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In Case You Missed It: Selected Scholarship in the Discipline

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We all tell our undergraduate and graduate students how important it is to keep current in the field. In our professional lives as writers and communicators, that means keeping track of trends in industry and technology; as academics, it means keeping up on our reading—the latest books, recent articles in journals, the proceedings of our major conferences—so that we can contribute to disciplinary conversations, teach our classes with integrity, and advance our own research agendas effectively. As part of this process, we show our appreciation to those who contribute to the knowledge of our field and participate in the process of peer review. We discuss the work of our disciplinary colleagues in the classes we teach or over coffee with our graduate students; we use it in professional training, and we cite it in our own research. What we gather in our journals represents our collected knowledge, not only in our libraries' databases and in various online contexts, but shared inside our classrooms and integrated with our ongoing intellectual reflections.

As the *Journal of Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization* joins the discipline as a place where our peer-reviewed knowledge is situated, we mark this occasion by reaching out beyond these pages to other journals. It is the purpose of this article to point out work recently published elsewhere that deserves special recognition. We hope that this article will become a regular feature of the journal, sometimes authored by the two of us, sometimes by others in our field, but always as a place where we can recognize the work of researchers contributing to published scholarship in rhetoric, professional communication, organizational studies, and their insights into the processes and phenomena associated with globalization and its evolving impact. What we provide here is not merely a summary of content, but rather a deeper look, just far enough to urge our readership to take notice. Our intention is to provide our audience with a polite nudge to stay current in the field, and perhaps encourage you to stretch your legs a bit into neighboring fields and journals you may not routinely peruse.

In this issue of the *JRPCG*, we would like to invite you to note four particular journal articles published in 2010, all in journals closely related to this one. The first article was published by Melissa Bridgewater and Patrice Buzzanel in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. The second article was published by Tiina Virkkila-Raisanen in the *Journal of Business Communication*. The third article was published Xunfeng Xu, Yan Wang, Gail Forey, and Lan Li in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. And the fourth article was published by Shiv Ganesh and Cynthia Stohl in *Communication Monographs*. These four articles collectively represent excellent contributions to the research in our discipline, and we believe they deserve special notice by our journal's readership. In future issues in the *JRPCG*, we hope to explore perspectives from these as well as more distant fields, seeking to have our perspectives, and perhaps our scholarship, influenced by a wide range of disciplines where there are compelling ideas and noteworthy studies using myriad methodologies on topics relevant to our work and our readers.

> Bridgewater, M. J., & Buzzanel, P. M. (2010). Caribbean immigrant discourses: Cultural, moral, and personal stories about workplace communication in the United States. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 47, 235-265.

A great deal of business and technical communication guides, facilitates, and regulates workplace processes. Professional communicators who develop such materials may understand their audiences primarily in terms of their workplace roles; however, effective audience analysis requires attention to the social and cultural contexts of workers' lives beyond the workplace, as well. As workplaces increase in demographic diversity, communication studies have begun to pay attention to such factors as language, gender, literacies, and age in designing documentation that is accessible, ethical, and appropriate to diverse audiences. In their article "Caribbean Immigrant Discourses: Cultural, Moral, and Personal Stories about Workplace Communication in the United States," Melissa Bridgewater and Patrice Buzzanel study 25 narratives of Caribbean immigrant workers collected through interviews by one of the authors, asking how these stories positioned the tellers in relation to the grand narrative of the "American Dream." They found that the immigrants' stories function as personal sense making and help the tellers to maintain their own agency as they reconcile themselves to, as well as resist, that dominant narrative.

The immigrants who speak in the study contradict numerous stereotypes of immigrant people of color. For example, all of them speak English as their first language. Most of them hold skilled jobs—in many cases, advanced professional positions—including nursing, teaching, financial associate, engineering, airline pilot, mechanic, and various administrative roles. And their years of residence in the U.S. range from 4 to over 30 years; in fact, only six claimed residence of less than ten years. Virtually all of these narratives also involved stories of success, which seem largely to confirm the American Dream mythology. On the other hand, their stories invoke values rooted in their Caribbean cultural backgrounds, which they credited as wellsprings of strength to overcome numerous obstacles. The authors explain:

> *Pursuing the ideal versus real American Dream.* Participants described a dialectic interplay between: idealized or fantasized images of the United States acquired through media and their "real" American Dream by which they obtained educational, job, and economic benefits.
> Every single research participant related—with humor—that they believed and anticipated finding evidence of *idealized* U.S. media depictions. Several interviewees said that they immigrated because of visions of wealth, an easy life, and a land of plenty—

mythic stories that they themselves perpetuated when they returned to their counties of origin. (p. 245)

Despite their experience of a harsher reality than they had expected, all but one of the narrators said they had attained the educational and employment goals they (or their parents on their behalf) had hoped to achieve when they migrated.

