

This paper presents a model of language-based communication zones in international business communication. The model builds on Du-Babcock and Babcock's (1996) descriptions of expatriate-local personnel communication patterns by reconfiguring and adding new zones, which vary according to the language proficiency matches of the interactants. The eight new communication zones represented here can contribute to a more comprehensive framework that represents the dynamic, bi-directional, multiply influenced, and transformational translation process integral to international business communication. Previous research has operated on the assumption that all participants within an international business communication setting function as fully proficient users of all languages being spoken, with no accounting for communication difficulties based on varying levels of language proficiency. This study asserts that there is, in fact, a language-competency variable that greatly impacts communication and communication dynamics within the eight identified language-based communication zones. Research-based incidents from four countries illustrate likely communication patterns in the language-based communication zones.

Keywords: International Business Communication, Communication Zones, Language Proficiency, Global Communication

Language-Based Communication Zones in International Business Communication

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Business communication is a dynamic, bi-directional, multiply influenced, and transformational translation process (Sherblom, 1998). In international business communication, the complexity and diversity of this translation process is compounded as individuals send and receive messages that are translated through multiple languages and cultures. In an increasingly fast-paced, interrelated, and expanding globalized business communication environment, individuals who represent different cultures and possess various levels of language competency send and receive messages that cover an entire range of subject complexity (from the most simple to the most complex) and require a need for precise wording (from low importance to mandatory). In the process, differing cultural exposures (direct and indirect), information exchange possibilities, and communication dynamics are activated in an ever-widening variety of communication situations.

We suggest that a comprehensive framework is needed in order to guide future research endeavors so as to provide a more complete and comprehensive explanation of international business communication. Given the complexity and diversity of the international business communication environment, such a framework should define the boundaries of international business communication (message content), include and interrelate cultural variables (contextuality and practices), and account for language variables (competency and language environments). Prior models have focused on boundary definition (e.g., Varner, 2000) and an extensive elaboration of cultural variables and their impact on communication (e.g., Beamer, 1992; Hofstede, 1991). The importance of language proficiency has been acknowledged but only preliminarily integrated into the explanation of international business communication.

We previously developed models (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996) showing how expatriates in Taiwan established three language-based communication zones (Zone One, Zone Two, and Zone Three) according to their relative abilities to speak a second language. Zone One expatriates spoke only rudimentary Chinese and therefore communicated through Chinese bilinguals. In Zone Two, partial bilingual expatriates used Chinese to supplement and complement their English communication but still used Chinese bilinguals for important and complicated business tasks. Zone Three executives spoke fluent Chinese as well as fluent English and would carry on business in either or both languages. In these different zones, the expatriates established different communication channels, faced different cultural exposures and pressures, and used different communication practices in their communication strategies. In the current article, we offer a more fully developed model of language-based communication zones of international business communication to complement the previously developed models that explain other aspects of international business communication. In our current model we recognize other international business com-

munication besides that of expatriates. In the process we re-define the previously identified language zones (Zone One, Zone Two, and Zone Three) and add three mixed language zones (Zone Three-One, Zone Three-Two, and Zone Two-One). To complete the model and capture the other communication patterns in international business communication, we also add two zones in which interactants speak the same native language (Zone A and Zone A-B). This language-based model can, we hope, contribute to a more comprehensive framework that captures and describes the dynamic, bi-direction, multiply influenced, and transformational translation process (Sherblom, 1998) of international business communication.

Global Communication Environment

The increasing globalization of business has been well documented (see for example, Bartlett, 1989; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; 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. In other words, in their roles as producers and customers, they create interrelated global value-added chains (Porter, 1985). Messages may undergo multiple translations through various languages as they travel upstream, midstream, and downstream within an industry as well as horizontally across industries and with other institutions and constituencies.

Constant advances in communication technologies are enabling a rapidly expanding volume of messages to be exchanged at significantly lower transaction cost. Integral to these changes is the competitive pressure on international firms to develop world-wide communication networks within their own firms, with their suppliers and customers, and with other external constituencies such as governmental agencies and special interest groups. In particular, the migration of workers and international relocation of production facilities have created multilingual and multicultural workforces. Expertise is no longer located solely within advanced countries as expert workers from developing countries can now be accessed at lower cost. Furthermore, customers from around the world, who drive the competitive process, are concurrently exhibiting both increasingly similar and divergent buying behaviors and preferences in choosing not only standardized world-class products but also customized culture-specific products. Given these conditions of globalization, international business communicators must now develop and display both language and cultural competencies to meet the increasingly complex and diverse challenges of the evolving global communication environment.

International Business Communication Studies

An extensive literature has identified a range of cultural variables that impact international business communication encounters, and studies on

national culture have provided background and context material for comparing different cultural communication styles and methods (e.g., Hall, 1959, 1976; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Trompenaars, 1993). Following Hall, researchers have focused directly on the international communication process by using the framework of contextuality to contrast and compare interaction patterns among communicators emanating from high- and low-context cultural societies (see, for example, Ting-Toomey, 1985).

Cultural research studies have also used Hofstede's (1980, 1991) and Trompenaars' (1993) national culture variables to compare culturally influenced behaviors, including communication among countries. Theoretical and applied studies that deal directly or indirectly with intercultural business communication and provide more in-depth analysis of communication patterns have supplemented these comparative studies. Culture-specific studies have focused attention on cultural and communication practices in specific countries and cultures (e.g., Gannon & Associates, 1994; Hsu, 1981), while conflict resolution and negotiation studies have integrated intercultural considerations into their theories (e.g., Leung, 1988; Rahim, 1983, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1988; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991). Studies have identified factors influencing intercultural business communication which include affect or emotions (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1971, 1978; Izard, 1977), non-verbal behavior (e.g., Bond & Iwata, 1976; Bond & Komai, 1976; Ramsey, 1979; Ramsey & Birk, 1983), "face" behavior (e.g., Bond, 1991; Bond & Hwang, 1986; Bond & Lee, 1981) and politeness (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987), and "*guanxi*" or relationships (e.g., Bian, 1994; Davies, 1996; de Keijzer, 1992; Stewart & Keown, 1989).

The earliest of these comparative, theoretical, and applied studies paralleled and reflected the conditions existing in the early stages of globalization following World War II. During this period, complex international business transactions could be channeled through fully bilingual specialists who provided translation and interpretation services, while simple communication exchanges such as obtaining and fulfilling sales orders could be processed through routine channels. These transactions did not impose the same communication requirements as do the interactive and intercultural communication channels of the present day international business communication environment. Consequently, the early intercultural communication studies reflect only the communication environment of their period and not the complexity and diversity introduced by globalization.

In general, intercultural communication studies have broadened their scope of investigation and captured the dynamics influencing interactions among full bilinguals from different cultures, but they have ignored communication episodes involving the interactions of partial bilinguals and unilinguals. In the present global environment, these studies therefore describe an extremely important aspect of the international business communication process but reflect only a part of it.

Need for Models and Frameworks

To facilitate the study of international business communication in a global environment, useful models and frameworks are currently in place. In a model aimed at better defining and developing boundaries for the field of international business communication, Varner (2000) identified a comprehensive list of factors that interactively impact the intercultural and international business communication process. She places these variables in three categories: business strategy (11 variables), intercultural strategy (11 variables), and communication strategy (12 variables including language). We agree that language should be included but add that language deserves special prominence as it determines how the other variables are activated. We argue that it is not only the languages that international business communicators speak (English, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, etc.) but also the language and communicative competence of such communicators (as full or partial bilinguals or unilinguals) that impact both interpersonal and organizational communication. In addition, language can be seen as the gateway to culture as it frames the nature of cultural exposure and contact as well as how information is filtered through the perceptual screens of all communicators (see, for example, Clark & Clark, 1977; Whorf, 1956). Indeed, language shapes how international business communicators perceive cultural influences and cues in different communication zones as they engage in the international business communication process.

Other models have concentrated on how communicators can develop cultural competence. Beamer (1992) provides a five-level model for learning intercultural communication competence that international business communicators can apply to specific intercultural communication episodes as competency is gained over time. Beamer's model draws on and expands five previous models of the intercultural communication process that describe various aspects of intercultural communication (see Albert, 1983; Bennett, 1986; Gudykunst & Kim, 1984; Haworth & Savage, 1989; McCaffery, 1986). Common to all these models is the principle stated by Goodenough (cited in Baxter, 1983) that culture governs communication behavior. Following Edward Hall's (1959) dictum that "culture is communication" and "communication is culture" (see also Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981), these models equate culture and communication and use the terms interchangeably. With an exclusive focus on culture, these models do not, however, allow for varying language proficiencies of speakers using multiple languages and having varying language competencies. They rely upon an unstated assumption that all international business communicators possess full proficiency and competency resulting in an unfettered ability to communicate with each other. We therefore emphasize the need for acknowledging the language-competency variable in any comprehensive model of international business communication.

