



Aalto University
School of Economics

New winds in language education: current needs in business and engineering speak in favour of more content knowledge

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International Business Communication

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Aalto University

...where science and art meet technology and business.

- Started on 1 January, 2010
- Consists of three schools
 - School of Economics (former HSE)
 - School of Science and Technology (former HUT)
 - School of Art and Design (former Taik)
- Staff 4,300; students 20,000; alumni 75,000
- President, prof. Tuula Teeri

New winds in language education: more content knowledge

- Language and communication education in Aalto School of Economics
- Research project on communication knowhow in global business
- Findings of the project
- Practical implications of the project

Department of Languages and Communication at School of Economics

35 faculty/staff and 3 professors

Research in business communication with
Master's and Doctoral programs in
International Business Communication (IBC) and
(Finnish) Business Communication

Teaching in communication skills
for all BSc and MSc students in 11 languages
(30 ECTS vs. 3 ECTS)

English Business Communication (EBC) courses

On the BSc level

- Business Communication
- Managerial Communication
- Managerial Writing
- Financial Communication
- Readings in Business and Intercultural Communication
- Readings in Corporate Social Responsibility
- Academic Writing

On the MSc level

- Communication for Business Professionals
 - Business Negotiations
 - Presentation Skills
 - Thesis Writing Workshop
-

International Business Communication (IBC) Master's and Doctoral Programs www.hse.fi/ibc

Focus

the strategic role of communication in the global operations of multinational companies on both macro and micro levels. i.e.

- the corporate communication function
- interpersonal interactions

Structure of MSc degree (120 ECTS)

Common core studies (12)

IBC studies (84)

Minor studies (24)

Research project on communication knowhow in global business

”Does business know how? The role of business and corporate communication in globalized business”

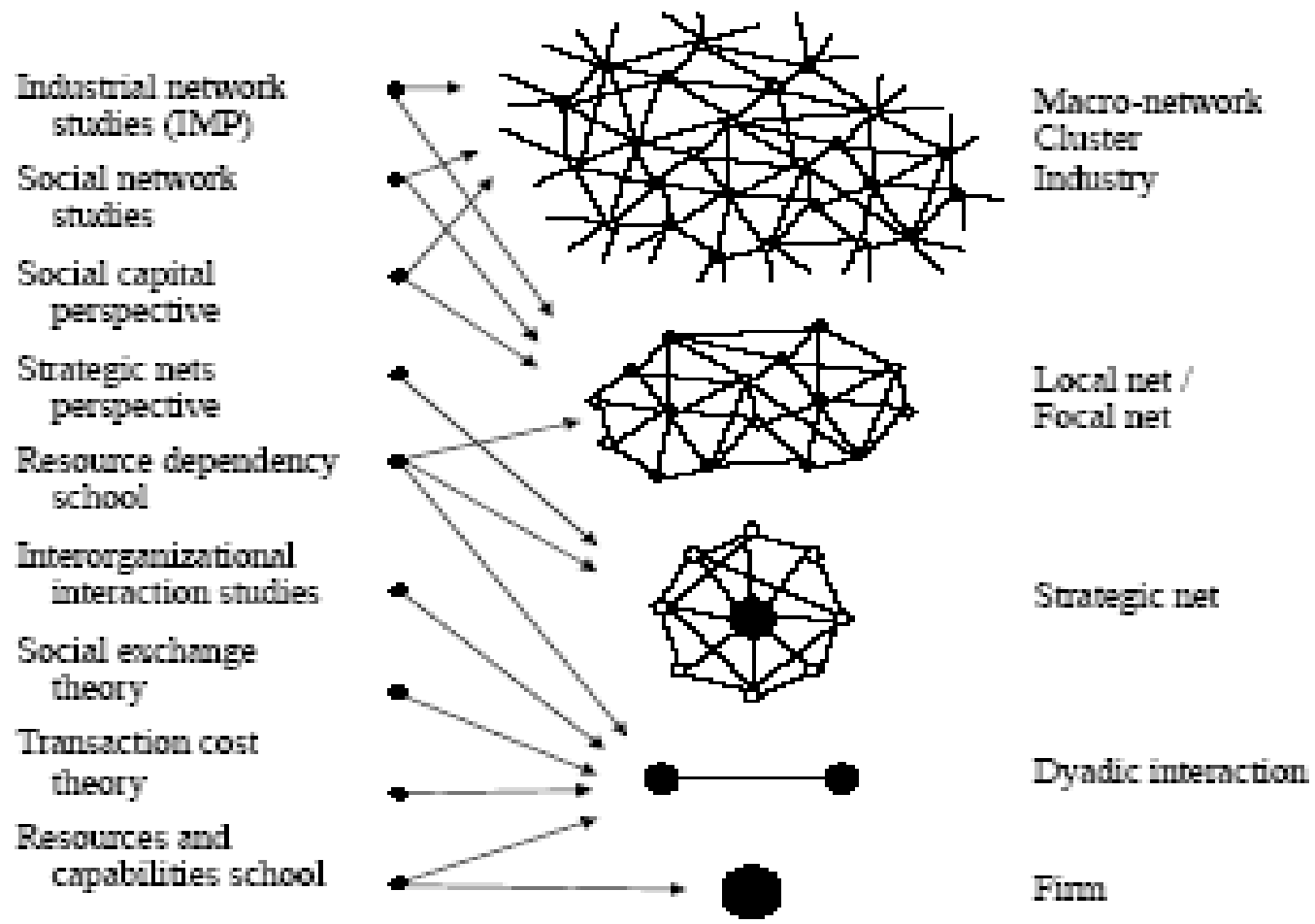
- One of 22 projects in a Research Program focusing on business know-how (LIIKE 2)
- Funded by the Academy of Finland 2006-2009
- Comprises 5 sub-projects

