CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Halliday, at a conference in Perth Australia suggested that:

> The structure of knowledge in the
> twenty-first century is likely, I think, to be
> thematic rather than disciplinary. A theme,
> in this sense, is not an object under study; it
> is not a content but an angle, a way of
> looking at things and asking questions
> about them, where the same questions may
> be raised with respect to a wide variety of
> different phenomena (Halliday 1990:29).

He goes on to add that there are two broad types of the thematic

approach: 'synoptic' (what I refer to as the system in this study) or

how things are organised, and 'dynamic' (what I refer to as the process

or the interaction) or how things change. Halliday believes that

research in this century will be a synthesis of the two, that is, a theme

as having to do with all phenomena seen as system and process.

In order to understand how people make meaning in language, it helps

to put language into a thematic context of system and processes of

meaning. Then the theme of 'how people mean' will intersect with the

theme of 'how people learn.' What the approach advocates is two ways of looking at things, as entities and as happenings. They are complimentary in the sense that both are valid and necessary modes of interpretation as each sheds light on different aspects of the same phenomenon.

Kress added to Halliday's prediction by saying that for the nineties, the theory of language will not be a linguistic theory of language (where language is treated as a discrete system) but a social theory of language:

> Descriptions and analyses will be from the
> social and cultural to the linguistic - where
> the linguistic is seen as one of the many
> socio- cultural semiotics, but also as an
> instance of the emergence of the socio-
> cultural (Kress (1990:51).

The social here is seen as a set of practices, where the speakers are social subjects, socially formed and participating actively in social practice, of which linguistic practice is but one aspect. Thus, he says,

> language is the institution - par excellence -
> which produces subjects in and for a
> particular culture and a particular society
> (Kress, 1990:53).

To arrive at an understanding of both the system and process in computer mediated communication in business, this research takes on a socioculturally oriented qualitative research approach.
What this generally means is that the focus will be on both the active construction of meaning in a specific social setting, to show the dynamic or process aspects, as well as well as on the shared meaning of a particular social group, by looking at the all pervasive system that

controls and sets the pace for the shared perception and communication to take place - the synoptic aspect.

To gain insights into the computer-mediated language of the business community one must first have an understanding of the social structure of the community one is researching into. Without an understanding of the social structure there can be no understanding of communication, for communication is structured by the institution of the organisation. Language is the principal mechanism by which members make their everyday activities, visible, reportable and accountable. Language is the linguistic process of the social event which is part of the social occasion. Hence, the resultant discourse is affected by the social structure.

The social circumstances in which people communicate would obviously influence how these people think about the act of communicating, as well as what gets communicated. Writers are socially circumstanced. In other words, they bring to the act of communication certain values and expectations about the communication. It makes sense, therefore, that the study of computer mediated communication examines the situations or contexts in which people routinely communicate or are expected to communicate.

This therefore calls for methods related to ethnography which is the study of the day to day activities of an individual member(s) of a particular group. The emphasis is that both process and product are equally essential in the understanding of this communication.

The dynamic (process) aspects enable us to understand the unfolding of the complexities of communication, and the product allows us to study the communication as an instance of the system as it provides a record of the state of that system at a particular time, in that particular social structure. The emphasis on the process is to show the possibilities of communication by members or people in actual interactions in time and in history. The emphasis on the product is to show the constraints exercised by the system. So, in order to understand computer mediated communication in this age of technology it is vital that we look at all and every aspect of the communication, that is, a holistic view. It is with this in mind that the study is undertaken. As illuminated by Reason and Diesling:

> The information that is gathered in the field situation is used by the holist to build a model which serves both to describe and explain the system. The model is built by connecting themes in a network or pattern; the connections may be of various kinds, but they are discovered empirically rather than inferred logically. The result of this is an empirical account of the whole system (Reason & Diesling, in Davis, K. A. 1995:440).

The theoretical orientation framing this study, therefore, follows the recent trends towards approaches that focus on the social interactive nature of meaning making and learning with interest in the linguistic, social, cognitive and contextual factors. Learning the language practices of the community is the process through which one becomes a member of a sociocultural group. By engaging in the sociocultural communication practices of the group, newcomers are initiated and learn to become insiders. As people act and react to one another, they construct social relations, ideologies, identities, solidarity,

and social order, and therefore become accepted members of that community. The assumption behind this framework is that these aspects of communication cannot be understood as separate factors, but are better understood as interrelated aspects of a broader notion of context. There is also the assumption that there is no simple adoption of a set of pre-existing methods. The approach can be broadly identified as eclectic. The aim of the research is to make true statements about the world. It is less concerned with the discovery of truth, and more with the relation of meaning and with relativism and diversity as opposed to singularity and monopoly. Truth is more closely related to consistency and logic, whereas meaning is related to diverse interpretation(s) and coherence. What we need in present educational research in Malaysia, is therefore, many ways into a problem and to an extent avoid monism. One is concerned here with binocular vision as opposed to single vision. The aim is to focus on:

> the meanings and experience of the people
> who function in the cultural web one
> studies
> (Eisner, 1981:6).

The study is therefore influenced to a great extent by Ethnography, which studies the world of daily life, common sense knowledge, or ordinary language as they routinely occur.

