

# GENRE PATTERNS IN LANGUAGE-BASED COMMUNICATION ZONES

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*This article modifies and elaborates the language-based communication zones model. The authors distinguish between potential zones and activated zones, add MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three to the model, define language competency more completely and precisely, and identify three types of genre patterns (i.e., professional genre, commercial genre, and relational genre). Concentrating on the language patterns in the direct channels of language-based communication zones, they focus on determining the language competencies required to communicate directly in different communication situations and about different communication tasks. Professional, commercial, and relational genre patterns in Zone One, MegaZone Two, and MegaZone Three are identified and described. Research-based examples are included to illustrate the genre patterns.*

**Keywords:** *international business communication; genre communication; language-based communication zones*

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Individuals who speak different national languages and possess varying levels of second-language competency exchange messages directly and indirectly in an increasingly fast-paced and expanding globalized communication environment. In this globalized environment, the messages cover a wide range of subject complexity (from the most simple to the most complex) and

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This article is partly based on two research studies (Strategic Research Grant Project Nos. 7001650 and 7001881) funded by the City University of Hong Kong. The generosity and kind support of the University Research Committee is gratefully acknowledged. The authors wish to acknowledge the valuable comments by anonymous reviewers and especially the help and support of Dr. Margaret Graham, editor. Bertha Du-Babcock is an associate professor and the director of FHS International Exchange at the City University of Hong Kong. She was the recipient of the 2004 Meada Gibbs Outstanding Teaching Award from the Association for Business Communication. Richard D. Babcock is a professor of management at the University of San Francisco. He also has taught at Nijenrode University (the Netherlands), Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong), and Murdoch University (Australia). Du-Babcock and Babcock received the *Business Communication Quarterly* Outstanding Article of 2001. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Bertha Du-Babcock, Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong, 83 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong; e-mail: enbertha@cityu.edu.hk.

Journal of Business Communication, Volume 44, Number 4, October 2007 340-373

DOI: 10.1177/0021943607306136

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require varying language competency levels (from full to little or no second-language competency) to compose and comprehend the exchanged information. For some communication tasks, and in some communication situations, only individuals who share an advanced competency in a national language can directly exchange information, whereas for other tasks and situations, individuals with lesser competencies can still directly interact and successfully fulfill the information exchange requirements. For instance, company representatives must share advanced and specialized language competence to negotiate a complex international merger, whereas customers and order takers need only basic language competency to complete a fast-food order.

To distinguish and organize the different communication patterns in this diverse multilingual communication environment, our 2001 language-based communication zones model (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001) described how individuals with varying language competencies and using different communication strategies and methods based on these competencies could take part in international business communication processes. This model showed that interactants, depending on their language competency fits, exchange messages through direct channels (not requiring translation over national languages) and indirect communication channels (requiring translation through intermediaries or language link-pins) in language-based communication zones.

This article expands the language-based zones model to identify and describe situations and tasks where interactants can directly exchange messages (labeled *situation-related* and *task-related genre patterns*) in given situations and tasks. This refinement to our 2001 language-based communication zones model, therefore, concentrates on genre language patterns emerging in the direct channels within language-based communication zones. We focus on determining what language competencies are required to communicate directly in different communication situations and about different communication tasks. We match language competency to situations and tasks and show that different situations and tasks require different levels of language competency to directly exchange messages. Professional, commercial, and relational genre patterns that emerge in Zone One, MegaZone Two, and MegaZone Three are identified and developed.

We again suggest, as we did previously (2001), that a comprehensive framework is needed to aid international business communication practices and guide future research endeavors so as to provide a more comprehensive explanation of international business communication. We offer

this refinement of our model (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001) as a complement to other models and theories that explain different aspects of international and intercultural business communication. Taken together, these models and theories can describe the dynamic, bidirectional, multiply influenced, and transformational translation processes (Sherblom, 1998) that occur in an increasingly fast-paced, differentiated, interrelated, and expanding international business communication environment.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE-BASED COMMUNICATION ZONES MODEL**

In this section, we summarize the development of the language-based communication zones model. Our initial study (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996) focused on the different communication challenges faced by three types of expatriate managers doing business within branches of multinational corporations in Taiwan. Those managers who could speak only simple Mandarin used language link-pins—assistants fluent in both English and Mandarin Chinese—to send substantive messages and often felt linguistically and psychologically isolated and excluded from the local Chinese staff. They reduced this isolation and developed a connection to their organizations through ritualized or symbolic communication in simple Chinese or English. Bilingual expatriates who had partial or intermediate Chinese language proficiency communicated through both languages but typically confined their use of Chinese to social occasions in which its use was viewed positively. They carried on all of their business transactions in English. Fully bilingual expatriates who were fluent in both English and Chinese carried on business activities in both languages. Yet, their fluency in the language native to the culture in which they were operating brought with it challenges not faced by the other two types of expatriates and for which excellent linguistic and translation skills were not always adequate to meet the cultural expectations that accompanied the job. As the language abilities of the expatriates increased, the expectations of cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and conformance also expanded. So, expatriates who appeared linguistically fluent were expected to be culturally fluent and sophisticated in a way that less linguistically fluent executives were not. Any slippage or violation of a cultural norm was interpreted more harshly—as an affront—unlike for the less linguistically adept expatriates.

Fully bilingual expatriates also found it more difficult to maintain contact with their corporate headquarters and indigenous cultures. They also had problems implementing corporate philosophy and culture appropriately in their branch operations. So, in addition to the greater risk of violating the cultural norms of the host country in which they operated, they also ran the risk of becoming isolated from their local corporate cultures. In sum, our 1996 study operationalized language competency and its association with cultural competency as a construct to be included in the study of international business communication.

Our 2001 model recognized the interactive nature of the communication process and reconstituted the 1996 zone model by identifying three additional different-language zones, as well as two same-language zones where interactants speak the same first languages. This refinement responded to previous theories and models in the field, which implicitly made the assumption that all communicators possessed full language competency or that messages would be passed through specialist translators or link-pin communicators (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001).

Communicators are confronted with different problems and challenges in the eight language-based zones and consequently must adjust their communication strategies and tactics to fit the zone in which they are interacting. In parallel zones, different-language and same-language zone interactants have equivalent language proficiencies, and thus, they begin the interaction and process of adjusting to their communication partners from equivalent (parallel) language proficiencies. In nonparallel zones, the interactants begin from an unequal (nonparallel) language proficiency level. In this situation, the communicators have to adjust to sets of contrasting patterns of language adjustments so that higher proficiency language communicators have to accommodate their lower proficiency communication partners.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MODEL DEVELOPMENT**

To guide the refinement and further development of the language-based communication zones model, we use genre theory to sharpen our definition of language competency and to describe language patterns. Communication accommodation theory (CAT) is also used to elaborate on the communication behavior of interactants. Genre theory enables us to define more precisely language proficiency and describe the language

patterns that arise in relation to differing situations and tasks, whereas CAT (as in our 2001 model) enables us to better describe communicator adjustments when interlocutors interact in various situations and tasks.

Genre theory has been successfully used for more than two decades to investigate the discourses used in various professional settings (see Bakhtin, 1986; Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990). These studies have established that any given genre is one that typifies a preferred mode of communication. This is applicable when oral or written communication is used, as well as a preferred use of vocabulary and format, whether for communicating within the group (discourse community) or the public generally. Users of the genre will therefore recognize the inherent features and rules and be able to identify and share the intended communicative purposes. In terms of our model, then, it is possible to view categories of language used in particular genres as also forming part of a national language (generally or professionally) in that they take on distinctive meanings in different contexts of use. For example, Yates and Orlikowski (1994, 2002) have described how genre communities develop distinctive communication patterns that can be organized into genre systems distinguished by their purpose, content, participants, form, time, and place. We have used this framework to help describe the characteristics of situation- and task-related genres where interactants form genre communities according to their linguistic competencies.

