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CHINESE USE OF ENGLISH IN BUSINESS TEXTS:
STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING BAD NEWS

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
The Problem

In a world where business, professional, and political discourse spans nations and continents English clearly dominates as the language of international communication. A common language is generally assumed to be a sufficient condition for effective communication, but is it? Communication is a goal oriented performance which relies on participants having some common base of understanding. Problems resulting from miscommunication or communication breakdown may occur as a result of cross cultural differences in expectations of linguistic behavior and in strategies of language interpretation (Gumperz, 1982). Because English is increasingly used in contexts where both senders and receivers of messages are non-native speakers it is time to reconsider the role of culture in both the study and use of a second language (L2). Generally, those lucky individuals who are native speakers of English are in the enviable
position of not only navigating in safe linguistic
waters but also of setting culturally compatible
standards of appropriateness. That these standards may
not always be universally acceptable becomes apparent
when non-native speakers respond to language
demonstrating "effective" use of English. In fact,
American managers are strongly criticized by their
European counterparts for being unable to communicate
across cultures (Keen, 1990).

In the business world, the use of English is
further complicated by the fact that frequently the
individuals communicating are all relying on English as
their second language (L2). These individuals bring to
the situation a perspective characteristic of their
respective cultures, a perspective which affects both
their choice of pragmatic strategies and the rhetorical
devices used to express them.

Research on the relationship between language and
culture has been considered in several different
contexts. This has resulted in somewhat contradictory
recommendations for the teaching of language and
culture. These differences, quite evident in the area
of second language (L2) instruction and instruction in business communication, present a dilemma in courses of English for Business Purposes (EBP).

Some recent language acquisition research on speech act pragmatics has narrowed its focus to interlanguage pragmatics or the way in which second language learners use their L2 to communicate specific functions (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989). This research views interlanguage as a progression towards pragmatic strategies that are appropriate to native speakers. Business communication research has also studied pragmatic preferences but has focused on the appropriate use of English in the context of a variety of cultures, many non-native. Interlanguage in this context involves some convergence on the part of all members involved in the communicative act and recommends learning the culturally embedded communicative practices or strategies of the audience and trying to satisfy these. In this view, it is quite likely that target language norms will be irrelevant in many contexts.

Clearly "many more theoretical and empirical
studies...are needed to discover how learners do things with words in a second language" (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, 1989, p.9). Perhaps even more important, research that considers the teaching of culture, or more specifically whose culture, is needed. If the primary goal of language learning is the ability to communicate effectively, then the focus on native speaker pragmatic norms may not be optimal.

Significance

The idea that foreign language proficiency should be evaluated in terms of the learner's ability to communicate is widely accepted. The concept that communication may involve more than linguistic knowledge is suggested frequently though indirectly. The pervasive use of English by individuals who are non-native speakers to communicate with other individuals who are also non-native speakers requires a fresh look at both language users and language learners. Corder (in Ellis, 1990, p.56) maintains that the goal of language study should be communicative competence, that is the correct and appropriate use of language in a variety of contexts. Historically,
appropriateness has been measured in terms of native speaker culture but this standard is becoming increasingly inadequate. A more common standard, in the area of English for Business Purposes (EBP) is that of audience culture, namely those individuals who will be the recipients of a message, whether written or spoken.

At the intermediate or even the advanced stage of language study learners may have their first experience of saying what they really want to say in the foreign language (Savignon, 1983, p.67). At this point the socially appropriate use of the second language becomes a factor for the learner. Before this the learner has almost no experience in the trial and error process that is communication. Savignon (1983) cites the need to analyze communicative intent as well as form, and to interpret meaning in a context that considers the background of the participants. Thus the idea is advanced that meaning is not an objective entity but rather the result of interpretation in a particular context. Although scholars agree that the essence of language is meaning, researchers have been unclear how this might be studied (Stern, 1987).
One approach to the study of meaning resulted in a number of studies of contrastive pragmatics done during the 1970's and 80's. These focused on the speech act as a unit of meaning and indicated both culture and language specific features of discourse. The classification of specific speech act performances as either universal or culture specific is still far from resolved. Their is, however, increasing awareness of the Freirean ideal that language is the carrier of cultural codes and that teachers have a moral obligation to avoid "every type of cultural invasion whether it be open or cleverly hidden" (Freire, 1978, p.9).

Business related courses have adopted quite a different approach to language and culture. A major goal of business communication research is to identify pragmatic and rhetorical strategies that function across cultures and those that are culture specific, in order to draw a profile of appropriate strategies for a given audience. The motivation to successfully conduct business across cultures has led to the practical application of the theoretical principal that the thinking and social behavior of people are controlled
by the hidden norms of their culture and that an understanding of these norms will facilitate cross-cultural interaction.

The early 1980's saw a surge of interest in interlanguage pragmatics. Blum-Kulka (1992) suggested a research focus on inappropriate speech act realizations as a means to uncovering a learner's L2 specific pragmatic knowledge. Appropriateness was linked to target language culture. Business communication research used a similar approach but with a major difference. Non-native speakers evaluated the appropriateness of native speaker written texts, generally authentic business letters. The pragmatic knowledge of the audience rather than native speaker norms determined appropriateness. Appropriateness was defined as relative and context specific. Research indicated that in the context of business communication it appeared that with extended exposure communicators tended to move towards strategies that were likely to succeed with their audience. The process, one of trial and error, involved sacrificing some aspects of their own sense of cultural appropriateness while maintaining others. It appears that certain strategies are quite
resistant to change while others are open to compromise.

Research in the fields of Business and Business Communication has begun looking at negotiating strategies from a cross-cultural perspective. This research has focused primarily on face to face negotiations but a few studies have considered written business texts. While acknowledging the effects of culture on language use and describing the strategies of different cultural groups, the research fails to explain how the two are related. In contrast, this study examines how specific aspects of culture are reflected in selection of pragmatic strategies employed in L2: the approach is both descriptive and explanatory. It takes the view that learning English need not be synonymous with being indoctrinated with target language patterns of thinking, that where norm conflicts can be identified L2 speakers should be free to rely on their L1 sociocultural norms. Thus, a major task of this study was to identify existing areas of norm conflict and to point out strategies that were perceived as likely to succeed with a Chinese audience.

The business community recognizes the importance
of culture in communication as is evidenced in the myriad of cross-cultural games and simulations used in university business programs and the stress laid on audience analysis in business communication classes. Similarly, L2 classes are placing increasing emphasis on the role culture plays in appropriate language use. While there is an abundance of descriptive literature on culture, there has been little work in the field of cross-cultural communication (Loveday, 1982). Research on how aspects of culture influence language use at either the production or reception level is scarce and non-native comprehension of and attitudes towards English language written communication have been practically ignored. Focusing on the Chinese audience, this study identifies areas of norm conflict as well as some strong culture specific pragmatic preferences in the area of Business English. It goes on to examine the relationship between culture and language use, identifying specific links drawn between L1 culture and L2 pragmatic preferences.

