

Intercultural and International Business Communication. Theory, Research and Teaching

Juan Carlos Palmer–Silveira, Miguel F. Ruiz–Garrido & Inmaculada Fortanet–Gómez (eds).

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The increasing internationalisation of business activities in the late twentieth century has brought new challenges to many organisations, hence boosting international contacts and enhancing the capability to cooperate with partners in different business and cultural areas. Linguistic and cultural boundaries enjoy a higher profile because effective business communication is essential to success in such global domains. Linguistic and cultural knowledge are basic nowadays when doing business internationally. Thus, international and intercultural business communication is one of the most relevant fields of research in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) given the growth of English as a *lingua franca*.

This volume provides new insights on current concerns for researchers in intercultural communication and business discourse. It comprises twelve articles which are organised into four different sections dealing with four aspects of international business communication: English language, genres, sociolinguistics, and teaching. In the introduction, the editors, J.C. Palmer-Silveira, M.F. Ruiz-Garrido & I. Fortanet-Gómez, well-known ESP researchers and practitioners, depict the current status of English as a *lingua franca* for business transactions. They distinguish between intercultural and international communication on the one hand, and also between individual and corporate communication as well.

The first section, “English in Intercultural and International Business Communication”, starts with the contribution by Leena Louhiala-Salminen & Mirjaliisa Charles who explain the concept of *lingua franca* to state that English *Lingua Franca* dominates international business and electronic communication. These authors speak of Business English *Lingua Franca* (BELF) referring to a foreign language shared by speakers with the common purpose of communicating successfully in a global business environment. They present a case study on BELF usage in a corporate merger of Finnish and Swedish companies which highlights the cultural and linguistic

differences such companies have to overcome for efficient business. The research was carried out through questionnaires, interviews and analysis of internal meetings in both firms. Results show that BELF is considered a “neutral” language by the non native speakers and that differences arise when dealing with discourse conventions. Bertha Du-Babcock & Richard D. Babcock’s chapter completes this first section. Their contribution explores the interaction between native and non-native speakers and their usage of linguistic and cultural competencies to communicate effectively. The authors introduce the concept of culture corridor within a language-based communication zones framework to be used in view of improving international business communication. Each corridor refers to the relationship among individuals who are unicultural, partially bi-cultural and fully bi-cultural. To illustrate their proposal many examples are presented.

Aud Solbjørg Skulstad opens the section “Analysing the Genres of International Business Communication” with a chapter in which she distinguishes and explains three traditions of genre analysis –i.e., the ESP tradition, Move Step analysis, usually referred to as New Rhetoric, and the Sydney School, and makes use of a Move-Step model labelled as “Relationships and Confidence” (RECON) to analyse parts of corporate annual reports. This author also points out the current process of genre mixing and the emergence of new genres. Since this study is based on corporate annual reports and environmental reports, which include pictures, both written and visual communication strategies are analysed. E-communication has exerted a great influence on business communication and this is the topic addressed by Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli in a second chapter. This author agrees that this way of communicating share elements such as informality, lack of punctuation or incomplete syntax, among others with spoken language. Thus, she presents the difference between spoken and written discourse according to different authors. Technology is an essential support to business communication nowadays not only because of the possibility it offers to get in contact very rapidly, but also because it allows businesses to communicate with each other and without the requirement of being physically present. Teleconferencing (i.e., audio-, video-, or web-conferences) is a common procedure used by businesses and, therefore, Crawford studies the structural and linguistic features of the language used in corporate earnings calls developed through business audioconferencing capabilities to suggest some interesting ideas for future research in this field. The extensive use of English in Dutch job advertisements is the topic researched by Frank Van Meurs, Hubert Korzilius & Adriëne Den

