

## INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR PRODUCT TALK IN BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSES

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**Abstrakt:** Ovaj rad opisuje upotrebu vizuelnih prikaza pri predavanju engleskog poslovnog jezika sa metodološkog aspekta. Potreba koju ističu studenti je potreba da prezentuju proizvod i načine prezentacije prikazujući tržišni razvoj i deo na tržištu tokom vremena uz upotrebu vizuelnih pomagala. To je veoma kompleksno pošto zahteva da se studenti usredsrede na istorijski aspekt proizvoda, čak da ga porede sa drugim i da na kraju ocene buduće uspehe. Stoga, obično se preporučuju „vizuelni organizatori“ koji mogu da predstavljaju proizvode na taj način.

**Ključne reči:** vizuelna pomagala, Boston marketing matrica, Ansoff matrica, životni ciklus proizvoda

**Abstract:** This article describes a methodological area of business English teaching-the use of visuals for presentation. One requirement often stressed by business English students is the need to talk about the product, or make presentations, in terms of its market growth and market share over time with the use of a visual representation. Such talk is quite complex in that it requires the trainer to focus on the historical aspect of the product, perhaps also comparing it to others, and finally to assess its future prospects. In reaction to this, usually recommended are effective “visual organizers” (Kang, 2004) that represent the product in these varied terms: the graphical Product Life Cycles (PLCs), illustrating the historical development of the product relative to its market share; the Boston marketing matrix (Kotler & Armstrong, 2002), representing the product’s present market growth and market share; and finally Ansoff’s matrix (1965), speculating on product and market growth strategies in the future.

**Key words:** visuals, product life cycle, Boston marketing matrix, Ansoff’s matrix

### Introduction

These three marketing visuals have been chosen because they emanate from the students’ own business practice rather than the general English language teaching field. The visuals have the advantage in that they are adaptable not only to various levels of student proficiency but also to different product information. For the language teacher, they allow the use of more complex language for higher level students and down for the less proficient. Specifically, from this linguistic view, past tenses and the language of cause and effect can be exploited through the PLC component of this sequence, while mainly present tenses describe the Boston marketing matrix. Similarly, Ansoff’s matrix can be used to practice the language of speculation, the conditionals and future tenses. Also, from a business perspective, the visuals represent a sequence of naturally interconnected concepts where the product is viewed over time from past to future market share and growth.

### Method

So how should teachers utilize these visuals? Following stages provide a suggested procedure, rather than a prescriptive set of rules.

Stage 1: The product history with the PLC

Stage 2: The present market position with the Boston marketing matrix

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Stage 3: The future strategy with Ansoff's matrix

### STAGE 1: THE PRODUCT HISTORY WITH THE PLC

In Stage 1, the concept of PLCs is introduced. Students are shown an unlabeled graph to elicit the six phases of the life cycle, as seen in Figure 1:

1. Introduction, 2. Growth, 3. Maturity, 4. Saturation, 5. Decline, 6. Withdrawal.

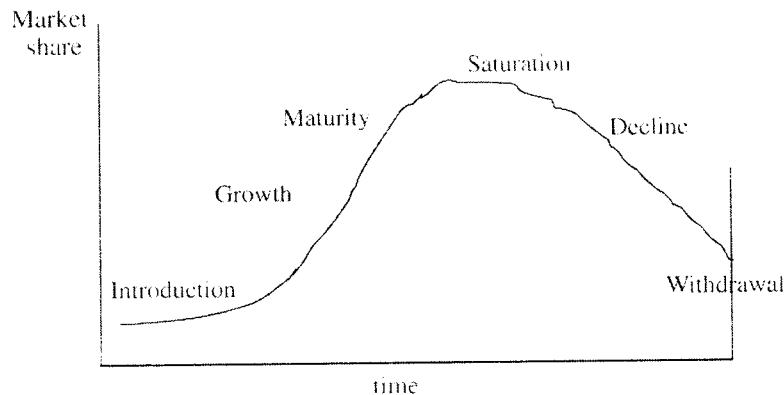


Figure 1: Product Life Cycle

This labeling procedure can be supplemented by eliciting the appropriate verb forms: "to introduce," "to grow," "to mature," "to saturate," "to decline," and "to withdraw." For less proficient students, practice can be done with these verbs in their active forms ("we introduced the product"), moving to the use of the passive ("the product was introduced") for the more advanced. After this first introductory elicitation and labeling of the basic visual, the trainer can move on to two short reinforcing exercises, as follows.

#### Exercise 1: PLC Description

In this exercise, three different products, X, Y, and Z, are presented. Their relative progress through the PLCs is described to recycle the nouns and verbs introduced in Exercise 1. Again, for lower level students, the language can be kept to its minimum, focusing on verbs in their active form that describe each phase of the life: "to introduce," "to grow," "to mature," "to saturate," "to decline," "to withdraw." It can be seen in this exercise that not all PLCs are fully completed, as is the case for Product X in Figure 3, leading to the necessity to describe the current phase of the product in the present continuous, or present perfect simple or continuous, as in "Product Y is currently growing" or "Product Z has been introduced."

