

Original scientific paper

Received: February 29, 2024.

Revised: March 24, 2024.

Accepted: April 08, 2024.

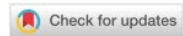
UDC:

371.3:81

81'27

81'42

 10.23947/2334-8496-2024-12-1-133-143



## Manipulative Potential of Humor in Business Media Discourse: Drawing up a “Starter Pack” for LSP Teaching

Elena N. Malyuga<sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>RUDN University, Faculty of Economics, Department of Foreign Languages, Moscow, Russia,  
e-mail: [malyuga\\_en@pfur.ru](mailto:malyuga_en@pfur.ru)

**Abstract:** The article investigates the manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse and its application in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) teaching. Recognizing humor as a tool for simplifying complex ideas and engaging a broad audience, the study aims to identify the functional-stylistic means through which humor is conveyed in business media, focusing on its capacity to influence audience perceptions and attitudes. Employing continuous sampling along with descriptive, comparative, and discursive methods, the research analyzes utterances from Russian- and English-language business media to explore humor’s various functions – such as persuasion, focus-setting, and entertainment – and how these can be harnessed to facilitate linguistic manipulation. The findings reveal that humor, through rhetorical devices like metaphors, idioms, understatement, allusion, sarcasm, and oxymoron, plays a key role in making business concepts accessible and engaging. A “starter pack” of tools is identified for LSP education, equipping students to recognize and utilize humor’s manipulative power in professional contexts. This toolkit aims to prepare future business communicators to craft and recognize humorous statements. Implications for LSP educators, students, and business communication professionals are significant, advocating for an integrated approach in curricula that balances the creative and manipulative implementation of humor. This prepares students for global business communication, emphasizing humor’s strategic importance in effective leadership.

**Keywords:** *humor, business media discourse, mass media, functions of humor, linguistic manipulation.*

### Introduction

Humor is a universal dimension of social life that can emerge in virtually any type of communicative contexts and discourses. As varied as it is, research on humor repeatedly brings up the question of its discursive application. Scholars argue in favor of examining authentic speech to understand the effectiveness of humor within linguistic frameworks: “By analyzing natural, unedited discourse one can identify the mechanics of humor directly associated with these linguistic models” (Thompson and Mulac, 1991, p. 314). Hence, one may hypothesize that by looking into a certain type of discourse to identify the nomenclature of most frequently used humor-inducing devices registered in this discourse, one might come up with a “starter pack” of language means to be taught in the classroom. Such a starter pack could be used by educators to develop students’ skills of detecting and producing humorous statements.

Humor is evidenced in a variety of communicative contexts, including business media discourse which can offer some of the most vivid illustrations of its use. For instance, incorporating humor into media reports on key topics can both broaden the audience base and boost information dissemination as it makes complex subjects more engaging and more easily comprehensible. A targeted approach, particularly when examining specific themes, can prove informative, as observed in the use of humor in business-related media coverage. However, it’s worth noting that the linguistic strategies underlying humor’s effectiveness have yet to be thoroughly explored.

This study investigates the business media discourse to ascertain the functional-stylistic means that are instrumental in transferring humorous implications and identify the manipulative potential of humor

\*Corresponding author: [malyuga\\_en@pfur.ru](mailto:malyuga_en@pfur.ru)



© 2024 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

that can be elicited from the corresponding material to be further used in LSP teaching. To examine humor as part of business media discourse, this study will investigate the functional potential of humor registered in business media discourse and analyze the means catering for humorous narration in business media discourse as a basis for their further integration in the classroom.

The study’s methodological framework centers on integrating all parties involved in communication, along with their social and cultural experiences, into a cohesive whole. This integration is achieved by identifying and leveraging what can be described as the interactive capital of the participants, which encompasses their qualities and relationships (Bateman, 2017, p. 37). This includes cognitive, operational, and intentional components of personal experience.

Researchers view humor as a multifaceted and abstract concept that is closely linked to some form of contradiction. From the functional perspective, it appears as a manifestation of the comic – mostly good-natured and light-hearted – which is aimed to identify various types of singularities and contradictions of languages and cultures and to evoke positive emotions in the recipient (Raskin, 2012; Martin and Ford, 2018).

To conduct the research on humor, it is crucial to study its functional aspects. Analyzing humor through the lens of functional linguistics can show its rightful place as part of business media discourse secured via a wide variety of functional-stylistic means. Functional-stylistic means refer to the linguistic tools and strategies used by speakers or writers to achieve a specific effect or purpose in communication. These include rhetorical devices like metaphors, idioms, and sarcasm, each chosen to fulfill functions such as persuasion, entertainment, or emphasis in discourse.