In the area of written business communication, a comprehensive documentation of specific and practical production strategies employed by a distinct group of
nonnative speakers of English has not yet been undertaken. Only limited attempts have been made to identify culturally unique or cross-cultural standards of what constitute successful strategies for the attainment of specific business goals. Such information could have important ramifications for the teaching of higher level EBP classes as well as for business communication classes for native speakers of English.

Some interesting questions surface. Are standards for successful communication universal or culture specific? Should teachers of English attempt to adapt language use to the purposes and culturally familiar strategies of the learners, where words and structures are raw materials to be used creatively by the learner, or should the language be taught embedded in its native culture? This study supports the position that teachers avoid pressing their culturally defined perception of sociopragmatic appropriateness on language students but rather offer native norms as one possibility among many.

Chomsky (1978), in a discussion of pragmatic competence, suggests that we "think of language as an
instrument that can be put to use" (p. 224), an interrelationship of intentions and purposes and the linguistic means at hand. In cross-cultural communication what determines strategies of maximum effectiveness? Is it the cultural dictates of the language being used, those of the message sender, or those of the receiver? In the arena of cross-cultural business communication there are no clear answers to these questions.

Theory

Theoretical support for the interrelationship of culture and language is drawn from a number of disciplines: second language research, semiotics, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy (Hymes, 1990). Although all are studying the same phenomenon, the assumptions and procedures of each may lead them to focus on different aspects of this relationship and perhaps to arrive at different conclusions and recommendations. This study limits itself to the study of language and culture in a narrow context. It explores the relationship of culture to pragmatic choices in L2. It is based on the view that
language is a tool, that appropriate use of language is based on how well it accomplishes the goals of the user and, that the appropriateness of a given strategy will vary according to audience. Therefore, knowledge of audience culture, not native speaker culture, is a prerequisite to optimal communication in L2. Second language reliance on native language pragmatic knowledge, as posited by Blum-Kulka (1982), may prove more effective than target language norms.

Social Theory

The interdependent relationship between language and culture is stated explicitly in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis; language influences interpretation of meaning and thus thought and culture. Stern (1987) contends that studies testing this hypothesis have generally concluded that "languages primarily reflect rather than create socio-cultural regularities" (p. 206).

Based on the belief that meaning is socially determined, Stern (1987) suggests that we consider not just form but also those who use the language. It is the assumptions, beliefs and attitudes of speakers and
receivers that underlie and render messages comprehensible (Loveday, 1982). Consequently, the study of language must consider these aspects. In addition, to avoid possible distortion of meaning, appropriateness of language needs to be considered within the context of the target language culture (Koike, 1989). Hymes' ethnographic approach to the study of language supports this thinking. He notes:

"One needs to investigate the use of language in contexts of situation so as to discern patterns proper to speech activity, patterns that escape separate studies of grammar, of personality, of social structure, religion and the like..." (Hymes, 1974, p. 3)

The need to place text in context and to focus on specific relevant features of context is stressed repeatedly in related literature. Notable among these features are: the effects of the verbal action; the relevant features of participants, both verbal and nonverbal; the relevant objects; what changes were brought about by what the participants in the situation had to say (Halliday and Hasan, 1986 p.8).

Green (1983) suggests consideration of some
additional features: the role of inferring in negotiating meaning; a common frame of reference; the evolutionary development of frames of reference; and the importance of context in defining meaning. Because meaning is constructed between individuals, studies should focus on the individual nature of the significance of a speech event. Like Green, Halliday and Hasan also emphasize the importance of context:

"...involved in any kind of linguistic interaction...were, not only the immediate sights and sounds surrounding the event, but also the whole cultural history behind the participants, and behind the kind of practices they were engaging in, determining their significance for the culture, whether practical or ritual" (Halliday and Hasan, 1986 p.6).

Brown and Herndl (1987) relate the importance of personal perspective to the area of written text: conventions for good writing shift and change influenced by criteria emerging from the changing needs of the discourse community.

It is clear that the participants in a communicative event, those who directly participate in
the production and reception of texts, can best explain their significance.

**Pragmatic Theory**

Givon states that language users move from a pragmatic or meaning based to a syntactic or structure based mode (Larsen Freeman and Long, 1991, p. 269). This suggests a line of second language acquisition research that places greater emphasis on language meaning than on structure. In her summary of recent studies of pragmatics Wildner-Bassett (in Van Patton and Lee, 1990) states that a learner’s native culture may conflict with the socio-cultural conventions of the target language culture. However, in the world of international English, natives from quite similar cultures may be relying on English as their common language.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) discuss a contrastive analysis approach to speech acts suggesting that “once we understand how a particular function is accomplished in the native language and target language of our subjects, then we can proceed with an analysis of the second language acquisition (SLA) process (p.
This approach assumes that native strategies are optimal, an assumption that is questionable.

Blum-Kulka (1982) proposes that second language learners apply native language pragmatic knowledge to their second language communication attempts. Studies focusing on specific speech acts (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Maier, 1992; Rintnell, 1984; Tripp, Strage, Lampert, and Bell, 1987) such as apologies, requests, invitations, compliments, refusals, and suggestions generally confirm this. Blum-Kulka further postulates that language learners exhibit a pragmatic competence that is characteristic of neither their first language (L1) nor their L2, a sort of interlanguage (IL) of speech act performance in which they may rely on L1, IL, or L2 strategies while using L2 structures. This phenomenon has been confirmed in a cross-cultural study of managerial values. It was found that national cultures contribute to the unique behaviors of managers. Extended exposure to other cultures resulted in some convergence, some retention of divergence, but most values were characterized by cross-vergence, the emersion of unique values not characteristic of either native or non-native culture (Ralsten, Gustafson,
Cognitive Theory

The literature drawn from cognitive anthropology sees the relationship of personal experience to the construction of meaning as characteristic of the evolution of individual cognitive structure. Cognitive anthropology posits a theory based on the premise that individuals' perceptions of reality emerge from their own personal mental model of the world and that individuals who are members of a common group or culture share a common stock of knowledge and beliefs that result in a system of shared cognition. This shared culture specific cognition predisposes members to a common stock of socio-cultural conventions which are manifested in how members use language to accomplish specific goals and functions not only in their native language but in L2 as well.

