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ON INTERNATIONALIZING OUR BUSINESS WRITING: FORM AND FUNCTION

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INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH GAP AND FOCUS

The role of language as a marketing tool and vital negotiation strategy is perhaps most evident in multilingual societies. In the open markets of Cameroon and southwest Nigeria, for instance, Pidgin (English) is the language of negotiation, and its use generally yields the best deals. In these and other cultures, where haggling is acceptable and, in fact, expected (see Pandey, 2005), language is instrumental to success in business exchanges. In Mumbai, India's financial capital, and the neighboring city of Pune, functional multilingualism is, in fact, a valuable marketing tool for the Madwari, the business caste and some of the most astute business folk worldwide. Many are fluent in up to six languages, including English, Katchi, Konkani, Marathi, (Bazaar and Standard) Hindi, and Gujarati, and artfully and strategically switch back and forth in the course of their everyday negotiations (Kachru, 1986: 68). They use the first three languages primarily for business transactions, and Marathi to communicate with their house assistants, and street vendors or "peddlers" (Kachru, 1986: 68). Bazaar Hindi, a dialect, is vital for interactions with the milkman who makes daily house calls and with other 'uneducated' individuals, while Standard Hindi[1] is the lingua franca elsewhere in the country, particularly in northern and central India. Gujarati is necessary for maintaining ties with family and community,[2] and serving an identity-affirming function.

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[1] Incidentally, Standard Hindi is generally referred to as "Khari boli" which literally translates to "straight" or "correct talk," and speaks to the greater power the standard variety enjoys.

[2] The Gujarati "samaaj" (i.e., community) is a key component of most Gujarati speakers' networking circle. Periodic community gatherings are organized in the homes of friends,

Given the multiple advantages of an expanded language repertoire in India and many parts of the world and the fact that more and more business exchanges involve bi/multilingual individuals, we must make every effort to understand variable communication styles and writing preferences. This is because corporate (manager-client or outsourcer-outsourcee) and other organizational ties (e.g., non-profit) are more geographically expansive today, and constantly changing. Moreover, not all international organizations use American or British English as their default, primary, or preferred medium of communication (see Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). Additionally, written exchanges are increasingly common, given that e-mail, text messaging, and other forms of electronic communication are generally more accessible, convenient,[3] as well as more time and cost-efficient than face-to-face communication, phone contact, and even traditional snail mail. In short, given that technology is both a globalizer and a vital medium for global contact (see Aggarwal, 2007), success in today's global economy necessitates three skills, namely: i) intercultural writing competence or culturally appropriate writing skills, ii) familiarity with World Englishes (Kachru, 1996; 2005) other than American and British English, and iii) a working knowledge of linguistics.

To minimize cross-cultural conflict and enjoy a competitive edge, we must familiarize ourselves with our business partners' brand of English and/or other business language, as well as with their writing styles and interpretations of writing. To say that English is the language of international business is presumptuous, particularly since English usage varies worldwide and even within national borders, "international English" is a vague construct, and because language competition is inevitable (see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), and very likely intensified in today's global world. Language reflects individual and national identity, and more often than not, linguistic allegiances mirror conflicting

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community centers, and temples (particularly during "Lakshmi puja," a prayer of thanks to Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth; "Dhanteras," a day on which the business community prays for prosperity and brings their checkbooks to the temple for blessings; Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights; and Independence Day).

[3] Accent and other obstacles, such as differences in time zones are dissolved.

language identities.[4] Rather than designating a single language as the language of business or policing the linguistic media employed to conduct business, then, one should endeavor to be more observant and willing to adjust one's language use according to the cultural context. This would necessitate bilingual and/or bidialectal skills and associated strategies, including code-mixing and code-switching. This paper, therefore, makes a case for enhanced, culturally inclusive and versatile business writing and reading skills. Bidialectalism and functional bilingualism are argued to be critical components of intercultural competence today.

Bidialectalism entails proficiency in more than one language and generally enables one to accommodate to culturally variable audiences through code switching and mixing-valuable communication strategies. The term functional bilingualism refers to knowledge of key words or culturally significant expressions and literacy practices in different languages. This includes culturally appropriate referents or forms of address, greetings, apologies, and expressions of gratitude and sympathy. For instance, the suffix –ji when added to the end of an east Indian name (e.g., Gandhi-ji) conveys politeness and respect. Such strategic use of a language is far more likely to relax participants and to add a personal touch to the exchange than the relatively limited politeness markers in English, one of the most widely used languages in business today.

Unfortunately, a comprehensive focus on English usage (particularly reading and writing practices) in the corporate sector in different parts of the world is lacking. Given the paucity of research on variable writing styles in English, the primary language of business--despite the global reach of numerous business ventures--researching (sub) cultural differences in reading and writing styles and developing intercultural business writing skills should be top priorities. More specifically, research on the English(es) employed in written exchanges between business partners across the globe, including Indian and Chinese businesses on the one hand and U.S. businesses, on the other, is very much in order, given these nations' pivotal role in business, and the centrality of written exchanges today. In short, we must learn to read and write between and across multicultural lines. In this paper,

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[4] English, for instance, dominates the world of e-business, although some contend that Chinese is an emerging competitor.

Contrastive Rhetoric theory (Connor, 1996) is contrasted with the World Englishes' paradigm (Kachru, 1996, 2005), and an intercultural framework of professional writing that is grounded in linguistics proposed as a first step toward closing this research gap.

The central premise of this paper is that clear communication necessitates *shared understanding* or use of *comprehensible English,* and that one's English usage should be determined by the intended readership and, more specifically, the cultural context in question. The underlying assumption is that written communication is the primary and, in many cases, the preferred medium of global exchange today, so the potential for miscommunication is relatively high. Miscommunication across *dialects* or varieties of English, the primary language of international business (Charles, 2007; Ah-Yave, 2006), for instance, is more commonplace today than misunderstandings arising from use of different languages. This is because English usage is culturally flavored in different (e.g., geographic) settings and, even though writing tends to be relatively more rigid than speech, pertinent (cultural) differences in written English are often overlooked, as will be demonstrated in this paper. Arguably, cultural differences in interpretations of the functions and format of written exchanges account for much of the *miscommunication* and *under communication* that takes place and that is, in fact, avoidable in professional exchanges today. For this reason, researching and improving professional communication, including writing across geographic and cultural contexts should be a top priority, as is recommended here. The primary research question investigated is "What's missing in business writing (i.e., resources and courses), and how can the gap(s) be filled?"

VARIABLE CRITERIA FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Familiarity with spoken and written World Englishes is increasingly necessary and, in fact, one of the most valuable forms of bidialectalism. This is because forms of communication and interpretations of language vary across cultures.

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In a pilot poll conducted with 65 undergraduate students enrolled in th. · ·ɾ;
Graves School of Business at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Marylaɾ · ··
the summer of 2009, for instance, 94% of respondents misinterpreted "I'm afraɪu
in the following e-mail auto-reply that Pandey received from the U.K.: "I'm afraid
I will be on sick leave for a further two weeks." Not all English users would
immediately understand that, in this context, "I'm afraid" is merely a politeness
marker; it is not intended to communicate fear on the writer's part. In it's
absence, this e-mail notification might, in fact, be considered curt and impolite in
British English. Similarly, not all English speakers are aware that the terms
"borrow" and "lend" are used interchangeably in southeast Nigeria, based on the
cultural belief that "what's yours is mine." Some might be surprised to know that,
in Nigerian English, the term "stranger" actually refers to a close or "tight" friend
and that one is expected to "escort" a stranger (i.e., walk and chat with them for
part of the way) at the conclusion of their visit. In yet another part of the world,
namely, India, meetings can be "preponed" (i.e., brought forward). The U.S. term
"rescheduling," however, typically entails moving a meeting to a later date and
time.