Overall, genre theory and studies have been useful in helping us relate language patterns to communication tasks and situations, and in determining the boundaries of the genre, the analysis of genre patterns, and the relationship of genres to general language. Of particular relevance to our framework are Bhatia's (1993, 2004) concept of professional genres and Nickerson's (2000) analytical framework for investigating the formal and substantive characteristics of organizational genres in multinational settings. We draw on Bhatia's (2004) professional genre classification and Nickerson's four types of genres (informational, promotional, relational, and transformational genres) to help categorize our own three genre types, namely, professional genre (per Bhatia), commercial genre (including Nickerson's informational and promotional categories), and relational genre (per Nickerson). We also recognize Nickerson's transformational category as a genre that develops in MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three and within our designated categories/genre types.

The rationale for creating our particular genre types is that the language limitations and competencies of interactants create distinctive sublanguages in national languages as the interlocutors adjust to the competency

levels of their counterparts. Language-generated genre patterns are activated by the communication requirements of tasks and in situations where communicators have the necessary genre language competency to interact directly without intermediaries. Our genre categories relate genre language patterns to professional tasks (where interactants draw on their professional expertise), commercial tasks (where interactants draw on company knowledge and experience, including persuasive and informational genres), and relational tasks (where interactants establish human contact and relationships). These genres draw on different vocabulary areas of national languages that reflect respective professional, commercial, and relational tasks.

*Professional genres* are specialized languages spoken by professionals within a discipline (e.g., law, medicine, and engineering). Professional genres are “often products of a set of established procedures that form an important part of the disciplinary culture within a profession” (Bhatia, 2004, p. 129). For example, engineers make up a language community that communicates through their professional genre as do other professional groups such as lawyers, doctors, managers, accountants, architects and builders, and so forth. Through common or similar education and experience, these professionals acquire a shared knowledge base (to a greater or lesser extent) even if the knowledge is coded in different national languages. In this process, professionals in the specified discipline develop their own specialized language communities within and across organizations, industries, and countries.

*Commercial genres* are a combination of Nickerson’s (2000) promotional and informational genres that cut across organizations and company languages that both relate to and reside in organizations. These genres are developed to describe information exchange and commercial transactions in specific companies and industries. For example, the dialogue of salespersons and customers (a promotional genre) and a new policy statement distributed among company employees (an informational genre) fit into our commercial genre category.

*Relational genre* refers to the verbal and nonverbal communication that creates the social fabric of a group by promoting relationships between and among group members/language communicators (Keyton, 1999). We include the category of relational genres to show how people in organizations exchange personal and social messages regardless of their language proficiency while also examining how such exchange affects their relationships in neutral, positive, or negative ways. People chatting at work or at a company party are examples of relational genres.

We also draw on communication accommodation theory (CAT) to analyze and illustrate how communicators with varying levels of language competency accommodate and adjust to their genre patterns. The CAT framework helps describe and analyze the interaction patterns of interlocutors in interpersonal communication (e.g., see Bell, 1991; Bourhis, 1979; Buzzanell, Burrell, Stafford, & Berkowitz, 1996; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988). This adjustment involves modifications in the use of both general and genre languages that are set off by competency matches in these two language categories. CAT is based on the assumption that speakers and listeners mutually modify their linguistic and/or paralinguistic behaviors to become more similar to (convergence) or different from (divergence) their interactional partners (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987).

The size and direction of accommodations in the different language-based communication zones are influenced by the initial language proficiency positions of the interlocutors and by the differing exposures (cultural, temporal, and spatial) available to the interactants while the zones remain activated. Besides assessing accommodation through CAT, our analysis of the different zones also takes into account likely communication risks, potential information loss and distortion, the channels used to carry information, and the power and interpersonal relationships of interactants.

### Refined Zone Model Development

In this section, we add task-related and situation-related genre patterns to the language-based communication zones model. We first present updated definitions and distinctions that we use to incorporate genre patterns into the language-based communication zones model. We then present the expanded model that integrates genre patterns into the language-based zones framework.

In 2001, we defined a language-based zone as “the possible communication channels available to prospective interactants given their language competence” (p. 381). Consequently, this definition of a language zone was based on the language competency match of interactants prior to their choice of a language in which to communicate. Although the prior definition had the advantage of describing the total information exchange possibilities among potential interactants, it carried the disadvantage of not being able to accurately describe the information exchange possibility of partial bilinguals after they chose a language and formed a language zone.

To capture these two distinctions, we now distinguish potential language zones (our prior definition and before language choice) to describe total communication possibilities among interactants and activated zones (after language choice) to describe the communication channels available in the chosen national language. Activated zones are formed at the point where interactants choose a language and begin to interact, whereas potential zones begin at the first contact of the interactants. In this article, our analysis of genre patterns is based on activated zones so as to better integrate genre patterns into our model and relate language competency to present communication behavior.

We also further divide language proficiency into two components: general-language competency (overall ability to use a national language) and genre competency (ability to use a specialized language in an area of a national language) (see also Du-Babcock, 2007). In the 2001 model, our definition of language proficiency was an overall measure in that language proficiency was defined as the general ability to communicate in a national language regardless of communication tasks or situations where communication might take place. Subsequently, in this article, language proficiency refers to the ability of interlocutors to communicate in specific situations and about specific tasks. We now distinguish between the ability to communicate in specific situations and about specified tasks, and divide competency into general language (continuation of our prior definition) and genre competencies (ability to communicate in specific situations and tasks).

To complete the model, we create MegaZones (see Figure 1) where we condense the eight previously identified language-based zones into categories that reflect the different levels of general-language competency for our analysis of communication in activated communication zones. Zone One remains the same as in our 2001 model, and we create MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three.

Zone One genre patterns are the interactions arising among unilingual communicators who do not share competency in a national language. MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three genre patterns are the interactions among partial or full bilinguals and first-language speakers. In MegaZone Two, communicators consciously make language adjustments to accommodate lower proficiency speakers, whereas in MegaZone Three, communicators assume full fluency and therefore do not make language-level accommodations. We combine Zone Two, Zone Two-One, and Zone Three-Two to form MegaZone Two. Likewise, Zone Three, Zone Three-One, Zone A, and Zone B are combined to form MegaZone Three.

