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# Unity in diversity: The view from the (UAE) classroom

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*This talk is about finding 'unity in diversity'. I ask how we can best focus our research efforts and then design our teaching for those of us involved with teaching language for specific business purposes in the Asia Pacific region and the Middle East. In parts 1 and 2 of the presentation I discuss how we need to (i) refer to empirical evidence as the basis for our teaching and training materials, (ii) become more aware of the challenges posed by globalisation, (iii) understand the role played for business people by English as a lingua franca, alongside other languages and (iv) develop closer ties with people working in business and industry. In part 3 I discuss, first, a teaching project involving undergraduate research that is a course for our senior business students on workplace communication and, second, the development of an evaluation instrument to chart our students' progress in terms not only of their language proficiency but also their communication knowledge and skills.*

## 1. Introduction

I am currently based in the College of Business at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). I am responsible for teaching business seniors, all of whom speak Arabic as a first language. In a traditional sense, some of my students would be regarded as bilingual in Arabic and English, others as second language speakers of English, and still others as foreign language speakers of English, although all grew up and went to school in the UAE. Likewise, although I do sometimes find myself dealing with the mechanics of the English language, my primary focus is to prepare my students to enter the workforce in the UAE, which means helping them to understand the challenges posed by multicultural interactions; the residents of the UAE represent more than two hundred different national cultures, and operate in a variety of work settings, in governmental, semi-governmental or business organisations. In this plenary address I will consider how to deal with this situation in an era of globalisation, where increasing numbers of us involved with teaching what used to be called 'Business English' around the world are now finding that we need to move on from a concern with language proficiency, towards a concern with what Braj Kachru has wisely termed FUNCTIONAL NATIVENESS (Kachru 2005). For societies such as the UAE, it makes sense to consider the 'RANGE and DEPTH of a language', where 'range refers to the domains of

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function, and depth refers to the degree of social penetration' (Kachru 2005: 12, emphasis in the original). And as David Graddol has recently reminded us in his exemplary report on the future of English language teaching, English proficiency, for many professional people at least, may now best be viewed as only one among a battery of skills which those professionals need in order to survive in the global workplace, including computer literacy, cultural awareness and emotional intelligence (Graddol 2006). Building on Kachru's perspective, Graddol goes so far as to suggest that it now makes more sense to think of two groups of speakers, one group of low-proficiency speakers and another of 'highly proficient speakers of English – those who have "functional nativeness" regardless of how they learned or use the language' (Graddol 2006: 110). This seems to me to be a useful way of thinking about my Emirati students, not only in terms of the role that English plays in their lives, but also in terms of the proficiency levels that many of them achieve.

My focus will be on how we as an academic community can best direct our research efforts, and then design our evaluation and teaching methods, to meet the needs of our students in a region as diverse as Asia. I believe that the Middle East and the rest of the region have much in common, with particular similarities between the multilingual, multicultural societies of emerging economies, such as India and Malaysia, and the countries of the Gulf. All deal with different languages and different cultures in the workplace, whether for historical or more recent economic reasons, or both, and their national cultures (if there is such as thing) are not only HIGH CONTEXT cultures, but cultures where hierarchical difference, or POWER DISTANCE, tends to be high (Hall 1976; Hofstede 1996). As a consequence, language and culture will underpin all of what I have to say. I will first look at four main areas of concern that I believe should shape our research in the future. I will then go on to talk about two initiatives at my own university in the UAE that have been influenced by my understanding of these four key areas: one on evaluation and one on teaching.

## 2. Research

Business communication is one discipline that has become increasingly relevant to the teaching of business English in Asia and the Middle East. As I and colleagues have noted elsewhere, many of the researchers who have contributed to the formation of the discipline of business communication over the past decade are trained as applied linguists. Many, like me, are also active as teaching practitioners in business schools or on business communication programmes in different parts of the world (see Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken 2007 for further discussion). If we consider business communication research in the region during the same timeframe, we can identify a number of people, places and developments that have shaped the way we teach. It is therefore to this discipline and the scholars associated with it that I turn first. In Hong Kong, for instance, the emphasis has been on the attainment of professional competence through good communication skills. Business communication scholars located in Hong Kong have consequently focused their efforts not on linguistic competence (or language proficiency), but on understanding what it means to communicate effectively in order to achieve professional goals. In Graddol's terms, this means identifying what an individual needs to be functionally native within a given professional