Objectives of the project

- to examine the everyday communication of internationally operating business professionals in globalized companies, i.e.
 - conventions,
 - characteristics, and
 - communication know-how
- to identify features that contribute to perceptions of communication being 'successful'

Motivation for the project

- communication knowledge as an essential part of business knowledge (i.e. what, why, how, when, to whom, etc. to communicate)
 - major changes in how global business organized into partnerships, networks, mergers & acquisitions
 - huge advancement of I(C)T technologies
 - English used as a Lingua Franca in business (BELF)
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Research into Business Relationships & Networks – Layered Field (K. Möller 2004)

The concept of BELF

(Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005)

- used as a shared code between non-native English speakers (NNSs)
- used by business professionals to enable them to operate in a business context
- used both in-house and with partners
- reflects the various cultural backgrounds of its speakers

Methodology

Questionnaire survey

- in 5 globally operating Finnish companies
- targeted at practitioners working internationally
- focus on e.g. communication conventions, characteristics and perceptions of 'success'

Semi-structured interviews

- in 2 Finnish and 3 Dutch multinational companies

→ 987 survey responses and 27 interviews

Respondents of the survey (N=987)

- represent 31 different native languages and more than 20 countries:
 - Finnish 40%, Swedish/Norwegian 15%, English 12%, German 11%, Chinese 7%, Tamil 4%, etc.
- West European languages dominate (over 85%)
- 80% have a university degree
- 70% between 30-50 years of age

Interviewees (N=27)

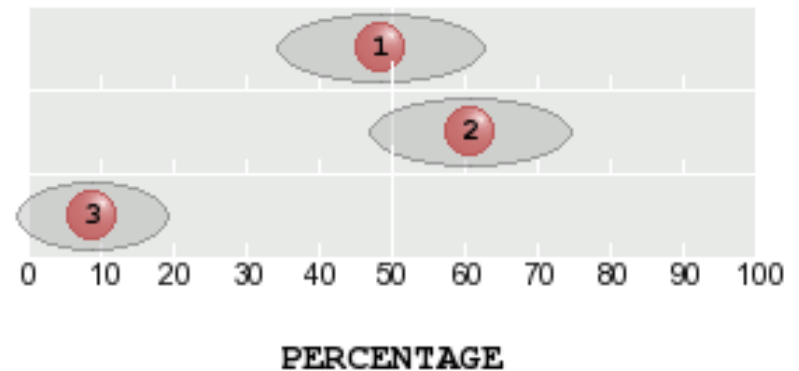
- 15 Finns, 8 Dutch, 2 Portuguese, 1 Italian and Brazilian
- 50% under 40 years old
- 16 males, 11 females
- 23 university degrees (either MSc or BSc)
- 25 managerial positions (senior or junior)

