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COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES: LANGUAGE ASYMMETRIES IN
PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The acquisition of language allows us to communicate among the members of our community. However, the act of communicating may be influenced by the context that surrounds the users of a language. The language required in a professional context is highly technical and specific, in contrast of the generality that marks the language we use in our ordinary daily life. The following research aims at observing the behavior of everyday language in an environment in which the requirement is a technical or high specific language. Thus, it is analyzed the linguistic behavior of individuals who have not access to a technical body language and consequently, how the ordinary language is reformulated to fill the gaps created by the necessity of a specific language.

La adquisición del lenguaje permite al ser humano comunicarse entre los miembros de la comunidad a la que pertenece. Sin embargo, el acto de comunicación puede estar influenciado por el contexto que rodea a los usuarios del lenguaje. El lenguaje que se requiere, por ejemplo, en contextos profesionales es altamente técnico y específico, a diferencia de la generalidad que caracteriza al lenguaje que usamos en el día a día. El siguiente estudio pretende observar el comportamiento del lenguaje ordinario en ambientes en los que se requiere un alto lenguaje técnico. Así, es estudiado el comportamiento lingüístico de sujetos que no tienen acceso a un lenguaje específico y consecuentemente, de qué manera el lenguaje ordinario se reformula para cubrir los espacios vacíos creados por la necesidad de un lenguaje técnico.

Key Words: linguistics, communicative strategies, language asymmetries, lexical competence.

Key Words: lingüística, estrategias comunicativas, asimetrías lenguaje, competencia léxica.

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Preface

Although a lot of research can be found that is applied to the cognitive functions of language or teaching a second language, there is not so much research to be found concerning communicative strategies applied to social contexts with specific purposes as hardware shops.

In order to transmit information in technical contexts, the individual must have access to a concrete body of language to utter the specific knowledge that is required in this area.

While I was studying English Studies at University of Valladolid, I worked in a hardware shop that was my family business. This type of business is known and characterized because of the wide range of material and items available, which lead us to manage a wide variability of technical terminology and specific lexis.

I could realize not only our difficulty as experts to transfer this technical language to customers but what is more important, the lexical insufficiency with which the customers deal when trying to explain their needs or the item they wanted to buy. There is a remarkable difference in managing vocabulary between the expert and client because the lexical corpus of the latter diminishes when it is applied to this type of language.

My degree provided me the linguistic knowledge that nourished my interest in studying the limits in dialogue that the customers handle when applying language to a specific context and the communicative strategies that they develop trying to sort out this situations. The ways in which ordinary language tries to be re-expressed and re- encoded has always caught my attention.

Morphology and syntax are the parts of linguistics that constitute the main support of language and are acquired naturally and gradually while growing. Individuals are provided since childhood with a corpus of rules and elements that will transfer them the ability to produce and communicate properly. However, lexis constitutes the part of language that never stops growing. Daily situations confer new terms and vocabulary to the lexical body of a language.

Although human being communicatively shares the same basis (morphosyntax) each individual experiences an unbalanced development of the lexical corpus. This inequality will constitute a key point when applied to specific contexts such as hardware shops, where due to a lack on technical terminology, the individual must expand his communicative abilities to neutralize the absence of lexicology and achieve his objectives.

This research tries to demonstrate not only the specific disorders but the different communicative approaches the individual deals with depending on the context. Human being is influenced by many contexts and situations in daily life that are a reflection on language and how we use it to receive and infer information.

The main aim of this research is then to focalize, observe and analyze the consequence of contrasting the use of technical and ordinary language in one specific situation and dialogue such as professional environments in order to:

- Demonstrate an almost inexistent linguistic technical competence of individuals in specific environments.
- Observe irregularities in language as a result of a technical insufficiency in language and the root of its appearance.
- Analyze communicative strategies used to diminish or reduce the previous asymmetries in order to go into detail on colloquial language when a technical is needed.

This analysis works on lexical competence and how it modifies or modulates our common language skills through the asymmetries or inequalities found in order to conclude with the techniques we use to alleviate or mitigate the unbalanced access to specific knowledge that each individual possesses.

The methodology used for this research was the analysis of customers in Ferretería El Arco (Valladolid – Spain) and the patterns of strategies drawn from my four years of experience as a hardware expert. The professional environment was analyzed through several recordings (Attachment I) of customers. These recordings will confer the analysis from a tested an empiric proof of the hypothesis established.

1. CONSTRAINTS IN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

1.1 INDIVIDUAL ROLE IN LANGUAGE

Language needs to be observed as a faculty of the human being that not only distinguishes us from the animal species but it is our main tool to interact and communicate with the rest of the society in which we live. Thus, language is a fundamental capacity of human being and as a consequence, the individuals play a major role in the development and use of language (Romaine, 2000).

Linguists such as Saussure defined language as a system of signs which organizes the world, defines and portray reality to us. We establish relations and connections with the rest of the society in which we live genuinely and without being aware most of the time of how and when we do it. It is possible to acquire this notion just by examining and looking at the roots of the definition of language. Language evidences the importance of at least, two individuals in order for communication to be fulfilled. In that manner, there is a need to bear in mind that language needs society to use it as vehicle to accomplish its main goal which is the exchange of communication.

Language is a main tool for the individual and at the same time the individual plays a major role in language. In order to support this argument, Holtgraves (2002) proposes the idea of language being an activity performed by individuals in society. Sociolinguistics gave an innovative insight in linguistics by maintaining and highlighting the importance of society and context in linguistics, and how the human being influences language use, finding evidences on history, culture or environment in which we develop.

1.2 LANGUAGE: INDIVIDUAL AND THE MIND

This section tries to give an insight of the nature of language and the importance of communication among individuals. It is important to bear in mind the conception of language as being the fundamental form of communication and the relationship between language and thought (Chomsky, 1993). The fact of the mind being essential to transport

our concerns through language involves the human being; the individual is placed as playing an elemental role in communication.