Kvale (1992) suggests the study of cognition in a local cultural context including local knowledge, historical traditions, and the network of interaction, as essential for understanding behavior. He views language as neither universal nor individual but
culturally determined, and believes that the content or product expressed by individuals may serve as evidence of this cultural similarity.

Deely (1990) provides an explanation of what occurs during cognitive processing: The environment is selectively organized and reorganized based on the individual’s previous experiences and existing knowledge. Relating this to the comprehension of texts, Deely states that individuals experience a text through their senses in a given context, followed by perception which involves the conscious knowledge of the significance of the text and the ways it may be defined and related to other cognitive structure. Rosette, like Kvale, believes that the common network of signs or mental images that comprise cognitive structure are largely culturally determined (Rosette, 1990).

Shared cognitive experience serves as the foundation of a common linguistic structure which is necessary for negotiating meaning. This experience may be arrived at differently and may be expressed to different degrees in individuals, but great similarities will still exist as the result of common
experiences and community determined conventions defining the way things should be done.

Individuals from more widely divergent cultures are more likely to have barriers to successful communication. Receivers may assign different meaning to terms, structures, or rhetorical devices than the sender intended and thus fail to accurately comprehend the sender's message. Appropriate language choices depend on application of cultural and experiential elements of meaning (Kleifgen, 1988). Familiarity with significant aspects of the interlocutors culture can ease the process of cross-cultural communication, particularly during the initial stages.

Pilot Study

The area of business communication is particularly well suited to exploring pragmatics, or the way in which individuals use language to express their ideas, because business texts use language to accomplish specific predefined goals. The success of a business text may be evaluated in two primary ways: The first is the receiver's reaction to the text itself including actions taken as a result of the text, and the second
is the goodwill engendered by the text towards both the sender and the organization.

In a pilot study, a Chinese business student evaluated 3 pairs of letters; each pair contained a letter taken from a Chinese business communication textbook and one of comparable content taken from an American Business communication textbook. The student used a semantic differential scale, a survey, and an interview to evaluate both the text’s message and its author.

This method produced several specific responses to the texts and senders which were then compared with both Chinese and American techniques for building goodwill. In addition, the study included an interview to explore cultural and linguistic explanations for these responses. Although this research design yielded a range of responses, the survey format did set parameters on these responses thus possibly eliminating some potentially interesting ones.

Description of the Current Study

In the current study a more open ended design was used, producing a much wider range of responses. Data
was collected from a fairly homogeneous sample (Chinese university students in a business center of the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC).

Kasper and Dahl (1991) discuss a range of limitations inherent in the various research approaches to interlanguage pragmatics. They distinguish between production and comprehension tasks, and between elicited and observational data collection and note that both task and method affect resulting data. In addition, they stress that judgement tasks pose a particular set of problems in that each participant’s understanding of the task and its context may be quite individual. Sufficient data, gathered in a variety of contexts, was needed to discover patterns of language use. To accomplish this, data was elicited using a variety of methods and a variety of tasks and a total of 32 students participated.

This study primarily focused on the emic (insiders’) definition of the appropriateness of a speech act. An emic perspective is increasingly being sought not just in the area of anthropology but also in classroom research as researchers attempt to identify and interpret the participants perceptions. This
perspective relies heavily on "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) emanating from the behavior and ideas of the participants. It explores the contexts, intentions, motives and, meanings of actions (Denzin, 1988). In this study, the participants' language choices and explanations, taken from written texts and interviews, were used to illustrate the relationship between language and culture. To more adequately represent the views of the participants, frequent member checks were made to disclaim, explain, clarify, or validate assumptions.

Research Questions

When students learn a foreign language the target language culture generally serves as the model for determining appropriate pragmatic strategies. This study suggests that target language strategies may not only conflict with the cultural norms of the learners but, in fact, may not best serve their L2 needs. In today's world L2 speakers of English in any given communicative situation may all be non-native speakers from cultures that diverge widely from that of the target language. This study identified socio-cultural
conventions deemed appropriate for a Chinese audience in a particular business context. The goals of the study were to identify specific pragmatic choices and to demonstrate the relationship between language use and culture. The following questions were addressed: When Chinese business students, produce and receive business texts in English, what communication strategies for the achievement of specific goals do they identify as effective/ineffective? What strategies do they employ to accomplish desired goals? Do these choices relate to aspects of Chinese culture identified in the relevant literature and by the participants?

Objectives of the Study

This study compiled characteristics of communication in written English business texts that were identified by Chinese business students as either effective or ineffective in accomplishing a designated goal. The characteristics that emerged from the study were related to the bodies of literature of both Chinese negotiating and business communication strategies and American English business communications
strategies. The objective of the study was to determine whether speech act pragmatics in production and comprehension of business texts reflected the socio-cultural conventions of the sender and whether the strategies selected were compatible with the conventions of the target language culture. Major divergences support the need for focusing on audience culture in the field of English for Business Purposes.

Definition of Terms

* Pragmatic competence is defined "in a narrow sense, referring to nonnative speakers (NNS) comprehension and production of speech acts. (Kasper and Dahl, 1991)."

* Speech act is defined as "a functional unit of speech that derives its meaning not from grammatical form but from the rules of interpretation in a given speech community. (Savignon, 1983, p. 309)."

* Text, is defined as "functional language, language either written or spoken which conveys meaning in a particular social context (Halliday and Hasan, 1986, p. 10)." The texts used in
this study will be a selection of business letters, both authentic documents and sample texts taken from instructional materials as well as texts produced by participants.

* Message is defined as the meaning conveyed in a text. This implies: (1) the code of the message is intelligible to (2) the participants in (3) an event characterized by its transmission in (4) a channel, (5) a setting or context, (6) in a definite form or shape and (7) characterized by a topic and comment (Hymes, 1974, p. 13).

* Goal is defined as the response the sender of a document endeavors to elicit in the receiver.

* Strategy is defined as the senders predetermined plan to employ particular rhetorical devices and to express those ideas that are deemed likely to accomplish desired goals for a given audience.

Theoretical Assumptions

The general conceptual base supporting the role of culture in the production and interpretation of communication is derived from social-semiotics and contrastive pragmatic theory. The following
assumptions are espoused by these theories:

1. Basic speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, declaring, and questioning are universal (Fraser, Rintell, and Walters in Larsen-Freeman, 1980).

2. Strategies for realizing speech acts are culture specific, linked to basic differences in cultural norms and values (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

3. Cultural values and underlying assumptions and a common stock of knowledge and beliefs evolve historically as a result of shared experience and are relied on by members of a culture to interpret events (Wilkins and Dyer, 1988; Malenewski, and Rosette, 1990).