This investigation into computer mediated communication is essentially a study of meanings and society as they connect and interact for meaning making in a business setting in Malaysia. The concern here is with those particular aspects of contexts in meaning - making and the types of computer related communication which are used by the business sector for self-interest. Through the implication of

various research approaches, my purpose is to show in part at least how meanings are negotiated and business transaction is achieved as well as how the business organisation functions as a dynamic open system. Hence, various approaches: ethnography, social theory, organisational theory, genre theory, theory of discourse community, and relevant aspects of linguistics have provided a particularly fruitful theoretical medium through which to begin to think about such a context. The various approaches, though from different disciplines, have been consciously or unconsciously interested in similar issues and perspectives. This similarity actually dispels confusion and in fact illuminates and contributes towards our understanding of technology in the business community. The approaches that have contributed to the study of computer mediated communication of the corporate discourse community are best illustrated diagrammatically in figure 2A below.

Figure 2A

Theories contributing to the study of the corporate discourse community.
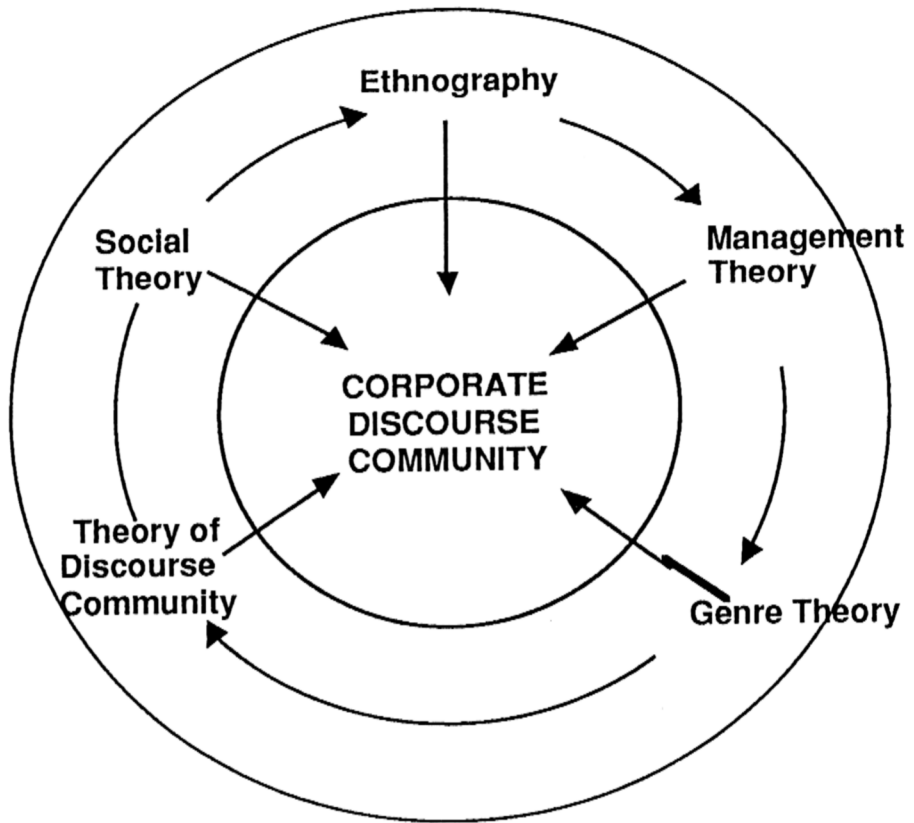
All the various theories shown in the diagram above, together, help to represent and explain the system and the processes in a business organisation.

2.2   ETHNOGRAPHY

The overarching framework of the methodology is ethnographic. Ethnographers observe everyday life on the assumption that individuals see themselves in terms of a group or groups to which

they belong. Ethnographers are concerned with the meanings that groups confer on individual actions, and perceive the selection and evaluation of action as significant. Ethnography is interpreted in this study as:

> a way into studies, not a set of specifications about how they should be done hence not a set of binding requirements (Sharrock and Anderson, 1986:61).

Through the implication of the ethnographic approach, as Rogers has indicated, the concern is the:

> how of social structure - how social groupings emerge, how a sense of social structure builds up, how members make available to one another the organised character of their activities (Rogers, 1983:85).

According to Rogers two processes receive attention, decision making in common-sense situations and reality maintenance. This research is fully grounded in the empirical world and it stresses the importance of closely:

> observing the specific phenomena of the culture in which one is conducting research (Geertz in Odell and Farina 1985:504).

The close observation will allow one to not only to narrate about the phenomenon, technology, but will also allow one to indicate the meaning(s) the phenomenon has within a particular social context. (Geertz in Odell and Farina 1985). The task of the researcher is therefore to: observe the phenomena, collect the data related to the phenomena, and interpret and evaluate the meanings people within

the society ascribe to the phenomena. It is an attempt to demonstrate the "Seen" but "Unnoticed" order of everyday life (Garfinkel in Cuff & Payne 1984:163). These mundane routines are the very crux of the social world. The ability of members to successfully perform practical activities in collaboration with others is what makes the social world possible. The aim is to take these practical actions of the community and examine them to see how they are accomplished and to discover how complex and sophisticated these methods possessed by members are. (Heritage, 1988; Sacks & Schegloff 1978; McHoul & Watson, 1984). The member's common sense knowledge to accomplish his/her tasks in the social process is sometimes referred to as the member's " elegant knowledge". (Mehan, 1983:117). In the words of Garfinkel:

> the activities whereby members produce
> and manage the settings of organised
> everyday affairs are identical with
> members' procedures for making those
> settings "accountable-able
> (Garfinkel in Heritage 1988: 25).

Agar (1986) refers to such studies as ones that venture into "alien worlds" in an attempt to understand it. The researcher's role is therefore one of a newcomer who has to learn the customs, habits and ways of working of this new environment in order to fully comprehend the phenomenon in that environment. Therefore, at the point of entry into this alien environment, the researcher may have some notions guided by intuition and theories, but there are really no fixed assumptions, hypothesis, instruments or pre-determined outcomes as the knowledge is data driven and data revealed.