The harsher reality faced by the narrators involved more than the unrealistic expectations resulting from media exaggerations. The participants described racism, linguistic chauvinism, and simple ignorance from employers and co-workers, but their stories focused less on their experiences of injustice than on their own strategies for overcoming these problems. Their strategies included confrontation of unfair treatment, adapting to American ways by means of attire, "accent," and "strategically invoked identities, such as someone who networks and can handle people" (p. 253). In general, these strategies involved what the authors describe as a

> moral tale of Caribbean people as being resourceful, successful, and adaptable. They maintained that they were successful in their new environment because they were taught from an early age to seize challenges but do so in the Caribbean way.... Their moral tale of Caribbean people's superior work values enabled them to position themselves as having greater courtesy, respect for others, and compassion in contrast to the values and workplace communication of their U.S. colleagues. (p. 248)

Although this study has a number of limitations (e.g., the respondents to the study tended to be people with strong educational and professional backgrounds rather than representing a broader range of Caribbean immigrant demographics), it represents an important direction for workplace communication studies. Among its significant contributions is in showing how cultural transformation can occur through the structural influences of organizations and power relations, as well as by the agency of subjects who draw upon their own cultural resources and the motivation of their personal goals. This study points to the many contradictions in the migration narrative, particularly as informed by and contested through a postcolonial analysis.

> Virkkula-Räisänen, T. (2010). Linguistic repertoires and semiotic resources in interaction: A Finnish manager as a mediator in a multilingual meeting. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47, 505-531.

As one of the core activities in the workplace, the business meeting is a familiar research site for many who study applied rhetoric and professional communication. Scholars in our discipline study the language issues in business meetings in relation such phenomena as the exercise of leadership and the building of work relationships. In "Linguistic Repertoires and Semiotic Resources in Interaction: A Finnish Manager as a Mediator in a Multilingual Meeting," Tiina Virkkula-Räisänen extends this research tradition to help readers better understand the "interplay of various languages [as] one of the key features that characterize globalization today" (p. 506). Drawing on observational data she collected for over a year at a small engineering firm in Finland, she uses a discourse micro-analytic framework (heavily influenced by Gumperz) to reveal linguistic details and non-verbal communication behaviors among Chinese and Finnish professionals in a single 90-minute business meeting.

The two Chinese and two Finnish professionals who attended the business meeting used English as their language of interaction. The meeting's participants possessed, to various degrees, functional literacy skills in this shared language. Virkkula-Räisänen, a graduate student at the University of Jyväskylä, used audio and video equipment to record the participants' interactions

and then analyzed these to show how their use of English led to (and in some cases hindered) decisions being made, leadership roles negotiated, and business relationships developed and maintained. The researcher hoped to learn more generally about how business gets done in a complex work setting, as well as to gain insight into the consequences of some of the cultural missteps she observed.

Previous studies have examined language use in multilingual contexts; however, Virkkula-Räisänen's study reveals the value of close observation in helping us understand how difficult it is to be competent as a business professional. She explains how success in the global workplace requires "a mixture of interpersonal, intercultural, semiotic, and interactional competencies" (p. 529). That is, it is not sufficient for business professionals to know the language of interaction; they must "know how to use it appropriately" (p. 527). Moreover, as researchers of workplace language, it is important for us to use appropriate methodologies to study what is said in business meetings, as well as to capture what is not said. Some of the most valuable data in this article describes when participants choose to stop speaking English in order to speak with their colleagues in their native language, to use humorous utterances to break tension and manage social relationships, or to use non-verbal behaviors such as glances that revealed their intentions or discomfort, or exaggerated pauses to communicate their approval or displeasure.

One scene that vividly illustrates the verbal/nonverbal dynamics occurred when one of the Finnish professionals came to realize that one of his Chinese counterparts was reluctant to admit that he did not understand a content-related matter and "almost always respond[ed] to questions with *yeah* or *yes*" (p. 520). Based on an interpretation of a non-verbal cue (i.e., an observed grin by the Chinese professional), he turned to his colleague and, briefly switched to Finnish in an effort to resolve the problem and then selected an appropriate visual aid to assist with comprehension. Virkkula-Räisänen notes that, based on her analysis of the subsequent non-verbal communication act (i.e., a directed glance) made by the Chinese professional, the participant's decision to speak Finnish, although intended to help his counterpart and advance the content level of the interaction, was perceived as rude. Thus, the researcher shows us that the content and relational levels of the interaction are equally important to monitor. Such analysis demonstrates that intentions do not determine communicative effectiveness and that the communication behavior at one level may be (perceived as) contradictory at another.

