Exploring professional communication. Language in action: Stephanie Schnurr, Routledge, London/New York, 2014, 234 pp., €30.99, ISBN: 978-0-415-58583-8

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Stephanie Schnurr's book *Exploring Professional Communication. Language in Action* is a welcome contribution to the study of communication – written as well as spoken – in a variety of professional settings. It takes, in line with the Routledge *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* series a problem-based approach: each chapter first introduces examples highlighting the problems and practices relating to different aspects of professional communication, followed by a section entitled “interventions and engagement” (p. 2) and a section that Schnurr calls a “theory section” (p. 2). This applied approach is exemplified in Chapter 1, where Schnurr quotes a number of issues that may be of particular interest to practitioners, from improving internal and external communication to changing a company's public image.

Exploring Professional Communication: Language in Action consists of eight chapters, each of which is introducing what is probably best called a ‘perspective’ on professional communication (for example, genres, culture, gender and leadership). It is one of the biggest strengths of this book that Schnurr takes a multi-method approach, that she does not focus solely on one research method – say, CA or genre analysis – and that she discusses both spoken and written communication.

Chapter 1 introduces professional communication as an instance of ‘institutional talk’ (Drew and Heritage, 1992), discusses both transactional and relational aspects of communication and delineates the term which forms the book's title from related ones such as ‘Workplace Discourse’ (Koester, 2010) or Business Discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007). Schnurr suggests that her aim is to broaden out the study of professional communication and increase its scope to include verbal as well as non-verbal communication, white-collar and blue-collar contexts, and multi-modal features of communication. As a consequence, the examples for this and other chapters are drawn from a wide range of contexts, e.g. corporate, non-profit, educational and legal.

Chapter 2 discusses genres of professional communication. The defining feature of this chapter is that it discusses both spoken and written genres, using examples as wide ranging as sales promotion letters, job applications, transcription of witness interrogations, classroom exchanges, patient–doctor interactions, to mention just a few. In the second part of the chapter, the notion of ‘genre’ is then defined with reference to a wide range of theoretical frameworks, also making references to the development of new genres as a result of technological advances. The concluding part of the chapter deals with the methods of genre analysis, focusing on the tradition of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993).

Chapter 3 deals with Workplace Culture. Schnurr defines culture as “a system of shared meanings and values as reflected in the discursive and behavioural norms typically displayed by members that distinguish their workplace from others” (p. 61). Continuing this organisational approach to the notion of culture, Schnurr then draws on several theoretical models, such as Schein's (1992), as well as Hofstede's (1990) dimensions of organisational culture and the notion of ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wagner, 1991).

Chapter 4 spins the cultural wheel further by discussing ‘culture’ in the context of personal relationships across cultural boundaries, as enacted through politeness. Starting with examples of intercultural cultural misunderstandings, the chapter then discusses critically the concept of ‘culture’, in particular with regard to the dangers of stereotyping and over-generalising the behaviours of particular groups. In the third part of the chapter, the concepts of ‘politeness’ and ‘face’ according to Brown and Levinson (1987) are introduced, as well as Spencer-Oatey's (2000) framework of rapport management.

In Chapter 5, Schnurr moves on to the issue of ‘identities’ at work’. This chapter takes again a broad approach, discussing corporate as well as individual identity as portrayed and projected through discourse. Schnurr contextualises the study of identity by discussing issues such as ‘power’ and ‘role’. The chapter ends with an introduction to various approaches to ‘identity’, most notably social constructionism and Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five principles of identity construction.

In Chapter 6, the discussion of 'identity' is continued with a focus on gender identities and gender stereotyping at work. Schnurr not only illustrates what one could call a chicken-and-egg-position women may find themselves in the workplace, where gender stereotyping on the one hand may limit their professional options, but where them displaying communication styles associated with masculinity is also evaluated negatively. The chapter continues with an in-depth discussion of research on gender and gendered speech styles. Section C then makes suggestions on how to research gender and language in the workplace.

Chapter 7 focuses on leadership and leadership discourse, showing mainly how leadership is displayed in spoken interactions and how both transactional and relational goals are pursued and reached by the speakers. It also introduces various approaches to leadership, in particular hierarchical leadership and co-leadership. In the final section, micro-analytical approaches to the study of spoken (professional) communication, most notably CA and interactional sociolinguistics, are introduced.

Chapter 8 closes the book, pointing out the importance of the need to create synergies between the various issues of professional communication discussed in the book and the need to conduct further research. Schnurr posits that this need for further research exists most notably in the area of culture in professional contexts, as much of the existing research tends to stereotype and essentialise the behaviours of those involved in workplace interactions.

On the whole, this is an excellent and concise introduction to a wide range of issues in professional communication that can be used as an introductory textbook for undergraduate and postgraduate students alike, and which, due to the multitude of real-life examples and its accessible language, might even appeal to the interested lay audience. These examples, which are drawn from existing published studies on professional communication, make it easy to relate to each chapter's topic. Moreover, exercises that ask the reader to relate theory to practice (including to readers' own experience) will make the book appeal to tutors teaching modules in professional communication and English for specific purposes at different levels.

One slight drawback of the book is the fact that a chapter on computer-mediated communication in professional settings is missing, but this is offset by the fact that CMC examples are frequently mentioned in the other chapters. Moreover, the purpose of the three parts of each chapter could, at times, have been better defined, as the purpose of each is not always entirely clear and varies across chapters. Section C, in particular, alternates between presenting theoretical and analytical approaches to the topics in question. However, this hardly limits the overall value of this publication which I personally will use in my classes for many years to come.

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