

Project Title : Communicative needs of Chinese professionals in Hong Kong

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Final Report

by

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(a) Title

Communicative needs of Chinese professionals in Hong Kong

(b) Abstract

This study examines the use of language and the communicative needs of Chinese professionals in Hong Kong using both quantitative and qualitative data. The participants were from the four key industries in Hong Kong (i.e. Financial services, tourism, logistics, professional and producer services). 163 participants filled in a questionnaire and 66 of them joined a subsequent interview.

The aim of the questionnaire was to examine the language use and communicative needs of Chinese professionals in Hong Kong, covering mainly spoken means of communication, written means of communication and use of Enterprise Social Media (ESM). Participants were also asked to express their comments towards the business English courses taken and their relevance and usefulness. In the follow-up interviews, participants were allowed to illuminate in detail their communicative needs and language use for different genres, and their expectations of an effective business English course.

This study is significant in collecting systematic and comprehensive data in revealing

the current situation about language use and needs of working adults in the local workplace. There are pedagogical implications for curriculum design of business and communication-related courses and programmes that will benefit business English learners.

(c) Keyword(s)

communicative needs, business English, curriculum design

(d) Introduction and Review of Literature

Business English as a lingua franca (BELF)

English has been extensively used as the medium for communication in international business contexts. The term business English as a lingua franca (BELF) was first used in Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta (2005) referring to English use as “a neutral and shared communication code”. It is “neutral in the sense that none of the speakers can claim it as her/his mother tongue; it is shared in the sense that it is used for conducting business within the global business discourse community, whose members are BELF users and communicators in their own right...” (p. 403).

As a lingua franca in international business communication, a number of spoken and written forms of communication are conducted in English. This includes business negotiations (Bhatia and Bremner, 2012; Bjørge, 2012 & 2010; Du Babcock, 2009; Canagarajah, 2006; Planken, 2005), meetings (Pullin, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2010;

Seidlhofer, 2009; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005); oral presentations (Schaller-Schwaner, 2015; Evans, 2013; Konttinen, 2012; Crosling & Ward, 2002) in spoken forms as well as email messages (Moreno & Sznajder, 2013; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005), advertising texts (Hornikx, 2015; Nickerson, 2015; Nickerson & Camiciottoli, 2013; Hornikx, Van Meurs & de Boer, 2010) in written forms. English has been commonly used in a number of business genres in either spoken or written form.

English is considered as a value-added language that is closely related to upward mobility (Li, 1999) in Hong Kong society. Its importance remains even after its return to Chinese rule after 1997 (Evans & Green, 2003; Evans, 2010). English has been the dominant medium for written communication in the workplace. Chinese professionals are found to often or sometimes use English for written forms of communication including sending emails or letters to colleagues (59.5%) and working on business documents (e.g. report, proposals, meeting minutes etc.) and reading for work-related purposes (e.g. reading books / newspapers / documents / web pages etc.) (54.7%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2018). Although Cantonese is commonly used in spoken communication in the workplace (Li, 1999; Chew, 2005; Green & Evans, 2000;

Evans & Green, 2001; Evans, 2010), this does not affect the use of spoken English. More than one-third of the workforce in Hong Kong are found to use English as a medium for communication with internal and external parties, i.e. chatting with colleagues (34.7%) and external parties/clients (41.6%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2018). Although there was a perception that there was a growing importance of Mandarin after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, Evans (2010) and Chan (2016) found that Cantonese is still the dominant spoken language in the workplace. Expansion into the Chinese market might have increased the use of Mandarin in the workplace; however, English is commonly used when other non-Chinese parties are present.

Language/communicative needs in the local workplace

A large-scale study involving over 2000 professionals in Hong Kong was conducted (Evans & Green, 2003) to examine the needs of using spoken and written English in the Hong Kong workplace; it was found that written English still plays a significant role in the workplace after 1997, and the frequency of communicating in English increases with rank and experience. A follow-up study (Evans, 2010) was then carried out to investigate the English needs of about 2000 professionals from the four key industries in Hong Kong. The focus of the study was on how easy or difficult the

professionals found about different sub-skills of spoken and written English use in the areas of writing, reading, listening and speaking. It was found that email writing is the most common medium for both internal and external communication and the need to communicate in English grows with rank and work experience.