As a social construct, humor serves various roles in interpersonal interactions as it adapts to the context and the speaker’s communicative goals. These roles include establishing connection (phatic), informing (informative), entertaining, beautifying (aesthetic), controlling (regulating), protecting, concealing (disguising), convincing (persuasive), relieving tension, and asserting dominance (superiority assurance). The phatic function of language pertains to its use in establishing and maintaining social relationships rather than conveying information. In humor, the phatic function often involves creating a connection with the audience, ensuring engagement, and facilitating a conducive environment for the message (Agapova and Grischechko, 2016).

Awareness of discursive canons ensures identification of the information by the recipient, i.e., their orientation within the setting of a speech event. Apart from that, creating a message in accordance with the canons of this discourse, the speaker signals that they perceive this communicative situation as being relevant to a particular model and therefore position themselves as a performer of a certain speech role, signaling to the listener how they wish to be seen. Thus, the concept of business media discourse itself guides the interaction and emphasizes the importance of situating oneself within the framework of a speech event. In this case – orientation within the setting of a speech event (Malyuga, 2019).

Speech is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors, which necessitates the examination of its connection to the cognitive and emotional realms of the communicators (Grischechko, 2023b). Theories on speech acts point out the central role of speech’s primary intention in guiding the speech production process, specifying its structure through purposeful speech acts aimed at specific communicative objectives (Grischechko et al., 2015).

The concept of discursive motivation further exposes how frequently communicators use specific structures – a notion Budinčić and Zubkova (2003) described by noting the grammar’s reflection of recurrent speaker actions. Volkov (2023) introduced the economy principle to advocate the selection of brief and efficient expressions under comparable conditions.

Media texts distinguish themselves not merely as information carriers but as tools for influencing public opinion, often via contentious narratives (Norrick and Chiaro, 2009; Grischechko, 2023a; Grischechko, 2024). Therefore, crafting business media discourse requires a thoughtful consideration of communication’s key aspects to sway audience perception effectively. Notably, mass media targets a broad spectrum of viewers, from industry insiders to the general public. Thus, while business discourse is rich with specialized jargon, it remains accessible to the average listener as it purposefully uses specific terms (e.g., stocks, investments, manufacturing, infrastructure, financial matters) to convey complex ideas simply.

Humor in business media is essential in streamlining the dissemination of information and facilitating linguistic manipulation aimed at persuasion and behavioral influence. This manipulation, as extensively

discussed by Akopova (2013; 2016; 2023a; 2023b) and others, seeks to alter perceptions or actions through various communicative techniques, essentially guiding human behavior through both verbal and non-verbal means (Malyuga et al., 2016; Malyuga and McCarthy, 2021; Malyuga, 2023). Employing humor helps actualize three key manipulative principles: accessibility (making obscure information understandable and engaging), associativity (creating memorable associations for the audience), and expressiveness (showing enthusiasm, providing subjective evaluations, and inviting audience participation), thus ramping up the impact of business discourse (Sibul et al., 2019).

The research question under investigation is whether a detailed characterization of the nomenclature, functionality, and nature of humor in business media discourse can be instrumental in drawing up a set of functional-stylistic means to be taught in an LSP classroom as an introductory list of means catering for a manipulative humorous effect.

## Materials and Methods

This study uses continuous sampling, descriptive, comparative, and discursive methods. The latter encompass the approaches and analytical techniques employed to examine how language is used in various forms of discourse. In the context of this study, discursive methods were applied to analyze how humor functions within business media discourse, focusing on the interaction between language choice, communicative intent, and audience reception.

Study material mostly covers statements made by business representatives, which allowed us to not only identify the functional-stylistic means of creating the humorous effect, but also additionally examine the manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse and pinpoint its distinctive features.

The examples of humor in business media discourse were selected based on their illustrative potential to demonstrate the manipulative capabilities of humor in a business context. The selection aimed to encompass a wide range of humor types, including but not limited to metaphors, idioms, understatement, and sarcasm, to ensure a full-scale exploration of humor’s diverse functions. This balanced cross-section was chosen to reflect both the effectiveness and prevalence of humor in business media, thus providing a representative sample of the humor landscape in this discourse. The categorization process involved a systematic analysis of the functional-stylistic characteristics of each humorous utterance, focusing on its intended communicative function (e.g., persuasion, focus-setting, entertainment) and the rhetorical devices employed. This methodological approach catered for a sophisticated uptake on how humor operates within business media discourse, serving the dual purpose of engaging and manipulating audience perceptions.

The study of functional-stylistic means utilized to create humorous effect in business media discourse relies upon the analysis of 299 instances from interviews, conversations, live talks, and news discussions that intentionally employ humor. This humor serves multiple purposes: it amplifies persuasiveness by increasing the compelling nature of the speaker’s monologue, it focuses attention by engaging and maintaining the audience’s interest, and it entertains by blending specialized information with humorous elements or intriguing facts. These functions, as we will argue, collectively cater for the manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse.

