

Effect of Link-Pin Channels in International Business Communication

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Abstract. This paper discusses issues relating to link-pin communication channels within language-based communication zones. In a dual translation process, messages coded in professional genres and national languages are transmitted through the link-pin channels. To illustrate various issues arising from communication via link-pin channels, six case studies are developed. It is hoped that our illustrations and discussions of these issues can guide further research and communication practices. [China Media Research. 2006;2(1):43-54].

Keywords: Language-based communication zone, link-pin communication, intercultural communication

The increasing globalization of business has been well documented (see, for example, Nadesan, 2001; Prince, 2001; Sands, 2001). Within this environment, individuals who speak different languages and represent diverse cultural groups interact directly and indirectly in interconnected global communication networks. This global communication network is becoming larger and more complex as people speaking different national languages and specialized languages (labeled professional genres) are creating and exchanging messages within this network. Some people in this network are having to become bilingual as they find a linking language to communicate directly with one another or to serve as language link-pins to connect others who do not possess the requisite competency to communicate directly and who must therefore pass messages through link-pin communication channels. Consequently, the construction of efficient link-pin channels is an essential component of building an efficient global international business communication network.

The focus of this paper is therefore on the effect of link-pin channels in international business communication. We first provide an overview of the role of link-pin communication in international business communication and then provide six cases illustrating the possible uses of link-pin channels.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, we review concepts and research that proceeded and led to our model of language link-pins and link-pin channels in international business communication. Drawing on genre theory, we develop two categories of language link-pins; namely, national language link-pins and professional genre language link-pins (see below for discussion of link-pin communication channels within language-based communication zones). For over 30 years, genre research has shown that professional genres are specific

languages that exist within language communities and that are distinct from general languages. Du-Babcock (2006, accepted for publication) in her recent study, distinguishes professional genre language from general language in that bilinguals who speak more than one professional genre can translate messages among professional genres. For our discussion purposes, we therefore only concentrate on the professional genres spoken in different areas of business.

In business management literature, the concept of a link-pin originated in 1939 from Roethlisberger and Dickson's analysis of the Hawthorne Experiments where they further elaborated on the first-level superior as the "man in the middle" who translated management and worker genres and carried messages between upper management and the workers. Three decades later, Likert (1967) proposed and defined link-pins as individuals linking the organization together vertically and horizontally by superimposing a group structure on the formal organization structure. Likert noted that a manager, other than a top organizational level manager, would be concurrently a subordinate in one group and a superior in another group to whom subordinates at the next lower organizational level reported. As such, each manager served as a link-pin translator between groups in a cascading pattern running vertically and horizontally through the organizational levels. Their overlapping roles theoretically facilitate the interchange of messages— both vertically and horizontally— and hopefully develop multilingual organization staff who could understand multiple professional genres across functional roles.

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) introduced the concepts of differentiation and integration and showed that the need for language translation across organizational units varies across industries. For example, in an industry with a dynamic and complex environment associated with high differentiation, there is a great need for language translation and language

link-pins (integration mechanisms); whereas, in an industry that is a stable and simple environment associated with low differentiation, there is little need for language translation and language link-pins. In language terminology, such differentiation therefore represents the differences in professional genres spoken in the Research & Development, Marketing, and Production Departments (where personnel have differing interpersonal orientations, time orientations, and goal orientations).

Coincident with Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) concept, Mintzberg's (1983) typology of organizations (machine, professional, entrepreneurial, and innovative) also shows that the necessity for link-pin translators varies among these types of organization. For example, 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 to connect the strategic apex who speak top management or executive genre language and the operating core who speak worker genre language. The technostructure and service staff (with even more divisions and further specialization within these units) and the middle line managers consequently develop their own distinctive professional genre that varies in form and size among the different organization types.

Du-Babcock and Babcock (1996) developed the term "language link-pins" as they extended the concept of link-pins to bilinguals who translate messages and thereby link organizational personnel speaking different national languages. In their study of expatriates in Taiwan (1996), they showed how expatriates with varying second-language competency made different use of link-pins. Unilinguals in Zone One who spoke little or no Chinese communicated through link-pin channels for all substance messages. Partial bilinguals in Zone Two who spoke some Chinese communicated directly for some messages but still relied on link-pin channels. Full bilinguals in Zone Three communicated in both languages and were not reliant on language link-pins to relay their messages. In their 2001 study, Babcock and Du-Babcock integrated link-pin communication into a language-based communication zones model. They found that in eight language-based communication zones, interactants developed different communication strategies as they sent different proportions of their messages through direct and link-pin channels. Du-Babcock (2006, accepted for publication) added the concept of professional genre language link-pins in order to specifically describe these link-pins within a national language communication network. To recognize and distinguish these two link-pin categories, we now adopt the terms national language link-pin and professional genre link-pin.

