

'COMMUNICATIVE' AND 'GOPHER' FORMS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: ANALYSIS IN LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL COMPONENTS OF THE BUSINESS LETTER

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1. Introduction

Contrastive rhetoric, which is primarily concerned with descriptive accuracy, originated out of necessity to solve problems facing foreign students writing in English. Research in contrastive rhetoric was originally initiated to undertake pedagogical problems such as when and why natives of other languages make certain types of grammatical and lexical errors when they write in English. Theoretical models and methods established for investigations revolved, during the sixties and seventies, around problems of non-native (NN) writing and the degree to which it deviates from native (N) norms.

However, it has been observed recently "that [foreign] students with excellent control of [English] sentence structure are not necessarily able to compose [English] text" (Kaplan 1988: 276).¹ Hence, this observation, though provisional, forces principal reconstruction of aims, objectives and foci of contrastive rhetoric research.

1.1. Alternative Analysis

Moving away from pedagogically motivated methods and concepts – though it is not totally possible to dismiss conceivable pedagogical interpretation in the analysis of natural language – to more communicative methods and concepts is the recent drift of contrastive rhetoric research. Communication, as a form of social behavior in a given context, which is judged on the basis of its actual outcome, involves culturo-linguistic interaction. In cross-cultural communication, particularly in the field of international trade, English is almost always marked as the medium of communica-

¹ See also Kaplan (1966), Alharbi (1997, 1998a), Ganguly (1986), Hymes (1972).

tion. Whenever a business letter is addressed to a foreign client the language used in this act of communication is English. Taking this contextual use of English into consideration, it is then reasonable to ask the following question. What might disturb the intelligibility of cross-cultural communication? This and similar questions have enjoyed increasing popularity during the recent developments in contrastive rhetoric research. Recent investigations in contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan 1967, 1972, 1986, 1987, 1988; Ting-Toomey and Korzenny 1989; Purves 1988; Connor and McCagg 1983; and Connor and Davis 1994) have adopted interdisciplinary approaches to examine cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. The purpose, here, is to explain problems of communication across culturo-linguistic settings. The paper in hand is one attempt, among others, to search such query. Any attempt searching cross-cultural communication must start with clear explanation of the relationship between communication, language and culture.

1.2. Communication

From a communication theory viewpoint, communication involves sender, message and receiver. "To communicate effectively is to be certain that the message the other person receives is as close as possible to the way it was intended when it was sent" (Singer 1987: 66). In theory, communication is said to have taken place if the information received is the same as that sent. In practice, however, one has to allow for all kinds of possible complications, especially in cross cultural communication. As early as 1969, Shannon and Weaver stated through their 'information transfer' model that the received message is not – and never can be – identical to the intended original message.

As far as human behavior and communication are concerned, Singer (1987), citing Watzlawick, states that

...behavior has no opposite. There is no such thing as non-behavior or, to put it even more simply: one cannot not behave. Now, if it is accepted that all behavior in an interactional situation has message value, i.e. is communication, it follows that no matter how one may try, one cannot not communicate.

(Singer 1987: 64)

Human communication – as derived from Aristotle's characterization of who says what to whom with what effect – is indeed a complex process. Communication whether intercultural or cross cultural, tends to be filtered through social values, beliefs and customs. To be liberal might be communicated positively in one culture as a sign of innovation, new ideas, more freedom, prosperity and progress while in another culture it might have a negative connotation as a danger to traditional values. To communicate cross culturally and effectively, one has to show appreciation of the target culture and understanding of its values, beliefs, and norms, as well as its linguistic codes.

Communication is considered in this research to be contextually designed, linguistically managed and culturally patterned. In agreement with Canale (1981), we view communication to be (1) a form of social interaction, (2) which takes place in

discourse and sociocultural contexts, (3) always has a purpose, and (4) is judged on the basis of actual outcomes.

1.3. Language and culture

The relationship between language and culture was correctly identified by Brown (1986), who said:

A culture consists of many systems – language, social organization, religion, technology, law, etc. Each of these cultural systems other than language is dependent on language on its organization and existence, but otherwise constitutes an independent system whose patterning may be described... The full statement of the point-by-point and pattern-by-pattern relations between the language and any of the other cultural systems will contain all the 'meanings' of the linguistic forms.

(Brown 1986: 165)

Among many possible interpretations of this statement is the sense, which we and presumably most sociolinguists share, that meaning is not attainable at grammatical, lexical, and phonological levels, rather at a combination of linguistic and socio-cultural levels.

