

New Landscapes in Professional Communication: The Practice and Theory of Our Field Outside the US

—PAVEL ZEMLIANSKY AND CONSTANCE KAMPF

Abstract—This special issue examines theories and practices of professional communication outside the US. In this editorial, we preview each article of this issue and place those articles in the context of current practices and theories in the field. We also outline crucial questions and directions for future research. These directions include the call for a more comprehensive view of international professional communication, which takes into account philosophies, approaches, and practices which are current in Finland and China.

Index Terms—Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), China, computer-assisted language learning, Finland, genre, international professional communication, resumé.

How does professional communication in the 21st century function across national, cultural, and economic borders? What can we learn about professional communication by listening to voices from different contexts such as Scandinavia and emerging economy areas like China? This special section includes three articles which highlight voices from China and Finland on topics which reveal the interactive nature of culture in global cross-cultural communication. These articles offer current “glimpses” into professional and technical communication practices in two very different parts of the world. Equally important is their role in setting the agenda for further research into intercultural communication in the context of professional and technical communication.

The authors examine interactions between (1) professional communication pedagogy and culture in efforts to establish professional communication as a field in China, (2) English language use and culture-based communicative competence to understand global uses of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), and (3) national and global cultures as seen through recent developments in the genre structure of resumes in China.

Our purpose in this editorial is to preview the articles you are about to read in this special issue, and to place these articles and the issue as a whole in the context of the discussions of international and intercultural professional communications by US scholars and practitioners of the field in recent years. We believe that placing the contents of this special issue into

the context of the larger conversation of our field makes the issue all the more relevant to the ongoing discussion of the importance and role of cross-country and cross-cultural issues in professional communication. It also shows our colleagues overseas that we, as a community of scholars and practitioners, are willing to expand the view of our field beyond the confines of our own continent.

What can an understanding of the interactive nature of professional communication in global contexts do for the field of technical and professional communication? First, it can begin to fill the gap in our understanding of how professional communication is understood and practiced outside the US. Since many of our graduates will seek employment in multinational companies, a background which includes US and global business perspectives is necessary to adequately prepare them for the workforce. In addition, to continue building a robust and relevant theoretical base for the field of professional communication, we need to extend our theoretical perspectives to include these relevant international and interactional perspectives on professional communication pedagogy, communicative competence, and genre.

To situate these interactional perspectives on cross-cultural and multicultural communicative situations in the IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION, we will present a number of trends about culture and internationalization from previous editions of the journal. This historical perspective demonstrates why now is the time to rethink our understanding of technical communication in the 21st century not only taking global and international perspectives into account but also listening to international voices and engaging through multidirectional dialog.

P. Zemliansky is with the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 32816 USA.
C. Kampf is with the Department of Business Communication, Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University, Aarhus 8200, Denmark (email: cka@asb.dk).

IEEE 10.1109/TPC.2011.2161799

In 1994, Michael Goodman introduced a special section in the IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION focused on professional communication in Russia from an American perspective [1]. The context of that special section was a time of change in Russia caused by the shift from a command to a market economy. The section focused on how that affected the practice of technical communication in Russia. Goodman called for Russian technical communicators to learn from audience and context-focused US principles of technical and corporate communication. Is this a parallel time of change for the large US-based field of technical and professional education in which it is our turn now to look out and learn from multinational new voices to further develop the field for the global contexts of the 21st century?

Since then, themes which address multinational and cross-cultural perspectives have included translation and localization [2]–[6] and technology as (re)shaping culture and communication patterns [7]–[10]. Several authors have relied on an approach to international context rooted in dimensions of culture [11], [12] or value orientations [13] as part of audience analysis (e.g., [14]). These themes have set a foundation for awareness and have answered Subbiah's 1992 call for including culture in audience analysis [15]. In addition, Michael Steenhouder, from the University of Twente in the Netherlands, edited a special issue with many European voices, focused on procedural knowledge of technology interfaces [16]. This special issue demonstrated an interactive approach to understanding culture by engaging with US-based ideas and introducing new voices from Europe in 2004. These new voices brought in a larger perspective in a subtle manner, without pointing out differences in background, assumptions, and constraints, but rather through engagement in the framing and presenting of ideas. This issue searches out other voices and looks to the ways in which they reflect on culture and the role of culture in understanding technical communication in China and Finland.