#### Exercise 2: Comparing Rival Products

In this third exercise, students are required to compare and contrast similar products by rival companies. This moves them to use language of comparison as well as that of the PLC language covered so far (past tenses and possibly the present continuous/present perfect continuous, and cause-and-effect language). In the life cycles showing Products X and Y, more advanced students are encouraged to find comparisons and contrasts in the two PLCs. Language such as "compared to," "comparing," and "in comparison with" can be elicited to create sentences—for example, *Comparing the two companies, we see that product Y grew initially at a slower pace than product X.* After these three short exercises, which can be viewed as linguistic preparation, the students are required to talk about their own products and those of their rivals. These descriptions can be enhanced through the actual drawing of mini-PLCs.

Summing up the use of PLCs in Stage 1, it must be noted that spiraling up and down is necessary. For the higher level students, I ensure that the basic language required for PLCs discussion is covered before moving

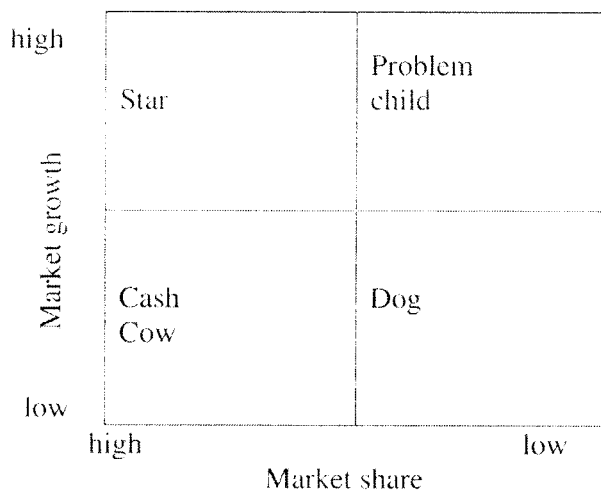
into the language of cause and effect or comparison and contrast. For all levels, some work on tense is also required, particularly using the simple past; note that continuous aspects of the present tense and present perfect are important if a product has not yet finished its life cycle.

## STAGE 2: THE PRESENT MARKET POSITION WITH THE BOSTON MARKETING MATRIX

In the next stage of the sequence of visuals, the Boston marketing matrix, each product is now viewed in terms of its market share and market growth. This is a current perspective on the product. The suggested procedure for using the matrix is as follows.

First, after showing the matrix without its content of “star,” “problem child,” “cash cow,” and “dog,” the vertical and horizontal grids (market share and market growth) are introduced, after which the appropriate term for each box is elicited. For example, “*What product would generate steady cash over a period of time with a high market share but a low market growth?*” (Answer: “cash cow.”)

Second, after completing the basic matrix, as shown in Figure 2, the lesson moves on to the natural step of taking the students’ own products and placing them on the matrix.



**Figure 2:** Boston marketing matrix

At the simplest linguistic level, this involves language in the present simple or continuous; as in “*Our Product A is a ‘problem child’ because it has high market growth but a low market share.*” Spiraling up for the more linguistically competent could involve verb usage of “*sell,*” “*buy,*” “*possess,*” or “*penetrate*” with the present perfect simple or continuous in their active or passive forms, as in “*Product A has been sold in large quantities in the domestic market recently but has still been possessing a low share of the potential market.*”

The next stage in the use of the matrix, after positioning a product in the matrix, is possibly to elicit the potential movement into another box. This prediction moves into the language of speculation (*may, might, possibly, is likely to,* etc.) and the future tense, as in “*Product A may possibly become a ‘dog’ because I believe its market growth will decline while maintaining low market share.*” Such language is, though, more ideally exploited in the Stage 3, using Ansoff’s matrix.

### STAGE 3: THE FUTURE STRATEGY WITH ANSOFF'S MATRIX

Ansoff's matrix specifically looks at strategies for growth in terms of the product and its market and engages the students in a future-oriented decision-making process. In the case of a product represented as a "problem child" on the Boston matrix, this brings the students to the natural juncture at which they need to make a decision about the product's future, whether to maintain or change its present form, and whether to maintain or change its market. The new matrix conveniently embraces these four possibilities, resulting in Figure 3, which could feasibly be elicited in the same manner as the Boston matrix.

	Present Product	New Product
Present Market	Market penetration/ Consolidation/ Withdrawal	Product development
New Market	Market development	Diversification

**Figure 3:** Ansoff's matrix

The lesson has so far moved from the use of the PLC (with predominant usage of past tenses) and the Boston matrix (with use of the present and some speculation) into the final phase, one that is purely strategy focused. The example of Product A, positioned as a "problem child" on the Boston matrix (high market growth and low market share), can be transferred over to Ansoff's matrix. This process of transfer to the new matrix is a potential source of student negotiation involving conceptual discussion, the language of agreement and disagreement and cause-and-effect expressions—for example, *"In my view, Product A, our 'problem child,' is a 'present product' in a 'present market' on the matrix. If we introduce the product to new markets without changing its basic features, this will lead to an increase in market share."*

#### Summary

Summarizing the proposed methodology, the linguistic components to be elicited and practiced are the following:

- tenses (past, present, and future);
- speculation and conditionals;
- cause and effect;
- comparison and contrast;
- agreement and disagreement.

In conclusion, the combination of PLCs, the Boston marketing matrix, and Ansoff's matrix create a number of product focused topics, which either supplement a core text or stand alone as part of a syllabus. The

“common ground” (Clark, 1996) is fundamentally the area of visual sales and marketing concepts that can be used for business English language teaching without the necessity of long explanatory texts for a presentation stage of the lesson. Such visuals can combine language, content, student knowledge to facilitate effective product presentations.

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