Link-pin Communication Channels within Language-based Communication Zones

Link-pin communication arises when potential communicators do not share competency in any linking languages to confidently exchange messages directly and so must choose to pass messages through intermediaries (or link-pins). These link-pin communicators are generally bilinguals who serve as intermediaries to translate messages across national languages as well as professional genres.

We distinguish two types of language link-pins; namely translators/ interpreters and job function link-pins. Although many experts distinguish translators from interpreters, we use these two terms interchangeably. For our purposes, translators and interpreters are language specialists who pass on unaltered content, whereas the job function link-pins are bilinguals who provide translation while performing their jobs in that the job function link-pins integrate and input new content by adding or deleting information into the communication channel to get a task done.

Link-pin channels exist in either immediate or non-simultaneous communication (see Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001, p.384). In immediate communication, messages are translated and passed through a single link; whereas, in non-simultaneous communication, messages may pass through one or more intermediaries before being translated into a second language by a language link-pin at a language cross-over point. The need for opening link-pin channels depends on the language matches of potential interlocutors. To help describe link-pin channels, we also distinguish between primary and intermediary or link-pin communicators. Primary communicators are communication partners (either individuals or groups) who exchange or attempt to exchange messages; while intermediaries or link-pins are those who stand between the primary communicators in link-pin channels. During non-simultaneous communication, messages travel among intermediaries after originating from the primary communicators until meeting at the language cross-over point where a dual language conversation takes place. In other words, language cross-over points indicate points in a communication chain or network where messages are translated into other languages.

Du-Babcock and Babcock (1996) identified and described different link-pin channel patterns that can arise when link-pin communication arises. For example, formal link-pin channels entail not only the exchange of messages through an organizational hierarchy in a scalar process, but also horizontal interaction processes among departments in the coordination of work (workflow communication). Informal or spontaneous link-pin communication patterns supplement the formal channels. In these spontaneous patterns, bilinguals step forward to

make up for language deficiencies of the primary communicators and perform translation functions as necessary.

Within formal link-pin channels, primary language link-pins and secretarial link-pins can be inserted into the communication process to translate and guide communication flow. Primary language link-pins are therefore kinds of link-pins who translate messages from top-level unilingual or partial bilingual managers to the extended organizational staff who tend to have varying second-language proficiencies (in most cases unilingual, especially for the operating core). In this process, these primary language link-pins also add and filter content from their distinct job responsibilities into the translated messages.

Formal link-pin channels also include secretarial link-pins. These tend to be executive secretaries and assistant-to's who enable their unilingual or partial bilingual supervisors to function in a foreign language environment. These language link-pins take on the role of linking their bosses to their immediate subordinates as well as with all staff throughout the organization. Unlike primary language link-pins, their roles do not entail separate or distinct job responsibilities but they are included in the formal organizational design to help their boss by performing a variety of activities including translation.

An example of the secretarial link-pin is how a unilingual American manager in a construction firm effectively used his executive secretary as a language link-pin (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). By having his secretary hold substantive discussions with his subordinates, this expatriate gained access to information that allowed him to more closely monitor the design and construction projects. His authority was not threatened by this process. The subordinates were willing to provide informal progress reports to the secretary without feeling a loss of face in reporting problems or difficulties. Through messages relayed back and forth by means of his secretary, the expatriate developed an information base to give the subordinates constructive feedback.

Formal link-pin channels are supplemented and supported by informal or spontaneous secondary language link-pin channels. These informal or spontaneous channels develop when secondary language link-pin individuals step forward to serve as a bridge between individuals who do not share competency in a language. These secondary link-pins, fluent in the languages of potential interlocutors, translate difficult-to-understand expressions including slang or idiomatic expressions. For example, Du-Babcock & Babcock (1996) found that as expatriate managers met with groups of Chinese managers or workers, individuals with fluent English proficiency emerged as informal secondary language link-pins. The

typical interactive communication sequence was that the expatriate asked a question and then the Chinese personnel conferred among themselves in Chinese. After concluding the Chinese conversations, the individual who possessed higher English proficiency and self-confidence emerged as a secondary language link-pin. This individual summarized and communicated the essence of the group discussion to the expatriate.

Professional Genre Channels and National Language Channels

The dual translation of messages across different professional genres as well as in different national languages impacts the exchange of messages in non-simultaneous organizational communication channels. Figure 1 shows professional genre channels where intermediaries exchange professional genre messages (G_1 and G_2) coded in their shared national languages (N_1 and N_2) in separate national language systems. As with Babcock and Du-Babcock's (2001) model, we now not only show a national language link-pin (labeled " $N_1, N_2...$ ") but also add professional genre link-pins (G_1, G_2) to indicate the translation of professional genres in the national languages (Figure 1).

