**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

**2.1 The interdisciplinarity of international business communication research**

It is important to understand from the outset that the study of international business communication is essentially interdisciplinary and that previous interest in the research questions will, by definition, have drawn on research from both business and communication. In a special edition of *English for special purposes* in 1996 Maggie Jo St John pointed out that “An interdisciplinary approach is called for to take account of language, interpersonal communication skills, business know-how and cultural issues”. And, much later, Ehrenreich pointed out (2010:411) “Although the multilingual nature of international (business) contact settings is generally acknowledged (e.g. Poncini, 2003), the way it is evaluated across the disciplines varies considerably. Contact linguistics, on the one hand, and international management studies, on the other, probably represent the two endpoints of an interdisciplinary continuum”. The challenge of an interdisciplinary approach is to resist the temptation to see one field as a subdomain of the other but to understand the complex synthesis of the two. Business communication has to do both with spoken or written acts themselves and the ways in which they are brought about within the business context.

*Journals, books and committees*

This interdisciplinarity is particularly evident in the range and approach of journals and books drawn on in the literature review which run from more business-oriented journals such as the *Journal of World Business* to language-oriented journals such as Applied Linguistics.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is also the approach of the Helsinki School of Business, the home of much research in this area which has a specific multidisciplinary committee dedicated to overseeing research in the area (Charles, 2007). At the Helsinki School for Business research must be approved by both business and linguistics disciplines before going ahead.

*Positioning of research approach*

As early as 1988, Holden proposed “communication competence” as an interfacing concept “in order to bring together the fields of language studies and management studies” (Holden, 1988) and in 1996 Charles undertook negotiation research “to partly fill the gap between a contextual, business approach and a linguistic text-based approach” (Charles, 1996). Further consideration will be given to the terms in these definitions below. Some approaches in business communication research have focused their attention on transcripts of speech (e.g Bjørge on backchanneling (2010) and on mitigating strategies in negotiations (2012)) whilst others take a much more global, company-wide look at the role of language in business strategy (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997, Harzing et al, 2012). The research reported in this paper aims to fit between these two ends of the continuum, seeking to understand both linguistic and operational strategies which lead to effective business communication. To clarify, a linguistic strategy might be the choice to keep written emails simple and direct, whereas an operational strategy might be to use a translator or to opt to employ a native speaker of English. Linguistic strategies might result in pedagogical recommendations, whereas operational strategies might result in a (business) model. The operational and linguistic strategies are complementary and they both lie within the remit and the influence of managers, who are, more often than not, also involved in the business of international communication themselves.

The rest of the literature review is divided into four main sections: Business, Business English, Business English as a Lingua Franca and Business English as a Lingua Franca Email. The intention is to start with a wider managerial perspective and move in to more specifically linguistic elements, thus taking in the full interdisciplinary nature of this investigation, and seeking to understand what enables success in international business communication.

1. The journals consulted include: Applied Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, European Management Journal, Business Communication Quarterly, Cross Cultural Management, Journal of Business Communication, Journal of World Business, Multinational Business Review, Public Relations Review, Journal of Pragmatics, International Journal of Applied Linguistics, Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, Nordic Journal of English Studies, Journal of English as a Lingua Franca, ELT Journal, Language Learning. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)