In this scene, Virkkula-Räisänen shows how a business professional used "nonverbal aspects of communication in a lingua franca situation where people come from a variety of cultural backgrounds" (p. 509) to communicate displeasure. In other scenes gleaned from the case, the researcher provides additional illustrations of how cultural nuance comes into play in the form of body postures, head nods, facial expressions, and other nonverbal movements. The researcher explores, for example, how Chinese professionals' gaze was used to monitor behavior and to indicate to various speakers that they are paying attention or that there was a need for more detailed translation. The consequences of the participants' linguistic and non-verbal choices are fascinating, especially since they take place in a setting where interlocutors often assume, at least in U.S. or other mono-cultural workplace contexts, communication is governed by shared conventions and strictly established notions of hierarchy. Thus, the findings confirm many of the tenets outlined in the cross-cultural communication literature.

This article was published as part of a double-issue of the *Journal of Business Communication* on the topic of "Language Matters." While some limitations exist (e.g., the researcher's lack of fluency in one of the three languages utilized in the research site), Virkkula-Räisänen's research methods, particularly her transcripts that capture both spoken words and nonverbal behaviors,

are indeed worthy of our attention. Equally important is the contribution this research makes as a slice of what is a very rare longitudinal study of a particular setting.

> Xu, X., Wang, Y., Forey, G., & Li, L. (2010). Analyzing the genre structure of Chinese call-center communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 24, 445-475.

For the past several years, call-centers have been the focus of much discussion in our discipline because they represent one of the sites of outsourced communication work for businesses in the U.S. and other developed nations and the work puts communication at the center of both effective practice and political controversy. In their article "Analyzing the Genre Structure of Chinese Call-Center Communication" Xunfeng Xu, Yan Wang, Gail Forey, and Lan Li examine genre features of call-center phone conversations in Chinese and English, particularly addressing the stability of genre structures across linguistic and other cultural and institutional contexts.

Although other studies have investigated call-center interactions, Xu, Wang, Forey, and Li, all of whom are employed by Chinese universities, point out that few have examined Chinese practices and none have investigated communication between speakers of different first languages (considering that for professional class South Asians, English is effectively a co-primary language). This kind of communication may be among the more challenging aspects of international professional communication because it directly engages L1 product users who may have little experience communicating with L2 English speakers such as the customer service representatives (CSRs) in Chinese call centers. It is also well known that outsourcing of customer service to call centers where the CSRs are likely to be L2 speakers has been a cause of customer resistance and dissatisfaction.

The study employs three approaches to genre analysis: English for specific purposes, which draws upon the genre analysis research by John Swales; systemic-functional linguistics, which employs the work of M. A. K. Halliday, Ruqaiya Hasan, and J. R. Martin; and what the authors characterize as "the social perspectives" approach (p. 449), or what many North American scholars may think of as rhetorical studies, which has roots in the work of Carolyn R. Miller as well as M. M. Bakhtin. More specifically, the authors analyze the discourse of call centers "in terms of its situational and structural features, including recurrent situations and the social practices, the communicative purposes, the move and exchange structures, the GSP [genre structure potential], and the dynamic complexity of interaction" (p. 450).

The data for the study was taken from recordings such as those we are routinely told by CSRs may be made "for purposes of quality control." Hong Kong Polytechnic University maintains an open corpus database of such recordings for call center communication research. The authors worked with recordings of 100 randomly selected calls in a Chinese call center in which all conversations were L1 in Mandarin Chinese. Another 100 calls were collected from a company in the Philippines in which the conversations were in English between L1 American customers and L2 Filipino CSRs (most of whom are native Tagalog speakers). The two sets of calls were analyzed for purposes of comparing intra-cultural with intercultural discourses.

The study finds a number of generic features common to Chinese and English call centers, although they point out that the genres available to speakers are different in different languages. The authors suggest that commonalities derive from similar goals and purposes among call centers, and from similar industry practices and policies. They note

the actual communication process also exhibits great diversity and complexity due to the situatedness of interaction and the varieties of industries involved in this diverse service area. The data we analyzed clearly show that call-center discourse is a goal-defined situated genre with dynamic structural features. The generic structure summarized here, however, is not a fixed or unchangeable pattern, but a flexible resource for practitioners to exploit creatively. (p. 469)

The flexibility and dynamic nature of call center discourse cannot be entirely reduced to an unchanging script because it is conversational. Customers' needs and goals are diverse and their discourse strategies can vary considerably, requiring a range of responding strategies on the part of CSRs. Moreover, when interlocutors are L1 and L2, as in the case of the Filipino call center, cultural differences as well as linguistic resources may considerably complicate interactions. Finally, call-center technologies and government policies regulating working conditions and other practices may influence genre flexibility and genre change. For example, the authors suggest that Chinese call centers need to improve English language proficiency in order to compete with similar businesses, such as those in India and the Philippines. These findings are important for those who study and provide education and training in business communication and customer/client relations, especially involving oral communication.

