JAPAN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION (JBCA)

1. Profile of Japan Business Communication Association

The Japan Business Communication Association, renamed from the Japan Business English Association in 2002, was founded in 1934. The JBCA is the fourth oldest organization in the Union of National Economic Associations in Japan, regarding the date of foundation. The original aim was to study Business English and its related areas and to promote both domestic and international academic exchanges. Specifically, the Association's members had worked in the field of Business English and trade practice. However, since 2002, the main research field has been extended from Business English and its related areas to Business Communication in international business transactions and international management.

There were three reasons for the change of name of the Association and the objectives of its research. First, a more fundamental reason was to activate research by clarifying the field of study. The Association used to emphasize the field in trade practices within the field of study by defining the objective first as "research in Business English and trade practices," and then later as "research in Business English and related areas." The related areas could deal with any business activities and/or transactions, including international management. The secondary reason was to erase the image of the technical aspect of studying commercial correspondence which is frequently associated with the term "Business English." Some members of the Association have an academic interest in commercial correspondence in English for foreign trade. However, with the expansion of business in which English is used, it has been recognized that the scope of research should be expanded beyond the area of commercial correspondence. It is necessary to consider the significance of any business activities in which English is used. The third reason was to emphasize the importance of the viewpoint of communication. English is just one way of communication in any business activities. Although English is the most widely used language in business, other languages are also used as business tools. The change from "English" to "communication" further enlarges the extent of our research fields. By the introduction of the concept of communication, research could cover non-verbal communication. From the viewpoint of communication studies, other important fields such as financial and legal issues can be research areas of the Association.

2. Current Research Trends

There are two main characteristics in the areas of presentations for the last 10 years.
In particular, this feature is much clearer for the last 5 years. Reflecting the change of the name of the Association 2002, the areas of studies have shifted from the area of Trade Policy and Practices to some diversification. From 1998 to 2002, approximately 30% of the presentations were in the area of Trade Policy and Practices. On the contrary, from 2003 to 2012, the number of presentations was one or two each year. Currently, such presentations are very limited.

The second characteristic was the increase of the area of Business Communication studies. Examples from the presentations are corporate communication, management communication, interpersonal communication, digital communication, negotiation and presentations. From 1998 to 2002, there were about 20% of the presentations in those areas. The presentations in those areas have increased since 2003 and recently more than half of them have focused on those matters.

Some examples of presentations in JBCA national conferences in the area of Business Communication for the last five years are chosen as follows.

(1) 2008 National Conference

In a study of “Business discourse analysis: a data driven multi-method approach to understanding business interaction”, Hiromasa Tanaka (Meisei University) provided the practical factors to establish mutual understanding. He discussed the applicability of business discourse analysis to examining the situated use of English in business and organizational interaction. He argued the need for a move to re-focus on the linguistic peculiarities of human interaction in business and organizational contexts, by applying discourse analysis methodology.

Nobumitsu Takahashi (Osaka University) took up “The Teaching of Presentation in Managerial Communication Courses — Nonverbal Communication”. He analyzed the three-layered presentation structure, strategies and nonverbal delivery skills in the teaching of presentation in managerial communication courses. He suggested integrating both theory and practice into presentation education when it is conducted at university level.

(2) 2009 National Conference

In a study titled “An Analysis of Corporate Philosophy and CSR in Nikkei 225 Constituents’, Yukio Hisashima (Osaka Prefecture University) examined Websites from the perspective of Business Communication in CSR”. He examined expressions of corporate philosophy and CSR in the websites of constituents of the Nikkei 225 index, Japan’s main listed companies. He identified the types of expressions of corporate
philosophy and CSR, and analyzed how corporate philosophies are reflected in CSR activities in websites.

Takashi Masuyama (Mitsubishi UFJ Trust and Banking Corporation) evaluated the possibility of miscommunication opportunities in “A Study on the Buyer-Seller Communication in Emission Trading”. He clarified the basic characteristics of emission trading from the perspective of international business communication.

