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## Cross-cultural Strategies and the Use of English in International Business Correspondence

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### Abstract

An exploration of the nature of intercultural communication and the use of English in international business correspondence is the principal aim of this study. Different aspects of intercultural communication in a sample of business correspondence consisting of letters, faxes and telexes in English written by business communicators from varied cultural backgrounds are investigated. These aspects include the deviation of linguistic features and expressions, the rhetorical structure of moves and steps with their linguistic exponents, the exchange structure of interaction and negotiation strategies, the organisation of message or information, and theme and theme structure. The implications for teaching are suggested in the design of English for Business Correspondence (EBC) courses which should be geared towards both the product and the process aspects of the intercultural communication through problem-solving tasks and activities drawing on students' knowledge and ability, and promoting students' adaptability. These tasks and activities should focus on both the overt and covert aspects of the negotiation of meanings which are activated via authentic tasks and activities incorporating topics, issues, roles, and linguistic exponents drawn from the socio-econo-cultural contexts of international business and trade.

### Introduction

This study investigates international business correspondence in which participants from diverse cultures are engaged in written communication. When these people come into contact, difficulties in their intercultural interaction are likely to arise. This is because differences in their linguistic and cultural backgrounds can result in misunderstanding

and breakdown in communication. Recently, studies in intercultural interaction and communication have revealed that misunderstandings and miscommunications may occur because of differences in the use of the same language by participants from different cultural backgrounds (Pride, 1985; Sukwivat, 1983; Wolfson, 1989).

Differences in language use and language behaviour by people from different cultures, even though they use a common language, may be related to linguistic differences in their native languages. A study of negative transfer or interference of certain features in the native language by second language users suggests that it can cause misinterpretation among native speakers of the target language (Odlin, 1990). In business letter writing, for example, some language problems the American writer could possibly have when composing a business letter in Spanish may be due to a mismatch of linguistic rules governing the native language and the target language (Reid, 1974). Differences in linguistic features of participants' languages, however, may not always be considered significant enough to cause barriers in communication. Cremer and Willes (1994) have noticed that in international textile business Chinese traders manage to communicate successfully in English even though their faxes contain a considerable number of linguistic errors. It would, therefore, be interesting to investigate linguistic features in English correspondence between Thai business communicators and their counterparts to see whether these features are likely to pose any problems in their communication.

Apart from differences in the linguistic features of native languages, there are other differences in language use, less obvious but perhaps more pivotal to difficulties people face in intercultural communication. Firstly, there is evidence that certain problems may arise from different cultural norms in relation to the selection of relevant information (Ballard,

1984; Ballard and Clanchy, 1984; Mead, 1990). Moreover, some problems may possibly result from different ways of structuring information or arguments in a conversation (Gumperz, Jupp, Tom & Roberts, 1979; Hinds, 1990; Scollon and Wong-Scollon, 1991; Tsuda, 1984; Williams, 1985; ) and in written communication (Clyne, 1981, 1987; Regent, 1985) in different cultures. These differences are possibly due to differences in thought patterns or forms of reasoning among cultures (Kaplan, 1972, 1976, 1987; Sunderman, 1987). In business writing Jenkins and Hinds (1987), following Kaplan's (1972, 1976) work, have revealed some differences in rhetorical orientation and linguistic style in French, American English and Japanese request letters.

Secondly, apart from the fact that cultures differ in the selection of information and the ways information and arguments are structured, difficulties in intercultural communication may be due to different cultural assumptions about the kinds of language behaviour or patterns of communicative acts or moves that are appropriate to achieve communicative goals in particular situations (Candlin, 1981; Littlewood, 1983; Richards, 1982; Smith, 1983, 1987). Examples would include the Thai way to begin a refusal of an offer with 'thank you' (Sukwiwat, 1983) and to ask the question "/Paj naj?/" meaning "Where are you going?" as an informal greeting (Schmidt & Richards, 1985). Diversity of cultural norms regulating language behaviour can be found not only in speech situations but also in those of written communication such as letter writing. An

investigation of letters written by students from South Asia and from the Middle East requesting application forms and entrance information has shown such acts as an appeal for pity, an appeal to the patriotism of the reader, and flattery (Clyne, 1991), which are considered inappropriate in English. Likewise, in his study of Mandarin letters of request, Kirkpatrick (1993a, 1993b) has found that most of the letters include facework or a long introduction and reason(s) for making the requests. The requests are mostly placed towards the end of the letters.

This variability of strategies for doing things with language may also be accounted for by the different conventions and expectations people have regarding types and degrees of indirectness (Tannen, 1985). For example, the concept of */kreengcaj/*, or taking their coparticipants' face needs and feelings into consideration, causes Thais to resort to indirect strategies to perform certain types of communicative acts in certain situations (Richards & Sukwiat, 1985).

Last but not least in importance are variations in the exchange or transaction structure which exist across situations and cultures. These variations are again likely to cause difficulties in communication. For instance, the study of cross-cultural interviews (Gumperz et al., 1979; Williams, 1985) has provided evidence of problems arising from cultural diversity in this aspect.