As this paper aims to demonstrate, interpretations of words, sentences, and
paragraphs written in English, as well as of numerals, and the ordering or
placement of information (i.e., organizational structure) do differ across cultures.
In India, for instance, it is customary to address those in positions of power as
"Sir" or "Ma'am." In contrast, in the U.S., these terms are generally considered
overly formal and impersonal. In fact, the term "Ma'am" has the potential to
aggravate some (Americans), as confirmed in a pilot survey.[5] The majority of
those polled noted that this term made them feel "old" and as though the addressee
was "condescending," "patronizing," "sarcastic," or "insincere." Understanding
subtle and not-so-subtle differences in terminology and in other dialect level
features is, therefore, critical to success in intercultural communication.

Criteria for effective business communication also vary across cultures. While
brevity and clarity are highly recommended in most U.S. business communication
texts (e.g., Locker, 2006; Bovee and Thill, 2007), many speakers of tonal
languages, such as Chinese actually enjoy subtlety, including so-called "circular

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[5] Respondents were the same 65 mentioned above.

language" and *ambiguity*, and intentionally employ ambiguous words, clauses, sentences, and even what some might dismiss as "unclear" content and "haphazard" organization in speech and writing. In some cultures, additional meanings or messages are purposely encoded in words, sentences, numbers, and even in the organizational style employed, as exemplified in the letter tailored to the Chinese audience in Figure 1. In this letter, the order in which the information is presented is just as critical to the overall message and success of the exchange, as discussed in the data analysis section. Similarly, readers in communal or predominantly high-context cultures (Pandey, 2009, 2007) typically assign extended interpretations to the language employed. In short, they read *between* the lines and likely assume that others do so, as well. Both explicitly stated and unstated-yet-inferred messages are actively sought and carefully decoded in this cultural context.

While some might argue that the more frequent and immediate exchanges that technology affords us in our more interconnected global business world likely accelerate our learning curve as professional writers seeking to understand cultural differences in writing, for instance, this is not necessarily the case. If it were, then mere exposure to different communication styles would suffice (i.e., foster cross-cultural learning) and guarantee that all participants could accurately decipher the messages intended in each other's speech and writing. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Differences in dialects of English employed in international businesses and in writing--including reading and writing conventions in place in different cultural contexts--must be carefully researched and the findings disseminated. As it stands, such critical differences are rarely addressed in business courses and texts.

Another shortcoming with business writing as it is usually taught in North America is that we tend to expect written exchanges to be *linear* in organization (see Chaney and Martin, 2007; Locker, 2006), and distinctly British and/or American in (English) word choice and sentence structure. In fact, American business communication practices and writing conventions are still the most widely discussed in textbooks and other instructional resources, despite the growing and veritable (e-)presence of non-American businesses. Papers that do not conform to American writing conventions are readily dismissed as

"disorganized," "jumbled," "longwinded," and/or "unclear," making it hard for those not trained in the linear writing tradition to get published in creative English-language venues (see Canagarajah, 2002), which make up the vast majority of international publications. Non-recognition of other writing styles and/or conventions constitutes a form of cultural discrimination, and every effort must be made to put an end to it. For this reason, this paper deliberately detracts from the strictly *linear* writing style.[6]

The next section further highlights the paucity of research on (intercultural) corporate writing in the 21st century. Interpretations of "audience" in widely employed U.S. business communication texts are examined with a view to illustrating their cultural restrictiveness.

Background: Expanding Audience(s) and Reading between Cultural Lines

Some business communication textbooks recommend use of "international English" (see Chaney and Martin, 2007; Locker, 2006), a variety that is presumably widely known and understood. Yet, its distinctive features are insufficiently discussed. The few examples provided resemble Standard British English in word choice, sentence structure, and in other respects, including the formatting of the date (i.e., the day followed by the month), and as regards stylistic considerations. The last-mentioned includes restricted use of idioms and contractions. Use of this so-called "international" English is unlikely to ensure seamless understanding between business partners today. In short, in the absence of empirical research, we cannot assume that a single variety is international in scope or usage.

Texts on business communication also tend to be lacking in the area of communication pertaining to outsourcing and specifically, as regards south Asian business writing practices (see Locker, 2006; Thill and Bovee, 2007). While intercultural communication is a topic touched upon in most of these texts, few provide representative and current examples and references. For success in today's highly diverse and fluid workplace, for instance, in addition to more traditional business partners like the Japanese, a focus on Indian and other major

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[6] So that the reader can get a feel for the writer's culturally distinct writing style—one heavily influenced by her background in Africa and South Asia.

players' communication practices is necessary. India will likely continue to grow in importance, not only because of its highly affordable, culturally diverse, multilingual, and skilled labor force, and the twelve-hour time difference between the U.S. and India that allows for a seamless 24-hour work day, but also because of the highly lucrative and wide open market India offers for a plethora of American products, services and solutions, ranging from fast food to fashion and popular culture (e.g., American television, Hollywood movies, and popular music). Familiarity with Indian communication styles and business writing, is therefore, of critical importance right now. In short, as business relationships change, so too should research on corporate language.

Another shortcoming in many business communication courses and texts is that insufficient attention is paid to culturally variable writing styles beyond superficial lexical and organizational differences (see Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996; Kachru, 2005; Bowe and Martin, 2007). Vital semantic differences, including covert messages that have to be inferred, for instance, are minimally researched and discussed. Even though China[7] and India are emerging economic powers and India is a top outsourcing choice for most U.S. companies, for instance, the distinctiveness of Indian Business writing (IBW, hereafter), among other writing practices, remains to be established. Given that English enjoys official language status in India, and given the emergence and widespread use of Indian English (Kachru, 1983, 2006), for instance, one would expect IBW to be of interest to business professionals interested in outsourcing and in doing business with Indian corporations. What is needed, then, is an in-depth and empirical analysis of corporate medium and message,[8] the kind that linguistics, a field dedicated to the scientific study of language, enables. Among the many benefits of analyses of the language(s) of business, one could systematically compare communicative media employed, including dialects of English, and tease out cultural nuances which would not be apparent otherwise.

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[7] Space constraints and the absence of a distinctly Chinese brand of English preclude extensive coverage of Chinese/Taiwanese Business writing.

[8] Some believe that language is merely the medium. Others argue that the medium (including unstated, inferred language) *is* the message (Kachru, 2006).

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Arguably, the absence of research on IBW is evidence of India's dependence on Western writing canons, namely, British English and, more recently, and as a result of the growth in US outsourcing, American English. Unfortunately, only those Indians who have lived in the U.S. and/or undergone accent neutralization and/or cross-cultural communication training are knowledgeable about American communication norms including the use of small talk, what constitutes acceptable small talk, and rules regarding joining and completing a 'conversation.' Outside of the U.S., then, familiarity with commonly employed in American English idioms/expressions, as well as with U.S. academic and professional writing conventions—which require that the thesis or main point is spelled out early on, chronologically supported, and reiterated throughout—is rare and cannot be taken for granted.