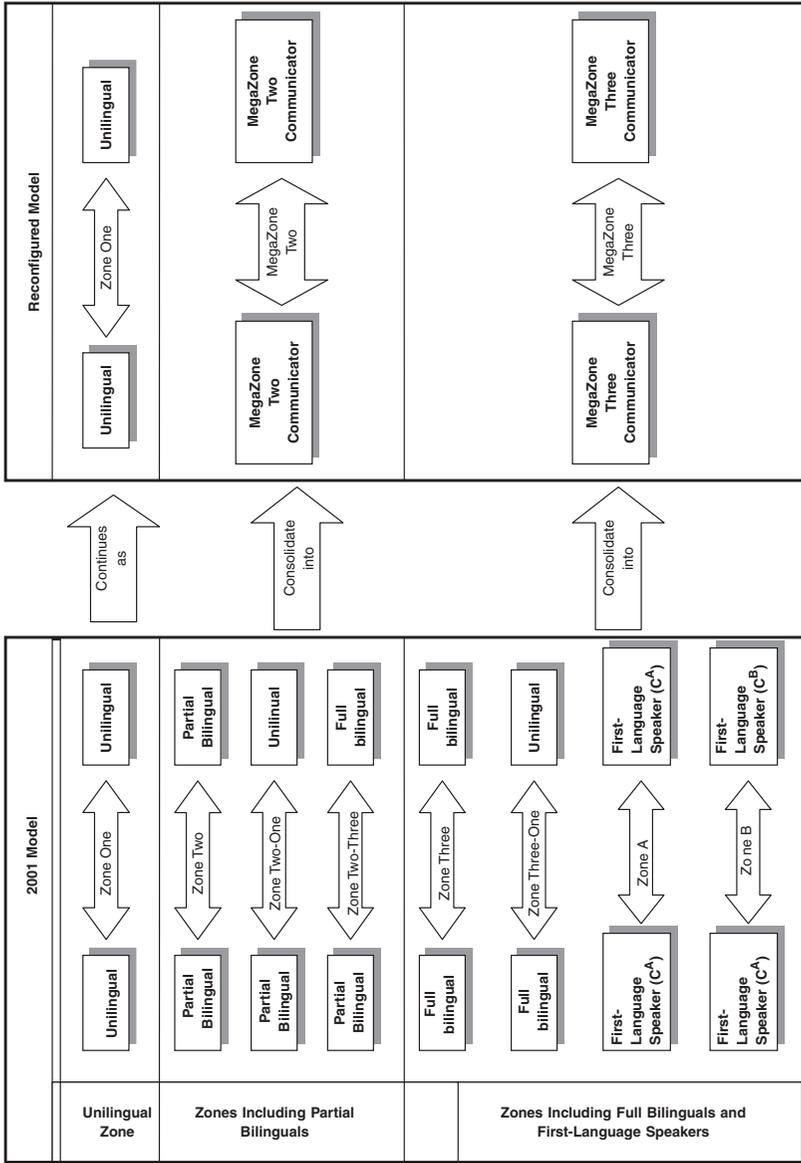
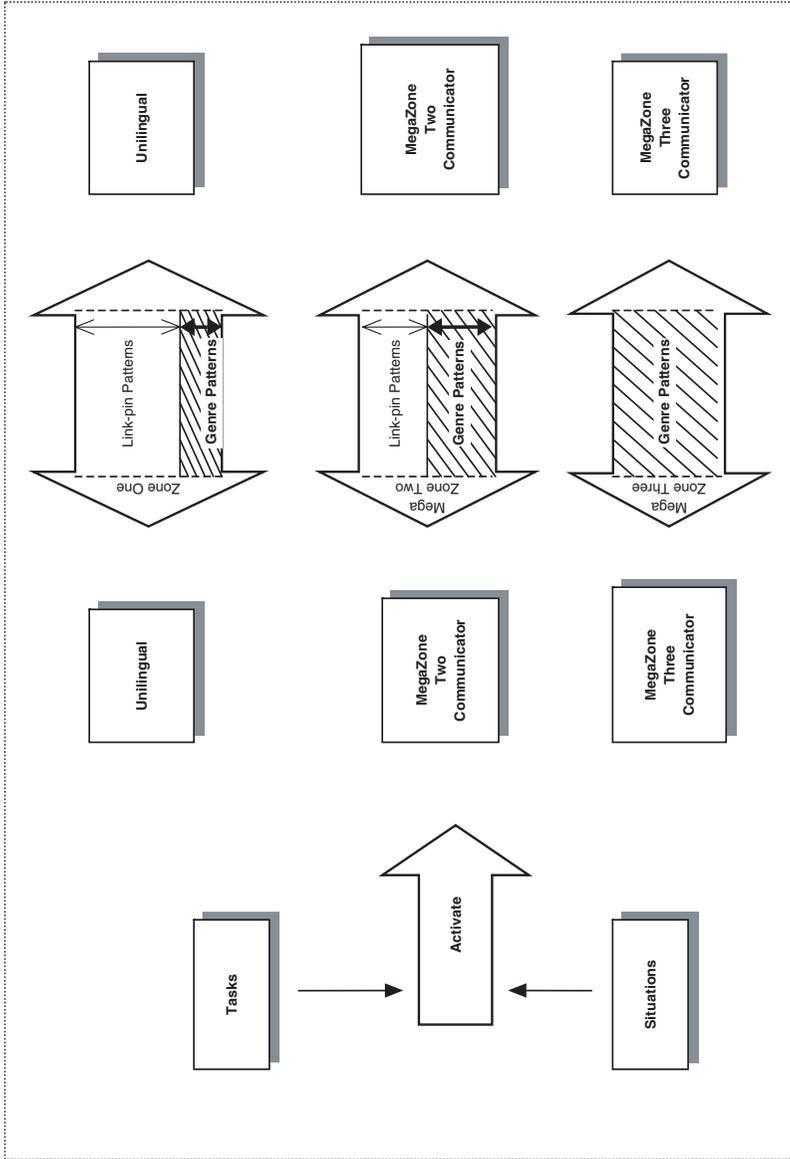


Figure 1. Language-Based Communication Zones and the Reconfigured MegaZone Models

MegaZone Two genre patterns are interactions that fit within the communication competencies of partial bilinguals. The distinctive characteristics of these patterns are that at least one speaker in a communication dyad makes language adjustments to accommodate and fit within the understanding capacity of a partial bilingual communicator. These genre patterns include parallel communication encounters among partial bilinguals (Zone Two) and the nonparallel interactions of partial bilinguals with interactants having a higher general-language competency—either with full bilinguals (Zone Three-Two) or unilingual speakers (Zone Two-One). In nonparallel communication encounters, higher competency speakers adjust their general-language behavior downward to accommodate for the competency levels of their partial bilingual interactants.

MegaZone Three genre patterns are interactions among fully fluent first- and second-language speakers. The distinctive characteristic of these patterns is that interactants assume that their interlocutors possess a fluent general-language competency and therefore do not use language simplification adjustments. These speakers can use full general-language competency to communicate in all tasks and situations. Not being constrained with any language deficiency, interactants in MegaZone Three interact from parallel general-language competency positions. In fact, some second-language speakers may assume superior general-language competency positions in their interactions. For example, with English emerging as the prominent international business language (Crystal, 1997), interactants often form English language MegaZone Three (where they assume that their communication will be in English and that their interlocutors have full language competency). However, we do recognize that full bilinguals speaking a second language have to make adjustments to accommodate to a local language environment (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001).

We next present the reconfigured model (see Figure 2) showing direct (genre patterns) and indirect channels (link-pin patterns) within the language-based communication zones. We distinguish both tasks and situations to relate genre patterns to activities and also to place interactions in the background context surrounding and influencing the interactions. Genre pattern tasks are defined as the communication activities of sending and receiving. They are also categorized by the subject of messages and are further divided into professional tasks, commercial tasks, and relational tasks. Genre pattern situations describe historical factors relating to the backgrounds of the interactants, the physical and social settings of the interactions, and other relevant factors affecting the interactions in general.



**Figure 2. Genre Patterns and Link-Pin Patterns in Language-Based Communication Zones**

Figure 2 also shows how tasks and situations activate different potential proportions of direct communication (genre patterns) and indirect communication (link-pin patterns) in the language-based communication zones. Larger possibilities for direct communication progressively emerge from Zone One to MegaZone Two to MegaZone Three.

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Genre pattern situations describe historical factors relating to the backgrounds of the interactants, the physical and social settings of the interactions, and other relevant factors affecting the interactions in general.