Thus, it has been well established that there are differences in the use of English by native

speakers and non-native speakers of English at various levels. There is, however, very little research on comparative or intercultural business communication (Limaye & Victor, 1991). Especially, no study has been conducted to explore and validate differences in written business correspondence between Thai (TH), native English-speaking (NE), and non-native English, non-Thai (NNENT) speakers. The scarcity of empirical work conducted by comparative analysis of the use of English by Thais and other English speakers in written discourse has been emphasised by Sukwiat (1983). She points out that less work has been conducted to describe differences in the Thai variety of English on the semantic, syntactic and discourse levels than on the phonological level. However, the potential for miscommunication between Thais and other speakers of English, as viewed by Sukwiat (1983:190), stems from the "magnitude of the non-phonological discrepancies" and further research should be conducted in the area of discourse and rhetorical structures or patterns. The present study is a small contribution to achieving this goal.

The findings may shed some light on the nature of intercultural communication and interaction between Thai business communicators using English to conduct business dealings with their foreign counterparts. The findings will also be useful in suggesting guidelines to avert communication breakdowns and to improve written communication and understanding between Thais and other speakers of English. The findings will be, in turn, beneficial for the

design of materials and courses for Thai business communicators. Furthermore, the study will have additional relevance to native English-speaking business communicators and to others who have to use English to communicate with Thais in their business dealings.

### **The Data**

The investigation of the use of English in intercultural business correspondence in this study was based on the data which were gathered by "triangulation" (Gorden, 1980: 12), a combination of techniques. The data used in this study are of three kinds:

1. the main source of data, consisting of 587 samples of business correspondence in English namely letters, faxes and telexes written by Thai, NE and NNENT business communicators which were collected from Thai companies and English-speaking companies which are involved with international trade mainly in terms of product and service sales;
2. a questionnaire distributed to the same companies to obtain information about the respondents' general background and opinions as well as their samples of written discourse;
3. and a semi-structured interview with a sub-set of the same respondents to furnish information concerning the informants' opinions on the use of English

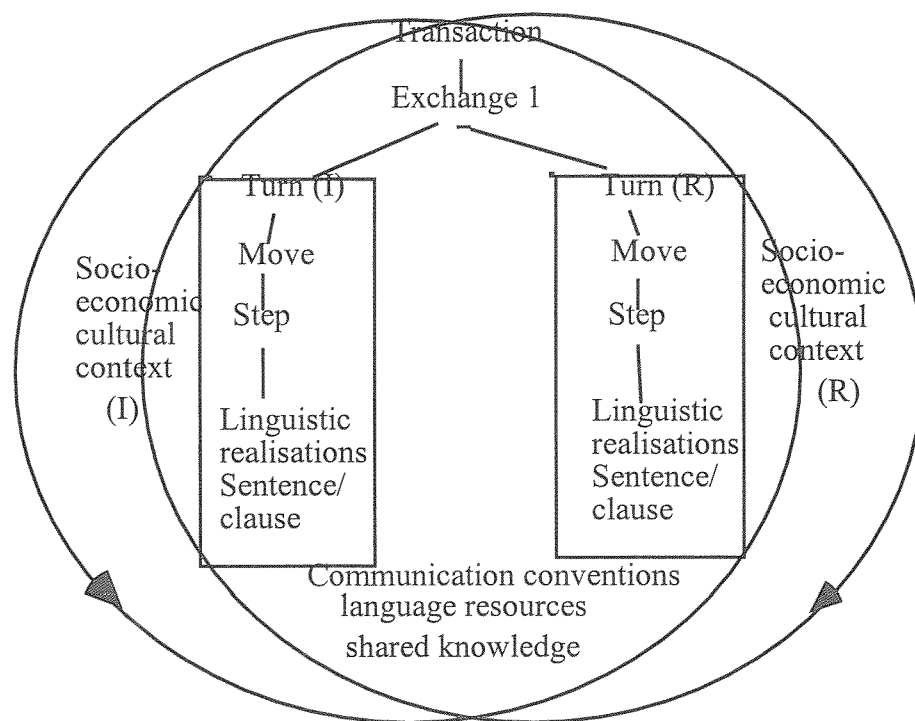
in their business dealings, and on the strategies and techniques they use in communication with their foreign counterparts, as well as on problems that they have encountered.

This study compared and contrasted written discourse produced by Thai business communicators in their interaction with NE and NNENT counterparts. It examined, firstly, linguistic or grammatical features and expressions. Secondly, it explored rhetorical strategies which were employed by these business communicators when using English to accomplish their communicative purposes in writing letters, faxes and telexes. It investigated similarities or differences in rhetorical orientation, discourse structure, patterns of communicative moves and steps, linguistic realisations and degrees of directness. Thirdly, it compared and contrasted exchange structures in terms of turn-taking and turn allocation executed by Thai, NE, and NNENT business communicators as well as the strategies they employed in negotiation to secure a turn. Fourthly, attempts were made to compare and contrast ways of structuring information used by Thai, NE, and NNENT business communicators to convey their written messages in English. The textual features under investigation in particular were directness and indirectness of approaches and thematisation as well as theme structures. The study also examined similarities or differences in terms of socio/econo-cultural, linguistic and professional backgrounds. Finally, the study drew conclusions regarding pedagogical implications for the design of English business writing courses in Thai universities.

