**International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation**
ISSN: 2617-0299 (Online); ISSN: 2708-0099 (Print)
DOI: 10.32996/ijllt
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijllt

IJLLT
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Cultural Dimensions as Guidelines in Handling Language Problems for Effective Written Communication Across Cultures

**Pinfan Zhu**

*Professor, English Department, Texas State University, U. S. A.*
**Corresponding Author:** Pinfan Zhu, **E-mail**: pz10@txstate.edu

## | ABSTRACT
This research explores potential problems that might occur in the use of language for cross-cultural written communication. It uses corpus-based study as methodology and cultural dimensional theory by Geert Hofstede as guidelines and identifies potential problems in language use in areas such as word choices, syntaxis, textual organization, translation, and rhetorical strategies. These findings will help cross-cultural communicators avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, misleading information, and cultural blunders and create effective written information for successful business and technical exchanges internationally. In this sense, the research makes a good contribution to international business and technical communication and enriches the education in cross-cultural communication.

## | KEYWORDS
Cross-cultural communication, linguistics, translation, rhetoric, cultural dimensions

## | ARTICLE INFORMATION
**ACCEPTED:** 01 December 2023 **PUBLISHED:** 10 December 2023 **DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2023.6.12.12

## 1. Introduction
A piece of written communication normally consists of words, sentences, and text blocks (paragraphs), and the ways in which these elements are organized. So, study of language use will take these elements as the focus. However, even though languages have all these elements as commonalities, rules governing the use of these elements in each culture have their own idiosyncrasies, which were developed by each culture' s conventions, customs, values, beliefs, assumptions, traditions, history, and geographical conditions. Naturally, it is only when writers of a certain culture can create writings within the frame of reference of the target culture that readers of that culture will feel comfortable, natural, and smooth, reading the text created. To reach that goal, we need to study cultural influences on the use of words, sentence patterns, and text organization to understand the effective ways to communicate between our language and the target language. In addition to the use of language, rhetorical strategies are also an imperative aspect worthy of our attention. *Rhetoric* in Aristotle's term means persuasion (Corbbet, 1990). In other words, it is about how we organize our language or text in the most effective way to convince or affect our audience, or "the art of speaking or writing effectively" as defined by Mer*riam-Webster Dictionary*. People from different cultures tend to use different rhetorical patterns or discourse patterns and persuasive means to influence their audience. Chinese people have the preference to use emotions to move their audience while Americans like to use logical reasonings to achieve the same purpose. This means the necessity of understanding the different persuasive means and organizational patterns used in different cultures, which naturally becomes one of the research foci of this study. Finally, we need to be aware that translation is an important channel through which cross-cultural communication is fulfilled, but translation needs to be guided by the correct or appropriate translation criteria or strategies; otherwise, the translated works would be misleading, confusing, unidiomatic, or inaccurate. The trouble is that there are different translation theories which claim themselves to be the right ones. Inexperienced translators may

feel puzzled about which to use as guidance. In this case, it is also necessary to explore this realm to find out the reasonable one for guiding business and technical translation. So, the article has the study of language use, rhetorical approaches, and translation strategies as its research scope. The methodology employed is text analysis, case studies, and comparative analysis, to be specific. The audiences of this article are writers who write for cross-cultural audiences or translators who translate for international communication. The significance of the research is that the findings can be used as guidelines for effective cross-cultural communication. The author in many cases uses Chinese and English for comparative studies.

## 2. Literature Review

As mentioned in the fore-going section that language use is in many cases decided by the culture it belongs to. So, it is advisable to understand the culture characteristics before discussing the language use of the culture. In this world, there are more than 200 countries with their own cultures. However, anthropologists and cross-cultural researchers, according to the similarities or common features of them, have classified these 200 or more cultures into a few categories for easy understanding. Each category has its own characteristics in using language. Understanding these characteristics will help create effective cross-cultural communication.

### *2.1 Inter-Cultural Communication Theories*

Hall (1976), in his *Beyond Culture,* held that high-context cultures have a communication style based on body language, tone, and overall context, while low context cultures are more straightforward and explicit in communication. This is important from the perspective of language use. Cross-cultural communicators need to use explicit, specific, and straightforward language for readers from low-context cultures but follow an indirect or non-linear pattern when writing for readers from high-context cultures. Another cross-culture communication researcher, Hofstede (1980) advanced theories of six cultural dimensions: small/large power distance, strong/weak uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and individualism/collectivism, long-term/short-term orientation, and indulgence/restraint. This categorization has significance on language use for cross-cultural communication. For example, when communicating people from a culture of large-power distance, cross-cultural communicators need to use language that focuses more on communication of status and authority of leaders, professional expertise, advanced and high-tech equipment, and highly respected figures in the scientific and educational communities. Documents both online and in print with more reference to such factors will exert more influence and obtain more trustworthiness from this group of people. Also, language that promotes group harmony and we-relationship and avoids individual self-interest will be more welcome and acceptable to people from a culture of collectivism. Language used by people from a culture of masculinity is characterized by confrontational, assertive, straightforward, and strengthful expressions while that of a culture of femininity is more demonstrated by modesty, politeness, indirectness, and harmony.