The research interests are the regularities and changes in selected features of behaviour (change brought about by the

introduction of technology) that are meaningful to the individual members in a business setting. In social settings, actions do not occur as isolated events, but rather are linked to each other as one member responds to and anticipates the actions of others. Any particular action then is embedded in a process of interaction involving several participants responding to each other's actions. (Cuff & Payne, 1984). The task of the researcher is to gain insights into the understanding of how the members of a setting go about constructing and maintaining social reality. The basic assumption is that individuals have meaning structures which allow them to operate on a social level, and those meanings are believed to be contextually related to the events in which action occurs.

Ethnography, therefore, is a holistic, thick description of the various interactive processes involving the discovery of important conditions, as they affect or produce certain results and outcomes in the society being studied. (Lutz, 1981).

In sum then we can say that the study is an:

> empirical study of social action,
> undertakings in a common - sense world
> accomplished by applying invariant and
> relative resources so as to continuously
> structure that world(Rogers, 1983 : 86).

The ethnographic approach warrants that the experiences on the site of investigation be narrated and narration in scholarly tradition threatens principles of objectivity and knowledge claims. However, one hopes that it is the methodology that will do the narration and not the methodologist. Furthermore, through a process of triangulation, data collected on the field will be cross checked with informants, activities,

and artefacts. Triangulation in this study is therefore the intersection of three different kinds of data (for example, a text is counter checked against an artefact, and again with a participant) and the consistent findings warrant an inference.

Figure 2B

The Process of Triangulation
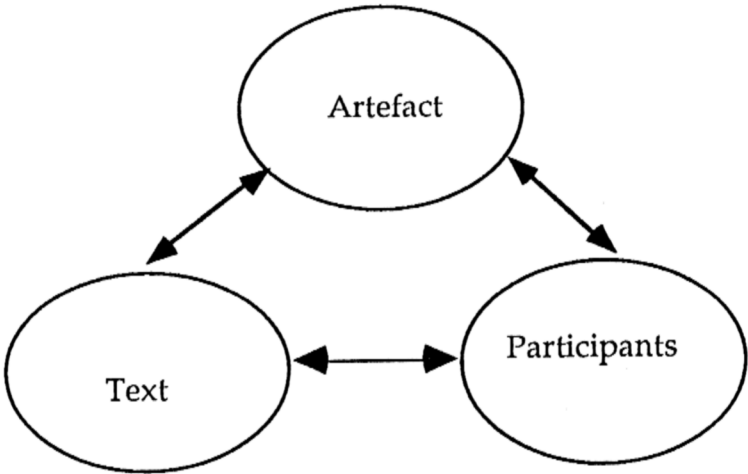
While this study has an overall ethnographic perspective, it is eclectic in its choice of subsidiary approaches. The subsidiary approaches incorporated in this study are, social theory, genre theory, theory of discourse community and organisational/management theory. (Refer to figure 2A) All these theories sit well within the ethnographic perspective. Only aspects of the theories that help to shed light on the phenomena being studied will be considered, as the aim is to give as complete a picture of the phenomena under study as possible. The aspects of the subsidiary theories or approaches that contribute to this ethnographic study will be discussed in greater detail

below. This synthesis of approaches is an attempt to integrate the best of available approaches with a view of giving a whole picture of how people make meaning and how any meaningful social action makes sense to the members of the community. The concern here is only with theories which address the essentially social nature of the individual and the manner in which individuals forge and develop their being in social process. It is not concerned with approaches which deal with the individual, the internal and the mental.

2.3   MANAGEMENT THEORIES

According to Management Theory, to understand the whole organisation, one should view it as a system. A system according to Management Theory, is a set of interacting elements that acquires inputs from the environment, transforms them, and discharges outputs to the external environment. This need for inputs and outputs reflects dependency on the environment. Interacting elements mean that people and departments depend upon one another and must work together. This means that organisations are actually social entities or structures that are goal-directed, deliberately structured activity systems with an identifiable boundary. (Draft, 1989).

This study, therefore, is influenced by aspects of management theory especially, systems theory, cybernetics and information theory to help direct perception when we view the various features and characteristics of the phenomenon (computer mediated discourse) in the Business Organisation. These aspects and interests of Management Theories are also found in sociolinguistics.

According to Management Theories, a system is generally viewed as a set of objects or entities that interrelate with one another to form a whole (Checkland, 1990 ; Draft, 1989), and also in sociolinguistics (De Beaugrande, 1980; Lemke, 1983; Halliday, 1978; 1989).

When we talk of systems in Management Theory, we are referring here to the open system. Basically, a system is said to consist of four main parts: the objects, the attributes, internal relationships, and the environment. The objects refer to the parts, elements, or variables of the system. These objects may be physical, or abstract. The attributes refer to the qualities or properties of the system and its objects. A system must also have internal relationships among its objects and it implies mutual effect, or interdependence and constraint. The system,of course, does not exist in a vacuum, but has an environment and is affected by its surroundings. By these attributes, the system here is viewed as more than just a collection of its parts. The whole is more than the sum of its parts, it is the product of the forces and interactions among the parts. It is a whole because its parts interrelate and cannot be understood separately, and any person, object, or concept is constrained by its dependence on the other parts. It is this pattern which creates organisation in the system. Since systems exists in a changing dynamic environment, it must use its processes of communication and control to enable it to adapt and sometimes change structurally in response to shocks from the environment. (Checkland, 1990).