### The Framework and Data Analysis

In this study, the framework of the analysis draws the units of discourse from the socio-economic-cultural context in which business communicators operate at all levels of the discourse as presented in Figure 1 adapted from Candlin's (1989) diagram which shows pedagogy is derived from the interconnection of language and sociocultural context. Each circle represents the socio-economic-cultural context in which each interactant operates. The overlapping section reflects the amalgamation

of the communication conventions, their common language resources, and their shared knowledge, all of which develop during the ongoing process to bring about the desired outcomes. This framework was based on the integration of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) rank scale model of conversational analysis focussing on the interaction of both participants, Swales' (1990) move-step genre analysis, and also Halliday's (1985a, 1985b) text analysis.



I = Initiator  
R = Recipient

Figure 1 Units of analysis of intercultural business correspondence derived from the Rank Scale Model of transactional analysis of conversation discourse, Swales' move-step model of genre analysis, and Halliday's text analysis

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In the present study, the units of analysis used are:

A *clause* is the grammatical unit in which semantic configuration of different kinds are combined to form a whole.

A *sentence* is a unit in the grammatical constituent structure, and it consists of clauses.

A *step* is a means or act, sometimes sequential sometimes optional, used to achieve the move and it is manifested or embodied by linguistic realisations or exponents.

A *move* is the smallest functional free unit or element of discourse and schematic structure.

A sequence of moves comprises the schematic structure of the business genre in question. A move can be realised by steps or stages and options to achieve the overall functional goal of each genre. Some moves are obligatory and some are optional. Obligatory moves can be identified by their presence in the schematic structure or patterns of expectancy, and they define the types of genre.

A *genre* is a recognised communicative event with shared public purposes and with its communicative intentions mutually understood by the participants. In other words, it is a highly structured and more or less standardised communicative event with expected contributions or moves from either the writer or the recipient in terms of content and form.

In written business correspondence, a genre is a communicative event in which the writer makes use of sequences of standardised moves and associated steps specified in his/her socio-cultural context in order to achieve his/her main purpose or goal in conducting business, particular in that genre. Examples of buying-selling transaction genres are sales promotions, enquiries, and replies to enquiries.

A *turn* is a structural unit marking the occasion or time in which the writer takes the floor and conveys his/her meanings, intentions, and messages. In written business communications, a turn begins with the opening salutation and ends with the closing salutation. A turn, in other words, is simply a letter, fax or telex message.

An *exchange* is the smallest unit of interaction with contributions from the writer and his/her correspondent. For instance, an enquiry and a reply to enquiry form an exchange in the buying-selling transaction.

A *transaction* is a unit above exchange, and it forms the line of interactions consisting of exchanges from the beginning to the end of a business dealing.

The analyses of different levels of meanings or aspects of intercultural written communication in Thai, NE, and NNENT business correspondence are presented in Figure 2.

Deviation Analysis	Linguistic/syntactic/expressions
Genre Analysis	Patterns of rhetorical moves/steps and linguistic realisations
Transaction Analysis	Patterns of interaction in exchange and turn-taking
Text Analysis	Information /Message organisation-Text Thematisation and theme structure-clause

*Figure 2 Analyses of different aspects of Thai, NE, NNENT written business correspondence*

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The investigation of samples, the main data, at different levels confirms the results of the questionnaire and interviews that the view that barriers in intercultural contact arising from differences in the cultural backgrounds people bring into the contact situations (Samovar & Porter, 1994; Smith, 1983c) has turned out to be incorrect. Despite the variability of the business communicators' culture and native or first language, intercultural communication in this arena was unlikely to suffer difficulties. The analysis clearly shows that, in spite of the multiplicity of business communicators' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, their written communications shared a lot of common features at the higher levels of discourse and text in spite of a large number of differences in linguistic levels, and the use of expressions.

### Linguistic Features and Expressions

At the level of the language code, it is seen that there were a considerable number of deviations in Thai and NNENT business correspondence caused by the transfer of native linguistic features and expressions into English, in contrast to most of the deviations in NE correspondence which were slips. Business communicators in this context, however, were hardly ever prone to communication difficulties. This is because most of the deviations in non-native business texts were grammatical rather than pragmatic and these grammatical deviations, with certain pragmatic ones, in context would rarely caused miscommunication. According to a specialist informant, a manageress, who went through all of the deviations to identify those which were likely to cause misunderstanding, due to shared common expectations and practice, it

was not difficult to understand the communicative intent of the message even with a lot of grammatical errors. This study (see Appendix A.) reveals that sociopragmatic deviations caused by a mismatch of socio-economic conditions, which could block the activation of schematic knowledge and really cause problems, were in fact, very rare. Pragmalinguistic deviations stemming from differences in speech act realisations which here comprised a fair number, were not likely to be problematic either because the interpretation of their intended meanings depended partly on the context or positioning of the acts and partly upon the shared schematic knowledge of the business communicators. What is important is that this study reveals communicators' adaptability in exploiting their limited knowledge of English grammar and expressions in order to achieve their communicative intentions. For instance, the expression "to survive our agent" which a Thai exporter employed in negotiating the price with her seller in (1) shows a tactical extension of the use of "survive" to the context of trade and commerce. Hardly at all would this deviation cause the seller to misinterpret the communicative intent.