> Ganesh, S., & Stohl, C. (2010). Qualifying engagement: A study of information and communication technology and the global social justice movement in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Communication Monographs*, 77, 51-74.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been a basic feature of the technical communication landscape for years. Much of our concern with ICTs is reflected in the abundance of studies focusing on electronic collaborative writing, online education, and workplace applications of ICTs in information sharing and collaborative projects. We have paid less attention to the role of ICT networks in social change, even where such processes might relate to issues that concern many of us in technical communication such as agriculture, environment, and healthcare promotion, although such interests have been implicit in many studies, and have influenced practice for some time.

Other disciplines, meanwhile, have given a lot of attention to the relationship of ICTs and social networks with studies having both specific and evocative implications for technical communication. A quick search on Ebscohost, for example, provided studies in the fields of business administration, information sciences, science and technology studies, and a number of others. Such work is especially germane in international and intercultural technical communication where scientific, medical, and technologically based organizations that utilize ICT networking systems may have social, legal, and ethical impacts, particularly in developing countries. These are issues relevant to our own field, and it is surprising that few professional communication studies, particularly in international/intercultural contexts, have addressed the implications of perspectives such as that of Manuel Castells in sociology or Jan van Dijk in communication studies. For these reasons, we consider the study by Shiv Ganesh and Cynthia Stohl valuable.

"Qualifying Engagement: A Study of Information and Communication Technology and the Global Social Justice Movement in Aotearoa New Zealand" reports findings based on interviews with 24 activists in New Zealand-based social justice movements. Ganesh and Stohl specifically sought respondents that could be characterized as "rooted cosmopolitans," whom they defined as activists who participate in demonstrations outside their own borders, but who "bring their learning, ties, and expertise back to their own societies" (p. 55).

The researchers investigate the validity of three assumptions of prior studies about ICT use in the global social justice movement (GSJM). First, they look for evidence that ICTs enable GSJM activists to function as "informational brokers" (i.e., connecting actors and organizations that would not otherwise function together, and bringing what they learn and the results of their activism back to their home organizations). The study finds that the participants they interviewed do in fact serve brokerage roles. Their respondents "became organizational entrepreneurs, leveraging one form of organizational identity as they created and sustained new groups and identities through ICTs" (69). Second, they investigate whether the well-known conduit metaphor of communication advanced by Shannon and Weaver was characteristic of the way these activists regarded ICTs. They find, instead, that respondents who perceive ICTs in the value-neutral sense of the conduit metaphor were those who were skeptical of the importance of such technologies in their work. Overall, however, the authors find little support for the prevalence of this perspective. Instead, the majority of these activists see technology as capable of influencing the meaning or value of messages depending upon the medium (e.g., e-mail, newsletter, or website). Many regard ICTs "as a means of exchange, engagement, and commitment," although they often posit offline ways of communication "as having richer possibilities" (p. 64).

Finally, the study explores respondents' concerns about the role of ICTs in the GSJM. Those who were the strongest advocates for the value and importance of ICTs in their work also recognized difficulties and risks in using these technologies. They mention the challenge of keeping up with changing technologies, the fact that effective use of ICTs required specialized skills and additional work for which they lacked both aptitude and time. Some were concerned that people they most needed to reach through their work may have limited access to information and communication via ICTs, although none of them considered themselves to have access problems. They also recognized security risks, and acknowledged that in fact their communications were almost certainly not secure and that hostile parties were likely to be monitoring them. At the same time, the strongest advocates related ICT use to enhanced power "to transform communities and society" (65).

The data for Ganesh and Stohl's study was gathered in 2007 and they point out that technologies have already evolved considerably. In particular, social media, which their study did not address, have emerged as a transforming technology being employed by GSJM activists. This does not mean the study is already obsolete. On the contrary, what studies such as this one help us to understand is the ways social processes and technologies interact, transform, and shape one another. More specifically, the study reveals ways that technical information shapes and constrains issues and interactions well beyond the corporate and consumer contexts in which our field so often considers central to our work. As we cross borders of language, culture, and knowledge, it is increasingly important that we understand and engage with the issues of human rights and social justice, how these are implicated in technological and information systems, and may produce costs that are not necessarily balanced by benefits to the communities they impact. Moreover, this study suggests that there are already numerous sites, such as social justice organizations and grass roots movements, in which alternative forms of technical communication are being practiced, or could be practiced. This study may call some among us to consider further research in these sites, or other engagements that could improve the effectiveness of communication for social change.