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FRANCESCA BARGIELA-CHIAPPINI[a] & CATHERINE NICKERSON[b]

[a]*Nottingham Trent University, UK*
[b]*Nijmegen University, the Netherlands*

ABSTRACT *Intercultural business communication (IBC) is a complex disciplinary endeavour. The fundamental constructs of culture and communication involve an array of well-established and highly developed fields of enquiry, with their distinctive and sometimes overlapping approaches, theories and methodologies, and the added dimension of the business context clearly increases that complexity. This paper selectively reviews the disciplinary fields of relevance to research in IBC. It briefly outlines current debates, identifying key topics and their potential contribution to the exciting 'diversity' that exists within IBC, and it concludes with a brief introduction to the four papers that make up the remainder of this Special Issue.*

1. Diversity: the hallmark of intercultural business communication

Intercultural business communication (IBC) has undoubtedly grown into a complex disciplinary endeavour.[1] Of themselves, the fundamental constructs of culture and communication involve an array of well-established and highly developed fields of enquiry, with their distinctive and sometimes overlapping approaches, theories and methodologies. The added dimension of the business context clearly increases that complexity. We would challenge readers of this Special Issue to become involved in the debate around the nature and status of IBC. The approach that we take here is therefore intended to be thought provoking rather than programmatic.

When asked to reflect on the nature of their field of study or work, business communication 'interculturalists' may be overwhelmed by the multi-faceted nature of the discipline. On the other hand, they may choose to value its complexity as a stimulus and a rich source of inspiration for the development of a future research agenda. This is our point of departure in this paper, as we selectively review the relevant disciplinary fields, and briefly outline current debates, identifying key topics and their potential contribution to the exciting 'diversity' that exists within IBC.

2. Recent Trends in Intercultural Business Communication

Intercultural business communication (IBC) is a young field of study compared with some of its contributing disciplines such as intercultural communication, business

communication, social psychology and most recently, discourse studies (e.g. Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003).

In the European context, the internationalisation of business means that 'in fact, a business interaction is rarely a monolingual event' (Vandermeeren, 1999, p. 276). Although companies in Europe are still reminded that a lack of foreign language skills may lead to loss of business (Hagen, 1999), the role of English as the lingua franca of business is now largely unquestioned (Edwards, 2000; Li So-mui & Mead, 2000; Poncini, 2002; Stapp, 1998; but also see Gimenez, 2002 and Nair-Venugopal, 2001 for a critical re-appraisal). Elsewhere, despite the fact that historically both Australia and North America have hosted multicultural workforces, research on IBC at work was relatively limited until the end of the 1990s (Clyne, 1994; Goldstein, 1997), when the increase in trade with Asian countries, Japan in particular, began to be reflected in the IBC literature (Christian, 1998–9; Marriott, 1997; Miller, 1995, 2000; Yamada, 1997; Yamaguchi, 1998–9). In turn, the changing role of business English in Asian countries has prompted much needed research by Asian scholars (Enokizono, 2000; Honna, 2000; Kameda, 2001; Nair-Venugopal, 2001; Said & Siew, 2000; Takeshita, 2000; Ting, 2001, 2002), complementing the smaller body of work on intracultural language strategies in Asian contexts (e.g. Emmett, this issue; Wei *et al.*, 2001).

The North American preference for theory development and testing in intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 2002a) has led to a large number of theoretical studies, overshadowing the more modest development of qualitative, empirical research. A notable exception to this is the work currently in progress between teams based at the University of Michigan Business School and the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, investigating the concept of organisational voice and its realisation across the two different cultures in business writing (see Rogers *et al.*, 2002). We would argue that the proposed testing of existing theories, or their integration with 'subjectivistic' theories alone, without detailed reference to the real world, is unlikely to further understanding of micro-level, pragma-linguistic practices. This is the space occupied by intra-, inter- and cross-cultural qualitative, discourse-based research that has a long-standing tradition in Europe.[2] We would welcome its further development in North America, mindful of the influence of the US economy on a global scale and the importance of US business worldwide.