### *2.2 Writing Theory*

John Hinds (1978) pointed out that some cultures (as in the US) favor "writer-responsible" academic writings, in which the writer has the primary responsibility for making sure that ideas are clearly communicated to the reader, while other cultures (as in Japan and China) favor "reader-responsible" academic writings, in which the reader is responsible for making sense out of the writer's ideas. This theory helps create effective language for cross-cultural communication as they know how information should be presented in light of readers' need. Also, people from a reader-responsible culture tend to produce writings that do not follow a linear pattern and that contain some information that needs more contextual, cultural, paralinguistic, and background messages to understand the meanings, which, are often missed in the text so that readers from a low-context cultural background have trouble reading such text. Normally, people from high-context cultures tend to write reader-responsible texts while people from low-context cultures tend to write writer-responsible texts. So, people who are doing cross-cultures communication need to be aware of this difference so that they take the right rhetorical strategy.

Robert Kaplan (1967) proclaimed in "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education" that people's writing and speaking are first decided by their though patterns, which he used a diagram as follows to indicate the differences in this aspect:

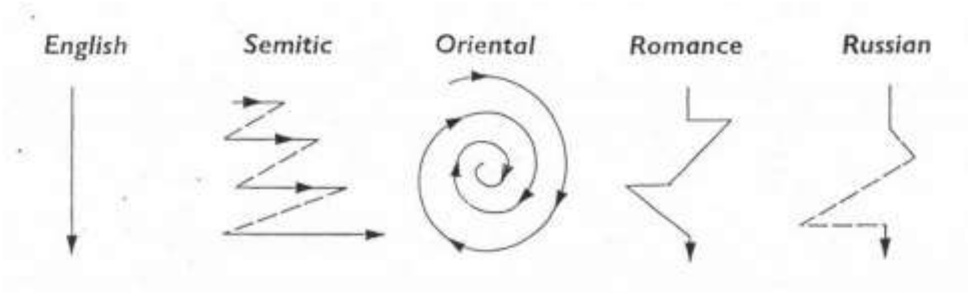


Figure 1. Kaplan's (1966) diagram of five cultural rhetorical patterns.

From the diagram above, we know English speakers' thought pattern is a linear one while Chinese (oriental people) has a spiral pattern. That's why we often see an academic paper starting with a thesis; then some topic sentences supporting the thesis, and then, some paragraphs supporting the topic sentences. It is a deductive pattern that starts with a point; then come the supporting details. However, Chinese people may start the paper by giving supporting details first; then come to the point being driven at. It is the other way around. That's the reason why some Westerners may have trouble following a Chinese speaker's ideas. Scollon (1995) gave the following example:

> Because most of our production is done in China now, and uh, it's not really certain how the government will react in the run-up to 1997, and since I think a certain amount of caution in committing to TV advertisement is necessary because of the expense. So, I suggest that we delay making our decision until after Lego makes its decision.

Then he comments that even though the words and the sentences of the speaker are easy to understand, a Westerner may still have the feeling that the speaker's main point is not clear. The reason, he explains, is that the listeners (American businessmen) and the speaker (a Chinese businessman) are using different principles to organize the presentation discourse. On the part of the speaker, the structure is this:

Because of

Y (topic, background, or reason)

X (comments, main points, or action suggested)

But normally, Westerners do not organize their presentation in this pattern. They organize their presentation in this pattern:

X (comments, main points, or action suggested)

Because of

Y (topic, background, or reason)

Then, in this case, a difference occurs between what the speaker uses and what the listeners expect, so difficulty occurs for the listeners to grasp the main idea. The first pattern, which has supporting details placed before main points is called an inductive pattern, while the second pattern, which has the main points placed before the supporting points, is called a deductive pattern. Scollon notices that an inductive pattern is more favored by the Asians while a deductive pattern is more favored among Westerners, though both patterns are used by the two groups of people.

