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Language-Based Communication Zones and Professional Genre Competence in Business and Organizational Communication

A Cross-Cultural Case Approach

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To facilitate the study of business and organizational communication in a global environment, useful models and frameworks are essential. The current study further extends previously established language-based communication zones models by integrating professional genre competence within the framework of a more recently developed language-based communication zones model (see Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001). It is hoped that by adding professional genre competence dimensions to this theoretical framework a more comprehensive framework can be identified, and thereby better represent the dynamic and multiply-influenced processes integral to international business communication.

Research-based empirical data from the US, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China (where language-based communication zones make up the communication networks) were collected and analyzed. Building upon previously established theoretical models, the current study reconfigures eight language-based communication zones by redrawing Babcock and Du-Babcock's (2001) model to take account of the professional genre competencies of interactants. Eighteen parallel and non-parallel patterns are developed within the language-based communication zones. Cases are provided to illustrate key concepts of the reconfigured language-based communication zones.

Introduction

Recent developments in globalized business (see, for example, Bartlett, 1989; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Nadesan, 2001; Prince, 2001; Sands, 2001) have made the Asia-Pacific region a desirable research environment and one where New Zealand and Australia (aside from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China) play

an increasingly important role in the international business arena. New Zealand and Australia are experiencing an increasingly multilingual and multi-cultural business communication environment because of immigration (internal change) and participation in international business activities (external change). Due to their prominence as international centers and multi-ethnic societal environments, New Zealand and Australia are ideal research sites as individuals are increasingly exposed to and interact with the native and non-native English speakers.

In this expanding and diverse global communication environment, individuals who speak different languages and represent diverse cultural groups interact directly and indirectly in present day organizations or in interconnected global communication networks. According to Ruhlen (1987), there are approximately 3,000 different languages spoken in the world. Among the languages spoken, the major business languages include Arabic, English, French, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. These languages of business do not operate in isolation but co-exist in the real time of business transactions. To illustrate how corporations operating in a global business environment encounter multiple language use and translation, I quote an advertisement by The Body Shop International. This example recognizes and illustrates the need to communicate in real time and in multiple languages. The advertisement reads: "*The Body Shop International is a high quality skin and hair care retailer operating in 50 countries with over 1,900 outlets, spanning 25 languages and 12 time zones*" (*The Sunday Times*, 2001, January 13, 7.1). The example is consistent with Hagen's (1993) view that "at the micro-level of companies, [business] transactions are frequently carried out in a mixture of several languages" (p. 10). In addition, these transactions take place among speakers at all proficiency levels ranging from multilinguals with full fluency in many languages to unilinguals with limited proficiency in the target languages except their own native languages.

With the increasing complexity of the global communication environment, models and frameworks are essential to guide communication research and practices. An initial recognition that second-language competency affects communication and organizational patterns lies in an analysis of expatriate communication (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996) where expatriate managers at different second-language proficiency levels developed different communication strategies when communicating with their Mandarin-speaking Chinese staff. Extending this analysis, Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001) identified five additional language-based communication zones and demonstrated how differing communication dynamics were activated in the respective unilingual, partial bilingual and fully bilingual zones. In their study, Babcock and Du-Babcock constructed their definitions to describe overall second-language proficiency without distinguishing language use between general and professional purposes. In the current study, I integrate pro-

fessional genre competence within the framework of the language-based communication zones model. It is hoped that by adding the dimension of the professional genre competence to their recent language-based communication zones model (2001), this reconfigured theoretical framework can further develop and define the language proficiency more completely. Consequently, the overall purpose of this paper is to (a) reconfigure the language-based communication zone models by adding a dimension of professional genre competence so as to better present language proficiency of interactants; and (b) describe the effects of general and professional genre competency by illustrating communication tasks that can be successfully handled by individuals with varying LGP (language for general purposes) and LSP (language for specific purposes) proficiency levels.

Literature Review

To reflect the realities of language use in present-day business and organizational communication in a global context, I first review the impact of language in international business communication studies. Second, I review the critical importance of professional genre in international business and organizational communication.

Language in International Business and Organizational Communication

Studies reflecting the impact of language use in international business have increased since the 1990s. The overall thrust of the literature suggests that individuals with a fully bilingual competency level can exercise greater flexibility over a wide range of topics whereas individuals with low second-language proficiency may only be able to participate within their specialized area or the narrow-band boundary (see, for example, Du-Babcock, et al., 1995). During the last two decades, much research has focused on miscommunication resulting from differences in discourse or communication strategies among languages. During this time, language choice has also gained importance in an increasingly globalized business and organizational communication world. For example, studies by Charles (2001) and Nickerson (2000) on language choice and its effects illustrate that the choice of language to be used as *lingua franca* (company official language) is based on responses to situational factors and organizational needs. In addition to the studies examining language choice in European organizational contexts, studies by Du-Babcock and Babcock (1996) and Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001) looked at language choice in cultural interactions in the Asia Pacific region. Their studies have illustrated that while expatriates expanded their use of second-language

when interacting with local Chinese staff, these expatriates went from being considered cultural outsiders to cultural insiders, and consequently they were subject to host country norms. This line of research suggests that it is not only the language proficiency but also the language choices made that affect language used in international business and organizational communication.

The importance and impact of the language used in international communication has also gained increasing recognition from organizational theorists who have implicitly recognized (in classical and neo-classical studies), and explicitly acknowledged (in modern studies) the notion that language lies at the very foundation of organizations and their management (Boje, Oswick, & Ford, 2004). By focusing on language for professional purposes, modern theorists conceptualize that boundaries within organizations may be seen as products of language in that department and groups speak different languages that are not easily transcended. As Morgan (1990) notes about one LSP language, “a language of control ... has evolved in nature and sophistication to cope with the changing requirements of organizational control” (p. 16).