At first sight the connection between language and mind seems to be clear and logical. However, the interrelations established between what we think, our emotions and desires and the actual representation of language are complex and subtle.

Jespersen (1935) highlighted the role of the producer due to the vital connection between speaker and listener in order to understand the origin of language. This author also established the basis for language as being the primary tool for communication which resides on the fundamental role of the human action. It is the human being who plays a major role trying to succeed in the game of understanding both the speaker and the listener.

Being stated our position, the individual as inhabitant of the world is affected and receive the impact of the different and heterogeneous elements that compose our world and our reality. The space, situation and social variables in which we develop our linguistic skills are diverse, so that after having acquired our language we modify its use according to the environment.

These situations we face affect not only the way in which we behave as society, but also influence our language. Language as a tool for communication is reformulated depending on the membership or community to which is directed. There is a difference between the thoughts in our mind and the processes through which this thought goes through before producing the utterance (Slobin, 1996). In that sense it can be derived that these utterances that the individual elaborates will vary in its style depending on the objective and situation in which they are produced. Thus, as Slobin (1996) states, our thought is constrained by our reality.

1.3 TECHNICAL VS. ORDINARY LANGUAGE

The Oxford English Dictionary (1995) defines the term linguistics as ‘the scientific study of language or of particular languages’. From this definition of linguistics it can be derived that linguistics recalls on the study of language. Thus, linguistics analyses not only the structure but also the development of language and therefore, its functions.

According to the structural organization of language it is logical to think that it is constituted by different fields or areas of study. Linguistics observes diverse areas of language organized in fields or levels. The lexicon of a language is one of the branches which provide us from the units needed to build a specific language. Those units are the words and the different forms and derivations in which these can appear, the vocabulary by which a language is constituted.

The lexicon and the grammar, which establish the rules to connect and combine those units of the lexicon in order to form sentences, are considered as the main two elements to create and develop a language (M. Kaplan and Bresnan, 1995). Authors such as Dixon and Marchman (2007) focus on the importance of grammar and lexicon developing from different systems or mechanisms, however subtle and deeply interconnected. As it has been established, lexicon and grammar are correlated, that is, words that form lexicon are tied through grammar. However, Bates and Goodman (1999) recall on a crucial difference to establish a separation between them.

The procedures used to induct and build lexicon in children's brain are different from the establishment of grammar, since as Bates and Goodman (1999) maintain, 'core grammar is universal, functionally opaque and infinitely generative'. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that unlike lexicon, the basis of grammar is shared universally and it is formed by a set of rules pre-established in order to combine the words within a language. The lexicon of a language is wide and is continually changing; there is no 'pre-established' lexicon within a language. Society and the use we made of language originate not only new words but a change in the ones that already exist. Due to the evolutionary nature of language it cannot be observed as a list of organized words that can be found within the different languages present in our world.

Therefore, words are a key element of communication since they constitute the vehicle to express ourselves and our emotions through language. The ordinary language we use nowadays allows us to express our feelings since it is constituted by a wide variety of terms in connection with our mind and mental processes (Iñesta, 2010). Through ordinary language we are able to verbalize our thoughts with different senses and meanings depending on the situation we face.

Those daily life situations we encounter imply that sometimes the individual is exposed to an environment where a scientific-technical language is required. This type of language is considered among the languages of specialization or *lenguajes de especialidad* (Zorraquino, 1997). This author also states that, although the latter is based and develops from the ordinary language, its high specificity establishes important distinctive marks between them.

The author also characterizes the technical language considering its restrictions on the amount of individual's ability to use this language and the specificity on the circumstances in which it is used. Therefore, the particular membership and environments in which this language is developed lead to the concrete science-technical lexicon of this type of language.

The technical terms that constitute the lexicon of the language in which this research focuses form a unidirectional connection between sign and signifier (Rodríguez – Díez, 1981). That is, concerning the terminology of the technical language there is no space for ambiguities or different senses according to the high specialization of this type of language.

In professional contexts, the technical language replaces the ordinary language. Both languages share linguistic structures concerning phonology, syntax, morphology and both of them follow the same graphemes. However, the pragmatic and functional aspects of the technical and ordinary language are different (Zorraquino, 1997).

Saeed (1997) highlights the importance of pragmatics, or the role of context within a language, when dealing with sentences and speech. Due to the environment in which words develop we are able to interpret the meaning of sentences in a specific situation. According to this author, context can also be understood as background knowledge of users, the non-linguistic knowledge that an individual possesses which allow them to interpret words out of grammar, syntax or phonology.

Background knowledge refers to the notion we have about the world or environment. It is this assumption of the world around us which at some point makes us able to recognize words and its senses without having a perceptible or empirical context surrounding us.

Saeed (1997) therefore explains:

[..] this suggests that words and sentences have a meaning independently of any particular use, which meaning is then incorporated by a speaker into the particular meaning she wants to convey at any one time. In this view semantics is concerned with sentence meaning and pragmatics with speaker meaning

Saeed (1997)

Meaning must be considered as the nucleus between semantics and pragmatics; however, it is the relation with the users that establishes a distance between them. Semantics refer to the unidirectional meaning of a word which is not given by users. On the other hand, pragmatics refers to the variation of meaning within a word depending on the sense that the user of a language infers to the meaning of a word.

In that sense, the ordinary language is more attached to pragmatics, different meanings of words and subjectivity. It depends on the user the sense that a word has. However, the language used in professional contexts and the specificity in the environment in which it is used limits and restricts linguistic aspects such as polysemy, synonyms, connotations and its considered mono-referential (Rodríguez – Díez, 1977).