In IPCC conference proceedings, suggestions for teaching an interactional perspective on culture for international and multicultural settings have been set out, such as viewing culture as dimensional, learnable, and interactional [17], [18] and paralogic hermeneutics which situates culture within the give and take of a communicative situation [19]. However, these calls focus on the technical communication in a US classroom environment, and need perspectives from international and

multicultural contexts to be fulfilled. One such study from Melton, talks about the adaptation of a US-focused training seminar for a Japanese audience, calling for a reevaluation of “the rhetorical abilities that are required in professional communication contexts” [6].

In taking an interactional perspective on educational structures, communicative competence, and genre in multicultural environments, we believe that these three articles bring in perspectives that can aid us in understanding how to extend theory and practice into 21st century global contexts which are formed through and rely on transformation linked to intercultural interaction.

In the first article, Peiya Gu presents a 10-year study of a project to develop a computer-assisted language learning program for professional communication in China. She finds that the link between culture and education implies that for a shift in education practices to occur, the local culture needs to undergo a transformation in beliefs as well. The tensions involved in the transformation described are influenced by a new global economic and cultural reality in which “doing” is valued over being. In order to move to a philosophy of intercultural education, she explains that deep, long-held, and ancient belief systems must be confronted. The significance of her findings is that she confirms a link between the education system and culture which is, by nature, the dynamic and transformative and involves ways in which knowledge is conceptualized.

In the second article, Leena Louhiala-Salminen and Anne Kankaanranta from the Aalto School of Economics in Finland present a focus on BELF to reveal the notion of multicultural and intercultural communicative competence. This competence emerges from interaction in international business environments. They differentiate the notion of competency in BELF from competency in the English language as used by native speakers, suggesting that communicative competence stemming from an understanding of the intercultural situation is more important than language knowledge and ability. This work has significant implications for defining communicative in competence in intercultural business environments as a core skill in the global workplace. Implications for the curriculum for professional and technical communication programs in the US include the need for integrating intercultural communicative competence as

part of the basic rhetorical toolkit for technical communicators in the new global environment.

Finally, in the third article, we return to China with a focus on an emerging genre, the resume, and its implications for the global practice of professional and technical communication. Here, Xiaoli Li emphasizes the importance of the resume in a globalized economy, reminding us that it not only affects students, but also other job applicants and hiring managers in companies. She situates the Chinese resume in the cultural context of business processes for hiring, pointing out unique features such as the “evaluation” parts of the resume, which take the place of cover letters and often self-recommend the candidate. One key implication of this study is that genres are shifting in a global world in response to global economic forces and local cultural institutions and, thus, we should consider how we teach genre so that we enable students to derive the appropriate genre structures from the ability to analyze exigencies present in changing global economic contexts and cultural responses to them rooted in local institutions. This article also challenges technical communication teachers to expand their understanding of the resume genre in order to help Chinese students write appropriate resumes for job seeking in China.

These three articles continue to fill the gap in our understanding of professional communication outside US contexts. These articles pose questions that are fundamental of our understanding of 21st century professional communication as it functions across economic, national, and cultural borders. The three interactions presented—between cultural tradition and educational practices, English language use and intercultural communicative competence, and national institutions and norms with global economic needs as represented in genres—lead us to expand the scope of our vision for understanding technical communication and imply crucial questions for further developing technical communication theory and practice:

- (1) What are the social and cultural forces that affect professional and academic communication education and practice as globalization progresses?
- (2) How are the planning and implementation of communication projects, initiatives and practices influenced by long-standing societal and cultural habits and customs? And how do these habits and customs function and transform in intercultural environments?
- (3) How can professional communicators approach differences in genres, habits, and customs as opportunities for expanding their own practice rather than trying to correct them?
- (4) How can the notion of BELF and the need for intercultural communication competency reshape our notions of language, audience, and genre use for technical communication?