Ulla Conner (2003) proclaimed in her *Contrastive Rhetoric* that this indirect writing pattern of Chinese has the root in ancient Chinese eight-legged essays that normally consist of eight parts: breaking open the topic (poti), 2 receiving the topic (chengti), 3 beginning discussion (qijiang),4 initial leg (qigu), 5 transition leg (xugu),6 middle leg (zhonggu),7 later leg (hougu),and 8 conclusion (dajie). From such an organization, it is easy to see there is no such a relationship like one is in support of another, but each section is discussing a different topic from a different perspective, which results in a round-about manner. Kaplan (1967) further identified that different thought patterns lead to the cultural preference of using certain sentence patterns, in addition to that of different textual organization. For example, in the Arabic language, (and this generalization would be more or less true for all Semitic languages), paragraph development is based on a complex series of parallel constructions, both positive and negative. This kind of parallelism may be in the form of synonymous parallelism (e.g. *his descendants will be mighty in the* *land and the generation of the upright will be blessed*), synthetic parallelism (e.g. *because he inclined his ear to me therefore I will call on him as long as I live*), antithetical parallelism (e.g. for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous : *but the way of the wicked shall perish*), and climactic parallelism ( e.g. *Give unto the Lord, O ye sons of the mighty, Give unto the Lord glory and strength*. Megginson (2004) pointed out: "Loose sentences are the most natural for English speakers, who almost always talk in loose sentences; even the most sophisticated English writers tend to use loose sentences much more often than periodic sentences. While a periodic sentence can be useful for making an important point or for a special dramatic effect, it is also much more difficult to read, and often requires readers to go back and reread the sentence so that by the end the reader has forgotten the main point."

Lian (1993) once explained that the Chinese language prefers parataxis, a literary technique, in writing or speaking, as explained by Wikipedia, that favors short, simple sentences, without conjunctions or with the use of coordinating, but not with subordinating conjunctions. However , the English language prefers hypotaxis to parataxis which tends to use a lot of subordinate conjunctions. He gave an example as follows:

> When I try to understand what it is that prevents so many Americans from being as happy as one might expect, it seems to me that there are two cases, of which one goes much deeper than the other.

In this sentence, we can see seven conjunctions such as *when, what, that, that, which, as,* and *than*. But, when it is translated into Chinese, only *when, what* and *than* are translated, and they are not translated as conjunctions but as prepositions. In other words, no conjunction is used. Therefore, communicators need to remember the preferred or more conventional sentence types used in the target culture.

### *2.3 Linguistic Theory*

Even in the use of words, cultural differences still exist. The same words may have different implications in different cultures, thus causing different associations in the minds of different audiences. For example, *bourgeois liberalization* is a positive expression in the English language, but a negative one in the Chinese language. In addition to the positive/negative value of a word, there are other aspects communicators need to pay attention to. Newmark (1981) created a table to illustrate the different meanings of the same word in different cultures:

Newmark's Componential Analysis Model (78). (Source: Newmark,

Peter. *Approaches To Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press 1981)

| | Shocking | Sex | Humor | Loudness | Vulgarity | Intensity (order of) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| bawdy | + | + | + | + | + | 3 |
| ribald | ? | + | + | - | + | 4 |
| smutty | + | + | + | - | + | 8 |
| lewd | + | + | - | - | - | 2 |
| coarse | + | - | - | - | + | 6 |

Therefore, if a technical communicator decides to use the term "bawdy" to translate a Chinese word, the translator must be aware that it carries multiple connotations or harmonics, suggesting a sexual aspect, an element of vulgarity, etc. He might prefer to use a substitute term, such as "coarse," if he wants to avoid the sexual overtone. In light of this componential analysis model, a translator can construct other models for specific situations.

### *2.4 Translation Theory*

Since this article focuses on business and technical communication across cultures, translation is also a concerned topic, so it is necessary to discuss some literature on translation.

Translation theories concern themselves with translation criteria, approaches to translation, and specific techniques in handling special language phenomena. Translation theorists, according to Peter Newmark, mainly swing between literal and free, faithful and beautiful, exact and nature translation, depending on whether the bias was to be in favor of the author or the reader (38). For example, Richards holds an aesthetic belief that there exists a unified "meaning" that can be discerned and that a unified evaluative system exists by which the reader can judge the translation. The model demands that translator should be aware that a sign does not only indicate something, but also characterize it (Gentzler 23). He believes that translators can arrive at perfect understanding and reformulate that message correctly. Obviously, Richards' theory is too subjective, and more author based. Another translation theorist, Eugene A. Nida (1964) of the same school, advocated a theory of dynamic equivalence, which means that the target language wording will trigger the same impact on the target language (TL) audience as the original wording did upon the source language (SL) audience, so translators should prioritize the effect of the source language and try to communicate this effect adequately.

Another representative theorist of this school is Lawrence Venuti (2013) who emphasizes the preservation of the original flavor of the source language. So, it is SL reader oriented. His theory is anti-translation in nature. He advocates "alienation" in the translation process, which means the alien elements in the SL text should be preserved. The purpose is to let the TL readers understand and accept the SL culture.