In our own work, centred on the cross-cultural analysis of Italian and British English company meetings (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997) and the written communication in use in international business contexts (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999), we have gradually developed the notion of 'business discourse'. Elsewhere we have discussed the implications of this development for a new, multidisciplinary field of enquiry (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2002). In Section 4, we will argue that 'discourse' understood as *praxis* within a broad socio-constructionist framework (Roy & Starosta, 2001; Shi-xu & Wilson, 2001) affords the conceptual latitude necessary to accommodate a dynamic view of the business context as a rich complexity of culture(s), human relationships and power. This concept of 'business discourse', resulting also from internationalisation, demands that we take the role of technology in intra- and inter-firm communication

(e.g. facsimile, electronic mail) into account in internal and external corporate relations, together with the significance of language choice (Akar, 2002; Gimenez, 2002; Nickerson, 2000).

Insights from business communication and management and from organisational studies have convinced us of the need for 'partnership research' in the multidisciplinary endeavour of IBC, not only between disciplines (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2001; Rogers, 2001) but also between academics and practitioners (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). And indeed, in response to the practical needs of the business world, a number of European universities have formed a network to study the role of intercultural communication in business and organisational settings.[3] Their approach is multidisciplinary, with a strong emphasis on business-related fields and themes (Schmidt, 2002a). Their recent work has further explored internal and external corporate communication in Europe with studies of the language of advertising and of its relationship with corporate culture, as well as of multilingualism and language policies in companies and their effect on communication (Schmidt, 2002b).[4] Initiatives such as this, herald a small renaissance of research on intercultural communication in Europe, after the domination of the USA since the inception of the field in the 1960s (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Whereas North American research on intercultural communication has traditionally been concerned with issues such as assimilation, prejudice and discrimination, non-verbal communication and collectivism vs. individualism (Rogers & Hart, 2002), the European movement focuses more specifically on the analysis of the role played by language. One way forward would therefore be to combine these traditions with a focus on the analysis of language together with a discussion of both the immediate and wider social context (see in particular Spencer-Oatey & Xing, this issue).

From an international perspective, the Western bias on intercultural communication has regrettably persisted into the 1990s (Rogers & Hart, 2002), balanced only by a noticeable growth of American vs. Japanese studies and the research on Asian Englishes vs. indigenous languages. These developments seem to have only marginally affected the historical preference for the theoretical and experimental approach in intercultural communication research that we have described above. In addition, cross-cultural communication has suffered from other limitations, such as comparisons based on two cultures only, a mono-method approach, one-dimensional analyses and the neglect of individual-level factors (Gudykunst, 2002a).[5] Three of the papers that make up the rest of this issue (Yeung, Emmett, Spencer-Oatey & Xing) involve non-Western cultures in what we consider to be a crucial area of interest in the field of IBC. The fourth, Poncini, further underlines the need to incorporate languages other than English into our research agenda, and aptly illustrates that multilingual, multicultural encounters increasingly make up the fabric of international business.

3. Disciplinary Debates and the Concepts of Culture and Nation

As we have suggested above, IBC may benefit greatly from concurrent developments in other related disciplines. The intersection of psychology with sociology, anthro-

pology and organisational studies, for instance, is fertile ground for a critical appraisal of the overarching construct of 'culture'. A survey of recent literature in these disciplines shows that the debate is still continuing as to whether culture is a mental construct, a social dimension or shared, patterned behaviour. In cross-cultural management research, for instance, this has engaged scholars for several decades in the well-known controversy on the validity of the notion of 'national culture' that also lies at the heart of Geert Hofstede's classic work.[6] Discussions such as this epitomise the continuing ontological and methodological difficulties engendered by the concept of culture in general and of national culture in particular. As recent research suggests, national culture and a discursive approach to cross- (and undoubtedly inter-) cultural business communication, are uneasy bedfellows (Gunnarsson, 2000). Organisational research has taken the alternative approach of identifying the locus of culture in the organisation, rather than in the nation (Parkin, 2000). In organisations, then, multicultural identities derive from the multiple cultural membership of the people who compose them. As Sackman *et al.* suggest:

> [t]his precludes the strong and purposeful focus on national culture as the cultural grouping of certain relevance to the organization (as assumed in cross-national intercultural interaction ICCM research) and as a culture of permanent identity for the individual (as assumed in cross-national comparative ICCM research). (Sackman *et al.*, 1997, p. 33)

At the level of organisation, culture(s) are negotiated rather than fixed, particularly within the context of joint ventures (Brannen & Salk, 2000; see also Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002).

In addition to the insights into IBC that can be gained from the current debates in organisational and management studies, we can also learn much from the field of cultural psychology. The conflict between the two sets of prevalent cultural theories, i.e. culture as a meaning system and culture as a signification process (Kashima, 2000), raises the difficulties endemic in the notion of national culture. In cultural psychology, however, native cultural discourses have at least challenged the dominance of a Western cognitive paradigm that has had vast epistemological and methodological consequences for the field (Jing & Fu, 2001; Matsumoto, 2001; Oyama *et al.*, 2001; Shi-xu, 2002). For example, under the influence of the Cartesian dichotomy, scholars have conventionally considered that the two (Western) needs for autonomy and relatedness are irreconcilable, whereas the synthetic approach of much Eastern philosophy permits a dialectic coexistence of opposites (cf. Singelis, 2000). Cultural psychology, therefore encompasses a growing awareness of one's own cultural heritage and distinctiveness, as is inherent, for example, in the emergent notion of 'Japaneseness' (Donahue, 2002; Oyama *et al.*, 2001; Tsujimura, 1999). Finally, cross-cultural psychology and its focus on historically situated, interactionally based relationships between individuals provides a rich source of ethnographic data (e.g. on the role of emotions as in Piker, 1998) which will benefit both intra- and intercultural research.

A perhaps more accessible discipline for business interculturalists, is

that of linguistic anthropology, most especially in its approach to 'language as culture' (Duranti, 2003), which crosses over important boundaries, partly resolving some of the tensions that we have observed so far in other fields. In linguistic anthropology, social phenomena, i.e. the broad cultural context, are understood through language, and an ethnographic approach is considered as the optimal methodology for the empirical work of observing 'culture in action'. Although it could be argued that anthropologists are in danger of losing self-reflexivity and the necessary degree of detachment from the situations they observe because of their traditional immersion in the local, they undoubtedly have the opportunity to record culture as it is constructed through communicative action (Knoblauch, 2000). As is the case with cultural psychology, we believe that linguistic anthropology can provide new insights and tested methodologies for the further development of IBC.

Our contention is that the internationalisation of IBC requires a re-appraisal of concepts like 'self', 'identity' and 'nation', ideally through the multidisciplinary lens of related disciplines such as organisation and management studies, cultural psychology and linguistic anthropology. Our intention in this section has been to demonstrate that recent work in all these fields can shed new light on both the scope and methodologies of IBC.

4. Harnessing Diversity for the Future: towards a discussion agenda for intercultural business communication

The dimension of culture and social behaviour that seems to have received the least attention in the disciplines mentioned thus far, is power. In many books on intercultural communication, cultural difference is seen (in a largely Western ethnocentric way) as an obstacle to be overcome through the means of communication. As Kramsch suggests, 'intercultural communication can be used to gloss over the increasingly deep divide between the have and the have nots, between those who have access to the Western discourse and power and those who don't' (Kramsch, 2002).[7] We would argue that the discourse-based approach that is currently gaining favour among critical linguists and business scholars alike, appropriately recognises that intercultural communication is social action and therefore affected by power (Bucholtz, 2001; Heller, 2001; Zaidam, 2001). In addition, we agree with Shi-xu and Wilson (2001) that a social constructionist understanding of human action views both culture and power as dynamically realised in interaction, therefore moving beyond competence and misunderstanding as the traditional tenets of intercultural analysis.

