



## **Book Review: Jung, Yeonkwon. (2022). *Sociolinguistics and Business Talk. A Role-Playing Approach.* Palgrave Macmillan**

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In *Sociolinguistics and Business Talk. A Role-Playing Approach*, Yeonkwon Jung explores talk at work with the support of both a theoretical and applied approach. The book focuses on talk in various work situations through a corpus of semi-structured conversations among L2 students of Business English as Lingua Franca. As already clear from the title, the book looks at the relationship between language and context, paying special attention to business talk—with examples of various types of situations from the business sector—and to role-play, based on data retrieved from simulated conversations.

The data which the author examines consists of a series of student class presentations during one semester; moreover, as students were majoring in humanities and social sciences with no experience in business studies, the interactions follow a more mundane approach rather than an institutional and work-related one. In terms of role-play, the book explores topics that require creativity from the participants (e.g., imagining call centre talk, business meeting talk, sales talk, etc.), less-interactive dialogues (e.g., job recruitment and job application), and less professional ones (e.g., random business encounters). While highlighting the benefits of naturally recurring data, in the first chapter the author explains why conversation analysis has not been used as a method for the study, as it can be

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insensitive to cultural diversity (Duranti 1988; Gumperz 1982). According to the author, despite being simplified and failing to explore the full context (Bardovi-Harling & Hartford 2005), role-playing data can still be considered a close approximation to natural language as it allows for the simulation of actual speech behavior. Moreover, while stimulating their imagination and creativity, role-play teaches both scientific and knowledge skills that students can use outside the classroom.

Drawing on Canale and Swain (1980), role-play data and the students' linguistic skills were analysed considering four competences for communication success: grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics, and discourse strategy. With grammar competences, the author takes into account rhetoric, grammar, register, and vocabulary looking at how they contribute to the development of the notion of identity. Through discourse competence, Jung stresses the importance of genre (Bhatia 1993; Swales 1990): it is to be noted that each chapter opens with an account of specific rhetorical patterns and moves associated with each professional setting. With regards to this competence the author also focuses on random connectors used to describe self-identity and to share commonality of experience, as well as on skills used to show interest (e.g., asking questions, attentive listening) and to provide effective follow-up. With sociolinguistic competence, the author highlights the importance of bridging language and context, especially in goal-oriented conversations. With discourse as a strategic competence, the author looks at politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson 1987) which are crucial in decision-making goal-oriented activities such as business.

In Chapter 2 the author explores rapport talk in random business encounters. After providing the reader with an overview of the structure and paragraph conventions in rapport talk (opening – body – ending), the author remarks on the importance of the body of the conversation as it is fundamental for further communication, discovery process, and for transactional talk. Jung also highlights the importance of questions, which function as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, they help carry on the conversation and lead to effective follow-up; on the other hand, they may sound intrusive. In the “ending” step of rapport talks, the author refers to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson 1987), proving how showing solidarity might emphasize the positive face, while sarcasm might lead to a negative follow-up.

Chapter 3 focuses on conversations in call centers, where language is of primary importance (Cameron 2000). In particular, Jung looks at inbound calls, namely those in which customers call potential centers for support and/or information. Again, after an overview of call center conversational moves (i.e., greeting – identifying – defining – negotiating – resolving – closing), the author sheds light on how operators

structure apologies. Through a set of examples and excerpts, Jung describes organizational apologia as a speech of defense to public accusation (Hearit 1994, 1996, 2006), highlighting the important role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) might play in this. Based on Benoit and Czerwinski (1997), the author then goes into detail with some of the sub-strategies of both the avoidance and accommodative statement of apologies, which are respectively used to deny the accused persons' responsibility and to admit their responsibility. Finally, drawing on Clark's taxonomy (2007), this chapter closes with the importance of empathic communication in call centers, identifying both the linguistic features adopted by complaining customers and the empathetic strategies used by the operator.

In Chapter 4, Jung focuses on business meetings, pointing out once more the general three-stage structure (opening – discussing agenda – closing). The author explores some of the conventionalized practices and language features adopted in such genres (Holmes & Stubbe 2003; Bargiela-Chappini & Harris 1997). In particular, this chapter looks at smaller units of business meetings, providing examples of both autocratic and democratic meetings, with the former showing asymmetry in power, while the latter displays a more horizontal structure. With autocratic meetings, the chairman usually adopts imperative forms, topic agenda, and takes individual decisions, while in democratic ones the chairman is more limited. Drawing upon Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987), the author explores the taxonomy of disagreement which is described as the ability of a relationship to deal with conflicts, insults, and interruptions.

Chapter 5 looks at Sales Talk: after an overview of the structure of conventions and moves, this section looks at how trust – which is taken as a discursive practice – can be achieved through *grounds for trust* (Candlin & Crichton 2013). The author provides examples and explanations of how it can be realised by emphasizing the company's ethics and professionalism, as it can be based on performance knowledge, proficiency, and ability. Sales is also linked to purchase satisfaction, which is why sales operators are expected to use questions to appeal the audience and customers. Looking also at strategies influencing the buying decision, namely listening attentively and meeting the customers' needs, the author shows how the sales person appeals to the potential customer through different steps.

Job Recruitment Talk (Chapter 6) focuses on language features which are used as tools for job recruitment. Again, the chapter opens with the four-paragraph conventions of this work talk (i.e., self-introduction - corporate information - job recruitment information - Q&A). It then focuses on textual features related to corporate code of conduct and the complex nature of organizational credibility, such

as calculus-based trust, where trust is based on ongoing calculability of others' behavior. The author explores the corporate code of conduct, looking at the keyword-based management language, which includes corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and corporate values – linked to the notion of identification. Drawing upon Tompkins and Cheney (1985), the use of specific keywords might invite people not currently employed to identify themselves in a company and, viceversa, a company may want to “homogenize” people they hire (Conrad & Poole 2012, 47). The author also looks at the persuasive nature of this genre, exploring in detail and through examples the use of the *you*-attitude, which is used for directive messages and takes from the audience's perspective.

With regards to job application talk (Chapter 7), the author once more opens with the classic paragraph convention (introduction - body - ending) followed by examples. The introduction is used to establish the credibility of candidates as well as to show their identity and social identity. In the body, candidates can enhance his/her persuasiveness by making the central selling point and boosting credibility through expertise. The ending adopts various motivational techniques through which the applicant shows their wish to work with the audience.

The final chapter of the books sums up the concluding points. Specifically, the author remarks on the various uses of simulated data, which is usually created by L1 speakers who are highly experienced in their sector, meaning that results might be similar to authentic data. The author stresses on the fact that the interaction between L2 speakers and novices of business English as Lingua Franca may help students in the contingencies of real-life situations. The book closes with suggestions for future research such as delving into concepts of identity in L2 students and the way they interpret Face Threatening Acts.

All in all, the book under review might be used as a practical guide in Business English as Lingua Franca classes, with materials highlighting both rhetorical moves and phraseology which might be useful in actual work situations. Moreover, open questions at the end of each chapter might be used for discussion groups in class. However, an explicit table or reference to the phraseology of each step and move could certainly help students in the process of language learning. It might have also been useful to add an appendix of materials at the end of the book with sources for students being trained in role-play. Overall, Jung's book can be seen as a springboard for students willing to approach business communication for the first time, as well as for teachers and researchers who are interested in further exploring role-play conversations from both a teaching and cross-cultural perspective.

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## Declaration of Interest

The author hereby confirms that there are no identifiable conflicting commercial interests or personal associations that might have seemed to impact the research presented in this paper.

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