Arguably, cross-cultural miscommunication is quite prevalent in written/electronic exchanges and is the result of variable literacy assumptions or, more specifically, differences in reading and writing practices. While cultural differences in the organization or structure of writing have been touched upon briefly (see Kaplan, 1966; Kachru, 1988; Connor, 1996), many of us are unaware of these and other pertinent differences. Moreover, differences in writing beyond structural differences must be carefully researched and discussed with business students, as organization is just one component of writing.

Most of us would agree that perhaps the easiest way to tailor communication to meet the needs of different audiences is through the language we use and, specifically, by accommodating our language and writing style to meet the reader's (cultural) preferences. Yet, despite the emphasis on audience considerations in most writing texts (see Locker 2007; Bovee and Thill, 2007; Dobrin, Keller, and Weisser, 2008), the importance of knowing and using at least one other dialect of English—in addition to American English--is rarely clarified.

Functional bilingualism, a valuable communication skill is also rarely recommended. The latest edition of Locker (2007), a widely used text in business communication, for instance, conceives of audiences along two superficial dimensions: *order of receipt of information* (e.g., initial, primary/target, secondary, and tertiary), and recipient's *rank* (e.g., peers, subordinates, and superiors or gatekeeper and watchdog audiences). Cultural differences between audiences are completely overlooked. The only audience-specific language

differences mentioned are formal versus informal language (i.e., stylistic variations stemming from differences in participants' rank), minor differences in content (specifically whether reader benefits are worth mention), and in level of detail (i.e., length). However, no mention is made of which language(s) or dialect(s) to use, with who(m), *when,* and *why.*

Given the international scope of today's business exchanges, the term "audience" must be reconceptualized, and the specific needs and wants of each audience carefully researched. While Dobrin, Keller, and Weisser (2008) observe that cross-cultural audiences "have different needs" (30), these "different needs" are not identified. Instead, they offer the following "strategies": shorter sentences, carefully chosen words, minimal use of idioms and jargon, spelled out acronyms and abbreviations, and clear visuals (pp. 30-31). They assume that these tips are sufficient to ensure clarity in communication, and will automatically yield seamless communication across cultures and geographic borders. They also recommend that ambiguous words should be avoided, as well as "obscure words that are rarely used in English" (p. 30). However, examples of neither are provided. Although writers are invited to "discover audience expectations" and "attitudes," and to consider cultural differences, once again, guidelines are missing. Exactly what the terms "audience expectations" and "attitudes" refer to is, therefore, unclear. Do they, for instance, refer to content, organization, word choice, sentence structure, format and/or mechanics? In the absence of clear guidelines in the form of a working checklist or key questions one could ask, both the consistency and depth of audience analyses are questionable.

While five aspects of culture are identified in Dobrin, Keller, and Weisser (2008), namely: linguistic, religious, legal, technological, and social customs, no mention is made of differences in English usage under linguistic considerations), as evidenced by the following statement: "In some countries it may be acceptable to communicate in English, but in others it may not be." What are readers to make of this observation? Simply recommending that "Writers need to consider whether *English* is the appropriate language to use" (31) is minimally instructional. Moreover, a single page is devoted to this critical issue and the conclusion to this brief section is equally vague: "Thus, writers do not research only the content that goes into workplace writing but *in some cases* must research the audiences as

well" (p. 31, emphasis added). One could argue that researching the audiences should be a consistent practice, and not just "in some cases." In short, available business resources tend to fall short of offering timely and practical recommendations regarding writing for culturally varied audiences. Unlike what Locker (2006) proposes, then, the linear model of writing is unlikely to guarantee success in all parts of the world, as Boiarsky (1989) demonstrates.

Boiarsky (1989) cites the example of a lead-generating letter, reproduced in Figure 1, which is structured in the linear (American) style. (SEE PAGE 4, IT SAYS LETTER IS CIRCULAR and again nonlinear later...)

Dear Mr. Yen Zen-jiu:

I hope you have had a safe journey home and that you have found your family in good health. The midwestern part of our country where you graciously visited continues to have wet weather, but I am thankful for the rain after our two years of drought.

Ag-World wishes to thank you for your participation at the state Agricultural Convention and for stopping by our booth.

Our firm is situated in Bloomington, Illinois, the heart of grain and cattle country. It has a history of 10 years' experience in selling livestock and livestock equipment. It has trade relations with more than 45 countries in the world. Our firm is well known for its excellent service and good quality products.

In 1987 we sold 168 hogs to China. We wish to establish relations with China on a regular basis. We would like to know whether our breeding livestock and livestock equipment, such as Pork-Preg, Pork-alert, and Beef-o-meter, could benefit you in any way. I will be very happy to provide you with further information.

I am also enclosing two price lists of our equipment; one is the regular price, the other is the pricing for demonstrators.

May your seasons be fruitful and plentiful.

Sincerely,

Tan Wen-lan

ig. 1: A Letter Tailored to the Chinese (excerpted from Boiarsky, 1989).

This letter was sent to over 300 Chinese clients who had visited a trade show in Illinois. The initial letter mailed out was apparently culturally inappropriate (i.e., too brief and impersonal), so it failed to elicit the desired (number of) responses. A technical writer familiar with Chinese culture was subsequently hired to revise the letter. The result was a substantially longer and reorganized letter, consisting of six paragraphs, as opposed to the initial three; and twice as many words. Unlike the initial letter which began by explicitly stating the writer's intent (to establish business ties), the revised letter is organized in an unlinear style.

The revised letter (see Fig. 1) begins by inquiring about the reader's "journey home," and about their family before proceeding to describe the rainy weather that the region the reader had visited (highlighting a shared experience and harmony with nature—especially important for an agricultural firm) was experiencing (paragraph 1). The second paragraph thanks the reader. The third establishes the company's credibility by noting that it has been around for a decade before mentioning the number of "foreign countries" with which it has been doing business. This information emphasizes their long and (undoubtedly) profitable history and standing. The next paragraph lists many of their products and hints at a desire "to establish relations with China" but only after they mention that they sold "168 hogs to China." While Boiarsky (1989) makes no mention of the cultural significance of this number, an informal poll with three randomly selected speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and Wu (dialects of Chinese, a tonal language) revealed that this number (i.e., "one hundred and sixty eight") apparently rhymes with the Chinese term for good fortune or good luck, a seminal point worth conveying to members of this community. In other words, the message behind this sentence has to be inferred, and necessitates shared (bilingual knowledge) on the part of both the reader and the writer.

The Chinese respondents noted that Chinese or Taiwanese readers would "promptly get the message," namely, that engaging in business with this American company would be fruitful. Meanwhile, when the same letter was presented to a randomly selected group of 110 undergraduate American students specializing in business at Morgan State University, the number "168" was overwhelmingly described as "low" or "inconceivable" and "too small to mention." One respondent noted that he would be tempted to ask "That's all you sold?" Most

American respondents found the Chinese version to be "too long" (97%),"flowery" (98%), "unorganized" or "all over the place" (100%) and "unprofessional" (74%). When asked what made the letter "unprofessional," respondents identified "mixing work and family" (paragraph 1) and the "soothsayer" ending. "Reference to the weather was unnecessary" noted another respondent, while yet another observed, "Keep the family out of this!"