At the same time, young scholars like James Holmes and Gideon Toury, feeling frustrated with these theories, begin to take a new route in this confrontational situation. Toury (1980) criticizes the source-text-oriented models of translation. He emphasizes the importance of the target literary system and advances the concepts of adequacy and acceptability, which are two theoretical poles of the continuum in which all translations can be found. These two concepts are widely accepted by the translation circles. To put it simply, Toury emphasizes "adaptation" to the target culture or language in the process of translation so that the TL audience accepts the version easily. Translation theorists that advocate TL culture-oriented translation are regarded as the adaptation school.

Both the alienation school and adaptation schools have good arguments for their theories. The former claims: 1) It is necessary to let TL readers understand a foreign culture, which is also their purpose of reading a translated version. 2) Translators should trust that readers' intelligence and imaginary competence are good enough for them to understand the alien characteristics of a foreign culture. 3) Introducing SL culture will enrich the TL Culture and its expressions. 4) Translation should help cultural communication, which is also the purpose of translation. 5) A translated version cannot be said as faithful to the original if it fails to communicate the phenomena of the source language. The latter also has its rationality. It claims: 1) It is unrealistic to impose the SL culture upon the TL readers, and at times, it is risky to do so. Translation needs to overcome cultural barriers. 2) Since translation is communication, translators should avoid cultural conflicts, which might lead to misunderstanding. 3) TL readers will have no difficulty understanding the translated message if it fits into the readers' knowledge scope both in form and content. 4) It is unreasonable to place high expectations on TL readers regarding their ability to understand the SL culture. So, translators should make the world of the SL culture as easily acceptable to the TL readers as possible. 5) Viewed from a communicative perspective, an effective communication mode in one culture may not be so in a different culture. Even if the SL has some equivalent words in the TL, the effect produced in the translated version may not be the same to the TL readers because he/she tends to interpret the content in his/her culture values. So, in a certain sense, translation is to seek a cultural equivalence between the SL and the TL. From the above discussion, it is not difficult to see that translation should not be confined to one approach or one school's theory. With different situations of translation, different approaches or theories are needed.

In the literature review section, the author has discussed how cultures may decide in what aspects language use should give more weight, the rhetorical strategy for organizing sentences and choice of words. Undoubtedly, these factors play an important role in developing effective cross-cultural communication, and they should not be overlooked. In addition, discussion was also given to translation theories. The author considers that in translating business and technical information, emphasis should be given to the accessibility and marketability of the translated works, or the commercial value would be lost if the target readers fail to accept the information.

**3. Methodology**

Corpus-based studies involve the investigation of corpora, i.e. collections of (pieces of) texts that have been gathered according to specific criteria and are generally analyzed automatically. The author based his research on corpus studies. Specifically, he collected texts from both online and in print and read them closely at different levels: semantic, syntactic, textual, and translational. Then, through analytic, comparative, and contrastive studies, he identified patterns and applied categorizations.

Guided by relevant theories as stated in the literature review, critical reading of the text was conducted to identify issues in the texts for cross-cultural communication. The focus was on the English and the Chinese languages in the context of both Chinese and America cultures. Specifically, words in the text were examined from the cultural and linguistic perspectives, then sentence by sentence, and finally the organization of the text. After data was analyzed and categorized, the study was basically completed for the report.

**4. Research Results**

Through careful study, issues at different levels were identified. They include word choice problems, sentence pattern problems, text content and organization problems, translation problems. The author will discuss them in the following sections.

***4.1 Word Choice***

In terms of language use, words are the basic unity to use in a piece of writing. Words are made up by their forms, sounds, and meanings. In all these three aspects errors can occur if their cultural associations are neglected. We will first discuss forms. In noun linguistics, there are words or expressions that have the same or similar form in two or three languages but different meanings in each of those languages. *Gift,* for example, means "present" in English but "poison" in German. Roberto Crivello (2016) points out that, in technical translation or technical writing for a cross-cultural audience, false friends are frequently chosen. He lists a host of words such as "versus" (indiscriminately replaced by "contro" instead of "infunzione di"), "rotate" (replaced by the Italian word "ruotare" instead of "girare"), "procedure" (replaced by "procedro" instead of "procedimento" in many cases), and "measurement" (replaced by "misurazione" instead of by "misura" in the electrical field.

Another such blunder occurs when the Parker Pen Company experienced a case of such when they were trying to translate their slogan "It won't leak in your pocket and embarrass you" for the Latino market. As they mistakenly thought "embarazar" meant "to embarrass," the Spanish.

slogan was proudly displayed across Latin communities as: "It won't leak in your pocket and impregnate you" ("to embarrass" in Spanish is "avergonzar" (Crivello).

