FRANCESCA BARGIELA-CHIAPPINI and SANDRA HARRIS, eds., *The Languages of Business: An International Perspective*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. 257 pp.

The nine essays in this volume analyze authentic business discourse in cross- and intercultural settings. By explaining how underlying cultural values shape discourse strategies, the authors give business people practical insights for communicating effectively with those from foreign countries. Nearly half the book studies Asian/Western interactions; the rest examines European countries.

Graham T. Bilbow's "Spoken discourse in the multicultural workplace in Hong Kong: Applying a model of discourse as 'impression management'" (pp. 21-48) explains how Chinese and Westerners assign opposite values to certain discourse styles. For example, Chinese "consider that requests for opinion...demonstrate a highly deferential style of speaking. Western participant-observers, however, tend to identify proactive offers of opinion as indicative of a highly deferential conversational style" (p. 44). Bilbow argues that these differences in judgement are largely due to contrasts between Confucian and Western philosophies.

Haru Yamada's "Organization in American and Japanese meetings: Task versus relationship" (pp. 117-135) comes to the similar conclusion that Americans and Japanese have dichotomous purposes for meetings, which is why the content of a Japanese-run meeting may be misunderstood by an American, and vice versa. As Yamada illustrates, Americans may think that the use of small talk by Japanese in a business meeting is "pointless" or "irrelevant ... information" (p. 118). Yet the Japanese value small talk because their focus is on cultivating relationships, as opposed to the Americans' emphasis on independence and "the bottom line" (p. 133).

"The Asian connection: Business requests and acknowledgements" (pp. 94-114) by Joan Mulholland analyzes discourse conducted in English between Australians and Asians. She was able to isolate several semantic differences between the two cultures. For instance, an Asian 'yes' may mean "'I understand', not agreement...since the Asian may be using an acknowledgement as a means of avoiding a clear refusal to comply" (p. 101). This situation is exemplified in the following exchange:

A[ustralian]:   will you be able to decide by, say, Friday next, 16th on the quantity of [goods] to be shipped by Qantas

J[apanese]:   yes yes

...[c. 10 minutes later]

J: I will ask for a time when we can agree about the amount of [goods] to come to Sydney by Qantas (where these are the same goods as in the earlier exchange, and it is now clear that the 'yes yes' had been acknowledgement of understanding rather than agreement about the date of a decision.) (p. 102)

The volume's recurring theme is that a foreign country's discourse strategies are often misinterpreted until one comprehends the society's underlying values. Consider the case of an Asian who falls silent during a business meeting conducted in English. The Asian, coming from a Confucianist background, places high value on silence, yet the Western businessman considers knowledge without expression to be useless. This example also demonstrates that when a person speaks a foreign language, he still employs his native discourse strategies and cultural rules. Without this type of knowledge, intercultural communication suffers, which causes business relationships to deteriorate, and results in lost growth opportunities and, ultimately, lost money. An excellent remedy for reversing this downward cycle is found in this invaluable publication.

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