## Results

Business media discourse is a complex subject for discussion, not in the least because getting a large audience interested is never an easy task as one will need to find ways to attract audience’s attention and adapt their narrative to make it more accessible and understandable. To simplify a text and “add some frills” to it speakers use metaphors associated with everyday reality but assuming new meanings in the business context.

A vivid illustration of this can be found in the way public figures often employ humor when referring to significant business initiatives or policies. For example, in this speech a business leader, addressing the need for business revitalization, quips: “*We’re planting the seeds for entrepreneurial growth, but unlike my garden at home, we’re expecting these to actually sprout jobs and opportunities*” (Brunner, 2023). Here,

humor is employed through a playful metaphor that contrasts the unpredictable nature of gardening with the intended certainty and productivity of business policies. This makes the message more relatable and memorable and manipulates the audience’s perception, making them more receptive to the underlying message of optimism and action. The manipulative potential of such humor lies in its dual capacity to entertain and persuade. As the speaker draws parallels between everyday experiences and complex business concepts, they not only demystify the subject matter but also engender a positive emotional response from the audience. This emotional engagement is crucial, as it can shift audience perceptions, making them more aligned with the speaker’s objectives.

In an interview, the CEO of AmplifyreHub stated: “*Someone ones joked I got “sick with digitalization”. Far from it! In fact, it is the global business economy that is pregnant with digitalization, and pregnancy is, as you are aware, a normal state and not a sickness*” (Amplifyre, 2021). In his remarks, the speaker uses two vivid image-metaphors, not merely for embellishment but to inject humor into the discourse. Initially, he responds as though the term “sick” were applied to him in its literal sense. He then compares the current wave of digitalization in the economy to “pregnancy,” discussing it as if it were a normal physiological condition. In his clever use of humor, the CEO of AmplifyreHub not only disarms the audience with laughter but also manipulates their perception towards digitalization. By framing digitalization as a “pregnancy” – a process that is natural, expected, and ultimately fruitful – he shifts the narrative from one of potential apprehension to anticipation and acceptance. Used this way, humor is gently guiding the audience’s understanding and attitudes towards embracing digital transformation. The humor here does more than entertain – it acts as a conduit for change, illustrating the profound impact well-crafted humor can have in swaying public opinion on significant business trends.

Apart from that, business media discourse can be saturated with colloquial and idiomatic expressions, which help get the information across in a more accessible way, since in the conscience of native speakers there are solid semantic links between events of reality and linguistic expressions recorded in the phraseological corpus of their language (Liu, 2017; Malyuga and Akopova, 2021).

A notable use of colloquial language in business discourse was observed during a tech startup’s pitch, where the CEO humorously remarked, “*We’re not just another tech company spinning its wheels. We’re the grease in the wheels of the industry’s progress*” (O’Neill, 2017). This colloquial expression, “spinning its wheels”, commonly denotes futile effort or lack of progress, which the speaker contrasts with the idea of being the “grease” that facilitates movement. Employing this casual language, the speaker renders the concept of industry innovation more tangible and relatable and manipulates the audience’s perception to view their company as a key player in technological advancement. The humor here lies in the unexpected shift from a negative to a positive image, which engages the audience’s attention and predisposes them favorably towards the company’s value proposition.

In addressing climate policy, the use of idiomatic expressions can significantly influence public and stakeholder perceptions, making complex and multifaceted issues more relatable. An illustrative case in point is the discussion on strategic diversity in response to climate change, encapsulated in the recommendation, “*When it comes to climate policy, don’t put all your eggs in one basket*” (Visser, 2021). This idiomatic expression conveys the principle of not relying solely on one strategy or solution, but rather spreading efforts across a broad spectrum to mitigate risk and maximize resilience. The humor embedded in this idiom demystifies the challenges of climate policy and emphasizes the need for flexibility and the capacity to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. The statement draws on the simple and familiar concept of risk management depicted through the metaphor of diversifying one’s investments – or, in this case, strategies – and guides the audience through the uncertainty inherent in climate change projections and solutions. This strategic use of idiomatic humor engages the audience and manipulates their understanding and acceptance of a pragmatic approach to climate policy. It emphasizes the importance of preparing for a range of possible futures, thereby facilitating a broader acceptance of adaptive and multifaceted strategies in the face of climate uncertainty.

Both examples illustrate the manipulative potential of humor in business discourse through colloquial and idiomatic expressions. By making complex ideas more accessible and engaging, speakers can shift audience attitudes and perceptions, leveraging humor not just for entertainment but as a strategic tool in shaping and guiding public opinion. This emphasizes the importance of humor’s role in business communication and reveals its capacity to alter viewpoints and foster a positive reception of business policies, strategies, and innovations.