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context. For example, Vijay Bhatia, Bertha Du-Babcock and Jane Lockwood, based at City University, and Winnie Cheng and Gail Forey at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University are all scholars who have been involved in this type of research. Forey and Lockwood's work on call centre communication, in particular, has brought home to many of us the competitive advantage that can be gained for some of the poorest people in the world by having good communication skills. I believe that the relationship between communication skills and professional effectiveness, and understanding what determines that relationship, is a crucial element in determining what we decide to teach. The numerous publications that have come out of Hong Kong in the past decade are of relevance to anyone interested in knowing more about this. Perhaps more than anywhere else in the region, they have moved the teaching of English for specific purposes in general, and business English in particular, beyond the classroom and into the workplace (e.g. Baxter, Boswood & Peirson-Smith 2002; Chew 2005; Jackson 2005; Du-Babcock & Babcock 2007; Forey & Lockwood 2007).

With the continuing influence of globalisation and internet-based technologies – the increasing 'flattening of the world' in Friedman's terms – the formidable march of global English continues (Friedman 2005). And it is this that underpins the second research area that I want to discuss. In particular, the increasing interest in the use of English as the language of Asian business has begun to build up a picture of the complexities of business English use and how this underpins commerce and industry in the region alongside the use of other languages. Mirjaliisa Charles' work on business English as a lingua franca (BELF) is important here and her contention that 'BELF differs from English as a lingua franca (ELF) in that its domain is solely business, and its frame of reference is provided by the globalised business community. The *B* of BELF is thus the sociopragmatic backdrop against which language – and any lexical or syntactic anomalies in it – is to be interpreted. Looked at from this angle, we can refer to the global business community as the "culture" that has created BELF, and within which BELF evolves' (Charles 2007: 264).

The recent shift from a concern with native-speaker models of English towards a concern with how English is used as a lingua franca in business is especially important. We can see this reflected in recent publications in journals such as *English for Specific Purposes*, *Journal of Business Communication* and *Journal of Pragmatics*. Work by scholars such as Anne Wil Harzing and her colleagues, based in Melbourne, and by Leena Louhiala-Salminen and her colleagues, based in Helsinki, has begun to establish how professional people use English as a conduit through which they carry out their work, but through which they still maintain their own cultural values and decision-making processes (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta 2005; Zander, Mockaitis & Harzing 2011). The work of the Malaysian critical scholar Shanta Nair Venugopal, in particular, reminds us that our teaching materials must reflect the realities of our students' communication landscape, which means moving away from native-speaker models – and, most importantly, that we urgently need research to achieve this (Nair-Venugopal 2009). This call for empirical scholarship, which can then be used to underpin teaching materials, is at the heart of the third general area that I would like to discuss, as exemplified by the Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) at the University of Wellington in New Zealand (www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/lwp/). The LWP project, directed by Janet Holmes, provides us with a database of authentic language use in multicultural workplaces employing people

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from around the region – this includes empirical work on areas such as women's language, humour and leadership, and it gives us an insight into how people use language to 'do' their work. Over the past decade, Holmes and her colleagues have also shown how the findings from such research can then be used as the basis for appropriate teaching materials that closely match the needs of their users, both the teaching practitioners and their students. We need more such initiatives.

To summarise, the emphasis in recent research in the region has been on the relationship between professional communication and professional competence, as well as on exploring authentic data and listening to the experiences of the practitioners themselves. In addition, there has been an increasing focus on how English co-exists alongside other languages, operating as an enabler for Asian business both within the region and beyond.