Findings of the research project

- Language use at work
- Native vs. non-native English
- Perceptions of English language competence
- Significance of contextual factors
- Components of BELF competence
- Key communication strategies
- "Successful" BELF communication

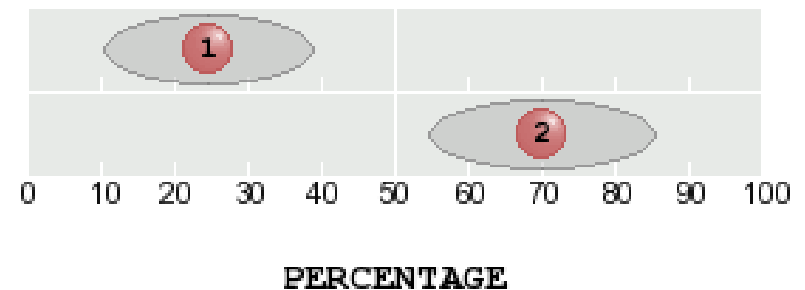
Language use at work

- English (1)
- Native language (2)
- Other (3)



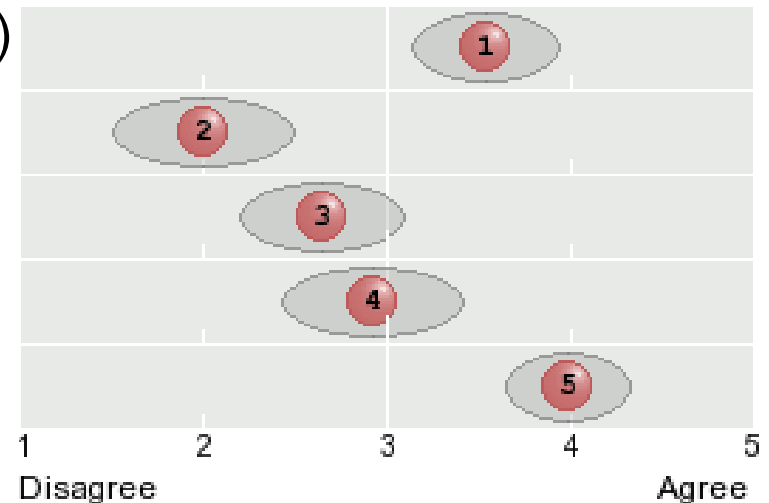
Communication with native and non-native English speakers

- Native speakers, NS (1)
- Non-native speakers, NNS (2)



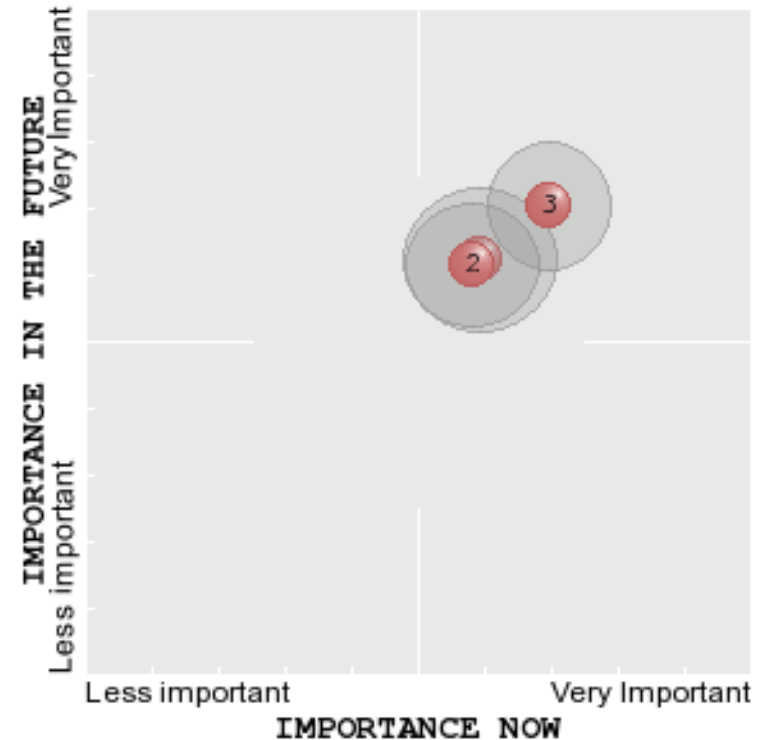
Perceptions of English language competence

