Intercultural Business Communication and Simulation and Gaming Methodology

Victoria Guillén-Nieto, Carmen Marimón-Llorca & Chelo Vargas-Sierra (eds.).

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In *Intercultural Business Communication and Simulation and Gaming Methodology*, Victoria Guillén-Nieto, Carmen Marimón-Llorca and Chelo Vargas-Sierra serve up an interesting set of articles on intercultural business communication (IBC). It is important to assume, from the very beginning, that IBC is a complex disciplinary endeavour, as many studies in the last fifty years have clearly highlighted. Thus, Hall (1959 & 1966), Hofstede (1980 & 1983), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) or Schwartz (1999) have pointed out fairly different perspectives that should be considered while analysing communication. In fact, we cannot avoid studying intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, or national perspectives in order to understand the way someone can communicate within a business framework. It is important to analyse how anyone can improve his/her competence in order to communicate effectively in a business-based environment.

Some years ago Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2003) stated that interculturality should play an important role in order to communicate effectively in business settings. Thus, the fundamental constructs of communication involve an array of well-established and highly developed fields of enquiry. There are many approaches, theories and methodologies that tend to overlap. Among those methodologies which can help us improve our communicative competence in business settings is the simulation and gaming methodology, a target of this book as well.

The volume is divided into three main sections: an introductory section "explaining intercultural communication", comprising three different chapters. The second section, devoted to "applied linguistic research on intercultural business communication", is clearly the longest one, being formed by seven contributions. Finally, the third section, "simulation and gaming methodology as a vehicle for communicative competence in intercultural business settings", comprises three different texts.

The initial section tries to explain the diverse nature of intercultural communication from the perspective of different disciplines. The first chapter of this section, "Crossing disciplines in intercultural communication research", written by one of the editors of the volume (GUILLÉN-NIETO), tries to establish some parameters related to intercultural communication, offering an interesting overview on some previous analyses on the topic. This state of the art study is then followed by a text on how cultural orientations have an influence on certain nonverbal and verbal patterns of behaviour within cross-cultural communication between Spaniards and Britons. ESCANDELL-VIDAL tries to offer a new view on intercultural communication from a sociocognitive perspective in "Social cognition and intercultural communication", the second chapter of this initial section. She has observed how different disciplines play an important role when people try to communicate ideas or emotions in a social environment. Different fields of study such as neuroscience, cognitive psychology or linguistics have an important effect while communicating in intercultural settings. Finally, MATEO and YUS study "Business language from a cognitive perspective" in the third chapter of this initial unit. The need to update socio-cultural information in a wide variety of business communication exchanges, always from an inferential-social perspective, implies that international companies should always pay attention to the cognitive and cultural layout of its members, even in those cases where the language shared is the same.

After establishing a critical framework in its initial part, the second section of the book deals with specific efforts on applied linguistic research related to IBC. In the first chapter in this section, "Intercultural negotiations: Theories revisited", GRINDSTED pays attention to the two different levels implied within negotiations (instrumental and interactional). Being a communicative process, the author points out that social constructivism may be a good answer to analyse in detail all the different parameters that should be considered when developing a negotiation process within an intercultural framework. On the other hand, RONKAINEN, the author of "Multi-cultural meetings", the second contribution in this section, observes the way that Finnish people interact with business professionals from other countries, paying attention to the way that different aspects (dominance, personal relations, cultural contexts, or meeting tactics, among others) affect the way business people act while at meetings. CAMPOS-PARDILLOS and BALTEIRO-FERNÁNDEZ analyse the influence of culture on the linguistic understanding of legal aspects within real estate marketing in the third chapter of this

section, "Building bridges … and properties aplenty: Cultural problems in Spanish Marketing for real estate prospective British buyers", highlighting that there are great asymmetries while translating some web-pages on the topic. They aptly observe that the problems in those translations have to do with cultural differences between buyers and sellers, and not necessarily on the erroneous use of English grammar. Similar conclusions are drawn by GARCÍA-YESTE in the following chapter, "The language of graphic advertising in Spain: Bridging the cultural gap", where he analyses the cultural values that tend to define the Spanish advertising style, observing with further detail all the linguistic features which might reflect those values. His results point out the need for any advertising company to make an effort to adapt the messages to the receivers' cultural frame. DÍAZ-PÉREZ, the author of the fifth chapter of this second section, "Perspective selection and politeness in the production of face-threatening acts in English and Spanish", focuses on two different speech acts (requests and complaints), to point out that both the specific characteristics of the group of speakers and the communicative situation will have an influence on the choice of perspective in the production of face-threatening acts. The author considers that English native speakers tend to use negative politeness more often that their Spanish counterparts, trying to convey a message in a less threatening way for the hearer. MARTÍNEZ-LINARES, in "From hiding the speaker to persuasion: *se*-passive and *se*-impersonal constructions", provides an interesting analysis on the different kinds of se-constructions in Spanish, basing the study on a set of 30 business-related newspapers. She examines with broad detail the different functions that *se*-passive and *se*-impersonal sentences perform in communication. Politeness strategies are also analysed by MARIMÓN-LLORCA in the final chapter of this second section, "Cultural models and social discourses in business: The case of ideological-politeness strategies in service encounters". In this contribution the author has collected information taken from 30 books and web pages, offering information related to market techniques and customer service. Being mainly written by North American and British authors, the use of positive politeness conveys a positive image, despite the fact, pointed out by the author, that in their original cultures negative politeness is often preferred in social interactions.

The third section of the book pays specific attention to simulation and gaming theory in intercultural business settings and is, in my view, the most interesting part of the book. GARCÍA-CARBONELL and WATTS offer a relevant

analysis of previous studies on the topic in their initial chapter, "Principles of simulation and gaming methodology in language acquisition". This review of the state of the art of simulation and gaming methodology sets the tone for an extremely thought-provoking text on how the simulation and gaming methodology can be applied in linguistic contexts. It is RISING who, in her chapter devoted to "Business simulations as a vehicle for language acquisition", develops an empirical study based on this methodology. After carrying out a study comprising 772 university students, she points out that simulation is a highly effective methodology in order to teach English to foreign language students in the university classroom. It is very useful to observe the general guidelines that RISING offers in order to adapt business games within the English language classroom. Finally, and to round everything up, HOFSTEDE, PEDERSEN and HOFSTEDE add a final chapter, "The synthetic cultures model as a simulation and gaming methodology for intercultural sensitization and training in business settings", containing a selection of excerpts from their work *Exploring Culture*, published in 2002. Being a brief summary on their previous work, it does not add much information, but it can be used as a nice introduction to how the ten synthetic culture profiles are identified in their original work. Despite not being a very common way to round things up, this last chapter can be very useful for those becoming interested in the field of intercultural communication.

In summary, I believe this book can be a valuable tool for everyone interested in intercultural communication, complementing interesting contributions previously published on the topic.

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