The fifth paragraph of the adapted letter mentions two price lists, and seems to suggest that their prices are negotiable. The sixth and final paragraph ends with a forward-looking statement that sounds like a blessing and that is likely to be well-received in the target culture, namely: "May your seasons be fruitful and plentiful." The writer then signs his full (Chinese) name after his closing salutation. It is noteworthy that it is not until the very end that the writer shares the objective of the customized letter. In short, the most important point--the primary purpose--is mentioned at the end, and only after the writer works on earning the reader's trust.

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Data for the present study were gathered from the following sources: letters of interest and resumes e-mailed from interested Indian professionals in response to two job advertisements for Project Managers[9] (one placed by the UNForgotten, Inc., a not-for-profit organization, and the other by the Principal Investigator of a grant-funded research project); surveys[10] conducted with Indian and American students in India and the U.S., respectively; and background studies. The last mentioned were used for primarily comparative purposes. The STEPS framework of business writing that is outlined here was devised using random data samples and the questionnaire that appears in the Appendix. It draws on the two major frameworks of writing (in English), namely, Connor's (1996) contrastive rhetoric (CR) model and B. Kachru's (1986) World Englishes' (WE) paradigm, as well as strands from discourse analysis, specifically conversation analysis or CA (see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Arguably, CA is just as applicable to

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[9] One was placed on devnetjobs.org, the largest portal for openings in the non-profit segment in India, and another on the *Linguist List*.

[10] These took the form of questionnaires.

writing as to speech.   After all, like verbal exchanges, writing engenders and requires some degree of turn-taking.   An initial e-mail sent out, for instance, prompts a response, much like a self-selected turn.   Accurate analyses of written exchanges therefore necessitate a focus on all parties' contributions.   Focusing on just a single piece of writing, without considering what preceded or pre-empted it is insufficient.

Under CR, all writing in English from locations other than internationally recognized English-using countries like the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Canada is considered "second language writing."   One could argue that the label "second language writing" suggests that the writing is second rate.   In this vertical framework, non-Standard dialects are consistently placed below their Standard equivalents, and differences in writing are essentially considered deviations from the norm (i.e., American, British and Canadian English).   In short, under CR, indigenized varieties of English are neither acknowledged nor encouraged.While CR is applicable to "Expanding Circle" (Kachru, 1996) nations such as China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan where English is used for international exchanges, it is inapplicable to India and other Outer Circle settings (see Pandey, 1998) that have developed their own brand of English.

In India, for instance, English is one of two designated official languages and, while most Indians are multilingual, English is the primary language of many (Indians).   For some, English might be the only language in which they write (and read).   Given this scenario, to classify such writers as "second language writers" is both hasty and erroneous.   For this reason, the CR framework is inapplicable to the data presented here.

CR is not a writing framework per se, as organizational and minor linguistic differences are the primary focal areas.   Moreover, differences in writing are presented as deviations from the linear norm.   The term "linear," for instance, connotes something goal-oriented or straight and to the point, and is far more positive than the term "circular" or "non-linear."   A more cross-culturally applicable framework of professional writing is, therefore, in order, particularly one grounded in linguistics.

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Of the two frameworks, then, the WE paradigm is more culturally and linguistically inclusive. The WE framework is a horizontal model that places language varieties side by side (not one on top of the other) or *side by each*, as the Canadians say. Each dialect of English is considered (culturally) acceptable, and presented in an appropriate socio-cultural and historical perspective. This framework is premised on the idea that writing is a two-way street and that interpretation (termed "interpretability") is culture-specific. While the *acceptability* of a particular English is context-dependent, *comprehensibility* or culture-based understanding is the goal in this model of variation in English usage. *Comprehensibility* is one of three key constructs employed in this framework, the others being *acceptability* and *intelligibility* The last-mentioned, namely, intelligibility, refers to recognizable speech or language; that is, to a distinctive variety. A discussion of medium and/or message (i.e., Is the medium the message or are they disparate units?) is, in effect, central to the WE framework.

For instance, as regards reader expectations, American readers are more likely than Indian readers to look for specific meanings or messages encoded in specific sections of a piece of writing (e.g., the opening, the body, and the conclusion). For this reason, readers in the linear American writing tradition share the burden of communication with their target audience. As such, they are likely to organize their message(s) into three distinct categories or parts: an opening where one's main idea or primary purpose is introduced, the body where the main idea is developed or supported, and the conclusion, where it is reiterated and explicit mention made of next steps or desired actions from either party or all of the parties referenced in the correspondence.

In contrast, someone raised in India—where expository/persuasive writing is rarely taught—is more likely to view the medium as the message, and to concentrate on the message, regardless of where it is located in the correspondence, and how it is phrased. From an Indian perspective then, deciphering the intent or the message in a piece of professional writing is essentially the reader's job. The resultant writing could be relatively formal and/or impersonal, or it could mix in what might sound like contradictory discourse styles and features.

Overall, neither CR nor the WEs model provides a stand-alone and thorough understanding of key differences in business writing across (sub)cultures. For this reason, a more globally applicable framework of writing, one that systematically analyzes culturally variable expectations of readers and writers is very much in order, and outlined next.

Given the Janus-like characteristic of communication, a professional writing framework must borrow strands from linguistics, specifically conversation analysis (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson,1974), and other relevant frameworks of linguistic analysis. This is because strategic language yields successful communication, and the interdisciplinary language-as-communication focus of applied linguistics makes it an ideal auxiliary. In short, complete analyses of international corporate communication/writing necessitate a knowledge of basic linguistics.

While the WE framework is more global in scope, its primary focus is on dialect features. To be fully applicable to professional writing, for instance, one must consider other key components such as the prompt or purpose behind the writing, cultural similarities and variations in interpretation, in writing conventions and/or mechanics, and in writing etiquette (i.e., conceptions of goodwill or politeness). This more comprehensive framework is termed the STEPS framework, and is outlined next.

## TOWARDS A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK OF BUSINESS WRITING: STEPS

Given that successful business/professional communication entails strategic language use, a linguistic framework--one that zones in on variable units of language--particularly one that is applicable to cross-cultural and linguistically variable (i.e., dialect-level-differences-based) writing is very much in order. Identifying culture-specific politeness markers (see Patil, 1994) and reader-writer expectations in culturally distinct corporate environments is an important first step in devising such a framework, and discourse analysis is invaluable in this endeavor.

Fig. 2 is a diagrammatic representation of core components of professional writing. As noted, in this framework, cultural differences in business

exchanges/writing are attributable to differences in STEPS, namely, structure, theme(s), etiquette, purpose, and style of writing.