Language, thus, can be perceived as an index of social activity in an identified community, and, as a means of communication, the most visible and available expression of its culture. One's world view, self-identity, system of thinking, acting, feeling and communicative norms are largely shaped by his sociological-and-linguistic experience (Brown 1986 and Goodenough 1981).

1.4. Communication in business

A number of questions arise concerning previous analyses of business communication in the USA tradition of contrastive rhetoric. The most important of which was in connection with the corpus used in the analysis, which consists largely of letters written by foreign students. The addressee of the letter was either the department chairperson or the dean of the admissions office. The purpose of the letter was either to obtain college application forms or to seek admission or financial aid.

As for the foci of the early analyses, there were three primary approaches. The first approach investigates (a) whether the lexicon used in NN letters was compatible with its English counterpart i.e. 'content' (lexical) error analysis, and (b) illustrates the number and type of linguistic errors that occur in NN letters i.e. 'language' error analysis (Khalil 1985 and others).² The second approach focuses on business English instruction (Zong and Hildebrandt 1983, Halpem 1983 and others), where investigation involves (a) the influence of native (American) English on business curricula taught in NN environment, (b) language transfer, and (c) updating business

² Further examples are to be found in Sims and Guise (1992), Goodenough (1981), Gudykunst (1989), Inman (1983 and 1985), Leeds-Hurwitz (1990), Lii-Shih (1994).

curricula in NN setting. The third approach complements the latter as it focuses on the actual practice of business communication in non-English speaking countries. Sims and Guice (1992) summarized the findings of previous analyses of business communication in the US tradition as: "(a) content [lexical] errors are more likely to impede communication than are language [syntactic] errors, (b) knowledge of business communication instruction in the reader's country may improve communication, and (c) understanding the business communication practice improves communication" (Simms and Guice 1992: 24).

2. Research questions

This study has a twofold aim: (a) to examine when and how the intelligibility of cross-cultural communication is interrupted, and (b) to assess the communicative value of both the linguistic and the cultural components of the business letter.

In particular, this study answers the following questions:

- (1) What is a N and NN business letter?³
- (2) When and to what degree is a business letter judged to be NN?
- (3) Is the intelligibility of cross cultural communication more influenced by the linguistic components or by the cultural components of the business letter?

3. Material

Two types of data were incorporated in this study. The first type consists of eight authentic business letters. These letters were carefully selected from a larger body of data (n. 145), which was collected from various places around the world:

- (a) Letters written by Arabic native speakers (n. 70). These letters were collected from various places around the Arab world; from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Bahrain, Kuwait, Algeria, Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, Libya, and United Arab Emirates.
- (b) Letters written by English native speakers (American) (n. 25). They were collected from various places around the United States of America; from Oklahoma, New Jersey, Texas, and Michigan.
- (c) Letters written by native speakers of languages other than English and Arabic (n. 50). They were collected from a number of places around the world; from

³ Who is the native speaker of a language? Why is it important to identify rather than to assume a native speaker? Who might be considered as a non-native speaker of a language? These and similar questions are correctly answered by Davies (1991).

Japan, India, Switzerland, Iran, Philippines, Cyprus, Hong Kong, France, Italy, CSSR, and Singapore.

All the letters were written in English. Business letters written by Arabic native speakers were recursively treated independent from other NN letters for the purpose of shading light on linguistic and cultural distance between Arabic and English. Such binary contrast will be developed further in an independent investigation to follow. Business letters written by English native speakers, on the other hand, were used as illustrative model of nativeness.

The second type of data consists of three consequent though independent experiments (as described in method and procedure below). In each experiment an attempt was made to answer a particular research question and for that reason render independent interpretation.

4. Method and procedure

4.1. The first examination: nativeness

As the first examination detects nativeness, it answers the first research question (What is an N and NN business letter?). It incorporates the eight authentic business letters and a forty-question questionnaire. One hundred American subjects (English native speakers); business executives, administrators, professors, graduate students were asked to give their professional judgments on the nativeness of the letter. The questionnaire solicits: (1) the purpose of the letter, (2) whether the letter preserves N cultural norms, (3) language quality, (4) and (5) whether the letter is perceived to be written by an N or NN. The subjects' intuitive judgments are summarized in Table 1 and discussed under three headings: (A) letters written by Arabic native speakers, (B) letters written by English native speakers, and (C) letters written by others.