Other theorists have identified how boundary spanners or integrators (also called link-pins by organizational behavior theorists, and by Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996) speak multiple languages as a means to overcome or reduce language-induced boundaries (Galbraith & Kazanjian, 1986). In this process, individuals must communicate not only in their professional genres but also with those who have varying degrees of second-language proficiency in the specialized professional contexts (see, for example, Bhatia, 2004). These studies have been mainly conducted in an English-speaking context (mostly in the United States), and thus the coding of messages in multiple languages has only recently emerged as an issue to explore in investigating translation.

In a separate literature, cultural, communication, and language scholars have extensively studied the translation of messages across languages but, for the most part, have implicitly assumed that all speakers communicate in a common language and possess full language proficiency. These deficiencies have been recognized and overcome in the development of models that take into account the fact that interactants communicate in multiple languages, at varying proficiencies, and in matched language proficiency fits (see Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001).

Professional Genre Competence in International Business and Organizational Communication

Using the concepts of language and language translation, I reinterpret the work of management scholars who have identified groups speaking different professional

genres and language link-pins who tie together different language communities. Management pioneers Fayol (1949) and Taylor (1911) both recognized management and workers as separate language groups speaking different professional genres (management and worker) and, therefore, that indirectly there was a need for language translation in communication among these groups. With his scientific management and functional foremanship, Taylor created a language (simple instructions for “doing” based on time and motion analysis) and the carriers (functional foreman) of this language between management and the workers. The foreman using the linking language would therefore connect the management of large-scale US enterprises who spoke managerial English (language for professional use) with the workers (comprised largely of immigrants) who spoke little or no English.

Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) in analyzing the Hawthorne experiments further elaborated on the first-level superior as the “man in the middle” or link-pin who translated management and worker languages and carried messages between upper management and the workers. Thus, the translation process consisted of the dual (upward and downward) translation of two professional genres (management and worker) between two language groups (management and worker) who might speak the same language (American English). Their study illustrates the increasing complexity and interactive nature of the communication channel and the corresponding translation difficulties faced by the link-pins in translating management and worker languages when an organization has become more globalized. Likewise, Mintzberg’s (1983) typology of organizations (machine, professional, entrepreneurial, and innovative) also shows that the necessity for link-pin translators varies among these organizational types. The translator groups (technostructure, service staff, and middle line) standing between the strategic apex and operating core vary in size in different kinds of organizations. These groups act as link-pin translators in that they connect the strategic apex who speak top management’s or executives’ languages and the operating core who speak workers’ languages. The technostructure and service staff and the middle line managers develop distinctive professional genres that vary in form among the different organization types. For example, in the entrepreneurial organization, all personnel may be generalists (bilinguals in language terminology) who speak mutually understandable language and do not require link-pin translators. In the professional and innovative organization, it may be that managerial, functional, and technical languages (various professional genres) merge but there will still be translation difficulty when professionals from different disciplines interact with such an organization. This is especially true in innovative organizations where professionals representing different specializations interact and have direct contact in cross-functional teams.

In sum, language competency has become an important issue to study as world business becomes increasingly globalized, and international business communicators engage not only in interpersonal, social communication, but also in professional contexts. Therefore, I would argue that the integration of general language and professional genre competence should be identified, and specifically stated in any model that attempts to completely describe the varying patterns of international business and organizational communication.

Reconfiguration of professional genre competence within language-based communication zones

To reflect the realities of present day business and organizational communication in an international context, I reconfigure the language-based communication zones model by taking into account professional genre competence and discussing how general and professional language proficiencies mutually impact communication. Within any given language, speakers engage in intermixed conversations in two categories: language for general purposes (LGP) and language for professional use (also called language for specific purposes, or LSP). LGP is the part of any given language that is understood and used by all speakers of the language. Within this framework, interactants may also use language in professional contexts where individuals exchange messages within their specialized areas, or discourse community (Bhatia, 2004). While LGP is seen as a broad category of any given language, LSP is defined as the specialized languages contained within the language and used in professional contexts (e.g., business and management, manufacturing), in companies and divisions of companies (e.g., stories, creeds, myths, policy manuals), and in business transactions (e.g., buyer-seller, negotiating partners, company-auditor). In this study, I also distinguish LSP from LGP genres as recognizable communicative events characterized by a set of “communicative purposes”, identified and mutually understood by the members of identified language or discourse communities (Bhatia, 2004). However, LSP can vary in scope from very wide (professional genre) to very narrow (customer ordering pattern in a fast-food restaurant). Language use in professional contexts, and other recognized situations such as language for specific purposes or language in professional genre, is therefore used interchangeably wherever applicable. To take account of these views, I first summarize a theoretical framework developed by Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001). I then reconfigure the previously established language-based communication models by integrating professional genre competence within the framework to better represent the dynamic and multiply-influenced processes integral to international business communication.

In their model of language-based communication zones, Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001) identified eight language-based communication zones based on speakers interacting in any given language. In creating the model, Babcock and Du-Babcock distinguished full bilinguals, partial bilinguals, and unilinguals by placing them within various language-based communication zones according to the speakers' relative capabilities in exchanging information in a language environment (see Figure 1 as it appeared in Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001, p. 381). With any communication partner, full bilinguals have equivalent linguistic abilities in their first and second languages so can handle the requirements of both professional and social conversations. Partial bilinguals have sufficient control of the language structure and vocabulary of the second language to handle some professional discussions and most social conversations. In contrast, unilinguals are unable to speak or understand enough speech acts of the second language in use to fulfill the complete communication process in a communication environment, even though some of these individuals might be able to use the second language to encode greetings, ordinary social expressions, and simple questions in their daily encounters.