Fig. 2. STEPS: Structure, Theme(s), Etiquette, Purpose, and Style in Professional Writing
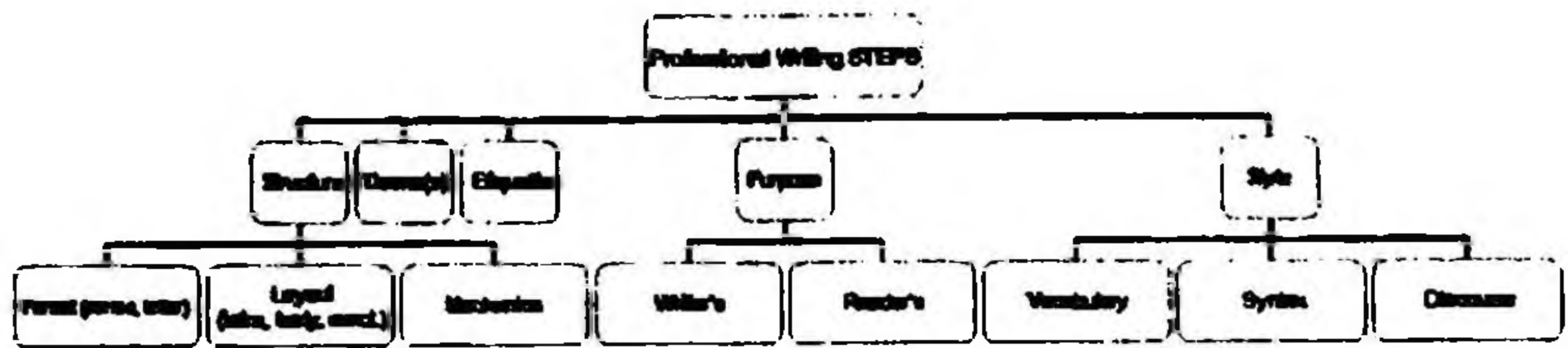
The first "S" in STEPS stands for Structure which refers to a recognizable format; mechanics or conventions regarding punctuation, capitalization and spelling; and the layout of each paragraph—which could vary from culture to culture. The "T" stands for Theme(s) and refers to the content or focus, both the stated or expected content, and the implied meaning(s). The "E" in STEPS refers to writing etiquette or operant cultural conventions that guide writers' language choices. Differences

in writing etiquette account for overtly goodwill-oriented language versus writing that could be interpreted as rude or potentially rude. They also account for whether or not a writer mentions the prompt that initiated the writing (for instance, a question or a request for a refund). "P" stands for "purpose," both the writer's and the reader's, while the final "S" stands for Style and refers to the language units employed, yielding stylistically variable outcomes. In increasing order, these include numbers, vocabulary, sentence structure, and discourse elements employed, as well as acceptable or expected writing acts (comparable to speech acts) or maxims associated with openings or greetings, and leave-taking or closing; of tone and register, and culturally significant inferences or interpretations that could be assigned to specific referents. As regards the last mentioned, in tonal languages like Mandarin Chinese, for instance, certain numbers and words tend to rhyme with others (such as 168 with good fortune), and when they rhyme with positive words, they generally have a higher value or more positive connotations. By the same token, in such languages, words that rhyme with negative words (like "four," "knife," and "death") are generally avoided.

Cultural differences in discourse are also captured in dialect-level differences. In Indian English, for instance, making the reader feel overtly empowered and important is critical. It is for this reason that overt respect markers such as "Sir" are employed at the start and sometimes even in the body of the writing. As if "Sir" isn't polite enough, some Indian writers could decide to make the reader feel even more honored by adding words like "respected" and "honored" in front of "Sir," as in letters of interest or e-mailed applications for employment. The goal is not so much to come across as obsequious (a possible interpretation of such language and a potential source of miscommunication) as to appeal to the power wielded by the reader. This is because in the Indian context, the contact person listed in a job ad is generally the key or sole decision maker, so the Indian writer generally attempts to appeal to their (shared) cultural identity. To come across as humble and respectful is extremely important. These qualities only add to an applicant's qualifications and are viewed as evidence of credibility or trustworthiness and following. In contrast, overt mention of one's qualifications for a position could be viewed as signs of an unreliable and egotistic individual who is more self-absorbed than interested in meeting the needs of (upper)

management. While team skills are valuable in most contexts, they are usually downplayed in the Indian context, where hierarchy, leadership (generally male) or guidance (essentially following) are more the norm than the exception. This is because, when contrasted with the U.S., India has more of a hierarchic corporate culture than an egalitarian one.

This is hardly surprising given the stark disparities between the rich and the less fortunate in this competitive and highly populous country, where both skilled and unskilled labor are readily available and relatively affordable, prompting what some might describe as distinct language use by bosses or directors, on the one hand, and employees and/or "servants" (the Indian English term for those that one employs in one's residence), on the other. In this culture of linguistic subservience, those in positions of power typically employ imperatives and other language forms indicative of their greater power. Such individuals rarely employ politeness markers with their employees. Also, such individuals generally expect . to be addressed as "Sir" or "Ma'am" (short for "Madam"), and by way of the Hindi and Punjabi honorific "–ji" which roughly translates as "respected Sir and Ma'am." The fact that those in power rarely object to the use of such address forms, nor insist that they be addressed by their first and/or last names, or by way of equivalent and polite terms such as "bhai" (brother) or "bhaiya" and "Didi" (big brother and big sister, respectively) in Hindi and other Indian languages attests to their expectations of role-demarcating language. Moreover, in Indian culture, overt politeness in the form of "thank you" and other declarations or expressions of gratitude is generally associated with undue formality and insincerity. For this reason, Indian writing contains a mix of overtly formal vocabulary alongside imperatives, which most Americans consider rude, as well as colloquial or relatively informal syntax, yielding mixed (i.e., ambiguous or unclear) reactions or interpretations. In short, the potential for misunderstanding Indian writing—even when it is written in English--is presently relatively high, much higher in fact, than the linear and overtly spelled out American equivalent. ·

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the U.S., reading and writing are survival skills that most of us imbibe early on. For most Americans, writing is generally faster or more convenient and time-efficient than face-to-face or phone exchanges, and often more cost-efficient, as well, as in the case of off-shore outsourcing. Written exchanges with partners

across the globe could also help to eliminate potential obstacles such as differences in accent and in speech styles.[11]   Writing is also a vital project management tool in the U.S.   It helps generate periodic reminders and status checks, and it fulfills a critical record-keeping function in legally backed (i.e., sue-happy) societies. This, however, is not the case everywhere.

For instance, while most Americans view intercultural corporate exchanges as informative negotiations, our global partners might view them as merely rapport-building and relationship-affirming (i.e., as establishing and reinforcing trust). The following is an example of an informative and assurance-providing e-message from Citibank India, with offices all over India:

Dear Citibank Customer,

Please find the OAC 412075 for the reference number 14341635.

Visit the self-select IPIN page at www.citibank.com/india and
use the reference number and code to select your own IPIN online.

Assuring you of our best service at all times.

Warm Regards,
Manager - Customer Service

This note assures the reader that Citibank provides A-quality service. Another example follows. This e-mail, titled "Your Trust Inspires Me" was also composed by an Indian manager and sent out at the start of the new year (2009):

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[11] What Americans consider to be (rude) interruptions, for instance, are not necessarily regarded as negative in India, and much of Latin America and South east Asia (including Japan).