Language Competency and International Business Communication

In this section we present background information that establishes the relationship between the languages that communicators speak (choice of and proficiency in) and the resulting communication behavior. We do so to provide an introduction to and rationale for our language-based communication zones model where we specify different language-based communication zones generated by different combinations of language match and competency.

Language competency has become an important issue to study because much of the world's business is now carried out using multiple languages (see Ferraro, 1996). English has emerged as the world's prominent linking language in international business communication (Crystal, 1997; Kameda, 1996), and individuals from around the world are learning English in order to fulfill this linking role. Crystal (1997) notes that non-native English speakers outnumber native-English speakers by two to one and that 75% of English-speaking individuals are second-language users. Consequently, English-language speakers of varying competency have the potential to communicate directly with and relay messages to non-English speakers in the international business communication process.

Other languages also function as international linking language even though their volume and frequency of use is lower than that of English. Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese, German, and Japanese all serve as international business languages in certain regions of the world, especially in marketing communication where speaking the language of the customer takes precedence (Kotler, 1997). For example, note the prominence of Spanish in Spain and South America, of French in the former French colonies, and of Mandarin and Japanese in Asia. These linking languages impact the international business communication process as messages of varying complexity and precision are translated and filtered across different languages and cultures in a global communication network.

Significantly, the language that communicators choose—*independent of their competency*—can influence and change message content. The linguistic relativity principle (sometimes also referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) addresses this issue by theorizing about the relationship between experience, mind, and language (Whorf, 1956). According to this principle, speakers of different languages necessarily construe the world differently and are locked into the world view given to them by the languages they use. As a result, the languages that speakers know and use structure their understanding of the world and the way they construct messages. The linguistic relativity principle applies especially to bilinguals as they switch between languages. In the process, they adjust their perceptual and thinking processes to fit the language they are using and consequently introduce different content into their first and second language messages.

The linguistic relativity principle continues to generate as much controversy as it did when first formulated over a half a century ago. Current studies offer at least partial support of its validity despite its having been dismissed by experts from various disciplines (Davies, Sowden, Jerrett, Jerrett, & Corbett, 1998; Lee, 1996, 1997). We argue that the linguistic relativity principle offers a plausible but not proven theoretical basis for inferring that the language communicators use affects the message content in international business communication. Research studies on international business communication that could either prove or disprove this controversial principle are lacking.

In addition, schema theory can help explain why bilinguals (major translators in international business communication) may choose to communicate in different languages in different topic areas. This language behavior is activated because individuals can more readily retrieve information in the language where the information was first registered (Widdowson, 1983). Consequently, bilinguals find it easier to interact in specialized topic areas using languages in which they have more ready access to personal and socio-cultural schema which in turn relate to or influence message content. For instance, in personal conversation, people usually communicate best in their native language due to early socialization but possibly less well in professional topic areas if concepts were first registered in a foreign language. So, many English-as-a-second-language (ESL) speakers find it expedient to communicate in English when using a professional genre because this is the language in which they received training and registered professional concepts or field knowledge. These bilinguals have more ready access to professional English language genres and often are able to retrieve and express these ideas better in a second language (Bhatia, 1993, 1997). Over time, practice in expressing ideas in a second language may accentuate these differences and produce two separate schemas representing professional and personal discourse.

There is also the common sense notion as established and confirmed by empirical studies that the language proficiencies of communicators influence their interaction patterns and that individuals at different competency levels communicate very differently (Hamzah-Sendut, Madsen, & Thong, 1989; Terpstra, 1991). In communication encounters, low proficiency second-language speakers contribute fewer ideas than do fluent second-language speakers or first-language speakers (Du-Babcock, Babcock, Ng, & Lai, 1995; Hamzah-Sendut, Madsen, & Thong, 1989). Also, in dyad communication, speakers at all competency levels adapt their communication styles and strategies to their respective interlocutors (Du-Babcock, 1999). Higher proficiency speakers engage in language simplification strategies due to a need to communicate at a level closer to that of their less fluent communication partners, while lower proficiency speakers use avoidance strategies due to face issues as well as a lack of fluency. Fear-

ing the possibility of making mistakes (thereby losing face), less proficient second-language speakers may take a less active part in the communication process. This phenomenon is commonly observed, especially in fast-paced interactive conversations, where less proficient speakers may not be able to process information quickly enough or have sufficient vocabulary to actively engage in conversations. In the process, silence becomes a more expected and tolerated aspect of second-language communication as lower proficiency speakers pause to compose their speech acts if and when they are called on to participate in conversations. In addition, receivers may have less confidence in processing second-language messages and therefore engage in uncertainty reduction behavior by confirming information in their native language (Gudykunst, 1983).

These differences in first- and second-language communication of bilinguals also seem to carry over and apply to group communication. Using an experimental design, Du-Babcock (1999) had Chinese bilingual groups conduct similar decision-making meetings in Cantonese (first language) and English (second language). She found that communication patterns varied across languages as the same bilingual groups used differing interaction sequences during the first- and second-language communication encounters. These patterns were interactive and spiral as groups interacted in their native Cantonese but linear and sequential as they interacted in English. Furthermore, bilinguals at the extremes of second-language proficiency either participated more actively at the high end or very little or not at all at the low end, whereas bilinguals in the intermediate proficiency range exhibited equivalent first- and second-language communication behaviors.

In sum, the examples and studies we present in this article demonstrate that the language variables (choice of and competency in) impact both the content and style of international business communication. Therefore, we argue that language variables should be identified and specifically stated in any model that attempts accurately to describe the varying patterns of international business communication.

Research Method

The current study draws upon two sets of data. 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 new data from five companies stationed in Japan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan.

In the 1996 study, the research method changed from a straightforward interviewing strategy in the pilot stage to a multi-faceted approach in later stages that centered on using a technique described as objectifying interviewing (Redding, 1990; Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). 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.

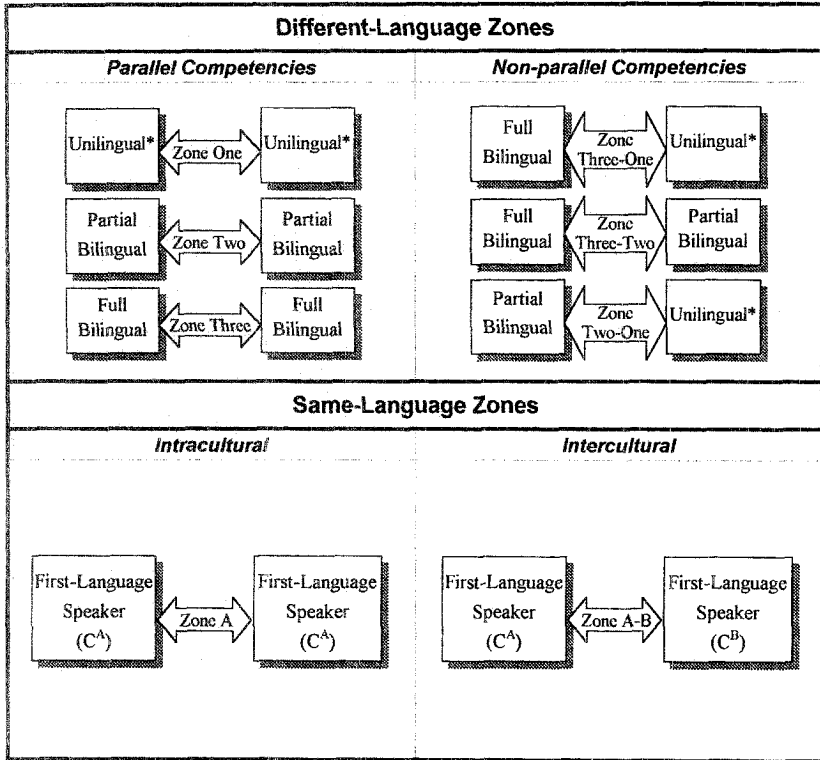
For the second data set, using a case-study research design, we blended different data collection methods for gathering information: on-site observations, analysis of company records and documents, and objectifying interviews. For example, in collecting data on one company, we and four research fellows 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.

Model of Language-Based Communication Zones

In this section, we present our model (see Figure 1) for describing the different patterns of international business communication based on the languages the communicators speak and their levels of language competence. The logic of the current model centers on how the language competency matches of prospective communicators determine whether and which communication zones will be activated and on the channels, interaction patterns, and communicator adjustments in the activated zones. Beamer (1992) explained this process by stating, "transmission by itself is not international business communication, but the conscious perception of signals at the receiver's end is essential for communication to have taken place" (pp. 285-286). So, when both sides of the dyad, in their roles as receivers, find a linking language where they can recognize the signals sent within their perceptual fields or schema (Widdowson, 1983), the conditions for establishing communication zones are satisfied. Communicators are confronted with different problems and challenges in eight language-based zones and consequently must adjust their communication strategies and tactics to fit the zone in which they are interacting. In creating these language-based zones, interactants identify prospective communication partners with whom they have the possibility of exchanging information. At the same time, and during the course of their interactions, these interactants determine and modify the nature and style of their discourse.