Against this backdrop, Hans-Georg Gadamer's critical hermeneutics[8] may be viewed as singularly attractive to interculturalists in that it allows an understanding of (intercultural) communication as a dialogic relationship embedded in a historical tradition (Roy & Starosta, 2001). Language as a determinant of all understanding and the source of creative power imposes on the researcher a moral burden: '[t]he purpose of dialogue … is not necessarily to achieve consent but to achieve social justice for everyone' (Singh, 2002, p. 228). The dialogic situation must aim to go

beyond achieving consent regardless of the procedures adopted. The process, as well as (or more than, Gadamer would argue) the product, is of concern to the negotiating parties. While there is no shortage of calls to be 'critical' in the social sciences and humanities, we would agree with Adler, that the critical cry for interculturalists indeed begs the question: 'Critical in the name of whom and what?' (Adler, 2002).

The post-colonial, anti-imperialist, postmodernist nature of the self-reflexive West leaves us with an open moral agenda for IBC: do we, for example, side with the critical management scholars, and agree that profit cannot be the only goal of economic activity? Should we concern ourselves with the issues of inequality and exploitation that inevitably arise when multinational corporations explore new markets in the developing world (Livesey, 2001)? Or, indeed more relevant for linguists and communication scholars, how do we go about harnessing the power of 'generative discourse'[9] (Bargiela-Chiappini, forthcoming 2004) for the good of interpersonal and inter-organisational relationships across cultures?

We believe that IBC now finds itself in the crossfire of many current academic and moral debates, which it cannot afford to ignore. How we respond to the challenges we face both from within our own discipline and beyond, will be a measure of our growing maturity as a scholarly community.

5. Sampling Diversity: the papers in this issue

Our introduction to IBC has deliberately emphasised the 'diversity' of this young discipline. In the four, specially commissioned papers that follow, we have chosen to concentrate on the crucial role of verbal and non-verbal behaviour in intercultural and intracultural face-to-face business meetings.

It is no accident that corporate meetings should continue to dominate much of the research in business communication. As yet, the technological advances that have accelerated internationalisation in business have not, and arguably, never will, quite replace face-to-face encounters. Local media preferences (Gimenez, 2002), the logistics of large membership (Poncini, this issue), or simply, the traditional custom of exchange visits (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, this issue) are among the practical reasons why the popularity of meetings, as preferred multi-party business interactions, endures. Three papers concentrate on discursive strategies in English, Italian and Japanese (Yeung, Poncini and Emmett) while the fourth (Spencer-Oatey & Xing) takes a combined view of verbal and non-verbal behaviour within Sino-British meetings and outside, to emphasise the importance of the wider context for the interpretation of intercultural encounters.

The contrastive analyses of multilingual meetings by Poncini, the Sino-British meetings by Spencer-Oatey and Xing, and Yeung's comparative analysis of Australian and Hong Kong meetings neatly complement Emmett's intracultural analysis of Japanese meetings. Each provides a different approach to the analysis of the data, ranging from a close linguistic analysis of the text (Emmett) through to the (data-driven) discussion of broad cultural and organisational factors affecting the immediate meeting context (e.g. Yeung). In addition, authors have also used interview and ethnographic data not only to aid their understanding of interactions

through feedback from participants, but also to gain access to the wider business and socio-cultural context. Spencer-Oatey and Xing, in particular, concentrate in their analysis on interlocutors' perceptions and expectations, which convincingly demonstrates the weighting of the cognitive and socio-psychological dimensions in intercultural encounters.