Chan (2014)'s study, through a questionnaire survey of 215 working adults, reported (a) the spoken and written needs of professionals in the local Hong Kong workplace, (b) the challenges they meet, (c) what they perceive as the most difficult spoken and written communication means, and (d) professionals' concerns about the course content to make such courses effective. Business plans, business publicity, contracts, and proposals were found to be the most challenging written means of communication whilst press briefings and business negotiations were considered as the most challenging spoken means of communication.

With the exponential growth in the use of public networking social networking platforms (SNPs), business technology experts started developing SNPs specifically for collaboration and communication in the workplace. These platforms are generally referred to as Enterprise Social Media (ESM) which contain various communication tools, including blogs, microblogs, wikis, forms, instant chat and messaging, file

sharing, opinion polls, bookmarks, and RSS feeds. Generally housed on corporate intranets, these platforms are in some ways Facebook-like applications for employees. There are four main features of ESM that make it distinctive: (1) visibility; (2) persistence; (3) editability and (4) association. *Visibility* refers to “the ability [of social media] to make [users’] behaviours, knowledge, preferences, and communication network connections that were once invisible (or very hard to see) visible to others” (Salmon, 2012, p. 150). For example, a status update on a social networking website can be made visible to part or the whole of a member’s network (DiMicco, Geyer, Millen, Dugan, & Brownholtz, 2009). With *persistence*, social media allow for what is published to remain permanently accessible (Wagner & Majchrzak, 2006). *Editability* makes it possible for social media users to amend, modify, add to and change collaborative work published on the internet. Wikis are such types of social media applications which allow people to jointly construct new knowledge, consolidate their experiences, and innovate (Mejova, Schepper, Bergman, & Lu, 2011; Ransbotham & Kane, 2011).

More than a decade has passed since the last large-scale study conducted by Evans (2010) concerning language use of Chinese professionals in the local workplace. This study aims to examine local language use in the workplace concerning spoken

communication, written communication and use of Enterprise Social Media. Besides examining perceived language use through a questionnaire survey, participants also had the opportunity to illuminate in detail their language use and communicative needs in a subsequent interview.

(e) Research questions

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the common spoken and written communicative needs in the local workplace as perceived by Chinese professionals in the 21st century?
2. How is this compared with the use of Enterprise Social Media (ESM)?
3. What is the relative importance of English, Cantonese and Putonghua?
4. How can the findings help inform pedagogy?

(f) Methodology

The participants of this study were working adults of different ranks in different professions in the four key industries in Hong Kong. Email messages were sent to different business professional bodies to invite their members to participate in the survey and interviews. The professional bodies included Hong Kong Management Association, The Hong Kong Institute of Bankers, The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers, The Hong Kong Institution of Architects, The Hong Kong Institution of Accountants, The Hong Kong Securities and Investment Institute and Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. Graduates of the Department of English of The

Hong Kong Polytechnic University were also approached. The alumni were also asked to invite their colleagues and friends to fill in the questionnaire and join the subsequent interview.

A total number of 163 participants filled in the questionnaire and 66 of them also joined the interview (see Appendix A and B for details). Most of the Chinese professionals had work experience of 1-15 years (1-5 years: 28.8%; 6-10: 23.9%; 11-15: 20.8%) There were 47.9% female participants and 52.1% male. In terms of age, they were mostly in the age range of 31-40 (36-40 years old: 23.2%; 31-35: 20.9%).

Among these 163 participants, 66 of them were invited for an interview to illuminate in detail their workplace communicative needs. Serafini, Lake & Long (2015) stressed the advantages of having working adults as target participants. Unlike pre-service or pre-experience learners who may not be well-informed about their future communicative needs, in-service learners or working professionals are fully aware of the communication tasks at work and language skills they need to perform these tasks. Understanding communicative needs from their perspectives allows an accurate investigation into the English language needs on the job and provides a reliable reference for developing effective business English courses.