In addition to these three observations, I would also like to talk about the relationship between (national) cultural and professional identity, as exemplified by the work of my colleague Valerie Goby in the UAE (Goby 2009), since an understanding of this relationship is of particular relevance for bilingual or multilingual professionals working in multicultural societies or organisations. Goby's project investigated the views of a group of 56 female Emirati students, all of whom had some work experience. The central research question was: How do people decide who to engage with in work-related interactions? In other words, do we opt for people who come from our own or a similar (national) culture, or people who speak our own language as their first language? Or do other things influence us in our decision-making process? The students were asked to respond to a set of prompts which allowed them to give anonymous individual responses, e.g. 'The foreigners I most like to communicate with are . . . . . because. . .'. This is a fascinating exercise to do with students, as long as you know them quite well! It's an excellent way to introduce students to intercultural communication and the pitfalls associated with the concept of national cultures. I have found that if I do this in class (as was the case in the empirical study), a very large number of different nationalities are mentioned that either help or hinder communication, and the same ones are frequently included on both sides from different respondents (which is of course the point). Goby found that the choices an individual makes about who to communicate with in the workplace have a lot less to do with a shared national or linguistic identity and much more to do with perceived positive characteristics, such as a willingness to help and the maintenance of a professional demeanour. Likewise, individuals care more about poor or inappropriate communication skills, or what they consider to be undesirable personal or professional characteristics, than they do about national culture. In looking at intercultural communication, in particular, this raises a number of points for those of us involved in tertiary education in such societies, or for those of us involved in training people who have already entered the workforce.

There are parallels here with Daphne Jameson's work on cultural identity (Jameson 2007) and with Gina Poncini's work on multicultural interactions in business meetings (Poncini 2004). Jameson's contention is that our cultural identity is not limited to national identity; it can and does change with time, and crucially for all of us in the room today, 'it can be negotiated through communication' (Jameson 2007: 224). Students find this a useful concept as it generally reflects the reality of their experience, that is, it is not the case that if we are different we automatically have a problem, but rather that if we can accommodate each other, we can find a solution. And we can see similarities here with the positive aspects of

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Giles' Accommodation Theory (Giles & Coupland 1991). Jameson goes some way towards explaining how accommodation operates, by referring to TRANSACTION CULTURE or THIRD CULTURE, alongside the notion that, for some of us at least, our cultural identity changes as a result of our exposure to people who come from different cultures. She writes: 'When people with substantially different cultural identities interact, they can create a new cultural context: a hybrid that synthesizes components of each person's cultural background' and 'Because many international business persons have studied abroad, lived overseas, or consciously sought to adapt business approaches from other cultures, their cultural identities are more nuanced' (2007: 230–231). These are two useful ideas for students to consider, especially those for whom multicultural encounters are a fact of daily life. Poncini echoed this when she observed in an interview in 2006 that: 'Focusing on miscommunication in intercultural settings is limiting because the approach assumes intercultural interactions are problematic and consequently tends to ignore factors possibly contributing to successful intercultural communication' (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007: 45). Goby's work and the observations made by Jameson and Poncini suggest a way forward for all of us working with students from multicultural societies, or equally for those of us with students who are likely to interact with people from other cultures in the future. That is, to view intercultural business encounters not as a minefield of mis-communication, but as a negotiated form of strategic communication.

To summarise, these are the key areas that I believe will – and perhaps should – continue to shape our research efforts in the future and provide us with a basis for our teaching.

First, in terms of methodology, we need to work with authentic data, to provide us with the empirical evidence that we can then use as the basis for our teaching and training materials.

Second, in terms of the research areas that should be our concern, we should become more aware of the challenges posed by globalisation and the increasing interface between people representing different (national) cultures, both within national boundaries and beyond them. As a result we should think more about cultural identity as a construct and what that means both for us and for our students.

Third, the role played by different languages, alongside that of English, should continue to be a major focus in our research initiatives and we should work towards a greater understanding of how English is being used as a lingua franca by business people and professionals across the region.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we should develop closer ties with the sort of people working in business and industry that our students aspire to become – it is only through listening to them that we will understand the communication knowledge and skills that will ultimately lead to professional competence.

## 3. Two initiatives at Zayed University

I am now going to talk about two initiatives at Zayed University in the UAE. One is a teaching project involving undergraduate research that is a course for our business seniors, and the other is work in progress to develop an appropriate evaluation instrument to chart our students' progress in terms of their communication knowledge and skills. I have been influenced in both of these initiatives by the research directions that I have just discussed.

