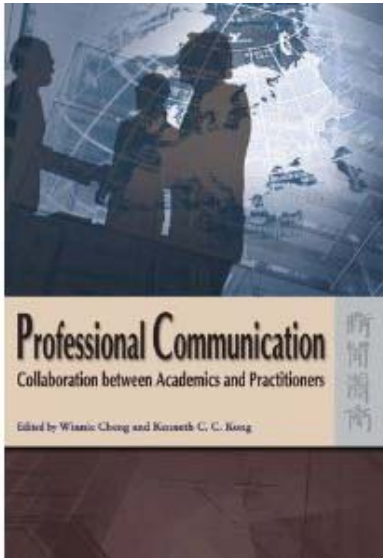




## Book Review



### **Professional Communication: Collaboration between Academics and Practitioners**

Winnie Cheng and Kenneth C.C. Kong (eds.)

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Winnie Cheng and Kenneth Kong's edited collection of essays, *Professional Communication: Collaboration between Academics and Practitioners* takes a discourse approach to professional communication with the emphasis on research-practitioner collaboration and authorship. Papers are solicited from both academics and researchers who are also practitioners in their own professions. They introduce readers to fascinating accounts of professional communication in different contexts across different regions, from Danish multicultural companies to Hong Kong academic institutions, from Dutch government to Chinese courtroom. Drawing on discourse analytic framework, the chapters provide insight for improving communication in the workplace and understanding the social construction of professional discourse. As such, the book will appeal to a variety of new researchers, students and educators in professional communication from different disciplines, as well as those already practicing their professions who would like to know to what extent intercultural professional communication studies are impacting their language use, policies and practices in professional settings.



Even more pertinent to the practitioner are the practical implications of how these research findings could be explored for use in curriculum design and material design informing professional communicative practices both locally and internationally.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, consisting Chapters 1-3, serves to set the scene by considering the methodological and conceptual issues involved in studying professional communication. The second part, comprising Chapters 4-9, may well constitute the “core / heart” of the volume, as Cheng and Kong devote six chapters to present case studies of professional communication in the Asia-Pacific Region. Finally, the third part, Chapters 10-11, considers case studies of professional communication on the European continent.

In Chapter 1 (Intercultural Professional Communication: Approaches and Issues), Cheng and Kong first review the different approaches to intercultural professional communication and explain how a discourse approach can be informed by different fields of scholarship. They also highlight some of the major issues involved in intercultural professional communication, including how and to what extent intercultural professional communication studies have succeeded in making their way into the different levels of communication and language use in professional settings.

In Chapter 2 (Business Communication across Cultures: A Theoretical Perspectives), Bargiela-Chiappini argues that intercultural business discourse (IBD) should move on to richer notions of ‘culture’, ‘discourse’ and ‘context’ this being the conceptual cluster that stands at the heart of the notion of the meta-theoretical notion of ‘interculturality’. The latter is thus seen in a new light defined as the process and condition of cultures-in-contact, interaction based on a linguistic anthropological understanding of language. It also considers the steps in a tentative ‘priority list’ when prescribing the agenda for intercultural business discourse.

In Chapter 3 (Professional Communicative Competences: Four Key Industries in Hong Kong), Cheng reports the perceived attributes among professionals and practitioners in four key industries in Hong Kong economy: Financial Services, Tourism, Trade and Logistics, as well as Professional Services and Other Producers Services. The chapter constructs a descriptive Taxonomy of Professional Communicative Competences (TPCC) applicable to both professionals and organizations within Hong Kong and elsewhere. With respect to the practical implications for curriculum design and materials writing for ESP or LSP, and for informing professional communicative practices, it is valuable to have a comprehensive study which employs a diversified research methodology to investigate the notion of professional communicative competence, and how the notion is manifested in a range of business and professional communicative settings.

In Chapter 4, (A Genre Analysis of the Strategic Plans of Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong and the United States of America), Chan examines the strategic plans of five universities in Hong Kong (HK) and five universities in the United States of America (US). It is found that their strategic plans require discursive practices and procedures when imparting information. For example, a promotional message may also be needed perhaps to the effect that the university is not just concerned with monetary gain, support for its various functions is also important. The implication being that a better understanding of the move patterns of



university strategic plans as well as ways to adapt may contribute to better information-giving and effective promotion.