- Other party must know English well (1)
- I can work without English (2)
- Native-like pronunciation essential (3)
- I am more successful with NSs (4)
- English between NNSs works well when topic familiar (5)



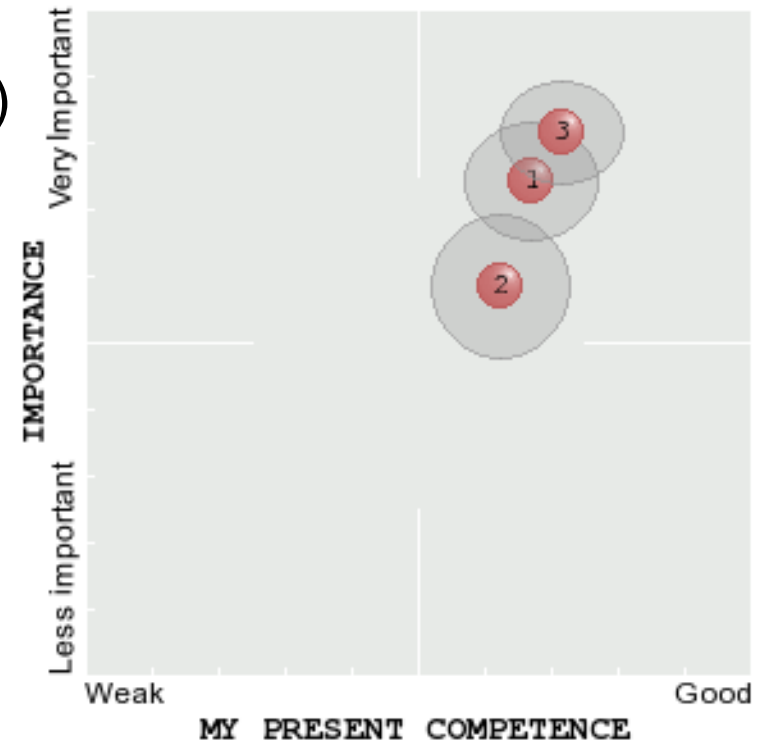
Significance of contextual factors

- Other party's role in the organization (3)
- National culture (1)
- Corporate culture (2)



Components of BELF competence

- Business-specific discourse (3)
- Wide general vocabulary (1)
- Grammatical correctness (2)



Business-specific discourse/content

Jargon, content and vocabulary is where you get the differences...what's important for effectiveness is that you share the jargon and content with your communication partner.

Communication with 'insiders' is typically easy but with 'outsiders' challenging.

Business-specific discourse/content

You need to be able to translate your specific knowledge to suit the other party; you're not always at the same level. How I talk to project teams is completely different to how I talk to clients about projects.
I need to adapt the content, be flexible, regardless of the language I'm using.