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Zayed University (ZU) was founded in 1998, originally as a women's university, and is one of three government-funded institutions in the UAE that provide tertiary education for Emirati nationals. Although ZU does now accept male students, in keeping with the traditional norms of segregated education up to the end of undergraduate programmes, the students that I teach are all female business majors, all of whom speak Arabic as a first language, and the majority of whom are highly proficient users of English by the time they start on their business degree. In the UAE, as elsewhere in the Gulf region, women are currently being encouraged to pursue education and then enter the workforce, and the UAE in particular has recently brought in groundbreaking legislation to allow (Emirati) women to work part-time. This has brought about a huge shift in perspectives and expectations within one very short generation. Prior to joining the College of Business, students spend between one and three years on a foundation course to ensure that they have the necessary English language proficiency and other general study skills to manage a Bachelor's degree, and then spend two years with us in order to complete their studies. The demographic landscape they will enter in the UAE workforce is as follows: a population of approximately eight million people, encompassing 220 different national cultures, and an expatriate working population of more than 90% – Emirati citizens comprise only about 11% of the general population, and only about 9% of the working population. This also means that outside government (and semi-government) organisations where Arabic is used, and some parts of the construction industry where Urdu may be spoken, the *de facto* lingua franca in the UAE is English. My colleague Belinda Crawford and I have recently surveyed the Emirati community and have found a strong indication that whereas Arabic (unsurprisingly) is the language of the home, English is the language of retail. If you buy a pair of shoes in Dubai, then you do so in English! Edgar Schneider's dynamic model of postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2007) is beyond the scope of my discussion today; it would, however, provide an interesting challenge for an enterprising postgraduate student who would be interested in applying it to the UAE context. I will talk first about evaluation and then move on to teaching.

## 3.1 Evaluation

Zayed University uses an outcomes-based academic programme model, which identifies a set of six learning objectives – the Zayed University Learning Objectives or 'Zulos' – in six different areas: Language (Arabic and English), Information Technology, Critical Thinking and Quantitative Reasoning, Information Literacy, Global Awareness, and Leadership. This resonates with Graddol's suggestion that English can now best be viewed as just one in a battery of required skills that people need to excel in the contemporary workplace (Graddol 2006; www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/colleges/colleges/site_university_college/Colloquy/ZU_Learning_Outcomes.aspx). Of these six, the learning objectives that are of most relevance to our communications courses are Language and Global Awareness. The College of Business operationalises these learning objectives in the following way:

(i) Language: the ability to communicate effectively in the business environment. Students will be required to demonstrate competence in professional communications.

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(ii) Global Awareness: the ability to compete successfully in a global business environment. Students will gain an understanding of culturally determined differences in communication and learn how to operate within multicultural work settings.

In order to develop an appropriate testing instrument to evaluate our students, we therefore have to find a way of deciding whether they have achieved these two learning objectives in the course of the 18-month period, during which they follow a set of modules in communication.

An over-arching method of evaluation is apparently becoming increasingly important for many of us, as we often find ourselves in situations where our institutions are seeking different forms of accreditation as part of a general trend towards quality assurance in education. This means going beyond the existing methods of assessing English language proficiency, such as the Cambridge ESOL Examinations or TOEFL, because we need a way of assessing not only our students' language and communication SKILLS, but also their KNOWLEDGE of a given discipline area. Increasing numbers of tertiary institutions now offer Bachelor's and Master's level courses that either focus primarily on communication or business language (such as the newly introduced university-level courses in mainland China in business English) or those, like ours at ZU, that include components in communication as part of another discipline (see Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007 for an overview). For programmes in business administration and management in particular, the accreditation provided by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (the AACSB) remains perhaps the best known global quality assurance programme, and therefore the most sought after, and our testing instrument is an attempt to contribute to our efforts to secure AACSB Accreditation. In order to do this, the instrument needed to show relevance to the learning objectives of the College and University, which meant in turn that it needed to take the demographic landscape of the UAE into account.