(1) HENCE, SHOULD YOU HAVE  
SOME ROOMS TO REDUCE YOUR  
PRICE TO SURVIVE OUR AGENT,  
PLS IMMPLY INFORM.(TH-F)

It is fascinating to find as well that some deviations in Thai correspondence were caused by strategies of communication. This is clearly seen in (2) in which a Thai seller borrowed the

word "heatresistance" from his German customer but used it incorrectly as a verb.

(2) OUR MELAMINE MATERIAL CAN  
*HEATRESISTANCE* AT 150 CELSIUS.  
(TH-F)

In the same way, some deviations made by NNENT business people to achieve their communicative purposes can be seen in (3) and (4). In (3) the Italian customer was negotiating with his Australian seller asking the seller to make a price reduction. The customer particularly expressed his hope that the customer would "meet us in the better way" which was directly translated from an equivalent in Italian.

(3) FOR THIS REASON WE REALLY  
HOPE YOU WILL *MEET US IN THE  
BETTER WAY.* (NNENT-F-ITALIAN)

(4) SO, UNFORTUNATELY, THEIR  
TANK IS PACKED WITH MANY  
LOBSTERS OF 1 KG UP AND THEY  
*REFUSED WITH THANKS.* (NNENT-F-  
JAPANESE)

Another example in (4) shows the expression "refused with thanks" which the Japanese customer employed in informing the Australian regular supplier that the end-buyer declined the offer of lobsters. Obviously, though the decline is atypically direct, it is toned down by such an expression of gratitude and thus reflects the Japanese way.



Therefore, the findings shows that the deviations made by Thai and NNENT business communicators differed from those made by their NE counterparts. A great number of these deviations were caused by incorrect grammar and the wrong use of expressions. These deviations, however, were rarely found to be problematic by the NE specialist. What seemed to be of more concern was at the level of discourse.

### **Discourse and Rhetorical Structure**

Commonality of business conventions is also noticeable in the rhetorical structure of moves and steps and in the use of language to realise them. The study of typical text types in both single messages and multiple messages reveals that business communicators also tended to share similarities in the patterns of moves and steps to achieve the main task goals of business dealings and to attain the interpersonal goals of maintaining good business relationships. For example, in the first written contacts such as sales or enquiries (see Appendix B.), business communicators were likely to create business relationships and trust by link and confidence establishment before taking the moves or steps to fulfill the main task goals of introducing the offer in sales or soliciting information in enquiries. Because they shared the same communicative purposes, they also enhanced their interrelations by ending the message with specific moves and steps, such as encouraging the recipient to make further contact, which served to maintain good interpersonal and business relationships. In later contacts in which trust and confidence had already been established, communicators

again shared their communicative practices. While they did retain the moves and steps which served to bridge the relationship interpersonally, they only did so as required, perhaps by collapsing the steps and attending more to those moves and steps which served to mediate conceptually and to achieve their main task goals. For instance, in sales or enquiries in faxes and telexes between partners (see Appendix C.), no confidence establishment was attempted, the steps in link establishment were reduced and the remaining steps were for mediating conceptually. Similarly, in persuasive and unfavourable or bad-news messages, business communicators resorted to moves and steps which showed their common concern for mediating conceptually and interpersonally. An example of this is providing the context in claims as seen in the following samples:

#### **Sample 1(Thai fax)**

FROM PREVIOUS CORRESPONDENCE AS PER YOUR FAX 042776 AND OUR REPLY 34056 WHICH CONFIRM THE ACCEPTANCE OF MONITOR HCM-401 INSTEAD OF HCM-402C. AS YOU WILL SEE WE HAVE TRIED TO ASSIST YOU IN GETTING THE MONITOR SHIPPED OUT ASAP. BUT YOU HAVE PUTTING US INTO TROUBLE BY SENDING US HCM-401 AND INVOICE US ON HCM-402C. THE GOODS WAS CONFISCATED BY CUSTOMS FOR ALMOST A WEEK. BESIDES WE HAVE TO PAY THE FINE FOR ANOTHER USD.\_\_\_\_. WE ARE SORRY THAT WE HAVE TO PASS ON THIS EXPENSE TO YOU.

#### **Sample 2 (a NNENT-Chinese fax)**

DEAR SIRs,

THIS IS TO ADVISE YOU THAT THE SEEDS OF YOUR CHINESE -CABBAGE : GREEN LEAF COVERED BY YOUR INVOICE NO, 20312 OF WHICH CONSISTS TWO LOTS NAMELY K15274(598KGS) AND K15274A (69 KGS) IS ARRIVED OCT 10, AFTER SELLING, OUR CUSTOMERS HAVE FOUNF THAT THE RATE OF GERMINATION OF K15274 (598KGS) IS VERY POOR, ONLY 50-60%. THEREFORE THEY STRONGLY REQUEST US TO SEND THEM BACK, (IN OUR MARKET THE CHINESE CABBAGE SEED MUST HAVE GERMINATION 85% UP.

BY AIR PARCEL POST WE ARE SENDING OF SAMPLE (PICK UP 3 BAGS OF SAMPLE FROM YOUR 15 SACKS K15274 (598KGS)) FOR YOUR TEST,

ACCORDINGLY WE HOPE YOU COULD REFUND OUR PAYMENT YOUR PROMPT COMMENT IN THIS MATTER WILL BE HIGHLY APPRECIATED.