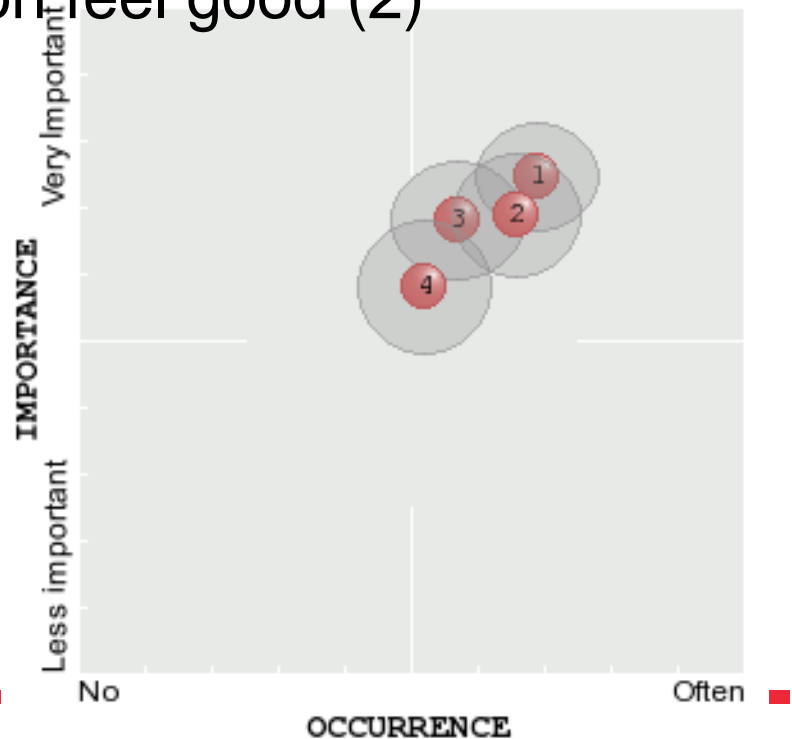
Business-specific content/'facts'

I always check and double-check.

I need to follow up and confirm in writing – I don't need to do that when working in Finnish.

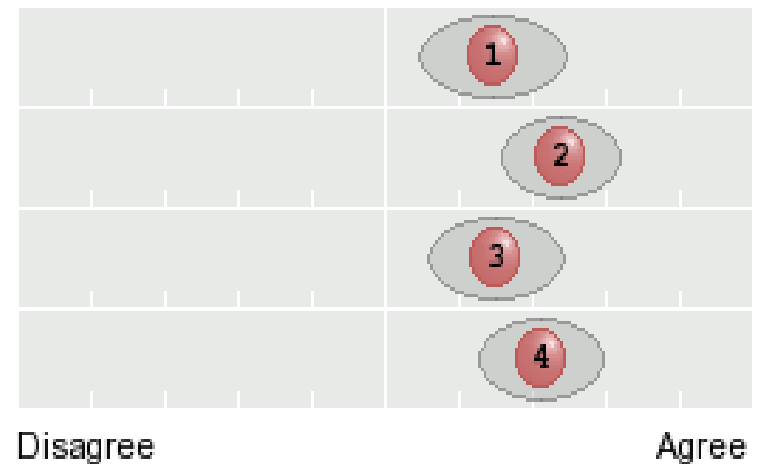
Perceptions of one's own and partner's communication

- I try to see the other person's perspective as well (1)
- I try to make the other person feel good (2)
- (S)he tries to understand my point of view (3)
- (S)he tries to make me feel good (4)



Key communication strategies in BELF

- Directness (1)
- Clarity (2)
- Politeness (3)
- Facts + explanations (4)



Directness and clarity

(BELF) is more purposeful, task-oriented and persuasive than general English – they don't teach you that in courses.

There should be no doubt what the writer means.

”Politeness”

First you say something nice, then you give the facts, and then you close by saying something nice again.

You should just behave in a non-natural way and realize that it works!

”Successful” BELF communication



It gets the job done!

”Successful” BELF communication calls for knowledge of and skills in (1)

(Business) content

- shared understanding of principles, processes, goals, topics, etc. of the business domain/context
- specific terminology and concepts

(Business) communication

- right channel, audience focus, etc.
- clarity, brevity, directness and politeness
- importance of ethos, pathos, and logos