(g) Data collection and analysis

Data collection

Questionnaire

A questionnaire in the form of a google form consisting of 2 sections was developed (Please refer to Appendix C). In Section 1, participants were asked to provide personal information concerning their gender, age, the sector/profession where they are working in, ownership of the company, years of work experience, and their rank in the current job. Section 2 concerns the language needs of the professionals. It examines their frequency of using different means of communication including spoken, written and also use of enterprise social media (ESM).

Interviews

The interview aims to examine in detail the communicative needs of Chinese professionals in the HK workplace. 66 Chinese professionals from each rank and 4 key industries were involved. There were 33 males and 33 female interviewees who possessed work experience of 1-30 years. There were interview questions related to spoken communicative needs, written communicative needs and use of ESM, in addition to effectiveness of a business English course (see Appendix D).

Data analysis

Quantitative data

There were 2 main parts in the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis was conducted for demographic information in Section 1 of the questionnaire. MS Excel 365 was used for means calculation and ranking for Section 2 of the questionnaire. Repeated Measures ANOVA was then used to calculate the difference in mean scores and significance among the items/groups.

Qualitative data

Interviews were conducted with 66 Chinese professionals. The purpose of the interview was to allow participants to illuminate in detail their perception noted in the questionnaire concerning (a) spoken communicative needs; (b) written communicative needs; and (c) use of ESM, and (d) expectation of a business English course. Using NVivo 1.2, the interview data were coded based on themes which appear in the interview and the data were then segregated accordingly. The main themes and the sub-themes are shown in Table 1.

(h) Results and Discussion

Quantitative data

There were 8 spoken communication means, 10 written communication means and 11 enterprise social media tools included in the first part of the questionnaire

requiring participants to indicate the frequency of using them in different languages, with 1 indicating never; 2 seldom; 3 not very often, 4 sometimes and 5 almost every day. For written communication, participants were also asked to indicate whether email or letter was more frequently used for different text types.

Most needed spoken communication in the workplace

The spoken communication means included are: (a) telephone conversation; (b) presentation; (c) face-to-face meeting; (d) online meeting; (e) appraisal; (f) job interview; (g) negotiation; (h) small talk. Overall, Cantonese is mostly used for spoken communication in the local workplace as the mean is the highest compared with English, Putonghua and other languages. The three most frequently used languages in the local Hong Kong workplace are still Cantonese (3.50), English (2.91) and Putonghua (1.98). Other languages (1.03) are rarely used.

The top 3 most frequently used spoken communication means in Cantonese are small talk (4.63), telephone conversations (4.59) and face-to-face meetings (3.96), and the least are online meetings (2.55), appraisals (2.6) and job interviews (2.7). In using spoken communication means in English, the top 3 are telephone conversations (3.38), presentations (3.25) and small talk (3.24), and the least are appraisals (2.40),

online meetings (2.41) and job interviews (2.66). Regardless of the languages used, telephone conversation has the highest overall mean (2.98) and appraisals the least (1.84).

Most needed written communication in the workplace

The written communication means covered are: (a) negative messages; (b) goodwill messages; (c) sales correspondence; (d) enquiry messages; (e) replies to enquiries; (f) newsletters; (g) business proposals; (h) business reports; (i) manuals; and (j) memos. Overall, English (3.39) is mostly used for written communication in the local workplace as the mean is highest compared with Chinese (2.47) and other languages (1.04). Email is also much more frequently adopted as the means of communication compared with letter (90-95%).

The top 3 most frequently used written communication in English are replies to enquiries (4.09), enquiries (3.99) and goodwill messages (3.72), and the least are newsletters (2.65), business proposals (2.99) and business reports (3.07). In using written communication means in Chinese, the top 3 are replies to enquiries (2.97), enquiries (2.88) and goodwill messages (2.69), and the least are business reports (2.00), business proposals (2.04) and newsletters (2.16). Regardless of the languages

used, replies to enquiries has the highest overall mean (2.71) and newsletter the least (1.94).

Most text types are produced using email but the gap is the smallest concerning goodwill messages. 89.5% of the Chinese professionals use email and the remaining letters in conveying goodwill messages.

Most needed Enterprise Social Media (ESM) in the workplace

The ESM tools examined are: (a) blogs; (b) enterprise Wiki; (c) Virtual Worlds; (d) Facebook; (e) Instagram; (f) WhatsApp; (g) LinkedIn; (h) Line; (i) WeChat; (j) YouTube; and (k) Twitter. Overall, English is mostly used for ESM except for Line and WeChat when participants mostly use Chinese for communication.