Humor can convey specific information in business media discourse, achieved through a range of functional-stylistic techniques. A particularly effective method is the use of paradox, where a statement is infused with a meaning that contradicts conventional wisdom or even defies logic. For instance, during the “Big Game” business talk show, the VTB Bank President and Chairman of the Board Andrey Kostin described the stock market situation during the pandemic using a notorious phrase coined by Viktor Chernomyrdin: *“Never has this happened before, and now it has happened again”* (Channel One, 2020). Obviously, the situation which has never taken place before may not repeat, therefore the combination of the lexemes “never” and “again” qualifies as humorous narrative. In this context, the phatic function of humor is fulfilled, as the speaker quotes the Soviet and Russian statesman at the very beginning of the show, thus winning the audience over. Importantly, the mechanism of engagement here varies with the viewer’s age. For individuals aged 16-45, the humor and engagement are primarily driven by the absurdity and illogical nature of the statement, relying on a linguistic foundation for its effect. For those over 45, a psychological dimension also plays a significant role. For instance, those who were adults during Viktor Chernomyrdin’s political emergence might remember his speeches, making them more inclined to engage with and recall the information presented due to a personal connection to the context, alongside the humor.

Understatement is another technique employed for humor, where the speaker deliberately minimizes the significance of an existing, often problematic, situation or pretends to underestimate it. Despite understanding the severity or significance of the matter, the speaker chooses a remarkably understated or neutral description. For instance, Indian economist Raghuram Rajan humorously comments on the scale of the U.S. response to the coronavirus-induced lockdown, saying: “The US has issued three trillion dollars’ worth of debt this year, and you know, a trillion here, a trillion there becomes real money very-very quickly” (BBC HARDtalk, 2020). Given that a trillion dollars represents a vast sum, Rajan’s remark on it quickly becoming “real money” is bound to elicit smiles for its understated implication of enormity. This method of understatement adds humor and serves a persuasive function, especially effective in cultures like the British, where reserved communication is appreciated and familiar. Through this delivery, humor builds a connection with the audience and reinforces the impact and reception of the message. In this context the infotainment function of humor is fulfilled, i.e., a business representative shares real statistical data in a simple language, while accompanying it with a humorous insertion, which, inter alia, allows the viewer to react to the information about the problem less sensitively, which means that humor in this statement performs an additional function of tension relief.

In corporate strategy discussions, experts frequently employ allusion as a rhetorical device to convey complex ideas with a touch of wit. A noteworthy instance of this technique was observed in a keynote address by a business strategist at an international business conference. The speaker remarked, *“As the ancient fable goes, the nimble fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. In our industry’s race, we’re choosing to be the hedgehog, focusing on our one big idea”* (Chute, 2022). Here, the speaker alludes to the famous parable attributed to the Greek poet Archilochus, leveraging it to draw a parallel between the strategic approaches of diversification (the fox) versus specialization (the hedgehog). This allusion enriches the narrative with depth and engages the audience on a more intellectual level, encouraging them to decipher the underlying message. The humor emerges from the juxtaposition of the animal kingdom with corporate strategy and invites the audience to reflect on the wisdom of adopting a singular focus in a competitive landscape. Such an approach lightens the tone of the discussion and manipulates the audience’s perception by endorsing the merits of specialization with a memorable analogy. The use of allusion in this context serves multiple functions: it entertains, provokes thought, and reinforces the speaker’s viewpoint, all while demonstrating an adeptness at weaving cultural literacy into business discourse. This example testifies to the effectiveness of allusion in business communication and reiterates its role in persuading and engaging stakeholders through the interplay of humor and wisdom.

Sarcasm is another popular stylistic device. Sarcastic utterances normally contain criticism, disapproval, condemnation of the situation, while coming off as positive judgments. For example, the CEO of EcoTech Innovations addressed questions about the company’s recent downturn in profits with a sarcastic remark: *“Well, in a shocking turn of events, it turns out that investing in sustainable technology isn’t just about planting trees and hoping for the best. Who would have thought?”* (Sathwara, 2023). This sarcastic comment serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it humorously acknowledges the challenges involved in the green technology sector, contrasting the naive optimism often associated with environmental initiatives

with the harsh realities of business. The sarcasm here plays a strategic role, simultaneously deflecting criticism and emphasizing the company’s commitment to long-term environmental goals over short-term profits. The use of sarcasm in this context lightens the tone of the discussion and manipulates audience perception by framing the company’s financial setbacks as an expected part of its journey in sustainable technology. This approach reassures investors and stakeholders of the company’s resilience and forward-thinking strategy, persuading them to maintain their support. Moreover, the sarcastic remark highlights the speaker’s wit and confidence, which enhances their credibility and appeal. By employing sarcasm to address potentially negative news, the executive cleverly shifts the narrative from disappointment to determination, thus showcasing the power of well-crafted humor to influence and reshape public opinion even in the face of adversity. The sarcastic humor in many cases, including this statement, performs the regulating function (the audience, while being aware of the gravity of the problem, still do not react to it as acutely and calm down after a chuckle) (Malyuga and Grishechko, 2021).