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In language-based communication zones, interactants must adjust to the genre competency levels of their interlocutors so that genre patterns represent either parallel accommodation or nonparallel accommodation. In parallel patterns, communication partners with an equivalent genre competency share the responsibility for finding an understandable language, whereas in nonparallel patterns, the interactant with a higher/superior language proficiency carries more responsibility and must simplify or adjust the language level to accommodate the comprehension level of the less proficient interactant. There is mutual adjustment in parallel patterns and a one-way adjustment by the individual possessing a higher language competence in nonparallel patterns.

## **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF GENRE PATTERNS**

In this section, we discuss the task- and situation-related genre patterns that emerge because of the relative competencies required to communicate across genres and national languages. Different patterns can be identified in genres (professional, commercial, and relational) and in language-based communication zones (Zone One, MegaZone Two, and MegaZone Three). Specific genre patterns can be delineated in professional, commercial, and relational genres in Zone One, MegaZone Two, and MegaZone Three. First, we compare the overall characteristics distinguishing professional,

**Table 1. Characteristics of Professional, Commercial, and Relational Genres**

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Commercial</i>	<i>Relational</i>
Genre community membership	Professionals within and across organizations and industries	Individuals within and across organizations and industries	Individuals in social situations around professions and organizations
Genre source	Professional education and experience	Company and industry training and experience	Societal and company socialization
Scope	Universal	Local	Universal and local
Linguistic features	Specialized vocabulary	Artificial vocabulary	General-language vocabulary
Learning time and difficulty	Varies across professions	Varies across organizations and industries	Varies across social systems and among individuals

commercial, and relational genres (see Table 1) regardless of the language zones in which interactions take place. Second, we discuss how the varying general-language competency levels of the interactants affect the quantity and nature of communication tasks and situations in the respective communication zones regardless of the genre category in which the interaction takes place. These two sections form a foundation for analysis and comparison of the communication possibilities (tasks and situations) and the interactions (genre patterns) that arise in genre types (professional, commercial, and relational) in the language-based communication zones (Zone One, MegaZone Two, and MegaZone Three).

### Comparisons of Genre Characteristics

Table 1 compares professional, commercial, and relational genres according to five identified characteristics, namely, the genre community membership, genre source, genre scope, linguistic features of the genre, and time taken and difficulty when learning the genre. First, in terms of genre community membership, individuals communicating in these genres comprise different genre communities. For example, lawyers and accountants make up distinctive groups who speak their specialized professional languages, whereas company representatives constitute other genre communities in which individuals communicate through distinctive company languages or

commercial genres. When coming into contact with each other in the course of their professional or commercial activities, or at professional or company social functions, these individuals also engage in social conversations representing relational genre.

The source of the genre language varies among these three genre communities. Professionals acquire field-specific knowledge and related genres through professional education and training. Individuals learn commercial genres through the process of both formal training and informal exposure to company and industry practices. As for relational genre, individuals acquire appropriate social behaviors and discourses as they become more integrated into the cultures of their companies and professions.

The scope of these three types of genres varies in that professional genres develop across companies and industries, whereas the commercial and relational genres develop within companies and industries. Consequently, the scope of the professional genre community is universal because members of a professional group throughout the world can communicate with each other in their professional language. In contrast, commercial genres are local in nature, as members of a genre community communicate through the specific commercial genres used by the companies and industries. For example, IBM employees speak a distinctive company language (see Locker & Kaczmarek, 2004). Relational genres are both universal and local in scope. The universal aspect of relational genres is influenced by interaction and politeness rules and practices that are applicable to and extend over cultures, whereas the local aspect of the relational genres refers to the practices pertaining to a particular culture. To interact successfully, individuals learn to abide by universal behavioral norms and also take into consideration cultural differences and local conditions.

The linguistic features of these three genre types differ in that their vocabularies come from different parts of the national language. A professional genre has a specialized vocabulary that codifies the accumulated knowledge of the discipline. In comparison, a commercial genre has an "artificial" vocabulary component that is developed to describe a company's products, services, or practices. The vocabulary is artificial in the sense that the terminology is chosen and may be changed or updated (e.g., a company choosing a new slogan for an advertising campaign). Contrasting this, the vocabulary of a relational genre emanates from general language so that individuals establish and maintain human relationships by becoming more proficient in this genre.

To interact successfully, individuals learn to abide by universal behavioral norms and also take into consideration cultural differences and local conditions.

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The learning time taken and difficulty of mastering genres also varies among and within these three types of genre. Comparatively, it takes much longer for individuals to enter the medical or legal profession than to become sales personnel. Likewise, the learning time required for mastering a commercial genre depends on the complexity of products and services that a company provides. For instance, individuals will need a much longer time frame to learn computer-related genres than to master most commercial product genres. The timeline for learning relational genres also varies depending on the complexity of a company's culture. This means that determining appropriate behavioral norms in a highly politicized organizational culture with dominant and opposing (more complex) subcultures takes longer than learning correct behaviors in a harmonious and unified (less complex) organizational culture.

### Genre and General-Language Competencies

Genre and general-language competencies, or the lack thereof, interactively restrict or stimulate the development of differing and varying genre patterns in and across the language-based communication zones. Consequently, the interconnection of general language and genre varies. In Zone One genre patterns, unilinguals cannot interact in general-language conversations, whereas partial or full bilinguals in MegaZone Two or MegaZone Three intermix general language and genre language in their interactions. In Zone One genre patterns, the interjection of general language is most likely to overload the information processing capacities of the interlocutors and thereby becomes noise for the unilingual genre language receivers. In MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three genre patterns, general language is an integral part of the genre patterns—either to facilitate communication flow or impart meaning for some tasks and in some situations.

The relationship of the general-language competency and genre patterns lies in the communication flow of the interactions, language use and style of the interactants, and the possibility of creativity and flexibility in genre communication. In Zone One, the genre is largely independent of general language and stands alone in the simplest Zone One communication transactions. In fact, the injection of general language into Zone One communication episodes may disrupt the message exchange process. Consequently, communication episodes in Zone One are short and non-continuous as the interactants begin and finish their interactions in a short time frame. In MegaZone Two, general language provides structure and support for the genre language, whereas in MegaZone Three, general language becomes intertwined and integrated in the genre pattern. In other words, in MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three, the interactants use their general-language competency to develop and maintain an interactive exchange in an ongoing communication flow, but with different characteristics. In MegaZone Two, the communication flow is characterized by rougher transitions, for example, with more pauses between the speech acts, and is probably more tolerant of language errors and possibly less small talk in conversations. In contrast, MegaZone Three genre communication has a smooth and continuous communication flow. In this zone, pauses or silent periods are not caused by language-competency deficiencies but rather by conscious or unconscious choices of the interactants.

To illustrate the relationship of general-language and genre competencies and how these competencies interactively determine communication ability, we show how an individual with full genre competency can completely fulfill the communication requirement of tasks and situations within the language areas that are encompassed by the genre. However, lacking equivalent competency in all other areas of the national language, this communicator will also struggle with communicating and be unable to communicate with regard to tasks and situations in professional (legal), social, and relational areas. Our illustration is a part of a dialogue between the partial bilingual Belgian owner of a lace manufacturing firm and an American potential business partner as they held a preliminary discussion to address the possibility of forming a joint venture to import Belgian lace into the United States. The Belgian was a general-language, partial bilingual, and the American was a first-language English speaker. This general-language match placed the interactants into MegaZone Two. In this MegaZone Two genre pattern, the Belgian possessed full genre competency in a language area revolving around lace and could communicate as much as a fluent

general-language speaker in lace-related conversation but could not carry on interactive conversations in other areas of general language.

