Contents

1
What is Business Discourse?

This chapter will:

- Define *business discourse* as it will be referred to in the rest of this book
- Provide a brief overview of the *historical development* of business discourse with a number of landmark studies
- Discuss the *hallmarks* of business discourse research including the types of data investigated
- Provide details of the most important *approaches* that have been taken in business discourse research
- Give a *geographical and disciplinary overview* of how business discourse has evolved around the world together with profiles of a number of prominent researchers.

1.1 What is business discourse?

Business discourse is all about how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations in order to get their work done. In this book we will view business discourse as social action in business contexts. We will discuss the work of researchers (and practitioners) primarily interested in the investigation of spoken and written communication in general and language in particular in business settings, most often in corporate settings. We will be looking at a) what business discourse research has told us about how people in business organizations achieve their organizational and personal goals using language, b) how the findings of that research have been applied in teaching and training materials, and c) how to go about doing business discourse research.

Business organizations and the types of communication used within them are complex entities. Many different factors can contribute to the ways in which business people use language in order to carry out their work. As we will see in the next section in this chapter, researchers interested in business discourse have referred to a number of fields and disciplines in their investigation of language at work, such as genre theory, discourse analysis, organizational communication and applied linguistics. This crossdisciplinarity has led to a number of different ways of thinking about business language and the different contextual variables that can be of influence in how people talk and write at work. We will discuss many of these ideas in this chapter and the next, and then go on to look at their applications in Parts 2 and 3 of this book.

1.2 A short history of business discourse

Business discourse has been influenced by a number of different fields and disciplines including discourse analysis, conversation analysis, the pragmatics of interaction, ethnography, genre theory and organizational communication. We will return to many of these and the way that they have been used in Part 3, when we talk about doing business discourse research. An additional characteristic of business discourse research is that many of those researchers involved in the investigation of business discourse are also active in teaching. This has meant that applied linguistics in general, and LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in particular, have also been influential, especially outside of the North American context where many of those involved with business discourse research are teachers of English or other languages for specific business purposes (see: Swales, 2000 for an overview; see also the volume on LSP by Gollin and Hall, 2006). In addition, business discourse research shares some of the same concerns as the North American business communication tradition, although unlike business communication, business discourse research does not generally claim a vocational focus. A number of the researchers we will profile later in this volume have been influenced by and influential on both business discourse and business communication through their involvement with the Association for Business Communication and the *Business Communication Quarterly* (e.g. Gina Poncini, Priscilla Rogers, Linda Beamer).

In this section, we will present a short historical overview of the development of the field of business discourse from the late 1980s onwards, referring to a number of landmark studies to do so.

Concept 1.1 Applied linguistics, LSP, ESP and business discourse

Applied linguistics is concerned with how people learn languages, what it means to speak or write a language effectively, and how people might learn to speak or write languages more easily. One important branch that developed within applied linguistics in the 1980s is the investigation of Language for Specific Purposes or often more narrowly, English for Specific Purposes, where researchers are particularly interested in how language is used in a specific social context, such as in an academic setting, in the doctor's surgery or in a business organization. Many of the methodologies associated initially with LSP/ESP research, such as needs analysis surveys, genre analysis and close text analysis, have also been used in investigating business discourse. Unlike LSP/ESP research, however, business discourse is less motivated by pedagogical concerns and more with a concern with understanding how people communicate strategically in an organizational context.

There is now also a growing cadre of organizational and professional communication scholars who do not have much to do with either LSP or ESP directly, e.g. Srikant Sarangi, Christopher Candlin, Celia Roberts, Rick Iedema, etc. Their work has, and will continue to be of influence on business discourse research.

The late 1980s did not seem to have much to offer to the linguist in search of an understanding of the role of language in corporations, other than in research with a prescriptive motivation. At that time, the *Journal of Business Communication, Business Communication Quarterly*, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* and, to a lesser extent, the *Management Communication Quarterly*, reflected the strong vocational and applied intent of much research in North America, as did work in LSP and applied linguistics, where journals such as *English for Specific Purposes* also tended towards a pedagogical focus. Researchers interested in business discourse in the 1990s were faced with the task of defining the field and also with identifying those approaches and methodologies that could be useful in understanding how business people use language to achieve their goals (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999).

Quote 1.1 Understanding business discourse

Business discourse as contextual and intertextual, self-reflexive and self-critical, although not necessarily political, is founded on the twin notions of discourse as *situated action* and of *language at work*. This perspective seems now quite remote from early discussion on the nature of *professional language* that originated from within LSP, or Language for Specific Purposes (Johns, 1986). In its attempt to

Quote 1.1 (Continued)

recontextualize discourse within the current dialogues between related disciplines and combined approaches, and between praxis and social theory, business discourse also remains distinct from recent developments in LSP (Swales, 1999) and ESP (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002).
(Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2002: 277, original emphasis).

Bargiela-Chiappini (2004a) provides a historical overview of the evolution of the field of spoken business discourse beyond the boundaries of a primarily pedagogical focus. She describes the lack of interest in language by authors of books on business negotiation in the 1970s and 1980s and their reliance on quantitative analysis. Attention to the role of communication in bargaining (Putnam & Jones, 1982) and the strategic use of language in negotiation (Donohue & Diez, 1985) continued to be relatively unexplored topics in the literature on negotiation until quite recently (e.g. Candlin, Maley & Sutch, 1999). The positivist influence of cognitive and behavioural approaches to the study of language in business settings remained dominant and language was treated as one of the dependent variables. It was not until 1986 when Lampi's seminal monograph on the discourse of negotiation was published, that studies of negotiation became language-based and began to proliferate. The numerous publications that date from that time, as evidenced by the following list, are an indication of how influential this shift to language-based analysis was (e.g. Ehlich & Wagner, 1995: Firth, 1995: Ulijn & Li, 1995; Trosborg, 1995; Jaworski, 1994: Graham, 1993: Holden & Ulijn, 1992; Mulholland, 1991; Neumann, 1991; 1994). The most representative of these, including a variety of different languages and settings, are the two collections both published in 1995, edited by Alan Firth, and Konrad Ehlich and Johannes Wagner, respectively. Although authored by scholars from a variety of disciplines, the research in these collections marks the establishment of a growing body of discourse analytic and pragmatic studies of real-life language in the workplace. Unlike earlier research in negotiation, Firth's (1995) collection of fourteen articles approaches negotiation as discourse, i.e. as language in use (p. vi). In his introduction, Alan Firth reviews the theoretical approaches to negotiation research, ending with what had until that time been referred to as the 'discourse approach'. Firth's discussion makes clear that this is a potentially misleading label as this approach in fact tended to describe studies that used (decontextualized) transcripts of negotiations but analysed them by means of preset coding systems, or through conversation analysis. In contrast, Firth's volume illustrates a range of discourse-based (contextualized) methodologies applied to negotiation talk, such that the chapters approach negotiation not as an isolated activity, but as an activity embedded in a variety of workplace interactions (e.g. meetings, intercultural negotiations, technical problem solving, general practice consultations, travel agency calls, etc.).

In a similar way, Konrad Ehlich and Johannes Wagner's collection (1995) echoes Firth's discussion on negotiation through the micro-analyses of authentic or simulated business interactions in Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Danish, Japanese, British English, American English and Australian English. In their introduction, the editors note the growing interest in business negotiation among practitioners, novices and researchers. They also recognize that observation of the interactions and audio-recordings are essential to sound research but that issues of access, data sensitivity and transcription detail often complicate the job of the discourse analyst. Ten years on, business discourse researchers are still grappling with the same problems, but have however acquired much more experience in ethnographic research in corporate and institutional environments. As we will discuss in the next chapter, we are now more often able to work alongside 'the research' as our peers in co-constructed collaborative projects.

A pioneering work on negotiation for its time, Mirjaliisa Lampi's multilevel, micro-analytical discourse analysis of British business negotiations (Lampi, 1986), firmly established the credentials of language-focused research in business and international relations. The discourse features that contribute to perceived strategy in negotiation are the focus of Lampi's study, hence her approach concentrates on 'levels of discoursality': acts, moves, exchanges and phases, all converging to form a negotiation 'encounter'. This terminology will have been familiar to discourse analysts in the 1980s but the originality of the study lies in the application of these analytical categories to the study of strategy in real business interactions. In a later paper, Lampi (1990) moves the field on again by discussing the influence of company agendas on negotiation talk. In this way, she points towards a systematic analysis of the contextual components of verbal interaction in business settings; six years on from there (now writing as Charles) she definitively makes the connection between the business context and language in a self-proclaimed attempt '. . . to partly fill the gap between a contextual, business approach and a linguistic text-based approach' (Charles, 1996: 20). In this 1996 study, she draws both on discourse analysis and business studies of negotiation, and demonstrates how the linguistic choices made in negotiation situations are a direct reflection of whether the business relationship between the participants involved is established or new.