4. Qualitative research methodology lends itself to more in depth analysis of individual’s motives, intentions, and understanding, allowing for consideration of both emic and etic viewpoints.

Underlying the first assumption is the notion that speakers expressing themselves in L2 will generally be familiar with the functions that may be accomplished
with language (Koike, 1989).

Underlying the second assumption is the notion that the strategy for accomplishing a specific speech act in L1 cannot be assumed to be the same in L2. Learners may rely on L1, L2, or interlanguage strategies in an attempt to perform a given speech act. A common set of mental images shared by members of a culture and resulting from common experiences and community determined conventions define the way things should be done (Rosette, 1990). Message senders attempt to get their message across in what they determine is the clearest way, often selecting meaning over form (Koike, 1989).

Underlying the third assumption is the idea that members of the same or similar cultures would have fewer barriers to successful communication than individuals from disparate cultures. This is supported by studies investigating the effects of cultural background, content, and rhetorical organization of texts in L2 reading (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, 1984, 1987; Johnson, 1987). Culturally familiar characteristics tend to improve comprehension whereas unfamiliar patterns and content are seen as a
deterrent (Carrell, 1984). Hymes explains this manifestation of common background knowledge in terms of membership in a common culture. In confirmation of this, the present study identified a variety of distinct attributes of Chinese culture that were reflected both in the production of ESL business texts and in the evaluation of these texts by Chinese readers.

A cross-cultural survey that asked executives to identify the most important negotiator characteristics from a list of forty-five possibilities displayed clear cultural preferences (Graham, 1984). Topping the list for Chinese managers were: persistence and determination, winning respect and confidence, and preparation and planning skill. The American managers selected preparation and planning skill, thinking under pressure, and judgement and intelligence. This difference in values would quite likely have an impact on strategies of communication.

Underlying the fourth assumption is the interpretivist paradigm which seeks to explore interpretations inductively and which focuses on understanding motives and meanings underlying overt
acts. This involves identifying and verifying the motives and meanings of participants and presenting an emic or insider's perspective. Problems of cross-cultural communication increase the difficulty of presenting an accurate picture. Patton (1990) suggests that long-term fieldwork mitigates against these problems. Also the use of key informants to clarify and validate assumptions, the use of multiple data gathering techniques allowing for triangulation, and the use of frequent member checks should serve to increase validity.

Summary

Business texts present a good context for the examination of English language use by non-native speakers because a close match exists between intentions and expectations of native and non-native business people, and because business texts generally have a conscious, clearly identifiable purpose. These texts provide an excellent data source for examining "how meaning is created in different cultures to achieve ostensibly the same purpose" (Jenkins and Hinds, 1987, p. 329).
This study used participant constructed texts as well as participant evaluation of both textbook and authentic texts as the basis for investigating the genre of Chinese use of English in business communication.
The relevant research base for this study centers on four main areas: pragmatics, including speech act realization, interlanguage pragmatics, and cross-cultural pragmatics; studies of L2 cross-cultural business communication; characteristics of Chinese negotiating and business communication behavior and; characteristics of American negotiating and business communication behavior.

Research on Interlanguage Pragmatics

Studies in this area generally focus on specific speech acts, such as requests, apologies, or refusals, and the way in which language is used to accomplish these functions. A study may compare strategies across languages or may focus on strategies used by different L1 speakers using a common L2. Subjects' characteristics and methodology differ from study to study, the common thread being the focus on a speech act. Kasper and Dahl (1991) point out two serious problems in the research base: One is the lack of
standardized methodology hence a lack of comparability among studies; The second is reliance on a single data elicitation task. They suggest following elicitation tasks with retrospective interviews as one way to increase comparability. In this way participants' can explain their language preferences in their own socio-cultural context. They further suggest using multiple data elicitation tasks. This approach can offer more convincing evidence and therefore heighten the credibility of a qualitative research study (Patton, 1990). Unfortunately, Kasper and Dahl found only two studies that relied on more than one data elicitation task: Rintell (1984) and Irvin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, and Bell (1987).

Rintell (1984) studied pragmatic comprehension of English expressions of emotion in Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic students using observation and a listening-rating task. Reactions of Chinese students were found to be distinct from the other two groups.

Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, and Bell (1987) examined non-native speakers (NNS's) interpretation of American English requests and compared this process
with NS’s strategies. Using experimental methodology in a task that involved two data elicitation procedures (story completion and explanation of what a character in a story meant by a particular utterance) allowed for triangulation of results. The fact that both tasks yielded similar results strengthened the conclusion that participant’s pragmatic comprehension was situation centered rather than language centered.

The majority of studies of interlanguage pragmatics base their conclusions on a single data elicitation task.

Blum-Kulka (1982) addressed production aspects of pragmatic interlanguage to determine whether some properties of communicative language were culture and language specific. Using a discourse completion test she elicited indirect speech act forms from native speakers and learners of Hebrew and also from native speakers of English. A quantitative analysis of responses, revealing differences between native speakers' and learners' responses motivated the following hypothesis: While indirect speech acts may be a universal phenomenon, their manifestation may differ systematically across cultures and languages;
Differences may be manifested in levels of social acceptability, linguistic acceptability, and pragmatic acceptability. The addition of an introspective interview, as suggested by Kasper and Dahl, could have provided greater insight into culture specific perceptions of indirect speech. For language learners, misunderstanding may occur at the linguistic level and also at the pragmatic level due to cross-cultural differences in "pragmatic ground rules" (Thomas, 1983, p. 106). Participants' explanations of significant data might have provided further evidence in support of cultural differences as a mitigating force.

A major problem in studying interlanguage pragmatics is identifying situations that are roughly comparable across cultures (Kasper, 1881). The importance of a common frame of reference as well as the importance of context and inferencing in defining meaning (Green, 1983) make this imperative. The area of international business communication, with English as its common denominator, global level, provides a variety of situational contexts that exist cross-culturally. Language used to market a product, elicit or respond to a business offer, even announce a
customer benefit are common corporate occurrences throughout the world. A similarity may be assumed in sender and receiver context, intention, and relevant knowledge.

Despite the fact that business is a sphere where English serves as the international language of communication it is one in which "native speaking norms are not necessarily the only acceptable ones for use in many contexts where English is spoken" (Richards and Sukiwat, 1983, p. 124).

While a similarity of situational context may be assumed, this does not hold true for the equally important factor of socio-cultural context. The process of communication assumes at least some perceptually shared reality between sender and receiver (Rosette, 1990). However message senders, often unaware of a reader’s cultural context, may assume greater similarity than in fact exists. In reality, this similarity may not exist. Rosette states that delineating the "cultural other" from the "cultural I" and validating assumptions of similarity aid in correctly interpreting language. Halliday and Hasan (1986) lend support to this view.
Involved in any kind of linguistic interaction...are not only the immediate sights and sounds surrounding the event but also the whole cultural history behind the participants, and behind the kind of practices they were engaging in, determining their significance for the culture, whether practical or ritual (Halliday and Hasan, 1986, p. 6).