Oxymoron is another common technique and instrument behind humorous narratives. It involves placing seemingly non-contradictory words next to each other in a way that their combination brings to the surface a secondary, unexpected meaning in one of the elements: “*We’re navigating through a thriving recession this year, a rare blend of downturn and opportunity*” (RTVI News, 2020). This oxymoron – “thriving recession” – juxtaposes the grim reality of economic decline with the notion of growth or prosperity, sparking both humor and reflection. By labeling the downturn as a paradoxical state of flourishing, the speaker softens the blow of the harsh economic forecast and manipulates the audience’s perception, suggesting that within the apparent setback lies hidden potential for innovative adaptation and resilience. This humorous twist engages the audience with its witty incongruity and encourages a more optimistic and proactive outlook on economic challenges, which showcases humor’s ability to transform perception and inspire a more dynamic engagement with the realities of economic fluctuations.

Table 1 below extrapolates the proportion of each humor device from the total of 299 instances.

**Table 1.** Distribution and impact of key humorous devices in business media discourse

Humor device	Number of instances in the sample	Percentage (%)	Key functions in business media discourse
Metaphor	70	23.4	Simplification, Engagement
Idiom	60	20.1	Accessibility, Relatability
Understatement	40	13.4	Tension Relief, Persuasion
Allusion	50	16.7	Engagement, Cultural Connectivity
Sarcasm	45	15.1	Infotainment
Oxymoron	34	11.4	Contradictory humor, Infotainment

The table delineates the distribution and functional impact of various humorous devices across a sample of 299 instances from business media discourse, illustrating the prevalence and strategic utilization of each device. Metaphors and idioms are the most employed techniques, which points out their effectiveness in simplifying complex ideas and boosting relatability to a broad audience. Understatement, allusion, sarcasm, and oxymoron also play significant roles, each contributing uniquely to the discourse by easing tension, ramping up engagement, and prompting reflection through contradictory humor. Humor constructed based on the above rhetorical devices can help enrich the discourse and engage viewers, which testifies to humor’s integral role in effective communication. In the context of popular business media discourse, the entertaining function of humor is somewhat superimposed on the informative one, which leads to humor performing the infotainment function, which is connected to the narrow focus of business media discourse and orientation towards familiarizing a wide audience with special information.

## Discussion

The study reveals that business media discourse distinguishes itself through its simplicity and accessibility as it caters to both experts and laypersons alike. This approachability is achieved through the thoughtful selection of specific yet commonly understood terms, alongside the use of metaphors,

colloquial language, and idiomatic expressions.

Humor in business media fulfills several key functions, aligned with the speaker’s communicative goals, including establishing rapport (phatic), guiding behavior (regulating), and easing tension. The entertaining function of humor in business media discourse experiences the influence of the informative function of mass media, resulting in a new function of humor – infotainment. Humorous elements in discussions about business not only entertain but also sharpen focus, thus paving the way for the seamless absorption of subsequent information.

Such means as sarcasm, allusion, and understatement were found to be exceptionally frequent in business media discourse. Business figures craft their speech to resonate broadly and generally prioritize the establishment of rapport (phatic function) as a primary goal. This effort is marked by the use of humor, which is explicit, rich in emotiveness, abundant in vivid image-metaphors, and replete with colloquial and suggestive language. Furthermore, humor serves as a vehicle for these speakers to offer their personal viewpoints on current events, masked within the guise of jest. Their discourse is aimed at addressing pertinent issues and seeks to sustain a delicate balance: while it seeks to engage on a professional level, it eschews complex image-metaphors in favor of straightforward, “dead” metaphors, employing subtle humor to psychologically prime the audience. This ensures that the information is accessible and predisposes the audience towards a particular understanding or perception of the discussed topics.

The analysis of humor in business media discourse points to its evident manipulative capabilities. The study’s findings reveal that effective leveraging of humor garners audience engagement and influences their perceptions and attitudes towards business issues discussed. This manipulative potential is primarily harnessed through the strategic employment of humor to simplify complex concepts, making them more accessible and palatable for the general audience. By integrating humor, speakers not only boost the appeal of their message but also guide the audience’s focus, directing their understanding and interpretation of the information presented. This capacity of humor to engage and manipulate is especially crucial in the context of business media discourse, where the inherent complexity and dryness of the subject matter can easily alienate or overwhelm the audience.

The obtained results should be integrated as a “starter pack” in teaching humor in an LSP classroom. Below we discuss some of the most fitting methodologies that can be used to introduce LSP students to the functional-stylistic means creating humorous effect in business media discourse.