4.2. The second examination: reasons for communicative failure

The second examination develops the analysis of NN letters. It comprises five international business letters and a 25-item questionnaire. Five letters (1, 3, 4, 6 and 8 representing a spectrum (0.73-0.91) of NN) were examined by means of a 25-item questionnaire investigating "to what degree is a business letter judged to be NN?" Sixty professionals (English native speakers) working as linguists, professors, English instructors and business executives were asked to give their evaluative and professional judgments on the linguistic and cultural components of the letters. The 25-item questionnaire investigates: (1) the content of the letter, (2) the language, (3) the N cultural norms, (4) who might have written the letter, and (5) in case that the letter is believed to be written by an NN, what is the reason for such judgment?

Further examination of the linguistic components of NN letters complement what have been reported by Grabe and Kaplan (1989: 268). Grammatical and lexical errors, among other types, were evidently present. Illustrative examples of these NN linguistic errors are given in the appendixes. Nonetheless, some cultural components

of NN letters were listed following the discussion of the findings of the second experiment. The listing, here, illustrates the main reasons for communicative impediment in cross-cultural communication. The cultural components examined were (a) number of messages included in the letter; (b) layout (format); (c) the inter-relationship between parts of the letter; (d) the manner in which requests and promotions are made, and finally (e) cultural interference.⁴

4.3. The third examination: linguistic vs. cultural components and their role in the intelligibility of communication

As the third examination detects intelligibility of communication, it therefore further investigates NN letters in an attempt to answer the third research question (Is the intelligibility of cross-cultural communication more influenced by the linguistic components or by the cultural components of the business letter?). Four letters (Ls 1, 3, 6 and 8) which were judged to be communicatively a failure were selected for further analysis. Each letter is reconstructed twice and hence two reconstructed forms emerged for each letter. The first is the linguistically edited form, which is edited for grammatical and lexical accuracy. Reference is made to this form as 'linguistic form' (LG). The second is the culturally edited form, which is edited for cultural accuracy. Reference is made to this form as *cultural form*, (CL). The aim here is to examine types and degrees of influence that linguistic and cultural components of the letter may have on non-nativeness. In spite of the fact that linguistic and cultural components of NN business letters were previously identified, the present investigation provides an independent examination of the effect of each component. By means of establishing the two reconstructed forms, their effects are abstracted as contrastively as possible. The American subjects (n=25) (business executives, administrators, professors, graduate students) were asked to give their intuitive and professional judgments on the two reconstructed forms. Each form is investigated independently and the subjects were asked to comment on (1) language quality, (2) cultural norms, (3) intelligibility of content.

5. Discussion of findings

5.1. Findings of the first examination

Findings of the first experiment are shown in Table 1 below. Discussion of these findings is given under three headings: (A) letters written by Arabic native speakers, (B) letters written by English native speakers, and (C) letters written by others.

⁴ For a detailed account of *cultural interference* see Hymes (1974). For cultural transfer see also Alharbi (1997, 1998a).

Table 1. Subjects' assessments in the first examination (n=100).

Answers / Letters	Native			Non-Native			Layout and Style			Words and Paragraphs		
	N	NN	un-known	N	NN	un-known	N	NN	un-known	N	NN	un-known
L1	0.00	*0.91	0.09	0.03	0.83	0.14	0.19	0.67	0.14	0.04	0.86	0.10
*note	0.65 SD + 0.26 D			0.64 SA + 0.19 A			0.41 NN + 0.26 N			0.54 NN + 0.32 N		
L2	0.72	0.08	0.20	0.63	0.12	0.25	0.89	0.02	0.09	0.69	0.14	0.17
note	0.48 A + 0.24 SA			0.45 D + 0.18 SD			0.50 N + 0.39 SN			0.47 N + 0.22 SN		
L3	0.04	0.84	0.12	0.06	0.83	0.11	0.15	0.69	0.16	0.02	0.85	0.13
note	0.44 D + 0.40 SD			0.42 A + 0.41 SA			0.47 NN + 0.22 SNN			0.49 NN + 0.36 SNN		
L4	0.16	0.60	0.24	0.16	0.64	0.20	0.32	0.42	0.26	0.16	0.66	0.18
note	0.40 D + 0.20 SD			0.43 A + 0.21 SA			0.32 NN + 0.10 SNN			0.51 NN + 0.15 SNN		
L5	0.42	0.26	0.32	0.36	0.25	0.39	0.55	0.14	0.31	0.40	0.26	0.34
note	0.24 A + 0.18 SA			0.23 D + 0.13 SD			0.41 N + 0.14 SN			0.24 N + 0.16 SN		
L6	0.03	0.91	0.06	0.06	0.88	0.06	0.16	0.71	0.13	0.02	0.89	0.09
note	0.67 SD + 0.24 D			0.69 SA + 0.19 A			0.39 NN + 0.32 SNN			0.69 SNN + 0.20 NN		
L7	0.79	0.11	0.10	0.71	0.12	0.17	0.83	0.06	0.11	0.70	0.20	0.10
note	0.51 SA + 0.28 A			0.44 SD + 0.27 D			0.47 SN + 0.36 N			0.48 SN + 0.22 N		
L8	0.06	0.88	0.06	0.09	0.78	0.13	0.16	0.73	0.11	0.05	0.86	0.09
note	0.57 SD + 0.31 D			0.59 SA + 0.19 A			0.39 NN + 0.34 SNN			0.67 SNN + 0.19 NN		