This view raises some interesting questions in the universal versus culture specific debate over speech acts: are there similarities in both speech acts and in strategies for accomplishing these acts that extend across cultures? How can these similarities, if they exist, be uncovered?

Research on Cross-cultural Business Communication

Even when English is used as the language of communication, differences in tone, organization, style, even what writers choose to say and not to say may exist as a result of cultural differences. While some work has been done on the impact of cultural variation (Baird, Lyles and Wharton, 1990; Eure, 1976; Graham and Andrews, 1987; Jenkins and Hinds, 1987; Stewart and Keown, 1989; Stevenson, 1983; Varner, 1987), it remains unclear whether writers should maintain their own cultural standards or adapt to the conventions of their audience for maximum communicative
effectiveness.

Eure (1976) demonstrated that certain principles of good business writing, American style, had cross cultural validity with a group of Mexican college students. The author suggests that further exploration of this phenomenon in other cultures is necessary. He further suggests that specific cultural factors, such as authoritarian submission, might affect both readers' responses (Eure p.63, 1976) and their production strategies.

In a study that investigated politeness strategies employed in business letters by native and non-native speakers of English, Maier (1992) found that although both native and non-native speakers employed politeness strategies these differed in a number of aspects: degree of directness and formality, lexical choice, offers of benefits or compliments and, use of face saving negative politeness. The subjects were of various Asian backgrounds and no attempt was made to isolate strategies employed by a specific non-native group or to compare strategies among groups. Also it is unclear how much previous exposure these subjects (students of International Business English at the
Minnesota English Center) had to American standards of business communication.

Familiarity with the audience is necessary for effective communication. Stevenson (1983) contends that even if writers adapt to the needs and abilities of the international audience by being comprehensible as well as grammatically correct, the writer's mode of expression may still be at odds with the reader's language and culture. While working with Japanese technical writers in Japan, Stevenson was able to identify several differences between Japanese and American business communication practices. Two of these differences, Japanese discomfort with English imperative verb forms, and differences in the organization of documents (Americans stress direct and immediate identification of the problem while the Japanese establish a polite relationship before getting down to business), also were identified as problems in a preliminary case study. This study focused on the reactions of a business student from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the standard letter form taught in an undergraduate Business English class in the PRC and to a version amended to build goodwill
according to American Business Communication standards (Kasoff, 1991). The subject’s evaluation of the letter did not confirm American strategies for creating good will. The case study suggested that even when basic content was understood, a writer’s intentions could be misinterpreted. Strategies and language selected to convey good will were not appropriate across cultures.

Different expectations of what and how to communicate can lead to communication breakdown which can seriously undermine business relations. Graham and Andrews (1987), in their study of Japanese and American negotiating behaviors, identified language and communication problems as the most serious obstacle to successful negotiations. They found that when language or communication problems occurred participants retreated to safe ground and tended to focus on quantitative information (price) and on preset goals, generally "tuning out" all qualitative information. This more limited information exchange led to a decrease in alternative solutions which in turn led to a lowering of potential mutual solutions. Like Stevenson, Graham and Andrews found cultural differences in the normal order of topics: American
negotiators got straight down to business often beginning a negotiating session with price quotes or price quote requests while Japanese negotiators preferred some general discussion of the seller's "situation" first (p.67).

Another area of difference lay in the general tone of negotiating: Aggressive, persuasive sales appeals by American sellers caused their Japanese trading partners both discomfort and irritation (Graham and Andrews, p.73), a clear illustration of culturally inappropriate strategies. The Chinese case study had the same reaction to what was perceived as a persuasive sales appeal. Japanese also showed a negative reaction to an American's use of a strongly worded refusal of a price offer. The American's use of "No, absolutely not" was considered as "very strongly negative" (Graham and Andrews, p. 73). This also was confirmed by the case study subject. Apparently, the appropriateness of strategies, while not universal, may be shared culturally similar groups. These studies highlight a major problem in the teaching and use of English as an international language.

Technical discourse is routinely treated as "a
variety of English written by native English speakers for native English speakers" (Stevenson, 1983, p.319) however, this is increasingly not the case. Companies within the United States (US) are hiring increasing numbers of non-native speakers of English. Belcher (1991) notes that many of these employees display major differences in both linguistic and rhetorical aspects of writing. Perhaps even more important, they demonstrate a "lack of awareness of the implied goals or the social functions of many of the new genres they were faced with" (p. 113). The strategies employed in business communication are often intended to serve dual, if not multiple, purposes. The literature on cross cultural business communication, particularly the work of Belcher (1991), Stevenson (1983), and Graham and Andrews (1987) demonstrates that maximally appropriate strategies are defined, in large measure, by the socio-cultural norms of the reader. Consequently, speakers of English in a variety of cross-cultural contexts will need to focus on audience, not native speaker, based considerations of appropriateness.

Some insights into culture specific norms are
found in literature of a more descriptive nature, written by both cultural insiders and outsiders.

Research on Chinese Negotiating and Business Communication Practices

Stewart and Keown (1989) characterize Chinese negotiating practices as having a process and protocol unique to the Chinese environment. Based on interviews of 50 Western trading partners of PRC companies, the authors identified several factors responsible for the success or failure of negotiations. Success factors included: good personal relations; patience of the American team; knowledge of PRC business practices, social customs, history and political system; and perceived sincerity of the American team (p.69). Failure factors included: breakdown in communications; insincerity of the Chinese team; and lack of patience by the American team (p.70). A major factor for achieving successful communication may be identifying appropriate strategies to convey sincerity.

Despite the fact that with increased experience in the international market place the Chinese are becoming more western in their approach, certain cultural
factors such as face saving and good personal relations still remain very strong.

Baird, Lyles and Wharten (1990) collected data on the role of managers from practicing middle managers from the US and the PRC. Their data reveals basic differences between Chinese and American perceptions of management that have some clear implications for strategies of communication. The Chinese culture is described as traditional and authoritarian with a management group that prefers clear instructions, is relatively resistant to change, has a problem with uncertainty, and is suspicious of foreign managers (p. 55). In addition, Eure suggests that cultures, such as the Chinese, which stress authoritarian submission may be more receptive to a clear-cut one sided argument and react to a two sided proposal with confusion and doubt. Coupling these characteristics with the basic distrust of foreign managers magnifies the potential for communication problems.