In our earlier article describing the communication patterns in multinational firms, we focused on "the expatriates who initiate the communication process and the response of local personnel to these initiations" (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996, p. 143). Consequently, this model was one sided

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



*Includes bilinguals in language environments where their languages are not spoken.

Key: C^A: Culture A
 C^B: Culture B

in that it traced communication by and to the expatriates and ignored messages originated by their communication partners (local Chinese personnel). By specifying the interactive nature of the communication process, we now define a language-based communication zone as the possible communication channels available to prospective interactants given their language competence. This redefinition makes our current model bi-directional and dynamic by explicitly acknowledging that all interactants in the communication transaction have the potential to send and receive messages in a continuing process. To make our model more comprehensive, we have not only reconstituted the zones of the earlier model but have also identified three additional Different-Language Zones as well as two Same-Language Zones where the interactants speak the same native language.

In our current framework, the ability to compose, perceive, and understand messages (language competency match) of prospective interactants establishes enabling factors for formation of the different zones. According to their relative capabilities to exchange information in a specific language environment, we distinguish among full bilinguals, partial bilinguals, unilinguals, and first-language speakers in these environments. These designations are constrained by context; for example, a speaker could be a bilingual in an absolute sense (e.g., know English and French), but only unilingual in certain contexts (e.g., when communicating with a unilingual Chinese person). With any communication partner, full bilinguals have equivalent linguistic abilities in their first and second languages and can handle the requirements of both professional and personal conversations. Partial bilinguals have sufficient control of the language structure and vocabulary of the second language to handle professional discussions in one or more specialized fields in addition to social conversations. Unilinguals are individuals who cannot 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. Finally, we are using the term first-language speakers to designate interactants who use the same native language when communicating.

Within the Different-Language Zones, we distinguish between parallel and non-parallel categories because differing communication dynamics are triggered in these zones. In parallel zones, interactants have equivalent language proficiencies, and thus they begin the interaction and the process of adjusting to their communication partner from equivalent (parallel) language proficiency positions. In the parallel zones, three patterns are identified: Zone One communication (interaction between unilinguals who cannot speak each other's language), Zone Two communication (interaction between partial bilinguals who can somewhat speak each other's language), and Zone Three communication (interaction between full bilinguals). In non-parallel zones, the interactants begin from unequal (non-parallel) language proficiency positions, which sets off contrasting patterns of language adjustments as higher proficiency communicators may have to decide whether to accommodate toward their lower proficiency communication partners. Non-parallel zones are also classified into three patterns: Zone Three-One (interaction between full bilinguals and unilinguals), Zone Three-Two (interaction between full bilinguals and partial bilinguals), and Zone Two-One (interaction between partial bilinguals and unilinguals).

When interactants in Different-Language Zones cannot find a linking language or choose not to communicate directly, they will then need a language "link-pin," or translator, in order to form a communication zone. Link-pin communication channels arise in the zones when prospective

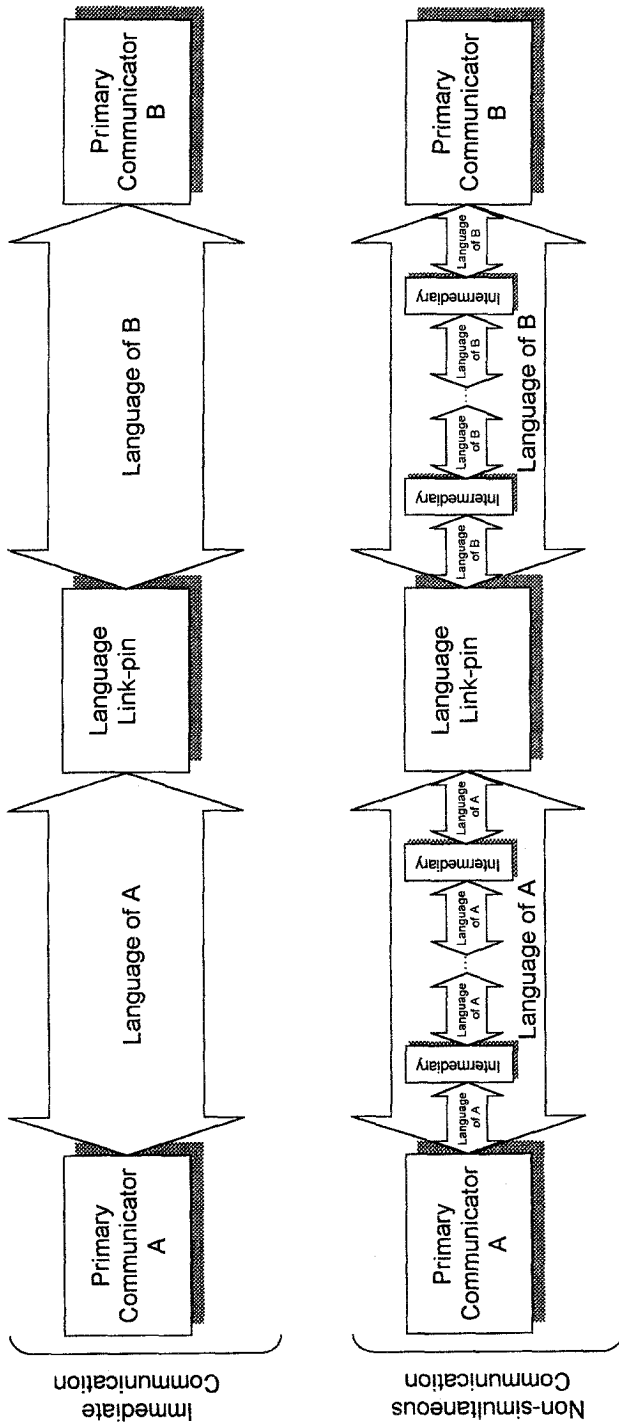
communicators do not possess the requisite language competencies to exchange information directly or when they choose to communicate through intermediaries for other reasons. Link-pin channels (see Figure 2) can be used either in immediate or non-simultaneous communication. In non-simultaneous communication, 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.

Unilinguals must communicate through link-pin channels for all but simple and symbolic messages (see, for example, Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). Partial bilinguals must utilize link-pin channels for complicated messages and interactive message exchange but can negotiate some direct channels that correspond to their language proficiency levels. Full bilinguals also may use link-pin channels for a variety of reasons that are independent of language proficiency constraints. For example, they may wish to monitor the conversations of intermediaries in immediate communication or maintain the position of outsiders in cultural environments (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). As we will show, the use of link-pins can have a significant effect on the communication process and results.

Within the Same-Language Zones we distinguish between intracultural communication (Zone A) and intercultural communication (Zone A-B). Interactions in English between Americans or 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). We include Zone A, between first-language speakers in the same culture, to reflect that these conversations are part of the communication network in international business communication. For example, a discussion between two Americans in Taiwan on how to market a product in Taiwan is certainly part of international business communication. While we have included the Same-Language Zones to make our model complete, we concentrate on the Different-Language Zones in this article, as an extensive literature already describes communication patterns existing in Same-Language Zones.

Communication zones can form for one period of time in the same language environment or over time in different language environments. To illustrate the process of zone formation at one period of time (i.e., who is included and who is left out), we describe a three-sided communication episode. Two Chinese engineers and a French engineer were looking together at the drawing on a computer screen in Zhuhai, China, figuring out how to arrange the machine rows in a factory under construction. In this episode three communication zones could be formed among these interactants. The Chinese engineers could speak to each other in Chinese (Zone A). One of the Chinese engineers was fully bilingual (English was his second language) so this individual was able to communicate in English with the

Figure 2. Link-pin Communication Channels



fluent English-speaking French engineer (Zone Three). The second Chinese engineer (a unilingual Chinese speaker) and the French engineer (a unilingual English speaker in this language proficiency match) could only interact by passing messages through their bilingual Chinese colleague who served as their link-pin (Zone One). The fact that the French engineer spoke French is not relevant in this language environment; he was not a bilingual according to our context-based definition. In this episode the bilingual Chinese can understand the total conversation, whereas the unilingual French engineer can comprehend only the English language part and unilingual Chinese the Chinese language part of the dialogues.