*Figures in bold are further explained in the note section underneath, where the two sub-scores are listed.

N= Native NN=Non-Native A=Agree D=Disagree
SN=Strongly N SNN=Strongly NN SA=Strongly A SD=Strongly D

5.1.1. Letters written by Arabic native speakers

Letters 1, 6 and 8 illustrate the category of letters written by Arabic native speakers. These letters represent obvious cases of non-nativeness. Judgments were strongly positive (0.57-0.67) on the non-nativeness of these letters. More obvious judgments were reported when subjects were asked if these letters were written by NNs (0.86-0.88). The NN layout and style, and words and phrases retain similar judgments at 0.67-0.73 and 0.86-0.89, respectively. Over two thirds (0.83) of the subjects who pass NN judgments on these letters were consistent in their decisions.

5.1.2. Letters written by English native speakers

Letters 2 and 5 represent the category of letters written by English (American) native speakers. The two letters had almost the same ratio of differences on N judgment as outlined by 0.19 on L5 and 0.18 on L2. Letters 2 and 5 represent an average N business letter (appendix 1).

5.1.3. Letters written by natives of other languages

Letters 3, 4 and 7 represent the category of letters written by natives of other languages. The N judgments passed on these letters were far from being compatible. On the one hand, L3 was judged to be of NN quality by nearly 0.84. Letter 7, on the other, was positively identified as preserving N cultural norms by nearly 0.80.

An interesting observation arises in this category which is related to the subjects' assessments of the cultural component of L4. Subjects judgments read 0.42 for the letter's cultural component to be NN and 0.32 to be N. It, thus, leaves a very narrow margin (0.10) between being N and being NN. Unlike the cultural component, the language used in the same letter was judged by the same subjects to be N at 0.66 and to be NN at 0.16. This is, indeed, an interesting fact which evidently suggests that linguistic and cultural components of the letter have different effects.

As an immediate outcome of the first examination, the following linguistic and cultural components illustrate what was judged to be a Native-English business letter. A full-length letter is constructed in the appendixes.

- (1) An N letter serves exclusively distinct purpose either to promote, to request, or to announce. A letter, which communicates incompatible messages, was perceived to be NN.
- (2) An N letter is (a) condensed, (b) plain in language, and (c) direct in message.

As for the organization of the business letter, the following crucial components of a N letter were culturally encountered.

- (1) Readers of the N letter expect an immediate announcement of *what it is all about* very early in the text. A lengthy introduction was perceived to communicate NN impression.
- (2) The second component of N letter is *the bread and the butter*, where further elaboration on the nature of the message is expected. Unless this component of the business letter is stated unambiguously, its communicative value may suffer.
- (3) An N letter ends with clear, direct and brief statement informing the reader of *what is expected of him*. Absence and/or misplacement of this component leaves the letter purposeless.

5.2. Findings of the second examination

As mentioned earlier, L4 presented a unique case and therefore was treated separately. It has been identified in the first experiment as a NN letter. When its content was further investigated different results emerged. Surprisingly, the subjects have acknowledged considerable understanding of the letter's content (0.80 easily and fully understood and 0.20 understood with minor difficulties). The language in this letter was either 0.50 poor or 0.50 fair. Contrary to the quality of its language, the N cultural norms were observed at 0.90, of which 0.45 were fully observed. Letter 4 provided clear evidence for the linguistic and cultural components of the business letter to have dissimilar effects – a case, which will be further discussed and fully demonstrated in the following discussion.