The most frequently used ESM in English is WhatsApp (3.93), and the least are Line (1.52), Twitter (1.56) and WeChat (1.76). In using ESM in Chinese, the most frequent one is WhatsApp, (1.70) and the least Twitter (1.24). Regardless of the languages used, WhatsApp has the highest overall mean (2.92) and Twitter the least (1.27).

The overall means of using spoken communication (2.39), written communication (2.3) and Enterprise Social Media (1.17) indicate that use of Enterprise Social Media

seems to be in the initial state.

Qualitative data

This section reports the interview data concerning details of the use of spoken communication means, written communication means and ESM in the workplace.

Most/least frequently used spoken communication means

According to the interviewees, telephone conversations are mainly used for internal and external communication. For internal communication, telephone conversation is used to communicate with colleagues in the same department and also other departments. For external communication, it can be used to communicate with people overseas, parents and also the public. The main purpose of telephone conversation is to inform (e.g. work progress; project details, application results). It is also used for confirmation together with email messages (i.e. email first and then phone call to confirm or phone call first because of urgency and then email for confirmation). Participants also highlighted the effectiveness of using such means of communication, being direct, easy and fast. Appraisals are least frequently used; interviewees suggested that appraisals are done once or twice per year via phone or through a 'middleman' assigned by the boss. Like appraisals, job interviews are only

conducted once or twice a year to recruit local staff.

Other common spoken communication means

There are both internal and external face-to-face meetings and interviewees expressed a higher demand for internal meetings compared with external ones.

Internal meetings are mainly used to meet colleagues with the same department or between departments or students in the same school involving the boss/head. Most of them seem to be information meetings whose purpose is to inform participants of work progress, review events or work done, and ideas sharing. There are also external meetings involving clients, suppliers, parents, banks, school partners and other local companies. All such meetings are conducted to facilitate work and what the meetings are about very much depend on the different professions and job nature.

They can be about (a) law enforcement and procedures; (b) with parents about students' social life and studies; (c) manpower required because of structural change of the company; (d) instructions and requirements of translation work; (e) with clients about product design and expectations; and (f) with shareholders about the financial situation of the company. Online meetings, in contrast, are mostly used to communicate with overseas clients and colleagues through the use of Skype. This may be a more formal way of communication compared with email as expressed by

interviewees.

There are two main types of presentations: informative presentations and persuasive presentations. Most interviewees expressed that they need to make informative presentations instead of persuasive ones in the workplace. The information presented includes (a) work progress of appeal cases; (b) cases, therapies and social activities organized; (c) stress management in workshops and talks; (d) briefing about the centre being worked in; (e) background information of a local region (e.g. HK, Taiwan to foreign colleagues; (f) instructions about how to use a particular system; (g) work plans; (h) teaching duties; (i) development of SEN; and (j) success stories (e.g. in selling insurance plans); and (k) latest journals and research findings. Persuasive presentations consist of sales presentations, presentations about problems and solutions to the management, and project proposals. There were also a few interviewees who indicated that they are not required to make presentations because of the professions and positions being involved, for example, as translators, interpreters and administrative personnel.

Small talk in the workplace, according to the interviewees, is informal, casual talk mostly related to work. While most believe this can happen any time or anywhere,

interviewees also reported having small talk before meetings or negotiations. By using small talk, a number of purposes can be achieved: (a) for establishing closer relationship or bonding with colleagues; (b) being used along with other spoken means of communication; (c) gossiping. The difficulties involved in having small talk cover the following: (a) inadequate English language proficiency level; (b) understanding cultural differences; (c) determining what topics should be initiated and what not; (d) communicating with the senior.