We learn at least two very important lessons about the practice and theory of professional communication outside North America from the articles included in this issue. The first lesson is about the connection between linguistic and communicative practice on the one hand and cultural practice on the other. Significantly, for the writers whose articles are included in this special issue, the phrase “cultural practice” includes histories and philosophies of their societies. The second lesson is that with the rise of China and other countries as new world powers, the American-centric view of the use of English in professional communication settings may not be sustainable any more. Instead, we may need to think of the global professional communication landscape as a more decentralized place, one that has multiple sets of conditions, agendas, and players. Such a geo-political and geo-social change will surely require a new set of theories, approaches, and methods. The articles in this special issue take an important step toward the development of such new sets.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. B. Goodman, “The special section on professional communication in Russia: An American perspective,” *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 60–61, Jun. 1994.
- [2] W. Fukuoka and J. H. Spyridakis, “Japanese readers’ comprehension of and preferences for inductively versus deductively organized text,” *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 355–367, Dec. 2000.
- [3] M. Flammia, “Preparing technical communication students to play a role on the translation team,” *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 401–412, Dec. 2005.
- [4] P. Hofmann, “Localising and internationalising graphics and visual information commentary,” *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 91–92, Jun. 2007.
- [5] J. H. Melton, “Lost in translation: Professional communication competencies in global training contexts,” *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 198–214, Jun. 2008.

- [6] J. H. Melton, "Going global: A case study of rhetorical invention, packaging, delivery, and feedback collection," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 229–242, Sep. 2009.
- [7] K. St. Amant, "Cultures, computers, and communication: Evaluating models of international online production," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 291–295, Dec. 2001.
- [8] D. Anawati and A. Craig, "Behavioral adaptation within cross-cultural virtual teams," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 44–56, Mar. 2006.
- [9] J. B. Strother, Z. Fazal, and M. Millsap, "Legal and ethical issues of the corporate blogosphere," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 243–253, Sep. 2009.
- [10] D. Dysart-Gale, K. Pitula, and T. Radhakrishnan, "Culture, communication, and ICT for development: A Caribbean study," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 43–55, Mar. 2011.
- [11] G. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996.
- [12] F. Trompenaars and C. Hampden-Tumer, *Riding the Waves of Culture*, 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998.
- [13] F. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Company, 1961.
- [14] M. McCool, "Adapting e-learning for Japanese audiences tutorial," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 335–345, Dec. 2006.
- [15] M. Subbiah, "Adding a new dimension to the teaching of audience analysis: Cultural awareness," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 14–18, Mar. 1992.
- [16] M. Steehouder, "Acquiring procedural knowledge of a technology interface: Introduction to this special issue," *IEEE Trans. Prof. Commun.*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 1–4, Mar. 2004.
- [17] C. E. Kampf, "Building a theoretical framework for intercultural communication in technical communication pedagogy," in *Proc. IEEE Int. Prof. Commun. Conf. Commun. Jazz: Improvising New Int. Commun. Cult.*, 1999, pp. 151–158. [Online]. Available: <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=799115&isnumber=17347>
- [18] C. Kampf, "Processes of intercultural communication as part of shifting cultural paradigms," in *Proc. IEEE Int. Prof. Commun. Conf.*, 2002, pp. 237–244. [Online]. Available: <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=1049106&isnumber=22469>
- [19] N. Matveeva, "Paralogic hermeneutics: An alternative approach to teaching intercultural communication in a technical writing course," in *Proc. Int. Prof. Commun. Conf.*, Jul. 10–13, 2005, pp. 390–395. [Online]. Available: <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=1494202&isnumber=32120>

Pavel Zemliansky is an associate professor in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, University of Central Florida (UCF), Orlando. He is also the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at UCF. He teaches courses in writing, rhetoric, and professional communication. He has published books, book chapters, and journal articles on workplace communication, digital and visual rhetoric, composition theory and practice, gaming for education, and other topics. Before becoming a teacher and researcher of writing and professional communication, he worked as a translator, interpreter, and teacher of English for specific purposes in the US and abroad.

Constance Kampf is an associate professor in the Department of Business Communication, Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark, and has been a visiting researcher at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, and the Aalto School of Economics, Aalto University, Aalto, Finland. She teaches project management from a communication perspective, Internet communication, and grantwriting. Her research examines intersections between knowledge communication, culture, and technology in organizational contexts.