The first thing that we did was to identify a set of components that we could operationalise and use as the basis for a set of appropriate questions, and which would also lead us back to our learning objectives. CLASP was the result of this discussion: a five-component model consisting of Cultural Literacy, Language and Genre, Audience Awareness, Social Capital and Sustainability, and Persuasion. Each of these components was also given a definition, as follows:

- **C**ultural Literacy: knowledge of culture and how this impacts on communication in organisational settings
- **L**anguage and Genre: understanding the various communicative genres available within organisational settings and the ability to use these strategically, including channels, media, tone, style, structure and language
- **A**udience Awareness: responsiveness to audience and how this determines the form and content of any communication event
- **S**ocial capital and Sustainability: ability to network, build goodwill and create positive, enduring relationships in organisational settings
- **P**ersuasion: ability to communicate effectively to achieve objectives.

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Although, as with all models, this suggests that these are five discrete categories, they do of course overlap. For instance, when we talk about Persuasion with our students, it's clear that we can only do so by also referring to Cultural Literacy, in order to explain to them that the function of persuasion may look and feel very different in one culture from another. Next we identified three different process levels, drawing on the excellent work by Linda Fraser and her colleagues in developing a testing instrument for the assessment of business writing at the California State University Fullerton (Fraser et al. 2005). These levels are Knowledge (what do they KNOW?), Comprehension (can they APPLY this knowledge?) and Application (can they RE-APPLY this knowledge?).

We also referred to Fraser's work to help us in the design of our testing instrument and started to compile a bank of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) and Cases. At the level of Knowledge, we decided to develop a set of MCQs for each of our five components. Our aim was to produce four questions for each component, thus a total of 20 MCQs for each testing moment. Each MCQ has the same format, in which students are required to choose one of four possible answers. In addition, we aimed to include 20 additional MCQs, to provide a bank of at least 40 items in total, which would then allow us to produce different versions of the same test.

At the process levels of Comprehension and Application, we decided to use short cases in order to evaluate our students' knowledge of each component. Our aim was to produce two cases for each of the five components to test the Comprehension process level, and two cases for each component to test the Application process level. In order to do this, we referred to our own existing lesson materials, as well as to the textbook materials that we use with our undergraduate business students (e.g. Andrews 2002; Guffey 2007; Barrett 2008). As in the MCQs, we developed two cases for each process level, to provide us with a case bank and allow us to produce different versions of the same test. Both the MCQs and the Cases were then tested for fit for each component in consultation with a communication faculty from another institution. She was asked to look at each question and case and to assign it to one of our five CLASP components. In cases where this was not possible, or where it was difficult to assign the question or case to only one component, the item was either removed or adjusted to produce a better fit. The final bank of questions and cases now consists of 40 MCQs, eight for each component, and 20 cases, two for each component and process level.

In order to evaluate the answers given to the cases at the Comprehension and Application process levels, an additional assessment rubric was developed for each case for each component, ranging from Very Poor through to Excellent (Very Poor, Poor, Average, Good, Excellent). Along the lines of the grading rubric reported on by Fraser and her colleagues (2005), which was used to evaluate writing assignments, we discussed what our expectations were for each case and for each process level, and then produced a short description of those expectations to be used as a guide for each evaluator. In other words, we produced a description of what we expected a student to include in their answer to be graded as Excellent, Good, Average, Poor or Very Poor for each case and at each process level. A score of 4 was given for an Excellent rating, down to 0 for a Very Poor rating. As in the assignment of questions and cases to each of the CLASP components, a third communication faculty from outside ZU also worked with us to test our assessment rubric for fit.

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I would like to illustrate the MCQs and Cases with reference to Cultural Literacy: knowledge of culture and how this impacts on communication in organisational settings. In discussing Cultural Literacy with our students, three of the major theories that we talk about are (i) Edward T. Hall's work on high and low context cultures (Hall 1976), (ii) the related theory of monochronic and polychronic cultures, which is to do with people's concept of time, and (iii) Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions (Hofstede 1996). Clearly these are essentialist macro-theories which tend to focus on miscommunication, rather than on the creation of a transaction or third culture to manage the interaction, which is a more useful way of thinking about intercultural communication (I mentioned this earlier in connection with the work of Jameson and Poncini). We include these macro-theories in the communication modules on the Business Sciences programme, not only because it helps students to deconstruct intercultural interactions in theory and then understand how individuals actually construct them in practice, but also because they underpin some of the discussions that take place elsewhere in the programme, notably in courses related to human resource management and management courses on leadership, and students need to be familiar with them. Between our two testing moments, therefore, we also know that a certain amount of reinforcement may take place over the eighteen-month period. Here are examples of two of the MCQs relating to Cultural Literacy:

1) Communication within a high-context culture like the UAE is characterised by which of the following:
   a. Agreements made in writing are not considered binding, attention to detail is high, directness is valued
   b. Politeness and ambiguity are valued, people rely on non-verbal communication, agreements made orally are binding
   c. The written word is very important, attention to detail is low, directness and confrontation are valued
   d. Agreements in writing are considered binding, politeness and clarity are important, attention to detail is high
2) According to the researchers Iris Varner and Linda Beamer (Varner & Beamer 2001), one set of business negotiators they observed shared the following characteristics: they (i) avoided conflict, (ii) suggested additional items and (iii) supported arguments with personal connections. It is MOST LIKELY that these negotiators came from:
   a. a high context culture
   b. a collectivist culture
   c. a low context culture
   d. any of the above

The theory of high and low context cultures predicts that the former (like the UAE) will prefer a style of communication associated with characteristics such as the use of non-verbal communication, less focus on writing and a preference for politeness and ambiguity. Low context cultures (like the US), on the other hand, place less emphasis on non-verbal communication, more emphasis on writing, and have a tolerance for directness and conflict. Question 1 in our multiple choice section is designed to test our students' basic knowledge of this theory and the consequences of belonging to either a high or low context culture for the

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ways in which we (prefer to) communicate. In other research based on high and low contexts, researchers such as Varner & Beamer (2001) have studied the impact of the differences between the communication styles prevalent in these cultures on specific business events, such as negotiations. Question 2 is based on this work, and tests the students' knowledge of the high/low context theory, as well as their ability to differentiate between two different cultural theories, that is, in this case the question requires students to be familiar with Hall's theory alongside that of Hofstede in order to select the correct answer.

In the second part of the test, we test students on their Comprehension and Application of a given concept by asking them to answer a set of short cases. Here is one of the Cases we developed for the Comprehension process level focusing on Cultural Literacy, which tests students' knowledge and comprehension of Hall's high and low context theory, together with different cultures' concept of time.

> Case: Comprehension, Cultural Literacy
> Jan is from the Netherlands and has come to do business in the UAE on a five-day visit. For the first two days, his Emirati hosts take him on a tour of Abu Dhabi and Dubai and he spends time with them in the evening in a number of the UAE's finest restaurants. On the third and fourth day he is introduced to a series of new people that he has not met on the first two days. He begins to wonder when the discussion on business will start. . .
>
> Explain why you think Jan is becoming frustrated.

As a second example, here is one of the cases related to the Application process level, where students are required to re-apply any of the cultural theories they know about to answer the case in the context of the UAE. In this case we would be looking for reference to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, with particular reference to collectivism and individualism, and also to Hall's theory on high and low context.

> Case: Application, Cultural Literacy
> A US businesswoman is visiting your company to negotiate a possible partnership which is important to your company. You have been charged with helping her get to know the company and its employees. On her first day she is to meet the CEO. The appointment was scheduled for 11:00 and was to include a lunch together at 12:30. The CEO arrived for the meeting at 11:25 and then invited a representative of another competitor company to join you all for the lunch. You sense that the US woman is confused by the way the day is going. What could you do to make her feel her comfortable and ensure she has confidence in the way your company operates on a day-to-day basis?

This is where we are so far. In August of this year (2011) when our students return after their summer break, we hope to have an online version of the test available for them which we will be able to pilot in the Autumn semester, and then start administering the test to those students at the start of their communication courses at the beginning of their business programme in January 2012[1]. Evaluation is not easy, and quality assurance in the guise of an accreditation process can be frustrating, especially for those of us that find ourselves – as we often do – in a support function or on the fringes of a mainstream discipline. I would

[1] Since this plenary speech was delivered in June 2011, the test has been piloted and adapted. It was run for the first time with our business juniors in February 2012.