BEST REGARDS,

Sample 3(an NE-Australian Fax)

GOOD MORNING - RE YR FAX 6439 20/6/91

LIVE ABALONE FOR NIHON SHOJI

YES, WE WERE ABLE AFTER SOME EFFORT AND COST TO STOP THE SHIPMENT IN SYDNEY AND WILL BE RETURNING THE 6 CTNS BACK TO HOBART WITH ETA 15.25 HRS LOCAL TIME TODAY.WE ARE RATHER CONCERNED THAT WE WERE NOT PRE-ADVISED THAT PRODUCT COULD NOT BE CLEARED AT FUKUOKA AT 16.15 HRS ON FRIDAY 21ST JUNE.

THE SITUATION WE ARE NOW IN IS AS FOLLOWS.

SAFCOL TASMANIA IS ASKING THE QUESTION OF WHO IS GOING TO MEET THE COST OF MOVING THE PRODUCT FROM HOBART TO SYDNEY & RETURN, LABOUR COST IN PACKAGING, +ACTUAL PACKAGING MATERIALS WHICH CANNOT BE RE-USED. IN FACT THIS MATTER HAS CREATED QUITE A PROBLEM AT THIS END.

IS J.U.C. OR NIHON SHOJI PREPARED TO MEET THE ABOVE COST PLUS ANY MORTALITY THAT MAY TAKE PLACE?

I KNOW THAT SAFCOL TAS GENERAL MANAGER KEIN MORRIE WILL BE VERY RELUCTANT TO RE-SEND ANOTHER SHIPMENT TO JAPAN IN VIEW OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE.

Furthermore, business communicators were also similar in their ability to adapt the generic structure of a typical text type by strategically combining more than one message to achieve multiple task goals. This can be seen in multiple messages most of which were between trading partners among whom trust, confidence, and business relationships were well established. In order to avoid confusion in such a multiple message, they easily manipulated the patterning of moves and steps by extending the step in link establishment to mediate between certain pieces of information, items, or messages, not between whole texts. On the other hand, they collapsed the steps which were peripheral and could be left understood, such as expressing interest in the product in enquiries. Interestingly, a reduction of the steps which had interpersonal functions was generally made and expected. In some messages such as in most of the unfavourable and persuasive messages, particularly

unfavourable adjustments, and especially between sellers and regular customers whose relationships were not as close as those between trading partners, business communicators generally tended to retain these interpersonally oriented steps. This retention in the cases of Thai and some of NNENT business communicators could be explained in part by the dominant cultural influence of their Asian cultures; thus, they tended to share an orientation towards smooth and pleasant interpersonal relations and this accords with the business culture which they generated. In NE unfavourable adjustments, interestingly, business communicators also followed a similar pattern. Therefore, this is a practice which may be commonly observed in business communicators from whatever cultures they come.

Not only in the patterning of moves and steps but also in the use of language did business communicators share common conventions. Most of them were likely to employ polite and indirect expressions when they first wrote to each other, such as in enquiry letters in initial contacts, and indirect requests denoting ostensibility and tentativeness were common. The language between the sellers and regular customers in subsequent contacts and in follow-ups tends to be more direct and more concise and especially among trading partners. In persuasive messages such as enquiries and orders in which the customers negotiated terms and conditions with the sellers, nevertheless, they were likely to have recourse to indirect expressions. In multiple messages, however, in persuasive and unfavourable messages, the

employment of indirect expressions for negotiating purposes tended to be forsaken by trading partners who preferred directness and straightforwardness to expedite the deals. This was, undoubtedly, common in NE correspondence and it was also a common practice among Thai business communicators and their NNENT counterparts even though their cultures value the indirect approach and the preservation of "face." Moreover, business communicators tended to develop similar conventions of employing direct expressions in checking information, requesting clarification, confirmation and reiteration which helped in preventing miscommunication. Therefore, it is not surprising that their communication was unlikely to be impeded by the diversity of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### **Exchange Structure**

Another aspect that business communicators share is the way in which they took turns to negotiate meanings to achieve intended outcomes. It is clear from the analysis of the exchange structure of international business correspondence that business communicators rarely faced problems in taking turns because they not merely tended to employ the normal technique of "the-current-writer-selects-next," but also switched to self-selection, especially in follow-ups (see Appendix D). Of more importance is their commonality of exploiting discourse strategies in securing cooperation so that their snatching of turns was not regarded as an imposition. The two common strategies which business communicators employed were preparatory and reparatory negotiations. It is interesting that business communicators were

similar in their application of these negotiation strategies, relating to factors such as the nature or subject of the message, role-relationships as well as rights and mutual obligations, the recipient's expectations, and the conceptual, emotional, and cultural backgrounds. For example, in claims concerning routine problems, the claimants tended to employ preparatory strategies to build some grounding so that the claim would be accessible to the claim adjuster. In claims with controversial problems, and in follow-ups, reparatory negotiation was preferred to include the justification of request for adjustment. The adjusting and adapting process according to the topic, role-relationships, and socio-cultural contexts was at the heart of international business communication, especially for the selection of negotiating strategies employed in the exchange structure.

