
In recent years, the linguistic aspects of business communication have attracted the interest of a number of applied linguists, as is evident from the list of presentations at major conferences like the AILLA (Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée) conference in Amsterdam in 1993 and recent annual AAAL (American Association of Applied Linguistics) conferences. In addition, many universities and colleges in various countries have started special courses at MA and PhD level that deal with business communication under various guises.

As evidenced by the lists of ‘books received’ in this journal, there is also a booming market for publishers in our field. Some of the books that have been published recently treat business communication as one of the possible settings of communication with its own inherent characteristics in which applied linguistic paradigms and theories can be used, while other books treat business communication as something completely different, with only a marginal overlap with ‘traditional’ applied linguistics. David Victor’s *International Business Communication* clearly belongs to the second category. Not only is the scope of this book much wider than the use of language as part of business communication, it simply does not deal with much work in applied linguistics that might be of interest.

While reading Victor's book, I was haunted by thoughts on the demarcations between disciplines: Is business communication to be seen as an integral part of applied linguistics as a field, or is it a new field of its own, which in its *status nasciendi* relies on other disciplines, in much the same way that applied linguistics as a field has done in the last two decades. If Victor’s book is anything to go by, business communication will eventually become a field of its own, though it will need support from other disciplines for the years to come.

The aims of the author are clearly stated in the preface: ‘The premise of this book is that students and practitioners need an approach to international business communication that enables them to ask the right questions in a multicultural environment. *International Business Communication* provides a framework for formulating such questions when assessing the role cultural differences play in any international business interaction’ (p. xiii).

Clearly, the readership aimed at consists of both students and business communicators themselves, i.e. those at the sharp end. Given this audience, Victor had to strike a balance between practical information and relevant theories, and this he does very well.

In the introduction, the LESCANT model is introduced. This is an acronym for the seven variables that will affect business communication. LESCANT stands for: Language, Environment and technology, Social organization, Contexting, Authority conception, Nonverbal behavior, and Temporal conception. A chapter is devoted to each of these variables.

For most applied linguists, the chapter on language will not contain much that is new. There are some surprises here that suggest that this is not a field with which the author is very familiar. First, an uncompromising Whorfian stance is presented. Based on examples taken from Rheingold's *They Have a Word For It* (1988) which contains a large number of words that express specific meanings in a way that is completely different from other languages, the author concludes that 'one's view of reality stems largely from the language one uses'. This is not the place to enter into a discussion on linguistic determinism, suffice to say that most linguists nowadays would maintain a more relativistic view on the relation between language and thought. A second point shows what I may falsely interpret as a US-bias, in the assertion that 'it is possible (although arguably more difficult) to be effective in the international arena without knowing even one foreign language' (p. 18). Fortunately, the evidence presented in the rest of the book contradicts this viewpoint very convincingly.

In the chapter on language, impact of level of proficiency in the foreign language on business communication processes is discussed very briefly, but there is no reference to research on the specific problems of native/non-native interaction which is at the heart of current applied linguistic research. This is surprising, since the effectiveness of business communication is likely to be influenced by the way in which the communication partners deal with those problems. Another issue that is not discussed is error-evaluation: some errors are likely to be more damaging (in terms of accuracy and/or irritation) than others, and business communicators should be informed about the types of errors they should avoid. This kind of error-avoidance is discussed throughout the book with regard to many different cultural aspects, and one wonders why linguistic blunders do not get equal attention. Linguistic ethnocentrism, however, is discussed in some detail: the attitudes of speakers towards their own language varies a great deal, and some awareness of sensitivities in this respect is indeed very useful: even symbolic use of the other language conveys a message that may help to establish a more comfortable interaction.

In this chapter, a discussion of Giles’s accommodation theory (e.g. in Giles and Coupland 1991) would have been very useful because it provides a framework for the various factors that may influence language behavior in international business negotiations. This type of negotiation is characterized by the alternation of complex patterns of converging and diverging communication, in order to achieve the shared interest of reaching agreement. Different cultures will have different patterns of accommodation in interaction, and the risks of over- and under-accommodation provide a rich field of research.

Another type of research that should have been included in this chapter is the work on politeness strategies and face threatening activities by Brown and Levinson (1987). There is a growing body of research on politeness strategies in business communication that shows the importance of awareness of ‘face’. In other chapters in the book, there is much attention given to problems of saving ‘face’ (e.g. in settling disputes in Japan and the US), but the role of language in face-saving in communication is (sadly) not discussed.
As in all the following chapters, this chapter ends with some practical suggestions, some of them more enlightening than others. The author stresses the importance of the careful selection of translators and interpreters. He points out that many business negotiators attribute an understanding of negotiation strategies and specific business knowledge to the interpreter they work with, which can be a dangerous assumption. A second suggestion is to make use of back translation of texts in order to control the quality, and also in order to understand the limitations of translations. This may also be a relevant suggestion for simultaneous interpreting. Interestingly, 'try to learn the foreign language' is not one of the suggestions in this chapter, and how the specifics of language use in international business communication should be learned is not discussed in this book at all.

The remaining six chapters are a rich source of information about many aspects of international business communication. By giving clear examples and (sometimes rather elementary) theories, the author manages to fulfil his aims: making the reader aware of his/her own cultural prejudices, that do not appear to be as universal as they might expect. There are numerous examples here. For me, the information on the interpretation of bodily smells, or 'olfactory communication' as Victor calls it was an eye-opener. 'In the Americas, northern Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, smell is not considered a major source of message in business communication. . . . Such an aversion to natural body smells is not universal. Many cultures do not mask odors but instead interpret their presence as olfactory messages' (p. 224). Victor goes on to explain how attitudes in 'olfactory' and 'nonolfactory' cultures may play a role in communication with both sides unaware of those attitudes. The evidence presented serves as a cultural mirror for the reader who becomes aware of the fact that so many things relating to culture are taken for granted.

Despite its weaknesses on the linguistic front, this is a very useful book for everyone interested in international and intercultural communication. It contains an abundance of relevant information, it is well structured and the writing is very transparent. It is also humbling for the linguist who tends to overestimate the role of language in intercultural communication: *Lingua non olet*.

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REFERENCES