Hollander. In this third chapter, these authors put forth different reasons for using English in advertisements in non native countries: prestige, high price, intelligent and interesting look. In order to study the effect of English on potential job applicants from printed job ads, a completely English, a partly English and a fully Dutch advertisements were placed on a well known website. The questionnaire the respondents answered measured the time taken to read the ads, attitude towards the organization and the job offered, or the comprehension of English, among others. The valuable findings of the study reveal to what extent assumptions which take for granted the positive influence of the use of English in advertising are true. The fourth contribution in this section is Yunxia Zhu's thorough review on genre study. With a sociocognitive perspective she introduces the reader into Confucio's standards for adequate conduct in order to understand interpersonal relations and persuasion and their influence in professional gender writing. A sales invitation in English and another one in Chinese serve as models to illustrate the contrastive cross-cultural genre study. Her paper illustrates the considerable differences in both cultures and their influence in documents like the one analysed. Hikka Yli-Jokipii ends this section with a paper on translating professional discourse. She focuses on translation of three professional genres which are part of expository and promotional genres: the Chairman's statement of Annual report, Company Websites and Powerpoint Presentations. For the translation of those documents the translator needs to take into consideration the purpose of the text and the intended audience mainly. It has to be born in mind that these three promotional genres may open the firm to other international markets, thus cultural differences and rhetorical preferences in the languages involved must be considered in view of a successful translation.

A chapter on expatriates' behaviour in an international assignment opens the section "Intercultural Business Communication from a Sociolinguistic Perspective". Here, Jakob Luring mainly bases his research on the observation of participants and their families as well as on semi-structured interviews developed in the foreign country. Through all the personal contact established, Luring offers a very clear description of the situation and the atmosphere the executives and spouses live in. Interactions within the group and between other national groupings are presented to discuss personnel international transfer for corporate development and the possible conflict between the organization's and the expatriates' goals. Britt-Louise Gunnarson studies the extent of the influence of English on the Swedish business world, being English *the lingua franca* in Nordic companies with

international relations. Based on previous studies, she states that the use of English or Swedish is concerned with hierarchical levels, written or oral language, day-to-day direct communication and internal and external texts. Gunnarson's chapter covers the bilingual and multilingual practices on six large Swedish companies' websites and the potential risk of Swedish being replaced by English. The last paper in this section is a contribution by Vijay K. Bathia & Jane Lung on corporate identity. This is a construct that plays a significant role in corporate performance as it can broaden the company's horizon in the competitive current market. The authors draw attention to the conjunction of features which are part of that identity, features related to the organisation, nation, culture, society, or individuals, among others. They clearly distinguish between concepts such as corporate, organisational identity and image, and also disciplinary and professional identities which interact with the generic integrity for the discursive and communicative practices of corporations.

Two chapters are included in the last section of the volume, "Teaching Intercultural and International Business Communication". In the first part of his paper, Julio C. Giménez presents a brief overview of the teaching of Business English and how teaching methods have varied since the 1990's. Next, Giménez focuses on certain strategies advanced learners of Business English will benefit from when using the language in global business communication. Besides being aware of the impact language can create, the relevance of listening, or how to manage conflict and reduce uncertainty, these advanced learners need to exercise the corresponding control. To assist them in achieving such aims and developing learners' strategies towards international communication improvement, this author provides some hints for the development and implementation of different classroom activities. To finish this section and complete the whole volume, Gina Poncini researches on evaluation in written and spoken business discourse and applies her findings to intercultural business communication training. This author starts by reviewing the use and functions of evaluation and, for the general purpose of her study, she makes use of data drawn from her own previous studies (i.e., transcripts from business meeting, brochures, websites, texts and letters). Throughout her paper, and thanks to the different examples provided, it becomes evident how evaluation can be used strategically and how to apply the data obtained to current teaching practices. Moreover, students should be made aware of the relevance of linguistic strategies when communicating interculturally.

The relevant contributions to this monographic issue explore one of the main topics of English Business Communication at present. Throughout the whole volume the defining role of language and culture in international communication is highlighted, affording at the same time a wide range of current approaches to the field. All chapters authored by prestigious scholars from different countries include updated and relevant references which help to enhance knowledge in the different topics presented and analysed. This volume stems from research and teaching to offer new perspectives and insights which will hopefully encourage further research in the field.

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