Business English in meetings

Dr. Mable Chan is a lecturer at the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She was awarded the Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching twice in the 2005/2006 and 2010/2011 academic years, and has vast experience teaching academic and business English to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Her first business English book 職時上位：名人英語全面睇 was published in 2009, and another one called 商業英語 will be published soon. In this column she advocates using simple English for business communication.

Video conferencing is becoming increasingly popular in the workplace. It requires active listening skills, particularly for non-native speakers of English. As an effective Chair, one has to make effective use of different strategies to encourage discussion, and to summarize discussions from time to time, making sure that all participants are clear about what have been discussed and covered.

In terms of structure, the Chair usually opens the meeting by saying *Hi* or *Hello* and closes by saying *Goodbye*. In face-to-face meetings, however, participants might stay behind for further discussions after the meeting.

Below are some examples of expressions used for different communicative purposes in video conferences.

1. Opening the meeting

The Chair opens the meeting by greeting and introducing the participants. He/she may also explain how the meeting works and deal with technical issues/problems:

Greeting and welcoming

- Hello, Mable from Hong Kong here.
- Welcome to the meeting.

Introducing early comers

- Martin, can I introduce you to Larry? He's from Human Resources.

Checking on the number of participants and the technology

- Before we start, I'd like to check that everyone is here and the technology is working.

Introducing each other

- Let's start by introducing ourselves to you.
- Would you like to start introducing yourself to colleagues in London?

Introducing key participants

- Let me say a few words about our Deputy Director, Dr Eric Chan.
- I'd like to start by welcoming Dr Eric Chan from London to the meeting today. He's the Deputy Director and will be presenting a SWOT analysis in detail later today. Eric, would you like to say anything?

Explaining how the meeting works

- I suggest that people introduce themselves before they speak. Please keep comments concise and focused, and ask questions directly to named individuals.
- Please feel free to speak when you want to express your opinions.
- Ask for clarification if there is anything you don't understand.
- Let me know if you have difficulty saying what you want to say.
- Please try not to interrupt while others are speaking.

When dealing with technical problems

- Can you all hear me?
- Can you all see the white board and the PowerPoint slides?
- Any technical problems?
- There might be a technical problem. The white board isn't working.
- I think there's a technical problem. Can you log out and try again?
- Can you move a bit closer to the microphone?
- The connection is poor. Can you call again?
- The number does not seem to be correct.
- The password is not correct either.

2. During the meeting

You may need to introduce yourself, ask other questions, express your opinions and make clarifications during the meeting.

Introducing oneself before taking the floor

- Mable Chan, from San Francisco, USA, I'd like to say that…

Asking questions

- This is Mable Chan, and this question is for Mary Ho.
- I'd like to clarify a point with Martin Wong about his idea of recruiting part-time models.

Asking for clarification

- Jason, it's Mable. Could you be a bit more specific about…?
- Is that really the case?
- What do you mean by…?
- How do you mean?
- Why do you say that?
- Why not?
- Are you saying that…?
- In what way do you agree with the idea?

Interrupting others

- It's Martin. Sorry for interrupting, but can I come in here?
- Can I interrupt here?

Avoiding being interrupted

- Martin, could I just finish and then I'll hand over to you??
- I'd like to finish this point first.

Other expressions used to show agreement and disagreement can be referred to in the last issue in which we covered expressions used in meetings.

3. Closing the meeting

The Chair may show the minutes towards the end of the meeting or ask the participants for feedback of the video conference.

Showing the minutes

- Can everyone see the minutes?
- Are there any comments or changes you want to make?
- Can we accept the minutes and close the meeting?

Asking for feedback

- Would anyone like to say anything about our conference meeting today?
- Can we do anything better for the next conference meeting?
- What worked well and what didn't?

Whether you are taking part in video conferences or face-to-face meetings, preparation is the key to success. Both participants and the Chair should understand their respective roles well. Beside the use of language, non-verbal communication like body language and facial expressions are as important.

Quiz:

Examine the following expressions and decide whether they are found in stage 1 (opening), 2 (in the course of the meeting) or 3 (closing) of a video conference.

1. This is Peter from London. ___

2. Could you please explain what you mean? ___

3. Exactly. ___

4. Any comments for the meeting today? ___

5. Let me welcome Dr Wong, President of our head office. ___

Key:

1. This is Peter from London.

1: introducing oneself

2. Could you please explain what you mean?

2: asking for clarification

3. Exactly.

2: showing agreement

4. Any comments for the meeting today?

3: asking for feedback

5. Let me welcome Dr Wong, President of our head office.

1: introducing key participant

References

陳美寶. (2013, in press). 《商業英語》. 香港：世界出版社.