Most/least frequently used written communication means

Enquiry messages and replies to enquiries are most frequently produced in the workplace through email or phone conversations or face-to-face meetings. For formal situations, written form is used while spoken form more for trivial issues according to the interviewees. Enquiries and replies cover a variety of topics, including (a) work schedule; (b) procedures and details of making a company listed; (c) sales activities; (d) structural change and manpower arrangement; (e) submission deadline; (f) course contents; (g) terms/conditions/shipping/pricing/marketing. Besides mainly factual messages, there are also persuasive ones asking for the possibility of partnership. Most interviewees expressed that it is not difficult to prepare enquiry messages and replies

to enquiries as there is always a template available and that they are very familiar with what people ask and how to reply and provide solutions. There is also a comment saying that it is easy because the company has established a solid team-working environment among colleagues. Regarding goodwill messages, thank-you or appreciation messages are mostly produced. Interviewees find such messages easy to prepare as the purpose is to make people happy. Some reported that a gift or just a simple message like 'well-done' or 'good job' are used instead of a formal thank you message.

Business reports, business proposals and newsletters are rarely produced by the interviewees involved. A business report is usually prepared because of the decision of the boss or the directors. Business reports can be about reviews of business plans, research of the customer groups and travel agencies who bought their products or services. Only one interviewee mentioned the purpose of writing business proposals, which is to suggest sightseeing points to attract customers with high consumption power. There were a few comments about newsletters which are produced following the policy and procedures of the organization and then uploaded to a system for review and approval before being released. They take the form of e-newsletters being produced together with the digital media department. The content can be about best

travelling places for clients or travel agencies; the change of personnel; company's development, the status of the branch office in the world; the superior's expectation related to business profits or information the audience might be interested in (e.g. language teaching; students' interests; language learning interests).

Other common written communication means

Conveying negative messages is also common in the workplace. The negative messages conveyed include: (a) sales drop; (b) rejection of appeal cases; (c) request of working overtimes; (d) assigning extra work; (e) salary reduction; (f) termination of contracts; (g) price adjustment; (h) missing information in submissions to regulators; (i) complaints about poor quality of translation work; (j) raise in service charge. There were comments about the importance of face and language use so as not to upset the recipient when preparing negative messages. There were also interviewees reporting that negative messages are only prepared by senior members of staff who may have the expertise required to do so. While there were interviewees believing that a face-to-face conversation is more effective in conveying negative messages to allow clarification, some others find a hard copy better so that he/she can modify the wordings to minimize the negative impact on the recipient.

Manuals include instructions telling employees how to do something. They can be about layouts of activities or projects for people involved or instructions of using products. Instead of reading manuals, staff may want to see demonstration so as to be more familiar with the steps and procedures concerned. Memos are mainly used for internal communication to inform or update, particularly when the person is on leave. This can be about highlights of some information related to the company and there may be proposals or contracts attached.

Use of email versus letters

As reported above, email messages are dominantly used in nowadays workplace in Hong Kong. People prefer using email as the record can easily be retrieved for reference or follow-up actions. In terms of preparation, there is much time for one to compose and edit before finalizing it to send. A number of advantages and features of email messages were discussed in the interviews: (a) simple and concise; (b) having the reminder function; (c) allowing many people to view the email anytime and anywhere (e.g. using the *sent* and *forward* functions); (d) allowing the sender to know when the recipient opened and read the email; (e) fast and informal; (f) documents being attached; (g) people involved can be held accountable. Given such features and advantages, email is always used for confirmation, for example, after

having phone conversations.

While email seems to have replaced letters in the workplace, letters for different communicative purposes are still used: (a) formal invitation letters; (b) enquiry letters from the public; (c) sponsorship letters; (d) sales letters; (e) letters to go with audit reports; (f) letters to members requesting membership renewal; (g) bank statement; (h) letters concerning legal actions; (i) promotion letters; (j) appreciation letters; (k) letters communicating with the public (e.g. replied to enquiries); (l) notification letters (e.g. about election results); (m) resignation letters; (n) letters from publishers together with new teaching materials for promotion; (o) approval letters; and (p) letters of acceptance. Interviewees believed letters might be more formal in conveying messages of such kind.

Overall preference of using ESM

Professionals working in the government sector expressed that the use of ESM is not getting more popular whereas those in the private sector suggested the contrary. The use of ESM, according to the interviewees, has the following advantages: (a) for easy communication with those who do not have emails (e.g. parents, students); (b) for

ideas brainstorming regarding activities to be held; (c) causal use of language to facilitate more interactions with counterparts; (d) collecting more clarification and feedback for review adjustment; (e) one-to-one communication using Virtual Worlds; (f) free to use; and (g) easy to find out information of competitors; and (h) promotion through for example Facebook and YouTube. Though a number of pros were outlined, interviewees also suggested some cons such as security, the need to reply to messages even after office hours, and inadequate data plans.