In an English language discussion, the Belgian, in an advanced genre pattern, explained the manufacturing process and the product specifications of the lace. The dialogue can be placed in a limited or specialized language area relating to lace that the Belgian had learned through repeated use over a 20-year period. The Belgian also controlled the communication flow, and she was able to adjust her genre language level to fit the understanding capacity of her American interlocutor, whereas the American participated in a listening role. However, when the discussion turned to possible legal arrangements, the conversation faltered as the Belgian did not have an adequate general-language or professional-genre competency to communicate in the relevant legal genre. In closing the conversation, the Belgian also had difficulty discussing the opera that they were going to attend that evening.

This case illustrates that the Belgian was able to have an interactive conversation, as she possessed a genre competency in lace-related deliberations, but was unable to discuss matters in terms of legal discourse due to her lack of legal genre competency. Her advanced genre language competency was confined to the subject area of the genre, where she could integrate genre and supporting general language in an interactive conversation with full information exchange. However, she could not transfer her general-language competency to the discussion in legally related genres. In other words, her genre communication competence was limited to the industry/product-related genre and did not extend to legal discussions (a professional genre) or to advanced social conversation (a relational genre). In this communication episode, the language competency matches of interactants moved them past Zone One. In this MegaZone Two genre pattern, the Belgian could take part in full information exchange lace-related communication tasks and situations. However, MegaZone Three genre patterns did not develop because the Belgian general language could only communicate at the partial bilingual competency level outside of her genre language area.

## **GENRE PATTERNS IN LANGUAGE-BASED COMMUNICATION ZONES**

In this section, we identify the communication possibilities (tasks and situations) and discuss the nature of the interactions (genre patterns) that

arise across genre types in the language-based communication zones. The refined model comprises three zones, namely, Zone One, MegaZone Two, and MegaZone Three. Within these three zones, there are three genre patterns: professional genre patterns, commercial genre patterns, and relational genre patterns. Organized by genre types, our analysis provides a general overview and description of the genre patterns in professional, commercial, and relational genres followed by analysis and examples.

### Professional Genre Patterns

In these genre patterns, professionals draw on their shared professional knowledge to establish a contextual framework for their interactions. The shared knowledge context of professionals in a discipline and their general-language and genre competencies together form the basis for successful communication in professional genre patterns.

Different professional genres have varying potential to carry meaning over national languages because of the differing nature and composition of the linguistic component of the genres. The vocabularies of some genres are coded in words (word-dominated genres), whereas the vocabularies of other professions are coded in both words and symbols (symbol-dominated genres). That is, words from a national language make up the entire vocabulary of word-dominated disciplines, whereas symbols, diagrams, formulas, and graphic materials that cut across national languages together with a word vocabulary provide the linguistic component of symbol-dominated genres. Law is a word-dominated genre, whereas engineering is a symbol-dominated genre. For example, lawyers in a word-dominated genre can exchange legal briefs only if their briefs are written in a national language that the lawyers can understand, whereas scientists or engineers in symbol-dominated genres who speak different first languages can still exchange understandable computer codes or diagrams. The differing proportion of words from a national language and the symbols that translate national languages in the vocabulary of a genre affect the ability to communicate in language-based communication zones. For instance, two engineers communicating in a symbol-dominated genre are engaged in a joint software development project where they exchange e-mails and meet face to face. The computer codes contained in the e-mail messages form the basis for their face-to-face discussion. When they meet, their dialogue can focus on confirming, changing, and adding to the formulae and equations contained in the communication exchange. In their discussions where they mutually focus their

attention on formulae and equations that appear in a written format, the engineers can make refinements, additions, and corrections to the programming codes as they sequentially move toward developing operational programs.

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The shared knowledge context of professionals in a discipline and their general-language and genre competencies together form the basis for successful communication in professional genre patterns.

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In contrast, legal discourse is a word-dominated genre. As two lawyers negotiate and draft a contract for their respective clients, interlocutors in the dialogue used to frame the contract need to use not only the correct legal terminology but also the correct modifying and connecting general language in their discussions and written text. The modifiers and connectors are integrated with the legal terminology and concepts to complete the meaning of their communication exchange.

In symbol-dominated genres, the accurate encoding and understanding of symbols and diagrams are critical to successful information exchange. However, grammatical errors in word messages and incomplete verbal explanations of the symbols will not necessarily jeopardize the information exchange. These symbols can carry meaning by themselves. In word-dominated genres, the correct coding of the words, including both the concepts and the modifiers and connectors (e.g., proper form and grammar), are critical elements of effective communication in these genres.

*Zone One professional genre patterns.* In Zone One professional genre patterns, professionals must find ways to overcome their mutual general-language competency limitations and use their shared professional knowledge and experience to exchange messages. A means of transmission must be present to facilitate the information exchange among the interactants. The exchange mechanism can be by pen and paper, where communicators write and exchange symbols on paper, or computer aided, where interactants use a mouse to input messages onto computer screens. In immediate communication, interactants may take turns making notes or typing their

input into the computer and may add or delete the content via the communication process. In immediate verbal communication, the message content can be enhanced and confirmed by body language and simple verbal exchanges (yes or no, for instance). In addition, if potential interactants can speak and understand key items in the genre, the possibility of interactive communication is increased. With computer technology, the ease, speed, and clarity of information exchange makes professional communication in Zone One increasingly feasible in more situations and for a greater number of tasks.

To illustrate this point, we present an example of a Zone One professional genre pattern where professionals are engaged in a group decision-making scenario. A computer room became a hub of the communication process as five interlocutors gathered in front of a computer terminal and jointly focused their attention on the screen. Chinese engineers who spoke only limited English needed to communicate with a French manager who spoke English, but only very limited Mandarin Chinese. Direct interactive communication was limited due to this language deficiency. These interlocutors exchanged messages through nonverbal communication and by changing symbols on the computer screen. Usually, one individual controlled the mouse and simple language phrases were injected back and forth among interlocutors. Sometimes, the mouse was shared as other individuals made additions or deletions to the figures on the screen. Approval or disapproval was signaled either verbally or nonverbally. Simultaneous conversations among participants speaking their own first languages did take place, but order was maintained through the concentrated attention on the screen images. English phrases (English was the linking language) were intermixed in the conversations. It was evident that all of the participants were focusing on a common problem and used computer technology to overcome language deficiencies. Consequently, the exchange of complicated technical messages was accomplished by using diagrams with the additional aid of limited verbal and nonverbal communication. There was a prerequisite, however, that the communicators shared an adequate understanding of the subject knowledge projected in the computer diagrams. This prerequisite was met as these interlocutors, huddled in front of the computer screen and sharing the mouse, were able to pull up screens representing the in-plant work flow stations and propose machinery needed to help them to jointly decide where to ultimately place the machinery.

*MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three professional genre patterns.* In MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three professional genre patterns, professionals

draw on their shared professional expertise to engage in a high-context communication style based on a shared knowledge context, in which they do not have to completely elaborate and explain concepts to exchange information. That is, the conventions of the disciplines and advanced professional language mutually understood by the genre communicators form the actual basis underlying their professional genre patterns.