2. ASYMMETRIES AND COMMON ERRORS IN LEXICAL COMPETENCE

2.1 SOCIETY, CONTEXT AND LANGUAGE VARIATION

Holtgraves (2002), in his analysis of language use attempts to explain:

What people are doing when they use language, with the actions they are performing as they speak. People use language to accomplish various things—they request and compliment and criticize, and so on. But it is not only an action, it is also a social action, an action involving other people. This fact both shapes the nature of the activity and its consequences.

Holtgraves (2002)

In the moment the single individual establishes a dialogue and thus, involves other individual, they separately point the direction that the conversation is going to take by choosing from the different options that language allows them to use. In this manner we can summarize that as much as in the production as in the comprehension of language there is a necessity of the effects and impact of the social dimension of language.

Our language suffers from important modifications depending on formal or informal situations. The social constrains to which we are exposed since we are born transfer us the ability to know how and when to modify our language to adapt it to the environment in which we live (Dubois et al, 1986). That is, in professional contexts our language behaves in the way to be closer to the formal variety language. By contrast the informal varieties are more linked to the common or daily uses of language.

The way in which we behave is mainly constrained by language and communication. According to the previous author, it is the tool we use to achieve our goals, and in that way, being language our particular tool it is modified by us depending on the objectives we want to accomplish. The clearest example to illustrate this thought is the differences in the formality of language we make when being in a job interview or asking our brother to handle us the salt.

Nevertheless, the formality – informality of a technical discourse will depend on the context or environment in which the latter develops, since as it has been established previously, the study or analysis of language cannot be done without having taken into account the social influences it receives (Gilbert & Mulkey, 1984).

In that manner, we will be facing a formal technical discourse when we encounter, for instance, a hardware conference in which the dialogues concern mostly technical vocabulary and formal conversations. However, and this is the field in which we are interested in regarding the analysis here conducted, when the dialogue takes place in a business between an expert and a customer, the environment in which this dialogue develops is highly informal.

From the particular and restricted use of the technical language for the members out of that specific community is derived the informality of the situation. The informal nature of the situation is created when users that do not belong to the technical language environment try to use that particular language. Thus, the limitation in access to the technical language to the customer who handles ordinary language opens the path for irregularities or errors in the use of a language of specialization. As a consequence, two language styles are analyzed, technical and ordinary language.

It has been considered important Drew's (1991) notion of asymmetries in dialogue in order to support the previous stated argument. Language behavior in professional areas can be easily understood when we establish the contrast between the use of language on the streets and in this specific field. According to this author, in daily use of language, conversational language involves the balanced participation of the speakers in conversation. It is this balance that makes the dialogue successful, since the overuse participation of one of the speakers will give features of authority to the main speakers or, on the other hand, the former participant will only make interventions to comment or support the utterance of the authoritative speaker.

However, if we compare this situation with professional areas such as hardware shops, the language inequality between speakers is more noticeable. The dialogue starts and one of the speakers, who we will call the expert or assistant, is established as the authoritative individual (Drew, 1991). The expert controlling the dialogue is a result of the

second speaker lack of access to the technical knowledge required. The notion of having access to a specific knowledge deals with the wide variety of technical terms that we can find in the professional areas that we are analyzing, hardware shops. This area requires from a very specific and accurate language and thus, the linguistic contrast between expert and novice language is highly remarkable.

It has been found that, although the differences in technical knowledge are considerably remarkable, the customer is able to recognize ordinary words of the hardware field such as *bombilla (bulb)*, *taladro (drill)*, *tornillo (screw)* or *martillo (hammer)*. These are words not considered technical words due to the rise of do-it-yourself projects that society carries out nowadays. The modern life allows people to fix domestic problems by themselves so that it has a sociological influence in language, using those terms more frequently.

Nevertheless, technical language in professional environments demands accuracy and therefore, specificity. In the moment that the average customer tries to move out from its ordinary language knowledge some lexical gaps appear derived from the lack in knowledge of this specific language.

2.2 LANGUAGE IRREGULARITIES IN PROFESSIONAL AREAS

Technical language is defined as a very specific type of language that has an actual connection with a very concrete environment whereas colloquial language is, on the other hand, used and understood by the whole society. Due to a whole society managing a type of language and just a particular section using technical language, it can be deduced that there are times where the users of colloquial language attempt to intrude in the areas of the technical one. For example, hardware shops are known as being professional contexts where the level of specificity in language is quite high. As the majority of society is not capable to handle that technical language it is produced a movement in the use of the type of language. The failure on trying to use a technical language that customers do not dominate originates a variety of irregularities in language.

In everyday conversation our fluency in dialogue allows us to connect perfectly with our listener and it does not show any particular error at first sight. The colloquial

vocabulary used in daily life is large enough to cover our lexical desires. However, Edwards (1997) explained that it is in the moment when we move out from common talk when we confront misunderstandings between speakers. The movement outside the language 'comfort zone' derives in linguistics anomalies contemplated in this research.

Akmajian et al. (2001) also refers to this concept explaining the importance of cognitive background in speech production. Cognitive background must be understood as the notions we have in our minds about the reality we face. Those ideas or beliefs that society already has, influence not only the direction of our conversation but the context in which this develops and our listener's beliefs regarding the dialogue. Thus, the individual becomes skeptical when he has to manage linguistic items that do not belong to his cognitive knowledge and environment, creating doubts and insecurities when producing the utterance required.

It has been proposed previously how it is the difference of access to this specific knowledge that marks and characterizes these two speakers involved in this dialogue (Drew, 1991). In the contexts in which professional language develops there is an unequal distribution of knowledge not only in lexical areas but also in procedures. This dialogue is characterized since it is directed to achieve a main goal which is to get the object or the name of the object the customer requires. Our mind follows mental procedures to create an image and thus, a linguistic sign.

However, these procedures influence the successful reaching in the object that the customer requires. The lack of technical knowledge has an impact on these procedures being disrupted and thus, they do not allow the customer to create an utterance from a mental image, so that the dialogue will be considered a fail.