Similarly this same concept is also present in systemic linguistics which views language as a large network of inter-related options - a resource (Martin, 1985; 1992; Halliday, 1978; 1989). Systemicists formalise these options/choices by means of systems for example singular versus plural or passive versus active. The way these systems are bundled together give systemicists an insight into how language is related to the contexts in which the language is used, and from which speakers unconsciously select. This concept present in management and in linguistics, implies a view of reality as existing in layers in a hierarchy. Hierarchy is used here in its technical sense and does not necessarily imply authority. In a biological hierarchy, we move from atoms to molecules to cells to organs to organism and an observer can describe emergent properties at each layer. Basically then we can see that these perspectives on systems and systemics are similar in linguistics and management theories. To this systems theory in Linguistics and Management Science, we add the knowledge from a related aspect of Management Science, and that is Cybernetics. Cybernetics is:

"the study of regulation and control in systems with emphasis on feedback." (Littlejohn 1992:45). Cybernetics deals with the way systems gauge and take stock of themselves, and make necessary adjustments. Related to these processes is information. Since information is a crucial ingredient in any business corporation, the third aspect of Management Science that is relevant is Information Theory. It deals with the study of information in messages and the flow of information between senders and receivers, the need to compute information quantities, and design channels, transmitters, receivers, codes, that facilitate efficient handling of information.

All these three aspects (systems, cybernetics, and information theory) of Management Theory, while similar in many ways to linguistic theories help us researchers to better understand the "alien world"

(Agar,1986)in this case the business world, we are researching into as it provides the necessary insights to view this alien world in terms of the members that inhabit this world. These aspects of Management Theory enable us to define the meaning relations within and between the various recognised kinds of social practice in the business community in their own terms and not ours.

One realisation from research in this area is that all organisations large and small have one characteristic in common: they all feature human beings in social roles, trying to make purposeful action. These organisations then can be referred to as "human activity systems". The activity systems refer to:

> sets of activities so connected as to make a
> purposeful whole, constructed to meet the
> requirements of the core system image,
> emergent properties, layered structure,
> processes of communication and control
> (Checkland 1990:26).

Every bit of communication makes its social meaning against the background of other bits of communication within the community. In other words, the concern is who is doing what to whom with this communication and how? Where other communication and action stand in what relevant relations for the meanings made and acts performed with this communication.

In order to better understand these aspects of the communication, it would be fruitful to make models of the human activity system, its

information flows, meaning system, and political system. By looking at the business organisation this way we may be able to define it in their terms but interpret it critically from both viewpoints that is the business and the linguistic. Knowledge and an understanding of these aspects of Management Theory help to confirm, enhance and support our sociolinguistic perceptions, thereby ensuring that our understanding of the "alien world" (the business community) is not in any way skewed or biased.

2.4 DISCOURSE COMMUNITY / SOCIAL THEORY

Fairclough defines discourse as:

> any spoken or written language use
> conceived as social practice - that is, as
> simultaneously (a) a part of wider social
> action, (b) interaction in the specific sense of
> production and interpretation of text, and
> (c) text(Fairclough, 1990:55).

His 'orders of discourse' refer to the overall configuration of discourse practices of a society or one of its institution. A focus on the historical study of contemporary orders of discourse is a necessary condition for the social relevance of discourse analysis. He adds that discourse analysis therefore refers to or is understood as:

> mapping onto one another accounts of three
> sorts: descriptive accounts of texts, accounts
> of interactional discourse processes, and
> social scientific accounts of social events
> and their relationship with social structures
> (Fairclough, 1990:65).

This is what he calls discourse analysis, it is not just a linguistic analysis or a social analysis because it hinges on the interactional dimension. According to him there is also a need to centre analyses upon orders of discourse, and that it is fruitful to think of institutions as having orders of discourse, and to conceptualise changes in orders of discourse in terms of articulatory struggle. Articulatory struggle is:

> struggle over boundaries within and
> between orders of discourse, and within
> discourse types, to reproduce those
> boundaries, or disarticulate and re-
> articulate relations within orders of
> discourse (Fairclough, 1990:67).

One implication of this approach is that it looks like a multi - disciplinary activity. This bias towards discourse orientation and approaches, which focus on the social, interactive nature of learning and meaning is supported by many researchers and theorists in the field of Sociolinguistics. Halliday (1989) proposes that an appropriate model for language teaching practices will begin by addressing the nature of language as social semiotic. Within such a model, language is seen as the primary resource with which humans build meaning. It is a resource which is systematically employed to build and transmit ' the essential patterns of the culture', where these include among other things 'systems of knowledge, value systems and the social structure'.

De Beaugrande (1980) is of the view that the study of written discourse must be from the stand point of "human activities." He views language as a system, therefore language has to be looked at as an entity and not in isolation. He believes a systemic examination of data can be done following a systems view. This idea of studying data from the standpoint and interests of a community itself and to see its members

as sources of shared knowledge and insight is also supported by Hymes (1974). To Halliday's proposal of a social theory of language that is reality constructing and reality changing semiotic process, Threadgold adds:

> Social Semiotic" is probabilistic, never entirely a predictable system for making meanings (and thus always a process) which at once constructs and changes, and is constructed and changed by, social processes and social realities. (Threadgold, 1987:549).