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> *Hello,*
> I am writing to thank you for the trust and confidence you had reposed in a *stranger* sometime ago.
>
> Over the last couple of months I have endeavored to work dedicatedly to meet your expectations. I hope I have not *disappointed* you. I *promise to work hard in the future* so that you are happy with my services.
>
> Kindly accept my best wishes for a Prosperous, Contented, Safe and Secure New Year.
>
> With Warm Regards
> Assistant Vice President
>
> South Asian Banking Group

When shared with twenty randomly polled American undergraduate students studying business administration at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, this piece of writing was overwhelmingly viewed (by 97% of respondents) as a sign of "inconfidence," and "desperation" and, to quote another respondent, "strange in its wording." When asked what they would revise, one respondent wrote:

First, I'd address each individual separately. Mass mailing is impersonal and "hello" is unprofessional. Next, I'd open with the last paragraph. Third, I'd use phrases like "continue to provide excellent service" and others that would emphasize my unique skills. Finally, I'd invite feedback to assure my reader that I'm confident, competent, open to suggestions, and that I value collaboration.

The chronological sequence of this respondent's recommendations, echoed in the words "first," "next," "third," and "finally" reflect the step-by-step organizational style most Americans are accustomed to, particularly those who have taken one or more writing courses. "I don't want to seem insincere and I cannot claim to know what you need. Nor can I simply take orders—which is how this person comes across to me" observed a third respondent. "I'd change the subject line to "Thank you" or some such, so that it would be read and not spammed!" noted another respondent. The words these writers recommended replacing are italicized.

Self-criticism and/or self-degradation are not uncommon in Indian writing. These features are generally interpreted as a sign of humility and politeness [as self-centered individuals are considered arrogant or rude] The following e-mailed letter of apology is an example:

Dear sir,

I received the money Rs.10875 send by you and also the check of 271 u.s.$.I am very sorry for my stupid behaviour and begging your pardon for the same. I would also like to convey you the actual reason for that.

The compensation fixed by you is very less as compare to the qualification and experience desired by you and when due to technical reasons the fund tranfer was delayed i thought that someone is making fool of me,but now i am conviced about the authenticity of the organisation.

If required by you i want to send you the report for which you have paid the amount and would also keenly intrested in providing my services again to you.

regards

This message was sent to the (American) Director of a non-profit organization who had just received a notice of termination of contract after a major disagreement that was prompted by each participant's writing. The writer of this letter had been hired to oversee a water project in southwest India. As might be evident, in Indian culture, the content of this letter carries the most weight and the mechanics and grammar the least (hence the numerous typos are generally forgiven in Indian culture). In contrast, this piece of writing would be unacceptable in the U.S. and British corporate contexts. The writer does not hesitate to "beg" for forgiveness for what he describes as his "stupid behaviour" and offers his services yet "again" after a major misunderstanding. In the words of the American Director(the intended reader), however, "What was he [i.e., the writer] thinking? There are no second chances!" Clearly then, these individuals fail(ed) to communicate, primarily because of conflicting expectations and interpretations of written business exchanges. Cross-cultural misunderstandings of this nature are avoidable.

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Depending on the relationship between reader and writer or speaker and listener, (brutal) honesty is a mark of informality in Indian English, as well as in Indian culture. The general idea behind this is that one need not mind their language or mince words with family and close friends; one is encouraged to speak their mind. In general, the more overtly polite Indians are with each other (as evidenced by the use of "Thank you" and other overt politeness markers), the more distant they are, and the more formal their relationship. Diplomacy is viewed as underhanded (i.e., hiding behind words) and, as such, is generally considered insincere. The following e-mail message sent to Pandey on July 24, 2009 by a well-known publisher in New Delhi is exemplary:

Dear Anita,

Thanks for the <u>mail</u>. My sincere thanks to you for <u>intimating the receipt of</u> the journal. However, I must admit as I have <u>before</u> Vinay<u>ji</u>, that the printing quality is <u>far far</u> below the stardard this time. The blunder happened since my printer <u>vanished</u> suddenly and I had to give the job to <u>one idiot</u> unfortunately to meet the deadline. However, this <u>would</u> not happen for any of the future issues.

Warm regards,

[Writer's first name]

Dialect level differences are underlined. Prior to the class discussion on politeness (markers) and dialects of English, none of the respondents observed how the writer had used the Hindi/Urdu/Punjabi honorific {–ji}. Fifty eight American students studying business unanimously observed that "intimating the receipt of LF" (i.e., acknowledging receipt of the journal *Language Forum*) was unclear and "legalistic" and that the writer's use of "would" in place of "will" in the last line was "unusual." All found use of the word "idiot" to be "unprofessional" and noted that it made the writing "lacking in goodwill." The use of self-criticism to signal humility, a common Indian practice was totally misconstrued and in fact, quite confounding to these students. In the words of one, the writer was "so direct to the point of sounding rude."

To most Americans then, writing is "logical" and organized when it is chronologically structured. Not so to most Indians. Peer editing is relatively non-existent and minimally encouraged in India, so revisions are not always apparent. In fact, in an informal poll conducted at the 2008 All India Conference on Linguistics held at Deccan College, Pune on November 27, 2008, the overwhelming majority (99%) of Indian respondents (N = 110) responded "No" in response to the following three questions:

1. Have you ever taken a writing class?
2. Have you ever taught a writing class?
3. Have you heard of the term "peer-editing"?

This pilot poll attests to the minimal emphasis placed on writing—in English and in other languages—in India. In a follow-up pilot study, the following two questions were asked of a randomly selected group of 110 American students and 110 Indian students, in the U.S. and India respectively. Participants' responses reflect culturally variable interpretations of professional writing. The former were undergraduates specializing in business at Morgan State University's Earl Graves' School of Business, and all 110 had taken a required course on business writing. The latter group (the same group polled earlier) consisted of eleven Indian undergraduates and 99 graduate students studying linguistics at one of four institutions in India, namely, Benares Hindu University, Delhi University, Calcutta University, and Deccan College, Pune. [None of the Indian respondents had taken a course in business writing, nor was such a course offered at the Indian institutions]

1. What in your view are the two to three most important ingredients for success in professional writing?

2. On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being least important and 5 the most, rate the importance of following criteria in professional communication: clarity/organization (i.e., the main point is stated quickly and clearly, and reiterated in a linear logical fashion), politeness/goodwill, completeness (all of the reader's/listener's questions are addressed), brevity, ethicality, and accuracy/correctness.

The American students unanimously identified *goodwill* (i.e., a positive image of the speaker/writer and of their organization) and *brevity* as chief ingredients and rated them most highly, followed by ethicality, completeness, and accuracy/correctness, in that order. In contrast, in response to the first question, the majority of the Indian respondents (85%) identified *respect* as the single most important ingredient for success in professional communication. Others (9%) identified *trust*, "assurance provision" or "promising to do one's best" (4%), and "confidence" (1%) as key ingredients. As regards the second question, 84% rated brevity the highest, followed by politeness/goodwill, and accuracy/correctness, in that order. These culturally divergent views are quite revealing and necessitate (empirical and large-scale) study. For this reason, a more extensive survey instrument was designed in conjunction with the present study. This sixteen-item questionnaire appears in the Appendix. While it was designed to i) gauge students' cross-cultural writing know-how and ii) ascertain criteria prioritized in professional writing in different cultural contexts, time constraints did not permit implementation with an Indian audience. The findings will be shared in a follow-up study.

