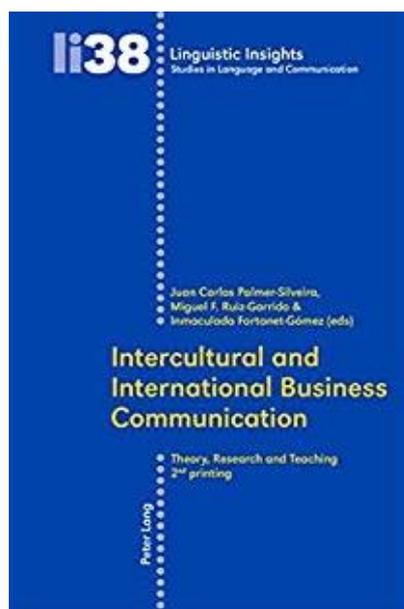




Intercultural and International Business Communication. Theory, Research and Teaching. 2nd printing.

Juan Carlos Palmer-Silveira, Miguel F. Ruiz-Garrido and Inmaculada Fortanet-Gómez, eds.

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Review by Dora Renna*

This volume, edited by Juan Carlos Palmer-Silveira, Miguel F. Ruiz-Garrido and Inmaculada Fortanet-Gómez, contributes to the ongoing debate concerning the multifaceted relation between business and communication. The editors introduce the volume by listing the viewpoints adopted in the publication as a whole. First, they clarify that their conception of English stems from a Lingua Franca research perspective, while still underlining lights and shades of the worldwide use of English – from competence gap to colonial heritage. They also specify that intercultural and international business communication are the main concern of the essays collected in this volume. The importance of including the cultural factor lays in the fact that cultural boundaries do not necessarily coincide with national boundaries, so the authors' aim is “to get an overview of the relations established both between cultures and nationalities” (11). Another crucial premise to the volume is the interdisciplinary approach required in the field, integrating linguistics with sociology, economics and business organisation. In fact, not only does a complete perspective require several points of view, but communication may also have a significant impact of the overall company performance.

The collection of contributions follows four main research directions, corresponding to the sections of the book: English in Intercultural and International Business communication; Analysing the Genres of Intercultural Business Communication; Intercultural Business Communication from a Sociolinguistic Perspective; Teaching Intercultural and International Business Communication.

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The first section consists in two chapters whose aim is to stress the relevance of English when it comes to business communication at an international and intercultural level. The contribution by Leena Louhiala-Salminen and Mirjalisa Charles opens with the definition and historical evolution of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca), and subsequently presents a case study on BELF usage in a Swedish-Finnish merger. Their research, carried out through surveys, interviews, and real-life examination, attests to the importance of BELF and the way the use of a business lingua franca is influenced by the users' native language and culture. The second chapter of this section is authored by Bertha Du-Babcock and Richard D. Babcock, who take English as the accepted language of international business, and focus on the competence of the business communicator (full bilingual, partial bilingual, unilingual, and first-language speaker), and the way different competence levels impact on their interaction practices.

The following section, which contains five essays and is thus the longest, is concerned with the analysis of intercultural business communication genres. The first chapter here included is a state-of-the-art article, which offers an overview of the different approaches to research in this field (e.g. ESP studies, North American New Rhetoric studies etc.) and shows how a genre is a rhetorical means to achieve a communicative goal. More specific case studies follow, with Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli analysing the increasingly used audio-conferences as a hybrid genre – remote and imageless like written communication, in real time and hands-free like face-to-face meetings. Frank van Meurs, Hubert Korzilius and Adriënne den Hollander present a case study aimed at discovering the way the use of job advertisements in English to recruit personnel in Dutch-speaking areas may change the perception of a job position for employers and prospective employees. The findings suggest that, in contrast with the common conception of the employers, using English does not seem to make the business look more prestigious to its potential employees. In the third chapter of the section, through a comparison between English and Chinese professional genres, Yunxia Zhu stresses the importance of broadening the study of genres to adopt a cross-cultural approach, and proposes a model for a contrastive study of genres, tested by carrying out an analysis of English and Chinese sales invitations. The closing chapter of the second section is a contribution by Hilikka Yli-Jokipii, who focuses on the translational perspective. Within the ESP perspective, she focuses on the texts involving English – in particular on expository and promotional genres, whose translation requires a deep understanding that is not only linguistic, but also involves knowledge of the genres and their characteristics.

The sociolinguistic approach to international business communication is the main focus of the third section, which features three essays. The first is authored by Jakob Luring, with a particularly remarkable ethnographic analysis aimed at describing the way expatriates interact among themselves and with speakers from the host country. The findings show that, despite the fact that employees are transferred abroad in order to bridge knowledge and practices across the countries involved, the Danish group analysed by the author remained focussed on sale targets and market shares, showing a non-cooperative attitude of superiority that generated frustration in the hosting country nationals. The following chapter is an exploration of the language practices of large international Swedish companies by Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, who shows how different levels of English proficiency are accepted according to the target of the communication, with more advanced skills being more important when presenting the business to potential customers or partners (e.g. presentations, brochures). The closing chapter of this section is a socio-cognitive analysis of corporate identity construction, affirmation and interpretation in business discourse. The authors, Vijay K. Bhatia and Jane Lung, develop a discursive model of identity construction through which it is possible to see a tight link between identity construction and communicative practices.

The volume closes with a fourth section dedicated to the teaching of intercultural and international business communication. The contribution by Julio C. Jiménez underlines some critical points in the field, and shows that, while useful for intermediate language learners, indulging in technicalities of letters or phone calls as discrete genres may not be as convenient for advanced students. The author underlines the importance of four key demands that need further discussion in teaching English for business: language impact, active listening, conflict management and uncertainty reduction. The concluding chapter by Gina Poncini aims at showing the positive outcomes of linking research and teaching in the field of business communication, revealed through the analysis of real data drawn from actual business interactions. Poncini's work also points out the kind of linguistic strategies that facilitate successful multilingual and multicultural business communication.



The collection of essays covers several aspects of the main topic, which appears in all its multifaceted and multi-layered complexity. From the breadth of aspects considered by the authors, it is easy for the young and the experienced researcher alike to find inspiration in the case studies here reported for further research. On the other hand, students and people approaching the topic for the first time will benefit from the state-of-the-art contributions, as well as from the articles in the opening section.

Overall, the volume offers a valid contribution to a field that is still relevant and current from various points of view, going from applied linguistics and specialised discourses to language teaching and business studies. The recurrent reference to English and its role as a crucial tool for globalised business – as emerged in the case studies reported in this volume – further proves BELF has long been integral part of any discourse concerning international and intercultural business communication not only among theorists, but also among professionals at all levels.