A New Possibility of ESP: How to Utilise IBD Research for English Education

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1. Background

Recently, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) has been drawing ever-increasing attention in the field of English Education. This is primarily due to the understanding that research into ESP can provide specific suggestions for the development of university curricula, as well as analysis of the features and the needs of the language used for a specific purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In particular, special attention has been paid to English used for business because of the outstanding amount of demand: especially in Europe, the research into business discourse called IBD (Intercultural Business Discourse) has been rapidly developing, as proven by the large number of presentations on this topic at the AILA conference held in Germany last year. In this presentation, I would like to overview the development of IBD, then using IBD, analyse and discuss linguistic and cultural problems in intercultural business communication, with a special focus on 1) tense, 2) discourse structure, and 3) lack of shared knowledge. Lastly, I will present specific suggestions regarding how to utilise IBD research for English education.

2. Outline of the presentation

2.1 Overview of the development of IBD: Definitions and approaches for IBD will be overviewed.

2.2 Presentation of the current empirical study: My empirical study consists of the following two stages and this presentation will focus on the second stage of discourse analysis.

1) In order to identify specific problems in intercultural business communication, a questionnaire was administered to Japanese employees working for foreign-affiliated companies; quantitative and qualitative analysis was conducted (Fujio, 2007).
2) In order to further investigate the problems highlighted above, post-interviews were conducted with the participants of the stage 1 research; furthermore, pieces of discourse were collected and analysed.

2.3 Suggestions for English education (See below)

3. Major Findings
In the presentation, the following points will be highlighted with specific discourse examples.

1) Major linguistic problems (tense): Wrong use of tense that could cause fatal misunderstandings in business, such as the confusion between a) the present and past tense and b) the past and present perfect tense.

2) Gyre-style discourse structure: Two outstanding features of the gyre-style observed in the data: a lack of logical consistency by the overuse of “however” and a “non-sequitur pattern” or missing information between sentences (Kameda, 2005).

3) Lack of shared knowledge: Various types of misunderstandings caused by lack of shared knowledge and strategies to overcome these cultural constraints.

4. Suggestions for English education
Based on these findings, I suggest several possibilities for future English education: 1) development of materials with specific business examples that highlight communicative problems caused by grammatical mistakes; 2) reemphasis on the importance of logical structure or paragraph writing, especially the teaching possibility of rewriting; and 3) effective use of strategies that make up for the lack of shared knowledge.

References