Different zones can form over time in different language environments as an individual encounters potential communication partners with varying language competencies. In these language environments, international business communicators experience different language proficiency matches, and these differences in turn activate differing communication dynamics and adjustment patterns. For example, a unilingual English speaker can enter multiple zones with interactants of varying language competencies while travelling from an English-speaking country (e.g., England) to non-native English-speaking countries where people possess varying English-language proficiency levels (e.g., high in Holland, much lower in France). In Holland this native-English speaking traveller may be able to conduct all professional affairs in English and only be excluded from Dutch personal conversations (Zone Three-One). However, in France, this individual may have to communicate through link-pins in both professional and personal discussions (Zone One). In both of these language environments, this English-only international traveller is potentially excluded from native-language conversations and may, to varying degrees, experience the sensation of isolation or exclusion. By choosing certain communication strategies and practices that are associated with Zone Three-One (Holland) and Zone One (France), this individual can make the communications in both countries more effective. It follows, therefore, that language competencies provide the primary background enabling conditions for zone formation and influence the interaction patterns within the communication zones.

In the communication environments where the data for this study were collected, Japanese and Chinese were the dominant modes of communication. In these language environments, English served as the major linking language. Chinese and Japanese personnel possessed varying second-language English proficiency, ranging from mid-to upper-level managers who were fully bilingual to workers with limited English-speaking abilities. In general, of the four basic language skills, the majority of Chinese or Japanese personnel had much better receiving skills of listening and reading than the sending skills of speaking and writing (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). However, a sufficient number of the Chinese or Japanese respondents had adequate second-language proficiency in English to render the

use of translators unnecessary. Given the language proficiency mix and the information requirements, the communicators formed and interacted in all eight communication zones.

Zone Communication Dynamics

In this section we concentrate on the communication dynamics and interaction processes in the Different-Language Zones. We recognize that individuals require both language and cultural competence to communicate effectively, and that these two are closely related. Language competencies place communicators in particular communication zones, but cultural awareness and competence are required for them to become effective communicators in these zones. In effect, language competencies allow communicators to enter and interact within zones, while cultural competence determines the effectiveness of communicating within the zones. However, detailed explanation of cultural influences is beyond the scope of our analysis. Our goal is primarily to point out the different communication dynamics that are stimulated when multiple languages are introduced into the communication process, and only secondarily to show that cultural issues are raised as well.

To analyze these dynamics, we draw on the main premise from communication accommodation theory (CAT), a framework that has been successfully used for over a decade to describe and analyze the interaction patterns of interlocutors in interpersonal communication (see, for example, Bell, 1991; Bourhis, 1979; Buzzanell, Burrell, Stafford, & Berkowitz, 1996; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988). CAT is based on the assumption that speakers and listeners mutually modify their linguistic and/or paralinguistic behaviors to become more similar to (convergence) or different from (divergence) their interactional partners (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987). Convergence strategies signal the interactants' positive attitudes toward each other, such as increasing attractiveness and approval or showing solidarity, whereas divergence strategies accentuate differences between interactants (Giles et al., 1987). Besides convergence and divergence, interactants may continue to use their own styles (maintenance) without reference to their communication partner's cues, perhaps as a deliberate reaction to partner's particular strategies (Bourhis, 1979). In our research we have found that the size and direction of accommodations in the different language-based zones can be heavily influenced by the initial language proficiency positions of the interlocutors and by the differing exposures (cultural, temporal, and spatial) available to the interactants while the zones remain activated. Besides assessing accommodation through CAT, our analysis of the different zones also takes into account likely communication risks, potential information loss and distortion, the channels used to carry information, and the power and interpersonal relationships of interactants.

We first examine parallel zones, as the interactions in these zones most clearly reflect how varying levels of language proficiency impact communication dynamics in the respective zones. In parallel zones, prospective interactants begin the adjustment process from equivalent language proficiency positions. We then look at the patterns in non-parallel zones where communicators carry over their fundamental communication behaviors, proficiencies and communication tendencies but in addition must adjust to speakers having either higher or lower language proficiency. We lastly look at group communication where communicators move among zones to achieve their communication objectives.

Parallel Communication Zones

In parallel zones, interactants begin the adjustment process from equivalent language proficiency levels, whether they are unilinguals (Zone One), partial bilinguals (Zone Two), or full bilinguals (Zone Three). From these parallel language competency positions, the interactants must first choose the language they are going to use in the communication zones they establish. This choice sets off differing patterns of communication dynamics including channels (whether direct or link-pin), duration of zones (how long the zones are active), and the nature of the interactions (the communication practices and adjustment movements of the participants).

Zone One communication occurs when international business communicators possess limited linguistic competencies that do not match those of their communication partners. Because they do not share a linking language, only simple messages can be communicated directly, and complicated messages must be passed through language link-pin channels. In our earlier article (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996), we explained how English-speaking expatriates used selective and generalized communication patterns in communicating with local Chinese-speaking staff. In the selective communication pattern expatriates used simplified English to disseminate ideas and information in organized meetings. In generalized communication patterns, expatriates and the Chinese staff used ritualized English, token Chinese, and non-verbal communication to exchange symbolic messages. These direct Zone One information exchanges can support and clarify the substantive information exchanges that are carried through link-pin channels.

Zone One link-pin communication can emerge (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 (see Figure 2). Through interactions in their native languages, the primary communicators develop direct or indirect relationships with

their language link-pins and indirect relationships with their communication partners. In multiple-link channels, primary communicators may send messages through several native-language channels before translation at language cross-over points. Standing at the intersection of languages in Zone One communication channels, bilingual language link-pins are central to Zone One communication. They carry the responsibility of providing accurate translation of primary communicators' messages and therefore connecting the two language worlds to create a successful communication channel (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996).

In our 1996 study, we gave an example of the organizational communication that took place as a U.S. consumer products company with a branch in Taiwan introduced a brand of ice cream to Taiwan. To provide an overview of the program, an American expatriate at the vice president level invited key Chinese marketing and production personnel to a general meeting. By speaking in English, he was communicating not only 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 and marketing departments. In framing his presentation, the expatriate developed his message for both these direct and indirect listeners/receivers. In this example, the language cross-over point (from English to Chinese) was immediate in that the meeting attendees 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. In other Zone One communication, the language cross-over point may be delayed as the message is passed through additional links in the original language before being translated in a subsequent link. For example, in a Zone One channel, the CEO of a Taiwanese multinational reviewed the performance of the company's Japanese unit with Chinese members of the executive committee (primary senders). These conversations were conducted in Mandarin. The essences of these discussions were then conveyed to the bilingual country manager of the firm's Japanese unit. In turn, the bilingual country manager translated the message into Japanese, added context, and communicated the headquarters messages to the Japanese staff (primary receivers).

In Zone One communication, therefore, primary communicators are either easily identifiable in immediate or single-link communication where both primary communicators and their link-pins are physically present or known, or less visible and potentially camouflaged in non-simultaneous workflow organizational communication and in inter-organizational communication. In the latter case, the separated primary communicators are less obvious and can be falsely identified. In addition, multiple translation processes transpire as messages travel through the successive links in non-simultaneous Zone One communication channels. In each Zone One channel, the intermediary communicators move toward (convergence),

away from (divergence), or maintain their positions with their receivers (maintenance). In cases where the cultural context levels of primary communicators differ, the link-pin intermediaries face the challenge of translating messages not only to suit acceptable context levels in each language but also to maintain the accuracy of the original messages. In workflow (horizontal) and scalar (vertical) organizational communication, the link-pin communicators are intermixing messages that are based on their job functions and responsibilities with the messages created by the primary communicators. In this dual communication process of originating and passing on messages, the translated link-pin messages may become hidden as they are integrated into organizational and inter-organizational communication channels.

We have found Mintzberg's (1979) framework helpful in conceptualizing link-pin organizational communication through scalar channels. In these vertical communication channels, managers in the strategic apex and personnel in the operating core are the primary communicators in a communication dyad, with techno-structure and middle-line managers standing between them as their intermediaries and link-pin translators. In the two-way communication flow, the middle line managers merge the messages of the strategic apex and operating core with those they originate as they communicate upward and downward in the scalar communication channels. In translating and integrating messages, the middle-line managers may filter the initial message content. As senders, primary communicators may compose messages without realizing the possible consequences of distortions being introduced into the translation process. As receivers, primary communicators may not be able to separate those messages of their communication partners from those originated by link-pins. In the process, messages may be converted between languages and become translated to fit a different cultural context level (either higher or lower). In this situation, the possibility of translation error increases in the form of distortions, contradictory additions, and deletions (Sherblom, 1998).

Primary communicators can facilitate Zone One communication by learning about the potential target communication environment and context so as to better encode and decode messages. Skilled primary communicators develop the ability to distinguish their communication partners and to frame messages to them rather than to intermediaries. For general messages, Zone One communicators can send written messages directly to groups of primary receivers in either a translated, non-translated/original language, or dual language format and, in the process, supplement and complement the scalar and vertical link-pin channels.

