Editorial

The need for successful communication in intercultural and international business settings: Analytic and comparative studies, new trends and methodologies

Communicating is a need in today's business world; if professionals are not able to express their ideas appropriately, it will be difficult for them to reach positive agreements while operating internationally. This special issue of *Ibérica* is devoted to the analysis of successful experiences aimed at communicating accurately in intercultural and international business settings. Needless to say, the traditional difference between domestic and foreign markets has basically disappeared nowadays, as trade barriers have been removed thanks to the increasing amount of commercial agreements among countries. This situation has forced professionals to learn languages in order to survive in international markets, where they will have to find their space against a larger number of competitors (Selmier II & Oh, 2012). As a result of this new international stage, learning other languages has become a must for most of those professionals, and English is often used as the business lingua franca in order to negotiate internationally (Ehrenreich, 2010; Evans, 2013). Nevertheless, this can present some challenges, as Rogerson-Revell (2007) pointed out, as in many situations these communicative interactions are carried out among speakers whose native language is not English (Kankaanranta & Lu, 2013; Nickerson & Crawford-Camiciottoli, 2013). Additionally, we should also consider that these challenges may not only be linguistic, but also cultural.

Practitioners have aptly noticed that knowing a language in order to communicate appropriately in business settings often implies mastering three different concepts. All of them are necessary in order to succeed in business negotiations with people coming from different cultures. Those three elements to be considered by any professional are: (i) the use of

appropriate business-related concepts; (ii) using the corresponding specific terminology in English; and (iii) applying appropriate communicative techniques. In some way, working on business-related activities implies being in control of this communication triangle. Nevertheless, this process can sometimes be altered by intercultural or international misunderstandings that can jeopardise the process. Doing business with people from other cultures can be a fairly frustrating activity (Kowner, 2002). Young professionals, working as expatriates for important companies, often comment on the difficulties they have in order to communicate adequately, in many instances because knowing the language and using the right business techniques are not enough. They miss the intercultural/international component, and it may take a long time to develop it. That is why the study of the different theories related to intercultural business communication can help any interested party to succeed professionally (Gibson, 2002).

When dealing with international business communication we often pay attention to discourse. As Bargiela-Chiappini (2004) pointed out, international business discourse is both culturally-situated and context-dependent; the communication process is always affected by all three elements (discourse, culture and context), and should be understood as a whole and not as three separate elements that can be isolated. Any professional has to consider the type of discourse to be used in a specific country or region (considering its specific political, economic and social situation), but always assuming the culture of the place s/he is visiting. Knowing the culture and using the language accurately allows any professional to get the most from a business communication process (Van Meurs, Korzilius & Den Hollander, 2006).

Intercultural business communication tries to solve the wide range of communication problems that often appear within a firm, considering that corporations are frequently formed by people coming from different countries and/or regions, who have different educational backgrounds, and who may be affected by their religious beliefs, their ethnic group, or their social class (Dowling & Welch, 2004; Varner & Beamer, 2005). Lauring (2011: 234) aptly points out the relevance of culture in business communication when he states:

> Most authors in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what mediums they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted. This implies that

> when transmitting a message in an international setting, culture might function as a kind of disturbance, which can distort the intended meaning.

A message can be somehow defined as valid when it is adapted to the culture of the receiver, being appropriate for his/her cultural background and achieving a final goal. Thus, both appropriateness and effectiveness are two important parameters to understand the success of our messages in an intercultural setting. Communication breakdowns are often caused by problems while adapting our message to our audience's real cross-cultural competence, and sometimes we do not realize that we have not provided the receiver with the intended message. Unfortunately, many professionals agree to state that the effects of failed communication can be very damaging, as their own experience can suggest so. Those two concepts of appropriateness and effectiveness should be applied with a high level of sensitivity, so as not to offend people from other cultures, a fact that could jeopardize anyone's possibilities to reach a satisfactory business deal. We should therefore try to know other people's cultures, and this implies a basic understanding of their norms and values. What can be perfect in one culture may be taken as something inappropriate in another. In intercultural business communication, behaving as one would normally do might cause unintentional offences. Only those professionals who could communicate accurately, observing the intercultural rules applied in real commercial settings, will be able to survive in this global market companies are nowadays dealing with. It is the survival of the fittest, of those who can get adapted to their environment, and in order to do so professionals will need to enhance their intercultural competence.