In meeting discourse, Haru Yamada's work on the differences between Japanese and US meetings (1990; 1992; 2002), is another pioneering work in business discourse studies. It provides a detailed account of the crucial difference between the two cultures involved and the rhetorical action that each group is trying to achieve in a meeting situation. The Japanese, for instance, use the meeting in order to exchange opinions, whereas the Americans use a meeting to come to a decision. Yamada's studies include both cross- and intercultural analysis and are among the first full-length studies of the interaction between two different cultures in a business setting.

The publication of Deidre Boden's *The Business of Talk. Organizations in Action* in 1994 originally combines distinctive intellectual and methodological traditions such as conversation analysis, organizational theory and social theory. It provides a detailed and singular account of how organizations bring about action through the business of talk, in an analysis of talk in organizations such as the health sector, academia and business. Drawing on the work of the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984; 1987), Boden discusses how the organizations she studied generate talk, and are themselves simultaneously constructed through that talk, in a process that Giddens has referred to as *structuration*. Using ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA) as an analytical framework, Boden shows how the talk is influenced or shaped by the organization, i.e. the social context, and that an organization is in turn, influenced or shaped by the talk that takes place within it. Boden's choice of meetings as an object of study is significant. As the substance of management, meetings are central to organizing structure and action, time and space. No other researcher has yet been able to deconstruct this process in quite such a convincing (and readable) way, in unpacking the complex nature of the role played by language as a fundamental contributor to organizational communication.

Quote 1.2 Talk and organizations

Talk, I shall propose, is the lifeblood of all organizations and, as such, it both shapes and is shaped by the structure of the organization itself.
(Boden, 1994: 8).

Three years after the publication of Boden's study of meetings in the United States, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' investigation of British and Italian business meetings includes both a crosscultural analysis of the structural and pragmatic properties of British and Italian business meetings respectively, as well as an intercultural study of the specific meetings that took place in an Anglo-Italian joint venture (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997a). This study therefore re-emphasizes an important hallmark of business discourse that we will refer to in many places in this book, i.e. that business often involves communication across national borders between people who do not share the same culture. Business discourse research therefore needs to account not only for organizational cultures, but also for ethnolinguistic cultures (see Sarangi & Roberts (1999) for an important discussion on the distinction between ethnolinguistic cultures on the one hand, and organizational and institutional cultures on the other). We will return to this issue later in this chapter and look at it in detail in the next. Like Charles' studies of negotiations, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' work has also been of considerable influence on later work on the discourse of business meetings. The 1997 study remains of interest as a ground-breaking attempt to understand real communication involving real business people, and it provides countless examples of the mismatch between the language taught for meetings and the language used in meetings that Williams so eloquently described at the end of the 1980s (Williams, 1988).

Marian Williams (1988): The relationship between reality and teaching materials

In 1988 Marian Williams published an article reporting on the relationship between the language used by native speakers of English in business meetings and the language taught by business English textbooks at that time for use in meetings. She analysed the language used in three meetings by a total of twelve native speakers of English and then compared this with the language taught for meetings in thirty English textbooks. She found that there was almost no correspondence between the meetings and the textbooks and that the speakers' use of language was far more complex than the way in which it was represented for the student. Although nearly two decades old, the study remains a landmark study of the mismatch that continues to exist between teaching materials and real language (see Part 2 for further discussion on this point).

For written discourse, the work of the genre analyst Vijay Bhatia has shaped the work of a generation of applied linguists specializing in writing in organizational contexts. Published in 1993, Bhatia's book-length study extends the ESP approach to genre analysis that was pioneered by John Swales for academic writing (e.g. Swales, 1990a), and re-applies it to professional discourse, including sales letters and application letters. Although now more than ten years old, the 1993 volume remains an influential account not only of how context and text are intertwined, but also of how writers use a genre creatively to achieve their own ends. Bhatia's 2004 volume *Worlds of Written Discourse* moves even further away from the ESP tradition and continues to explore the way in which context and text are related. We will discuss Bhatia's work and the usefulness of a genre approach to the analysis of discourse, in Parts 2 and 3 of this volume in relation to the work of researchers such as Ulla Connor, Catherine Nickerson and Leena Louhiala-Salminen.

Work on written business discourse in the 1980s and early 1990s was characterized by the analysis of the business letter, as an important genre of communication in business setting at that time. From the study by Ann Johns of cohesion in different types of business discourse (Johns, 1980) through the contrastive study of business letter writing in English, French and Japanese by Susan Jenkins and John Hinds (1987) to the book length study of requests in British, American and Finnish business correspondence by Hilkka Yli-Jokipii (1994), the field was dominated by the business letter. The 1999 edited collection on the genres of written business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999), for instance, includes two important types of business letter, i.e. sales letters and mass-produced correspondence with customers (but also showcases a number of other written genres used in business, such as email, business faxes and business magazines). The characteristics and influence of the business letter have continued to be of interest, particularly the way in which the genre has been subsumed into other genres such as the annual general report and email correspondence, as exemplified by the collection edited by Maurizio Gotti and Paul Gillaerts (2005). The role played by the communicative purpose in the letter was generally of more interest in this type of research than the interpersonal relationship between the writer and reader (although see Maier, 1992; for a study of politeness strategies in business letters, and James, Scholfield & Ypsiladis, 1994; for a study of the effects of using different strategies in application letters).

Over the course of the last decade working at the Helsinki School of Economics the Finnish researcher Leena Louhiala-Salminen has made an extensive contribution to the development of business discourse, particularly in her study of the use of electronic media in business contexts. In a series of publications dating from the mid 1990s onwards she has used a variety of different methodologies, such as survey-based research, corpus-based genre analysis, text analysis and informant studies, to investigate the role played by fax communication in English in Finland, its discourse characteristics and the response of readers to those characteristics (Louhiala-Salminen, 1995; 1996; 1997). Furthermore, in collaboration with Didar Akar at Bogaziçi University in Turkey, she has investigated the similarities and differences in fax communication in English as it is used for international business in Turkey and Finland, and most recently, she has worked with her colleagues Mirjaliisa Charles and Anna Kankaanranta also at the Helsinki School of Economics to investigate how English is used in two Swedish–Finnish cross border mergers, involving the integrated analysis of meetings and email, as well as a series of in-depth interviews with Finnish and Swedish business people (Akar & Louhiala-Salminen, 1999; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005).

1.3 The hallmarks of business discourse research

In this section, we will discuss the hallmarks of business discourse research. We will look at the type of data that has been analysed and the relationship that has developed between certain types of data and different methodologies. We will also examine the role played by context in business discourse research, the research aims behind business discourse research and the dominance of English in international business, as well as the work that has been done on business discourse involving languages other than English.

Types of data

Business discourse research draws on a variety of different kinds of data, depending on the research aims in each case. These could be as diverse as the results of a survey, the analysis of a real business discussion or the findings of an experiment. In Part 3 of this book we will look in detail at the increasing body of research which has focused on *authentic* data, and we will also consider business discourse research where it has been most appropriate either to use *simulated* data, or to use *manipulated* data in an experimental setting. Sometimes business discourse researchers will also use a combination of different kinds of data in one investigation. Findings based on a corpus of authentic data, for instance, can be used to inform the collection of simulated data to tell a researcher more about what students do as opposed to business people with experience. Likewise, a corpus of authentic data can be used to inform an experimental investigation into readers' response to a particular textual characteristic, e.g. the use of 'I' rather than 'we' in business writing.

Many business discourse researchers prefer to work with authentic data, despite the difficulties associated with gaining access to business organizations and the confidentiality agreements that are necessary to work on the data and publish the findings. Authentic examples of business discourse provide invaluable insights into how people actually communicate in organizations. As many of the studies we profile in Chapter 8 show, increasing numbers of researchers are managing to persuade corporations to let them in to investigate their communication first hand. Authentic data tends to be messy, however, and one of the challenges that business discourse researchers have to meet initially is how to organize the data so that it can be analysed.