By communicating directly to groups of receivers, primary communicators face only one language translation, thereby reducing the possible translation errors as compared to scalar and workflow channels. By avoiding multiple sequential translation whenever possible, senders can help

ensure that their communication intent is maintained and separated from the ideas of others and also establish direct contact with their communication partners.

Primary communicators in Zone One should also recognize that link-pin choice and language cross-over points can affect the translation process of Zone One communication channels. In our earlier article (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996), we discussed primary, secretary, and secondary link-pin patterns and how to choose and effectively use them. Link-pins who better understand the rationale underlying original messages can pass on more accurately translated messages and facilitate the communication process. Assigning culturally sensitive and proficient individuals at language cross-over points consequently ensures a more accurate translation process.

We now provide two illustrations of how executives made use of link-pins to communicate successfully in Zone One, the first regarding link-pin competencies and the second illustrating the significance of the place or point in the link-pin channel where messages are translated across languages (cross-over points). In the first case, the choice of two secretary link-pins (a primary type of link-pin as defined by Du-Babcock and Babcock, 1996, pp. 146-148) influenced organizational effectiveness. In a British-Taiwanese joint venture, 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 language skills but who lacked the "*guanxi*" or relationships that are built 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 first expatriate CEO accommodated to his Taiwanese secretary. This accommodation altered his previous working style developed in work assignments where he had interacted with full bilingual English-speaking secretaries. According to the interviewed expatriate, he 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 translations 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 new CEO as 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 case, the 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.

To illustrate the contrasting influence of differing language/culture cross-over points on organizational communication, 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 these 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 Chinese (Zone A) 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 altered the communication and organizational patterns of both the subsidiaries and the Taiwanese company overall. Appointed country managers possessed intermediate English and had limited Japanese and French communication abilities; thus, English was introduced into the language environments, although Japanese and French continued as the major/dominant languages in these 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 (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.

Zone Two communication involves partial bilinguals in a language environment where the interactants can handle some but not all of the communication requirements. Consequently, Zone Two consists of direct channels where the interactants have the requisite competency to exchange information directly and link-pin channels for those subject areas where they lack these language competencies. In addition, either interactant, as in Zone Three, can choose to open link-pin channels for language-unrelated reasons. There are two contrasting Zone Two language proficiency matches that evoke differing communication dynamics and accommodation processes.

In one, the interactants share partial fluency in each other's native language but do not speak a common third language. In this case, interlocutors must choose to communicate in a language that represents the first language of one of the interactants. This language competency match creates a language superiority position in favor of the native language speaker. Direct communication among interactants is constrained and determined by the language proficiency of the second-language speaker. To widen the direct channel in the zone, either the native-language speaker must accommodate by employing language simplification strate-

gies or the other speaker must be aided by a link-pin. After the language to be used is chosen, the zone dynamics resemble those in Zone Three-Two where both interactants have access to both languages and can inject words and expressions from both languages in their exchanges, but the more proficient speaker at any point has the advantage.

The other pattern in Zone Two communication is where the interactants speak in a third language. In this situation partial bilinguals usually can master linguistic requirements within a routinized communication environment and in specialized topic areas even though they do not possess adequate vocabulary to communicate outside their specialized topic areas or handle the demands of spontaneous conversations. Partial bilinguals interactively engage in a process of defining their zone boundaries and finding understandable communication practices. In the process, they establish shared vocabulary and an understandable communication style to compensate for their language deficiencies. These interactants can, therefore, communicate directly when it is desirable or possible and can supplement the directly exchanged messages through link-pin channels and written communication for more advanced topics.

To illustrate the nature and scope of Zone Two communication in a third language, we present contrasting examples of a partial bilingual Taiwanese product manager interacting in English with her partial bilingual German and French customers respectively. In both cases, the purpose of the discussions (conducted in English) was to finalize the overall electrical design of a cooking grill that the Taiwanese home-appliance supplier had contracted to manufacture for the German and French customers. As it turned out, the vocabulary required for the discussions with the French customer was far more complicated than for the conversations with the German customer. In discussions with the German customer, the interlocutors were able to quickly exchange understandable information and reach agreement so that the Taiwanese supplier could proceed to build a prototype model of the grill. In contrast, the language requirements for the discussion with the French customer were more difficult as the prototype model had to conform with the French legal requirements for electrical circuits which are different from and more complex than those required by Germany and other northern European countries. In France, the circuitry for grills requires specifications to carry higher and uneven electricity flows and falls under regulations different from those governing other small kitchen and cooking appliances.

The Taiwanese product manager had negotiated previous sub-contracting agreements for small appliances with the same French engineers and designers, and the parties had developed an effective Zone Two channel. This time, the language proficiency required for specifying the grill prototype fell outside these Zone Two boundaries. Although the partial bilinguals were unable to finalize the prototype arrangements, they were able

to communicate well enough to pinpoint the source of their communication difficulties and agree on the initial steps toward developing a workable prototype: namely, to purchase a competitor's product, take the product to Taiwan for disassembly and analysis, and thereby learn the required circuitry for French grills. Armed with this knowledge and an expanded vocabulary from this interaction and related discussion, the partial bilingual Taiwanese product manager was then able to follow up and finalize the prototype design with the partial bilingual French engineers and designers. Ultimately, the Zone Two channel width was widened as the partial bilingual Taiwanese product manager acquired the necessary vocabulary and communication skills to discuss the required circuitry, and as the French accommodated by giving more detailed explanations, slowing down the conversations, and checking from time to time to see if the Taiwanese product manager understood them correctly.

In successful Zone Two third language communication, the adjustment process is typically mutually converging as the interlocutors move toward the establishment of a common vocabulary and an understandable communication style. In addition, under certain circumstances, Zone Two interactants seek to increase the proportion of messages exchanged directly and thereby expand the outer boundaries of the communication zone. We found that this strategy occurs when dependable link-pins are unavailable or are too costly. In other situations, Zone Two communicators have link-pins and are reluctant to communicate in Zone Two without them. By using these link-pins, Zone Two communicators are engaging in uncertainty reduction behavior and avoiding the possibility of introducing mistakes into the communication process (see, for example, Gudykunst, 1983). For example, we found that upper-level partial-bilingual Taiwanese engineers made extensive use of mixing technical English into their Chinese deliberations and even preferred to speak English in some professional communication situations. In Zone Two communication channels, individuals representing authority and subject expertise are most likely to engage directly in the international business communication process. In general, successful Zone Two communication is facilitated in situations where partial bilinguals face predictable and routinized language environments and can draw on shared contextual background and supporting written documents. Even though Zone Two dialogs may sound disjointed and fragmented, the exchanged messages are often still capable of meeting the information requirements of the communicators.

In addition, the language deficiencies of partial bilinguals in Zone Two communication can be advantageous under some conditions. In such circumstances, partial bilingual communicators may in fact be more effective as their encoded blunt or "rude" messages are more likely to be tolerated and attributed to their language deficiencies than would be the case for full bilinguals or native speakers. In addition, the language defi-

ciencies of partial bilinguals may reduce superfluous conversations and the possibility of making offending comments.

Silence and pauses in conversation are normal and accepted parts of Zone Two communication. Partial bilinguals in Zone Two can strategically use breaks in the conversation flow—even in situations where they could process information faster and send messages sooner. In essence, periods of silence provide the two-fold advantage of reducing the possibility of introducing unproductive and destructive comments into conversations and providing breaks for reflection, digestion of ideas, and planning of communication strategy and tactics. Consistent with the norms of Chinese and Japanese language patterns (Graham, 1985), partial bilinguals in our sample did not experience anxiety with the breaks in the conversations, but we suspect that Westerners might have discomfort in the same situations.

Zone Three Communication involves full bilinguals in a language environment where they can, theoretically, handle all communication directly without relying on link-pins or engaging in language simplification strategies and tactics. Although Zone Three interactants may possess fluent second-language proficiency, their language use can still create communication errors and misunderstandings as words, expressions, and concepts in one culture may take on different meanings and emotional connotations in other cultures even though a dictionary definition is the same for both interlocutors. For instance, Berry (1998) described how abstract concepts that may carry ideological meanings, such as “liberty” or “freedom,” are interpreted differently in different European countries.

If both bilinguals choose to speak their native languages, link-pin channels also can emerge in Zone Three. These link-pin channels are frequently activated in ceremonial activities, international negotiations, and diplomatic relations. In immediate link-pin channels, bilinguals can use their listening skills to monitor the conversations of their link-pin or primary communication partners. In non-simultaneous communication, bilinguals have the ability to initiate direct communication with the intermediaries in which they can directly seek information and clarify translation errors.