In an organizational design, individuals are assigned to departments that are formed according to functional specialization (called functional departmentation). These individuals represent different professions and speak the professional genres acquired through professional education and experience (see, for example, Bazerman, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Bhatia, 1993; and Swales, 1990). As such, they may experience inter-departmental communication difficulties if they do not understand the genres spoken in other departments. For example, engineers and scientists in research and development (R & D) departments, finance professionals in finance departments, production professionals in production departments, and marketing professionals in marketing departments encode messages in their professional genres and cannot integrate their inter-departmental activities if their messages are not understood by professionals other than their own respective departments. This condition was labeled as high differentiation by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967). In cases where inter-departmental communication difficulties are recognized, intermediaries (which we label as genre link-pins) can be interjected into the communication channel to translate messages and improve communication flow among departments. These professional genre language link-pins speak the genres of the interacting departments and are in a sense genre bilinguals. Given organizational titles such as facilitators, product managers, project managers, or coordinators who may also work in a matrix structure,

these individuals are recognized as part of the formal organizational structure.

The use of genre link-pins is appropriate when organizations are characterized by high differentiation; in other words, where professionals do not speak or understand the professional genres spoken in other departments. Consequently, in our diagram of genre channels, we show how professional genre link-pins can be inserted to improve communication flow, promote understanding, and facilitate decision making. For example, in a matrix structure, a project manager could be a professional genre language link-pin who translates messages between a financial manager (language of finance) and an engineering manager (language of engineering). In addition to the formal professional genre language link-pins who are part of the official organization design, secondary or spontaneous genre link-pins may then emerge to facilitate communication and translate messages among individuals speaking different professional genres.

In sum, link-pin communication emerges (a) in immediate and single-link communication situations where translator link-pins stand visibly between the primary communicators, or (b) in non-simultaneous multiple link situations where the link-pin function is less visible and the interaction is integrated over time in the scalar (vertical) and workflow (horizontal) processes of organizational and inter-organizational communication (Figure 1). Through interactions in their native languages and speaking different professional genres, the primary communicators develop direct or indirect relationships with their language link-pins as well as indirect relationships with their communication partners. In multiple-link channels, primary communicators may send messages through several professional genre native-language link-pin channels before translation into another national language at national language cross-over points. Standing at the intersection of languages in communication channels, bilingual language link-pins are central to this communication process. They carry the responsibility for providing accurate translation of primary communicators' messages and therefore sending information through genre and national language channels in a dual language translation process.

Method

The current study draws upon three sets of data collected over the past ten years. The study reinterprets our earlier (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996) data set that describes expatriate and local personnel communication in 14 multinational organizations operating in Taiwan and adds intermediaries and newly collected data from ten companies located in Japan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan.

During the course of data collection over this period of ten years, a technique described as objectifying interviewing (Redding, 1990; Sjoberg & Nett, 1968) was employed. Using this methodology, researchers engage in interactive dialogues with the respondents. In effect, the researchers supply background and a frame of reference in which both parties explore issues. In addition, for the second and the third data set, a case-study research design was employed in that we blended different data collection methods for gathering information; namely on-site observations, analysis of company records and documents, and objectifying interviews. For example, in collecting data on one company, we and four research fellows observed internal company meetings, sales visits to customers' facilities, telephone conversations, and one-on-one and group conversations. Twenty one-day observation visits were made at the company's Hong Kong headquarters and manufacturing facilities in southern China during which the research fellows tailed assigned managers throughout the working day and chronicled the day's activities of four specific departments. Following these observation visits, we interviewed the company CEO and pre-selected mid- to top-level managers of the company's Hong Kong and China operations. To gather data on the other four companies, we interviewed mid- to top-level managers and observed meetings in Japan, and interviewed personnel in Taiwan and Mainland China.

Case Studies of Link-Pin Channels

In this section, we discuss issues that arise in the development and maintenance of link-pin channels in international business communication. In doing so, we provide six case studies that illustrate possible link-pin communication patterns. Case 1 shows how language translation or link-pin channel changes and expands as a firm moves toward internationalization. Cases 2 and 3 describe the development of formal and informal link-pin channels. Case 4 points out how national language cross-over points in link-pin channels impact communication flow and efficiency. Case 5 illustrates the interplay and translation of professional genre and national languages, and the language related problems and conflicts within the context of a genre and national language environment. Case 6 discusses and provides illustrations of how primary communicators select and interact with language link-pins.

Case Study 1: Development of Link-pin Channels to Meet the Internationalization of the Firm

This case study describes how professional genres and national language translation change and expand over time as the company expands into a global market. We demonstrate this process by presenting a case in which a Hong Kong-based manufacturer of PVCs

developed multiple language competencies to adapt to a changing customer mix, more complex and diverse products, and 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 repairing/maintaining of existing equipment (production manager). The technical genre languages of the company (engineering and production management) also increased in complexity in a parallel process.