The content (Table 2) of letters 3 and 8, which are similar but not identical to L4, was positively identified but its language (Table 3) and its cultural norms (Table 4) had contrary effects. The content of L3 was 0.68 fully understood. Obviously, the content of the letter is comprehensible because of the fact that the native cultural norms were 0.88 observed in the letter. Furthermore, its language, though evaluated negatively (0.10 very poor, 0.22 poor and 0.68 fair), has little effect on the comprehension of its content. Likewise, the content of letter 8 was 0.78 understood (0.20 fully and 0.58 with minor difficulties). The comprehension of the content of letter 8 was due to the obvious adherence to native cultural norms where it had a score of 0.40 full and 0.60 partial compliance. The quality of the language used is the main reason for letters 3 and 8 to be judged as NN.

Letters 1 and 6 represent categorical cases where the subjects experience difficulties in understanding the content of the letter because of both the poor quality of language and the breach of N cultural conventions. The content of letter 1 had a score of 0.25 being understood with minor difficulties. This is so because of its language has a score of 0.85 being poor and N cultural norms had a score of 0.87 being violated. Likewise, the content of letter 6 was 0.38, understood with minor difficulties because of the negative effect of both poor quality (0.92) of language and violation (0.62) of native cultural norms.

Table 2. Content analysis of NN letters (n=60).

Content/ Letters	easily/fully understood		understood with minor difficulties		understood with major difficulties		difficult to understand		extremely difficult to understand	
1	0	0.00	15	0.25	39	0.65	6	0.10	0	0.00
3	41	0.68	7	0.12	6	0.10	6	0.10	0	0.00
6	0	0.00	23	0.38	31	0.52	6	0.10	0	0.00
8	12	0.20	35	0.58	13	0.22	0	0.00	0	0.00

Table 3. Language analysis of NN letters (n=60).

Language/ letters	excellent		good		fair		poor		very poor	
1	0	0.00	0	0.00	9	0.15	31	0.52	20	0.33
3	0	0.00	0	0.00	41	0.68	13	0.22	6	0.10
6	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	0.08	21	0.35	34	0.57
8	0	0.00	11	0.19	35	0.58	14	0.23	0	0.00

Table 4. Culture analysis of NN letters (n=60).

Culture/ letters	fully observed		partially observed		I don't know		violated		seriously violated	
1	0	0.00	8	0.13	0	0.00	42	0.70	10	0.17
3	24	0.40	29	0.48	0	0.00	7	0.12	0	0.00
6	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	0.38	30	0.50	7	0.12
8	24	0.40	36	0.60	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00

Furthermore, Table 5 below shows a significant correlation between the comprehension of content and the level at which native cultural norms are observed. In three out of the five letters being examined here, the content had a 0.87 comprehension score, of which 0.57 was easily and fully comprehended. Likewise, native cultural norms had a 0.90 observation score, of which 0.37 was fully and 0.53 was partially observed. This strong tie between the content and the native cultural norms coincided with the assessment of nativeness. It was obvious though for all the subjects that the writers of these letters were NN. The nativeness ratio shows that 0.97 either disagree (0.87) or strongly disagree (0.10) that the writers of these letters were American business executives.

Table 5. Cross analysis of NN letters (3, 4, 8) (n=60).

Content	fully understood	understood with minor difficulties	understood with major difficulties	difficult to understand	extremely difficult to understand
	0.57	0.30	0.10	0.03	0.00
Language	excellent	good	fair	poor	very poor
	0.00	0.23	0.57	0.17	0.03
Culture	fully observed	partially observed	I don't know	violated	seriously violated
	0.37	0.53	0.00	0.10	0.00
Native	strongly agree	agree	can not tell	disagree	strongly disagree
	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.87	0.10

Beyond this point, the data was reclassified into the following categories: N letters, NN letters and Undetermined. The native letters do not receive further analysis. N letters were primarily examined for linguistic and cultural identification. Letters, which fall into undetermined category, are un-analyzable as they were judged to be on the border between N and NN. The letters, which were identified to be non-native, were thoroughly analyzed in the third experiment to follow, for further examination of the effect of the letter's linguistic and cultural components on cross-cultural communication.

5.3. Some cultural components which were reported to categorize NN letters

As an immediate outcome of the analysis of cultural component, a number of NN cultural tendencies emerged. Further analysis of the effect of cultural and linguistic components of NN business letter will be provided in the third experiment. The cultural components examined here were (a) number of messages included in the letter, (b) layout (format), (c) inter-relationship between parts of the letter, (d) the manner in which requests and promotions are made, and finally (e) cultural interference. Non-native cases were illustrated here by means of authentic examples abstracted from the data.