”Successful” BELF communication calls for knowledge of and skills in

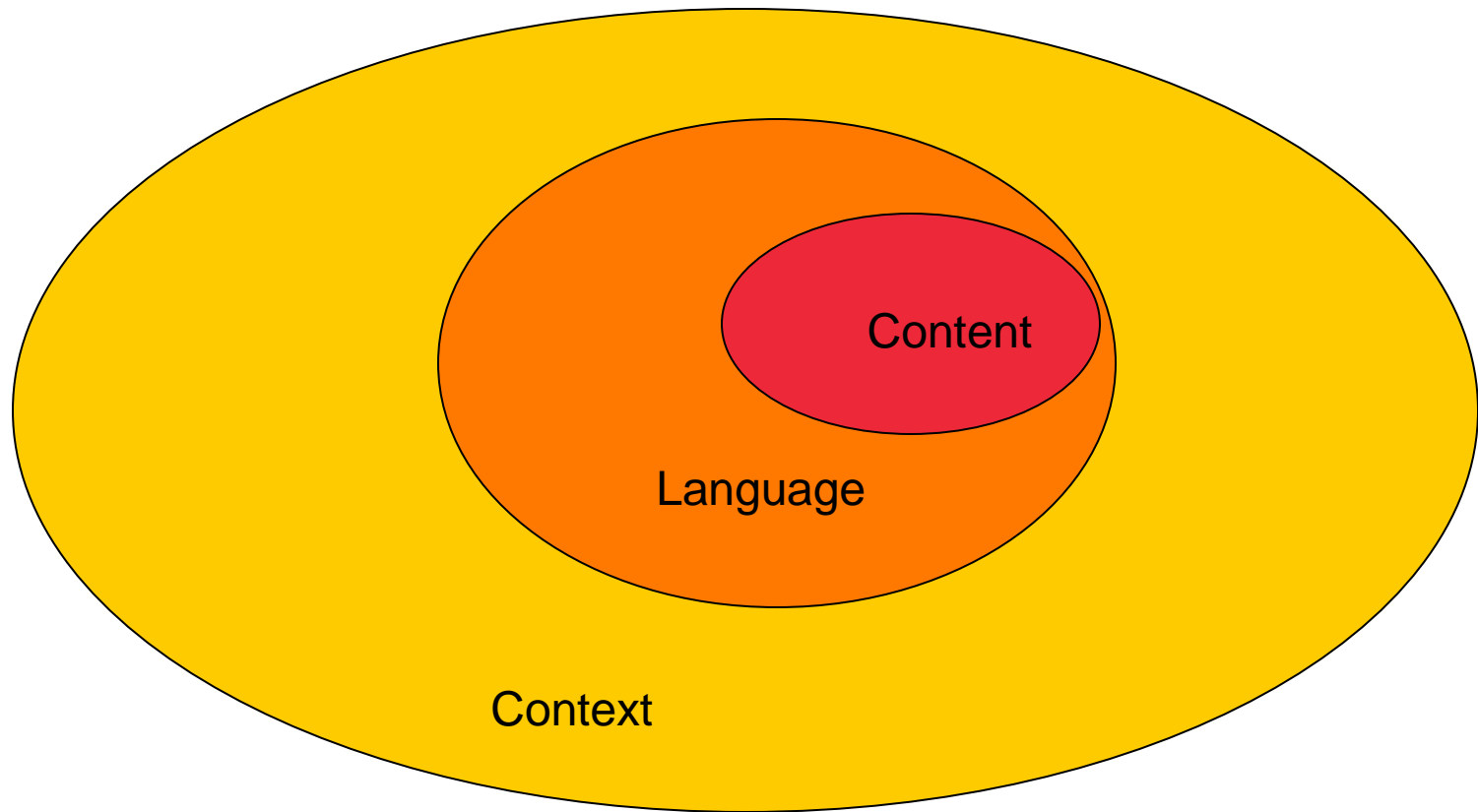
English

- 'simple' English with adequately correct grammar
- understanding different 'Englishes'
- specific terminology and concepts of one's own field of expertise

Cultures

- awareness of how different 'cultures' may affect discourse and interaction
- respect and sensitivity of other cultures

”English? – Oh, it’s just work!”



Practical implications of the research project

(1) Know your content ('facts', terminology, concepts)

- Adapt the content according to the audience
- Make the content clear
- Check for understanding

(2) Make your audience feel good 😊

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