In their extended theoretical framework, Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001) further divided language proficiency matches of the interactants into parallel and non-parallel language matches. In parallel zones, interactants begin the ad-

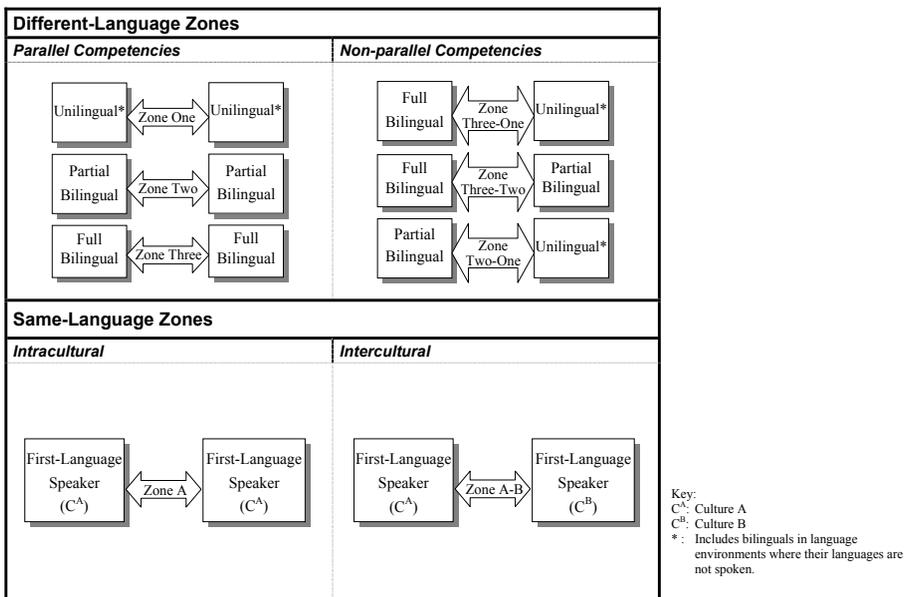


Figure 1. Language-Based Communication Zones in International Business Communication