Drew (1991) analyzed these procedures in terms of collecting data from emergency calls and argued that 'This illustrates the kind of disruption which can be generated by an asymmetry between the expectations of a lay caller, and the specialized procedures operated by the emergency services as regards the collection of essential information'.

In professional areas such as hardware shops the structure of collecting information is similar. The expert makes use of common procedures based not only on the superior knowledge but also on his experience in the field and sometimes it confronts to the

expected method by the customer, who does not understand the terminology that the expert uses and consequently, the dialogue.

Edwards (1997) also supports this idea establishing that each human mind is made up of concepts, notions and ideas. Those elements are different depending on the individual due to sociological constraints and are used as the basis 'for a variety of communicative goals, such as informing, persuading and finding things out'. However, it is in the variety of intellectual foundations where the asymmetries in language arise. These differences in specific knowledge observed in this analysis are also heterogeneous; nevertheless there is a pattern of usage.

It have been considered and analyzed the most recurrent inequalities that can be divided as: overuse of general terms and lexical insufficiency, semantic and phonological confusion. These have been selected and organized taking into the account the degree of appearance.

2.2.1 OVERUSE OF GENERAL TERMS AND LEXICAL INSUFFICIENCY

It is observed a lack in the usage of technical words in social requirements such as a specific lexicon that adapts to our language necessities. The customer should be able to utter a detailed description of the object he needs in order for the expert who receives the message to create the specific image of the object in his mind. However, the customer has no access to this concrete body of language.

Singleton (2000) states the development of the lexicon in early stages of life as crucial. The appearance of irregularities in language depends to the input that we receive as children. Normally, the infant does not receive a considerable amount of hardware related input, being just the normal words use in the house such as *martillo (hammer)*, *tornillo (screw)* or *pila (battery)*. In fact, these words are infrequently repeated that it is difficult for the child to retain them in the first stages of language development. The correct establishment of these words in the mind depends on adult aim to acquire and work on specific vocabulary. For example, the individuals who normally acquire this language are the novices doing a degree on this professional area or starting to work, they are instructed in this technical area of language. The specific language used is wide and concrete, so that

the ordinary customer is reticent to involve himself on learning due to its complexity. Consequently, background knowledge of the customer cannot fill and correct the lexical gaps presented.

According to the notion of linguistic comfort established before by Edwards (1997), and the consequent colloquial usage of language in technical contexts, a subsequent excessive generic terminology is used by speakers to fill the lexical gaps originated by technical terminology requirements.

Utterances have been examined by the speakers such as *bombilla de rosca grande* (*big screw light bulb*) instead of *lámpara con rosca e-27* (*e-27 screw light bulb*), *pilas pequeñas* (*little batteries*) instead of *pila LR03* (*LR03 battery*) or *llave normal* (*normal key*) when the technical nomenclature is *llave serreta* (*household cylinder key*). As it can be observed the terminology used to substitute the technical terminology is made up of words that can be easily applied to everyday life such as *grande* (*big*), *pequeñas* (*little*), *normal* or *bombilla* (*light bulb*).

In order to answer the question of why individuals use such unspecific terms, it responds to the ignorance of customers of the technical term, so that speaker assigns a more general use that can be recognized and accepted by the whole community. It is easier to use an ordinary term in specific contexts rather than learning a technical term that belongs to a linguistic community to which the customer does not belong. This behavior appears for example in terms as *grande* (*big*), *pequeñas* (*little*) or *normal* instead of *rosca e-27* (*e-27 screw*), *LR03* or *serreta* (*household cylinder*.)

There are also instances of technical terms being transformed into general items by society. We are referring to the use of *bombilla* (*light bulb*) and the appearance of the word. Experts on the hardware environment have stated that the term *bombilla* (*light bulb*) does not even exist by itself and that it was a creation of society to refer to *lámpara* (*incandescent light bulb*), nomenclature used in hardware technical language. They affirm that the term used responds to the shape of the item (*bombilla* (*bulb*) / *abombada* (*ballooned*)) and the necessity to use a word that could be understood by the whole society and thus, it was easier to relate the linguistic sign to the signifier.

In order to support this idea, Chomsky (1972) maintains that for the human being, language is used as a tool to generate and create new words that cover our linguistic necessities. He declares that society is made up of ‘human essence’ and this ability that the individual possesses is what differentiates us from the animal community, which responds systematically to the same linguistic pattern and methods. In Chomsky’s (1972) words ‘that by diminishing the range and complexity of materials presented to the inquiring mind, by setting behavior in fixed patterns, these methods may harm and distort the normal development of creative abilities’. The human being needs to face new situations and environments, since we modify our language used and communication through the activity of generating new terms for a language that stand for our thoughts, feelings and expressions.

The usage of generic terminology solves an absence of technical terminology in the client. Technical vocabulary is needed in the hardware environment, and responds linguistically to the necessity of detailed specificity. For example, in technical language it is considered essential to differentiate between different types of pliers such as *alicate boca cigüeña* (long nose plier), *alicate boca plana* (iron work plier) and *alicate boca biselada* (diagonal plier) since each of them has a specific use. However, to the customer the three of them are named simply *alicate* (plier), expecting the expert to be the individual who distinguishes between them and offers and instructs the customer the one which adapts to his needs.

Therefore, the overuse of general terms is triggered by lexical insufficiency. As a consequence, absence of specific technical items in lexis is reflected in the individual as abundance on the production of unspecific terminology that completes the linguistic necessities of the customer.

2.2.2 SEMANTIC IRREGULARITIES

From the lexical insufficiency derives subsequent asymmetries in language that deal with confusions in the specificity of the semantic area of a word. It is common to find examples where the individual is able to recognize the common semantic features of

technical words but has an absence in knowledge of the specific semantic features required in technical language. Thus, he is not able to specify and produce an utterance that contains the concrete element he needs.