Halliday's notion of "social" means two things simultaneously, first it refers to the social system or culture, and secondly the relationship between language and the social structure and these take an external form as a network of relationships. If this notion were to be applied to the business community under study, knowledge is seen as being transmitted in social contexts through a network of social relationships, and this knowledge is defined in terms of the value system and ideology of the culture. Halliday's (1989) notion of the nature of language as a social semiotic carries with it the view that experience and reality are socially constructed and constantly subject to processes of transformation. This is tied in with the view that language is the central resource by which humans negotiate, construct, and change the nature of their social experience. Within such a model, language is seen as one primary resource with which humans build meaning. Human action is seen as an inherently social phenomenon in its sources, functions, contexts and effects. Following this perspective, the business organisation is viewed as a" a social institution " (Halliday 1978:183; Kress, 1985: 6). From a linguistic point of view it is seen as "a communication network" "(Halliday 1978:154). In this

network, there will be sharing of experience, expression of social solidarity, decision - making, planning and forms of control, transmission of orders and so on. Or, as Halliday puts it:

> Language is one of the ways in which
> people represent the meanings that are
> inherent in the social system
> (Halliday,1978:162).

The structure and culture of the institution will therefore be entrenched in the language and in the different types of interaction, or "realisation of the meanings" (Halliday 1978:163). The mechanism in this communication chain or network, is linguistic and can be described by the researcher.

In any period, there are sets of globally shared meanings which are instantiated in various forms in day to day activities and various institutionalised discourses. These constitute part of the discursive practices, or Halliday's "higher order social semiotic" (1978), or what Foucault calls "episteme" (1974) or Eco (1976) as "recurrent patterns". All texts unfold in some situation or context of use. Just as text is analysed according to categories of language and discourse, so a socio-cultural situation is analysed as a situation type and is analysed according to situation and culture.

Foucault (1974) says that each period has a distinct world view, or conceptual structure, that determines the nature of knowledge in that period. The character of discourse in that period he calls "discursive formation." The vision of each age is exclusive and incomparable with other ages, therefore making it difficult for people of one age to think like those of another. He says that the dominant

discursive structures are ways of practising or expressing ideas. Consequently it will seem that one cannot separate what people know, and the structure of discourse used to express that knowledge. Discourse, to Foucault, includes written texts, spoken texts, nonverbal forms such as institutionalised practices etc. Foucault's work is about analysing discourse in a way that it reveals its rules and structures which he calls "archaeology." He feels that analysts should avoid trying to associate authors with the discourse because these authors are merely fulfilling the discourse's function and are not instrumental in any fundamental way in establishing the structure of the texts they produce. He believes that power is an inherent part of all discursive formation, as such power is a function of discourse or knowledge.

Following from Foucault's point of view, business routine can be looked upon as social practice, where meanings are socially constructed and where texts (spoken and written) are considered social acts that take place within a specific society or community. (Lemke, 1988; Halliday 1978; Kress, 1988).

Learning business discourse, or learning a subject -area is understood as cultural learning or more specifically, socialisation into the culture of the meaning system of the subject area (Green, 1988). Competency with the meaning system requires language. Since language is the most important ingredient, Green argues that learning business discourse or subject-specific learning, involves learning to operate both its 'language system' and its 'meaning system.' The purpose of looking at discourse as socially constructed is to explore the relationship between text and context and between:

> language as social semiotic and other
> socially constructed and constructing
> semiotic systems, in order to try and
> understand the "what" and the "how" and
> the "why" of the construction of social
> realities in and through
> texts(Threadgold, 1987:552).

After all, it is human labour that as a social agent produces texts from a position within discourse or in a network of social relations (Kress 1988). It is this combination of social and human that transforms social meanings and values into texts. This view is echoed by Lemke (1983) Eco (1976) and Threadgold (1987).

> Whether the text is object, commodity
> (closed system) or social discourse (praxis,
> open) is a historically and ideologically
> constrained choice which the subject is
> positioned to make. It depends as much on
> genres of reading and writing (practices)
> and thus on subject positioning, as it does
> on the nature of text (Threadgold, 1987:555).

For Hymes, a speech community is an extended metaphor to include writing as well as speaking, if writing figures as part of the linguistic repertoire of a given community. Furthermore, a speech community consists of all the people who can, by virtue of their knowledge, communicate with one another in a particular community. For Hymes:

A speech community is defined, then, tautologically but radically, as a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech, and knowledge also of its patterns of use. Both conditions are necessary. Since both kinds of knowledge can be shared apart from common membership in a community, an adequate theory of language requires additional notions, such as language field, speech field, and speech network, and requires the contribution of social science characterising notions of community, and of membership in a community (Hymes, 1974:51).

This is a similar view to Kress, who believes that an explanation for the different mode and form of speaking can only be attempted if we look at the phenomenon (technology) from a linguistic and social point of view because:

speakers share membership in a particular social institution, with its practices, its values, its meanings, its demands, prohibitions, and permissions. We also begin to get an explanation for the kind of language that is being used, that is the kinds of texts that have currency and prominence in that community, and the forms, contents and functions of those texts (Kress, 1985:6).

Communication is a socially constituted act whose meaning and value to speakers and readers and listeners depend on contingent social arrangements. The practices of communication in a particular community are seen as social, and thereby, material enactments of their collective as well as individual understanding of what can and cannot be done. A study of computer-mediated discourse as a social practice would involve an inquiry into the circumstances under which people

communicate. Communication is intricately woven into the fabric of social life. All communicators use the language of a community. A study of computer-mediated discourse as social practice begins by situating social agents in terms of what Hymes calls a " speech community" or Swales, "discourse community." These practices therefore constitute literacy for a given community. Brodkey (1997), has a similar view of culture and community:

> I use the term culture when referring to what the members of a group know, or could learn, about language conventions. This kind of cultural knowledge would of course include the psychological as well as social information that is frequently compiled by rhetoric and style manuals. I reserve the term community, however, to speak of cultural practices, in this instance to talk about <u>what members of a business community do with their knowledge</u> (emphasis mine)(Brodkey, 1997: 7).