A tri-national language environment then arose upon moving production facilities to Dongguan, where tri-lingual managers served as national language link-pins and 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). These national language link-pins also become professional genre bilinguals as the marketing, production, and engineering professionals interacted with each other in reciprocal relationships. In sum, during the expansion period, the company had to manage the acquisition of national language and professional genre competencies to match the communication required to operate in a tri-national language and more complex professional genre communication environment.

Case Study 2: Development of Link-Pin Channels in Organizational Communication

This case study describes what happens when non-simultaneous link-pin communication channels develop in country organizations where primary communicators do not share competency in either a national or a genre language. In the study, it was found that bilinguals occupied links at language cross-over points in the communication channels where they translated messages over national languages. Within the national language part of the channel, it was also found that genre language link-pins may be added to the organization to facilitate communication flow among professionals representing functional departments. To illustrate, we describe the development of a non-simultaneous link-pin channel where the primary

communicators only spoke English (American VP) and Chinese (Chinese staff) respectively. This case took place at a US consumer products company within a branch in Taiwan when a brand of ice cream was introduced to Taiwan. Figure 2 traces the national language and genre channels in this communication process (Figure 2).

To provide an overview of the program, an American vice president (VP) invited key Chinese personnel in the marketing, finance, and production departments to a general meeting. The meeting attendees were chosen for multiple reasons: position in the organizational hierarchy, professional competence, and second-language competency. By speaking in English, the American VP was not only communicating directly to the meeting attendees but also through them in their roles as language link-pins to non-English speaking local Chinese personnel in the production, marketing and finance departments. In framing his presentation, the VP developed his message for both direct and indirect listeners and receivers. In this example, the national language cross-over point (from English to Chinese) was immediate in that the meeting attendees in their roles as national language link-pins switched the message from English to Chinese and then conveyed the translated message to other local Chinese personnel in their follow-up conversations with those not present at the meeting. These messages were further translated throughout the implementation process. There was also an upward flow of information as clarification of plans was requested by lower level personnel and derivative organizational levels. After the program overview, the original meeting attendees met informally and formally, as they jointly developed an implementation plan. As differentiation in the organization was low, the multi-lingual genre professionals could interact directly in the development of the implementation plan. Even so, since the professionals did not have previous experience with the project, a project coordinator (a genre language link-pin) was appointed to facilitate the development and implementation of the project. This project coordinator spoke fluent Mandarin and had previous experience in Hong Kong where he acquired practical experience to complement his professional education in engineering and business administration.

In sum, the case illustrates the development of national and genre communication channels in a country organization. Because the organization exhibited low differentiation, only one genre language link-pin was inserted into the communication channels.

Case Study 3: Multiple National Language Link-pin Channels and Mutual Link-pin Patterns

In this case study, we illustrate how formal link-pin and associated informal language link-pin patterns arise

because of the national language competency fits of an organization's personnel. In cooperative systems requiring information exchange, language-influenced formal channels and spontaneous communication patterns emerge. In Figure 3, we show 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). We also show how 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 (Figure 3).

Figure 3 illustrates the process of how headquarters or divisional personnel convey the corporate messages and technical information to the meeting attendees coming from different 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 representatives of the firm's country organizations in English. This step establishes direct contact and communication (one-way usually) among a large number of enterprise personnel. In our diagram we 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 language groups during breaks or at the end of 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 their 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 scalar process.

To illustrate the case of mutual link-pin pattern, we discuss an English-language company-meeting held in Hong Kong for the marketing managers throughout Southeast Asia who were responsible for introducing and selling heavy duty printing machines in their respective countries. Mandarin, Malay, Indonesian, Thai, Cantonese, and Togalo first-language speakers attended

the training sessions. Meetings in English were made 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 completely 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 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 workshop. This process of using respective native language to share and clarify information therefore enhanced their understanding of the workshop.

During these native- or first-language discussions, the initial or warm-up topic was a comparison of personal affairs and backgrounds as the meeting attendees needed to get to know each other to form a group structure (informal organization within the formal organization). This stage was followed by the discussion and interpretation of the presentations. The group members were highly motivated to learn the nuances and the use of the printing machines as they would have to explain the product features to their customers or train other company personnel upon their return in the near future. Consequently, their ensued give-and-take discussions among the different first-language groups make sure that all of the applications and uses were understood (professional genre language). In these developing reciprocal relationships, the meeting attendees not only increased their understanding of presentation contents and nuances, but also solidified their understanding and were alerted to areas that needed additional clarifications. The process of mutual link-pin communication therefore arose out of the need to clarify second-language and professional genre information.