The extracts below are examples of authentic data, the first taken from a meeting at a Finnish–Swedish multinational (Data 1.1) and the second from a set of internal email correspondence collected at a Dutch multinational corporation (Data 1.2). In both cases, the researchers involved have taken a set of raw data, i.e. audio recordings of meetings and a set of electronic files respectively, and transformed them into a set of data to be analysed. The recordings have been transcribed into a written form and the electronic files have been separated and then merged into one consistent corpus. In both cases, the researchers have then made the extracts anonymous in order to be able to publish their findings, as well as gaining written permission from the corporations involved that they could do so.

Studies of writing may have more pervasive results in that they can reveal the degree to which competency in writing is used as a mark of expertise and also as a means of sanction. We will look at an example of this in detail in Chapter 4 when we review the work by Baxter, Boswood and Peirson-Smith at the Hong Kong Jockey Club (Baxter, Boswood & Peirson-Smith, 2002).

Data 1.1 An example of authentic spoken data

1	**C**	**since this is in Swedish Bob why don't you er comment on it first please**
2	**S1**	**Yes I think er we got the status and <u>I think you Chris</u> has also made**
3		**comments on it**
4	F	Yupp I have yes

5	**S1**	**Er so I think most of us have seen this text or (.) is it new for anyone (.) er (.)**
6		**that they say in (.) er from Company D side that they say that what you have**
7		**said from the Finnish side er it's about 'tycke och smak' what's what is it in**
8		**English I don't know and er . . . you agree**
9	F	yeah
10	**S1**	**in that**
11	F	yeah
12	**S1**	**maybe you can continue I think**

(Taken from Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005)

Data 1.2 An example of authentic written data

ÞMSG FROM: INASM2 – INTRAVM01 TO: INAHA3 – INTRAVM01
24-05-96 10:01:05
To: INAHA3 – INTRAVM01 A. van Edel

From: J.L.C.Smal SIC-INTRO/1 'Separations'
Introduct, Rotterdam
Internal address: NL 32-14tel.3185

Subject: werINanvrSUSen
Anton
Hierbij de reactie op min ELFjes en Klokken
Over de klokken is een dikke file aanwezig incl. TKF en VVF.
Hans B. heeft daarin gesuggereerd dat er geen TKF maar een ELF dient
te worden ingestuurd. En dan krijg je deze reactie . . .
Ook bij een recente opknapbeurt van NL 32–13 is de klok niet
weggehaald.
Bij het opknappen van NL33 is er niets aan de isolatie vanleidingen gedaan.
Klantgericht??
Ik stel voor dat we 4 juni samen lunchen. Accoord?

With kind regards, Jos Smal
Introduct, Rotterdam

tel. +31 20 630 3185, fax. 4037; e-mail: SMAL9@sic.introduct.nl
(Adapted from Nickerson, 2000)

In some situations, it may be necessary to work with *simulated* rather than *authentic* data, in order to investigate a particular aspect of business discourse. This may be because it has proved impossible to gain access to an appropriate set of authentic data, or because the researcher is interested in a specific aspect of language use and therefore needs to control as many variables as possible. Simulated data is collected on the basis of a set of instructions for the writers or speakers involved in which they are asked to play a particular role intended to elicit the aspect of language the researcher is interested in. The data collected as a result will then be treated much like authentic data, as can be seen in the transcribed example of simulated spoken data in the extract below (Data 1.3). Simulated data like this has been used by business discourse researchers, for instance, to compare the language produced by students with no experience of work with that produced by experienced business people. We will discuss this in more detail in Part 3.

Data 1.3 An example of simulated spoken data

S: Uhuh. *Do you have to sell your marketing erm sales policy? Because before you were selling to wholesalers I suppose*?
B: No, we were always a chain of stores.
S: Uhuh.
B: Highly specialized and quite known I think from erm all the consumers erm the young people
S: Uhuh.
B: that travel and go camping.

S = Seller, B = Buyer
(Adapted from Planken, 2005).

Quote 1.3 On the use of simulated data

. . . there are considerable advantages to using simulation as a method of data collection. The use of simulation as opposed to observation in an authentic setting, for example, allows for greater control of stimulus conditions, as well as comparisons and generalizations across data produced in any number of interactions elicited by a particular simulation game. Also, simulation serves as the best alternative, in terms of data collection, in situations where access to authentic data in an authentic setting – for example, access to authentic negotiation discourse, produced in an authentic organizational environment – is difficult, because participants are protective of potentially sensitive corporate information, or because they are reluctant about being observed and recorded on the job.
(Planken, 2002: 51).

In addition to authentic and simulated types of data, the most recent type of business discourse research has made reference to manipulated forms of data in order to investigate the response of a particular target readership to a specific aspect of language. This could be, for instance, the use of English in advertising texts rather than the national language of a particular country, the use of one type of argumentation strategy in a fund-raising letter rather than another, or the use of a particular type of pronoun in an email message. In this type of investigation, reference is usually made initially to a set of authentic data and a series of test items are then developed on the basis of that authentic data representing the target variable. The 2005 study by Nickerson, Gerritsen and van Meurs, for instance, refers both to the texts used in original advertising campaigns, as part of an authentic corpus of advertising texts containing English, together with a set of manipulated test items, used with different target readers to investigate the effects of including English in advertising in glossy magazines (Nickerson, Gerritsen & van Meurs, 2005). As we will discuss in Parts 2 and 3, this type of investigation has been a hallmark of the type of research generally referred to as *document design*, which has developed largely in Belgium and the Netherlands to investigate and improve the effectiveness of technical, professional and, most recently, business documents.

The link between data and methodology: multimethod research

One of the defining features of business discourse research is that it has not relied on any one approach or methodology. In the analysis of authentic data in particular, researchers have allowed themselves to be data rather than theory-driven, and have selected the most appropriate type of analysis on the basis of the data set they have been interested in. In this respect, business discourse researchers have taken a similar stance to that of the genre analysts John Swales and Vijay Bhatia. They have been more interested in saying something useful about a set of data through reference to an appropriate theoretical approach and associated methodology (data-driven research), rather than the other way around (theory-related research). In the process, they may also have been able to make a contribution to the development of theory. As we will discuss in Part 3, however, similar types of data have often been analysed using the same approach, such that conversational analysis or discourse analysis, for instance, have often been considered the most appropriate methods of analysing spoken interaction in business meetings; genre analysis (which itself allows for a combination of different methodologies) has been widely used in the analysis of written business discourse. It has also been characteristic of business discourse to combine one or more approaches in order to say something useful about a set of data. We will return to this combinability or multimethod approach, and the multidisciplinarity it has led to, as a central theme in the next chapter and in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 in Part 3.

Research purpose: description and prescription

Business discourse research has been both descriptive and prescriptive in its research aims. With its roots partly in the business communication tradition in North America and the applied linguistics tradition elsewhere, much of the early research that was carried out at the end of the twentieth century was pedagogically motivated. Business language was investigated not as an end to itself, but largely to inform teaching or training programmes, for pre- or post-experience business people respectively. As we will see in Part 2, when we look at the ways in which business discourse research has been applied, some business discourse research involving needs analysis or linguistic surveys, remains prescriptive in its aims in that it seeks to improve language training provision for the business people of the future.

Other studies, such as those in document design that we look at in Part 3 are also unashamedly prescriptive in their aims, since the main research aim is to improve the effectiveness of specific types of business writing on the basis of text analysis combined with experimental investigation. In contrast, although the pedagogical or wider prescriptive implications are often clear, there is now a large body of work in business discourse where the primary aim is to describe and interpret, therefore understand better, how people communicate using talk or writing as social action in commercial organizations in order to get their work done. As we will discuss in Part 3 this may be through reference to a variety of different types of information collected using a variety of different methods, including a written survey or interviews with business people, a corpus of written documents or spoken events, or a case-study approach focusing on one particular organization.

English versus other business languages

There has been an undeniable bias towards English in the research carried out in business language over the past two decades. This is partly due to the status that English holds as an international business language and also as a consequence of the ESP/applied linguistics background that many business discourse researchers share. As we will see in Parts 2 and 3, many researchers have focused on English, or they have included English in their investigations together with other languages (see Data 1.4 for a rare example of work on business texts comparing English and Arabic, by Mohammed Al-Ali, 2004). The exceptions to this have been the small group of European researchers such as those included in section 1.5 below, as exemplified by the Austrian researcher Eva Lavric (as profiled below), and Asian researchers such as Lorrita Yeung, Li Wei, Zhu Hua, Li Yue, Margie Li, Yuling Pan, and Keiko Emmett. The latter group, for instance, have given (monolingual) accounts of Cantonese (Yeung, 1997; 1998), Putonghua (Pan, 1994; Li Wei, Zhu Hua & Li Yue, 2001; Li, 1999) and Japanese (Emmett, 2003) (see also the three recent collections on Asian business discourses published in 2005 and 2006; Bargiela-Chiappini & Gotti, 2005; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2005a; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2006). The work of Lorrita Yeung is especially relevant here and also unique in that it includes both contrastive studies of Chinese/Australian management discourse (Yeung, 2000; 2003; 2004a; 2004b) and monolingual studies of Chinese management discourse (Yeung 1997; 1998). Finally, there is a small but growing body of research on business communication in South America (e.g. Barbara, Celani, Collins & Scott, 1996; Thatcher 2000a; dos Santos Pinto, 2002; Conaway & Wardrope, 2004), which also includes contrastive studies such as Thatcher (1999; 2000b; 2000c) and de Moraes Garcez (1993).

