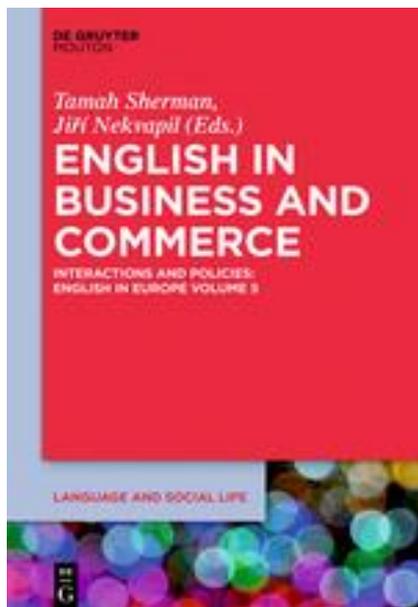




English in Business and Commerce: Interaction and Policies; English in Europe volume 5

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Review by Shawnea S. P. Ting*

This book on business English studies is the final volume in the *English in Europe* series of De Gruyter Mouton. With the core of its thirteen chapters being papers presented at the conference *English in Europe: Opportunity or Threat*, the book is a rare joint effort from both the fields of linguistics and business. The thirteen individual studies, divided into three parts, focus mainly on how English is adopted as a lingua franca or one of the lingua francas in business-related domains in Europe. They demonstrate how the ever-increasing dominating use of English can bring opportunities to its users and business, but also threats to speakers and domains using other languages. At the same time, the studies also show how this issue is worth being investigated collaboratively by researchers from linguistics and business with interdisciplinary perspectives.

In the first chapter of part one, “Ideologies and discourse on English in the business sphere,” Andrew Linn, Guro Refsum Sanden, and Rebecca Piekkari give a good introduction to the topic by exemplifying how an interdisciplinary study relating to both sociolinguistics and international business (IB) might look like. They illustrate language standardisation in IB by examining the language policy of a Danish multinational with reference to Haugen’s 1996 model of norm development (in written Norwegian) (25) and a model by Piekkari, Welch and Welch (2014) on language strategy in IB (36). The authors deliver a clear comparison of language standardisation in both the corporate and the national contexts, and aptly explain how the language policy of a company (analysed from the angle of IB) can inform the language policy on a national level (analysed from the angle of sociolinguistics).

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In the chapter that follows, Kamilla Kraft and Dorte Lønsmann delve into the language ideological landscape of Danish international companies from the perspective of managers. Kraft and Lønsmann interviewed thirteen staff members on the managerial level from eleven international companies based in Denmark. The interview data presented vividly depict that the language choice for the local, regional, and international context, respectively, is perceived “not so much as a choice, but rather as a given” (53), and languages other than English are regarded as unacceptable as *lingua francas* in the international context (59). Attending to ideologies and power, the chapter exposes the idea of “English as the language of equality” in the European context as an illusion (63), as the ideology of “language choice as a given” indeed stems from control and power, underlying “structural inequalities in the workplaces” (63).

The two other studies in part one look beyond Scandinavia, with Elisabeth Barakos inspecting how Welsh-English bilingualism is implemented in institutional business settings in Wales, and Alessia Cogo and Patchareerat Yanaprasart comparing the language ideologies and their impact in two multinational companies (MNCs) in banking in Switzerland and Italy (96). Sifting through documents from the companies and interview data, they find that tension exists between what is given top-down as policy and stakeholders’ bottom-up wants and needs at work (75). Therefore, although a bilingual or multilingual approach to communication may be stressed on paper, a rather monolingual approach, especially one that prioritises English as the corporate language, is frequently adopted in practice.

Language practice is discussed in more detail in part two, “The management of English in business and organisational contexts.” In the only study that devotes itself to the Asian context, Lisa Fairbrother evaluates how English is applied in daily interactions in the Japanese branches of European MNCs by conducting in-depth interviews with three employees (Mexican, Japanese, and Chinese) locally hired in Japan. Data reveal that unlike previous accounts of interactions using English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) which are always “collaborative and harmonious” (160), there are “deviations” (150) from the norms of standard varieties of English on the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural levels. Fairbrother attributes these deviations to local workplace power structure and communicative norms in Japan. Existing research on European MNCs has been focusing mainly on Europeans communicating with other Europeans in English inside Europe, overlooking interactions outside Europe. Therefore, the chapter acts as a good exemplar for her own proposal that more attention should be given to exploring interactions among ELF speakers of “very different communicative and sociocultural norms,” such as those outside Europe, in IB (167).

Sonja Barfod presents a stimulating chapter with the only study in the book that probes into how English is not used exclusively in MNCs. Barfod looks at how Scandinavians (speaking Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) in a Danish company communicate informally during lunchtime. Her discussion comes from eighteen hours of video-recordings, which show that in contrast to prior research about Scandinavia, inter-Scandinavian instead of English was employed, with participants adapting their languages to different extents to their fellow Scandinavians. She concludes that whereas the participants themselves do not realise their competence to communicate with other colleagues in inter-Scandinavian is a skill, such interaction is “a good example of linguistic diversity as a resource in informal workplace settings” (191). This conclusion elucidates what the meaning of *lingua francas* in the corporate setting could be, or in other words, what a multilingual approach to corporate language could entail.