By now, it should be clear that cultural differences in key business documents, including CVs/resumes (see Bhatia, 1993; Clyne, 1981, 1987, 1994), job-related cover letters (Al-Ali, (2004), application letters for schooling (Sii, 2004) and reports, among others (Bowe & Martin, 2007) must be more rigorously studied and disseminated. Differences in perceptions of the place, role, and importance of writing should also be carefully studied. In the U.S., for instance, a lot more time is invested in writing by way of formal instruction and informal, everyday exposure to environmental literacy or multiple renditions of written text--ranging from billboard and TV advertisements to junk mail, e-mail, and increasingly, text messaging. Moreover, a host of U.S.-based organizations, including the CCCC, NCTE, and MLA have helped to legitimize academic and business/professional writing.

Since the establishment of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (also known as the 4Cs) in the U.S., for instance, writing instruction came to the forefront. By the 60s, argumentative writing had become a vital and "respectable object of inquiry" (Connor, 1989: 59). The Modern

Language Association (MLA) and the National Council for the Teaching of English (NCTE) further supplemented the pioneer efforts of the CCCC. A host of journals devoted to writing instruction soon flooded the scene, attesting to the importance of writing in the American academic and corporate contexts. They included *College Composition and Communication, Written Communication, Rhetoric Review, Journal of Basic Writing,* and more recently, the *Journal of Business Communication,* and the *Journal of Second Language Writing,* as well as a plethora of online journals devoted to success in instruction and mastery of process-based argumentative or persuasive writing.

In contrast, expository and professional writing are rarely taught in parts of the world like India, a top outsourcing pick. Even today, in India, a literature-centered English language curriculum and product-based writing are more the norm than the exception. At most public institutions in India, in cities from Mumbai to Valsad, Gujarat, dated texts published primarily by Oxford University Press are still in use. *The Grammar Tree* (Vols. 1-12) and the British-literature-focused *Prose Reader,* with specific volumes for different grade levels, are examples. Volume 7, for instance, opens with an excerpt from a 1925 British publication, at the end of which students are asked to select the closest equivalents for many antiquated terms and expressions that are alien to India.

Even when the texts used in English classes in India are more culturally inclusive and contain excerpts from selected Indian texts, the focus is still primarily on reading comprehension and grammar. Writing, when required, tends to center around narrative themes, such as events in literary excerpts, or narrative accounts of holidays or festivities.

India is one of the most multilingual societies worldwide. Characterized by what Raja Rao (1938) terms "instinctively bilingual" communication styles, as opposed to the predominantly monolingual tradition of the Western world, code-mixing, code-switching and other forms of speech and language accommodation come naturally to most Indians, including children as young as two who can be heard artfully and swiftly switching between languages, and even translating for their peers and adults without adult assistance. Yet, the absence of a focus on culturally varied writing is, in fact, a major shortcoming of business trainings offered in

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India. John Doucette, CIO of United Technologies, a top outsourcing-to India veteran since "back when you didn't want to be doing this" observes that:

Successful outsourcing to India is still difficult. While the market has matured, telecommunications have improved and *English fluency in India has flourished, challenges still remain.* Cultural issues creep in . . . . (Overby, 2003) [emphasis added]

Arguably the obstacles stem not so much from insufficient fluency in English as from differences in English usage, including most Indians' unfamiliarity with the cultural nuances of American English. Clear communication necessitates knowledge of different dialects of English, and *shared understanding* or familiarity with each other's reading and writing conventions and expectations. Moreover, *comprehensible language* lies at the heart of successful written exchanges, so we must strive to improve written communication across cultural contexts.

"It's frustrating communicating with Indians!" observes Amit Kapadia, Director of a US-based non-profit organization, the UNforgotten (www. unforgottenfund.org) which recently initiated two community-based projects in Western India. Although Mr. Kapadia was born in India and understands Hindi and Gujarati and even spent over a year there—once as an engineering student at ITT—he finds what he describes as "Indian over aggression and obsequious behavior" to be "annoying" (personal communication, 2008). "Most corporate employees based in India harass you to death, and their customer service skills are practically non-existent. . . . Their words and sentences are lengthy, wordy, and unreal! " he continues. "Also, you never really know what you're getting into and what they want in return. For instance, some Indian banks say "checks are payable at par. I don't even know what that means. What's the difference between a check and a demand draft? You can't understand the bold print— much less the fine print! It's shocking how non-communicative Indians can be," he concludes.

Not surprisingly, many Indians end up mixing (semantically) conflicting features of British, Indian, and American English in their writing, with the result that their communication is potentially hazardous to business negotiations. How so? All

too often, Indian employees of US businesses begin by addressing US clients as "Sir" or Ma'am," in line with respectful British English. Nevertheless, they generally continue to intersperse these honorific terms throughout the conversation—and sometimes, too, in written exchanges—ultimately distancing their partners and inadvertently establishing a hierarchy instead of an informal rapport-consolidating and egalitarian exchange which is more likely to appeal to US clients. In short, many Indians have a tendency to over-"Ma'am" and over-Sir their listeners and readers, so their use of honorifics could end up annoying US customers, in particular (see pandey, forthcoming).

As noted earlier, the well-intentioned salutation "Ma'am" could offend many Americans. The result is that many Indians come across as insincere and needlessly subservient, qualities associated with negative behaviors and underhanded or brown-nosing techniques in the U.S. As we know, one's word choice and organizational style (i.e., sequencing of ideas) could communicate different things to different audiences, not all of which are intended.

At the rear of the countless flamboyantly decorated trucks, buses, and other goods carriers in India, for instance, one often finds the following sign: "horn okay please." This Indian English expression roughly translates to "Please horn (i.e., to let me know that you are behind me), okay?" and baffles many an outsider ("All Things Considered, NPR broadcast on noise pollution in Mumbai and Pune, Dec. 24, 2008, 6:30 p.m. EST). Given that honking is acceptable in most areas in India and is, in fact, a necessary communal exchange (see Ratna, 1980) in India's overcrowded roads and cities (where reckless driving is more the norm than the exception), this sign serves as a vital and communal call for assistance. Similarly, on the digital highway, additional research roadways are very much needed to accommodate and navigate the increasing complexities of everyday written exchanges. In short, we must master and differentiate between competing dialects of English.

Yet, even today, in Indian institutions of higher education, as well as in corporate training facilities and programs across India, insufficient attention is paid to

professional writing as a genre.[12] This includes outlining, drafting, and carefully revising all forms of written correspondence, including e-mail, reports, proposals, and even letters, resumes, and other documents sent to businesses and organizations. Such a focus is critical to India's success, given India's pivotal role in the world of (e)business as a top choice for outsourcing, and a growing economic power. After all, accurately encoding and decoding speech and writing, or effectively communicating one's intent and interpreting another's--across cultural boundaries—is a critical skill today. The need for more culturally relevant resources in this part of the world, then, as well as a focus on cross-cultural writing skills and on World Englishes worldwide cannot be overemphasized.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

As this paper has attempted to illustrate, alongside multilingual skills, familiarity with World Englishes, including Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle varieties of English (Kachru 1986, 2005), and an understanding of divergent rhetorical structures and writing practices are critical to our success in the global marketplace. In short, it is time to reconceptualize and rethink how we meet the needs of global audiences.