(3) 2010 National Conference

Yasuo Nakatani (Tokyo University of Science) reported on “Global Business Communication Strategies of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: A Case Study of Hacchando Vietnam”. A case study approach was used to investigate global strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises such as Hacchando. The results indicated that although Porter’s framework was useful for evaluating the generic strategies, another scheme should be introduced to analyze the implementation of strategies. It was suggested that a modified framework of Dill’s organizational task environment could be relevant to assess operations for the business strategies.

Jianfang Han (Kansai Gaidai University) made an attempt to analyze the issue of cross-cultural management communication of a Japanese company in China under a study titled “A Study of Chinese-Japanese Communication in the Business Environment”. Results indicated Japanese employees’ Chinese ability, understanding of the different culture and the construction of mutual trust were important factors to realize effective communication.

(4) 2011 National Conference

In a presentation titled “A Study of Cross-Cultural Adaptation in International Business Negotiations”, Yuichiro Yamamoto (Meiji University) attempted to give an insight into international business negotiations from the viewpoint of cross-cultural adaptation. To examine the importance of adaptation, several examples of adaptations were discussed and how factors impact international business negotiations was explained. There may be situations in which adaptation is inappropriate and unproductive. The study provided an overview of the proper role of adaptation in international business negotiations and suggested that adaptation does occur, which is beneficial under the relevant circumstances.

Momotaro Takamori (Doshisha University Graduate School) presented a study titled “Perspectives Required for Globish Usage in Global Business Communication”. Globish was proposed by a former IBM executive Jean Nerrier and has gained attention
in Japan. He pointed out the perspectives where the current trend to Globish in Japan is lacking, and presented important factors for successful Business English as a Lingua Franca discourse. The purpose of this study was to address Globish in relation to global business communication. Some people viewed Globish as a "cure" and believed that mastering it will make them better business communicators.

Toshihiro SHIMIZU (Ritsumeikan University) presented research titled "Dots or Flows? — A Field of Metaphors in Business" and discussed the roles of conceptual metaphors in business executive speeches. It employed the mental distance analysis that yields metaphors and attempted to investigate facts hidden behind the peaks and troughs in the field of metaphor research.

(5) 2012 National Conference

Takao NOKISADA (Kwansei Gakuin University) analyzed the importance of language usage in a study of "Strategy of Framing in Disney". He introduced the example of specific words for people working in Disney. They use Cast instead of Employee, Costume (Uniform), Role (Job), Onstage (Guest Area), Backstage (Behind the scenes), Audition (Interview), Audience (Crowd) and so on. Disney has its own communication style, approach, code of conduct, slogan, storytelling and so on. At the same time, they are using words contributing to the establishment of their corporate culture and way of business for entertainment. The creation of their own words is important and meaningful for Disney to enhance the minds of employees.

3. Publication activities

The 70th Annual National Conference was held at Kwansei Gakuin University in 2010. To commemorate the 70th anniversary the book entitled International Business Communication from the new viewpoints of analysis of International Business was published that year. Takao NOKISADA (Kwansei Gakuin University) originated this publication with Koji TSUBAKI (Waseda University) and Naoki KAMEDA (Doshisha University). Three key themes are presented by these three members respectively under the titles of "International Business from the viewpoint of Communication", "International Management from the viewpoint of Communication" and "International Transactions from the viewpoint of Communication" in accordance with the objectives of the JBCA.

Takao NOKISADA addressed the Conference as follows. Through communication, business can be done by a person who sometimes behaves in an irrational way that economics does not assume. Communication in business surroundings is called
international business communication if the communication is through a business person of a different language and/or culture. To achieve better results in international business it is required to enhance a good command of communication, culture, language and establishing trust with the counterparties. Especially English used as an international language has become a common language, in other words, a lingua franca. At the same time, some English words reflecting not only the culture of certain countries but also the culture of a particular country may become widespread as a de facto standard.