This research found a recurrent use of the term *tornillo (screw)* in ordinary customers. It is observed that *tornillo (screw)*, according to semantics, is a hyperonym or generic word that can be used to refer to a more specific term (Matthews, 2007) since it contains the common features of its hyponyms.

Its hyponyms are the specific or technical lexical items required in dialogue, such as *tirafondo (deck screw)*, *rosca chapa (metal screw)* or *berraquero (lag screw)*.

Hyperonym			
<i>Tornillo</i> <i>(Screw)</i>	[+mechanical element]	[+screw]	
Hyponym			
<i>Tirafondo</i> <i>(Deck Screw)</i>	[+mechanical element]	[+screw]	[+wood]
<i>Berraquero</i> <i>(Lag Screw)</i>	[+mecanical element]	[+screw]	[+cement]
<i>Rosca chapa</i> <i>(Metal Screw)</i>	[+mechanical element]	[+screw]	[+metal]

Fig.1

There is an overuse of the hyperonym *tornillo (screw)* rather than the hyponyms *tirafondo (deck screw)*, *berraquero (lag screw)* o *rosca chapa (metal screw)* needed due to accuracy requirements. This overuse is derived from the hyperonym *tornillo (screw)* being the general term used to name the dimension that contains specific terms.

Thus, in *fig. 1* it can be observed how the hyperonym *tornillo (screw)* contains the same semantic features ([+mechanical element] [+screw]) as the hyponyms *tirafondo (deck screw)*, *berraquero (lag screw)* o *rosca chapa (metal screw)*, however the latter are characterized by having distinctive features to differentiate themselves from the rest of

hyponyms ([+wood], [+cement], [+metal]) aspects that do not appear in the ordinary language used by the customer.

The lexical items are very close in meaning, sharing semantic characteristics, so that the customer chooses the general term or hyperonym, knowing that he will be understood by the expert. The expert will rapidly associate in his mind *tornillo* (*screw*) with its hyponyms due to its accuracy. The expert, making use of the specialization of the technical language will come up with the specific object that the customer needs.

For example, a customer explains he needs a *tornillo* (*screw*) (hyperonym – generic term) to fix a shelve that is broken, the expert associates the hyperonym *tornillo* (*screw*) ([+mechanical element][+screw]) and adds the feature required for a specific purpose ([+mechanical element] [+screw] [+wood]). As a result, the expert realizes that the customer necessity is a *tirafondo* (*deck screw*) (hyponym – technical term).

2.2.3 PHONOLOGICAL ERRORS

Finally, phonological irregularities can be recognized as: vocalic, consonantal or syllabic confusions. Therefore, it is important to dwell on the concrete characteristics of these errors to reach an understandable and well-based conclusion for this asymmetry.

	CORRECT USE	ASYMMETRY
VOCALIC	(1) Dest <u>o</u> r <u>n</u> illador	(1) Dest <u>e</u> r <u>n</u> illador
CONSONANTAL	(2) Mage <u>f</u> esa	(2) Mage <u>ç</u> esa
SYLLABIC	(3) <u>D</u> es·tor·ni·lla·dor	(3) <u>A</u> ·tor·ni·lla·dor

Fig. 2

In Fig.2 it can be seen the distinction between the correct use of the term and the irregularities found. It is important to consider where these errors are found in order to describe the phonological rules.

	CORRECT TERM	ASYMMETRY		CORRECT TERM	ASSYMETRY
MANNER OF ARTICULATION	(1) Close-Mid	(1) Close-Mid	PLACE OF ARTICULATION	(1)Back	(1) Front
	(2) Fricative	(2) Fricative		(2)Labiodental	(2)Alveolar

Fig.3

In Fig.3 the consonantal and vocalic examples are described (illustrated in fig. 2) since it can be observed that they share manner of articulation but differ in place of articulation.

The asymmetry and the correct term share the same manner of articulation; however it is articulated in a different place of the oral cavity. The activity goes close-mid and fricative action in vocalic and consonantal sounds respectively. Therefore, there is a distinction from back to front positions and from labiodentals to alveolar positions putting the phonological asymmetry in the place of articulation of sounds /e/ and /θ/ instead of /o/ and /f/.

Example (3) in Fig. 2 shows errors in the usage of the prefix *a-* and *des-*, due to a confusion on prefix meaning. According to Martín-García (1998) meaning of prefix, *a-* is used to confer words the aspect of negation and *des-* means as opposed to or contrary. In that manner, the correct usage in (3) is *destornillador* (*screwdriver*), meaning the contrary action to *tornillar*. But in the asymmetry it is used the prefix that means negation to confer the word the meaning of “*no-tornillar*” arising a syllabic asymmetry. There is a confusion as a result of the negative connotation of prefix *a-* and *des-* which the customer does not know how to make the difference.

Society makes mistakes in the usage of technical language due to several factors. Specifically, the asymmetries here analyzed deal with the context in which this language is used and the restrictions of individuals in the access to this area of specific language.

3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS: HARDWARE SHOPS

3.1 COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN DIALOGUE

The human being never stops communicating and transmitting information through verbal or non-verbal language. However, it depends on the individual the selection of the information he wants to transmit and the plans in language he designs in order to achieve a successful conversation.

Communicative strategies refer to the way in which individuals control and manage the knowledge they have in order to cover the gaps originated by the information they do not handle or know. According to Kasper (1997), the proper administration of their data will enable them to achieve one main objective, the successful transmission of information.

In the previous section the asymmetries analyzed were those found in conversation. These irregularities show only to the expert that the client is experiencing a problem in producing utterances that should contain technical terminology. Hence, the appearance in dialogue of a language irregularity entails the rise of a communication strategy (Wagner and Firth, 1997) as an amendment action to mitigate language asymmetries.