The two remaining chapters in part two are contributed by Sharon Millar on the one hand, and Neil Bermel and Luděk Knittl on the other. Millar enquires into how managerial level staff members in two Danish international companies make sense of the decision to apply English as a corporate language from a recipient’s standpoint. She finds that the “instrumentality of English” permeates the sensemaking process, with an absence of concerns over “linguistic rights or cultural considerations” (138). Meanwhile, Bermel and Knittl engage in an investigation of the linguistic landscape of the town of Turnov and the Hrubý Rohozec castle, a heritage site, in the Czech Republic. They describe the juxtaposition of Czech, the local language, and foreign languages (FLs), such as English and German, and how the “castle’s multilingual past is reflected and transmitted in a very different multilingual present” (225).

Moving on to part three, “The position of English and other languages on local and international labour markets, implications for language and education policy,” Vít Dovalil again addresses the position of English and German in the Czech Republic, particularly, “the decision-making processes” of and the effect of perceived “economic concerns” in the choice of FL learning (276). His data consist of media discourse and interviews



with directors of various institutions, parents and children, and private language teachers (276). Like five other chapters in the book, Dovalil discusses his data with the help of Language Management Theory (Nekvapil and Sherman 2015; Nekvapil 2016). Taking into account the Catherine Wheel model (Strubell 1999, 421), he concludes that English is dominating in the Czech Republic because of inadequate resources offered by public schools for a continuous teaching of German, and low perceived socio-economic values associated with learning German. This chapter fittingly exhibits that when learners and education providers do not put as much socio-economic value on multilingualism as policy makers do, motivation and resources to practise multiple FLs will be lacking. Therefore, although the idea of multilingualism and a second FL is advocated by the European Union, it is not well-implemented on the ground.

The dominance of English is the centre of focus for the rest of part three. Zoe Kantaridou, Iris Papadopoulou, and Jo Angouri provide a comprehensive account of how multilingualism is mostly “interpreted in the corporate world as command of English” (271) by scrutinising the required language skills stated in job advertisements in Greece. Tobias Schroedler deals with the values of FL skills in IB. Macroeconomic data and expert interviews reflect that poor FL skills in Ireland beget missed opportunities, lower competitiveness, and disadvantages in building sustainable business relationships. Schroedler argues for a better FL education policy to meet the demands of IB. In Austria, university management, programme managers, and domestic and international students interviewed by Miya Komori-Glatz and Barbara Schmidt-Unterberger all favour the adoption of English as the medium of instruction at WU Vienna, Europe’s largest business university. However, Komori-Glatz and Schmidt-Unterberger find that WU’s language department is little involved in these English-medium programmes. They believe that it remains a question “how language teaching in European business universities can be optimized” to support future “international managers” working in IB (330).

The book ends with a study that explores the African context. Based on interviews with twenty university students in Kenya and South Africa, group discussions, and ethnographic observations, Alla Tovaes and Nkonko Kamwangamalu assess linguistic diversity and the medium of instruction (MOI) in universities, and “the imperatives of the globalization and market value of English” in these two countries (335). Employing theoretical frameworks on language and capital, such as Bourdieu (1991), Tovaes and Kamwangamalu propose that to break the use of English as the sole MOI, and to enable African languages to be used as MOIs alongside English; students and their communities need to be made aware of the economic values of these indigenous languages. This is because students’ views of the MOI are indeed prompted by their perceived values of different languages in business and commerce. Thus, this chapter epitomises the theme of part three by pointing out how the use of English and other languages in business and more generally language policy and language attitudes affect one another.

Overall, the book does well in explicating a range of common areas of interest between the fields of (socio-)linguistics and business. The chapters offer ideas about how scholars from the two fields may collaborate by approaching an issue through different lenses. Therefore, the book can be useful for researchers who are interested in exploring areas for conducting interdisciplinary studies. In addition, the theoretical frameworks adopted in the studies are presented and explained clearly. Therefore, students or general readers who would like to learn about the use of English in business, but who do not have a strong theoretical foundation in either linguistics or business, will also be able to profit from this book.

Finally, the book is a good response to the original conference theme of “English in Europe: Opportunity of Threat.” Various chapters in the book illustrate how English is nearly always favoured, marginalising other languages. Instead of supporting the idea of using only English in the business context, contributors of the book support a more multilingual approach to communication. This means while English could be seen as a threat, the contributors propose a way out of this conundrum by suggesting English in Europe can be an opportunity if English is practised not with a monolingual mindset, but with an understanding of English as a Lingua Franca, representing a multilingual mindset. For instance, it is put forward by Cogo and Yanaprasart in their chapter that the use of English as a corporate language should not be confined to “a monolingual native variety, but” should rather be promoted as “a multilingual and more flexible medium of communication” (113) “shaped by the multilingual repertoires of the speakers” (101). With ELF evolving into “English as a Multilingua Franca” (Jenkins 2015), the emphasis on multilingualism advocated both in ELF and IB align with each other. Therefore, this book will also be enlightening to those who are interested in how to reconceptualise English as a multilingua franca in the business context.



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