In the next chapter we will talk more about the dominance of English and Anglo-Saxon perspectives in business discourse research, and the problems that this may pose in reporting on the findings of investigations into intercultural business communication.

Eva Lavric* and her colleagues at the Wirtschaftsuniversität (WU) in Vienna. A focus on languages other than English

As a specialist in Romance languages, Lavric has instigated a number of major projects over the past fifteen years looking at code, i.e. language, choice in various different types of business and professional settings in Austria and beyond. Her 1991 study, for instance, is a (quantitative) language needs review among the alumni of the WU, which looks in detail at the relationship between levels of language proficiency and professional activities. One of the most interesting findings is that the more proficient a speaker is, the more likely he or she will be to engage in a professional communication activity, such as the creation of export opportunities in business requiring communication with a foreign language partner. This study is particularly interesting as it centres on the language needs of Austrian professionals in communication with their Eastern European neighbours in the late 1980s, just as the political map of Europe was about to change. Other studies have also looked at the use of and need for languages other than English, notably French, Italian and Spanish, within the Austrian business context (e.g. Daublebsky, 2000; Kubista-Nugent, 1996; Rheindt, 1997; Seeböck, 1999). These, and the many other projects originating in the Viennese group, provide a picture of language use that belies the assumed dominance of English as a lingua franca in business communication and the corresponding attention that it has received in previous studies.

* Eva Lavric is now at the University of Innsbruck, Austria

Data 1.4 A comparative corpus-based analysis of English and Arabic job application letters

Mohammed Al-Ali (2004) used genre analysis to identify and describe the main components and rhetorical strategies used by Arabic and English writers to articulate the same communicative purpose, i.e. to elicit a call for a job interview. The data for the study consisted of 60 application letters, written by 30 English and 30 Arabic university teachers based in Jordan. Applicants had responded to either of two simulated, but roughly identical job advertisements, one in English and one in Arabic, for a teaching assistant position at a Jordanian University. The advertisements were both advertised by the researcher in Jordanian daily newspapers. To investigate similarities and differences between the writer groups in terms of their preferences for organizing the genre, across cultures and across languages, Al-Ali used a *moves* analysis in which he compared the relative occurrence of genre components, and the types and average length of these strategic moves, across cultures. Overall, the two groups of writers used different frequencies and different moves sequences to achieve the same communicative purpose. Also, the Arabic letters contained moves that none of the English letters did, such as 'glorifying the prospective employer', and 'invoking compassion'. By the same token, the English letters included moves that were not found in the Arabic letters, such as supportive discussions to promote the candidate and explicit requests for a job interview. Al-Ali's findings suggest that different rhetorical strategies are regarded as effective in different cultures and, at a higher level, that culture is a determinant factor of genre and poses constraints on writers' rhetorical options. More specifically, the findings suggest that an awareness of the cultural specificity of generic patterns employed in the genre of application letter in the two languages under study deserves special attention in Arabic and English (business) writing curricula for FL learners. This observation is also likely to be relevant for other genres and other national cultures.

The importance of the organizational context

The final hallmark of business discourse research that we will discuss here is that it has become increasingly concerned with the role played by the organizational context in shaping the spoken and written genres that evolve within business organizations and the language that is used to realize them. Business discourse researchers do not consider language in isolation as their object of study, but they seek to establish how written texts and spoken events reflect the social and organizational contexts in which they are used. All of the studies that we refer to in Part 3 when we talk about doing business discourse research are examples of contextualized language analysis or its experimental investigation. To conclude this section we will discuss the landmark study carried out during the 1990s, by the Belgian researcher Sonja Vandermeeren, that makes a definitive link between language use on the one hand, and the business context on the other.

Vandermeeren's large-scale project completed at the end of the 1990s (e.g. Vandermeeren, 1998; 1999) surveyed foreign language use in European business, focusing on companies in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Hungary. The project aimed not only to identify patterns of language use within the target corporations, but also to establish why these patterns existed, whether there was a link between foreign language use and export performance, the attitudes held by employees towards the use of foreign languages, foreign language needs in general – including unmet needs, and the strategies that could be employed to improve foreign language proficiency. In 1993 and 1994, corporations representing the car components sector and the electrical and electronics industry were surveyed in the five countries, resulting in a response from 415 corporations. For Germany, France and the Netherlands, for instance, this accounted for 143, 83 and 81 corporations respectively. The study provides a great deal of detailed information on the use of foreign languages within the responding corporations, but its most interesting aspect is the relationship it establishes between the need for languages and the corporations' business activities.

As in the studies within the framework of the European Union co-ordinated by Stephen Hagen that we profile in Chapter 4, although English was in widespread use in Vandermeeren's study, other languages were also used and were also considered necessary by her specialist informants. For instance, 42% of the French companies reported that they used German almost always in correspondence with German companies, compared to only 30% who almost always used English, and likewise, although just over 30% of the German companies reported that they almost always used English in correspondence with French companies, almost 25% reported that they almost always used French. As Vandermeeren observes, at least for German–French written business interaction in 1993 and 1994, English did not dominate as a lingua franca and a considerable number of the corporations chose to use the first language of their business partner.

The study also contains information on the languages used in specific documents, and among the many interesting findings, one that stands out is the fact that although some of the German companies produced pre- and postsale documents in French for their French business partners, other corporations communicated before a sale in French and then followed up the transaction in German. A similar situation exists for the

French companies in correspondence with their German business partners, since German was used almost by almost 50% of the respondents for presales correspondence, compared to only 30% for postsales documents, where French was also used as an alternative.

Vandermeeren's work contains a interesting discussion on the consequences of language choice for export performance, looking specifically at the relationship between 'standardization' i.e. the selection of English as a lingua franca for all transactions, versus 'adaptation' i.e. the conscious choice of using your business partner's language. At least for the French corporations who responded to the survey, the choice of German in correspondence with German business partners seemed to be associated with a better export performance than where companies had 'standardized' their correspondence and chosen English. Her findings underline the importance of understanding the impact of foreign language use and business performance. Indeed her study shows the value of empirical business discourse research in deconstructing the complex relationship between language and business, and, as a result, being able to make appropriate recommendations to the business community.

1.4 Different approaches to business discourse research

In addition to choosing between descriptive and prescriptive approaches within business discourse research, researchers in the field have also studied the influence of power and status in language use in business settings, or the communication that takes place between different cultures, or they have taken a critical approach to business discourse on ideological and political grounds. We will look at each of these aspects in turn, as important areas of concern within the wider field of business discourse research.

Discourse and power

The workings of power and status in business organizations have been the focus of interest of a number of business discourse researchers who view language as 'powerful action' (e.g. Yeung, 2004a; 2004b, for a series of publications looking at interlingual and intercultural banking discourses in Australia and Hong Kong). In Chapter 4, we will look in detail at a large-scale project centred on power and language called the 'Language in the Workplace Project', involving a team of linguists under the direction of Janet Holmes (e.g. Holmes, 2000a) based at the University of Wellington, in New Zealand. One of their latest studies, for instance, analyses the relevance of status and the exercise of power through the use of directives in a New Zealand workplace, using speech act theory as a theoretical framework (Vine, 2004). In this study, the power differences observed tend to be minimized through the use of mitigation and the gender of the (female) managers observed seems to contribute to the preference for a participative style of management, which in turn tends to empower lower level staff. The studies that fall within the LWP project all provide examples of how important the role of language is in creating and/or maintaining power relationships in business organizations.