The use of these structural patterns in language helps us to interact and connect with the world so that we can reach a specific linguistic aim. According to Kasper (1997) and as it can be observable, the use of a strategy in communication is a dual activity since it needs from the intervention not only of the expert but the client and vice versa

One of the most important elements of language is information. Thus, it is a logical thought to recall on the knowledge required for human beings to communicate. Laswell (1948) explains some of the principles of communication basing his argument on the fundamentality of knowledge, we cannot communicate the things or the information that we do not know. It depends on the level of access to a specific body of language we have. This author focuses on the impossibility, for example of transferring information about medicine if we do not have access to a medical body of information. In that manner, we

cannot talk with someone about the hardware world and environment if we do not have stored the technical knowledge required in our minds.

At this point a question may arise, if a person does not know about the specific terminology to explain an illness, how is he going to behave linguistically with his doctor? If customers do not have dominance in the specificity of language in hardware shops, how are they going to explain to the expert the technical characteristic of the specific tool that they need?

These questions can be answered by understanding the significance of language as a process that is directed in two ways. Drew (1991) explains that successful communication needs of the participation of two individuals, in this case the expert and client. Firstly, the method that the expert uses to manage the specific knowledge needed in hardware environments, will enlarge the probability of solving the asymmetries of the client.

Drew (1991) also focuses on the expert as being aware of the level of technical knowledge that the customer handles in order to use a particular communicative method. Secondly, from the perspective of the customer, depending on how the client manages his general and specific knowledge he will enlarge the possibility of being understood by the expert and thus, reach his communicative objective.

The individual needs also to choose the strategies developed depending on the type of audience we have and the knowledge this audience possesses. Hence, it has to be considered also the resources that the customer handles, such as the background information, context and the knowledge (ordinary or technical) he shares with the expert. Communication requires that both the speaker and the listener see the communicative situation from the other's perspective so that they can identify common ground or mutual knowledge, using and choosing particular strategies taking that information as a basis from the selection. Both customers and experts must make also frequent contributions in dialogue to acquire that knowledge, so that there can be an interactional feedback between both participants (Drew 1991).

Communicative strategies are collaborative processes that require from the collaboration of the customer and the expert, and also the ability of speaking and hearing. Drew (1991) also recalls on the importance of understanding the between individuals being

a key point in language use and communication. In that sense, in dialogue, individuals try to share the common background, mutuality and knowledge in order for contributions to be accurate. Thus, when applying linguistics skills to hardware environments, it is important for the expert to know the knowledge of the customer about specific vocabulary and terminology.

The level of customer asymmetries in technical language modulates specificity in language used by the assistant. Then, it will be easier for the expert to be aware of the specificity in language he has to use regarding the customer, so that the latter will be able to make contributions that clarify the process directed to the achievement of the object. The assistance of the expert and the specificity of his language may vary depending on the level of asymmetries of the customer. These asymmetries based on the level of specificity are heterogeneous and can be exemplified as follows:

(1) “Quiero un chisme que se rosca y une las cosas”

I want something to screw and join things.

(2) “Tornillos para unir tablas”

Screws to join boards

(3) “Tirafondos de aproximadamente 35mm para aglomerado de 50mm”

Deck screws of approximately 35mm to use it in agglomerate board of 50mm

Being example (1) the lowest stage of specificity and example (3) a degree that reaches a high technical terminology, it can be observed how the strategies and contributions used by the expert to determine the object that the customer needs may vary depending on these levels of specificity.

Although this research tries to focus on the strategies used by the customers, individuals encompassing a linguistic insufficiency, it has been considered important to recall on the role that the expert plays in the development and appearance of these irregularities. The contributions of the expert are considered as vital elements in language use in order to be successful and using the adequate strategies, help the client reach his

objective. However, the research focuses on the irregularities found in the use of technical language by customers and subsequent communicative strategies used by them as a result of the appearance of these irregularities derived from an attempt of these customers to diminish those irregularities.

3.2 LANGUAGE DESIGN: APPEARANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES

According to Faerch and Kasper (1984) communicative strategies are defined as 'related to individual language users' experience of communicative problems and the solutions (cooperative or non-cooperative) they pursue' In that manner, communicative strategies can be applied to the customer who handles ordinary language and tries to communicate his thoughts or requirements in a language of specialization, appearing the previously stated asymmetries in technical language. Strategies in trying to communicate having a limited knowledge in the type of language can be parallelized in the sense of individuals not having adequate knowledge to convey a specific thought.

Concerning these communicative processes, Levelt's (1989) proposes a model of speaking that helps us explaining the moment in which the asymmetries and subsequent language strategies arise. Levelt's (1989) highlights that in the first level of production, speakers conceptualize the utterance by means of taking into account the knowledge we have available as ordinary customers and the knowledge we share with our interlocutor or expert. It is important also to contextualize the situation and environment we face.

The second stage of production established by Levelt's (1989) involves the codification of the message and leads the way for the arising of language irregularities and problems, the majority of them founded on the lack of a specific lexicon that obstructs the use of the words they would like to use.

At this point, Poulisse (1997) proposes that subjects have to make a choice between giving up, therefore avoiding the appearance of a communicative strategy, or by contrast, encoding the message in a different way so that the linguistic goal can be achieved. The latter will involve a strategy or reorganization of the original structure in order to look for a lexical element replacement.

Taking into account the aim of this research, it is considered that the individual decides to use a communicative strategy in order to fill the linguistic insufficiency. Regarding this perspective, Poulisse (1997) proposes the principle of Quantity and Relation or Clarity and Effort. This author maintains that when communicating, speakers are unconsciously led to establish a balance between the production of clear and understandable messages and a minimum effort in production.

This balance is normally reached by using references that refer to the object we would like to achieve. The references can be used in a recurrent way until the customers reach their goal. However, customers analyzed for this research on specific contexts, normally find that balance in the generality of terminology. A strategy based on overuse of generic terms in utterances instead of using technical terminology accomplishes both principles. The usage of generic terms avoids lengthening the references trying to look up for technical knowledge they do not have available.