The articles published in this special issue pay attention to intercultural and international business communication (IIBC) from different perspectives. Starting from a general overview on business English as a lingua franca, the volume also presents new views on genre analysis, discourse analysis and different teaching methodologies related to IIBC, trying to shed some light on innovations related to this area of research.

In the opening article, Anne Kankaanranta and Leena Louhiala-Salminen (Aalto University, Finland) offer an interesting overview of the origins and foundations of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) or, as they claim in their text, English as Business Lingua Franca. In their opinion, the position of English as the global lingua franca in business is beyond dispute and it should be assumed that competence in BELF is a necessity for any

business professional in international contexts. They analyse their efforts, during the last decade, in order to define how the goal-oriented nature of business can have an influence in the way professionals perceive the importance of BELF. All their previous work leads these authors to conclude here that communicative competence is far more important for business professionals than linguistic accuracy, and this implies that there are many more aspects defining BELF than the language itself.

The next three articles deal with business correspondence in a variety of ways. Yunxia Zhu (The University of Queensland, Australia) compares English and Chinese business faxes from a genre-based perspective, paying attention to texts written in New Zealand and China, and analyses all the differences that can be observed regarding the persuasive techniques used in both languages. One important conclusion is that whereas English business faxes seem less direct and personal, Chinese faxes place a greater emphasis on affective aspects. Zhu points out that there exists a deep need to build a closer business relationship among Chinese professionals, a fact that can be observed in this specific genre. The author offers a theoretical framework based on the rhetorical structures and linguistic strategies present in the faxes analysed. In Zhu's opinion, genre teaching can help enhance professionals' understanding of institutionalised knowledge, implementing their level of competence when dealing with cross-cultural genre writing, and allowing them to overcome any problem arising from the lack of intercultural communication abilities.

In the following article, María Luisa Carrió-Pastor and Rut Muñiz-Calderón (Universitat Politècnica de València & Universidad Católica de Valencia, Spain) analyse language variation in one hundred e-mails written by business managers from India and China. Following the traditional structures proposed by Bhatia (1993), these scholars observe the possible variations in the internal organization of the e-mails gathered as well as some changes in the organization of different moves and steps within those texts. The conclusions of this article shed some light related to the influence of the mother tongue in the structural decisions taken by Asian businessmen while writing e-mails: despite the fact that English is used as a global language for business purposes worldwide, when they communicate their linguistic and cultural background still permeates.

The next contribution to the volume also pays attention to the same topic, e-mail writing, but in this case from a European perspective. Rosa Giménez-

Moreno and Hanna Skorczynska (Universitat de València & Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain) carry out a contrastive study on how Polish, British and Spanish companies reply to two different types of messages (formal and informal). From the 101 replies received and analyzed, they observe the main differences among those messages, trying to define some parameters of variation based on cultural identities. Similarly, they also notice that register variation fluctuates depending on the culture analysed. Authors conclude that, despite the fact that moves and steps can help any professional to write a good business e-mail message, variations should also be considered and studied in such a way that any author could create a message based on the reader's specific culture.

The fifth article appearing in this special issue, written by Bertha Du-Babcock (City University of Hong Kong, China), is devoted to the study of two sets of data containing transcripts of the dialogues of intercultural business meetings. The first set deals with meetings between Japanese and Hong Kong business professionals, all of them with an adequate level of English. The second set corresponds to two meetings held by professionals in two multinational corporations in Finland, and three languages are used (Finnish, Swedish and English), although it is English the main language used in both cases. In her analysis, Du-Babcock compares both sets of texts, analysing similarities and differences in the communication patterns through the number of turns taken by individuals, the length of speaking time for each group member, and the number of words uttered. She also pays attention to other aspects such as small talk, turn-taking and floor management as well as the disclosure of disagreeing opinions.