First, we must carefully research how writing and reading function in other cultures. Next, we must familiarize ourselves with World Englishes (see B. Kachru 1996, 2005) in use in different business and cultural settings, so that we can learn to switch and mix dialects accordingly, in both speech and writing. Last but not the least, a knowledge of basic linguistics is bound to enhance our success in business negotiations. Not only would it enable us to understand the nuances of cross-cultural communication, a workshop or course in introductory linguistics would help to clarify the central role language plays in business, so that we would recognize critical and success-enhancing differences between dialects and languages in use in our increasingly competitive world.

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[12] Much of the writing required in English Departments in India is narrative in mode and centers around literature (not necessarily Indian). In short, process-based argumentative writing is still relatively foreign to English Departments and universities in India.

Examples abound of how English terms and expressions are used differently in different parts of the world, yet a comprehensive and contextualized corpus that can be readily accessed by business personnel everywhere (and by others) has yet to be created. It would, for instance, be helpful to have access to a comprehensive list of frequently employed terms and expressions in business negotiations and the most common interpretations assigned to them in different parts of the world. Such a resource could take the form of a WIKI, allowing for users of specific dialects to share examples, and would provide valuable culture brokering. A Web site dedicated to this endeavor or a portion of a frequently accessed one, such as the *Linguist List* or the ABC Web site is very much in order and highly advisable.

With the advent of e-business and globalization, strategic language use is integral to success in the global marketplace. Multilingual skills, as well as bidialectal skills, or the ability to switch between dialects of English, an international language—to accommodate to different audiences—are, therefore, highly beneficial. After all, communication is a two-way street, and writing is no exception. To ensure that we are understood worldwide, and to understand our partners everywhere, we have a responsibility to master the nuances of the language(s) with which our target audience is most comfortable. In addition, we must understand our reader's expectations regarding writing. Fortunately, mastering languages has never been problematic for most bilinguals, including the majority of the population in South Asia where multilingualism has been a marketable tool (see Kachru, 1986). We must, in addition, master the cultural nuances of English, an international language. In short, familiarity with divergent discourse or "rhetorical structures and writing practices" (Canagarajah, 2002) is critical. A knowledge of different (World) Englishes (see B. Kachru 1996, 2005, 2007), and a working knowledge of linguistics are necessary for shared understanding and enhanced success in business today.

While familiarity with American business practices and communication preferences is critical to success in securing and maintaining the lion share of global business today, corporations based in different parts of the world must recognize their individuality, and both embrace and help to create resources that enable others to understand their individual communication styles—both oral and written. Such a global effort would also help to minimize miscommunication. In

addition, training corporate employees and others on global differences in English usage and on distinctive features of World Englishes (see Kortmann and Schneider, 2008) would be highly beneficial. After all, clear communication necessitates shared understanding, and comprehensible language lies at the heart of successful exchanges of any kind.

Business communication/writing courses must, therefore, strive to meet the growing demand for savvy intercultural communicators. To avoid generalizations or stereotypes, a customized ethnographic approach is highly advisable. To this end, a survey designed to gauge attitudes toward different kinds of professional writing could be conducted. This information should ideally be gathered in the medium preferred by the audience. For instance, in predominantly oral cultures, such as Latin American and African cultures, oral exchanges conducted over the phone or in person are likely to be more effective for audience-based research and rapport-building. A working checklist or questionnaire could be employed to investigate reader expectations and interpretations of professional written exchanges in the following categories:

- Writer's goal or the central purpose(s), and expected outcomes of the written exchange
- Organization or structure, including the writing format employed and the layout (linear or non-linear). For instance, in a predominantly linear culture, the reader expects to see an opening, a body, and a closing paragraph(s), and associates each with very specific content. The opening must be personalized—mentioning, for instance, the person's first or complete name, and the first paragraph must identify the primary purpose, generally by way of a strong verb (e.g., to request, to invite, etc.). Moreover, in the body, the writer is expected to persuade the reader. In a letter of interest written in the linear American style, for example, the applicant is expected to demonstrate how they meet the requirements for the position, and to reiterate their candidacy and availability in the conclusion. This carefully structured approach (which is just as easily deciphered and unpacked at the reader's end) is not the case in semi-linear, or non-linear writing.
- Content: the information mentioned and the amount of detail expected.
- Language: This includes the vocabulary and sentence structure—whether simple or Plain English or more complex language--as well as the dialect of English or other language in which a document is written and/or interpreted.

- The mechanics: namely, the punctuation, capitalization, and spelling conventions utilized,
- Writing style and tone: whether formal or informal, as evidenced by the address forms, salutations, and closings employed, and the image the writer presents of himself or herself (e.g., that of a collaborative partner vs. a dedicated follower) which is evident in references made to the writer and the reader (i.e., "you" vs. the honorific device "Sir"), and the
- Writer's and reader's expected role(s), from each other's perspective. That is, whether the writer should come across as an information provider, a Project Manager (providing periodic project updates and checking on the status), or trust builder. Readers might be expected to acknowledge receipt, provide PMs with timely updates, or to do nothing, as in predominantly non-linear exchanges, in which case silence might convey the message that the assurances the writer might have provided were satisfactory and sufficient.
- Other feature(s) that the reader or writer considers important.

While separable, these broad categories do overlap. A questionnaire such as the one that appears in the Appendix could be employed to research specific cultures' assessment of different ingredients in writing, yielding greater cross-cultural understanding and a more cross-culturally inclusive framework of professional writing.

Differences in dialects must be carefully studied as dialect differences could result in miscommunication or under-communication, as when one and the same language, namely, English (an international language) yields different meanings. For example, a pilot's announcement "We will be landing momentarily" could be interpreted by some as "We will be landing in a few minutes" (American English) and by others as "We will be landing for a brief moment or just a few minutes" (British English).

In short, there are clear benefits to knowing more than a single dialect of English. Unfortunately, as discussed, dialect level differences are minimally addressed in business communication texts. Our reading or interpretation of words, sentences, paragraphs, and organizational styles could differ. In short, differences in reader and writer expectations in different cultural settings must be explored—as a first step toward shared understanding. We cannot assume that we share the same

conceptions of clarity and correctness or appropriateness in writing, nor that key criteria for effective professional communication are the same everywhere. Adequately researching differences in cross-cultural writing, therefore, requires an investigation of reader and writer assumptions, expectations, and interpretations of both the stated and the unstated.

We must research "reader expectations" and "attitudes towards specific terms, sentences, and organizational styles and provide our students with more specific and tangible information in this important area, so that both the writer and the reader are familiar with each other's expectations regarding the purpose and content of the exchanges in which they engage, as well as with the interpretations they each assign to the writing in question.

A working knowledge of linguistics—by way of a workshop or elective course in introductory linguistics or sociolinguistics, for instance—would help uncover reader expectations and interpretations. It would force us to be more attentive to language(s), as culture is mirrored in language, and equip us with a knowledge of genre analysis (Bhatia, 1993), cross-cultural politeness norms and face-saving devices (see Brown and Levinson, 1978; Bowe and Martin, 2007), and strategic discourse strategies including code-switching and mixing across languages and dialects (see Kachru, 1986, 1988; Pandey, 2009, 2008, 2005, 1998). It is bound to foster shared understanding and enhance the success of all players. Last but not the least, a basic understanding of linguistics would facilitate functional bilingualism or the learning of key words and phrases in WEs and other languages.

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