We next present an example contrasting MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three professional genre patterns illustrating tasks and situations where MegaZone Two professional genre patterns were developed, and where only MegaZone Three professional genre patterns were possible. In the R&D division of a computer manufacturing firm in Taiwan, engineers regularly delivered project report seminars on their research efforts. These engineers had intermediate English-language competencies (therefore, MegaZone Two) and their mixed audience was composed of expatriates and visitors from the United States, who spoke only English, plus other Chinese personnel. These formal presentations and the question-and-answer sessions represented a MegaZone Two task and situation (full information exchange), where the partial bilingual Chinese controlled the communication flow as their presentations were within their linguistic general-language competencies. In these formal presentations, the Chinese engineers were able to fully describe the progress and essence of their projects. They built their presentations around diagrams and formulae and used electronic slide presentation technology to guide and organize the communication flow. Prior to their presentations, the partial bilingual English speakers wrote out their complete presentations and read out the text during the presentations. The structured and predictable communication situations provided the necessary prerequisites for successful communication. After the presentations, the Chinese presenters engaged in question-and-answer sessions within a limited subject area where they partly clarified and elaborated on their presentations (limited information exchange). In these exchanges, they were able to clarify specific items but not to expand on the ideas put forth in their presentations. This elaboration would have required interactive communication competencies (MegaZone Three professional genre pattern) that exceeded the fluency levels of the partial bilingual presenters.

The input that listeners received in these presentations and in the question-and-answer sessions set the stage and established a framework for follow-up exchanges representing both MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three genre patterns. In interactions still representing Zone Two genre patterns, expatriates and visitors met with presenters to follow up on the presentations.

The experience gained through listening to the presentations allowed both the expatriates and visitors to better adjust their language level to fit the competency levels of the presenters. In interactive MegaZone Three exchanges, the Chinese (including the presenters) and expatriate attendees formed separate Chinese and English language groups to discuss and further explore issues raised in the presentations. In these unstructured situations, they used their advanced general-language competencies to critically evaluate the projects, explore different options for coordinating projects, and informally discuss possible future project milestones and goals. Chinese full bilinguals took part as participants in both language groups but, more important, served as language link-pins to exchange information among language groups and to coordinate the development of future action plans. In these communication episodes, the MegaZone Two professional genre patterns in the presentations set the stage for the follow-up MegaZone Three professional genre pattern discussions that took place after the presentations.

### Commercial Genre Patterns

In the commercial genre patterns, organizational members interact from a shared situational orientation as they begin their interactions from the perspective of their respective roles. This discourse set draws on the application of professional genres in specific organizational situations and often overlaps with professional genres. From their respective roles, interactants use a commercial genre in exchanging persuasive and informational messages. These genres have word vocabularies that describe company products or services, policies, and programs. Commercial genres likely have a lower subject-knowledge competency requirement than professional genres but generally require a higher general-language competency. For example, sales personnel must possess adequate language competency to explain product or service features to potential customers but do not necessarily need to fully understand the technical aspects of their product or services. Link-pin support can be an integral part of this genre-communication process, especially for technical products and services, to provide more in-depth information and complete the required information exchange.

*Zone One commercial genre patterns.* In Zone One commercial genre patterns, participants share a contextual framework and background where the specialized genre and its basic vocabulary can be quickly learned and

easily understood. The interactions in the pattern are quick and are also directed toward a specific and recognizable communication exchange relating to the execution of specific tasks. These genres do not have the information-carrying capacity to transmit complex analytical and innovative information in interactive exchanges, and so are distinct from professional genres. In sum, Zone One commercial genres facilitate the efficient transfer of information in commercial transactions, especially in vendor-customer communication (both across and within organizations).

To illustrate, we discuss the Zone One commercial genre patterns where the interactants are unilingual Cantonese order takers and non-Chinese-speaking customers in Hong Kong fast food restaurants. The Zone One genre is an understandable language that connects customers who speak English as a first or second language, and order takers who speak only the most rudimentary English. The genre vocabulary is centered around the menu sets identified by numbers or letters. For example, the breakfast menu at McDonald's contained nine food sets, and breakfast No. 3 consisted of hotcakes, sausage, and a drink (coffee or tea). The English-speaking customers can read the English portion of the bilingual menu and make a menu choice that is coded in the genre language (by number or letter). This artificial component of the vocabulary takes on special meanings in the activated situations and tasks. The genre pattern can be successfully accomplished if the interactants can pronounce and understand English numbers or letters and pronounce and understand the words *coffee* and *tea*.

Numbers and letters are supplemented by words and phrases in this genre pattern. The genre includes vocabulary naming and possibly describing individual menu items so that customers can make a specific choice and are not restricted to menu sets. The vocabulary also designates where the customers will consume the food and has exact wording such as "stay here or take away." The genre also requires a sequence of communication behaviors: the order taker states "next" and the customer responds by specifying his or her order, states where the food will be consumed, and adds special requests (advanced genre).

The language in this genre pattern has to be in English, as customers do not know the words for the Chinese numbers and therefore cannot place their orders in Chinese. To participate in this genre pattern, English speakers do not have to learn additional vocabulary but only how to associate numbers (an automatic process) with the menu sets. In addition, second-language English speakers must be able to read the English-language menu and also to speak recognizable English (numbers and letters) to

participate in this Zone One genre pattern. The order takers need to learn to recognize and pronounce (for clarification) English numbers (already incorporated in the Chinese written language) and a few words and letters (if incorporated in the genre).

Language choice affects the communication process. If the language choice is a language where customers are proficient (English in our example), the language superiority position favors the customer. So, an individual must adjust language delivery to the competency level of the order taker to communicate effectively. Customers can facilitate this interaction process by practicing distinct pronunciation, inserting pauses between sequences, and slowing down their speech. In this process, order takers may progressively experience less comprehensive anxiety as the general language is repeated in subsequent order taker-customer interactions. Order takers also are placed in a learning environment where they gradually acquire the general vocabulary that surrounds and connects with the genre vocabulary. As they hear words and sentences repeated over time, the order takers learn to pick out a genre that is contained in general language and also learn the associated general-language vocabulary that illustrates this genre pattern.

Genre competence is evidenced as communicators develop the ability to sort out words and phrases constituting the Zone One linguistic component of the genre and, in the process, to disregard extra words and phrases that lie outside the vocabulary of the genre patterns, while associating the words or phrases of the artificial language that may be present in the genre language. For example, a customer ordered as follows: "I would like scrambled eggs, orange juice, hash browns, and coffee, and I would like it to go." Surprised to hear English, the order taker did not fully understand the entire sequence but was able to separate the following words contained in the genre vocabulary: eggs, orange juice, and coffee. The order taker responded, "Number 3, stay here, take away." The order taker had picked out the keywords in the genre vocabulary and associated these words with the linguistic component of the genre. The order taker also added a missing part of the genre sequence (i.e., stay here, take away).

However, interactants may encounter problems when a new menu item is introduced and a related number is not assigned to that item. Order takers with partial genre competency may not be able to handle the order because the terms or vocabulary of the new menu item are not yet included in their genre vocabulary. For example, when McDonald's added raisin scones to the breakfast menu, it was clear that *raisin* and *scones* were new vocabulary items for these order takers. When ordering a raisin

scone, an American customer was told that no raisin scones were available that day. Yet, the next customer who spoke in Cantonese successfully ordered a raisin scone.

Following is a communication incident that elaborates successful and unsuccessful communication in Zone One commercial genre patterns. At a KFC restaurant, an American approached the counter and said, "I would like a cornbread muffin and black coffee." The order taker did not respond and turned to seek an English-speaking bilingual supervisor. Seeing the communication breakdown, the American customer learned to say, "Number 4, coffee," and the order taker responded, "Stay here, take away?" which was greeted by, "Stay here." In this case, "to go" would have been outside of the order taker's genre vocabulary. This example illustrates a simple commercial genre exchange, where the genre has a small vocabulary that can be learned almost immediately. In this example, the customer is still served a creamed coffee, as black is not a part of the genre vocabulary. The next customer ordered as follows, "Give me a continental breakfast." Even the supervisor—knowing the meaning of *breakfast* but not of the word *continental*—did not understand this order. This example illustrates how the use of general-language words that are not included in a genre vocabulary can create a misunderstanding.

*MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three commercial genre patterns.* In MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three commercial genre patterns, bilinguals communicate through commercial genres as they exchange information about company affairs, especially in the roles of buyers and sellers in interorganizational communication and in developing and implementing programs and projects in intraorganizational communication. In typical commercial genre communication encounters, the interactants form a language zone with nonparallel genre competencies and a mutual understanding of the structure and situation of their upcoming genre discussions. In both persuasive and informational genres, the seller and the information provider, respectively, have a full genre competency, and their communication task is to provide input to the buyers and information receivers to raise their genre competency levels and successfully complete the communication transactions. However, if buyers or information receivers have prior knowledge or genre competency before interacting with sellers or information providers, the genre competency match is more equal but is still most likely in a nonparallel position. Over the time period during which the interactants exchange messages in the language zone, there is movement toward a parallel genre competency position as the

buyer or information receivers acquire genre competency. In continuing and future commercial genre communication, the interactants began their interactions from more equal genre competency positions. There is also more potential for interactive exchange as buyers acquire information in which to ask more specific questions.

We next present two examples contrasting MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three commercial genre patterns that illustrate tasks and situations where MegaZone Two commercial genre patterns developed, and where only MegaZone Three commercial genre patterns were possible. The first example describes how a partial bilingual Taiwanese product manager interacted in English with her partial bilingual French customers (MegaZone Two commercial genre pattern) and with the plant managers in her native language, Mandarin Chinese (MegaZone Three commercial genre pattern). The information she obtained in her MegaZone Three genre communication provided support and input to her MegaZone Two genre communication. The example concerns a Taiwanese small appliance manufacturer with customers in France and a production facility in mainland China. This example shows how a Taiwanese product manager communicated with plant personnel in mainland China (shared national language competency, but initial nonshared genre language competency) and used the information gathered in these discussions to better interact with customer representatives from France to determine product specifications, price, and delivery schedules of the Taiwanese firm's products targeted for the French market.

In communication representing a MegaZone Three genre pattern between the mainland Chinese production personnel and the Taiwanese product manager, the mainland Chinese initially assumed a genre language and knowledge superiority position over the Taiwanese product manager. Faced with production quotas (at specified quality levels), production deadlines (with penalties for delays and bonuses for achieving), and an unfamiliarity with the competitive demands of the market economy, the mainland China personnel continually attempted to modify and simplify the product specifications and delay the delivery schedules.

As the Taiwanese product manager developed an understanding of the production function and cost structures that included the genre competencies to communicate these topics, the genre language competency position moved toward equality, and the interactions between the Taiwanese product manager and mainland China personnel changed in both content and frequency. In these discussions, the Taiwanese product manager explained the importance of including the desired features in product designs and mutually explored, with the production personnel, the cost structure and product schedules of including or not including different design options.

In this dialogue, representing a persuasive genre (Nickerson, 2000), the Taiwanese product manager used her general-language fluency to fulfill the situation (unstructured) and task (complex) communication requirements. With the knowledge acquired in this first-language Chinese communication scenario (MegaZone Three genre patterns), she could integrate relevant information in the interactions with her French customers. In these communication transactions between product manager and customer, the partial bilingual interactants practiced mutual accommodation to successfully coordinate their activities in their Zone Two commercial genre conversations in English. In the process, the French customers gained an understanding of manufacturing operations and technology, with its influence on product schedules and design requirements. Consequently, the interactants all possessed sufficient genre-language competency to accurately decide when to call on technical experts to establish link-pin channels to supplement their direct interactions. In this case, the subject knowledge gained by the Taiwanese product manager in first-language discussion (MegaZone Three commercial genre pattern) supported and facilitated communication between the Taiwanese product managers and her French customers (MegaZone Two commercial genre pattern).

In the second example, we contrast a successful interaction in a MegaZone Three commercial genre pattern with an unsuccessful communication when a partial bilingual attempted to develop a MegaZone Two commercial genre pattern in a comparable communication situation. In this MegaZone Three commercial genre task, a financial advisor provided sophisticated investment advice to a discerning but nonexpert investor. Both interlocutors were fully bilingual in the general language (MegaZone Three), whereas the advisor had a professional understanding and the investor an intermediate but not professional knowledge of investment. In the conversation, the advisor was able to provide a comprehensive picture of the investor's financial portfolio so that she completely understood her options and financial position at the end of the meeting. Closure was thus achieved in this communication episode. Notably, the advisor addressed subjunctive "what if" questions systematically and adjusted to new issues as they arose. The interlocutors carried on an interactive discussion of various investment opportunities and options, in particular, whether to sell certain investments. In this MegaZone Three commercial genre pattern, the advisor used her fluent general-language competency to successfully execute the task and situation communication requirements.

In contrast, in an unsuccessful attempt to complete the MegaZone Two commercial genre pattern, another financial advisor had a conversation with the same investor about her investment opportunities. In this situation, the

financial advisor had an intermediate general English-language competency but a full professional genre competency equivalent to the first financial advisor. Although the second financial advisor possessed a full professional genre competency, his intermediate general English-language proficiency constrained him from engaging in a free-flowing interactive dialogue and specifically prevented him from fully responding adequately to the inquiries of the investor. The financial advisor kept responding to her inquiries, "Just do it." Unlike the first advisor, he could not achieve closure in the communication transaction and left the investor with unanswered questions. In this situation, it was not appropriate to open a link-pin channel where her questions could be answered by a more proficient general-language speaker.

This example illustrates a MegaZone Three genre pattern where the interactants need full general-language competency to fulfill the task and situation communication requirements. The first financial advisor had sufficient general-language competency to communicate in a MegaZone Three genre pattern, whereas the second financial advisor with intermediate general-language competency had to be content to communicate in MegaZone Two and thereby frustrated his investor client.

### Relational Genre Patterns

Relational genres are expressions of the social "glue" that brings together or separates people both in and between organizations, as well as being reflections of the cultures in which people interact. These genres take place within and alongside the structures provided by professional and commercial genres, as work is being performed and located in distinct social settings associated with work organizations. The quantity and nature of the interactions in relational genres can bring forth positive, negative, or neutral feelings among people both within and among organizations. As people increase their interactions, the potential for developing positive relationships increases, but also the risk of creating negative relationships is enhanced (Homans, 1950).

Linguistic fluency also may, or may not, bring forth expectations to be equally culturally fluent, especially for interactants engaged in the MegaZone Three relational genre patterns. These expectations are activated when language use identifies a communicator as a member of a cultural group and is therefore subject to the norms of that cultural group (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). Moving from an outsider to insider cultural status is determined by three dimensions: frequency of second-language use (less to more), situation of second-language use (social to social and business), and activities of language use (passive listening to interactive listening and speaking). For example, an expatriate in France speaking fluent French

might well be expected to abide by and respect French customs, norms, and mores, whereas a nonfluent French speaker might not be held to the same standards of conduct. On the other hand, if bilinguals (French and Spanish first-language speakers, for example) meet in a third country such as Italy and engage in English-language relational genre conversations, the language use of these interactants does not trigger an obligation to follow either French or Spanish customs.

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The quantity and nature of the interactions in relational genres can bring forth positive, negative, or neutral feelings among people both within and among organizations.