People need to be aware that expressions or phrases can also have false friends. For example, when American medical containers were distributed in Great Britain and caused quite

a stir. The instructions to "Take off top and push in bottom," innocuous to Americans, had very strong sexual connotations to the British. So, a false-friend expression can produce a negative communicative effect, and this is the very reason we need to be on guard against them.

Then, there is the problem of word sound. Randomly using a loaned word may also incur unpleasant associations. Here are some examples:

- In the late 1970s, Wang, an American computer company could not understand why its British branches were refusing to use its latest motto "Wang Cares." Of course, to British ears this sounds too close to "Wankers," which would not really give a very positive image to any company.
- A Chinese restaurant in Hangzhou, China prepares a well-known soup; it is phonetically translated as "Shitze." The term was the name of an Ancient Chinese beauty, thus having a very positive connotation. However, the name sounds like "Shits" in English, a very negative word. Who would like to use the soup whose name sounds like "shits"?
- Another cosmetic company in Hangzhou gave its face cream a name like "Fang Fang" which means fragrance in Chinese. However, the name was not translated but still used in the original form "Fang Fang" when it was

> sold in English-speaking countries. With the name sounding like the two
>
> front long sharp teeth of a poisonous snake, who would like it? (Ertan, 2016)

In addition, word meaning can produce problems as well. A *Shanghai Star* tabloid criticizes some sports players as individualism-obsessed, always wanting to show off themselves, but individualism is not a negative word, so Westerners may feel strange about such criticism. In fact, what the tabloid wants to say, in English, is "egoistic." Another word like "landlord" which is not a negative word in English, is a very negative word in Chinese as it means a person from the oppressing class. "Peasant" is a derogative term in English, but not so in Chinese. "Propaganda" is a positive word in Chinese, as it is associated with an enthusiastic situation where people are going about to spread some very good things, but it is a negative one in English. Writers also need to be careful when using idioms or expressions that contain colors or animals, because colors and animals connote differently in different cultures. For example, "green-eyed" means jealousy" in English but in Chinese jealousy is red-eyed. "A running dog" is not a negative expression in English but it is very derogative in Chinese, implying something servile and obsequious. Even word collocations cannot be overlooked either. In Polish, people say "polish the teeth" but the collocation is "brush your teeth" in English. Negligence of word collocation may cause awkward expressions. So, be careful of the cultural implications of idioms, expressions, and proverbs, as well as word collocation; do not think they mean the same to your target audience and use the exactly same form for cross-cultural communication.

### *4.2 Sentence Patterns*

The same problem may also occur at the sentence level. As stated above, each culture may have its preferred sentence patterns, and only if we are able to accommodate such syntactic preference that the target audience would feel comfortable reading our stuff. Otherwise, they may feel the writing awkward or not reader friendly. For example, in a text that communicates traditional Chinese Medicine, a paragraph goes like this:

> Take lung trouble for example. If it results from heart trouble, that is regarded as "fire subjugating metal." If it is caused by liver (wood) trouble, that is referred to as "wood reversibly restricting metal." If it is led by the spleen (earth), trouble, that is looked upon as "illness of mother-organ involving son-organ." And if it is due to kidney (water) trouble, that is taken as "illness of son-organ involving mother organ" (Enwei, TCM Basic 1, Chapter 3, Section1, 6).

Readers find a bunch of period sentences introduced by "if" which American readers may not find them so reader friendly as they prefer loose sentences to periodic sentences as mention above. They might find such a paragraph dull and boring as sentence rhythms are so monotonous with the main points always appearing at the end. Now,one more example:

> The word "Dai" in Chinese means "A belt". The Dai Channel runs transversely round the waist like a belt. So, it is termed the Dai Channel (the Belt Channel). It binds all the channels of the body, fixing and safeguarding the foetus and controlling the secretion of leucorrhea (Enwei, TCM Basic 1, Chapter 1, Section 1,150).

This paragraph is more paratactic in nature as more simple, short sentences are used to organize the paragraph. As said before, English prefers hypotaxis to the parataxis, so an English professor revised it to be as follows:

The Dai (a belt in Chinese) Channel runs transversely round the waist like a belt, thus the name. The Dai Channel binds all the channels of the body, fixing and safeguarding the foetus and controlling the secretion of leucorrhea.

The revised version immediately appears much more compact and idiomatic to American readers.