In addition to these cultural preferences, Hildebrandt (1988) offers evidence of the preference of Chinese managers for a more formal style of English. He surveyed 436 Chinese managers and found that 67% of
them felt that formal communication (an emphasis on written reports, formality of address, and structured channels of communication) was important (p.223). He attributes this to the pervasive influence of use of British business communication standards and the fact that the Chinese language has "historically relied on a formal tone and overt politeness", a diminution of the self through the use of we in place of I, and "honorific titles" when addressing people in positions of power (p.222). These preferences indicate a definition of appropriateness quite different from the informal, friendly tone suggested by American business communication standards.

The formality of both the Chinese language and the influence of British English, the authoritarian nature of Chinese society, and the variety of distinct attributes of Chinese culture seem to be reflected both in the production of ESL business texts and in the evaluation of authentic American texts by Chinese readers. The prevailing socio-cultural norms are further reflected in other business related contexts.

One example of this is the area of cross-cultural negotiating, a context where the subtleties of language
may be critical. Data from a cross-cultural survey that asked executives to identify the most important negotiator characteristics from a list of forty-five possibilities also indicated some differences that might impact on negotiating strategies (Graham, 1984). Topping the list for Chinese managers were: persistence and determination, winning respect and confidence, and preparation and planning skill. The American managers selected preparation and planning skill, thinking under pressure, and judgement and intelligence.

Although there seem to be some clear-cut differences between Asian and American audiences, some cross-cultural audiences show a high degree of similarity. Eure (1976, p.62) found that a group of Mexican students "overwhelmingly favored" messages using such principles as positive emphasis, conversational tone, and reader concern. His research is based on a comparison of American defined standards of "good" and "bad" letter texts. The study did not include participant production of a good letter nor did it seek to explain results in terms of the participants cultural norms.

The most complete description of Chinese
negotiating style is offered by Pye (1990). His information was taken from informants, American, Chinese, and Japanese, who were actively involved doing business in China. Based on extensive interviews, he arrived at the following characteristics of Chinese negotiating practices:

1. emphasis on trust and mutual connections
2. agreement on general principles before details; allows assessment of trading partners' vulnerability and patience
3. attachment of great importance to the prestige of a company
4. attachment of great importance to symbolic factors
5. preference for the best over the most practical in purchases
6. value of patience in negotiations; use of stalling tactics and delays.
7. manipulation of foreigners through scheduling of events, arranging meetings, providing relevant documents
8. use of extreme language and accusatory tone to put others on the defensive
9. stress on mutual interests rather than compromise
10. ethnocentric, distrust of foreigners
11. rigid negotiating posture when goals are not being met
12. preference for informal exchanges rather than formal sessions for clarification purposes
13. expectation of a long, continuous relationship
14. strong effort to avoid mistakes

A particularly compelling aspect of Pye's work was its focus on the underlying cultural explanations of the identified characteristics. The following norms, described by Pye, suggest a culture gap between Americans and Chinese that may easily be wide enough to cause misunderstandings:

1. Chinese xenophobia and xenophilia
   reflected in ambivalent feelings, distrust, and sudden attitude changes in the negotiating process.

2. Chinese efforts to create emotional ties with their negotiating partners in the form of a dependency relationship carrying with it the obligation of the stronger party to respond
with help and protection. A lack of response to this sought after relationship is often met with bitterness and resentment. American business people interviewed gave almost unanimous testimony to this occurrence.

3. Two traditional Chinese concepts, face and "guanxi" exert considerable influence on interactions in the negotiating process. In the Chinese culture, the influence of losing or gaining face, based as it is on gaining and maintaining prestige, results in personal insults and flatteries being frequently employed in the negotiating process. Social correctness provides assurance of protecting face. "Guanxi" is best described as a relationship of almost unlimited mutual obligation, which coupled with the dependency relationships developed by the Chinese, generally means "that the subordinate in fact has nearly unlimited rights over the superior" (p. 102). Chinese negotiators strive to establish this relationship and, once established, expect full commitment.
Solomon (in Binnendijk, 1987) also characterizes Chinese negotiators as "playing the games of guanxi". This involves identifying a sympathetic counterpart, cultivating a sense of friendship, and then pursuing objectives by manipulating feelings of guilt, obligation, and friendship. This behavior is attributed to historical and cultural characteristics including a stress on interdependency rather than individualism, a high level of management of interpersonal relations, and a political system that fosters relationships of superior and dependent rather than of equality. The establishment of "relations", a goal that is somewhat akin to building goodwill in the American context, is a primary goal of business communication for the Chinese. However, the obligations of "relationship" for the Chinese far exceed expectations associated with mutual goodwill in the American context.

In a business context, all participating parties seek an agreement that will be beneficial to their organization but the strategies employed to attain this goal may be markedly different. From the outset of the negotiating process the Chinese stress a commitment to
abstract principles favorable to desired objectives and to open-ended obligations and will compromise these only after they have determined that they have reached a deadlock (Lubman in Kapp, 1983, p. 83). They spend a prolonged period, often months, assessing foreign interlocutors and are reluctant to consider a breakdown in the relationship due to a cultural aversion to open discord. Solomon reaffirms the "patience as a virtue" characteristic and notes that the Chinese see the negotiating process as "an attempt to reconcile the principles and objectives of the two sides" (p. 6) rather than a process of compromising over details.

Several Business Communications and International Business textbooks include descriptions of Chinese behavior that may impact on the process of communication. Harris and Moran (1991) provide guidelines for American negotiators doing business in the PRC. These include: avoidance of self-centered conversation, including the excessive use of "I" as Chinese are more group oriented and somewhat contemptuous of self praise; focus on the group rather than on an individual; avoidance of the appearance of condescension. Solomon adds to this list: present your
position in a broad framework, be patient, understand the Chinese meaning of friendship and the style of your Chinese trading partner, know your own bottom line, and know the substantive issues well. He offers a final word of caution: "Understand and appreciate the Chinese style but don’t try to practice it" (p. 15).

Locker (1989) contrasts the way in which Chinese and Americans organize and present information. The Americans develop a message in the following order: introduction, central point, body, and conclusion (p. 463). The Chinese follow a radically different pattern of organization: introduction (generally an observation of a concrete reality), tell a story, introduce a new topic into the message, gather loose ends, provide a last point to think about which does not necessarily relate. No central point is presented in this construction, and the audience is allowed to draw its own conclusions (Wolvine and Oakley in Locker, p. 463). At a more micro level the Chinese rely on a variety of culturally motivated strategies to accomplish their goals. Solomon provides a summary of these tactics:

1. "You need us; we don’t need you!"

