below the line)
- 1 biedny jak student (as poor as a student)
- 1 biedny jak mysz kościelna (poor as a church mouse)
- 1 cienko z kasą (thin with cash)
- 1 nie mieć na chleb (not to have for bread)
- 1 brak środków (lack of resources)
- 1 być gołym (to be naked)
- 1 mieć zero na koncie (to have zero in the account)
- 1 kłopoty finansowe (financial hardship)

Again - these compounds were confronted with Dictionary of Phraseology. In the first group of twenty-eight expressions describing excess of cash, seven of them (including the two most frequently mentioned) we can find in the dictionary: to sleep/lie on the money; to have as much cash/money/dosh as ice; it overflows at someone's; a thick, full wallet; a thick sock; a full pocket; to make big money. In the second group situation is as follows: ten of twenty-five set phrases are recorded by lexicographic sources: not to stink with cash/money/penny; cash does not hold to somebody; to be/become without penny/broken penny; misery and poverty; to clap poverty; an empty wallet/emptiness in the wallet; barely make ends meet; an empty pocket; to be below the line; poor as a church mouse.

We can see that the new expressions with the lexeme "money" are formed, reflecting the dynamic development of business language.

2.1. The next question was designed to determine the popularity of idioms concerning "work". Also in this case I decided to examine these idioms, as the theme of work occurs very often in business conversations. Nine expressions defining hard, intense work, were presented to respondents (set

expressions registered by the Dictionary of Phraseology); respondents were asked to put them in the order from the most to least common:

pracować jak maszyna (to work like a machine)
 pracować jak mrówka (to work like an ant)
 pracoawać jak wół (to work as an ox)
 pracować jak koń (to work like a horse)
 pracować jak dziki osioł (to work like a wild ass)
 pracować w pocie czoła (to work in the sweat of sb's brow)
 pracować na wysokich obrotach (to work at high speed)
 pracować na dużych obrotach (to work at big speed)
 pracować na pełnych obrotach (to work at full speed)

Respondents recognized three compounds as popular: to work like an ox, to work at high speed, to work at full speed. The least popular were the expressions: to work like a machine, to work at big speed (which is interesting, when we consider, that expressions to work at high and full speed were among the most popular phrases). Other expressions were placed at the center of popularity axis.

2.2. Then respondents were asked to conduct a similar classification (due to the frequency of use) of idioms defining work without engagement, light work. Again – there were five set phrases from Dictionary of Phraseology given to respondents:

pracować jak senna mucha (to work as a sleepy fly)
 pracować na małych obrotach (to work at little speeds)
 pracować na wolnych obrotach (to work at slow speeds)
 pracować na niskich obrotach (to work at low speeds)
 pracować na zwolnionych obrotach (to work at slowed down speeds)

In the first place there was placed an idiom *to work at slowed down speeds*, then: *to work at low, slow, small speeds*. Expression *to work as a sleepy fly* was recognized to be the least popular, few respondents said they had not been familiar with it.

3. Another studied problem was the question of idioms in bussines referring to the metaphor of fight, especially often used in times of financial crisis, which we can observe in mass media. Respondents were asked to name the expressions with word “fight”, referring to the realities of business. There were two groups distinguished:

3.1. (f) walka o (fight for)

24 klienta (customer)
 13 przetrwanie (survival)
 9 władzę (authority)
 7 rynek (market)
 6 byt (existence)
 5 wyniki (results)
 3 stołki (stool)
 3 pozycję (position)
 3 udziały w rynku (market share)
 2 zyski (profits)

3.2. (f) walka z (fight against)

26 wiatrakami (windmills)
 25 konkurencją (competition)
 9 czasem (time)

- 5 biurokracją (bureaucracy)
- 4 inflacją (inflation)
- 3 bezrobociem (unemployment)
- 2 urzędami (offices)
- 2 korupcją (corruption)
- 2 kryzysem (crisis)

Dictionary of Phraseology notes under the entry “fight” only the phrases *fight for existence*, *fight for the stool*, *fight against windmills*. All of them were listed by respondents, one of the expressions even in the first place. However, taking into consideration the number of phrases, unrecorded by lexicographic sources, we see that the number of phraseological units is strongly increasing. This change is probably caused by the external factors – transformation of the economic system in Poland in 90’s was significant and influenced the language. When the Polish market in socialism 9 (socialist) times was controlled by the government there was no need to fight for profits, etc.. It changed in capitalistic times, when businessmen have to take care of their business; struggle for profits reminds war conditions very often.

1.5. The last question was to investigate the collocation degree of expressions of the language of contracts. For this purpose, a closed question was used: respondents were asked to choose the phrase that most accurately completes sentence, being a part of the contracts (written in bold). Semantically proposed phrases meant the same (Proposed phrases had the same semantic value / had the same meaning), but only one of them functions in real texts.

The following examples were used:

- a) W sprawach **nieuregulowanych niniejszą umową** stosuje się przepisy Kodeksu cywilnego. (In matters not regulated by this agreement Civil Code shall be applied.)
- b) Zmiany niniejszej umowy wymagają **formy pisemnej** pod rygorem nieważności. (Changes to this Agreement shall be in writing under pain of nullity.)
- c) W przypadku zwłoki z dostawą Rzeczy Sprzedawca zapłaci Kupującemu **karę umowną** w wysokości xxx zł. (In case of delay of delivery the Buyer shall pay the Seller contract penalty of xxx zł.)

In the first sentence 50 respondents indicated the correct, typical phrase, in the second - 72, while in the third – 53. Presenting the results in percentage, we can talk about almost 60%, 85% and 63% of correct indications. On this basis we may conclude that the language of contracts is characterized by the presence of fixed phrases and is highly reproducible.

Conclusions

The purpose of this survey was to verify the functioning and viability of idioms related to the broadly understood business, in the minds of participants of business communication. Analysis of the results of this survey allows to define several features of the contemporary Polish business phraseology.

Firstly, the number of Polish business idioms is increasing, as we see in the case of idioms with lexeme “money”. In the language function, in addition to already well-established, new idioms. The most popular, however, are those recorded in the lexicographic sources. We should be aware that in addition to those fixed in dictionaries, there are new compounds in the sphere of business phraseological Polish language. Increasing resource of idioms can also be noticed in the case of idioms referring to the of fight, where the disproportion between phraseological compounds in the Dictionary and those mentioned by respondents was significant (3 to 19).

The survey examined the popularity of compounds defining “work”. There were selected the most popular ones (*to work like an ox*, *to work at high speed*, *to work at full speed*) and least frequently used (*work like a machine*, *to work at high speed*; *to work as a sleepy fly*).

It was also shown that the language of contracts is formed by phrases strongly fixed in the minds of language users, which can be considered as phrasemes.

The studies provide a contribution to further research on the phraseology in business communication.

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