WhatsApp in both Chinese and English seems to be most dominant. Various WhatsApp groups can be formed for instant communication (e.g. between boss and secretary; among colleagues, colleagues and boss). In addition to instant communication, WhatsApp is also used when the superior or colleagues are away, during meetings when a computer is absent, or when there are ad-hoc or urgent issues to attend to. Confidential information is not conveyed using this means but email. It seems that the subordinates do not communicate with their boss using WhatsApp and this will only be done when initiated by the boss.

Effectiveness of business English courses

A number of the interviewees were positive when being asked if the business English courses taken were effective. They found the courses useful because of what they have learned in the course: (a) basic concepts about written communication; (b) conciseness and preciseness; (c) relevant course materials with good examples; (d) relevant course content; (e) structure and format of different genres; (f) developing one's confidence in using the language; (g) practice; (h) practicality; (i) knowledge about spoken communication; (j) common language errors; (k) presentation skills; (l) templates offered; (m) being indirect when producing negative messages; (n) format letter writing; (o) sentence structures and ways to analyze different text types; (p) discussion and brain storming with other Chinese professionals in class; (q) clarity; (r) negotiations; (s) a professional resume; and (t) writing email.

There were also interviewees who expressed that the courses they took were not effective because of the following reasons: (a) irrelevant to their job duties as a senior staff member; (b) not practical; (c) not relevant to those working in the government sector; (d) a must to follow the style and culture of one's workplace instead of what they were told in BE courses; (e) differences between the course content and workplace requirement; (f) insufficient writing skills covered; (g) focusing too much on the English language but not business communication; and (h) outdated course

content.

In terms of their expectations of a good business English course, small talk was mentioned most in addition to other written and spoken means of communication specified such as presentations, interviews, chairing meetings, negotiations, telephone conversations, writing email, negative messages, persuasive proposals and use of ESM. Regarding communication strategies, besides language use and text structure mentioned by a few of them, most interviewees found a number of other factors more significant in communicating effectively in the workplace, including understanding of cultural differences, non-verbal communication, politeness, conciseness and ways to communicate with senior members of staff in an organization (e.g. conducting small talk, how to be polite, how to convey negative messages).

(h) Conclusions and Recommendations

This study, based on quantitative data and qualitative data involving Chinese professionals from different professions having different years of work experience, reveals key communication means adopted by Chinese professionals. The dominant use of English for both spoken and written communication in the workplace

acknowledges the role of business English as a lingua franca in the 21st century local workplace, and highlights the pressing need for effective training for professionals to handle the nowadays communicative demands in the workplace emphasizing effectiveness and efficiency.

Many studies suggest the growing gap between the classroom and the globalized business environment (e.g. Bhatia & Bremner, 2012; Bremner, 2010). Author (2014), based on a survey study of workplace professionals in Hong Kong, reported that business English courses are found not very relevant to workplace communicative needs and they focus too much on theoretical perspectives of the language. Existing business textbooks (Bremner, 2010) and task design (e.g. business email writing as noted in Evans, 2013) fail to provide the types of activities that could help students understand and handle communicative tasks in the workplace. All these suggest that there might be divergences between curriculum design and content of business English courses in terms of what to teach and how to teach.

In terms of what to teach/cover, findings of this study seem to show an alignment between the popular means of communication available in the workplace and the topics covered in business English courses and curriculum. While the common

spoken and written genres are covered in existing BE courses, there may also be a need for teachers to involve students in suggesting what additional genres of communication they may want to be covered in BE courses to meet their unique workplace needs. Emerging use of Enterprise Social Media (ESM) should also be emphasized.