### *4.3 Textual Organization*

The above explains the errors in using syntax for cross-cultural communication. Now, we have come to the textual organization. Americans prefer a deductive pattern (points coming before supporting details) in their academic writing while Chinese prefer inductive pattern (points coming after supporting details). In this case, writings by Chinese may not be so easily interpreted by Americans. See the following passage:

> From the Qin and Han Dynasties (221.B.C.- 220 A.D.) doctors in the interior of China begins (began) to prescribe more and more rhinoceros horn (Cornu Rhinocerotis) amber (Succinium), antelope's horn (Cornu Antelopis) and musk (Moschus) from the minority nationalities; longan pulp (Arillus Longan), Lychee-seed (Semen Litchi) from the South China Sea and medical materials from southeast Asia and other region as a result of eve-developing

> communications and transportation both inside and outside of China. This enriched the Chinese people's knowledge of medicine (Enwei, TCM Basic 1, Chapter 1, Section 1, 2).

This paragraph discusses how the knowledge of medicine is enriched in TCM, but the main point is delayed until the end of the paragraph. The specifics that lead to the conclusion include doctors' prescription of more kinds of drugs, and more sources of drugs because of ever-developing transportation. The pattern is, because of A and B, thus C, a typical inductive process.

In addition to delaying the main points until the end, implying the main points in the text is also often found in the Chinese writings for English readers, but for English readers who prefer direct and linear written pattern, such writing is not reader-friendly either. See the following:

> Sun Simiao (581-682 A.D.), a famous medical man in the Tang dynasty, devoted his life to writing out the two books: *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies* and *A Supplement to the Essential Prescription Worth a thousand Gold*. The former is divided into 30 volumes and introduces 5,300 prescriptions: the latter 30 volumes 2,751 prescriptions. These two books deal with the key problems of every clinical department: acupuncture and moxibustion, diet therapy, prevention, health preservation and so on. His outstanding achievement is in the treatment of deficiency disease. For example, he realizes that patients suffering from goiter and the like were among those who lived in the mountains for a long time and drank a type of harmful water. He dissuaded people from living for any length of time in such places and advocated that nyctalopia should be treated with animals' lives, to mention but a few. In 752 A. D. Wang Tao wrote a treatise, the Medical Secretes of An Official. The book contains 40 volumes, 1,104 categories (of which 1,048 have so far been verified) and introduces 6000, or so prescriptions. It can certainly be known as a mastery of prescriptions available before the Tang Dynasty (Enwei, TCM Basic 1 Chapter 1, Section 1)

This paragraph discusses TCM's development in prescriptions. Though the writer made no point at the beginning, with the details of the two books on prescriptions by Sun Simiao that cover problems of all kinds of clinical departments with the total number of 8,051 prescriptions and another book on prescription by Wang Tao that also covers 6,000 prescriptions, the reader could come to the conclusion that a marvelous achievement was made in prescriptions, especially when he also reads about the effective examples of these prescriptions. It is an inductive pattern, though the conclusion is implied.

### *4.4 Writing Topics and Strategies*

The foregoing paragraphs illustrate the rhetorical strategies in organizing the information or in arrangement of text in Aristotelian term. In fact, even in the process of invention (creation of text), one of the five canons of Aristotelian rhetorical theory, strategies also vary in different cultures. They are normally concerned with how language is to be used to achieve certain effect, or to what aspect it should give more weight. Zahedi et al (2001) advanced some guidelines regarding how to use language to accommodate different cultural dimensions. Even though they specified that the guidelines are online writing, the author considers they are also applicable to general writing as they follow the same principles. They are as follows:

a. Web documents designed for users from cultures with large power distance (as opposed to small power distance) will be more effective if they have references to characteristics associated with large power distance, such as authority, power, expertise, and wealth.
b. Web documents designed for high levels collectivism (as opposed to individualism) will be more effective if they promote group cohesion and not individual self-interest.

Web documents designed for users with masculine (as opposed to feminine) cultures will be more effective if they refer to or can be associated with characteristics such as success, winning, strength, and assertiveness.

c. Web documents designed for users from cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance (as opposed to weak uncertainty avoidance) would be more effective if they referred to precise and detailed information, referred to relevant rules and regulations, and avoided emphasizing novelty and deviating from the norm.
d. Web documents designed for users from cultures with long-term orientation (as opposed to short-term orientation) will be more effective if they emphasize perseverance, future orientation, resources for conservation, respect for the demands of virtue, and de-emphasize truth and falsity as a strictly binary, black-and-white relationship.

Zahedi even provided some examples to illustrate the guidelines. Limited by the space, here only two examples are shown:

*A hypermedia archive sponsored by the Library of Congress and supported by the Getty Grant Program, the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia, Sun Microsystems, and Inso Corporation. With additional support from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We ask you to adhere strictly to the terms under which these materials are made available. The Archive as a whole, its texts, and its images are protected under the copyright laws of the United States and the Universal Copyright Convention.* (The example for guideline a displays wealth, authority, and expert. Zahedi).