Hence, according to Poulisse's (1997) principle, customers design language in hardware shops by producing clear and effective references in order to reach their communicative goals at the same time that they maintain their efforts and the ones of the experts to a minimum point. In that sense, goals are reached with little effort, if customers display from the technical knowledge required. On the other hand, if they do not control the technical language, which is the situation in the majority of cases, they will have to choose between being clear and lengthen references in their utterances or maintain the effort to the lowest level by using generic terms.

To support this notion established, the University of Nijmegen carried out a project to demonstrate that speakers were all the time trying to make use of the principle of Clarity and Economy. When referencing, if the interlocutor rapidly indicates that he understands the strategy used, reference is established in the most economical possible way. On the other hand, if the interlocutor does not understand the communicative strategy, the customer will proceed in the way that Levinson (1987) describes as 'giving gradual information and checking understanding until they both reach their communicative goals or are satisfied with the results'.

It has to be clarified that the following strategies here analyzed are not intended to show the whole communicative strategies that can be found in hardware shops but an attempt to illustrate and understand properly communicative strategies and how they are developed by customers in technical environments.

This analysis tries to demonstrate the behavior of individuals when facing asymmetries in technical knowledge required in order to obtain an object or goal. For example, the linguistic behavior of a customer that has not acquired the specific terminology and tries to explain or name the hardware object he needs. This research analyzes how he reformulates his ordinary language to make the expert understand his needs.

3.3 VERBAL AND VISUAL METHODS OR REFORMULATIONS

Customer reformulates his utterances using different communicative strategies that will help them to succeed linguistically.

Tarone (1977) in his study about the communicative strategies on second language learners, offer us a division on the communicative strategies observed, such as paraphrasing, borrowings and avoidance. According to the data used in Tarone's (1977) research the main strategies will be based on the paraphrasing analysis of this author. The communicative strategies found in this research and its following of the pattern established by Tarone (1977) are the basis for the classification of the communicative strategies found in hardware shops.

3.3.1 APPROXIMATION

The speaker substitutes the desired unknown target language item for a new one, which is assumed to share enough semantic features with it to be correctly interpreted.

Tarone (1977)

It refers to the use of a single technical vocabulary item or structure, which the customer knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with

the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e.g. *tornillo (screw)* instead of *tirafondo (deck screw)*)).

Thus, the customer uses a vocabulary item that is located inside the semantic circle of the technical word that would be accurate. By contextualizing the item it is easier for the expert to locate the item and thus recognize the exact word. Although the customer knows the generic word is not correct, the placing of the word in an environmental area gives accuracy and specificity. To illustrate these strategies it is important to observe production examples of customers such as the following:

Customer: Quería las botellitas estas para las cocinitas de gas.

I would like to have those little bottles for the gas cooker

Expert: ¿Cartuchos de gas?

Gas cartridges?

C: Sí.

Yes

E: ¿Para este tipo de cocina verdad? (Señala el objeto)

To use it in this type of cooker, right?(points the object)

C: Sí.

Yes

The knowledge of the expert and the contextualization of the use by pointing out the object, enables him to recognize the specific type of *botella (bottle)* that the customer requires. Moreover, the generic use of the term *botella (bottle)* leads the expert to recognize that the element the customer needs in technical nomenclature is a *cartucho de gas (gas cartridge)*. This recognition responds to the similar shape of *cartucho (cartridge)* and *botella (bottle)* and the context that the customer gives about where she uses it, *para las cocinitas de gas (for the gas cookers)*.

The expert formulates a question using technical terminology so that the customer recognizes the object she is looking for, besides he points out: *¿para este tipo de cocina? (to use it in this type of cooker?)*, showing to the customer that there are different types of

cocinas (cookers) so that there is a necessity for her to be more accurate in her description of the object. The customer strategy is produced using the generic term *botella (bottle)* but by contextualizing it (*para las cocinas estas de gas (for the gas cooker)*) allows the expert to determine the specific word and object she needs.

3.3.2. CIRCUMLOCUTION

The learner describes an object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item. *Tarone (1977)*

The customer describes the characteristics of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure. The customer gives detailed descriptions in ordinary language lengthening the references. Then, the expert gets the common background and level of technical knowledge that the customer has. The expert from his perspective knows this knowledge through the use of Maieutics. According to Merriam – Webster dictionary ‘relating to or resembling the Socratic method of eliciting new ideas from another’, that is, the answering of proposed questions or contributions by the expert to get the knowledge hidden in the mind of the customer.

Customer: ¿Molinillos tenéis?

Do you have grinders?

Expert: ¿Molinillos de café?

Coffee grinders?

C: Bueno eh...es para café...es para otra cosa.

[Intervención del cliente anterior, vuelve al cliente de ahora]

Well, ehm...it is for coffee...no, it is for other purpose

[Previous customer intrudes, comes back to the current customer]

C: No molino...no que no sea para café...es para otra cosa.

No grinder...I do not want to use it for coffee...it is for other purpose

E: ¿Para qué es?

What it is used for?

C: Es para moler...pipas de calabaza...y cosas de esas.

To grind...pumpkin seeds...and things like that.

The customer establishes a general question which the expert concretizes by adding the construction: *de café (for coffee)*. After the dubitation of the client concerning the purpose of the object the expert makes a question that will help him to localize the object inside the circle of purposes. In that manner, the customer organizes his ideas in his mind.

Therefore, the expert establishes the question: *¿para qué es? (What it is used for?)*, so that the customer is able to reach his objective with a short reference and contribution made by the assistant.

3.3.3 WORD COINAGE

The learner makes up a new word following the target language rules of derivation and composition
Tarone (1977)

The customer comes up with a new word in order to communicate a desired concept. In this study, rather than the definition given by Tarone (1977), the customer does not create a new word but a concept based on the general knowledge that he has. Using words considered highly colloquial or general such as *chisme* or *cosa (thing)* he illustrates that the technical term is not available for him. Then, by the addition of a lexical development in ordinary language (*que sirve para, de esos que tienen (to use it for, those which has)*) that normally explains the use of the object or its main characteristics, establishes a new utterance instead of the technical term.