Naoki KAMEDA stated in his address that multinational corporations should be able to function as multicultural corporations. One reason is that international business must be considered beyond national boundaries. More importantly, business people in multinational corporations should be able to establish some strategies about the sales of products, provision of services, marketing and allocation of human resources in consideration of culture beyond the national boundaries. Global managers in multinational corporations are required to be communicators between head office and local offices, and also their relationships with their suppliers and customers are important. In addition to being good managers in business, they must have sufficient abilities to handle human aspects of global networks involved.

Koji TSUBAKI examined international transactions from a communication perspective. International transaction starts with effective communication between the parties involved. They state their own positions and reach agreement through some adjustment of necessary terms and conditions, and then draw up a contract and add their signature depending upon their commercial interests. People may come across the problems of different language and culture. They may think that they have much in common when they negotiate. However, they may notice that they have a different attitude behind the negotiation and agreement. The use of a foreign language in agreement has a different meaning in some cases. For example, the use of force majeure can be written in some ambiguous words without specific examples in Japanese agreements. On the other hand, in English agreements those are written specifically with sufficient examples. This is just a part of the difference between Japan and the West in terms of thinking and expression caused by cross-cultural differences.

In addition to those three main themes, other JBCA members wrote specifically on their own themes as follows:

"Discourse in Business", Hiromasa TANAKA (Meisei University),
"Intercultural Business Discourse in a conference of Non-Japanese companies", Misa FUJIO (Toyo University),
“Communication Problems in Non-Japanese Employees”, Kashii FUKAYA (Suzuka International University),
“CSR in websites in Japanese companies and Non-Japanese companies”, Yukio HISASHIMA (Osaka Prefecture University),
“Crisis Communication in Japan”, Takehisa KOBAYASHI (Wako University),
“Negotiation in Quality Control with the US head office of Intel”, Yasuo NAKATANI (Tokyo University of Science),
“Verification of Japanese Style Negotiation”, Kazue AKUTSU (Kanagawa University),
“Comparison of Loan agreements of Japanese Banks and Foreign Banks”, Yuichiro YAMAMOTO (Meiji University),
“Terms used in Trade documents”, Naoshi TAGUCHI (Waseda University),
“Transport Documents as a means of Communication”, Ken NAGAMURA (Doshisha University),
“Communication in Electronic Commerce”, Kimihiro KOHNO (Gifu Shotoku Gakuen)

4. Relationship between JBCA and ABC

The JBCA has enjoyed academic exchanges with the Association for Business Communication (hereafter ABC) in many ways. The present president, Hiromitsu HAYASHIDA (Chuo University) became the president of ABC in 2012.

Many JBCA members attended the 11th Asia-Pacific Conference of ABC held at Kyung Hee University in Seoul on March 29-31, 2012. Almost 40 Presentations were given at the Conference, of which one-third of presentations was by JBCA members. The program covered various areas, similar to the JBCA, including:

a. Cross-Cultural Communication
b. Internal Stakeholder Communication
c. Industry-Specific Communication
d. Teaching Business Communication
e. Communication in Global Business
f. External Stakeholder Communication
g. Trust in Communication
h. Information Technology in Communication
i. Communication and Rhetoric
j. Issues in Business Communication
k. Empathic Communication
l. Social Media in Communication

In 2013, the 12th Asia-Pacific Conference of ABC was held at Doshisha
University in Kyoto on March 13-15. About 30% of presentations were made by JBCA members. The programs mainly covered the following themes, including, but not limited to:

a. The art of business communication:
   Simple, clear and focused forms of communication much like the practice of Zen
b. Globalization and intercultural communication
c. Business stakeholder communication
d. Perspectives from the business world: Case studies from various industries
e. Rhetoric: Traditional approaches of business communication
f. The role of business schools and academic institutions

(Yuichiro YAMAMOTO, Meiji University, Yasuo NAKATANI, Hosei University)