2. Play adversaries against each other
3. "Kill the chicken to warn the monkey." A small concession is granted to avoid granting a larger one.

4. "You are the guilty party." identifying weaknesses, faults and failures to perform to put your counterparts on the defensive.

5. Word games. Use of very general agreements in principle to exert pressure on specific issues.

6. Time pressures. Patience: We are in no hurry to reach an agreement.

7. Negotiation as an on going process. (p.10)

Finally, some particular aspects of Chinese thought and communication also have some bearing on the negotiating process. Chinese speech is characterized by indirectness, the absence of categorical statements (Murray, Light in Kapp, 1983).

"Perhaps" and "maybe" are cultural stock-in-trade. "Maybe I will come with you" usually means "I'm coming." "Perhaps it is too far for you to walk." means "There's no way I'll let you walk." When something is "inconvenient" it is most likely impossible. (Murray, p.20)

Add to this the Chinese tendency to respond to questions in terms of expectations and goals rather than with actual facts, and the potential for miscommunication is evident. A practical manifestation
of this is that Chinese view a contract as a commercial document which defines the desired outcomes of a transaction as opposed to the Western view of the contract as a legally binding definition of mutual responsibilities (Lubman in Kapp, 1983). Lubman notes that "much more study is needed of the nature and causes of misunderstandings between Chinese and Americans in the context of commercial negotiations" (p. 68). To date, research evaluating the cross-cultural appropriateness of American business communication had yielded mixed results.

Research on American Business Communication

Eure's (1976) study of the cross-cultural applicability of American written business communication principles identified a number of characteristics of written texts deemed to create positive images in the minds of readers. These include: planned presentation, positive emphasis, conversational tone, and attention to reader concerns. Most Business Communication textbooks provide similar lists as well as abundant illustrations of general and context specific strategies and texts.
For example, Locker (1989) provides a list of five generic criteria for effective messages:

1. be clear - communicate intended meaning to the reader.
2. be complete - provide enough information to the reader to evaluate the message and act on it.
3. be correct - provide accurate information, free from errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, word order, and sentence structure.
4. save the reader time - style, organization and visual impact of the message should help the reader to read, understand, and act on the message as quickly as possible.
5. build goodwill - leave a positive image of the writer and the writer’s organization.

In the field of business communication there is broad agreement on both strategies and patterns of organization necessary for an effective message.

Tebeaux (1990) defines organizational guidelines for the structure of a business letter. The first paragraph states the purpose or provides the main information the reader needs. The second paragraph develops or provides support for the main point. The
final paragraph provides the reader with a suggested course of action. She stresses that tone should avoid sounding rude, flattering, insincere, or coercive and offers the following as an example of potentially offensive use of flattery: "Our organization eagerly anticipates the great privilege and opportunity to offer your outstanding firm a proposal to redecorate the reception areas of your corporate headquarters" (Tebeaux, 1990, p. 127). Although careful analysis of the reader is generally offered as a primary consideration in business communication (Janis and Dressner, 1972; Tebeaux, 1990; Locker, 1989), Tebeaux fails in this regard in her use of examples. It is possible that this sort of flattery would be quite effective in some cultural contexts. The fact that standards of appropriateness are not universal must be more of a driving force in evaluating texts.

Text books on business communication suggest several strategies to promote successful fulfillment of the most common goals of business communication (communicating necessary information, motivating desired reader responses, and maintaining a positive image of both the writer and the organization). These
include emphasizing positive aspects of a situation, buffering negative information or burying it in the middle of a message, highlighting reader benefits, and concluding with goodwill endings (Jenkins and Hinds, 1987; Locker, 1989). Words with negative tone should be avoided: Even if the message is negative "state it as positively as possible" (Tebeaux, p.128; Locker, p. 238)) and "You attitude", a strategy designed to show concern for reader interests, should be used to build goodwill (Janis and Dressner, 1972).

Jenkins and Hinds (1987) describe the purpose of American business letters as an "attempt to get the reader to appreciate the benefits of doing what the writer wants" (330). Knowledge of the audience is critical to success. Reader benefits are often stated explicitly, and phrased in a you-attitude that is tailored to the specific audience (Locker, 1989). Devices such as goodwill endings are "positive, personal and forward looking and suggest that serving the reader is the real concern" (p.638). This implies that the writer attempts to view the situation from the reader's perspective and to select strategies compatible with that perspective, employing a strategy
of you-attitude.

Audience analysis is a critical part of this production process in American business communication (Stevenson, 1983). In contrast French business letters are writer oriented and Japanese letters are oriented to "the space between the writer and the reader" (p. 327), in other words, to the establishment or maintenance of an appropriate reader-writer relationship.

Summary

Although there is a wide array of related research ranging from studies of interlanguage pragmatics to descriptive studies of Chinese and American standards of business communication, there are few attempts to link specific L2 language use strategies to their cultural underpinnings. Abundant data sources for this line of research exist in authentic texts, texts written by students, and textbook sample documents. Research on pragmatics provides ample evidence of culture specific norms of communication. Studies of Chinese negotiating practices provide a research base for identifying actual strategies employed to attain
clearly defined goals in authentic contexts. Research done in collaboration with native informants identifies and validates appropriate strategies for the accomplishment of universal business goals. The research base on American and cross-cultural business communication identifies strategies appropriate to the Chinese audience as well as those that may be employed successfully with both Chinese and American readers.

A few studies have been based on cross-cultural evaluations of good and bad English business texts. Standards of appropriateness have been defined in an American context. A more meaningful comparison might exist between native and non-native English texts.

In addition, a more open ended data gathering process, one that allows participants to focus on reasons for the success or failure of a letter, is necessary to establish a baseline for pragmatic performance in the specific socio-cultural context of the participant. Subsequent studies of comparable sample populations with varying amounts of exposure to English in a business setting could then be used to trace the evolution of pragmatic interlanguage. Studies focusing on more micro level language use might
provide additional evidence of an interlanguage of rhetoric. These could include investigations of the effects of using imperative verb forms, formulaic expressions of politeness, or first person singular pronouns in place of the collective we.

As a first step, this study establishes a baseline of pragmatic and rhetorical choices relied on by a group of Chinese students with no previous exposure to American standards of business communication. It relates these choices to six socio-cultural norms that were identified by the participants as critical to successful communication with a Chinese audience.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Westerners who live and work in the People's Republic of China (PRC) quickly realize that they must adapt to different and often conflicting socio-cultural norms if they are to make the most of their experience. Although substantial deviation is accepted in foreigners' behavior, visitors soon discover that some norms must be honored. This study identified these critical norms and how they were manifested in second language communication and explored the significance of the resulting language strategies to a group of Chinese participants.