- (1) When two or more unrelated messages are compressed in a single business letter, it loses its expressiveness and consequently loses its communicative value. The N reader, as in the case of L 3 and L 6, will not comprehend the communicative message of the letter. L6 was unnecessarily packed with incompatible messages. It began with *hope this finds you and family in fine health...*, then moved – in the third paragraph – to promote business expansion *...we are planning to expand our business activities...* and shifted back again – in the fifth paragraph – to a different type of personal message saying *I am not sure whether my son-in-law, who is presently visiting (country) could contact you on phone. I gave him the numbers*
- (2) Likewise, ambiguous messages were reported in letter 3. The first paragraph of the letter thanked the provider of the mailing address. In the second paragraph, the writer introduced his company and illustrated his line of business. Towards the end of the letter – fifth paragraph – the writer offered his service. Although the same negative effect on cross cultural communication was reported in the two letters (L3 and L6), the latter was more mysterious as it communicates three independent and unrelated messages.
- (3) While the implied message of L1 was to promote a service, its third paragraph read “for some circumstance (company 1) has been handled [handed] to (company 2). Then (company 3) has bought it from (company 2). And one distributor has been appointed for the whole (region)”. The writer was simply stating that they were not distributing company 1's product any more. In addition to its odd style, the N reader finds it difficult to relate this information to

the overall message of the letter, and consequently cannot figure out the vocal communicative segment the letter delivers. Enclosure of irrelevant information in this letter communicated further pragmatic ambiguity to the inherent linguistic one.

- (4) It has been noticed, especially in the letters which were written by Arabic native speakers, that the three fundamental components of the N business letter (statement of PURPOSE, detailed ELABORATION, and DO statement) were not recognized (see appendix 1). Letters 8, 3 and 1 took progressive contour instead.⁵ Each letter began with general and lengthy introduction and ended with relatively brief statement of purpose. This progressive contour style fits very well within the Arabic culture. To the contrary, contour style was incoherent to the English reader who is accustomed to being informed as early on in the letter as possible of *what it is all about*. The following example illustrates the contour letter.

Dear Sirs,

We would like to take this opportunity and give you a brief idea of our establishment. Our establishment begins its activity since the beginning of 1975. It is a family Est. of Mr. [name] and his Sons. Our general manager is Mr. [name] and we have 18 employees; Marketing manager, Sale men and women, Accountant, Secretaries ...etc. Our main activity is a whole distributor for the different clients in [country] (exhibitions, co-operatives, pharmacies, and beauty salons). Besides, we have two excellent exhibitions in very good places of [country] markets.

We had been a sole distributor of [brand name] in [country] for 18 years. We were also distributor for [brand names] for four years. As well as, we distributed [brand names] for a year and half.

For some circumstance [company 1] has been [acquired by] [company 2]. Then [company 3] bought it from [company 2]. One distributor has been appointed for the whole [region].

We are the agent of [brand name], [company and brand names], and [company and brand names] since 1992. In addition, we are dealing with different kinds of perfumes.

Would you, please, supply us with your catalogues, stand pictures, cards, samples and testers. So that we could study your brand.

Please [tell] us the name of your agents, distributors in the [region] and in [area], if any.

⁵ Reference ought to be made to Kaplan (1966) and Ostles (1987) for further analysis of the type of developments to be expected in an English text written by an Arabic native speaker.

- (5) Additional interesting incidents of cultural transfer were reported in the analysis. The first was *We are thankful..., We have pleasure..., We are pleased..., Further we are pleased..., Please be ..., Please find..., Kindly go..., ...please feel..., Thanking you...* Every sentence, in this letter, started with an explicit form of complaisant expression. An Arab reader may appreciate this 'polite' style. An English reader, however, may anticipate otherwise. The writer – writing spontaneously within accessible and precious cultural norms to promote his business – gave a misleading impression. In business – the American businessperson may think – there is no place for charity.
- (6) The second incident of cultural transfer was when the letter began with an inquiry about the health of the addressee and his family *hope this finds you and family in fine health*. This phrase illustrated the Arabic way of expressing close friendship, by means of showing concern about the well-being of the addressee and his family. Wishing, of course, that they are in good health. For a native speaker of English, this phrase was simply out of context.
- (7) It is culturally expected by English native audience that the closing paragraph of a letter, which immediately proceeds the *looking forward* cliché, will explicitly state the requested information or action. However, when the penultimate paragraph stated, *would you please supply us with your catalogues...* and the final paragraph announced *please inform us of the name of your distributors ...*, this is, indeed, misleading. As the two requests were independently stated, they tend to communicate independent requests.

