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KAZAKH BUSINESS DISCOURSE: PECULIARITIES OF KAZAKH BUSINESS MEETINGS

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Abstract

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a young country, which is actively developing since its independence in 1991. The way of doing business by entrepreneurs has evolved in twenty five years with some features of Soviet Union, renaissance of Kazakh cultural values and western influence, so has the way of communication in the Kazakh business. Meeting in Kazakh business is more of a tool to minute decisions made prior the formal communication in order resolve business challenges and conduct day-to-day activities. Therefore, informal meetings are playing the significant role in pure Kazakh business culture. This is mainly because of the cultural perception and preferences, as well as the language to communicate it. This paper depicts the analysis of academic researches, which discusses factors relevant to Kazakh business discourse. It argues that factors of cultural perception and preferences along with business language context affect the Kazakh business meetings. It highlights the peculiarities of Kazakh business

meetings, which has altered during the years of independence. Although, meetings in Kazakh business normally reflect decisions only, Kazakh perception of the purpose of the meeting is changing. The meetings, especially with the international involvement, reflect discussions as well. Decisions in such meetings are made during the meeting as a result of discussion. The importance of perception by Kazakh culture and language context is also discussed in this paper.

Keywords

Kazakh Business Meeting, Business Discourse, Cultural Preferences, Language Context

1. Introduction

In December 1991 the Republic of Kazakhstan declared its independence. Starting from this period Kazakhstan started its journey to rebuild its economy and business. During the restructure of the business the western influence played its major role. In fact, the flood of the western goods into the country made local entrepreneurs adapt to the western ways of doing business.

Along with that Kazakhstan signed Production Sharing Agreement with the western oil and gas giants to explore and develop perspective oil and gas fields in the western part of Kazakhstan, such as Karachaganak, Kashagan etc.

Within twenty five years of Independence business of the Republic of Kazakhstan has evolved from Soviet Union style into something which could generally represent a mixture of styles with the heritage of Soviet Union, renaissance of Kazakh cultural values, and interaction with Western business.

Western influence led to stressing more attention into definition of business discourse in Kazakhstan. Although, this subject is not well studied in the Kazakhstan's academic world, it is considered as a perspective subject to explore. Some Kazakhstan based universities do launch research and investigations in this subject. Furthermore, the subject of Kazakh business meeting peculiarities, as one of the elements of business discourse, is poorly researched in the academic world. The purpose of this article is to highlight research related to cultures and cultural preferences which affect business meetings worldwide and to outline specific features of the Kazakh business meetings, considering significant influencing factors, which shall be taken into account.

This article delivers few elements which play significant role in the defining the specific features of the Kazakh style business meetings. Based on the western research related to cultural differences and preferences, the similarities and discrepancies are presented.

2. Factors relevant to Kazakh business meetings: Literature review

Business meeting is one of the significant tools to do business, which is normally aimed to resolve day-to-day issues and challenges. Companies, which are based in Kazakhstan, similar to Western businesses, use meetings to communicate business objectives, as well as communicate and brainstorm the ways to achieve such objectives.

When conducting the business meeting in the Kazakh environment there are a lot of factors which shall be taken into account. Such factors do matter in terms of understanding the Kazakh peculiarities and preferences in order to understand the Kazakh business discourse, specifically understanding business meetings.

One of the key findings of Hosted (1991) is the framework, in which he depicts the cultural dimensions. One of the dimensions is Individualism and Collectivism, which are two extremes of Hofstadter's framework. In high-individualistic societies individuals are loosely linked, with a confident vision of independence of a person from the group (Australia, Canada, and USA) with a high motivation led by personal preferences. In collectivism society people tend to associate themselves with the communities / groups they are in, implying tight link between the individuals of the society (Japan, China).

However, as specified by Bond, Zegarac & Spencer-Oaten (2000), statement that general cultural characteristics do affect rhetorical or pragmatic practices. It is argued through the following principles: "(a) the demands of the business situation or subculture, (b) the characteristics of the parent culture, and (c) the prescriptions of experts..." (Trosborg & Jorgensen, 2005).

The subject of culture is also argued by Ahlstrom & Bruin (2010), when the Authors highlight the problems in dealing with cross cultural communications. In fact they present the following problems:

- **Parochialism** means that the only right way to do the things (business) is the way it is done in someone's culture;
- **Ethnocentrism** is linked to the previous statement and means that someone's culture is superior and do things better than other cultures;

- **Polycentrism**, which is opposite to previous two statements, means seeking to imitate the way things done by local representatives, e.g. “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”.

The academic research by Trosborg & Jorgensen (2005) in cultural aspect of business discourse concluded that “...the parent culture does cause different evaluations of the language of complaint handling despite the relatively standard demands of the situation from the business point of view...” and “...the effects of parent culture are... powerful... and thus provides evidence for their deep-seated and unconscious nature”. The result of the research shows the complexity of the cultural aspect in business discourse and in particular in business meetings. Therefore, it is challenging to label cross cultural business meeting expectations and preferences with a specific pattern.

Taking into account the research of “Germanic Northern Europe”, Japanese and Italian cultures through the prism of English language, Trosborg & Jorgensen concluded that “... less promotional and/ or face-enhancing forms are generally less likely to cause offence...”

Another key conclusion of Trosborg & Jorgensen is to see clearly the forms from the perspective of prefer redness and acceptability, which are entirely independent. The Author also argued the importance to understand the taste diversity relevant to modern and complex society, which completely denies any categorization of relative cultural differences.

The cultural differences are clearly evidenced in the Spencer-Oatey & Xing (2003) research and analysis of the business meeting outcome, which stated the difference in expectations from the meeting of Chinese and English participants. In fact, the Authors study the issue of Chinese-British relation management based on the meeting minutes and feedback received from the Chinese and English participants, which clearly evidenced the different perception of the success of the meeting. Due to misunderstanding of the expectations the Chinese parties were not happy about the meeting results, while English parties were satisfied with the outcome (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003).