*The communicative approach.* The communicative approach addresses a fundamental challenge faced by all learners of foreign languages: “I understand, but I can’t verbalize it”. Considering that the communicative approach is originally based on the conversational practice of the target language, it is very effective in overcoming the language barrier. In this case, introducing the “starter pack” in the LSP classroom will operate on several key principles: (1) achieving fluent and competent speech as a natural result of ongoing practice, providing intuitive language development; (2) making sure that students actively use the target language from the very first class; (3) application of authentic materials in the classroom, like the ones discussed above. The communicative approach will help students get rid of the habit of literally translating their thoughts from their native language into the target language (Farea & Singh, 2024). Using the communicative approach, students will practice the rules through repeated practical application, which will allow them to form an understanding of the communicative features of using lexical and stylistic means creating humorous effect in business media discourse.

*The audiolingual approach.* This approach is about developing the ability to comprehend foreign languages by listening. Its distinctive feature is that it uses analogies for memorizing new vocabulary (Pérez-Cabello and Quinn, 2024). Specifically, students learn language patterns and words often used in business media to create humor, which helps them to independently form sentences and engage in conversations. This method incorporates the memorization of various dialogues, starting with essential grammatical and lexical structures built around a core vocabulary. Over time, this vocabulary expands with new words. Notably, only a quarter of instructional time is dedicated to theoretical learning, with the remainder devoted to hands-on practice. Renowned globally and implemented in academic institutions from Oxford to language schools worldwide, the method has formed the basis of many original methodologies, including author-developed methodologies of Charles Freese, Robert Lado (USA), Piere Rivin (France), Petar Guberin (Yugoslavia), and others (Dermendzhieva and Tsankov, 2022). Suitable for both novice and advanced learners, particularly those under tight time constraints, it offers flexibility for both group and individual settings.

*Learning through play.* The game-based approach allows to get wants and needs meet, while ensuring an easy and natural learning process. Utilizing games as educational breaks can help shift students' focus from one activity to another. The educational value of this approach is also that it serves a critical didactic function and enables students to discover new information, broaden their knowledge base, and practice English communication in a playful context. Games are versatile and can enrich various aspects of language learning – from phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary to reading comprehension and listening skills – at any lesson phase (Al Fajri and Oktavianti, 2024).

The choice of a fitting approach is a rather individual matter. However, some of the fundamental criteria to be taken into account in an LSP classroom are students' level of proficiency, study hours, and priorities of the study program.

Building on the methodological applications for teaching humor in an LSP classroom, it is essential to directly address the manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse. The study's observations on how humor can be used to influence audience perceptions and decisions point to the need for LSP students to not only understand humor's linguistic aspects but also its strategic applications in professional contexts. Incorporating modules that dissect humor's role in shaping business narratives and public opinion would enable students to critically analyze the intent behind humorous expressions in business media discourse. This could involve case studies of successful marketing campaigns or public speeches where humor was a key element in swaying public opinion or reinforcing a brand's message. By critically engaging with these examples, students can develop a better understanding of humor's power as a communicative strategy.

Additionally, training LSP students to create humor that carries a manipulative potential requires a delicate balance between creativity and ethical consideration. Educators should emphasize the ethical implications of using humor to manipulate audience perceptions, especially in sensitive business contexts. Workshops or projects that task students with developing humorous content for business communication should be critiqued not just for their linguistic and stylistic accuracy but also for their ethical implications. This would prepare students to use humor responsibly, ensuring that their efforts to engage and persuade do not mislead or harm the audience. Embedding discussions on the ethics of humor in business discourse within the curriculum would cultivate a generation of communicators who are not only effective but also conscientious in their use of humor.

To further connect the classroom discussion to the real-world manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse, incorporating experiential learning through internships or collaboration with industry professionals could be invaluable. This hands-on experience allows students to observe and participate in the creation of humorous content within a business context. Guest lectures from business communication experts who have successfully leveraged humor in their campaigns could offer students practical examples of humor's manipulative power in action.

Hence, the findings point to the importance of integrating humor into LSP curricula, not only as a linguistic tool but also as a long-term business communication technique. Educators could use the identified “starter pack” of humor to develop lesson plans that boost students' ability to craft and analyze humorous content within business contexts. For instance, lesson plans might incorporate case studies analyzing successful humor-driven campaigns in business media, practical exercises focused on creating business pitches, and in-depth evaluations of how humor improves the retention of messages. Incorporating these elements into LSP teaching would prepare students to use humor effectively in professional settings and appreciate its strategic value in leadership and global business communication.

While this study offers important observations regarding the manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse, it acknowledges its limitation in scope to Russian and English-language media. The cultural specificity of humor suggests that findings may not be universally applicable across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Further research could investigate the role of humor in business media discourse in other languages and cultural settings to offer a more global perspective on humor's manipulative power. Additionally, considering the impact of humor on specific audience demographics within the business community could yield more tailored recommendations for LSP teaching.