As illustrated in the example, it is assumed that this link-pin communication pattern also occurs regularly at conferences or meetings. The channel is continued once the meeting attendees returning to their respective countries. The benefit of the mutual link-pin pattern was to overcome the language and professional genre 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 transferring information among different language speakers in an international organization

(desirable consequence). However, there may also be possible unintentional consequences of strengthening linguistic groups and developing sub-cultures that may be at variance with an organization's company-wide corporate culture. This, in turn, may create a situation where some company personnel are drawn toward integration (among different cultural groups speaking the same language) and so divide the personal relationships of organization personnel due to informal organization groupings based on national language groups.

Case Study 4: Language Cross-over Points in Link-pin Channels

This case study concerns the contrasting influence of differing language-culture cross-over points on link-pin channels in organizational communication. To illustrate, we present an example of headquarters-subsidiaries communication in a Taiwanese multinational company. In this firm, Japanese and French locals originally headed their respective country's branch organizations. Communication problems arose between the headquarters staff and these country managers, with the most common resolution being that the headquarters deferred to the country managers. Being separated geographically and lacking country-specific knowledge, the headquarters staff did not have the confidence initially to challenge these country managers on a variety of issues. Over time, the Vice President spent a greater amount of time monitoring the affairs in these countries and came to distrust the managers. In both Japan and France, these local managers were eventually replaced with Taiwanese citizens after evidence of inappropriate managerial behavior (in the judgment of the Taiwanese VP) was discovered.

In making these changes, the Taiwanese headquarters moved the language cross-over point down one organizational level. The headquarters staff could now communicate in their native language, Chinese (Zone A in Babcock & Du-Babcock's term) with the respective country managers in Japan and France. Also, the Vice President could devote his time and efforts to more strategic issues since trusted Taiwanese regional managers were placed in charge of these subsidiaries. The language cross-over points and new language competency matches created and altered the communication and organizational patterns of both the subsidiaries and the Taiwanese company overall. Appointed country managers possessed intermediate English and limited Japanese and French communication abilities. Consequently, English was introduced into the language environments, although Japanese and French continued as the major/dominant languages in the respective country organizations. The language mix now dictated the establishment of

Different-Language Zones in the Japanese and French country organizations. Because the newly appointed country managers could not assume language translation responsibilities, full bilingual link-pins (English and either Japanese or French) assumed the Chief-of-Staff role in both countries (see Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996, p. 147) and reported directly to the Taiwanese nationals who now headed these country organizations. These bilingual Japanese and French nationals who assumed Chief-of-Staff roles became the critical links in the vertical communication channels. An additional link was therefore introduced into the vertical (scalar) communication chain, but the message content traveling upward through the vertical channels became more trustworthy. As this example shows, primary communicators need to choose the most strategic location of link-pins, given the organization's particular structure and needs.

Case Study 5: Effects of Professional Genre on Enhancing National Language Communication

This case study concerns a simultaneous professional genre and national language translation process. To illustrate, we present an example of a partial bilingual Taiwanese product manager interacting in English with her partial bilingual French customers and the plant managers in her native language (Mandarin Chinese in this case). The translation and information exchanges in language-based communication zone channels can be compared where messages are coded in genre languages (engineering, production) and in national languages (Chinese, English, and French). The example concerns a Taiwanese small electrical appliance manufacturer with customers in France and a production facility in Mainland China and shows how Taiwanese product managers negotiated with plant personnel in Mainland China (shared national language but non-shared genre language) and customer representatives from France (non-shared national language but shared genre language in English with partial fluency) to determine product specifications, price, and delivery schedules of the Taiwanese firm's products targeted for the French market.

In communication between production personnel and the product manager, the Mainland China production personnel initially assumed a professional genre language and knowledge superiority position over the Taiwanese product managers. Faced with production qualities (at specified quality levels) and production deadlines (with penalties for missing and bonuses for achieving), the Mainland personnel continually attempted to renegotiate product specifications and delivery schedules and directed their communication with newly appointed Taiwanese product managers. The prior experience of the Mainland personnel from state-owned firms and the Chinese cultural characteristic of

flexibility may well have been an additional motivation factor in influencing this behavior pattern.

The Mainland production personnel attempted to re-negotiate delivery schedules (delayed deliveries) and product specifications (simplified design) by using leased telephone lines (involving only marginal cost in their case) and acting from a genre language superiority position. In these negotiations, the Taiwanese product managers had to determine which demands were legitimate and in turn renegotiate contract terms with their French customers. As the Taiwanese product managers acquired genre language competency (and associated knowledge of the production process and physical plant), the genre language power balance moved toward equality and the interactions between the Taiwanese production manager and Mainland personnel changed in both content and frequency. Assuming that the personal relationship did not deteriorate beyond repair during the imbalanced power phase, change in the dialog was 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, these partial bilingual interactants 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 (genre language competency), she could integrate relevant information into the negotiations with her French customers. In the process, the French customers gained understanding of manufacturing operations and technology and its influence on product schedules and design requirements. Consequently, the interactants all came to possess sufficient professional genre competency to accurately decide when to call on technical experts and establish link-pin channels to supplement their direct interactions. In this case, high (even though not expert or specialist level) genre language competency (and subject knowledge) supported and facilitated direct communication in Zone-Two channels.