### **Message Organisation**

The investigation of the ways in which business communicators organised or structured the information in different messages also clearly shows that communicators were not likely to suffer communication difficulties as far as message organisation was concerned because of their shared common business culture. Despite other cultural divergences, business communicators followed either the direct approach or the indirect approach depending on the nature of the matters. For example, in favourable messages such as orders and favourable adjustments, business communicators were likely to employ the direct approach in which the topic or main move was placed at the

beginning of the message, and was followed by supporting details. On the other hand, unfavourable messages such as negative replies-to-offers and unfavourable adjustments tended to be organised by the indirect approach which started with supporting details or justifying facts followed by the major point or main move. This seemed to be commonly observed by business communicators although they came from diverse cultural backgrounds. Business communicators, however, did not always stick to this practice. They could also exploit these approaches to suit their communicative purposes depending on their relationship with the recipient, the stage of interaction, whether in initiations or follow-ups, and the recipients' expectations of the message. An example of business communicators' adaptability was the adoption of the indirect approach in favourable adjustments in which they wanted to negotiate the adjustment with the claimant; thus, they would rather start with some justifying facts. Another example was the exploitation of the indirect approach in order follow-ups in which business communicators intended to negotiate terms and conditions with the seller. Thus, business communicators tended to develop this adaptability and flexibility which thus constituted and reinforced the business culture.

### **Theme and Theme Structure**

In text organisation, business communicators not only shared the commonalities of the organisation of the message but also of thematisation and theme structures. Although business communicators came from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they

tended to follow the same pattern in which theme was realised, selected, and structured. Theme in international business correspondence was likely to be realised by the initial position of the text at the global level or of the clause at the lower level. At the top or global level of text, business communicators shared the same conventions of placing the title or sub-headings with or without markers at the top of the text or of the message. They also tended to mention the topic or the main point earlier at the beginning of the text if there was no reason to do otherwise. In this way, business communicators' background knowledge could be activated and brought to consciousness to facilitate the interpretation of incoming information. At the clause level, business communicators tended to have common ways of thematisation or of selecting of topical, interpersonal, and textual themes (especially marked themes) to orient the recipient to the intended messages in order to attain best the desired outcomes. For instance, business communicators generally employed a set of fronted nominals to orient the recipient who was either the seller or the customer to the specifications of the product or transaction terms and conditions. Moreover, most business communicators tended to exploit fronted adverbials to activate the recipient's time frame in negotiating certain terms and conditions such as prices. They were also similar in the way in which theme was developed and structured by employing one of the three common patterns of theme structure, namely theme reiteration, theme chaining, and a hyper-theme. They even adapted these patterns of theme development by combining more than

one of them to become what could be called theme medley to suit the multiple communicative purposes in multiple messages.

Therefore, it is clear from the analysis of different aspects of international business correspondence that business communicators in this sample, despite the diversity in their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, had and developed a common language culture as part of the secondary culture of business dealings. Although there were certain conventions which were culture-specific or could reveal cultural identity, for example, the Thai and East-Asian way of being orientated towards smooth interpersonal relationships in business transactions, they did not differ from the business conventions in kind but in degree. What was at the heart of the matter in the business culture of international business correspondence was the adaptability of available resources and flexibility in their use appropriate to the communicative goals and needs of the communicators. These qualities were the salient features of intercultural communication in this business arena.

### **Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

It follows from the findings of this study that the multiplicity of language and cultural backgrounds poses very few barriers in written business communication in English. In fact, business communicators seem to share a secondary or business culture accounting for certain similar features of intercultural communication which facilitate their interaction. Clearly, these features need to be incorporated in EBC course design if it aims to

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develop authentic communication via the classroom. These common features include business communicators' adaptabilities, their perceptions of language as means or as ancillary to their business interaction, and the interplay of linguistic and schematic knowledge in business communication for the achievement of business dealings.

What is the most salient of these features of intercultural communication in business correspondence is that business communicators tend to develop their adaptability in exploiting available resources, of both systemic and schematic knowledge, to achieve their intended outcomes which are non-linguistic but pragmatic in nature. In other words, they aim for the desired effects of communication, rather than concentrating on the communication itself. We can see that business communicators possess the capability of making the best use of their knowledge and mastery of the language code, however limited, generic structure, pattern of interaction or turn-taking strategies, information or message organisation, and thematisation. They are inclined to adjust their message and make use of suitable means, even in the selection of a particular channel to make the message appropriate to their needs or purposes, and to make it accessible and acceptable to the recipient. For example, when the business is not hot or active such as when a decline of the offer is made by a new seller, for this purpose business communicators normally send a letter. On the other hand, in cases where they are interested in the offer, they change to using fax or telex in negotiating terms and