Next, Gina Poncini (Zayed University, United Arab Emirates) presents a research project that aims at investigating how professionals communicate at several international industry events dealing with the wine and grape business. In her study she analyses contextual factors such as relationships, roles and level of expertise of those taking part in the meetings. She pays attention to how knowledge and interest help event participants to overcome cultural and professional differences; in fact, in her analysis, she realizes that both journalists and wine and grape producers share verbal and non-verbal practices during wine-tasting sessions. Despite coming from different linguistic, cultural and professional backgrounds, all the professionals attending the session share certain values and practices related to the wine industry, becoming a community of practice.

The next two chapters move on to the pedagogical aspects of IIBC in university settings. First, Guzman Mancho-Barés and Enric Llurda (Universitat de Lleida, Spain) analyse the steps to be taken in order to design the syllabus of a Business English course. Considering that their university requires a B1 level in English for all its graduates, they also examine an entry test and a questionnaire, specifically designed to gather evidence on the influence of the number of years studying English and the students' ability to read a text appropriately. Finally, they check these results with some business representatives, who emphasize the need to teach comprehension skills and language accuracy for those students interested in working in an international business environment. The data collected advocates for the need to enhance communicative efficiency in business activities. Professionals, as a whole, seem more interested in communicating successfully than achieving linguistic accuracy, though this latter aspect is the main goal promoted by university practitioners.

Next, M. Carmen Lario de Oñate and María Vázquez Amador (Universidad de Cádiz, Spain) pay attention to Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and how this field of study has evolved in 67 Business English textbooks through the last 50 years. They analyse the development of ICC as a concept and how it has been taught over the years, on the basis of the different examples gathered in their corpus. Lario de Oñate and Vázquez Amador observe that the intercultural component has become more evident in their corpus since the 1980s, whereas during the 1960s and 1970s cultural aspects were largely ignored. Results point out that almost half of the books published from 1980 onwards include some kind of intercultural component; however, only two of them include specific units devoted to intercultural communication.

The last article completing this special issue has been written by Miguel A. García-Yeste (Stockholm University, Sweden) and analyses how some cultural values as context dependence and individualism play an important role in the design of press advertisements in Spain. After observing that practitioners and agencies are trying to find ways to adapt marketing campaigns to intercultural target audiences, he analyses 100 Spanish graphic advertisements. His piece of research is both qualitative and quantitative because it offers a set of communicative and multimodal strategies which could help any advertising professional to promote products following Spanish cultural conventions as well as some final guidelines.

In this volume we have also included some book reviews that can be of interest to our readership, given the main topic of this special issue. Thus, Christina Burek's study on intercultural communication in multicultural companies is reviewed by Carmen Foz (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain). Another issue of interest, as stated above, is how intercultural issues are promoted in the classroom, and this is the main topic of Yau Tsai and Stephanie Houghton's volume, reviewed for us by Philip Shaw (University of Stockholm, Sweden). Next, Miguel F. Ruiz-Garrido (Universitat Jaume I, Spain) reviews Rita Salvi and Hiromasa Tanaka's volume on intercultural interactions in business, and, to round things up, the final review of this special issue, written by Carmen Piqué-Noguera (Universitat de València, Spain), offers some guidelines on the work edited by Paul Gillaerts, Elizabeth de Groot, Sylvain Dieltjens, Priscilla Heynderickx and Geert Jacobs dealing with discourse in business genres.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Ana Bocanegra-Valle, the Editor-in-Chief of *Ibérica*, for offering me the chance to work on this special issue. I want to point out that she has been a constant guide during this long-lasting process. She is one of the hardest-working people in our field, and an incredible support throughout this whole process. She deserves all my recognition, and I am glad to state that *Ibérica* would not be the same without her. Additionally, I would also like to thank all the invited reviewers that have devoted their time and effort in order to offer constructive feedback on the extended abstracts and the full texts submitted for publication. The following list includes, in alphabetical order, their names:

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The volume you are about to read is the result of all our efforts to offer a sound vision on new trends and methodologies on intercultural and

international business communication. I am terribly proud to have coedited this project, international both in its scope and in the origin of many contributions, together with my colleague, Dr. Ana Bocanegra-Valle. We just hope you enjoy the final result as much as we do.

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