There are two contrasting Zone Three language proficiency starting points that evoke differing communication dynamics and accommodation processes. In one, the communicators share full fluency in each other’s language but do not speak a common third language. In this case, interlocutors must choose to communicate in a language that represents the first language of one of the interactants. During the interactive process, the interlocutors have access to and can draw on the vocabularies of both languages. Code-switching and -mixing may well become an integral part of the communication process as communicators can draw on the language that best expresses the concept. Reflecting this pattern, Hong Kong Chinese interjected English words and phrases into their Cantonese dialogs in social

and business contexts (Du-Babcock, 1999; Gibbons, 1987; Li, 1999) and used English in business conversations with non-Cantonese bilinguals.

Du-Babcock and Babcock (1996) explored the consequences of language choice by bilingual expatriates (fluent in either English or Chinese) in Taiwan. By selecting English, these bilingual expatriates remained outsiders and so were less likely to be sanctioned for not following the country's customs and social norms. By choosing Chinese, however, they became insiders and developed closer interpersonal relationships with Chinese colleagues and had more access to "soft" information. Consequently, language choice has implications for the nature of the relationships that Zone Three interactants develop with their communication partners and for being included or excluded in the grapevine communication channels.

The other starting point for Zone Three communication channels is where the interactants cannot speak each other's first language and therefore exchange messages in a third or linking language. In these Zone Three communication channels, the bilinguals probably know they are each communicating in a second language, and this recognition establishes a basis for successful Zone Three communication. Enlightened Zone Three interlocutors can therefore practise simultaneous and converging accommodation (Gallois et al., 1988; Giles et al., 1987) by establishing mutually acceptable communication norms and practices (a shared culture). Our findings indicate that bilinguals in a third language are less bound by cultural restrictions than native-language speakers and can thus establish their own norms and practices as they interactively determine the basis of their interaction process.

To illustrate, we present contrasting examples of successful and unsuccessful Zone Three communication. Successful Zone Three communication emerged between bilingual American and Taiwanese engineers who worked on two projects together (one in the United States and the other in Taiwan) and who shared common or linking languages; namely, English and Mandarin. The language and cultural environment in which they interacted, together with the subject matter, mutually influenced their choice of language, interactive style, and message content. In general, when in the United States, these bilinguals chose English, and when in Taiwan, they communicated in both Mandarin and English. The language choice in Taiwan depended on whether the conversations related to their professional work or to private and interpersonal matters. When discussing professional subjects, these bilinguals gravitated toward English, while for private and interpersonal topics, these same individuals communicated in Mandarin. Code-mixing of English and Chinese phrases and expressions was also a prominent feature of both professional and personal conversations (Gibbons, 1987).

These full bilinguals also uniformly accommodated towards low-context communication in objective professional topic areas and high-context com-

munication in interpersonal and private topics, especially when conversations were related to face-threatening issues. During this accommodation, the American bilingual did not move as far toward high-context communication as that displayed by his Chinese communication partner. In interpreting these tendencies, we argue that exposure to both (a) low-context communication by both parties while pursuing advanced degrees in the United States and (b) high-context communication in the formative years for the Chinese and during his tenure in Taiwan for the American strongly impacted and laid the foundation for the accommodation strategies of these two bilinguals. By combining communication in two languages and using both high- and low-context communication styles, these full bilinguals successfully defined and interacted in Zone Three.

Unsuccessful Zone Three communication occurred between two full bilinguals, a Japanese country manager and his direct superior, a Taiwanese VP, who shared English as their linking language. In this example, these full bilinguals formed and maintained an interactive Zone Three communication in English over a three-year period. Communication failures developed despite frequent interactions (both written and oral) and extremely high-level English-language competency by both individuals. In fact, we speculate that the English language competencies of both parties camouflaged a spiral of escalating communication conflicts and failed to disclose their differing approaches to developing marketing strategy in Japan. These interlocutors employed high-context communication styles, but different ones; the Japanese bilingual reflected the cultural practices of large Japanese companies in that he desired to emulate the growth strategies practiced in these companies (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994), while the Chinese bilingual reflected the "no frills-low cost" strategies of the Chinese family firm (Redding, 1990; Westwood, 1992). Thus, despite having high-context communication styles, their background contexts (Japanese and Chinese) were very different as revealed by their differing priorities on how to spend company funds. It was this difference, we feel, that contributed to unsuccessful Zone Three communication.

Specifically, the Japanese interlocutor advocated buying the latest and most advanced model in office equipment, whereas the Taiwanese VP wanted to buy the most inexpensive products so long as they could perform the desired function. He saw the Japanese manager as needlessly wasting money on glamorous but unnecessarily expensive equipment, whereas the Japanese manager saw having the latest products as one way to establish his company's reputation and a basis for future sales and profit growth. To ensure successful communication, these bilinguals needed to lower the context of their interactions in order to explore and resolve their fundamental differences, but their high-context behavioral styles prevented them from constructively engaging in a context-lowering process. These two bilinguals did not explore and classify the factors in

their differing content that lead to their misunderstandings. This example of unsuccessful Zone Three communication highlights the difficulty of high-context to high-context communication in the absence of cultural competence to bring down the context-level in intercultural business communication. In this example we speculate that the vastly different Chinese and Japanese contextual frameworks provided different and conflicting behavioral assumptions and highlighted the fact that they did not share the same background context even though they shared high-context communication styles. Higher language competency, therefore, does not necessarily lead to improved communication in Zone Three, and in fact may contribute to communication conflict and error.

Non-Parallel Communication Zones

Non-parallel communication zones are communication channels where interactants do not share a first language and 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 also must negotiate the proportion of direct and link-pin channels in the zones they establish.

Zone Three-One communication involves fluent second-language speakers and their unilingual communication partners. Thus, the language proficiency match of Zone Three-One is such that the interactants can only communicate directly in the unilingual's native language. In these situations, supplemental link-pin channels or language level adjustments are not necessary. In other situations full bilinguals may insist on communicating in their native language, thereby requiring the creation of link-pin channels in Zone Three-One communication. They may do so in order to gain a strategic advantage, on account of social customs, or where special or technical language is required. By using this language choice strategy, full bilinguals assume a superior language position over their interactants in that they can understand the total conversation (now taking place in two languages), whereas unilingual interactants can understand only that portion spoken in their native language.

To illustrate Zone Three-One link-pin channels, we present the conversations of a Hong Kong-based consultant who represented global clients in forming joint ventures with Mainland China firms whose representatives spoke only Mandarin. Fluent in both Mandarin and his native Cantonese, he possessed the language competency to speak Mandarin in all conversations but chose to speak in his native Cantonese and let his associate act as his link-pin translator during the business negotiations. By employing this language strategy, the bilingual consultant could better

maintain his energy and attention levels during the discussions, monitor the reactions of the Mainland Chinese negotiators, and integrate his link-pin associate into the communication strategy. In associated social conversations, he communicated in Mandarin and therefore developed a social bond with the Mainland Chinese negotiators.

As with Zone Three communication, the native-like language competency of the full bilingual communicator may mask cultural differences among Zone Three-One interactants. In this case, communication effectiveness will be partly a function of the cultural awareness and competency of the interactants. If culturally aware and competent individuals form and occupy Zone Three-One channels, they can take into account possible cultural differences and engage in convergence strategies. Alternatively, if either or both interactants make false cultural attributions, their culturally based communication errors are introduced into the zone.

To guard against miscommunication, unilinguals need to take into consideration the fact that full bilinguals are communicating in a second language. Native-like second-language proficiency and knowledge of local affairs and customs by full bilinguals may mask and hide possible cultural differences with their unilingual interlocutors. With the unconscious expectation that bilinguals will automatically comprehend local and colloquial speech acts, unaware unilinguals may introduce unintelligible messages into Zone Three-One channels and thereby provide the basis for miscommunication if the bilinguals "guess" at the meanings incorrectly. This kind of miscommunication error is more likely in the early stages of interaction before bilinguals make language accommodations. Of greater consequence, ethnocentric unilinguals may compound communication errors by incorrectly attributing their cultural communication norms and habits to their bilingual partners who represent cultures with differing communication norms.

Unlike Zone Three communication, however, non-parallel Zone Three-One communication transactions often require more accommodation by one of the parties—the full bilingual. Because unilingual communicators may not have adequate intercultural communication competency (Beamer, 1992) to participate in mutual accommodation, they may insist on one-way accommodation by their bilingual communication partners and place the entire burden of cultural understanding on the full bilinguals.