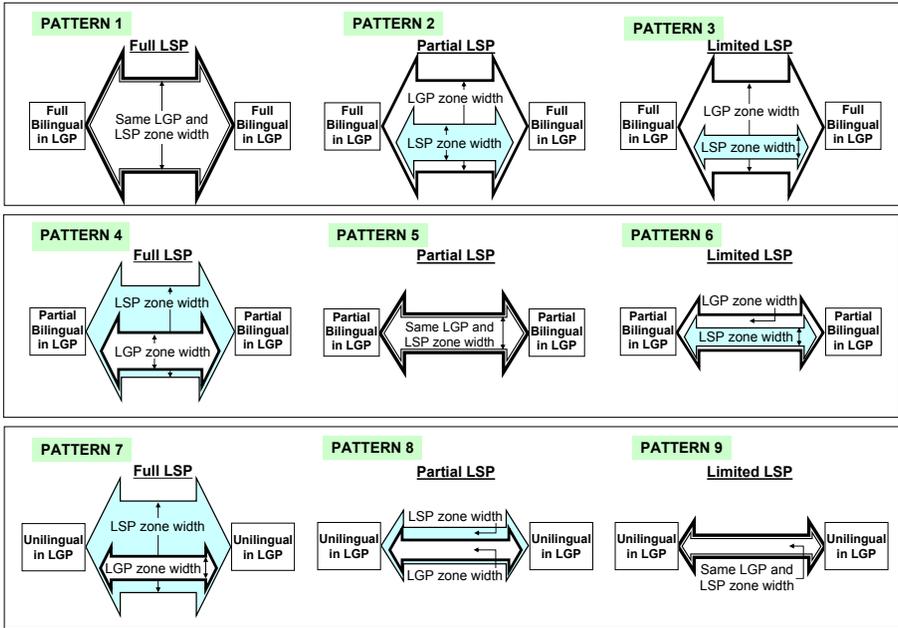


Figure 2. Patterns of Parallel Communication Zones

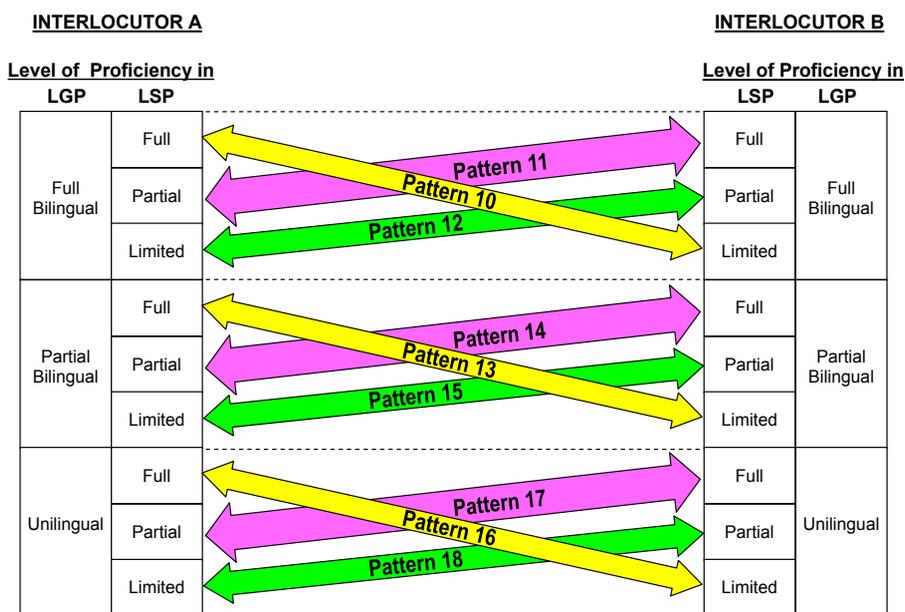
justment process from equivalent language proficiency levels, whether they are unilinguals (Zone One), partial bilinguals (Zone Two), or full bilinguals (Zone Three). In contrast, in non-parallel communication zones interactants start the interaction process from unequal second-language proficiency positions. Differing communication dynamics are activated in Zone Three-One, Zone Three-Two, and Zone Two-One as interactants make varying adjustments in their communication behaviors in order to account for unequal language competency matches. Within their communication exchanges, the interactants must also negotiate the proportion of direct and link-pin channels in the zones they establish.

To finish the model, two Same Language Zones (Zone A and Zone A-B) were added to distinguish between intracultural communication (Zone A) and intercultural communication (Zone A-B). For example, interactions in English between Americans or between Australians are examples of intracultural communication within the same country culture (Zone A), whereas interactions in English among Americans and Australians are examples of intercultural communication representing the cultures of two countries (Zone A-B).

In their model, Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001) did not distinguish between language use for general and professional purposes but rather constructed their definitions to describe the overall second-language proficiencies of communicators. In this paper, I further extend the language-based communication zones

model to include language for professional purposes in a unified framework. To guide the analysis of the relative influence of language competencies on zone communication, I therefore divide these overall competencies into language for general purposes (LGP) and language for professional purposes (LSP) and have re-drawn Babcock and Du-Babcock's model to take account of the professional genre competencies of interactants (see Figure 2 for parallel patterns and Figure 3 for non-parallel patterns). To promote continuity with the earlier framework, I have labeled and reformulated the original language-based communication zones according to LGP and LSP competencies (see Figure 2). For instance, individuals who are full bilinguals (Zone 3) in LGP competency are sub-classified (row 1) according to their LSP competencies, and the three combinations are: full bilingual in LGP and LSP as shown in Pattern 1; full bilingual in LGP but partial bilingual in LSP in Pattern 2; and full bilingual in LGP with limited LSP in Pattern 3. Using the same classification method, even though the distinctions may not actually reflect the actual competency level of individual communicators (ranging from highest to lowest from the left to the right of the figure), a total of nine patterns of parallel communication zones emerge.

Figure 3 shows nine non-parallel zone communication patterns (Patterns 10–18) and is based on the same classification method of language matches between



Keys:
 LGP: Language for General Purposes
 LSP: Language for Specific Purposes

Figure 3. Patterns of Non-Parallel Communication Zones

interactants' LGP and LSP competencies as in Figure 2. Thus, patterns 10, 11, and 12 indicate the possible language proficiency combinations of interactants who are fully bilingual in LGP with varying LSP competencies, such as the combination of one interactant with full LSP competency with another interactant with limited LSP competency (e.g., Zone Three-One LSP proficiency match) as shown in Pattern 10. Similarly, Pattern 11 indicates the possible LSP competency combination between full and partial bilinguals (i.e., Zone Three-Two LSP proficiency match). Patterns 13, 14, and 15 show the possible combinations of interactants with partial LGP competency, but varying LSP competencies; while Patterns 16, 17, and 18 show the possible combinations of interactants with limited LGP competency and varying LSP competencies.

These contrasting LGP and LSP language proficiencies and proficiency matches introduce further and different communication dynamics and adjustment patterns into parallel and non-parallel zones. To differentiate the varying LGP and LSP competencies, the zone-associated width for the combination of the patterns is indicated accordingly. For instance, Patterns 1, 2, and 3 illustrate not only the combination of interactants with full LGP competency and varying LSP competencies, but also how while the zone width of the LGP competency remains the same, the zone width for LSP competencies varies. The communication dynamics of each pattern of language match between interactants is shown by the zone width for both LGP and LSP competencies in all 18 patterns. Thus, in parallel zones, interactants possess equivalent LGP and LSP competencies, and begin the interaction and process of adjusting their communication partner from equivalent (parallel) language proficiency positions. In non-parallel zones, interactants begin from unequal (non-parallel) LGP or LSP proficiency positions, which sets off contrasting patterns of language adjustments as interactants with higher LGP or LSP competencies may have to decide whether to accommodate toward their lower proficiency communication partners.

In non-parallel communication zones, the unequal LSP competency combinations of interactants affect the LSP zone width and determine the extent to which the topic and vocabulary used need to be mutually adjusted and accommodated. For example, non-parallel communication zone Patterns 11, 14, and 17 carry wider LSP zone width than Patterns 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 18. This is because Patterns 11, 14, and 17 are the language proficiency matches between interactants possessing full and partial LSP competencies (i.e., Zone Three-Two LSP proficiency matches); while Patterns 10, 13, and 16 are the LSP language proficiency matches of interactants with full and limited LSP competencies (i.e., Zone Three-One LSP proficiency matches), and Patterns 12, 15, and 18 show LSP language proficiency matches of interactants with partial and limited LSP competencies (i.e., Zone Two-One LSP proficiency matches). For Patterns 10, 13, and 16, although one of

the interactants possess full fluency in LSP competency, this individual needs to accommodate to his/her communication partner who possesses limited LSP competency. Similarly, the partial LSP individual also needs to accommodate to individuals with limited LSP competencies as shown in Patterns 12, 15, and 18. Based on this analysis, I consider the communication zone widths in Patterns 10, 13, 16 and 12, 15, 18 to be similar, even though the interactants possess full LSP competency in Patterns 10, 13, and 16.