## Conclusion

The study explored the manipulative potential of humor in business media discourse, with a particular focus on its application in language for specific purposes (LSP) teaching. Adopting a functional approach, the study examined the interconnection between humor and linguistic manipulation across Russian and English-language business media, specifying the distinct stylistic mechanisms catering for humor’s persuasive, focus-setting, and entertaining functions. The investigation exposed the critical role of humor in simplifying and rendering complex business concepts accessible to a broader audience, thereby enhancing engagement, and influencing audience perceptions and attitudes. By examining 299 utterances from business media, the study demonstrated the varied applications of humor, fulfilling its goal of outlining effective strategies for LSP students to recognize and apply humor’s manipulative power.

Key findings from the analysis emphasize the critical role of humor in business media discourse and demonstrate its capacity to bridge linguistic and cultural divides and to tailor business narratives in a manner that resonates with diverse audiences. Through the examination of 299 utterances from a variety of business media sources, the study has identified a “starter pack” of tools essential for developing LSP students’ abilities to recognize and wield humor’s manipulative power effectively. This toolkit equips students with the skills to discern the manipulative intent behind humorous statements and empowers them to craft their own humor in a professional context, mindful of its potential to persuade and influence.

Study findings will benefit LSP educators, students and professionals in the fields of business communication, marketing, and public relations. By integrating the identified humorous linguistic strategies into LSP curricula, educators can offer students a solid framework for understanding and leveraging humor in business discourse. This preparation is crucial for navigating global business communication, where the strategic use of humor can distinguish effective communicators and leaders.

Moreover, this study advocates for a conscientious approach to teaching the manipulative potential of humor, emphasizing the ethical considerations inherent in its use. As we prepare the next generation of business communicators, instilling an awareness of the power of humor to shape opinions and behaviors is paramount. It is essential to facilitate a critical understanding of humor’s dual capacity to enlighten and manipulate. This way, educators can equip students with a powerful communicative tool, as well as the discernment to use it wisely and ethically in the global marketplace.

## Acknowledgements

The reported study was funded by Russian Science Foundation, project number 23-28-00505 “Manipulative rhetoric in modern English business media discourse: the functional pragmatic analysis”.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### Author Contributions

Elena N. Malyuga: conceptualization; methodology; formal analysis; writing—original draft preparation; writing—review and editing. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## References

- Agapova, E. A., & Grishechko, E. G. (2016). Censorship as a factor of information warfare. *Russian Linguistic Bulletin*, 3(7), 43-44. <https://doi.org/10.18454/rulb.7.06>
- Akopova, A. (2013). Linguistic manipulation: Definition and types. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education (IJCRSEE)*, 1(2), 78-82. <https://ijcrsee.com/index.php/ijcrsee/article/view/13>
- Akopova, A. S. (2016). Manipulation as a component of efficient communication. *Humanitarian and Social Sciences*, 6, 33-39. <https://doi.org/10.18522/2070-1403-2016-59-6-21-25>