Additionally, Zone Three-One accommodation may require some minor language adjustments to the local language customs when a bilingual enters a new language environment, such as when a full bilingual expatriate takes on a new assignment. In this situation, perceptive bilinguals accommodate by introducing these speech acts into their speech repertoire as they become familiarized and learn the local dialect. For their part, perceptive unilingual communicators may also modify their speech acts by reducing or eliminating slang, colloquial expressions, or local idioms that the full bilingual is unlikely to be familiar with, and by uti-

lizing examples and frames of reference that are related to the backgrounds of their communication partners. The general accommodation pattern of unilinguals in Zone Three-One who show initial movement and modify their speech acts is a gradual shift back toward their normal and original speech patterns if full bilinguals introduce local speech customs into their speech acts. Over time, the overall accommodation pattern tendency is that the full bilingual interactants converge toward their unilingual communication partners and in the process, Zone Three-One gradually comes to resemble the communication dynamics of Zone A. In this process, bilinguals are integrated into the local speech community and move from their initial position of outsiders to that of insiders (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). However, there may not be complete closure in the accommodation process. Full bilinguals who retain distinct accents are more likely to be recognized as outsiders and to be engaged in distinctive zones. Accents automatically send signals that alert the unilingual communication partners to continue or maintain a less than fully accommodated pattern in the communication zone and to encode messages containing less local talk. Full bilinguals, as part of their communication strategy, may actually make it a point to demonstrate they are communicating in a second language. By doing so, they may lower the expectations of their communication partners, reduce the use of local expressions, maintain an outsider position, and gain a subtle language superiority position. For example, in cases we observed, Chinese speakers apologized for their poor English and Dutch speakers asked for help in recalling English words as a way of reminding their communication partners that they were not first-language speakers.

Of the non-parallel zones, Zone Three-One requires the smallest language adjustment between the interactants, yet possibly has the greatest potential for culturally based miscommunication. Because the interactants in this zone possess the language capacity to interact directly, supplemental link-pin intermediaries usually do not exist to mediate cultural differences, potential conflicts, and face-threatening communication situations. Successful communication is therefore largely a function of the interactants recognizing and accommodating differences arising from contrasting cultural communication styles.

Zone Three-Two involves full bilingual and partial bilingual interactants. There are two contrasting Zone Three-Two language proficiency matches that evoke differing communication dynamics and accommodation processes. One situation is where both bilingual interactants do not speak each other's native language, but communicate in a third or linking language (English in most cases). For example, bilingual Japanese and Chinese interactants who possess partial and full English-language competencies and do not speak each other's native language comprise this pattern. Another situation is where both bilinguals speak each other's native

language and must choose between languages. The language used in these two alternative Zone Three-Two channels alters the language competency match of the interactants and thereby sets off different communication and adjustment patterns.

In Zone Three-Two situations where interactants use a third or linking language (always English in our sample), full bilinguals tend to accommodate toward their partial bilingual interactants by simplifying their language to establish the zone boundaries and understandable communication practices within the zone. Partial bilinguals can facilitate this adaptation process by engaging in clarification and question-asking behaviors. In our sample of communicators representing face cultures (Bond & Lee, 1981), we found a general pattern of under-adaptation where communication errors were introduced because receivers did not acknowledge their lack of understanding of message content due to the fear of potential loss of face from admitting language proficiency deficiencies. Consequently, this under-adaptation pattern was a function of the communication behavior of both the higher and lower proficiency interactants. The higher proficient interactants assumed the sent messages were received, and the lower proficient speakers confirmed this impression. For important messages, partial bilinguals sought clarification from peers (Zone A) to complete the communication transaction rather than from their full bilingual communication partners. This communication behavior provided faulty and incomplete feedback in Zone Three-Two as well as creating additional zones (Zone A) and possible new sources of miscommunication.

In Zone Three-Two channels where the interactants use the native language of one of the interactants, the communication and adjustment patterns are a function of their language choice. If the interactions take place in the native language of the partial bilingual, the language proficiency match gives the zone participants equivalent language proficiency positions. If the interactions take place in the first language of the full bilingual and the second language of the partial bilingual, the language proficiency match is such that the full bilingual takes the superior language proficiency position. Consequently, these language match differentials stimulate differing communication dynamics in these alternative Zone-Three situations.

The most likely scenario is for the interactants to choose the native language of the partial bilingual where information sharing possibilities are larger. Through this choice, all communication can theoretically take place directly without resorting to the creation of a supporting link-pin channel. In this case, the communication dynamics activated resemble those of a Three-One Zone, with the exception that the interactants have access to the vocabularies and communication styles of both languages. Consequently, code-mixing and -switching becomes an available and integral part of this communication pattern. That is, both bilingual interac-

tants will inject words and phrases from each other's native language during the course of discussion, especially in social contexts.

In our sample, we observed both Zone Three-Two patterns. In the situation where the communication took place in a linking language, the interactants had no option but to use this third language in both business-related and social conversations. In contrast, in the situation where both interactants speak each other's native language (but to different extents), business-related conversations concentrated in the native language of the partial bilingual while social conversations took place in both languages. By being able to join social conversations, partial bilinguals increased their exposure to their business colleagues and to business-related information included in social conversations.

Zone Two-One channels—that is, exchanges between partial bilinguals and unilinguals—have such information-processing limitations that link-pin channels are often the main carriers of detailed and vocabulary-rich information in this zone. When the interactants do attempt to communicate directly in this zone, they usually use the language of the unilingual interactants. In a position of language proficiency superiority, the unilinguals may have to use a language simplification strategy as they encode messages in order to communicate successfully in interactive conversations. Partial bilinguals, of course, tend toward language simplification as well, given their limited proficiency, though they can achieve greater complexity in those cases where they prepare in advance and send these prepared statements in one-way communication.

Direct and link-pin channels can become mutually supportive in the development of effective Zone Two-One communication. Immediate direct communication provides face-to-face contact between primary communicators and thereby provides the basis for the development and nurturing of personal relationships between these individuals. These direct channels also can carry linguistically less complex business and technical information, especially where unilinguals choose appropriate language simplification strategies and partial bilinguals deliver prepared statements and are not subjected to time pressure. Through direct interaction the primary communicators receive unfiltered information and can observe facial cues and body postures. In our 1996 (Du-Babcock and Babcock) article, we discussed how partial bilinguals (then called Zone Two expatriate) could develop effective communication strategies that combined direct and link-pin (indirect) channels.

In our sample, partial bilingual expatriate managers used both direct and immediate link-pin channels to better communicate with local staff. For example, a partial bilingual general manager of a hotel in China whose native language was English used her own intermediate Chinese as well as her bilingual Chinese assistant when conducting meetings with her Chinese staff. By doing so, she established direct contact with the operatives in various departments and was able to communicate prepared statements

in her own words without translation. In the meeting we observed, she emphasized the importance of providing world-class service in all operations of the hotel. She also had appropriate subordinate managers (language link-pins) present at these meetings to amplify her overall statements, provide implementation details, answer questions, and develop action plans. By listening to the subsequent conversations, she also gathered information to use for further improvement of the hotel's operations.

Multiple Zones in Group Communication

When prospective communicators meet in spontaneous and informal groups, group meetings, and conferences, multiple zones can be activated. The communication dynamics in these situations can be mutually influential and significantly different from those in an isolated person-to-person dyad interaction. Multiple and related communication zones may be formed as needed so that higher proficiency interactants do not have to engage in language simplification strategies when communicating with their interlocutors. Higher proficiency speakers can serve as language link-pins in Zone One channels in order to convey complicated messages between lower proficiency interactants, while communicators in non-parallel zones can directly exchange less complicated messages that fit the language proficiencies of these interactants. Lower language proficient group members with subject expertise and decision-making authority can take an active part in the deliberation process by interacting through their link-pin colleagues. Consequently, in a group setting, effective communication is a function of matching the total language and communication competencies of communicators and their potential for sharing information with the information-processing and decision-making authority needs of the communication situation.

In group communication, in particular, interactants may have to switch among zones when interacting with individuals possessing varying language competency levels. Unilinguals, and to a lesser extent partial bilinguals, may experience isolation as they are excluded from the main conversation flow. In these situations, full bilinguals can exercise cultural sensitivity by stepping forward and initiating Zone Three-One or Zone Three-Two communication. In the process, bilinguals or partial bilinguals can join the general conversation and become integrated within the overall communication flow. If such initiations are resisted, sensitive full bilinguals can appoint themselves language link-pins and summarize and communicate the essence of the general conversation to the unilinguals or partial bilinguals in private or separate conversations.