It is clear, therefore that the adjustment processes in the non-parallel patterns (see Figure 3 Patterns 10–18) dictates that interactants have to concurrently adjust their language levels between LGP and LSP dialogs. Depending on the language proficiency position (either high or low in LGP or LSP), the interactants must carefully adjust the complexity of their language use when switching between LGP and LSP deliberations.

Differing patterns of LGP and LSP competency matches also offer varying information exchange possibilities. Although LGP competency may determine maximum information exchange possibilities, it may not be relevant in ascertaining actual exchange possibilities among interactants in LSP dialogs. In other words, high LGP competency can compensate a deficiency in LSP competency but is not necessarily a determining factor. For example, among the nine parallel communication zones in Figure 2, interactants from parallel Patterns 1, 4, 7 possess the same zone width in LSP competencies despite the fact that these interactants have varying LGP competencies (in Pattern 1, the interactants possess full LGP competency as compared to partial LGP competency in Pattern 4, and limited LGP in Pattern 7). Similarly, despite varying LGP competencies, interactants with partial LSP competency in Patterns 2, 5, and 8 also possess the same zone width in LSP competencies, as do interactants with limited LSP competencies in Patterns 3, 6, and 9.

This means that in language match positions where the interactants possess full LSP but varying LGP competencies (Patterns 1, 4, and 7), they theoretically have the requisite competencies to fully exchange LSP-related information. However, the information exchange may still be affected by the actual LGP competency. Information exchanges in Patterns 1 and 4 can therefore be wider than that of Pattern 7. Pattern 7, in practice, can exist but the scope of the information exchange tends to be restricted to the LSP boundaries (zone width). Among these three patterns, Pattern 1 interactants have the best communication potential to be successful as compared to Patterns 4 and 7; while full LSP competency can make up for the language deficiency in LGP of Pattern 4. In contrast, interactants with limited LGP competency, as in Pattern 7, can still communicate effectively provided the deliberations remain within the LSP zone width. For instance, order takers in most fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong possess limited LGP competency

in English, but can often function properly in taking orders in English, provided the information exchange is within their range of training, such as names of food items, procedure of order-taking, etc.

I now turn to a discussion of how LGP competency can compensate the LSP deficiency by examining the difference in communication dynamics between interactants represented by Figure 2 patterns 1, 2, 3. The interactants in these patterns possess full LGP competencies but varying LSP competencies. Of these three patterns, Pattern 1 interactants have the best communication potential (full LGP and LSP competencies) to be successful, followed by Pattern 2 (partial LSP competency) and Pattern 3 (limited LSP competency). Although Pattern 2 and 3 interactants possess less proficient LSP competencies than Pattern 1, their full LGP competency can largely compensate for their LSP deficiency, provided the topics do not involve much LSP.

While it is necessary to distinguish LGP competency from LSP competency, it is also important to recognize that there are differing degrees of common core between LGP and LSP in different professional fields (see Bhatia, 1993; Robinson, 1991). While LSP competency is represented more by mathematical symbols (engineering operations management) than verbal statements (literature, law), interactants with low LGP competency can still successfully exchange messages. That is, their LSP competency can provide the connecting language to support and facilitate LGP dialogs. Thus, Figure 2 Pattern 7 interactants may have better communication potential than Pattern 3 in dealing with technical-related topics. As such, Pattern 3 interactants who possess full LGP competency but limited LSP competency may not be able to actively participate in technical or subject-specific discussions as much as individuals in Pattern 7, even though a Pattern 7 individual may not be able to freely express his ideas verbally because of his limited LGP competency. It follows that Pattern 4 interactants with full LSP competency can compensate their LGP deficiency, and so be more likely to interact more effectively in complex technical dialogs as compared to interactants in Patterns 2 and 3 who possess full LGP competencies, but partial or limited LSP competencies. In contrast, in the non-science and technical fields, LGP competency takes on more importance when exploring new and complex ideas, problem solving, and inter-related multi-dimensional subjects. Consequently, individuals communicating in these fields need higher LGP competencies in order to adequately express and communicate related LSP topics.

LGP proficiency also plays a key role in non-parallel communication zones. Interactants in Figure 3 Patterns 11, 14 and 17 possess either full or partial LSP competencies but varying LGP competencies. Pattern 11 interactants therefore have better communication potential to be successful as their full LGP competency can compensate their LSP language deficiency. In contrast, for Pattern 17

interactants to communicate effectively, they need computers or other props (see later discussion on Case 2) to make up for their LGP deficiency.

Similarly, the full LGP competency of interactants in Figure 3 Patterns 10 and 12 can compensate their LSP competency differences even though the LSP communication zone width between these two patterns is similar. In either of these two patterns, one of the interactants has limited LSP competency, so the communication zone width cannot exceed the limited LSP competency and a full or partial LSP communicator must accommodate to the limited LSP communicator. Likewise, the communication potential for Patterns 16 and 18 are very limited. These interactants are not only restricted to the zone width of their LSP competency, but are also limited by their unilingual LGP competencies. In other words, the scope for effective communication in Patterns 16 and 18 is very limited and mirrors the scope limited in parallel zone for communication in Pattern 9.