In Chapter 5, (Gender and Professional Communication: The Role of Feminine Style in Multilingual Workplaces), Itakura argues that consideration should be given to the questions that arise from this unusual phenomena: What explanation can be found for the use or non-use of a feminine style of Japanese in intercultural work contexts? A symbolic meaning resource was one of the reasons given as well as a way of constituting roles and relationships for professional communication in an Asian language.

In Chapter 6, (Indirect Requests in Korean Business Correspondence), Jung highlights the manner in which politeness paves the way for interpersonal harmony in the Korean business world. It is found that prosodic features which are mainly employed in spoken communication also occur in written business communication in Korea in realizing politeness strategies. Both in spoken and written communication, for example, polite requests work to create solidarity rather than serve as a threat. This idea constitutes a new concept other than positive and negative politeness.

In Chapter 7 (Interactions of Professional, Institutional and Business Discourses in Academic Settings), Kong discusses the overlapping that occurs in certain professional, institutional and business discourses. This fact can be seen from the terms employed such as ‘intertextuality’, ‘interdiscourse system’, and ‘hybridity’, etc. Also, models and examples are given to show how different discourse can converge and by analyzing texts from academic settings, boundaries are seen not to be closed or intact. In fact, sometimes, for specific communicative purposes these boundaries can be negotiated and crossed.

In Chapter 8 (Linguistic Features and Writer’s Stance in Investigation Reports), Leung investigates the role linguistic features play, such as modality, hedging, negation and nominalization, when expressing one’s stance. For example, when discussing one’s stance in words denoting certainty, commitment, distance or indirectness, however, are the readers a critical factor in the rhetoric, lexis or grammar employed? How to achieve a delicate balance between the needs of the readers and the writer’s expertise?

In Chapter 9 (Theoretical Interpretations of Questions and Power Relations), Wang aims to explore how questions with their expectation of an answer aids in the production of orderliness which signifies power and solidarity. While investigating questions and power relations from three theoretical orientations (social semiotics, social psychology and cognition, and systemic-functional linguistics), the chapter also shows how questions as a potentially powerful means can be discussed in a practical way.

As the results of governmental attempts at plain language have been more or less disappointing, in Chapter 10 (Improving the Quality of Governmental Documents: A Combined Academic and Professional Approach), Renkema provides a framework that can be used to help governments produce clear or plain documents. He explains how the CCC (Correspondence, Consistency, Correctness) model serves as a general framework for design and quality research and its application to researching tax forms and official letters. This collaborated academic and professional approach is a promising one for improving the quality of governmental documents.



The use of humour is undoubtedly complex and paradoxical as seen from the final chapter of the volume, Chapter 11 (Politeness, Power and Control: The Use of Humour in Cross-cultural Telecommunications), as Ladegaard analyses the use and various functions of humour in cross-cultural telecommunications. It becomes apparent that humour can be used constructively as for example when it is used as a face-saving strategy to deflect criticism or to play down status differences. However, it can also be used as a weapon both in a contestive way or when power is unevenly held, in a repressive way. The study concluded by noting humour has the power to include or to exclude and to form new ingroup-outgroup boundaries

From the foregoing it can be seen that in the field of different contexts in different regions many professional communication issues have arisen. Cheng and Kong's volume provides a useful and practical collection of research whereby academics, researchers and practitioners have collaborated to improve professional communication while uncovering the methodological implications involved. The value of such a volume is seen from the fact that as Cheng and Kong states "the understanding of professional communication can be enhanced by the studies conducted by the professionals themselves, because they are the insiders in their professions" (p. vii). Thus, this book provides papers written by researchers who are also professionals in their field and who are able to reveal just how research-practitioner collaboration takes place. No doubt, new insights and directions for further research on professional communication are yet to come due in part to the valuable contribution of Cheng and Kong's present book.

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