Customer: Un chisme de esos que se ponen en el marco de las puertas para que la puerta se quede fija cuando la cierras.

One of those things to put in the door frame so that when you close it stays set.

Although not using even a technical word, the expert quickly realizes that the customer is looking for *un imán retenedor de puertas (door damper magnet)*.

3.3.4 VISUAL STRATEGIES

The strategies presented previously belong to the verbal perspective of language. Subjects make use of general language to explain the objects they want to reach and in most of the cases they are able to reach their goal without the necessity of employing technical language required in the professional environment. However, it has been observed that there are a percentage of customers, who, unable to reach their goal through the use of

ordinary language references or contributions made by the expert, they use the option of visual language or drawings for the expert to depict the object in his mind instead of using pragmatics or semantics.

It is a way to easily recognize the object through the visual recognition of shape and forms. Saint-Martin (1927) maintained that the rising of the visual language has its basis on its interrelations with verbal language such as being the verbal productions the vehicle through which individuals explain visual images.

Although most of customers, it has been observed, are characterized by an overuse of generic items, semantic and phonological confusions the way in which these irregularities are managed lead to the sentence reformulation and consequent production of communicative strategies. Hence, it has been established not only the role that customers play, but the importance of contributions by the expert so that the former can reach his goal basing its production on principles such as the principle of clarity and economy (Poulisse, 1997).

Real conversations are analyzed in this research. The classification of the strategies follows the pattern of those established by Tarone (1977) and has been divided depending on the level of paraphrasing to avoid the use of specific and technical vocabulary required by the professional environment.

4. CONCLUSION

The importance of linguistics studies allows us to go further in specific aspects of language. The behavior of language has been the main aim of this research and consequently, we have been able to test highly interesting results concerning the use of language by society.

This analysis has enable us to discover that, referring to the use of ordinary language, the human being does not present remarkable difficulties disregarding the context in which this develops. Daily life situations do not require an extreme linguistic competence so that the individual develops fluently. However, it has been found that when we take the ordinary language and move it into contexts in which a technical or specific vocabulary is required to reach our objectives (buy an item), the individual or customer confronts some lexical gaps that he is not able to solve with his ordinary linguistic competence.

Due to the latter problem, the asymmetries in language covered in this research arise. These linguistic irregularities refer to errors which appear in speech when it needs to develop a technical dialogue to which the individual has not access. This analysis of language covers not only lexical irregularities, but also semantic or phonological.

When the individual faces this type of problematic situations in language, inherently and unconsciously, the cognitive system develops strategies to succeed in communication, and thus, its aim. In that manner, communicative strategies have been found derived from language asymmetries that try to reformulate or re encode the wrong message of the speaker so that he can fill the linguistic empty spaces analyzed. Hence, and having this research the basis on a pioneer study made by Tarone (1977), we found that the classification of linguistic strategies in this specific contexts, more accurately, hardware shops, adapts perfectly to the original classification of this author.

However, further research has to be made in order to make a deeper study in the area of communication strategies in these areas. Due to global and sociological circumstances, society is approaching to these areas because of cost savings. As a consequence, people are looking for projects they can do by themselves without investing

money in a technical worker such as plumber, electrician or construction worker. This new connection between technical fields intruding into the daily life of common society is developing the acquisition of a new type of language in society that before seemed inaccessible.

This project tried to succeed on analyzing and studying the ways in which the ordinary language is modified when it confronts a language which requires from a highly specific language that contains a considerable amount of technical terms. However, the limitation on length of this research opens the path for forthcoming analysis on technical language in hardware shops and the different options that it provides regarding the study of applied linguistics.

5. ATTACHMENT I

5.1. APPROXIMATION: SPEECH EXAMPLE

Expert: Hola, buenos días, dígame.

Customer: Hola, quería las botellas estas para las cocinitas estas de gas.

E: ¿Cartuchos de gas?

C: Sí.

E: Sí, para esta cocina ¿verdad? (señala la cocina)

C: ¡Sí!

E: Vamos a ver... ¿este verdad?

C: Ehm...sí, sí, ¿me puedes dar más?

E: Si las que tú quieras.

C: Pues dame ocho.

5.2 CIRCUMLOCUTION: SPEECH EXAMPLE

Expert: Hola, dígame.

Customer 1: Molinillos...¿tenéis?

Expert: ¿Molinillos de café?

C1: Si bueno, si no es... es para café, no, es para otra cosa.

Customer 2: (Interrumpe la conversación) ¿Negras no tienes?

E: No

C2: Sabes lo que te digo, para...

E: Oye, acércate aquí, aquí...hay una tienda de ropa que se llama Los Catalanes, el siguiente... el siguiente es un portal y luego hay una tienda que se dedica a bellas artes y cosas de esas, igual tiene algo ¿eh? Igual, porque...porque ellos hacen, ellos hacen.

C2: Ah, vale, gracias.

C1: No que no sea para café es para otra cosa.

E: ¿Para qué es?

C1: Bueno, es para moler pipas de calabaza y...cosas de esas.

E: Tengo uno de ELMA de chapa, pero casi es más decorativo aunque yo he visto moler semillas con él.

5.3 WORD COINAGE: SPEECH EXAMPLE

Customer: Joven, venga usted por aquí que quiero hablar con usted.

Expert: Dígame usted, señor.

C: Dame un chisme de esos que se ponen en el marco de las puertas para que se quede fija cuando la cierras.

E: Un imán retenedor.

C: Eso mismo, ¿de qué color lo tienes?

E: Marrón y blanco.

C: Es para las puertas del pasillo así que dámelo marrón.

E: ¿Cuántos?

C: Uno.

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