5.4. Findings of the third examination

Although Table 6 below illustrates the most significant and interesting findings of the third examination, we shall pay particular attention to a couple of exceptionally interesting cases. First, the two edited forms of the same letter (culturally and linguistically reconstructed forms) were rated differently by the same subjects. Second, the content of the letter was found to be more comprehensible in the culturally edited form than in the linguistically edited form of the same letter. These and other findings of the third examination will be discussed below.

Table 6. Cross analysis of culturally and linguistically edited forms of NN letters (n=25).

FORMS		Culturally Correct (CL)		Linguistically Correct (LG)	
		N 25		N 25	
Content	Easily and Fully Understood	17	0.68	4	0.12
	Understood With Minor Difficulty	6	0.24	13	0.52
	Understood With Major Difficulty	1	0.04	5	0.20
	Difficult To Understand	1	0.04	4	0.16
	Extremely Difficult To Understand	0	0.00	0	0.00
Language	Excellent	6	0.24	1	0.04
	Good	7	0.28	2	0.08
	Fair	8	0.32	10	0.40
	Poor	4	0.16	9	0.36
	Very Poor	0	0.00	3	0.12
Culture	Fully Observed	13	0.52	2	0.08
	Partially Observed	10	0.40	5	0.20
	I Do not Know	1	0.04	10	0.40
	Partially Violated	1	0.04	8	0.32
	Seriously violated	1	0.04	0	0.00

Contrary to what was first expected, and perhaps pedagogically anticipated, the two reconstructed forms of the same letter received incompatible judgments.

Judgments on the content had a score of 0.68 that showed the culturally reconstructed forms to be easily and fully understood, whereas their linguistic counterparts had a score of 0.12. The same ratio of preferences was placed on the quality of language and the adherence to cultural norms in the two reconstructed forms. The figures were 0.52 and 0.12 (excellent/good language quality) and 0.92 and 0.12 (fully/partially observed cultural norms) in favor of culturally reconstructed forms. The fact that linguistic and cultural components of NN business letters have different effects on native subjects was reported throughout in the analysis. Hence, the findings from the third experiment further supported this fact.

The next question that needs to be addressed is: which of the two components contributes more to the intelligibility, and hence communicativeness, of the letter?

Native cultural norms had a score of 0.92 in the culturally reconstructed forms to be either easily and fully (0.52) or partially (0.40) observed. In contrast, their counterparts had a score of 0.28 in the linguistically reconstructed forms to be either easily and fully (0.08) or partially (0.20) observed. Likewise, the content of the culturally reconstructed forms maintained high frequency (0.68) of being easily and fully understood. In contrast, the content of the linguistically reconstructed forms had a

score of 0.72 of being understood with some degree (minor/major) of difficulties, or simply was difficult (0.16) to understand. In brief, cultural norms, language, and content were meaningfully more intelligible in the culturally reconstructed forms (0.92, 0.52 and 0.92 respectively) than in the linguistically reconstructed forms (0.28, 0.12 and 0.64 respectively). It was obvious, though, that the linguistically reconstructed forms were less favorably judged than their culturally reconstructed counterparts. We may conclude here that writing a grammatically correct letter does not necessitate the comprehension of its content. The more the letter adheres to the N cultural norms the more communicatively intelligible it becomes.

6. Conclusion

It must be stressed that conclusions emerging out of contrastive rhetoric analysis, especially the analysis of authentic material, are not always as booming as one might have expected in the analysis of classroom writing where the material is predominately controlled. Culture, to say the least, is a remarkably complex system. Writing, as one linguistic means of cultural organization, is intricate both as a process and as a product. Cross-cultural communication, on the other hand, incorporates not only dissimilar linguistic codes but also inharmonious sociocultural behaviors.

In this respect, our initial findings suggest that meaning-making and text-producing processes are conducted differently in different cultures. For the English culture, a business letter is constructed linguistically and culturally in a conventional and hence English style. A non-native business letter, however, is composed with linguistically and culturally different forms than English. As English becomes more and more the language of international trade, cross-cultural business communication tends to comply with both the linguistic codes and the cultural conventions of English.

At the end of the second examination, our analysis shows that there are two forms of the non-native (international) business letter. The first is the *communicative failure* form, which incorporates letters that feature both linguistic and cultural inadequacies. Hence, unconditionally perceived to be communicativeless. The second is the *gopher* form, which is characterized by letters, which are culturally permissible with some linguistic deficiency. The latter form, though interesting by its own merit, required further examination of the effect of linguistic and the cultural components of NN business letter on cross-cultural communication.