conditions. At a later stage, (once they develop business relationships) they even modify typical genres in business letters such as enquiries and complaints, and combine them in multiple messages which occur frequently in faxes and telexes. This modification could be explained not merely by time constraint and space limitation but also by communicators' well selected strategies to accomplish their purposes in business dealings. In so doing, they manipulate their linguistic realisations, snatch and violate turns, as well as adjusting their message in terms of information structure, theme selection and theme structure, according to the nature of the topic, role-relationships, and previous messages, including the recipient's shared background, current knowledge and expectations. These adaptabilities to adjust the message so as to mediate conceptually and interpersonally in order to realise communicative purpose are integral in the negotiation of meanings. Especially in written communications where communicators do not have direct or overt interaction, writers have to rely greatly on these mediating strategies or discourse processes to make the conveying of messages possible and effective (Candlin et al., 1983; Widdowson, 1983b; 1984a). This process-oriented aspect of business communication which is concerned with bringing about the intended outcome is crucial in international business correspondence and should be emphasised in the EBC course designs.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that business communicators regard language as use; language is ancillary to enable business communicators to mediate successfully with

the recipient of the message. Thus, the achievement of realising pragmatic force to fulfil their communicative purposes in business dealings is, from this study, shown to be prior to proficiency in language code. Business communicators' proficiency tends to vary in norms from sufficient comprehensibility to get the message across to near-native or native level depending on the requirements or judgement between business communicators. Thus, correction of errors is not made, business communicators regardless of their diverse cultural backgrounds request clarification once they do not succeed in getting the expected message and reiterate when they feel the message does not get across. The design of teaching and learning tasks and the evaluation in EBC course should take this view into consideration. That is, the evaluation of students' performance should be based on their ability to achieve the purposes of the tasks, not on an artificial proficiency.

In addition, it is clear from the study of this sample that business communicators rely on both linguistic and schematic knowledge in the construction, interpretation, and negotiation of meanings. The more they draw on shared schematic knowledge which is activated by textualisation or mediating strategies, the less they need to rely on linguistic resources in order to interpret the meanings and *vice versa*.. By this common process, business communicators develop and extend their linguistic and schematic resources as well as their ability to communicate by engaging in communication with their counterparts. In interacting with their foreign counterparts,

business communicators acquire new knowledge which they act upon and put into use. This natural learning process including cultural adaptation or accommodation in particular lends itself to easing of intercultural communication as well as enhancing the achievement of intended outcomes. It should be noted that business communicators in the main share the business conventions or culture and business English serves these fundamental needs. There are, however, certain conventions which are culturally specific or could reveal cultural identity. Some examples include the Thai way of being primarily orientated towards smooth interpersonal relationships even in business transactions. Therefore, business English in international trade reflects the interface of these primary and secondary cultures, that is, to convey personal needs, and the ideological and socio-econo-cultural realities of the users, who are business communicators from different cultures. This function of English to express the communicators' needs and cultural or national identity has been well recognised (Brumfit, 1982; Smith, 1983b, 1991; Widdowson, 1982) in addition to its potential to realise the professional purposes of international trade or in other areas such as international relations and diplomacy.

Based on the findings of the analysis of international business correspondence, the researcher suggests that the design of EBC courses should incorporate these features to make the course more relevant to business students than what tends to be currently practised, for example, in Thai universities.

The suggested course design of EBC places the priority on the methodology which is to activate the process of communication and learning in the classroom so that students, similar to business communicators in international business communication, are engaged in overt and covert negotiation by problem-solving. By participating in the

negotiation of meanings in the tasks and activities which require them to solve problems of various kinds, students can draw on and extend their linguistic and schematic resources to communicate in a variety of contextual conditions similar to those they will encounter in their future careers.

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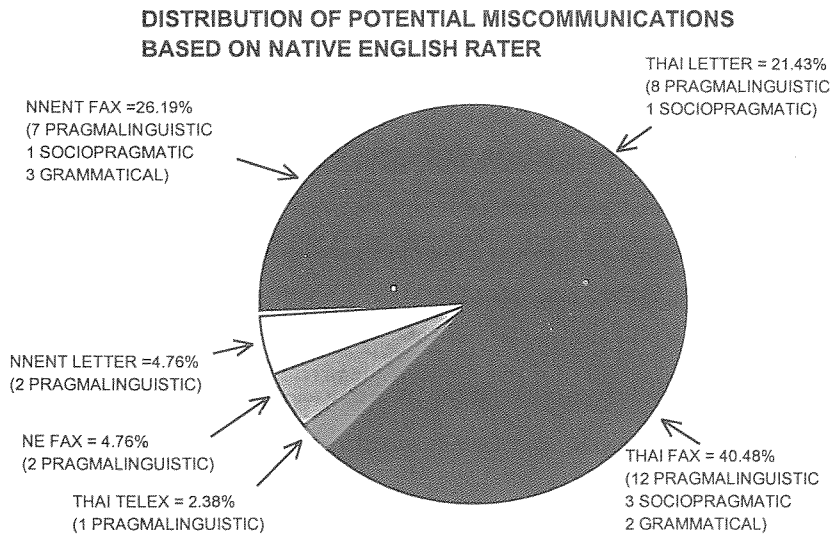
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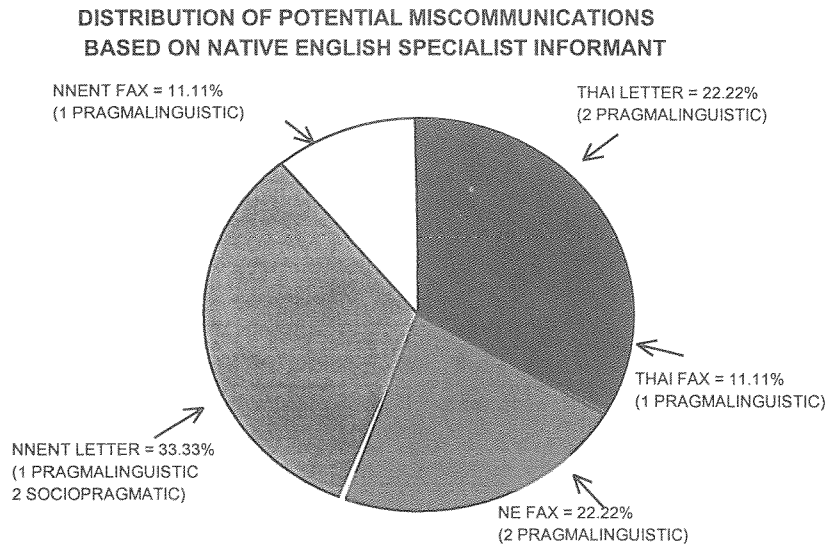
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Appendix A