Researchers examining power relations at work have also tended to be sympathetic to a critical approach that seeks to account for inequality and unfairness (see below). Feminist approaches to the analysis of business discourse, for instance, partly attribute power inequalities to persisting, if subtle, gender discrimination that forces women managers to choose between family or career. Until recently, studies in language and gender in the workplace have followed the traditional view that men and women, understood as monolithic categories, speak differently, helping to reaffirm stereotypical ideas such as 'men are direct and competitive, while women are more tentative and collaborative', that most western societies hold (e.g. as exemplified by the work of the American sociolinguist Deborah Tannen in publications such as the 1995 volume *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men at Work – Language, Sex and Power*). The emphasis on the distinguishing features of men's talk as opposed to women's talk is, however, gradually changing and studies in language and gender in the workplace are now moving away from differences in gender and are concentrating on the effects that contextual features can have on the communication of men and women at the workplace. Some workplace studies have, for example, demonstrated that men's and women's styles of communication show considerable variation not only between groups (men–women) but also, and more importantly, within gender groups (men–men and women–women) (Holmes & Marra, 2004). Another interesting perspective on language and gender in the workplace has resulted from considering how power roles, real or perceived, operate in workplace communication. Recent studies have revealed a complex situation, sometimes helping to debunk long-standing gender myths (e.g. Gimenez, 2006; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Holmes, 2005; Mullany, 2003; 2007; Peck, 2000; 2005). In one of these, for instance, Holmes and Stubbe (2003), demonstrate that at a meeting the chair tends to talk longer than any other participant, regardless of their gender, and also that women managers use imperatives to get things done and are as good as men at using humour (see also Chapter 2 for a discussion of the multidisciplinary nature of Mullany's work).

Other researchers who take a similar approach are the North American scholar Karen Lee Ashcraft (profiled below), the Austrian researcher Marlene Miglbauer who is investigating gender and power in banking contexts in Austria and Croatia, and the British feminist sociolinguist Deborah Cameron who has focused on power and women's discourse in business settings (see Chapter 4 for details on one of her studies that reveals the (inappropriate) nature of the language strategies provided in communication training targeted at women).

Profile 1.1 Karen Lee Ashcraft

Associate Professor, Department of Communication, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, USA.
(http://www.communication.utah.edu/faculty/pages/ashcraft.html)

Trained as: A student of human communication and an ethnographer

Inspired by: Cultural, critical studies of organization and feminist scholarship

Speciality: Organizational and occupational cultures and identities

Life: Born, educated and living in the USA

For:

- 'Articulating the distinctive contribution of communications studies to scholarship of work.'
- 'Blending the more typical attention of organization scholars to today's workplace settings with a historically conscious interest in how public discourse organizes gendered labour relations.'
- 'A fuller account of "intersectionality", or the ways in which gender interacts with race, class, sexuality, age, and other systems of identity and power.'
- 'Gendered organizational communication scholars articulating their distinctive contributions and relevance to wider audiences of scholars and practitioners.'
- The development of complex, candid perspectives on sexuality – however taboo and politically contentious – that could usefully disrupt the foundations of any "science" of work and organization.'

Against:

- 'Culture as a unified phenomenon' or as a concept used to 'capture aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and so forth . . . yet to obscure the complex intersections across these varied aspects of identity.'
- 'Extended discussions of ethnographic positionality for its own sake; to me, these often sound like self-absorbed scholarly confessionals.'
- 'The current trend among critical and postmodern organization scholars to focus analyses of resistance on discourse and micro-practice, often to the exclusion of broader temporal and material frames.'

Quotations:

- 'I study the relationship between organization, power, and identity. I investigate how communication theory and practice creates, sustains, obscures, and transforms their complex connection.'
- 'A common purpose guides my work: to promote productive dialogue between organization theory and practice in an effort to generate feasible forms of organizational justice.'
- 'In many ways, the discipline of communication studies is interdisciplinary in nature and the sub-field of organizational communication is no exception.'
- 'I would place myself on that part of the social constructionist continuum that acknowledges material realities beyond text, even some basic realities independent of language.'
- 'For me "language" usually refers to actual talk or vocabularies-in-use, and in that sense, might be almost synonymous with – or, at least, practically interchangeable with – "communication". I generally use "discourse" to refer to more crystallized, meso- or macro-narratives about something, or to what might be seen as a collection or distillation of talk/texts.'
- 'I believe that all organizational scholarship carries political implications, whether these are admitted or not. The absence of a visible political agenda should not be mistaken for neutrality, for knowledge is always situated, and a view from nowhere is not possible.'
- 'The larger history of feminist studies is fraught with ambivalence, which invites us to see power as repressive *and* productive, centralized/institutionalized/structured *and* localized/diffuse, imposed *and* self-policed, and so forth.'

Critical approaches and business discourse

The label 'critical' has become something of an attitude, an attempt to provide a new perspective on traditional ways of seeing the world and engaging with it. The literature is full of 'critical' studies in a variety of disciplines with an equally varied set of ideas and motivations. It is perhaps possible, however, to generalize that researchers in the critical tradition embrace a reflexive and self-reflexive stance on the subject of the study, the way they study it and in their role as researchers. The website on Critical Thinking (http://www.criticalthinking.org/) provides the following definition of 'critical':

> Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy,

> precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. (http://www.criticalthinking.org/about/)

In the last two decades critical approaches have proliferated, not least in the study of the language of management and other types of professional discourse, and political engagement with the inequalities generated by dominant discourses has come to be seen as an important research motivation. Critical discourse analysts are purposively engaged with the inequalities and asymmetries in social practices and with a commitment to changing it. They have looked, for instance, at the ideology of the language of marketization of higher education (Fairclough, 1993), at the ideology of clinical practice (Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite & White, 2003) and that of the Internet (Berry, 2004). It is worth remembering that 'critical' does not only refer to research practices that question social injustice and inequality; 'critical' is a definition for researchers who apply self-reflexivity in their work and remain open to continuous change, inspired by their findings and by practitioners' needs and feedback.

Text-based or field-based research with a 'critical' label remains in its infancy in business discourse, however, since many linguists involved in the analysis of business language have shied away from a critical positioning that espouses a political agenda for social change and have preferred to maintain a more neutral stance. The exceptions to this are the gender and feminist researchers on both sides of the Atlantic that we have introduced above (e.g. Peck, 2005; Mullany, 2003; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003; Gherardi, 1995), and the pioneering studies by Sharon Livesey in the *Journal of Business Communication* and the *Management Communication Quarterly* (e.g. 1999; 2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c) that have provided a critical analysis of the corporate discourse realized by corporations such as Shell, McDonalds and ExxonMobil (see Data 1.5 below for an overview). As we will discuss in the next chapter, this type of qualitative, multi-approach analysis may provide a fruitful line of enquiry for business discourse researchers in the future.

Data 1.5 An overview of Sharon Livesey's work in the *Journal of Business Communication*

1. *McDonalds*: in her award-winning 1999 case study, Livesey examines the public discourse of an alliance between McDonalds and the Environmental Defense Fund in the US which drew both on the (then) emerging discourse of market environmentalism, and on issues of command and control. She comments

that 'the McDonald's–EDF partnership was at once constrained by this discursive struggle over the environment and a constitutive element in the struggle itself' (1999: 5).

2. *Royal Dutch/Shell Group*: the 2001 study of Shell's public discourse in response to criticisms of its plans to de-commission the Brent Spar and its (controversial) operations in Ogoniland, Nigeria, extends Mauws and Phillips' (1995) use of Wittgenstein's term 'language games' together with Foucauldian discourse theory, to deconstruct Shell's engagement with, and 'cautious embrace of the language of sustainable development'. Livesey argues that 'such local conflicts over meaning-making around the natural environment must be understood in terms of discursive struggle at the socio-political level where they both reflect and influence the dynamics of cultural and institutional change' (2001: 58).

3. *ExxonMobil*: the 2002 study of advertorials produced by ExxonMobil draws both on rhetorical analysis and (Foucauldian) discourse analysis 'to illuminate the role of corporate public discourse in maintaining organizational legitimacy and influencing social and institutional stability and change' (2002c: 117). Livesey's analysis shows that 'the ExxonMobil texts reactualize other texts, specifically; discourses of environment and economic development articulated in *Brundtland** and entailed in contemporaneous climate negotiations under the umbrella of the UN' (2002c: 139).

* The *Brundtland Report (Our Common Future)* was a highly influential document produced in 1987 by the UN World Commission for Environment and Development.