The intelligibility of cross-cultural business communication is unevenly influenced by linguistic and cultural components of the letter. Our closing analysis shows that an NN business letter, on the one hand, is linguistically distinguishable. Its communicative value, on the other hand, is culturally assessed. In other words, the quality of the language used contributes largely to the judgment placed on the nativeness of the letter. The comprehension of its content, contrariwise, is distinctively associated with how much adherence to the native cultural conventions the letter exhibits.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. A model of a business letter.

LETTERHEAD

sender's address

Date

Recipient's name
Recipient's address

Dear Name,

(STATEMENT OF PURPOSE) The reader is expected to be informed, as early as possible and as precisely as possible, of what the letter is all about. This immediate section comes in the form of a single paragraph containing a single message. Extended paragraphs and/or the enclosure of more than a single message confuse the reader and hence disturb communication.

(DETAILED/ELABORATION) In the body of the letter, the reader searches for more detail, narrative explanation and elaborate information on the nature of the message. This section is usually carried out in an average of one to four paragraphs depending on the nature of the intended message.

The bread and butter of the letter comes in more than a single paragraph. It conveys the intended information and/or explains what the letter is all about.

Herewith, the language is expected to be tailored just to suit the occasion so that the mutually understood jargon is communicated. Sentences are relatively short and there is no time for artistic coloring or fancy composing. Paragraphs are brief with no more than a single unit of thought. In short, the language is precise, explicit and simple.

(DO STATEMENT) Finally, the reader wants to be told precisely and explicitly what the letter is asking him to do. Some extremely busy executives read this section first looking for a snapshot.

The letter usually ends with either "looking forwards" or "thanking" clichés.

Sincerely,

Appendix 2. Some Linguistic Components of NN Letters.

Non-nativeness is distinctively identified by means of the linguistic component of the letter. Grammatical errors such as tense, subject-verb agreement, verb forms, pronouns, prepositions, as well as run-on sentences and odd usage of some lexical items have high frequency score in the linguistic component. In what follows, we will abstract some examples which illustrate various types of NN linguistic errors. No attempt is made here either to explain the pragmatic value or to give a grammatical explanation of when and why such errors are made. This falls outside the scope of our investigation. Grammatical and/or lexical (content) analyses of non-native writing are to be found in pedagogically oriented research (see Grabe and Kaplan 1989). The aim here is to report examples of the linguistic patterns that are expected in some NN business letters.

- 1 – Within the same paragraph: "we *had been* a sole distributor... we were also distributor... we distributed".
- 2 – Within the same paragraph: "...has been handled.... *has bought* it... has been appointed".
- 3 – "Most of the transport *relate* to supplying water and petroleum products to various oil/water rigs *locations* in the deep desert and our vehicles have to be heavy duty and special types (6x4 and 6x6)".
- 4 – "Since *I* wrote.... *I* have associated *myself* with.... who.... *We* are...produced by **us...**" (pronouns refer to the writer)
- 5 – "*For some circumstance* (company1) has been *handled* to (company2). *Then* (company3) has bought it from (company2). *And* one distributor has been appointed for the whole (region)."
- 6 – "Ours is a reputed and established company in (country) with wide connections *and* we have an ambitious plan of business development *with diverse activities*."
- 7 – "Our own requirement of the vehicles shall be sizable *for which* we would like to have a self sufficient garage and stock of spare parts etc. and in our opinion this situation is best suited for us to be your agent as well."
- 8 – "As you mentioned during your *telephonic talk* that there is..."
- 9 – "We would like to explore the possibility of *import* of such vehicles from you *and if* your vehicles suit our work requirements and the (country) climatic conditions *we would* also be willing to take up the agency of your vehicles for (country) and (region)." (run-on sentence)
- 10 – "Ours is a *reputed and established* company..."
"...*transport vehicles* for transportation activities..."
"Most of the transport *relate* to supplying..."
"...to explore the possibility of *import* of such vehicles ..."
- 11 – "...takes *considerable long time*..."

- 12 – “... its activity *since the beginning of 01.01.1975.*”
- 13 – “Our main activity is *a whole distributor for the different clients ...*”
- 14 – “...*telephonic talk...*” , “...*contact you on phone...*”
- 15 – “Beside, we have *two excellents Exhibition* in a very good places of (country) Markets”
- 16 – “...which is *one* the main areas we are dealing with.”
- 17 – “...for a year and *half...*”