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argue that in developing a testing instrument, as we have done with CLASP, we also create an opportunity to reflect on and re-evaluate our teaching in a systematic way, as we seek first to identify and then to operationalise the learning outcomes that are of most relevance to us. In the next and final part of my plenary address I will discuss a teaching approach that also refers to the components we identified as CLASP in a research-based semester-long course for our business seniors.

## 3.2 Teaching

At the end of our programme our business seniors follow a research-based course called LANGUAGE IN THE WORKPLACE, which is the last communication course that they complete before their capstone project on a business-related topic, alongside a course in research reporting. The course lasts about five months, or between 15 and 20 weeks, with three sessions of just under one hour per week. The LWP course has evolved over the past two years since we first started teaching it in this way, and we identify a set of five topics at the beginning of each semester focusing on a small research project. Each of these projects carries an evaluated component in participation, and culminates in a project presentation and a research report in which students are given an opportunity to work on their language skills, particularly speaking and writing. At the same time, each of the five projects also carries a certain amount of content provided by the instructor in the form of background readings such as journal articles, government reports and newspaper reports, and the focus in each project is on one of the components in CLASP. These are the five project topics which we identified for this past semester, together with the relevant CLASP component:

- Intercultural Communication = Cultural Literacy
- International Business English = Language and Genre
- Website Communication = Audience Awareness
- CSR Communication = Social Capital and Sustainability
- Women and Leadership Language = Persuasion

Each project begins in a similar way, with a series of prompts designed to introduce students to the focus in their research work. Many of these prompts are advertising texts, as this is something that students generally find both interesting and accessible. The prompts, together with a set of questions for class discussion, provide a way of raising student awareness in the initial stages of each project, and the students are then also asked to complete a set of reading materials and to decide between two different project options. For the project on Intercultural Communication with a focus on Cultural Literary, for instance, the students were shown a series of advertisements with a strong cultural element, which they were asked to comment on and then consider from the perspective of the member of another national culture. In the past these advertisements have portrayed hamburger buns as the dunes in the desert, Emirati national dress in the form of salt and pepper shakers, and the Bollywood and Hollywood stars Shah Rukh Khan and Brad Pitt in the same celebrity advertising campaign stressing

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ambition and success on opposite sides of the world. At the same time, students were also asked to reflect on the following questions: (i) What do you already know about intercultural communication? and (ii) Can you name any relevant theories?

Likewise, for the project on English as an International Language with a focus on Language and Genre, students first discuss a set of advertisements all used in the Emirati marketplace, in Arabic only, in English only, in both Arabic and English, and in Anglicised Arabic, e.g. *Eid Mubarak* (May you enjoy a blessed festival). In addition, they are also invited to think about the following: (i) How widespread is the use of English in the UAE? (ii) What are people's attitudes to English? and (iii) Do they understand it in TV advertising and print advertising? For each of these projects, the students were introduced (or reintroduced) to a set of relevant theories as background for their research work. For the English as an International Language Project, for instance, this included Braj Kachru's ideas on functional nativeness and proficiency, which I mentioned earlier, and Barbara Seidlhofer's work on lingua franca communication, along with several empirical studies that have looked at the consequences of adopting English as a corporate language (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002; Kachru 2005; Ehrenreich 2010; Seidlhofer 2011). For the Intercultural Communication project, students analysed a case study outlining the failure of an international business negotiation (Varner & Beamer 2001) and they were also encouraged to visit a website detailing the findings of Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions, with particular reference to the Arab world (www.geert-hofstede.com). Other work that would be relevant as background reading for both of these projects is the ongoing work on intercultural communication by Will Baker at Southampton University in the United Kingdom (e.g. Baker 2011, 2012).