*We have read your manuscript with boundless delight. If we were to publish your paper, it would be impossible for us to publish any work of a lower standard. And as it is unthinkable that, in the next thousand years, we shall see its equal, we are, to our regret compelled to return your divine composition, and beg you a thousand times to overlook our short sight and timidity.* (This example for guideline b shows displays indirect language that supports group cohesion and harmony through formal politeness, rather than direct, "get to the point" individual self-interest. Zahedi).

*Be all that you can be. Become part of the best team in the world. Join the US Army or Army Reserve and we'll guarantee great training and skills to last a lifetime. Learn more and see if you're ready* (This example displays language that stresses masculine qualities of success, assertiveness, and strength. Zahedi)

As can be seen from the above discussion, how to accommodate another different culture in terms of language use is more or less a rhetorical act, which requires us to conduct audience and cultural analyses in order to decide the right rhetorical strategies for diction, sentence patterns, textual organization, and what content language should give more weight to.  Now, comes the discussion of translation. In fact, translation is also a rhetorical act especially in the case of technical and business translation across cultures. The author will explain this in the following paragraphs:

### *4.5 Translation*

Business and technical translation include translation of business letters, documents, websites, reports, proposals, user guides, emails, presentations, technical documents, resumes, and all other workplace writings which are different from creative writings like novels, fictions, movies, dramas, plays, biographies, and poetry. Business and technical writings normally help solve practical problems and achieve certain goals and have a special group of people as their readers. This means that their creation, organization, styles, and designs need to be decided in light of the communication purpose and the readers' needs. The focus is on the acceptability and marketability of the translated works. If the translation fails to satisfy these two requirements, the company will fail its communication goal and result in making no profit. Also, as pointed out by Amant, S. (1999) "Recent research involving translation has indicated that even when reading or speaking in another language, the reader or speaker still prefers the rhetorical patterns of his or her native culture and even judges the effectiveness of other language documents according to their cultural rhetorical expectation" (298).

The author once visited a Chinese- created website www.enwei.com, whose purpose, according to the editor is to popularize basic Traditional Chinese Medicine. However, in terms of meeting the readers' expectations and translation goal, the website simply failed. Here, a translated passage is cited as an example to illustrate this:

> In the light of research on the kidney by a special group at The First Medical College in Shanghai who studied this organ, it has been found that any of the following six different diseases: anovulatory and functional uterine bleeding, bronchial asthma, toxemia of pregnancy, coronary atherosclerotic heart disease, lupus erythematosus and neurasthenia, is present with low 17-hydroxycorticosteriod if the *yang* of the kidney is diagnosed to be deficient (Enwei, TCM Basic 1, Chapter 3, Section 5, 62).

As was told by the manager when I called her, the purpose of the website is to popularize the basic knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine, and the audience is the general public. However, when looking at the passage, readers may find the language very difficult. This is because first, the sentence is very long with about 67 words in this single sentence. According to

According to Rudolf Flesch (1964), a famous linguistic expert who once did a statistical analysis on the relationships between the length of sentences and the styles in *The Art of Plain Talk,* average sentence length in words for different styles are manifested as follows:

Very easy (easy prose, mostly dialogue): 8 words or less

Easy: 11 words

Fairly easy: 14 words

Standard (average reader): 17 words

Fairly difficult (literary English): 21 words

Difficult: 25 words

Very difficult (scientific English): 30 words or more (38)

By these standards, the sentence quoted is super difficult because it surpasses the limit by such a great disparity. In addition to the difficult sentence structure, words used are also very difficult to the general public as they are mostly laypersons to TCM. For example, words *like anovulatory and functional uterine bleeding, lupus erythematosus, toxemia, neurasthenia, and hydroxycorticosteriod* are not suitable for laypersons to understand. Therefore, the translator should have used plain words to render the original words and simple sentence structures to replace the original structure. What's more, some annotations might be also necessary for the term *yang*. Lack of some background information, the passage is simply high-context information, which Westerners may find unintelligible. Obviously, literal translation or alienation approach will not apply to such a situation. With so many "alien elements," readers of the target culture have trouble following the text; then, they may feel bored and switch their attention to other websites. In this way, the communication purpose falls flat and TCM products being advertised there will not sell.

So, through the translated example and the rhetorical analysis of the audience need, communication purpose, and language used, it's easy to see that only the adaptation approach, not the alienation approach, is suitable for business and technical translation. Otherwise, the audience cannot accept the translated information, and the products being sold will fail to have marketability. Also, the adaptation approach requires translators to adapt the words, sentences, organization, and the contents to the needs of the target audience, as well as the goal of communication. Only by following this principle can translators achieve effective cross-cultural communication.