Swales sees the business community as having reciprocal social arrangements of mutual benefit. According to Swales:

> In a discourse community, the communicative needs of the goals tend to predominate in the development and maintenance of its discoursal characteristics (Swales 1990:24).

He believes that discourse communities are "centrifugal " and not "centripetal." In other words, business discourse communities "are utilitarian discourse systems with a goal-directed ideology". (Scollon & Scollon, 1995 :169). Business members literally construct a practice out of the material resources of that culture, including the language in which to voice commitments in business. This view is supported by

Kress (1988) when he refers to the specific meanings and values which are articulated in language in systematic ways in institutions and social groups.

Scollon & Scollon (1995) propose, that in order to get a comprehensive description of a discourse system, one needs to identify the main issues that need to be analysed in order to understand how individual members internalise the identity of those systems and to understand how communication between members of those systems work. They propose that there are five major types of discourse systems, of which corporate discourse system is one. In order to study this corporate discourse system and to view and describe them profitably, one can do so by studying the following : (See Scollon & Scollon 1995: 170-171 for more details)

(1)   Ideology

(2)   Socialisation

(3)   Forms of Discourse

(4)   Face systems (social organisation)

A new member needs to learn the language (forms of discourse) which is specific to this community, learn the ways of working within the community (socialisation), find out the world view and governing philosophy of the group (ideology), and finally, learn about the clusters of interpersonal relationships and how to conduct oneself within the clusters (face systems). All of these four elements mutually influence each other. It is at once apparent that Scollon & Scollon's view is fairly similar to those of Draft and Checkland in management theories. Looking at the corporate discourse system this way will provide a fruitful analytical guide to begin to analyse corporate

discourse. The aim is to learn as much as one can about the discourse system or discourse community, in order to be able to communicate effectively and participate fruitfully in such a system.

> A person who understands the outlines of the patterns of differences and commonalities, but fully recognises his or her own lack of membership and state of non-expertise, is likely to be the most successful and effective communicator (Scollon & Scollon, 1995:252).

There are two important consequences of such a theoretical position. In the first, the individual is seen as a social being achieving a sense of identity through learning to enter with increasing confidence into the ways of working that are a feature of the culture, particularly where such ways of working are linguistic. In this view the individual is viewed as an apprentice, one who is initiated into ways of operating and dealing with experience through guidance, advice and experimentation with the models of others. The second consequence is that it brings us face to face with the ways in which social groups and classes actively participate in the building of social reality in language. Different ways of working on and in the world are encoded in the communicative patterns used by different social groups.

2.5   GENRE THEORY

Before we discuss Genre theory in relation to the study of the business community, it is best that a common understanding of the term genre be established. Swales, has given a comprehensive definition of the term and his rather lengthy definition is given below:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focussed on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realised, the exemplar will be viewed as pro typical by the parent discourse community(Swales, 1990:58).

When we refer to genre we are basically referring to texts purposively used in a community.

Or, to quote Martin, genre is really 'how things get done when language is used to accomplish them." (Martin, 1990:250). Genre is the crucial category of language use, linguistic theory and language change. Neither of these categories can be theorised without a prior theorisation of language users as social agents and cannot be attempted without an understanding of both social structures and social processes. (Kress, 1889b). According to Kress, text is formed in the interaction of linguistic agents who have a certain position in the complex of social structure. That position is a factor of both the linguistic and social history of that language user and of his/her position at a given time and place in structures of a complex constitution. Social structures are a web of overlapping and cross-

cutting structural factors. The sets of choices made by speakers in particular places in the complex social configurations are texts or bits of communication that are effects of and determined by the contingent social practices and meanings of the structures in which these linguistic agents make their choices. Hence, says Kress, to make choices, to produce texts in one social place over a long period of time would mean making choices that have become habitual or predictable or given.

> Texts are therefore encodings not just of one language user located in one place in the social system, but are always (traces of) encodings made from a complex of social positionings of all the participants in the formation of the text. A particular text is thus the encoding of a past history, and of the realignment of the elements of the past history in response to the demands of a present social complex (Kress, 1989b:7).

Looking at it from a social perspective makes it possible to speak of these interactants as being socially constructed.

As socially constructed subjects in a social interaction, they bring with them into the construction of text, all the lived social history of their experiences. (Kress 1989b). Genres are seen as products of systems or patterns of power relations which have a certain stability and persistence in certain societies. Therefore, genre " codes the state - of - play in the social -linguistic system. As object and record it has an effect on the system." (Kress 1989b:11).

Genre Theory is fundamentally underpinned by a socially based theory of language. It provides an understanding of how language is used for specific social purposes. (Knapp, 1989). All meanings are made by specific social practices. When we talk about the mastery of

business genres or business discourse, what we mean is the ability to make meaning in business discourse as an expert or experienced person in the business community would, using the resources of the language of the community. These social practices of the community, function socially, are parts of larger social activities, are learned socially and, are the resources for making social meaning. The specific genres of a community therefore are the institutionalised social formations or patterns of language use in specific communities. (Lemke, 1988). Also echoed by Kress:

> Genres have specific forms and meanings,
> deriving from and encoding the functions,
> purposes and meanings of the social
> occasions. Genres therefore provide a
> precise index and catalogue of the relevant
> social occasions of a community at a given
> time
> (Kress, 1985:19).