- Akopova, A. S. (2023a). English for Specific Purposes: Tailoring English language instruction for history majors. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(3), 31-40. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-3-31-40>
- Akopova, A. S. (2023b). Euphemism construction in English: thematic classification and statistical analysis. *Issues of Applied Linguistics*, 50, 28-51. <https://doi.org/10.25076/vpl.50.02>
- Al Fajri, M. S., & Oktavianti, I. N. (2024). Stance expressions in applied linguistics research articles: A corpus-based contrastive study. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), 54-65. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-54-65>
- Amplifyre. (2021, October 1). Interview on getting started with business digitalization. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@amplifyre/amplifyre-askthehub-interview-on-getting-started-with-business-digitalization-3125d34f5fa2>
- Bateman, J. A. (2017). The place of systemic functional linguistics as a linguistic theory in the twenty-first century. In T. Bartlett & G. O'Grady (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of systemic functional linguistics* (pp. 35-50). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315413891>
- BBC HARDtalk. (2020, May 30). *Coronavirus: Raghuram Rajan, economist, on the economic impact of Covid-19* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtube.com/watch?v=8Z3zdjKF7mo>
- Brunner, K. (2023, July 30). Sowing the entrepreneurial seeds. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/the-side-hustle-club/sowing-the-entrepreneurial-seeds-d100f517d419>
- Budinčić, V., & Zubkova, O. S. (2023). Linguistic landscape as a powerful teaching resource in English for Specific Purposes. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(4), 24-32. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-4-24-32>
- Channel One. (2020, March 14). *Coronavirus of the world economy. Big game* [Video]. RuTube. <https://rutube.ru/video/16bf2dec2b7c2eabe44948b650bbed1>
- Chute, R. (2022, November 4). The Hedgehog concept: From good to great companies. *Wizard of Sales*. <https://sellingrevolution.com/blog/the-hedgehog-concept-from-good-to-great-companies>
- Dermendzhieva, S. H., & Tsankov, N. (2022). Transgressive core of multi-modal education. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education (IJCRSEE)*, 10(3), 167-175. <https://doi.org/10.23947/2334-8496-2022-10-3-167-175>
- Farea, W. A., & Singh, M. K. M. (2024). A target English needs analysis on ESP course: Exploring medical students' perceptions of necessities at a Yemeni university. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), 20-37. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-20-37>
- Grishechko, E. G. (2023a). Emojis as nonverbal cues in online communication: Perspectives on conflict resolution and misunderstanding prevention. In *Proceedings of 10th SWS International Scientific Conference on Arts and Humanities – ISCAH 2023. SGEM WORLD SCIENCE (SWS) Scholarly Society*. <https://doi.org/10.35603/sws.iscah.2023/s11.12>
- Grishechko, E. G. (2023b). Language and cognition behind simile construction: A Python-powered corpus research. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(2), 80-92. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442x-2023-7-2-80-92>
- Grishechko, E. G. (2024). The linguistic landscape of “controversial”: Sentiment and theme distribution insights. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 24(1), 79-97. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2024-2401-05>
- Grishechko, O. S., Akopova, A. S., & Grishechko, E. G. (2015). English linguistic purism: History, development, criticism. *Proceedings of Southern Federal University. Philology*, 4, 185-192. <https://doi.org/10.18522/1995-0640-2015-4-185-192>
- Irfani, B., & O'Boyle, A. (2024). Teacher practices and student preferences of oral corrective feedback in Indonesian EFL classrooms: A Vygotskian perspective. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), 101-114. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-101-114>
- Liu, D. (2017). *Idioms: Description, comprehension, acquisition, and pedagogy*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315092843>
- Malyuga, E. N. (2019). *Functional approach to professional discourse exploration in linguistics*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9103-4>
- Malyuga, E. N. (2023). A corpus-based approach to corporate communication research. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 27(1), 152-172. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-33561>
- Malyuga, E. N., & Akopova, A. S. (2021). Precedence-setting tokens: Issues of classification and functional attribution. *Training, Language and Culture*, 5(4), 65-76. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-4-65-76>
- Malyuga, E. N., & Grishechko, E. G. (2021). How to build the foundation for a successful research journal: Training, Language and Culture best practices. *Science Editor and Publisher*, 6(1), 48-58. <https://doi.org/10.24069/2542-0267-2021-1-48-58>
- Malyuga, E. N., & McCarthy, M. (2020). Non-minimal response tokens in English and Russian professional discourse: A comparative study. *Voprosy Jazykoznanija*, 4, 70-86. <https://doi.org/10.31857/0373-658X.2020.4.70-86>
- Malyuga, E. N., & McCarthy, M. (2021). “No” and “net” as response tokens in English and Russian business discourse: In search of a functional equivalence. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(2), 391-416. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-2-391-416>
- Malyuga, E. N., Shvets, A., & Tikhomirov, I. (2016, July 13-15). Computer-based analysis of business communication language. In *Proceedings of 2016 SAI Computing Conference, SAI 2016* (pp. 229-232). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/>

SAI.2016.7555987

- Martin, R. A., & Ford, T. (2018). *The psychology of humor: An integrative approach*. Academic press. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.45-2902>
- Norrick, N. R., & Chiaro, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Humor in interaction* (Vol. 182). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.182>
- O'Neill, S. (2017, July 19). iCars denies that it is spinning its wheels in corporate ground transport. *Skift*. <https://skift.com/2017/07/19/icars-denies-that-it-is-spinning-its-wheels-in-corporate-ground-transport>
- Pérez-Cabello, A. M., & Quinn, M. T. (2024). Spanish as a resource in the acquisition of English as a second language. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), 38-53. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-38-53>
- Raskin, V. (2012). *Semantic mechanisms of humor* (Vol. 24). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-6472-3>
- RTVI News. (2020). *Sergei Aleksashenko: The economic decline by 5% this year is an optimistic scenario* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtube.com/watch?v=XOQpqkdcF0Y>
- Sathwara, N. (2023, October 19). Unlocking the potential: Investing in environmental sustainability for a greener future. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@threadbenderart/unlocking-the-potential-investing-in-environmental-sustainability-for-a-greener-future-e2ae1540982b>
- Sibul, V. V., Vetrinskaya, V. V., & Grishechko, E. G. (2019). Study of precedent text pragmatic function in modern economic discourse. In E. N. Malyuga (Ed.), *Functional approach to professional discourse exploration in linguistics* (pp. 131 - 163). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9103-4\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9103-4_5)
- Thompson, S. A., & Mulac, A. (1991). A quantitative perspective on the grammaticization of epistemic parentheticals in English. In E. C. Traugott & B. Heine (Eds.), *Approaches to grammaticalization* (pp. 313-329). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.19.2.16tho>
- Visser, M. (2021, June 9). When it comes to climate policy, don't put all your eggs in one basket. *Innovation Origins*. <https://innovationorigins.com/en/when-it-comes-to-climate-policy-dont-put-all-your-eggs-in-one-basket>
- Volkov, S. A. (2023). Applying the cognitive congruence principle to target language training. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(4), 54-67. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-4-54-67>