Case Study 6: Selection of and Interaction with Language Link-pins

This case study illustrates how unilingual CEOs made use of link-pins to successfully communicate day-to-day operation within the organization. In a British-Taiwanese joint venture in Taiwan, the Taiwanese secretary to the English-speaking CEO was assigned on the basis of seniority and not on ability in English-language communication skills. Perhaps contrary to expectations, this policy not only positively affected the careers of two Taiwanese women and their CEO superiors but also resulted in

better overall organizational communication. The first woman, an older secretary with seniority and organizational connections, was chosen over a younger candidate with superior English language skills but who lacked the "guanxi" or relationships that build up over time and fall within the context of a Confucian hierarchy (Hsu, 1981). This senior secretary gave the CEO access to and provided understanding of the communication and decision-making process in Taiwan even though she exhibited less proficient English language skills as demonstrated in expatriate and home office correspondence.

In this situation, the expatriate CEO accommodated to his Taiwanese secretary. According to interviews, this CEO had to make a special point in their interpersonal relations of respecting the personal face of the secretary by not pointing out grammatical errors and awkward English paragraph and sentence construction in English language reports. He accommodated his language to her by making a consistent and constant effort to speak as precisely and simply as possible, to avoid slang and colloquial expressions, and to provide illustrations and examples. Because his extra care and diligence created the framework for the translation of his English language messages, the older Chinese secretary could make more accurate translation of his English messages into written Chinese and oral Mandarin. His personal style also became less direct and confrontational than in previous assignments; to quote the Taiwanese secretary, "he was the ideal Chinese gentleman." In turn, the expatriate was rewarded by being kept informed of day-to-day business operations in the joint venture and also of general developments in Taiwan.

The younger secretary waited her turn in the organization promotion cycle and was duly appointed as assistant to a newly appointed CEO after the older secretary retired. In this case, it was she who moved toward the direct style of her expatriate superior. Having obtained an advanced degree in the United States, she possessed excellent oral and written English communication skills. She was also comfortable working in an English-speaking environment and interacting with Westerners. Consequently, she interacted well with overseas personnel, and her patience allowed her to build up "guanxi" or relationship connections and establish her position in the informal Confucian hierarchy (Hsu, 1981). In this second situation, the new expatriate CEO had a positive adjustment period as the fully bilingual and culturally aware administrative link-pin served as a buffer and eased his entry into his new position. He did not have to make adjustments in his communication and managerial behavior, as the full bilingual link-pin sensed his communication and managerial preferences and moved to accommodate her boss. In our judgment, both link-

pin choices reflected sound decision making that took into account the organization and cultural realities existing at different time periods, although the second situation created less stress for the CEO and better conditions for effective communication and managerial performance.

Summary and Implications

In this paper, we have discussed issues relating to various link-pin communication channels within language-based communication zones in international business communication. In a dual translation process, messages coded in professional genres and national languages are transmitted through the link-pin channels. To meet the ever changing and more challenging communication requirements of global competition, companies must develop both professional genre and national language translation capabilities as they enter into the global marketplace. In multi-national organizations, various link-pin communication channels need to be opened and managed to efficiently guide information transfer and communication flow in both formal and informal organizations, between headquarters and country organizations, within and among country organizations, and with external constituencies. In national language communication, carefully selected language cross-over points and link-pin communicators can develop and maintain the integrity and accuracy of channel messages. In professional genre communication within national languages, decisions as to whether to add professional genre link-pins are also required. In both national language and professional genre channels, language link-pins need to be identified and primary communicators need to develop skills in communicating through these link-pins.

We have developed six case studies to illustrate various issues of communicating via possible link-pin channels. It is hoped that these case studies and issues can guide further research and communication practice in international business communication.