In his chapter on critical applied linguistics for the Blackwell *Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Alastair Pennycook (2004) remarks that the notion of critical is as contentious as the role and scope of applied linguistics and argues for a critical turn in applied linguistics with reference to Christopher Candlin's insightful observations on the topic, over a decade earlier. Much of what both Candlin and Pennycook suggest can also be seen to apply to business discourse research if we pose the question '*What happens when business discourse research goes critical?*'

Quote 1.4 Critical applied linguistics

One of the central goals of applied linguistics has been to place questions of language in their social context. . . . It is in this orientation to the socially relevant, the contextualized, the real, that we can find another version of the critical. In his plenary address to the 8th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA), Candlin (1990) asked 'What happens when Applied Linguistics goes critical?' Candlin argued for a critical dimension to applied linguistics for two main reasons: First, because applied linguistics had started to lose touch with the problems and issues around language faced by ordinary language users. Applied linguistics, he argued, was becoming an arcane, sectarian and theory-oriented discipline that

Quote 1.4 (Continued)

was increasingly distanced from the everyday concerns of language use. Second, he suggested, a critical dimension was needed to reveal 'hidden connections . . . between language structure and social structure, between meaning-making and the economy of the social situation, but also connections between different branches of the study of language and their relationship to our central objective, the amelioration of individual and group existences through a focus on problems of human communication. A study of the socially-constituted nature of language practice' (1990, pp. 461–2). In this view, then, critical applied linguistics can be seen as an attempt to make applied linguistics matter, to remake the connections between discourse, language learning, language use and the social and political contexts in which these occur.
(Pennycook 2004: 789).

Intercultural business discourse

One very fruitful area of research in business discourse has been the investigation of the communication that takes place when different cultures come into contact with each other in order to do business. In a recent review of the issues and challenges of intercultural business discourse research, Bargiela-Chiappini, Bülow-Møller, Nickerson, Poncini and Zhu (2003) discuss the priorities and concerns that informed and motivated the methodological choices of the five authors involved in the discussion. A synopsis of some of the most salient findings of their work appears in Quote 1.5 and serves as an introduction to ways in which business discourse researchers have viewed intercultural communication. Chapter 2 will look at recent and future developments in intercultural business discourse research in some detail; the purpose of this section is to introduce the field and some of the issues that have been brought to the fore in recent research.

Quote 1.5 Intercultural business communication: the challenges facing researchers

1. The presence of 'fluid roles and flexible relationships' observed in intercultural business meetings (Poncini: 78), which forces the analyst to move beyond using limiting national stereotypes as interpretative categories. Further on this point, Bülow-Møller speaks of 'multiple identities' (84) as reflected in 'transactional discourse' (85). This is characterized by the suspension of fixed expectations and judgement, the tolerance of ambiguity and the willingness to engage in building new discursive frames (85).

2. The importance of professional experience as an attribute in intercultural negotiations, the importance of which stands well above cultural differences and individual linguistic competence: '[s]easoned business people . . . pay much less attention to culture and more to terms of agreement' (Bülow-Møller: 82); and 'students demonstrated time and again that an extensive knowledge of English grammar . . . could never compete with twenty years of experience as an international negotiator in successfully closing a deal' (Nickerson: 82).
3. The ethnocentrism of extant analytical categories and theories of crosscultural communication and the mono-disciplinary nature of much comparative and contrastive intercultural business research.

(Adapted from Bargiela et al., 2003).

One of the most comprehensive (and comprehensible) theories of intercultural communication with a focus on the use of language in a business setting is provided by the British researcher Helen Spencer-Oatey. Working within the specific context of intercultural negotiations, Spencer-Oatey distinguishes five interrelated domains all of which contribute to building a working relationship. In a series of landmark publications on its theory and application, she has referred to her framework as 'rapport management' (Spencer-Oatey, 2000a; 2000b; see also the volume co-authored by Helen Spencer-Oatey and Peter Franklin (2006) on Intercultural Communication). As in Gina Poncini's work on multilingual business meetings discussed in Chapter 2 and in Mirjaliisa Charles' work on negotiations that we have introduced above, the emphasis is therefore on how participants work together to find a solution, rather than on defining the communication breakdowns that may occur (see also Ken Willing's pioneering work on white collar multicultural workplaces in Australia as profiled in Chapter 4). As a theory of interaction, Spencer-Oatey's framework (see also Chapter 2) pinpoints a number of key dimensions that may play a role in the success or failure of intercultural communication in business contexts, including content, the organization of talk, politeness, style and deference, and body language. Applications of Spencer-Oatey's theoretical framework that we will discuss later in this book (in Part 3), include Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) in their account of two business meetings between Chinese and British native speakers, and Planken (2005) in her investigation of how rapport is managed differently by professional and aspiring negotiators.

Concept 1.2 Iris Varner on intercultural business communication

Varner (2000) provides a conceptual model for intercultural business communication that combines business strategy, intercultural strategy and communication strategy. In doing so, she makes the crucial link between the business context on the one hand and the discourse that realizes that context on the other. Her work is a rare example of a US-based researcher acknowledging the role played by discourse in a macro-theory, perhaps as a result of her European background. We will look at her co-authored teaching materials (with Linda Beamer) in Chapter 5.

Varner comments:

'. . . cultural strategy, [the] business strategy, and [the] communication strategy are interrelated. Together they formulate an intercultural business communication strategy that presents a new construct that is greater than the sum of its parts.'
(Varner, 2000: 53).

1.5 Business discourse around the world

In the final section of this chapter we will look at business discourse research around the world as well as profiling a number of researchers that represent each geographical area and cultural tradition. Turning first to North America, we can see that disciplinary boundaries and questions of identity have been common concerns for researchers involved with the field of business communication in particular, the field in which some researchers interested in business discourse are active. Business communication is characterized by researchers such as Priscilla Rogers (e.g. Rogers, 2000) and Jane Thomas (e.g. Thomas, 1997) who have specifically focused on language in their research work, while at the same time making a contribution to innovative teaching practice. Rogers' work on mission statements with the applied linguist John Swales appears in Part 3.

Concept 1.3 The need for 'prognosis' in business communication

In his plenary address given at the 2002 European Convention for the Association for Business Communication, Chris Candlin argued that business communication work both in the US and elsewhere has not actually engaged itself much with the structures and systems of business, since it has been largely language and genre oriented. In other words, its focus has been on 'communication', rather than on 'business'. Instead of concentrating exclusively on the interpretation of generic structure and textualization, or 'diagnostic analysis', Candlin proposes a 'prognostic' approach to organizational practices based on Soft Systems Methodology (SSM).

Two phases are envisaged in this approach:

(1) the construction of ideal system models based on data gathered through a variety of ethnographic methods and;

(2) the comparison of these models with practitioners' accounts of their own experiential world, with a view to working out feasible organizational change. The whole process, which is largely discursive in nature, is in Candlin's view the essence of business communication.

Business communication is a well-established component in North American academic programmes, and as Bargiela-Chiappini (2004: 25) has recently written, it tends to struggle with a competition between theory on the one hand and application on the other 'i.e. the conflict of interest arising between research and teaching/training priorities'. Outside of the business communication community, scholars working within disciplines such as rhetoric, speech communication and organizational communication, have also sought to understand the role played by language in the construction of (business) organizations. The work of Linda Putnam (profiled below) is an example of this being both multidisciplinary and multimethod in nature, for instance, in her work in the 1990s on communication and negotiation (e.g. Putnam & Roloff, 1992), and her co-edited collection of papers focusing on organizational communication from a (US) perspective over the course of two decades (e.g. Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983; Jablin & Putnam, 2001; Putnam & Krone, 2006).

Profile 1. 2 Linda Putnam

George T. and Gladys H. Abell Professor, Department of Communication,
Texas A&M University, USA.
(http://www.tamu.edu/comm/people/profiles/putnam.html)

Trained as: a student of communication and rhetorical studies

Inspired by: Organizational communication scholarship, Karl Weick, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Richard Harvey Brown

Speciality: Organizational communication, conflict management, negotiation, organizational discourse

Life: Born in the United States, educated at the University of Minnesota, and taught at Purdue University in Indiana.

For:

- 'Looking for the interconnection between management studies, organization studies and discourse analysis.'

Profile 1. 2 (Continued)

- 'Organizational communication as a social scientific field of study within the discipline of communication with the ability to offer concrete guidance to understanding important problems as well as complex processes.'
- 'Methods that fit research questions, puzzles that motivate research, and arenas of study.'

Against:

- 'Taking the linguistics into work settings without trying to understand organizing as a process.'