The papers begin with Gina Poncini's account of a series of multicultural, multilingual business meetings held between an Italian company and its international distributors. Although it acknowledges the role that English plays within these meetings as a lingua franca, it stresses the importance of languages other than English within the meetings, including the use of Italian (as a lingua franca). Referring to Goffman's (1981) participation framework and Thompson and Hunston's (2000) concept of evaluation, Poncini provides a series of examples to illustrate how participants in the meetings make use of different languages to facilitate the communication within the meetings, building solidarity and common ground, to bring about the achievement of the participants' (shared) goals. Several 'shared languages' are identified, together with their functions within the relevant business relationships. As Poncini suggests, this belies the traditional emphasis on conflict and misunderstanding that has characterised IBC research. In her paper, multilingual and multicultural meetings are revealed, instead, as complex arenas of emerging and intersecting group interests, partly negotiated through language choice.

The importance of collaborative work between participants in intercultural encounters is also highlighted by Helen Spencer-Oatey and Jianyu Xing, in their account of two business meetings between native speakers of Chinese and British English. Drawing on Spencer-Oatey's (2000) rapport management framework, they demonstrate that the success (or failure) of the communicative event depends on a variety of different factors—or 'multiple domains'—including the discourse and non-verbal domains. Extensive use is made of participant observation and of feedback from the participants themselves, emphasising the need to contextualise the data in order to understand what the authors refer to as 'the macro-context of authentic interactions'. In addition to aspects of the discourse content and the discourse structure that the researchers themselves observe, they convincingly argue the case for 'perception' data, most especially in intercultural communication, allowing the participants to interpret and illuminate the interaction for the researchers.

The third paper also highlights the importance of referring to the wider context in the interpretation of discourse. In this study of 20 meetings (in English) at two Australian banks, Lorrita Yeung looks at the culturally distinct features that characterise management discourse. In doing so, she contrasts her findings with those from a comparable set of bank meetings in Cantonese recorded in Hong Kong. Yeung adopts participative decision-making from management studies as a framework for her analysis; her discussion aptly exemplifies the interdisciplinary approach to IBC that we advocated earlier in this paper. Yeung identifies the strategies used in superior–subordinate discourse and illustrates them with examples taken from the meetings, showing how managerial styles reflect organisational choices. Although

Australian management style has generally been perceived as less formal than Hong Kong style, Yeung's findings in fact demonstrate that consultative practices are more widespread in Hong Kong meetings due to the adoption of quality circles as part of the move toward Total Quality Management.

The fourth and final paper also investigates the discourse strategies used by speakers in intracultural discourse, in this case in Japanese business meetings. In Keiko Emmett's account of three meetings at two Japanese companies, a detailed micro-analysis of the text reveals the complex discursive realisation of compliance-seeking. Emmett identifies 'theme-oriented' and 'agent-oriented' strategies and discusses how these are used to persuade the participants to comply with the speaker's point of view. Emmett's research is a good example of intracultural, interaction-based research that should inspire and encourage cross- and intercultural analysis of the kind discussed in the other three papers in this Special Issue.

What all the papers have shown, albeit within the limitations and constraints imposed by often limited access to sensitive data, is the depth and breadth that the 'intercultural' affords researchers willing to go beyond themselves to explore 'otherness': '[being intracultural] is both the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyse the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings' (Alread *et al.*, 2003, p. 4). We agree with Alread *et al.* that in intercultural encounters—including those motivated by business—'the new centre of interaction [is] on the borders and frontiers which join rather than divide' (ibid.). There is much that linguists and communication scholars can contribute to an understanding of the processes generating and reconstructing the liminal zone of the intercultural community. Through our analysis of discourse, we are granted privileged access to many layers of this partially explored area, and we now need to extend that analysis further using the tools afforded by multidisciplinarity.