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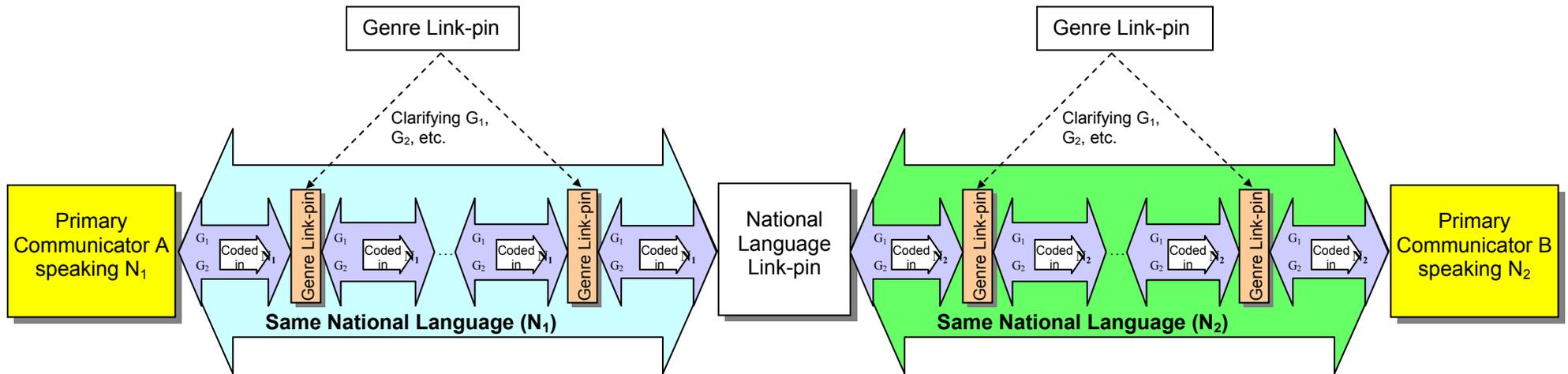
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Keys:
 N₁: National Language 1
 N₂: National Language 2
 G₁: Professional Genre in Language 1
 G₂: Professional Genre in Language 2

Figure 1: Professional Genre and National Language Link-pin Channel

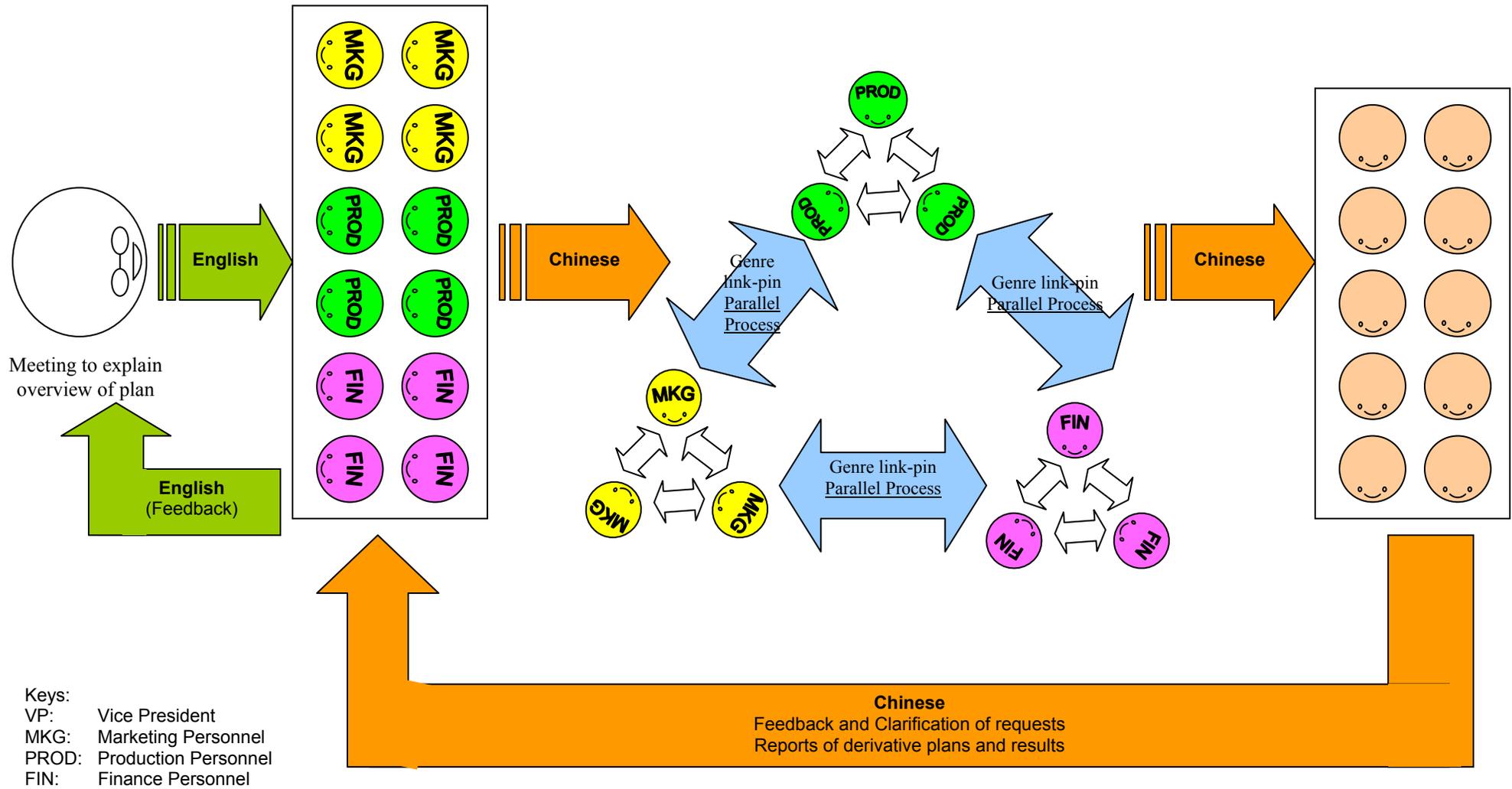


Figure 2: Development of Link-pin Communication Channel in a Country Organization