Effects of general and professional genre competence in various communication tasks

Having elaborated on an extended language-based communication zones model of 18 possible patterns, I now present three cases to illustrate the intermix of general and professional language use in various communication contexts and how communication efficacy can be achieved despite second-language deficiency. Case 1 illustrates how communication can be facilitated when a nominated facilitator who speaks different functional languages is added to an organizational design to better coordinate business transactions. Case 2 illustrates the change in organizational language policy to enhance communication effectiveness by describing how language policy in a firm changes and expands over time, and how top management manages its multilingual environment in order to meet the organizational change. Case 3, a case of mutual link-pin pattern, illustrates how a spontaneous mutual link-pin process connects managerial or technical personnel at headquarters and divisional organizational levels.

Case 1: LSP Link-Pin to Enhance Production — Customer Communication

Case 1 illustrates an example of a partial bilingual (Zone Two) Taiwanese product manager interacting in English with her partial bilingual (Zone Two) French customers, and with the plant managers in her native language, Mandarin Chinese. In this example, the translation and information exchanges in language-based communication channels can be compared where messages are coded in professional

and technical languages (engineering, production) and in various languages (Chinese, English, and French). The example concerns a Taiwanese small appliance manufacturer with customers in France and a production facility in mainland China and shows how a Taiwanese product manager negotiated with plant personnel in mainland China (shared national language but non-shared functional or LSP language) and customer representatives from France (non-shared national language but shared functional LSP language in English with partial proficiency level) to determine product specifications, price, and delivery schedules of the Taiwanese firm's products target for the French market.

In communication between production personnel and the product manager, the mainland China production personnel initially assumed a functional language and knowledge superiority position over the Taiwanese product manager. Faced with production qualities (at specified quality levels) and production deadlines (with penalties for missing and bonuses for achieving), the mainland China personnel continually attempted to renegotiate product specifications and delivery schedules and directed their communication with the newly appointed Taiwanese product manager. The prior experience of the mainland China personnel from state-owned firms and the Chinese cultural characteristics of flexibility may well have been an additional motivation factor in influencing this behavior pattern.

In attempting to renegotiate delivery schedules (delayed deliveries) and product specifications (simplified design), the mainland China production personnel used leased telephone lines (involving only marginal costs for them) and acted from a functional language superiority position. In these negotiations, the Taiwanese product manager had to determine which demands were legitimate and in turn renegotiate contract terms with their French customers. As the Taiwanese product manager acquired functional or LSP language competency (and associated knowledge of the production process and physical plant), the functional or LSP language power balance moved toward equality and the interactions between the Taiwanese production manager and mainland China personnel changed in both content and frequency. Assuming that the personal relationship did not deteriorate beyond repair during the imbalanced power phase, the change in the dialog became one of evaluating legitimate requests for product modifications and schedule changes. In addition, the communication process was further facilitated by the development of trusting personal relationships.

In product manager and customer communication, the partial bilingual interactants therefore practiced mutual accommodation to successfully coordinate their activities in their Zone Two conversations in English. As the Taiwanese product manager acquired a better understanding of the production operations in mainland China (functional language or LSP competency), she could integrate relevant information into the negotiations with her French customers. In the pro-

cess, the French customers gained understanding of manufacturing operations and technology and its influence on product schedules and design requirements. Consequently, the interactants all possessed sufficient functional or LSP language competency to accurately decide when to call on technical experts and establish link-pin channels to supplement their direct interactions. In this case, high (but not expert or specialist level) functional language competency and subject knowledge supported and facilitated direct communication in Zone Two channels. This example therefore clearly illustrates the interplay of the use of language for general and/or professional purposes.

Case 2: Multiple Language Use to Meet Organizational Change

Case 2 describes and illustrates how language in a firm changes and expands over time in that a Hong Kong-based manufacturer of PVCs developed multiple language competencies to adapt to a changing customer mix, more complex and diverse products, and to meet a move of its production facilities from Hong Kong to Dongguan, China (50 miles from its headquarters). Early in its history, all company communications were in Cantonese as this was the native language of management, the workers, and the customers. In addition, the production process was basic, so sophisticated technical language was not necessary. The manufacturer's service representative spoke Cantonese, as did maintenance and repair individuals. With the introduction of some upscale products and some English-speaking customers, English was introduced into the company language mix. The marketing and production managers utilized English language competencies in calling on customers (marketing manager) and in purchasing new machinery and the repairing/maintaining of existing equipment (production manager). The technical languages of the company (engineering and production management) also increased in complexity.

A trilingual communication environment was created upon moving production facilities to Dongguan, China, where multilingual managers switched among three languages in order to communicate with customers (English, Cantonese, and Mandarin), with the production staff and work force in Dongguan (Mandarin), and with the Cantonese headquarters staff in Hong Kong or among themselves (Cantonese). Again, the technical or professional language became more complex but at an even more accelerated pace than the technical language developed at headquarters. During the expansion period, the company had to manage the acquisition of multiple language competencies to match the communication required to operate in a multilingual communication environment.

With this example in mind, I now describe how top management (i.e., a Zone Three manager with fluent Mandarin and English proficiency levels) managed its multilingual environment in order to meet organizational change. The change included (a) increasing the translation capabilities of interactants (bilingual proficiency); and (b) making company (professional) languages easier to understand without sacrificing content exchange (standardization, simplification, and augmentation).