The projects on Website Communication and the Communication surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provide examples of the different types of methodologies that the students use in their research projects. For the Website Communication project, with a focus on Audience Awareness, students consider the framework provided by Chaudhri & Wang (2007) which allows them to think about web-based communication in terms of (i) prominence, or how easy is it to access the information, (ii) the extent of the information, or how much information is available and whether it is the right type of information, and (iii) the style, including the visual, textual and interactive elements accessible to the site user. The students then select a set of websites, all within the same sector, such as fashion, finance or telecommunications, but operating in different regions in the world, for example three from the Gulf region and three from the United States, and analyse them according to the Chaudhri & Wang framework. Once they have completed this stage of the project, they then select one website for further analysis, and either survey a group of users on all three aspects of the framework, using their own self-designed survey to do so, or conduct a small experiment in which they ask a group of respondents, as the potential audience for the site, how long it takes them to access one topic of interest, for example a red party dress on a fashion site! In the CSR Communication project, where the focus is on Social Capital and Sustainability, the students consider consumers as an important group of corporate stakeholders; they work with a survey and advertising materials to find out if consumers are more likely to buy a product or service if it is advertised using information of relevance for CSR. Last October, as it was Breast Cancer Awareness month, we ran this survey including CSR materials relating to corporate support to raise awareness of increased breast cancer screening. The information

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that has come out of projects like these has been fascinating, not least because our students get access to their own community in a way that we could never hope to achieve. As the LWP course has evolved, we have worked with the students to produce bilingual Arabic and English questionnaires for some of the surveys that have been run, and on occasion we have decided to run the same survey across all of the student groups attending the course, which has in turn led to several interesting research publications.

Finally, in the fifth project in the course, the focus is on Persuasion and the project topic is Women and Leadership Language. We look at how women leaders persuade their audiences, using a number of different source materials in order to do this. They are provided with discussions by Deborah Tannen and Deborah Cameron, presenting two very different opinions on the subject, and we also look at the LWP project's work on female leadership language in the New Zealand workplace, together with the most recent work by Judith Baxter and her group at Aston University in the UK, which looks at persuasive language strategies, women's leadership and double-voiced discourse (e.g. Tannen 1990; Cameron 2007; Baxter 2010). Students are asked to investigate either how women 'do' leadership language, or the attitudes of men and/or women to women's leadership language, using notable examples both within and beyond the UAE to do so. In the past, we have looked at the transformation of Margaret Thatcher's communication style over a fifteen-year period, and students have also analysed a number of the speeches given by notable women from all walks of life and from many different nations, speaking on the TED Talks site (www.ted.com). This site has neatly solved my student researchers' problem of gaining access to sources of spoken data. As you can imagine, this project has promoted a great deal of discussion within the student body, not least because, as I have mentioned, this generation of Emirati women is being actively encouraged to enter the workforce in the UAE and perhaps, in the future, to emulate the women leaders that we study.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, in the course of my speech, I have talked about research and how this has impacted my ideas on both evaluation and on teaching. Since 1993, when I first started teaching in tertiary education, I have noticed a shift in emphasis from what we then thought of as (English) language proficiency – or linguistic competence – towards an increasing concern with language as discourse, or how people use language to 'get things done' in their business and professional lives (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007). As a graduate in applied linguistics at that time, with a special interest in business letters, much of what I wrote or thought about, or indeed incorporated into my teaching, now seems quaint, at best. We now think of language as only one characteristic that contributes to the many different genres that shape organisational communication, and we are also much more likely to talk to our students about the impact of multimodality and social networking, about the use of English as a lingua franca, and about the differences between national cultures in their use and interpretation of different discourse strategies. And while our own field has been moving along the spectrum away from linguistics at one end towards genre and discourse at the other, I note from my students that it is now commonplace for them to interact with people from many different

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cultures, whether in their everyday lives, during their studies, or on completion of their studies in the workplace. They move effortlessly, it seems, from Arabic to English and back again, in conventional forms of communication and, through the influence of technology, they also have developed their own hybrid form of Anglicised Arabic for speed of use in chatting and texting. As high proficiency lingua franca users, the vast majority of them have achieved functional nativeness in many different domains by the time they reach their senior year. They achieve things through the conduit of English, not as foreign language learners making reference to native-speaker models that exist in reality thousands of miles away from home, but as novice business professionals who will spend the vast majority of their working lives in their own country, not only maintaining their own cultural values but also, as has been convincingly demonstrated in recent research on BELF, their own communication styles (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005). Their challenge for the future will be to preserve the unity of their language and cultural heritage, while at the same time benefitting from the diversity of opinions that life in the UAE has to offer.

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