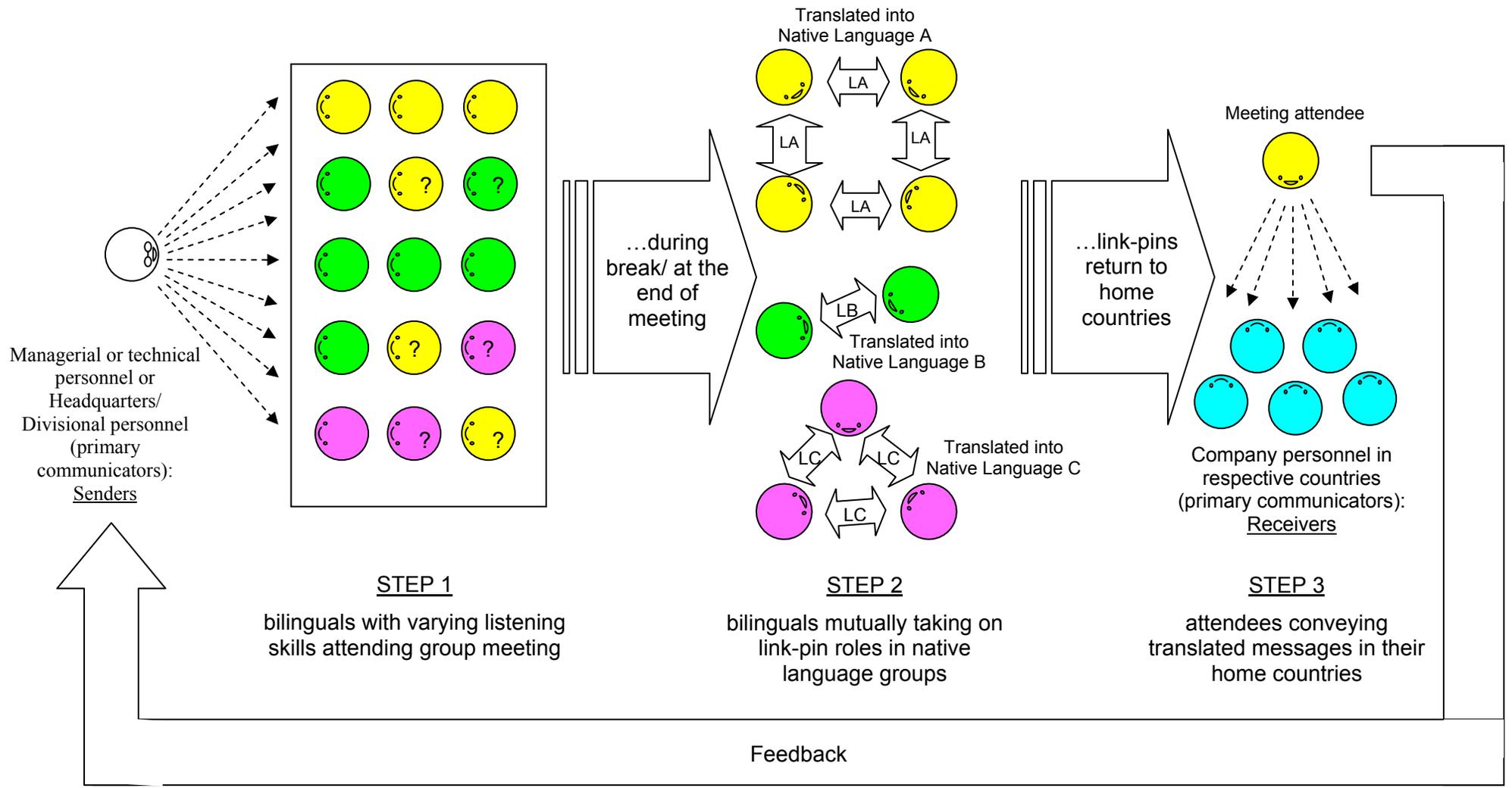


Figure 3: Multiple National Language Link-pin Channel and Mutual Link-pin Patterns

Keys:
 LA: Language A
 LB: Language B
 LC: Language C