The social contexts in which texts/bits of communication are generated are of fundamental importance in the structure and definitions of communication. Over time and routine, the occasions become predictable leading to the creation of conventionalised form of genres of communication. Each bit of communication then becomes recognisable because it has an overall linguistic structure of a certain kind and it is different from other texts, besides that it has specific forms and meanings derived form the function and purposes of a social occasion. The intended meaning is therefore carried in both the discourse and the genre.

In the world of the business community, every text, makes its social meaning against the background of other texts or instances of

communication in a community. Lemke (1985) argues that if we study

a discourse, a whole text by itself apart from other texts or occasions,

we run the risk of not learning how we build text upon and out of,

other texts as well as the social function of the system of texts we build.

An important characteristic of the use of language in communities is

the notion of intertextuality. In the world of the business community,

every text makes its social meaning against the background of other

texts or instances of discourse in a community. This is what Lemke

calls "intertextuality." The meanings we make through texts, and the

ways we make them, always depend on the currency in our

communities of other texts we recognise as having certain definite

kinds of relationship with them, generic, thematic, structural, and

functional. Says Lemke:

> Every text, the discourse of every occasion,
> makes sense in part through implicit and
> explicit relationships of particular kinds to
> other texts, to the discourse of other
> occasions
> (Lemke, 1985: 275).

Lemke goes on to add that in order to get a full account of the

meanings of the genre we must take into account, of who is doing what

to whom, with this text and how? (This is similar to Swales definition

of genre as " a class of communicative events, the members of which

share some set of communicative purposes." (Swales, 1990:58) and also

similar to the notions implied by Scollon & Scollon, Saville-Troike,

Draft and Checkland). In addition, he says that we need to know what

other texts and actions stand in what relations for the meanings made

and performed with this text. We need also to know exactly what social

interests are being served or contested in this text through its inter

textual relations. Further, how does this text contribute to the

maintenance and change in the system in the community. Finally, how are the intertextual thematic ties foregrounded, by what features of the texts, and in what situational contexts and discourse of the community. Meanings do not lie within texts as such, but meanings are made by the community members through and with texts as part of the social meaning making practices that construct and contest the wider patterns of our ever changing social lives. Thus, in order to trace and get the full account of the meaning of a genre, Lemke suggests, one should situate the text in the social occasion that it occurs and note the unfolding of the social processes that follow as a result of it in the routine day to day activities of the community (Lemke, 1983).

In this study, an attempt to understand genre will be made by identifying the genres and their inter textualities by tracing the processes, and the place of the genres in the processes and networks of interaction. Or, to put it in another way, through the various social occasions, text types, social processes, and participants involved and their roles in relation to the text directly or indirectly. For Lemke, the basic interlocking modes of inter textual connections relate to:

> (1) texts which share a common thematic
> system, the more so if the system is
> otherwise foregrounded in the texts, and
> the more so if the texts occurred in events
> which belong to the same regular activity
> pattern or sequence in the community and
> if that pattern is otherwise foregrounded in
> the overall flow of social activity which
> includes the events and their texts and (2)
> texts whose events belong to such a
> sequence, and the more so if they also share
> a common thematic system (Lemke,
> 1985:281).

Therefore if the overall patterns of our social order are to be analysed from actual social practices, we need a view point that is not bounded to a text but one that can analyse relations that connect and disconnect across texts. Lemke believes that such an analysis will describe the resources of language in terms of what people do, and can do, with those resources not just in intrinsic formal terms of its own.

Discourses present modes of talking about the world from the point of view of a social institution. Genre carries meanings about the conventional social occasions in which texts arise (Kress, 1985).

Texts, therefore, are doubly determined by the meanings of the discourse which appear in the text and by the forms, meanings and constraints of a particular genre. Both discourse and genre arise out of the structures and processes of a society; discourses are derived from the larger social institutions within society, and genres are derived from the conventionalised social occasions on and through which social life is carried on.

In summary, one cannot understand a text unless one knows something about the context in which it occurs. We are social beings, and as such this context should be a social one, involving people doing things with their lives, interacting with other people, and making use of a channel of communication do so. It also means that people engage in purposeful goal directed activities. In this study, following Lemke, 1985;Kress, 1985; Martin, 1992; Swales 1990; and Christie, 1993, genres are regarded as social processes because members of the community or culture interact with one another to achieve these social processes. Genres are also regarded as purposeful or goal directed because they

are evolved to collectively get things done by the members of the community. Genres are staged because it takes more then one step for participants to achieve their goals. This is because, organisations cannot exist without communication and communication cannot exist without messages/texts.

We have looked at the relevant aspects of all the subsidiary approaches within this ethnographic study of the corporate discourse community.

As seen from the views and discussions above despite different names or terminologies for the theories, each approach examines the relation of language to the formation of social events and individuals within economic, political, and cultural conditions. They are not really separate and distinct approaches but different ways or angles of looking at a phenomena. While the angle or view point may be a slightly different perspective, they all have a common thread unifying them which is that every human being is instituted and maintained through a complex interaction of interlocutors, audiences, and particular uses of language. That individual is a social being and as such should be studied in all the social events or occasions s/he is placed in and within directly or indirectly in order to get a complete picture of his/her role in that particular social community. In this context, one can view organisations as:

> an assemblage of messages if we subsume
> under message any stimulus whatever that
> triggers a "meaning" in someone's head.
> Thus we can think of such nonverbal or
> artifactual messages as carpeted flooring,
> executive dining rooms and parking areas,
> keys to the washroom, pay raises and more
> (Stohl & Redding 1987:452).

