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A Comparative Analysis of Persuasive Business Discourse between Hong Kong and Japan: The Impact of Culture

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Background

- English is important in AP region
  - Non-native English speaker outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3:1 (Crystal, 1997)

- Three concentric circles: people who speak 2\textsuperscript{nd} and foreign language are more than native speaker (Kachru, 1997)
Background (Con’t)

• To communicate effectively
  • Language proficiency or fluency
  • The understanding the impact of culture

• Persuasive Writing
  • Difficult for 2\textsuperscript{nd} and foreign-language learners (Bermudex & Prater, 1994)
  • Different persuasive strategies vs Different cultural background (Zhu, 2001)
Objectives

• Examine the extent to which cultural factor influences writing pattern and strategies in HK and Japanese students

• Compare and contrast the written discourse between HK and Japanese students
Research Questions

1. What specific cultural influences can be observed in persuasive discourse by Hong Kong and Japanese students?

2. Are there differences in organizational pattern between persuasive discourse written by Hong Kong and Japanese students?
Significances

- Study how and whether culture affects non-native English speakers in business-related persuasive messages
- Focus on non-native speaking Asian speakers
- Increase the understanding of the impact of culture → effective intercultural communication
- Investigate the effect of national culture:
  - individuals who share similar high-context cultures
  - received differing amount of influence from western culture
Methodology

• Written documents of two researched groups from Japan and Hong Kong
  • → write a persuasive document based on the same scenario

• “Structural Moves” approach:
  • Establishing Credentials; Introducing the Request; Offering Incentives/Rewards; Enclosing Documents; Soliciting a Response; Using Pressure Tactics; and Ending politely
Categorization (Tentative)

1. Greeting
2. Self-introduction
3. Ref. to previous meeting
4. Praise to gain interest
5. Statement of main purpose
6. Reasoning
7. Reference to rival company
8. Show understanding for negative reply
9. Make promise
10. Show Willingness for further contact
11. Show appreciations
12. Attached company info or proposal
13. Requested to reply by certain date
14. Letter end blessing
15. Provide company website
16. Apology for sending the email
Analysis in progress

- Different level of indirectness expression
- The way of expressing courtesy
- Enclosing documents
- Use of tone
- Reference to rival company
Contribution

a) To contribute to the body of research knowledge in the Asian style

b) To inform academics, who can develop and expand their materials for teaching about intercultural business communication, and

c) To give business practitioners an applied understanding of the similarities and differences of persuasive communication in international business.
Thank you!
Feedbacks are welcome!
Three Concentric Circles


A Comparative Analysis of Persuasive Business Discourse between HK and JPN
Importance of Cultural Influence

- Cultural influence and variables exert impact on the way individuals or groups encode and decode messages (Beamer, 1992; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).
- Varner (2000), the dynamics of interpreters influenced the whole intercultural business communication approach when both business partners communicate with a shared language. In order to engage in intercultural business communication successfully, communicators need to understand the business environment and communication practices of each side.
- Kankannaranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) also indicated that for BELF communication, business competence, knowledge of business communication and genre rules are much more important than language proficiency or fluency.
Indirectness of Asian English Writing

• Kaplan’s pioneering study (1966) stated that Oriental English writing has the tendency of being indirect, implying that language and culture could affect the shaping of second-language writing.

• Hinds (1987) also claimed that Asian students tend to use indirect expressions to elaborate their ideas.
High-context to low-context communication

- Kamimura and Oi (1998) compared the argumentative strategies in American and Japanese English.
- → mainly between East and West
Contrastive Analysis with Similar Cultural Background

- Contrastive analysis between countries with similar cultural background is relatively rare:
  - Bell, Dillion, and Becker (1995) compared memos and letters written by German and Americans;
  - Graves (1997) contrasted American and Canadian direct marketing letters.