*Distribution of potential miscommunications in Thai, NE, and NNENT correspondence based on native English rater*



*Distribution of potential miscommunications in Thai, NE, and NNENT correspondence based on native English specialist informant*



### Appendix B

TABLE : Distribution of Moves and Steps in Thai, NE, NNENT Enquiry Letters

M/Steps	no.	TH L=34(FU=1)	NE L=5	NENT L=9
Opening		34(1)	5	9
1.1		12	1	7
1.2		10	2	-
1.3		4(1)	-	1
2.1		9	2	4
2.2		25	2	2
3.1		15(1)	4	6
3.2.A		31(1)	3(+1)	8
3.2.B		22(1)	3	7
4.1		25(1)	4	8
Closing		34(1)	5	9

L=Letter, F=Fax, T=Telex, FU=Follow-up

+ This move-step occurs more than once in one sample.

#### The structure of the enquiry letter

#### Opening salutation

##### *Move 1 Establishing A Link*

- |          |   |        |
|----------|---|--------|
| Step 1.1 | Acknowledging source of contact information | and/or |
| Step 1.2 | Acknowledging informative materials         | and/or |
| Step 1.3 | Referring to previous contact               |        |

##### *Move 2 Establishing Confidence*

- |        |                                   |        |
|--------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Step 1 | Emphasising company's credentials | and/or |
| Step 2 | Making good impressions           |        |

##### *Move 3 Soliciting Information*

- |         |   |        |
|---------|---|--------|
| Step 1  | Expressing interest in product(s)/service(s)  | and/or |
| Step 2A | Requesting/Specifying product/service details | and/or |
| Step 2B | Requesting/Specifying transaction details     |        |

##### *Move 4 Prompting/Encouraging Further Contact*

- |        |   |  |
|--------|---|--|
| Step 1 | Expressing expectation of reply/attention |  |
|--------|---|--|

#### Closing salutation

### Appendix C

TABLE: Distribution of Moves and Steps in Thai, NE, and NNENT Fax and Telex Enquiries and Follow-Ups in Multiple Messages

M/Steps no.	F			T
	TH=13(FU=9)	NE=1	NNENT=4 (FU=10)	TH=3(FU=1)
1.1	-	-	(3)	-
1.2	2(5)	-	1(1)	-
1.3	-	-	(1)	-
2.1A	11+3(4)	1	4(9)	3(1)
2.1B	7+1(6)	1	(3)	3+1
3.1	1(4)	-	(3)	-

The structure of enquiries in faxes and telexes and follow-ups in multiple messages

*Move 1 Establishing A Link*

- Step 1 Acknowledging sales materials and/or
- Step 2 Referring to previous contact and/or
- Step 3 Acknowledging pieces of information

*Move 2 Soliciting Information*

- Step 1A Requesting/specifying product/service details and/or
- Step 1.B Requesting /specifying transaction details

*Move 3 Prompting Further Contact*

- Step 1 Expressing expectation of reply/attention

### Appendix D

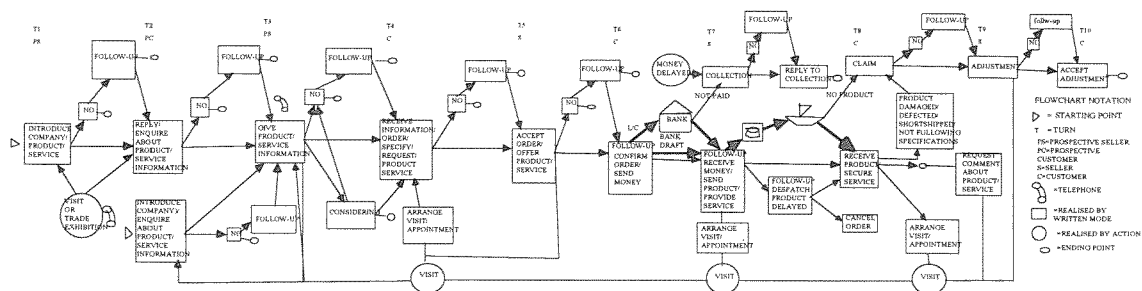


Figure 7.1 Flowchart: Exchange Structure of International Business Correspondence