Increasing Bilingual Proficiency. Translation capacities are determined by the ability of bilinguals to convert messages among appropriate languages. By itself, increasing the level of bilingual proficiencies does not increase translation capabilities if the language abilities are concentrated in the wrong languages. Without language competency matches, interactants who cannot find a linking language remain unilingual and still require link-pin translators to exchange messages (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001). Consequently, careful selection of bilinguals who have proficiencies in the appropriate languages and language training tailored to fit company needs can develop the translation capabilities that match enterprise activities.

Language Standardization, Simplification, and Augmentation. Making language easier to understand can be accomplished by either directing communication toward the use of fewer or a single language through language policy (language standardization) or developing simple language or symbols that can be understood by individuals speaking different native languages (language simplification and augmentation).

In language standardization decisions, companies face the issue of whether to adopt an official language (or *lingua franca*) as company language. The underlying motivation may well be to reduce language translation, but such a decision also carries with it other implications and ramifications. By specifying a designated company language, fluent speakers of this language are placed in language superiority positions and have more direct access to information coded in designated official language than those organizational members with less fluent proficiency.

The choice of language depends on a number of factors, such as the number of people who speak the language, the potential of that language to be an official language (e.g., English as international language), or the purchasing power of the buyers. Studies by Vandermeeren (1999) and Charles (2001) best illustrate the power of language choice in international business and multinational corporations. Overall, English has become the desirable standard language in the world of business when the choice of any of the other languages available may provoke a cultural conflict (see Charles, 2001).

Language simplification and augmentation involves structuring an environment so that interactants who share only an extremely limited language proficiency match (e.g., Zone One) can still effectively communicate with each other. An example of language simplification and augmentation is the use of computer diagrams/screens and written languages as link-pins to connect the interactants who do not possess adequate second-language LGP proficiency to exchange technical information. Using computers as link-pins to aid information exchange communication between unilinguals (Zone One) and partial bilinguals (Zone Two) can occur where precise communication is required and where translators are either unavailable or would inhibit and adversely affect the communication process.

To illustrate, I now describe how a computer screen linked unilingual and partial bilinguals in an interactive technical decision-making discussion. Chinese engineers who spoke only limited-to-low intermediate English (Zone One) needed to communicate with a French manager who spoke English but only very limited (Zone One) Mandarin Chinese. Direct interactive communication was impossible. The computer room became the hub of the intercultural communication process as the interlocutors gathered in front of a computer terminal and jointly focused their attention on the screen. These interlocutors exchanged messages through non-verbal 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 non-verbally. Simultaneous first-language conversation 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 in using diagrams with the additional aid of limited verbal and non-verbal communication. There was a prerequisite, however, that the communicators shared adequate understanding of the subject knowledge projected on the computer diagrams. This prerequisite seemed to have been 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 put the machinery. Despite limited verbal communication exchange due to a lack of a linking language, the communication flow was still highly interactive and efficient.

Case 2 suggests that a company can increase its language translation capabilities by enhancing general and professional language proficiency through the

strategy of language simplification. It suggests also that, at the same time, it can increase its communication efficacy through language augmentation with the aid of the computer and thereby further influence the choice of language in the information flow despite limited second-language proficiency.

Case 3: Mutual Link-Pin Pattern

Case 3 is an example of how a mutual link-pin process facilitates the communication effectiveness in the areas of general and professional languages. To illustrate, I next describe how language channels and associated informal multiple link-pin patterns arise to compensate the second-language deficiency. Figure 4 shows how a spontaneous mutual link-pin process is embedded in a multilingual link-pin channel that connects managerial or technical personnel at headquarters or divisional organizational levels (primary communicators as senders) with personnel in country organizations that may be scattered around the world (primary communicators as receivers). The mutual link-pin channels arise among bilinguals who may not be fully fluent or prefer to communicate in their native language rather than direct English channels.

Case 3 illustrates the process of how headquarters or divisional personnel convey the corporate messages and technical information to the meeting attendees coming from country organizations. The illustration of the direct communication and language translation process is divided into three steps. In Step 1, managerial or technical personnel typically at headquarters or divisional levels explain (usually in large group lecture format) a wide variety of company matters to represen-

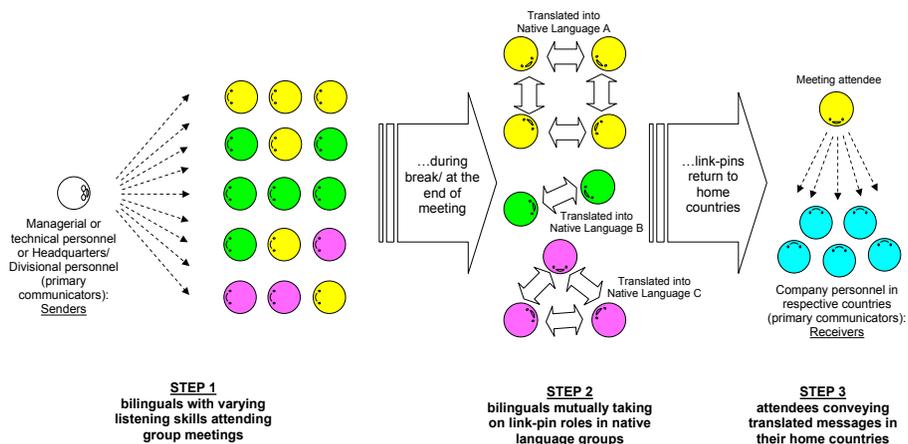


Figure 4. Link-pin Channel and Mutual Link-pin Pattern

tatives of the firm's country organizations in English (the world's most common business and company language as the medium of exchange). This step establishes direct contact and communication (one-way usually) among a large number of enterprise personnel. In the diagram I insert "???" to indicate that the bilingual listeners may not fully comprehend the message content.