In terms of how to teach, there are three main areas that are worth attention: (1) intertextuality; (2) multiple communication (MC); and (3) communicative competence. In workplace communication, professionals are involved in using a variety of spoken and written communication means in response to others' text, which may include telephone calls, emails, meetings and letters. In responding to others, people may refer to messages in previous texts to carry on with the communication. Such kind of dialogic connection and link between texts is referred to as intertextuality introduced by Julia Kristeva (1967). Professionals in this study talked about using email before/after having telephone conversations, and phone calls before/after meetings indicating the interrelations between different text types. Though there have been studies in the literature discussing intertextuality in both spoken and written discourse, the findings do not seem to reach teachers, curriculum developers and textbook writers. Studies (e.g. Lam, Cheng & Kong, 2014; Evans,

2013) show that topics covered in business English courses are discrete and people do not seem to be aware of the skills involved in communicating in an intertextual manner.

Chinese professionals in this study found the need to handle multiple communications (MC) simultaneously in the workplace essential, for example, talking on the phone while typing email messages, or texting while having meetings. According to Gimenez (2014), there are strategic decisions one has to make in order to be better prepared for such communication demands of today's workplace. They involve (1) thematic threading, meaning that we draw together communication tasks that deal with the same topic; (2) presence allocation, referring to using media to allow one's presence over a number of diverse communication instances; (3) media packaging concerning our decision of what media can be used together (e.g. email and telephone conversation); and (4) audience profiling, which is to group diverse audience by their needs and requests. Such research findings about MC point to the need for not just effective but 'efficient' communication in the nowadays workplace. Besides intertextuality that needs to be practised, there should also be scenarios and tasks designed for students in BE classes so that students can make decisions engaging in multiple communications using the skills and language required.

According to Qing (2016), existing workplace English language training courses are mainly outcome-oriented focusing on completion of different workplace duties or tasks but not developing learners' communicative competence. The teaching materials "relied on ready-made textbooks and trainers' own experiences rather than information collected from needs analysis and the instructional design" (p.118). This is a very true claim that needs to be addressed seriously. Communicative competence was coined by Hymes (1966) to discuss the importance of appropriacy that needs to be taken into account to make communication effective in addition to accuracy related to one's understanding or knowledge of the language. Besides linguistic competence that is valued highly in schools, there are also sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence we need to possess. Sociolinguistic competence takes into account the role of social contexts such as setting, communicative function, relationship of the communicators; discourse competence concerns how to form spoken and written texts of different genres and strategic one about strategies we can use to communicate effectively to avoid communication breakdown. Quite a number of Chinese professionals expressed that it is not grammar that is most important for effective communication in the workplace but one's understanding of social context and other related factors:

- "Since my boss often forgets the details which should be presented, I need to keep reminding him of the points during the meeting. To avoid him having hard feeling, I need to be very cautious in my use of intonation so that I can point out his mistakes in a polite way."

- "In fact, most people have unique communication styles due to their age and cultural background. These different patterns of communications might have negative impact on the relationships. To avoid this situation, it is important to understand the background of each other and try to match their style."

- "Manner in communication is important. Do not forget 'please' and 'thank you' as these are simple and basic business manner."

Findings of this study show that in order to communicate effectively in the workplace, one needs to be aware of workplace communication conventions well, including but not limited to (1) the communication means available; (2) the interrelationship between texts, i.e. intertextuality; (3) skills involved when engaging in multiple communications; for example, understanding how to package different communication media for effective and efficient communication. Besides communicative competence concerning accuracy and appropriacy, I suggest adding workplace awareness which seems to be the starting point for one to pursue accuracy

and appropriacy, and there should be adequate coverage of each in the curriculum for such awareness to take place. Implications from the study and suggestions for BE curriculum improvements are made not only with special reference to the local context, but also to the broader educational context where workplace communication has become an increasingly significant component. Besides genre-based, there should be emphasis on communicative competence which concerns not just accuracy but appropriacy. More importantly, one needs to be first aware of current (but ever-changing) workplace communication conventions before accuracy and appropriacy can be well interpreted in context.

Given the dominant use of online meetings through zoom and other means during COVID-19, there may be a need to examine how the use of communication means might change and the implications. Specific communication challenges faced by professionals in the workplace and how the difficulties can be addressed are other imminent topics to be examined to help develop one's workplace awareness for effective and efficient communication. Through shadowing or collection of actual examples of workplace texts, the notions of intertextuality, multiple communication and communicative competence can further be explored and clarified.

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