Finally, going back to Halliday's proposal that research in this century be from the viewpoint of systems and processes, we can see now where and how these subsidiary approaches help us gain synoptic and dynamic insights into a social occasion where texts, participants, goals and events including their communicative modes are involved. This view of synoptic/dynamic and text/process can best be summed up in the table 2C, below.

Table 2C

Static and Active perspectives cross - classifying Potential and Actual

	Potential	Actual
Static	synoptic system	text or system in this study
Active	dynamic system	process network flow in this study

(Martin, 1990: 259).

According to Martin (1990) potential, as seen from the static perspective is termed the synoptic system; viewed actively, it is termed a dynamic system. Again, actual when viewed statically will be termed text, or in this study, the system of technology; when viewed dynamically, it is referred to as process. Thus, we can look at the business or corporate discourse community as a synoptic system when it caters for the potential of communication and a dynamic system when the potential is illustrated in terms of activity networks and work flows, or processes within the organisation. Genres are represented as part of the synoptic system when the genres are viewed objectively as

things with particular relations to each other in the culture and genre is represented dynamically in the process of manifestation, full of interacting decisions, dependencies, choices, decisions etc when enacting the social processes of the particular society or community.

As explained by Ventola (1986) the unfolding of the social process can be described metaphorically as a chain. She says a chain can be used to secure a boat to a jetty. This chain is made up of many links which as a whole make up the structure of the chain. Each link performs an individual function in the chain. The function of the first link is to link the chain to the jetty. Each of the middle links take the chain a little further until the last link has the function of linking the chain to the boat. The boat is then secured to the jetty. Thus we can say that by carrying out their individual functions the elements of the chain achieve the overall global objective of fixing the boat to the jetty. So it is with any social encounter in a business organisation. It is made up of structural elements, each of which carries out a function. Step by step, as the structure of the social process unfolds, and is completed the overall objective or the global of the institution is achieved.

These two views of static and dynamic are two sides of the same coin. It is really a schematic structure which is simultaneously a product and a process as initially stated by Halliday(1990) and later Martin, 1990).

> We will never be in a position to make predictions about well - informed schematic structures unless the systems which generate these process/texts are viewed as two distinct but symbiotically interacting potentials." (Martin (1990:259).

2.6   SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

The theories mentioned above are approaches to the study of computer mediated discourse which are concerned with the social, interactive nature of meaning and negotiation in the business community. The different approaches mentioned typically share a concern with four key factors : cognitive, linguistic, social and contextual. To these it is also necessary to outline the ideas from the theory of Social Semiotics in order to provide a perspective on language and business discourse that deals with the complex interrelation among these factors. This perspective positions business discourse as a social practice in which language is one important resource for meaning.

Social Semiotics, a synthesis of contemporary approaches to the social production of meaning, is based on formal or mainstream semiotics, a theoretical approach to the study of signs and sign systems. Semiotics can also be considered more generally as the study of meaning, its central concern being how meanings are generated. Social Semiotics takes this concern in a particular direction. As the term suggests it focuses on social interaction: on how people construct systems of meaning, rather than on the systems themselves. Social semiotics views "meaning" as an active process, generated through social interaction.

The central notion of social semiotics is that all meanings are made. They do not exist as objects or concrete facts. Rather, they are constructed through systems of signs. A sign is a physical thing that stands for, or refers to, something else. eg. a photograph is an iconic

sign. Gestures can also be signs. A word, either spoken or written, is a linguistic sign. It has a physical form, either the spoken sound or the written letters, and is associated with certain mental concepts. The physical form of the sign is termed the signifier, and the concept of what it refers to, the signified. (de Saussure, 1974) What is of concern in social semiotics is the nature of the relation of signified to signifier, that is the signifying practices, which are the processes of meaning making. This relation is not purely linguistic but more of a social relation. The belief is that meaning relations cannot be understood outside the social practices of some community. (Lemke, 1987:218).

Business discourse is a system of signs. It comprises many systems of signs with which people make sense of their world. People construct meanings for it following the conventions of business. Its meanings may be derived in many ways. Different meanings may be made about, for example, business negotiation by different people or by the same person in different contexts. These shared meanings are constructed and developed using social conventions, such as board meeting, negations, etc which are recognised as ways of making meaning in the discourse community.

An important aspect of Social Semiotics is that it allows an understanding of language as a resource system: systems of possible ways of meaning. Semiotic resource systems comprise what can or might be said or done. What is actually said or done is a semiotic formation. Lemke's (1990) description of social semiotics in terms of semiotic resources and semiotic formations generalises from Halliday's (1978) model of language as " meaning potential"

> Language is being regarded as the encoding
> of a "behaviour potential" into a meaning
> potential"; that is, as a means of expressing
> what the human organisms "can do", in
> interaction with another human organisms,
> by turning it into what he (sic) "can mean"
> What he can mean (the semantic system) is,
> in turn, encoded into what he "can say" (the
> lexicogrammatical system, or grammar and
> vocabulary) (Halliday, 1978:21).

Language can be understood as a semiotic system: system of meaning and system for the creation of meaning People constantly use language to make sense of their experience. It is used as a tool to construct the "content" of the different content areas.

In this research, Social Semiotics is used where relevant to provide greater understanding of some of the meaning making practices of the business community. It proved particularly useful in the analysis of the e-mail business transaction in chapter seven as it provided a means of bringing out the meaning possibilities in the texts and also provided the means to show how meaning was actively and dynamically constructed as the text unfolds.