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In the first case, the expatriate would move from being a cultural outsider to becoming a cultural insider with the increased use of French. In the second case, the interactants would be in a neutral cultural setting where their cultural fluencies would interactively affect their communication, and neither French nor Spanish culture would inherently have a dominating influence on the development of their relational genre patterns.

*Zone One relational genre patterns.* These Zone One relational genre patterns develop as unilinguals come into contact in the course of carrying out their job responsibilities. The messages exchanged in these genre patterns can support and reinforce the information exchange in link-pin channels (for details, see Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996) that are the main carriers of information in Zone One organizational communication.

Our 1996 study explained how unilingual expatriates developed Zone One relational genre patterns as they communicated intangibles associated with the corporate culture to local staff throughout their organizations. By communicating in the Zone One relational genre, unilingual expatriates used these interactions to establish their image throughout the organization. In the communication process, the expatriates would randomly engage in conversations with enterprise personnel as they wandered through various departments, especially in the production departments. An example is the plant manager of a Taiwanese-English joint venture who made plant inspection tours where he interacted with maintenance personnel and line operators. Even though the plant manager did not possess sufficient

general-language proficiency to have even a basic spontaneous conversation, he prepared comments for specific personnel, as his relational genre competency (personal affairs of employees) in conversational Chinese was adequate to put together three or four sentences. Such a medium of communication can be described as “ritualized English” and “token Chinese” in that these expatriates could communicate only a few understandable words in English and say only a few token words in Chinese. Nonverbal communication, therefore, also played an important role in the communication process here.

*MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three relational genre patterns.* We next contrast the MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three relational genre patterns that emerged in Chinese- and English-language conversations among bilinguals and first-language speakers. The setting was the corporate headquarters of a Chinese company offering intercultural training to Chinese managers and executives. Our example describes the genre patterns developed during the initial day of a visit by a two-person consulting team to discuss training activities, interview managers, observe managerial activities, and develop a preliminary plan for training activities. In particular, the consultants gathered input for the curriculum development of future training programs. The general-language competencies of the interactants were a Chinese American consultant, a company host (fluent Chinese and English), an American consultant (fluent English and intermediate Chinese), and Chinese managers (fluent Chinese and low-to-intermediate English).

Relational genres did not develop during the day as the consultants and manager interviewees directed their comments to ascertaining training needs and related matters. There was not a structure in place to encourage and guide the development of relational genre patterns, so communication took the form of the MegaZone Three commercial genre and link-pin communication patterns. The bilingual Chinese American consultant and bilingual Chinese host spoke in Chinese to the managers in various departments and in English to the American partial bilingual as they went from department to department and waited for appointments. When the partial bilingual American posted questions to the Chinese managers, the two full bilinguals took turns as language link-pins. The communication patterns were highly efficient as the desired information was gathered, language simplification strategies were not used in the communication encounters, and all communicators were involved in the communication process. In addition, the commercial genre and link-pin pattern communication put the interactants into

initial contact with each other and thereby created a foundation for the establishment of personal relationships.

Following these daytime activities, there was a Chinese banquet in the evening. The structure provided by this banquet facilitated the development of relational genre patterns. Both MegaZone Two and MegaZone Three relational genre patterns emerged after each course of the banquet. MegaZone Two Chinese-language genre patterns included all of the attendees of the banquet, and in these patterns, the higher level speakers accommodated to the linguistic competency level of the American partial bilingual. The arrival of a dish provided the cue for the development and continuation of these MegaZone Two relational genre patterns. These patterns contained polite conversations about the quality of the food and were initiated with the serving of the first dish by the American partial bilingual as he demonstrated his Chinese fluency. With the arrival of each dish during the first three courses, the American partial bilingual rejoined the conversation. He made shorter and fewer comments after the first three dishes, as his remarks would have become repetitious at this point. Therefore, his engagement was sequential with defined breaks and cues for dropping out and rejoining the dialogue.

Following these MegaZone Two patterns, the full bilinguals and first-language Chinese interactants engaged in MegaZone Three relational genre patterns by pursuing mutual interests in their discussions. In this case, the discussion topics were the differing language policies in Hong Kong and mainland China, as well as a variety of other personal topics. The American partial bilingual did not join in with these MegaZone Three genre conversations as the speech speed and vocabulary range of the genre exceeded his linguistic capabilities.

In these conversations, representing the MegaZone Three relational genre, the fully bilingual Chinese American demonstrated empathy and appreciation and moved toward becoming more of a cultural insider (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). She expressed respect for Chinese culture that stimulated the development of a closer personal relationship with the company representatives. The use of Chinese by the American partial bilingual was viewed favorably, but he essentially remained a cultural outsider and did not move toward the same insider position as did the Chinese bilingual in her more extensive use of Chinese. In sum, this example contrasts the relative need of structure to facilitate the development of Zone Two (more necessary) and MegaZone Three (less necessary) relational genre patterns and the influence of language use on cultural relationships. The communication during the day set the stage for these relational genre patterns,

whereas the sequencing of the arrival of the dishes provided the structure for the development of the MegaZone Two relational genre patterns, with the banquet itself providing the structure for the MegaZone Three genre patterns. The more extensive use of Chinese (more frequent, social and business, interactive) by the Chinese American full bilingual moved her toward an insider cultural position. By way of contrast, the less extensive use of Chinese (infrequent, social only, and mostly listening) by the American partial bilingual contributed to the maintenance of his outsider cultural position (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

In our refinement of the language-based communication model, we identify task-related and situation-related genre patterns within the language-based communication zones in which the interactants can communicate directly. In the process of finding and interacting with communication partners, our updated model provides guidelines for finding competency matches. Especially, we show how unilinguals and partial bilinguals can potentially increase the proportion of their interactions when centered in direct communication and lessen their dependence on language translation and communication through link-pin channels.

This reconfigured model can be useful in guiding both practice and research. In practice, the model can be used in designing organizational structures and networks. It can also be applied in assigning personnel to positions by taking into account their genre competencies and the differing need for supporting general language in different jobs. Language learning could be directed toward teaching the language competencies that communicators will use (genre plus associated general language) in their jobs. Research activities can be directed toward assessing and more precisely linking tasks to the genre patterns, that is, specifying the minimum language competencies needed to interact directly without link-pins. Our distinctions of professional, commercial, and relational genres provide a framework for this suggested research in directing attention to tasks and situations using these three identified genre types. In this effort, further basic research could identify the genre patterns (including potential interactions with general language). In addition, applied research could possibly develop and refine the genre categories, especially in artificially created commercial genres where there is an inherent economic incentive.

By integrating our model into future investigations of international business communication, researchers can better define and divide international business communication into understandable categories (language-based communication zones and genre patterns). This practice can facilitate further elaboration of the already identified differing patterns that emerge from the various language competency matches in the three language-based zones. In turn, business communicators could use our framework to guide their communication practices and improve communication effectiveness and efficiency in relation to these communication tasks and situations.

For researchers, it is also hoped that this study will provide insights for the further development and refinement of the language-based communication zone model, as well as insights that can be drawn from (a) integrating genre competence in the model so as to define the language competency variables more accurately and precisely and (b) identifying and describing communication tasks and situations that can be successfully handled by individuals with varying levels of second-language proficiency. For communication practitioners, whether native or nonnative speakers of the language and who are engaged in the international business arena or working in multinational corporations, the model could be applied to improve communication practices. This could be achieved by first assessing their own general-language and genre competencies, then identifying the general-language and genre competencies of their counterparts, and finally, implementing communication strategies and practices that are appropriate for the established zones and patterns. Finally, this theoretical framework will guide all users in their communication practices and enhance cross-cultural organizational and international business communication effectiveness.

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