Notes

1. Cross-cultural and intercultural are often used interchangeably. However, 'cross-cultural' refers to comparisons of different cultures in situations of non-contact and 'intercultural' to comparison of cultures in contact. Finally, 'intracultural' describes behaviour within a culture (Gudykunst, 2002a, pp. 175–176).
2. For example, the Scandinavian countries, accustomed to bilingual or multilingual traditions, led the way of discourse-based studies in the 1980s with research on intercultural business negotiations (Ehlich & Wagner, 1995; Firth, 1995; Grindsted, 1997; Neumann, 1997; Trosborg, 1995).
3. The Finnish contact is Dr Christopher M. Schmidt (christopher.schmidt@abo.fi) who is based at the Abo Akademi University and is also the author of the review article quoted here.
4. See for example, the second international conference held in August 2002 at the Aarhus Business School (Denmark) on the theme of 'Dynamics, development and processuality in business communication' which included the participation of scholars from Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The proceedings are due to appear in the series 'Europaische Kulturen in der Wirtschaftskommunikation' [European Culture in Business Communication], published by DUV, 2003.
5. The second edition of the *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication* includes chapters on new topics such as affect and emotions and language and verbal communication. An excellent example is Tae-Seop Lim's (2002) discussion of values on language behaviour in

Asian and Western cultures, which promisingly takes a language-based approach to cultural diversity.

6. The second edition of *Culture's Consequences* (2001) sparked off a lively debate among management scholars writing in *Human Relations*, the journal of the Tavistock Institute in London. In the January issue, a detailed attack of the many weaknesses of Hofstede's model (McSweeney, 2002a) was less confidently opposed by the concluding argument that the model is likely to survive until something better is found (Smith, 2002). In the November issue Hofstede takes on McSweeney (Hofstede, 2002; McSweeney, 2002b) but their differing positions remain irreconcilable in the closing article (Williamson, 2002), which in fact sides with those who are not (yet) prepared to give up Hofstede's work:

> For social scientists working within the functionalist paradigm, quantification of national culture opens up what is otherwise a black box of cultural factors. For social scientists working outside the functionalist paradigm, Hofstede has named and described attributes of national culture that may be either used to describe social phenomenon [sic] or put up as a comparative yardstick for other cultural attributes. (Williamson, 2002, p. 1391)

7. William Gudykunst (2002b) readily admits that current theories of intercultural communication often do not deal with power but that they should. One possible exception is Ting-Toomey's conflict face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002), which however adopts uncritically Hofstede's national dimension of power distance.

8. Hans-Georg Gadamer (b. 1900 in Marburg, Germany, d. 2002) is best known for his important contribution to hermeneutics through his major work, *Wahrheit und Methode* [*Truth and Method*]. His system of philosophical hermeneutics is a response, through an exploration of historicity, language, and art, to Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger (from the H.-G. Gadamer website: http://www.svcc.cc.il.us/academics/classes/gadamer/gadamer.htm).

9. 'Generative discourse' unleashes the unrealised potentialities of discourse for a new critical, dialogic and human-centred programme of action. Thus, generative discourse: (1) speaks the unspeakable (e.g. moral values, emotions and affectivity); (2) thinks the unthinkable (develops rhetorical resources that not only oppose and resist (Linstead, 2001, p. 218); in other words, (3) it re-vitalises and re-enchants (Casey, 2002).

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Notes on Contributors

Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini is a Senior Research Fellow at the Nottingham Trent University. Her main publications are in the field of business discourse and include *Managing Language* and *The Languages of Business* (1997, both with S. Harris) and *Writing Business* (1999, with C. Nickerson). She has guest edited two other special journal issues: on business discourse (IRAL, 2002, with C. Nickerson) and on organisational discourse (*International Review of the Sociology of Language*, 2004). Her current projects include a study of the emergent 'Asian business discourses'. *Correspondence*: English and Media Studies, Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham, NG11 8NS, UK. E-mail: francesca.bargiela@ntu.ac.uk

Catherine Nickerson is a Lecturer in Business Communication Studies at Nijmegen University in the Netherlands. Her research interests include the use of English as a lingua franca in corporate life, the interface between English as an international language and the local languages in use, and the communicative genres in use in business settings. Her study of the English used by Dutch writers working in multinational corporations is published by Rodopi as *Playing the Corporate Language Game*. *Correspondence*: Business Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts, Nijmegen University, Erasmuslaan 1, PO Box 9103, 6500 HD, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. E-mail: c.nickerson@let.kun.nl