Quotations:

- 'Discourse has developed into a much more sophisticated phenomena in organizational analysis – focusing on how organizations are constituted through discourse, how discourse sets forth different relationships between structure and action, and how discourse underlines organizational practices through enacted routines and ways these routines shape texts.'
- 'For me the critical aspect of culture is how it forms a nexus for focusing on the intersection of institutional sets, marketplace issues, and national cultures.'
- 'Linguistics can offer considerable insights into both the epistemic and the methodological aspects of organizational research.'
- 'The links with social theory are crucial for intersections with organizational theory in the study of discourse.'
- 'I believe that social phenomena are constructed through social practices, but that practices become reified, recurrent, and reproductive.'
- 'Discourse seems to encompass issues of practices and social theory. Language for me relates to the finer details of verbal interaction.'
- 'Culture is a process that is enacted.'
- 'Science is a language game and the role of the authors, audiences, and knowledge production is part of that game.'
- 'My work on negotiation and interactions is governed around issues related to transforming disputes, changing definitions of the situation, and producing outcomes that enhance learning and address problems differently.'
- 'It is vital for someone to know that considerable research operates with a value lens rather than being value free. This value, however, is not necessarily a political agenda or a power/resistance approach but a goal for improving human relationships.'
- 'I believe through my qualitative research that data, concepts/theories, context, and methods interface and talk with each other.'
- 'For me, theories and concept development are important elements of discourse analysis. They are the elements that transfer and build knowledge that moves beyond studies or organizational settings.'

- 'For my work, power resides in the production and reproduction of social systems that privilege some organizational members and marginalize others, but these are not dominant coalitions per se as much as they are patterns of organizing and processes of instantiating dominant systems.'
- 'Gender is a process of social construction and a way of producing particular practices.'

Other notable work of relevance for business discourse research includes a collection of papers on the rhetoric of international professional communication edited by Lovitt & Goswami (1999) in which a group of (largely) US-based researchers consider the role played by (national) culture in different forms of professional communication. Although the North American tradition has not tended to prioritize the type of close text analysis that is a hallmark of many of the (European-based) studies that we will talk about later in this book, it has been of enormous influence in terms of the macro-theories that it has produced, such as the media richness theory proposed by Daft & Lengel (1984) and the concept of organizational genres proposed by Yates & Orlikowski (1992) working in the new rhetoric tradition.

Quote 1.6 On the nature of business communication from a US perspective

. . . we do appear to share an interest in providing practical knowledge that can enhance the communication effectiveness of all kinds of organizational stakeholders, particularly related to business.
(Rogers, 2001: 21).

As Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson point out, 'disciplinary boundaries have not traditionally been an area of such concern on the European side of the Atlantic' (2002: 275). Researchers have come primarily out of the applied linguistics field, and have been more likely to be involved with a close text analysis of the written texts or spoken events that they have investigated than their North American counterparts. Their work has focused on intercultural negotiations, business meetings and corporate communication (e.g. emails, annual reports, letters to shareholders, etc.). Despite the dominance of English, an increasing variety of other European languages used in business discourse have been investigated, including French (van der Wijst, 1996; Christian, 1998), Dutch (van der Wijst, 1996), German (Zilles, 2004), Spanish (Villemoes, 2003; Tebeaux, 1999; Candia, 2001; Charteris-Black & Ennis, 2001; Ulijn & Verweij, 2000;

Conaway & Wardrope, 2004), Danish (Grindsted, 1997), Norwegian (Neumann, 1997) and Portuguese (Silvestre, 2003; 2004; Pereira, 2004). The 2003 compendium of Spanish for Specific Purposes from 1985 to 2002, for instance, compiled by Myriam Bueno Lajusticia (Bueno Lajusticia, 2003), provides an extensive illustration of the work that is currently in progress outside of the English speaking world. The construct of 'context' has been of concern to European researchers and specifically how to bridge the gap between the different contextual dimensions that are of relevance in business discourse, such as the wider social context, the organizations investigated and the individuals who work within them, and on the whole, the European business discourse tradition has tended to be neutral in its stance and has been largely uncritical in its approach. The work of Gina Poncini, profiled below, which we will also refer to in Chapter 2, is an example of a Europe-based business discourse researcher who has investigated the use of as many as eight different (European) languages used in multilingual meetings.

Profile 1.3 Gina Poncini

Associate Professor in the Department of Language and Culture, Faculty of Political Science, European Economics Degree Programme, at the University of Milan, http://www.spolitiche.unimi.it/corsi-di-laurea/economia/ENG/index.php

Trained as: An applied linguist (undergraduate degree in marketing)

Speciality: Intercultural business communication, management communication

Inspired by: Business and management, interactional sociolinguistics and ethnography

Life: Born in the US, educated in the US (including Master's) and the UK (PhD). Has lived in Italy since 1978, near the border with Switzerland, working first in international banking in Milan before starting to teach in Switzerland in 1988 and then in Italy.

For:

- More 'going into the company' to do research on actual communicative practices in business.
- More interdisciplinary studies and collaborative work with scholars from related disciplines in business and in general more awareness of business communication and corporate communication issues, especially for linguists in Europe working with business discourse.

Quotations:

- 'Communication is interdisciplinary, and with business representing such a complex environment, the use of multimethods is especially able to provide a richer picture. An understanding of the wider business context and the way language can be used strategically is important.'

- 'Focusing on miscommunication in intercultural settings is limiting because this approach assumes intercultural interactions are problematic and consequently tends to ignore factors possibly contributing to successful intercultural communication.'
- 'In multicultural settings [. . .] there would clearly be limits in viewing each meeting participant as a representative of a homogenous national culture without recognizing individual differences or the business context.'
- 'One important ability for a leader's performance in multicultural, multiparty settings is that of shifting in and out of frames.'
- 'The research on business relationships, including work by the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group, has important implications for the examination of interorganizational business meetings and negotiations because it indicates some of the multiple factors affecting communication in these settings.'
- 'Training needs to give attention to the business context in intercultural business settings, especially business issues, goals, roles and relationships. This encompasses leader behaviour and the range of roles that may be enacted in business encounters.'
- 'One of the themes emerging in my research is that intercultural meetings can be viewed as a series of speech events and shifts in frames and participant roles, which occasionally take on the status of special episodes.'
- 'Intercultural meetings seem to have their own culture, or at least their own character and sense of "groupness", not necessarily linked to national cultures.'
- 'If conflict is observed [in the intercultural meetings examined] it involves factors not necessarily related to the different national cultures of participants.'

Quote 1.7 The nature of business communication from a European perspective

There seems to be a general understanding of the identification of the utilitarian goal of developing and disseminating knowledge that increases the effectiveness and efficiency of business operations.
(Louhiala-Salminen, 1999: 26) .

Elsewhere in the world other aspects of business discourse research have been a focus of attention. As we will discuss in detail in Chapter 4, the issues of power investigated in the Language in the Workplace project co-ordinated by Janet Holmes (see profile below) and her colleagues in New Zealand are a reflection of the multicultural nature of contemporary New Zealand society, as well as a concern with inequality that has characterized Australasian discourse research for a number of years.

Profile 1.4 Janet Holmes

Professor of Linguistics, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand (http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/staff/janet-holmes/holmes.aspx)

Trained as: A linguist

Inspired by: Sociolinguistics, John Pride, Dell Hymes

Speciality: Language and gender

Life: Born in Liverpool, England, university at Leeds, moved to New Zealand for work and have been there ever since . . . but travel a lot now.

For:

- Working with researchers from different disciplines
- Data-based interpretation
- Integrating quantitative and qualitative research approaches
- Valuing the background information that traditional sociolinguistic approaches supply
- Recognizing the contributions of earlier scholars

Against:

- Extreme positions in any form
- Treating reported data as evidence of what people do

Quotations:

- Approach to multidisciplinary research: 'getting in there and doing it is the answer from our perspective, not worrying too much in advance but trying with good will to make sure that you understand what the other persons' concerns are'.
- 'We tend to define culture as shared values and beliefs and ways of doing things that characterize a particular group or community of practice.'
- 'Access to the sites usually depends on knowing somebody who will vouch for you.'
- 'Sociolinguistics and pragmatics are the areas of linguistics that I would see as making the most obvious contribution to research on workplace discourse.'
- 'What is most important is to get people who want to work together; one of the ways of doing this would be to indicate what goals you are going to have for a project and then invite people perhaps for an initial discussion on how they would contribute.'
- 'I tend be a bit sceptical of the idea that there are no sociological categories and that they have to be constructed anew every time somebody speaks; every time we speak we either re-enforce or challenge the patterns but the speakers are making use of what they assume are the norms; part of our jobs as sociolinguists is to capture those norms where we can and to describe them so that we can interpret what is going on at the microlevel.'