In Step 2, a spontaneous link-pin pattern arises when these listeners come together in first- or native-language groups at breaks or the end of the meetings. At this time, the partial and full bilingual meeting attendees mutually take on the link-pin roles as they convert the information received in the second language to their native languages, and then mutually share their impressions and summaries. As these partial and full bilinguals understand differing parts of the second-language message, they can mutually interpret and explain (as mutual link-pins) the missing and confusing parts and, in the process, piece together a more complete message.

In Step 3, the meeting attendees carry the translated messages throughout their country organizations. Alternative and/or parallel channels are possible as information is conveyed directly (written form or large group meetings) or through intermediaries in the organizational communication.

To illustrate the case of the mutual link-pin pattern, I discuss the language-based communication channels and spontaneous language link-pin patterns that originated at an English-language company-meeting held in Hong Kong for the marketing managers throughout Southeast Asian countries where individuals were responsible for introducing heavy duty printing machines. Mandarin, Malay, Indonesian, Thai, and Cantonese first-language speakers attended the training sessions. Meetings in English were conducted by managerial personnel (to explain strategy) and technical personnel (to explain technical product specifications). At the breaks and over luncheons and dinners, the attendees gravitated into language groups as defined by their native languages. Lacking adequate second-language listening skills to understand the advanced or technical topic communicated in the senders' language, these second-language receivers took on link-pin roles by using their own native language during breaks or after the workshop. Through the process of discussing and sharing the content of the workshop, these second-language receivers were able to piece together the essence and nuances of the meetings etc. This process of using respective native language to share and clarify information therefore enhanced their understanding of the meetings and workshops.

As illustrated in the example, it is assumed that this link-pin communication pattern also occurs regularly at conferences or meetings where second-language speakers with differing second-language proficiency are present. The channel is continued once the meeting attendees return to their respective countries. In the example, the partial bilingual attendees, using the better understood information

acquired through the mutual language link-pin process, were able to convey the meeting information to their respective country organizations. The benefit of the mutual link-pin pattern was to overcome the language deficiencies of individual communicators and cancel out their communication deficiencies in that messages not picked up by one individual are received by another individual. In the process, the total amount and accuracy of information passed through and available to the organization may be increased. The mutual link-pin pattern is clearly an efficient way of enhancing information transferring among individuals from different language speakers and with different second-language proficiency.

Discussion and conclusion

Recognizing the importance of integrating professional genre competence into general language competence in international business and organizational communication, I reconfigured and expanded a model of language-based communication zones as a framework to distinguish professional genre competence from general language competence and to categorize 18 recognizable patterns. This reconfigured model has important theoretical and pragmatic implications for international business and organizational communication. Specifically, the framework is of importance in the New Zealand and Australia contexts due to their multi-ethnic societal environments and the increasingly important role they play in the Asia-Pacific region.

In global business environments like New Zealand and Australia interactants are likely to engage in any of three kinds of communication situations: native speaker to native speaker (NS-NS) with variations, native speaker to non-native speaker (NS-NNS), and non-native speaker to non-native speaker (NNS-NNS). In communicating with individuals speaking the same language with variations, professional genre competence becomes the key to success in the communication event where both parties possess equivalent general language competence. In contrast, when communicating with non-native English speakers, there is a greater need for native-English speakers to assess the competency levels of their counterparts in respect of their general language as well as professional genre competence. Depending on the nature of the communication task, these interactants need to mutually explore and establish the zone match where they can successfully and effectively carry out their communication task. As for the third communication situation (NNS-NNS), where both parties are second-language speakers, they need to first explore the linking language and second establish the communication zone. Once the zone pattern is established, interactants need to adjust their use of general or professional language according to the nature of the tasks involved.

To conclude, as the world of business has become more globalized, language use has become increasingly more complex and more diverse. Language mixes are now more common in an expanding global communication network, and so the key to communication efficiency becomes critical. In view of these circumstances, this reconfigured language-based communication zone model framework which integrates professional genre competency into the general language competency framework may help researchers and international business practitioners to identify these keys to effective communication. For researchers, it is hoped that the current study will provide insights for the further development and refinement of language-based communications zone models as well as insights that can be drawn from (a) integrating professional genre competence in a model so as to define the language competency variables more accurately and precisely, and (b) identifying and describing communication tasks that can be successfully handled by individuals with varying levels of second-language proficiency. For communication practitioners or individuals, whether native or non-native speakers of the language, who are engaged in the international business arena or working in multinational corporations, the model can be applied to improve communication practice by first assessing their general and professional genre competence, then identifying the communication zone match of their counterparts, and finally implementing communication strategies and practices that match the established zones and patterns. It is hoped that this theoretical framework will guide their communication practice and enhance cross-cultural organizational and international business communication effectiveness.

Against the background of the findings, I suggest that future research be conducted to operationalize the re-configured theoretical framework through experimental field investigation. Specifically, future research should be designed to (a) more precisely define the general and professional language competency variables that stimulate the interaction as well as the adjustment patterns in the respective language-based communication zones, (b) compare the communication tasks that can be handled by unilinguals, partial bilinguals, and full bilinguals; and (c) find the relative importance of general language proficiency and professional genre competence in the various language-based communication zones.

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