## 5. Discussion

This research focuses on the potential problems that may occur in cross-cultural communication from a linguistic perspective. Specific issues discussed include diction, syntax, and textual organization, and translation approaches. Along the way, some solutions were also offered. But, by no means can we say it is perfect research. There are some limitations to the research. Firstly, it cannot be said that the research has exhausted all the possible linguistic problems. For example, inadequate study was devoted to the translation of idioms and proverbs which are an important part of a culture. So, the author would hope more research could be done in these areas. In addition, some problems may need more examples to make the argument more persuasive, and word collocations or words concerning colors and animals could have more discussions on them. Also, some views are simply personal, like those on the approaches to technical and business translation. They may to certain extent bear some subjective color and need more evidence to justify; however, they at least point out a possible solution. As to rhetorical strategies, there should be some discussion concerning what type of persuasive means is preferred by certain cultures, which may also help writers with more ways to accommodate different cultures if they know certain cultures prefer a strategy like appealing to pathos (emotions) while others prefer ethos (good or moral character), or logos (reasons). These are important persuasive means in classic rhetoric. Also, the author wants to point out cultural dimensions are not static, but dynamic in nature with the elapse of time and progress of society, changes are sure to take place among them, so do not treat them in a mechanical way. When the author says certain cultures prefer inductive writing pattern, he does not mean, that culture always uses this pattern and never other patterns. It's something relatively or comparative spoken. Readers should not treat them as a piece of iron. All cultures also have other discourse patterns. It's just a matter of preference or convention. For whatever problems we are to cope with, we need to consider the communication purpose, the audience's needs, and most suitable discourse organization. Only by doing so can we make the most effective cross-cultural communication.

**6. Conclusion**

Cross-cultural communication covers many aspects such as linguistic, rhetorical, graphical, and translational. To conduct effective cross-cultural communication, we need to pay attention to the use of words, sentences, textual organization, rhetorical strategy, and topics to be covered. Specifically, we need to study the cultural differences, preferences, and effects regarding word forms, word sounds, word connotations, and word collocations. In terms of organization, we need to know the right rhetorical patterns to be used. Should it be deductive or inductive, direct or indirect, writer-responsible or reader-responsible? We need to decide these in light of cultural dimensions. Concerning translation, we need to consider the purpose, the audience needs and the nature of the works to be translated, only by following these guidelines, can we complete successful translation.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest**: The authors declare no conflict of interest.



**References**

[1] Amant, K. (1999). "When Culture and Rhetoric Contrast: Examining English as the International Language of Technical Communication." *IEEE Transaction on Professional Communication* 42.4: 297- 99.
[2] Conner, U. (1996), Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-Cultural Aspect of Second-Language Writing, Cambridge University Press.
[3] Corbett, E. (1990). *Classical rhetoric for the modern student. New York: Oxford University Press.*
[4] Crivello, R. (1999) " False Friends in Technical Translations into Italian" Retrieved from www.robertocrivello.com.
[5] Enwei (Aug. 25, 2003), Basic Traditional Chinese Medicine, www.enwei.com
[6] Ertan, S. (Dec. 8, 2013), Cross Cultural Marketing Blunders, https://theopenmic.co/cross-cultural-marketing-blunders/
[7] Flesch, Rudolf. *The Art of Plain Talk*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1946.
[8] Hall ET (1976) Beyond culture. Doubleday, New York
[9] Hinds, J. (1987), "Reader vs. Writer Responsibility: A New Typology.*" In Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text.* Ed. Ulla Cornor. MA: Addison-Wesley.
[10] Geert Hofestede (2003) Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations 2nd ed. SAGE Publications.
[11] Gonzalez, A. (1999), *Rhetoric in Intercultural Context.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
[12] Kaplan. K. (1967), "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education." *Language Learning,* 16.1: 8-20.
[13] Martinez, L. (Dec. 8, 2016), The Horrors of Cross-Cultural Advertising Translations. Retrieved from https://thenativa.com/blog/cross-cultural-advertising-translations/.
[14] Merriam-Webster. (2003). Litmus test. In *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (11th ed., p. 727).
[15] Newmark, P (1981), *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
[16] Nida, Eugene. A. *Towards a Science of Translation* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964.
[17] Flesch, R. (1946), *The Art of Plain Talk*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers.
[18] Scollon, R et al (1995), *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
[19] Zahedi, F. *et al*. (2001) "A Conceptual Framework for International Web Design." *IEEE Transaction on Professional Communication*. 44.2 (2001): 83-99.