- 'I tend to use interactional sociolinguistics as a broad framework within which to describe context. Within that, you tend pragmatically to describe as much of the context that is needed to understand what is going on.'
- 'Social constructionism has a lot to offer but there are insights to be gained from realizing that people bring to the interaction assumptions and preconceptions and stereotypes about gender, status, ethnicity, etc.'
- 'I do think we are not totally constrained agents, we *can* contest and challenge, but a lot of the time we do not, we go along with things and we follow the patterns that people expect. We tend only to notice when people break the rules.'

Finally, outside of Europe and the English-speaking world, there has been a proliferation of work on languages and, significantly, cultures other than English and the Anglo-Saxon cultures in business contexts, resulting in a wealth of information on business cultures as diverse as Argentina (Gimenez, 2002), Turkey (Akar, 2002), and China (Zhu, 2005). The 1990s in particular were characterized by intercultural business analyses of interactions involving Asian languages (together with English), mainly Japanese (e.g. Miller, 1994; Marriott, 1997; Yamada, 1997) but also Chinese (Bilbow, 1995; 1997; Rogerson-Revell, 1998; see also Yeung, 1998 for a crosscultural study of Hong Kong and Australian bank meetings). In recent years, the interest in business discourse in Asian contexts has grown to include field studies of the Malaysian workplace (Nair-Venugopal, 2000; 2001) and the Indian workplace (Kaul, 2003; Kaul, Ansari & Rai, 2005), of Chinese and Chinese–British interactions (Bilbow, 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2005), and of the role of English vis-à-vis other Asian languages (Kameda, 2001; Miller, 2000; Li So-mui & Mead, 2000). Finally, at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006, three landmark collections on Asian business discourse appeared in the *Linguistics Insights Series* and the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* (Bargiela-Chiappini & Gotti, 2005; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2005a; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2006), including the work of researchers such as Yeonkwon Jung (2005) for Korean business correspondence, Habil Hadina and Shameem Rafik-Galea (2005) for Malaysian electronic business discourse, Kusum Dhanania and Sandhya Gopakumaran (2005) for Marwari business discourse in India and Grace Chye Lay Chew (2005) for Vietnamese business communication. We will discuss many studies of business discourse from around the world in Part 3 of this book. To conclude this brief overview the profile of Shanta Nair-Venugopal below illustrates the work of an Asian scholar who has analysed not only the use of languages within business settings, but also, equally, the nature of intercultural business communication and the role of English within it (see also Chapter 2 for further discussion on intercultural issues in business contexts and the challenges this poses for the future of business discourse research).

Profile 1.5 Shanta Nair-Venougopal

Professor in Sociolinguistics and Intercultural Communication, School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
http://www.fssk.ukm.my/fac2/contents/cv.asp?id=953

Trained as: An applied linguist and sociolinguist (and now becoming an interculturalist)

Inspired by: Intercultural studies; politics of recognition; Noam Chomsky (as public intellectual)

Speciality: Workplace literacy and communication; intercultural communication research (rethinking ‘culture’)

Life: Born in Malaysia (of South Asian/Indian descent); educated in Malaysia and the UK (Edinburgh and Cardiff); Malaysian citizen

For:

- Revisionary views of difference; a greater understanding and appreciation of the significance of the concept of the ‘stranger’ in intercultural encounters vis-à-vis the more facile construct of the cultural ‘other’. The latter foregrounds the individual as a social actor rather than as the *ethnic*, helping to dismantle the view that ICC is wholly predicated on culture.
- Rethinking culture as the most salient construct in ICC to dismantle monochromic essentialist views and to reconceptualize it as ‘approximations of social reality’.
- Moving away from essentialist views of culture for explanations of interactional fracture and communication breakdown and incorporating the notion of personal and social identity and ‘voice’ (as a metaphor for self-expression) in ICC since individuals are firstly human and social beings.
- The local appropriation of English rather than a global monolith of English such as, for instance, localized business communication as one type of ‘multiple Englishes’ rather than a hegemonically imposed ‘standard’ English.
- Interactional models of English that expose the gap between contextualized language use and prescribed usage in business contexts which are preeminently sites of intercultural contact and contestation.

Against:

- Differences predicated as ‘problems’ rather than recognized as ‘creative practices’, and perceived similarities/commonalities seen as denying difference which conversely marginalizes the legitimacy and minimizes the significance of Otherness.

- Intercultural communication defined by Anglo-American speakers of English and within sites of aggressive assimilative immigration marked by the ideology of crosscultural adaptation and hegemonically enforced borderlands.
- The lucrative commodification of English for business communication worldwide – which I see as the 'global terrorist' (after Piyush Pandy, executive director of *Ogilvy Mather India*, 2002) of an idea – the ideology of linguistic normativity.

Quotations:

- 'To start with, when you are in the academe, your *raison d'être* is to be critical; you simply cannot afford to approach things as if they are natural or neutral phenomena. This is not to endorse deconstruction carte blanche. Good intercultural research should not only avoid the pitfalls of both essentialism and homogenization, it should also be judicious in using the criterion of "mindfulness"/"realistic cultural empathy".'
- 'I find that the most successful on-the-ground fine grained linguistic studies of workplace interactions are those that include multidisciplinary perspectives such as input from speech/communication theories and cultural studies, besides social theory, which explicate more fully both the social motivations and the meanings that underlie code and style choices. In this way emic realities emerge from etic frameworks as socio-pragmatic realizations.'
- 'The language of local team work interactions and negotiations on the shop floor tends to be the dominant local language (which may well be English as a localized community norm or lingua franca) especially in sites of outsourced operations (with the exclusion of call centres). However, many business organizations in postcolonial sites continue to expect their middle and top management to be proficient if not fluent in English and aspire towards the use of idealized norms, i.e. "good", "proper" or "quality" English, which remain abstractions.'
- 'Thus almost all English language communication skills training conducted for business and industry worldwide are based on prescribed patterns of English usage. Presented as the normative language for such purposes these are invariably available in commercially reproduced texts/materials that are the basis of a lucrative industry.'
- 'But it is data obtained from local business contexts in real time that can provide the contextual basis for developing appropriate indigenous approaches to training for business purposes in localized workplaces. For instance, it doesn't make much sense to teach native speaker norms of social interaction in communication and negotiation skills for non-native English speaking contexts that do not share the same "cultural" frames of reference.'
- 'The point is that while language teachers or trainers may be seen as the custodians of usage, usage cannot be prescribed in contexts of use but in fact may be predicted.'
- 'Commercially produced texts display a surprising lack of sociocultural awareness of the fact that in different areal sites, contexts and business settings there are

Profile 1.5 (Continued)

different ways of speaking and communicating that are a reflection of "differences" (and idiosyncrasies) in business practices, linguistic norms and social values, organizational priorities, and cultural attitudes to the use of English itself.'

- 'Globalization, or rather glocalization is a phenomenon that has to be captured in the final things one says about the workplace. The global is not resistant to the local and it is increasingly being localized as workplace culture demonstrates in many parts of the world.'

1.6 Summary

This first chapter has surveyed the field of business discourse starting with a definition of 'business discourse' and of the scope of the research activities clustered under this label. Following on from this introduction, a historical perspective of business discourse was offered with a brief discussion of landmark studies in a range of geographical and cultural contexts, together with examples of spoken and written types of data and an overview of the approaches adopted by analysts within varying methodological traditions. The concluding section focused on the cultural spread of business discourse around the world as illustrated by the diverse profiles of a number of researchers who also represent distinct disciplinary approaches.

Further reading

Bargiela-Chiappini, F., & Gotti, M. (Eds.), (2005). *Asian business discourse(s)*. Bern: Peter Lang. This volume showcases new linguistic and cultural studies of aspects of communication in Asian business contexts.

Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse. A genre-based view*. London: Continuum. This book moves genre theory away from educational contexts and into the 'real world'; the texts analysed represent the worlds of advertising, business, academia, economics, law, the media and fundraising.

Gouveia, C., Silvestre, C., & Azuaga, L. (Eds.), (2004.) *Discourse, communication and the enterprise. Linguistic perspectives*. Lisbon, Portugal: Centre for English Studies, University of Lisbon. The twenty-seven essays in this collection explore discursive strategies in written and spoken communication in a variety of countries and business settings.

Trosborg, A., & Flyvhom Jørgensen, P. E. (Eds.), (2005). *Business discourse. Texts and contexts*. Bern: Peter Lang. A collection of essays on aspects of written and spoken business communication in intra and intercultural settings, including mission statements, international contracts and decision-making meetings.

Index