Gina Poncini argues that intercultural meetings have their own specific culture, with its specific character and sense of “goriness”, not necessarily linked to national cultures (Poncini, 2007). Conducted research gave an understanding of the event-related community and shared practices across professional communities. She stated that the conflicts at the business meetings cannot be fully caused by the cultural differences of the meeting participants (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken, 2013).

Another crucial factor in business meetings is the language used, which is closely linked to the cultural perception. In case the business meetings are held in a foreign language (e.g. Business English in Kazakh business meetings) the cultural feature influences the discourse. Implications of English language, known as the worldwide business language, appear to be in different forms, which depend on the cultural preferences and expectations of the parties.

Hanford (2010) introduces the term of Language of Business Meetings (LBM hereinafter), which is defined as “corpus-informed study of the language and practices interlocutors employ in business meetings”. The Author highlights the importance of the data as the source to conduct effective analysis. LBM is represented by the methodology which depicts the interpretation of the corpus data in discursive, professional and social practices. Interpretation of data in Kazakh business style as well as the English language in Kazakh Business Meetings is subject for through study to precisely define the peculiarity of Kazakh business discourse.

In the research conducted by Halbe (2013) the special attention is given to the context of language. Halliday & Hasan (1985) outline the language use as context-specific, which implies that the use of the language, whether it is formal or informal, with or without jargon, depends on situation and audience. As stated by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) the language function is to “making sense of our experience, and acting out our social relationships”, which is applicable to the Kazakh business as well.

As argued by Holliday, the context has three implications, which are “filed, tenor and mode” (Dorothea Halbe citing Holliday, 2013). According to Holliday, **field** implies what role participants play. For instance, whether their role is to be actively involved and contribute or just to attend for information purpose. The meaning of **tenor** is correlated with the business meeting participants’ relationships. The relationships can be hierarchical or professional. **Mode** is related to the condition and environment, in which the communication takes place, e.g. teleconference, face-to-face meeting, etc. (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). All three levels are interdependent and connected, which “contributes to the overall discursive product” (Halbe, 2013).

The scientific research on business meetings outline the importance of above-mentioned elements as significant points to consider and apply. The importance of cultural perception and preferences as well as the business language seem affect the overall understanding of business discourse. Those elements are applicable to Kazakh business, which is discussed further.

3. Peculiarities of Kazakh business meetings

As defined above, meetings do play significant role in doing business, and Kazakhstan is not an exception. In fact, the meetings in many Kazakhstan companies are held every day and on a routine basis, to resolve day-to-day issues and face operational challenges. In some cultures there are number of types of meetings. However, generally from the business point of view they could be classified as formal and informal.

In Kazakh culture and business the importance of informal meetings plays significant role. This is mainly because of the cultural influence into the business, which gives specific feature into delivering the purpose of the meeting and the way to communicate it. Kazakhstan business has inherited some traditions from Soviet Union, in which the important factor in formal meetings was to present the positive achievements of the business even if it is not in reality. Such meetings were mainly reflecting the decisions rather than discussions in minutes. Normally the decisions are already made beforehand, which is similar to Japanese style of conduction business meetings.

As stated by Alston and Takei (2005) meetings in Japanese business are usually held not for the purpose of decision-making. Similarly to Kazakhstan business, the real decisions are made during the informal sessions / meetings. The Authors define “nema-washi”, which is method to reach agreements prior to the formal meeting. “Meetings serve primarily to develop shared feelings after decisions have been made through personal interactions” (Jon P. Alston & Isao Takei, 2005).

In Kazakh business the formal meeting is used as a tool to officially track the decisions. However, considering the factors affecting the meetings, as well as considering renascence of the Kazakh cultural values and the western influence into Kazakh business, meeting is becoming more of a tool to share thoughts and challenge decisions. In fact, the meetings with the international company do reflect the fact that decisions are made during the meeting as a result of discussion. This trend is becoming evident as the Kazakh business discourse evolves, which is subject for further investigation.

From the cultural perspective, both formal and informal meetings do distinguish the business language and tactics with elders, who are often higher in the business hierarchy. This is one another peculiarity of the Kazakh business discourse, since the age is considered to be the symbol of wisdom. However, following the western influence Kazakh business is transforming.

The role of field, tenor and mode are becoming as important as language and tactics with elders, which is subject for further research.

4. Conclusion

Kazakhstan business has evolved within twenty five years of independence. Along with the heritage from the Soviet Union and renaissance of Kazakh Cultural values the business is altering with the western influence. The factors of cultural perception and preferences as well as business language do play significant role in Kazakh business discourse, specifically in business meetings. The researches related to business meetings highlight cultural aspects to consider in business meetings, such as cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1991), cultural characteristics (Bond, Zegarac & Spencer-Oatey, 2000), cultural communications (Ahlstrom & Brutin, 2010), influence of a parent culture (Trosborg & Jorgensen, 2005), cultural differences (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003), cultural conflicts and specific business culture (Poncini, 2007). Furthermore, academic studies outline the aspect of business language, such as Language of Business Meetings (Handford, 2010) and context of language (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halbe, 2013). The literature review evidenced applicability of stated aspects when discussing Kazakh business discourse and business meeting in particular. In Kazakh business the meeting is used to minute decisions, which are made prior to the meeting. The research led to a drawing a parallel between Kazakh and Japanese perception of business meeting. However, following the influence of cultural transformational factors the perception of business meeting is changing in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, along with the significance of business language used at the meeting, especially when the elders are meeting participants, the implications of the language contexts, such as field, tenor and mode are given important role, which is intriguing for further investigation.

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