To illustrate the dynamics and the adjustment patterns within and across related language zones and among interactants of varying language competence in group communication, we present and analyze an hour-long business meeting that we observed in Tokyo, the headquarters of a

Figure 3. Language Proficiencies of the Speakers at a Business Meeting

Speakers	Language Proficiency		
	Japanese	English	Chinese
Divisional Manager (Japanese Multinational)	Native	Fluent	Elementary
Regional Manager (Taiwanese Multinational)	Elementary	Intermediate	Native
Country Manager stationed in Japan (Taiwanese Multinational)	Fluent	Elementary	Native

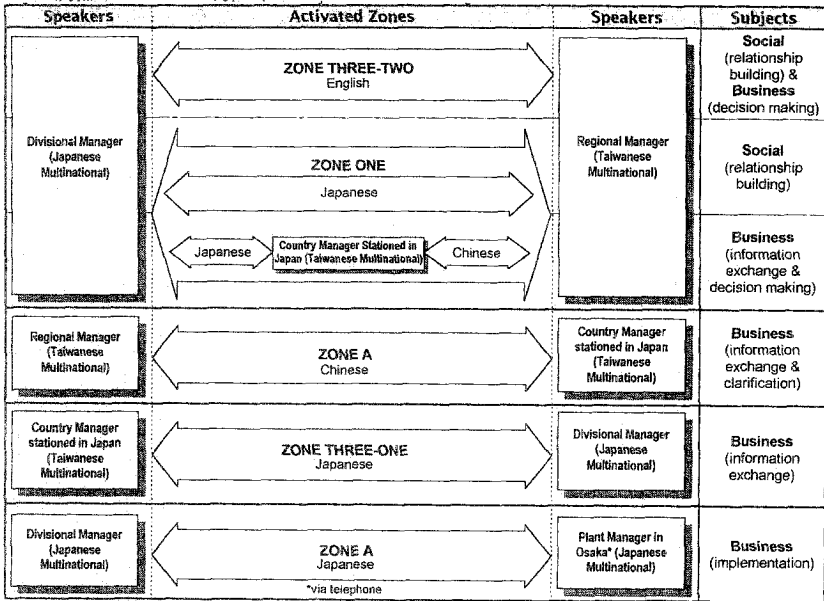
Japanese multinational firm. The attendees were a Japanese divisional manager of the Japanese firm, a Taiwanese regional manager of a Taiwanese multinational, and a Taiwanese country manager of the Taiwanese multinational who was stationed in Japan. Figure 3 shows the language proficiencies of these speakers.

The meeting participants met in the office of the Japanese divisional manager in Tokyo. The overall purpose of the meeting was to build on and cement the supplier (Taiwanese firm)-customer (Japanese firm) relationship of the two companies and to identify possibilities for incorporating the Taiwanese firm's products into the manufacturing process or as components in the consumer products of the Japanese firm. Focusing on the present and future product line at the Osaka plant, the interactants exchanged information that could guide the product and the technology development activities of both firms (intermediate and long-run consequence) and identified potential products and order quantities for the upcoming year (short-run consequence).

The Japanese divisional manager, only recently promoted from the Osaka plant, was thoroughly familiar with the product development and manufacturing processes and procedures at this plant. The Taiwanese regional manager, who was stationed in Taiwan but on a business trip to Japan, possessed up-to-date information on the Taiwanese firm's present and potential future products. The Taiwanese country manager (stationed in Japan) was knowledgeable of the current product line but not of the latest technological developments or research thrusts. He, however, could provide information on import procedures and logistics that would be required to plan delivery schedules. As such each meeting participant brought a different perspective and information base to the meeting.

Figure 4 shows the zones the speakers formed and their discussion topics. The Japanese divisional manager and the Taiwanese regional manager initiated the meeting in the direct channels of Zone One (Japanese)

Figure 4. Communication Zones and Conversation Subjects at a Business Meeting



and Zone Three-Two (English). Combining his token Japanese and intermediate English, the Taiwanese regional manager presented a gift and thanked the Japanese divisional manager for the Japanese sake that the Japanese divisional manager had previously given to him. In this social exchange discussing present and past gifts, the Taiwanese regional manager began the interaction with a Japanese greeting and injected a few token Japanese statements during the conversation, while the Japanese divisional manager made a language accommodation by simplifying and slowing his English language speech acts. In the successful communication exchange, the interactants engaged in a social ritual that further solidified their personal relationship without jeopardising the subject context.

The conversation next turned to the exchange of business and technical information. It was at this point that a link-pin channel emerged, as one of the interactants did not have adequate English language competency to handle the conversation requirements of this exchange. During this phase of the meeting, the interactants reverted to their different native languages (Zone One), using the Taiwanese country manager as a link-pin in order to explore possible short- and long-term uses for the Taiwanese firm's present and future products at the Osaka plant. As a link-pin, the Taiwanese country manager accurately translated the messages initiated by the two primary communicators and added information relating to import procedures

and logistics. (Within this link-pin channel, two sub-zones were activated: Zone Three-One, in which the link-pin conversed with the Japanese divisional manager in Japanese, and Zone A, in which the link-pin conversed with his superior, the Taiwanese regional manager, in Chinese.)

During this portion of the meeting, the participants chose their communication partners so that they did not have to accommodate or adjust to the language proficiency levels of the other interlocutors. They switched among the three languages (Chinese, Japanese, and English) and formed communication zones to meet the subject demands of the conversation flow. There were breaks in the overall conversation when the two Taiwanese held private conversations in Chinese (Zone A) and the Japanese divisional manager and the Taiwanese country manager conversed in Japanese (Zone Three-One).

Toward the close of the meeting, the discussion progressed to a decision-making phase. All the interactants became engaged in closely spaced direct and link-pin channels as they identified departments and managers at the Osaka plant who might be possible users of the Taiwanese firm's products. On the basis of these decisions, the Japanese divisional manager phoned the company's plant manager in Osaka (Zone A), setting up a follow-up visit to the plant. Following the meeting, the Taiwanese regional manager conveyed to us that the meeting had accomplished multiple purposes. In particular, it not only strengthened an important relationship but also provided background information for future product development (of long-term importance) and access to key personnel at the Osaka plant as well as background information to better prepare for the follow-up plant visit meetings (of immediate importance).

In this communication situation, the participants as a whole possessed sufficient language proficiency to meet all the communication requirements despite individual language deficiencies. Consequently, given the right language competency mix among group members and regardless of individual language competency, participants can contribute to group deliberations without changing their basic communication behavior. However, for such a language pattern to emerge, bilinguals must effectively perform link-pin roles to engage lower proficiency speakers and the more proficient bilinguals need to be willing to accommodate somewhat to the less proficient.

Limitations

The research that led to our model had several limitations. First, the research methods we used (case study, objectifying interview technique, and observation) did not allow for quantitative measurements of the adjustments made by communicators in communication zones and the effectiveness of communication patterns. In effect, we only described and estimated the accommodations and adjustments within the parameters of CAT and did not quantitatively measure the movement among communi-

cators. We did not audio- or video-tape dialogs to serve as a basis for later transcription and observation and were therefore forced to rely on our notes to estimate the size and movement of communication accommodations. Second, we used non-representative and convenient samples in collecting data in only four countries or territories having similar cultures (Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and southern coastal Mainland China). Consequently, we present our data as illustrations that fit into our overall framework and do not assert that the examples prove the universality of this framework. Third, we concentrated on oral communication, largely ignored written communication, and did not specify the media used in the communication process. The impact of written communication and communication media are not fully integrated into our case study examples of communication patterns. Finally, we did not provide an extensive analysis of how cultural variables affect international business communication patterns. We only speculate on how cultural variables influence communication patterns and dynamics in some of our examples.

Implications

Recognizing the critical importance of language competency in international business, we offer our reconceived and expanded model of language-based communication zones as a mechanism and framework to distinguish among and organize international business communication into recognizable language-based categories (labelled zones). The model can be useful in guiding both communication practice and research. International business communicators can apply the model to improve communication practice by first identifying the communication zones in which they will be communicating and then implementing communication strategies and practices that fit these zones. International business communication researchers can use the model to investigate and better describe the varying communication patterns evoked in language-based communication zones.

Against the background of the findings and the limitations of our research, we suggest that further study be conducted to better define and elaborate the language and cultural variables in the communication zones that are associated with efficient intercultural communication. These studies can compare the communication dynamics in the respective zones and how communicators form zones and develop effective communication strategies within the activated zones. We suggest identifying international communicators by their respective zones, the media they use to exchange messages, and the topics of communication covered in order to better analyze and explain the communication strategies and actions of such communicators. Further delineation of categories within the communication zones (i.e., sub-categories), especially with reference to full bilinguals, could also serve as a basis for improved understanding of intercultural business communication in advanced and special topic communication behaviors.

Zone communication could be further examined within the framework of CAT to systematically measure and describe the accommodation movements. Special focus could be placed on language link-pins as they manage the dual adaptation process of translating messages across languages in Zone One channels. Other studies could focus on organizational communication and how language matches affect the communication and information flows. Comparative studies could be directed toward measuring the information-carrying capacities of different zones for various subject areas. In the process, sources of information loss and distortion could be identified and measured. Also, we recommend addressing whether there are personal costs associated with bilinguals' continually switching among languages and unilinguals' being isolated in communication systems.

By integrating our suggested framework into future models of international business communication, researchers can more accurately and thoroughly investigate the dynamic, bi-directional, multiply-influenced, and transformational properties of international business communication (Sherblom, 1998). In turn, international business communicators, who find themselves in an increasingly complex and diverse global environment, can use our framework and future research findings that fit our framework to guide their communication practice and improve communication effectiveness.

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