The study was an in depth examination of pragmatic and rhetorical strategies employed by Chinese EFL speakers for accomplishing specific goals in written business texts. Descriptive data were gathered through text analysis of three business letters written or revised by the participants in response to situational tasks. Both situational contexts and reader-writer relationships are defined in the elicitation tasks (see
Appendices A, B, and C). Data explaining the cultural relevance of selected strategies was obtained through a series of unstructured interviews and group discussions. Resulting data were compared with the literature on both Chinese and American negotiating and business communications behavior to identify common and divergent practices.

In depth analysis of the participants' responses was confined to a particular variety of business text, the bad news text. This particular type of text was selected because it represented a situation where the engendering of goodwill was difficult and yet necessary to maintain a relationship. Participants evaluated authentic American letters of rejection and produced their own letters in response to business related elicitation tasks (see Appendices A, B, C). Text analyses of these letters identified common strategies and language use patterns. Participants' explanations were sought for both agreed upon strategies and divergent ideas. The data collection process was structured to the extent that situation based tasks were provided. Interviews took the format of an
individualized process writing conference and occurred weekly as an integral part of a writing class. Interviews were based on students' texts and were used to clarify participants' identification and evaluation of text goals and strategies. Collaborative researcher-participant text analysis allowed identification of not only the general preferences of the Chinese participants, but specific support for their preferences. Initial text analysis was done by the participants in memos focusing on identifying and offering cultural support for their selected strategies. They stated what they hoped their text would accomplish (i.e. specific actions to be taken by the reader) and what language devices and strategies they had used to promote their goals. Researcher-participant interviews, class discussions, and member checks served to clarify and expand the memos.

The unit of analysis was a complete text (i.e. business letter) although participants focused on specific aspects of a text in evaluating its effectiveness. The interrelation of macro features such as organization of content, tone and socio-
cultural appropriateness, and more micro aspects such as use of specific strategies, and formulaic speech surfaced frequently in group discussion and interviews.

The methodological approach was based on the assumption that members of a culture tend to be blind to the assumptions underlying their thoughts and actions (Green, 1983). Cultural norms or assumptions were identified by means of a brainstorming task as well as through numerous group and individual discussions. While samples and settings may resemble those in quantitative research, the relationship between researcher and participants was somewhat different. The effort to uncover meaning was a cooperative process: the researcher questioning, the participants explaining and clarifying, sometimes mystified at being asked the obvious, sometimes enlightened at the relationships they were discovering. The socio-cultural significance of selected language strategies to the participants was the driving force behind this study. A pilot study revealed that L2 pragmatic and rhetorical preferences tended to rely on L1 socio-cultural norms. The L2 literature confirms this occurrence in early interlanguage.
Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in which one business student from the PRC critiqued three pairs of business texts taken from a Chinese business communications textbook and then adapted to conform to American conventions. The primary purpose of the study was to determine whether this task would yield sufficient relevant data. In addition it was hoped that the findings would identify some potential areas for future exploration. Resulting data indicated a general preference for Chinese versions of texts although the participant reacted positively to certain aspects of the American text in some contexts. The following attributes were identified as a result of the study:

1. Document organization-establish personal relations first.
2. Convey respect or deference.
3. Use a formal register.
5. Note the status/success of your organization.
6. Avoid aggressive, persuasive narrative.
7. Avoid strongly worded refusals.
Although the pilot study yielded some interesting data the structure of the task was considered too restrictive for the scope of the current research. The following methodological assumptions were felt to indicate a more open ended approach.

Methodological Assumptions

1. Participants will rely on their perceptions of good business communication techniques when producing or evaluating texts.
2. Data patterns can emerge from elicitation tasks that are open-ended.
3. Participants with the help of an outsider can identify the socio-cultural norms underlying pragmatic choices.
4. Standards of good business communication are exemplified in illustrative texts taken from business communications textbooks and from authentic sources.
Limitations
1. Previous exposure to American business communication either in a class or in the workplace could affect participants' responses.
2. Level of language proficiency could affect comprehension and thus influence responses.

Sample
The sample was composed of 32 Chinese third year university students in the People’s Republic of China. The students were business administration majors who had no previous contact with standards of American Business Communication. Participants demonstrated a sufficient level of English language proficiency by having passed both the level four and level six national examination of English proficiency. These comprehensive examinations are administered to first and third year university students to demonstrate levels of English language competency. They measure listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing proficiency ((Zhen, 1993). Passing scores are expected for employment in joint ventures and as final preparation for taking the national English Language
Placement test (ELP) for study abroad. Although no published correlations were available between the ELP and the Test of English Language Proficiency (TOEFL), a highly experienced Chinese professor of English noted that students passing the ELP can generally score between 550 and 600 on the TOEFL.

This language proficiency prerequisite was to insure that basic language comprehension did not interfere with the participants' ability to perform the tasks. Participants were enrolled in a business communication class which assured their availability for long term participation. Data gathering was conducted over a five month period.

Because cross-cultural research seeks to identify those cultural universalities and divergences that impact on behavior (Nasif, Al-Daeaj, Ebrahimi, and Thibodeaux, 1991) research sites and subjects had to be appropriate to the focus of the study. This was essential if context specific recommendations for culturally appropriate use of language were to be made. Thus participants were limited to individuals who were or would be members of the business community. The participants had never been outside of the PRC and had
no previous contact with business writing conventions or strategies.

The following description of the participants includes data on L2 proficiency, age, education, work experience, and previous experience with English. The 32 participants had all studied English as a foreign language for a minimum of 8 years and had passed both the level four national examination of English language proficiency given to university sophomores and the level six examination given to university juniors or seniors. Every participant had studied oral English with a native speaker for one year. Additional exposure to English language and culture was achieved through the following experiences: occasional limited contact with foreigners; listening to English language radio, television, and films; corresponding with pen pals; and sporadic attendance at "English Corners" (informal gatherings of English language students for the express purpose of communicating in English). Despite the fact that students reported only limited opportunity to interact with native speakers their national test scores and in class performance reflected a high level of
proficiency. Students were able to respond to assignments appropriately, to answer questions related to class discussions, and to respond to lectures with appropriate questions. Business communication classes were conducted entirely in English.

Cantonese was reported as the first language (L1) of 15 students with Mandarin as the second language (L2) and English as their third. Mandarin was listed as the first language of 17 students. The Chinese professors of the first and second year English classes noted that this difference in L1 only had a slight effect in the area of pronunciation and that significant differences in proficiency were more likely a consequence of a student's high school language program.

The participants, 17 men and 15 women, ranged in age from 19 to 20 and were all in their third year of university. Attendance at this particular university required exceptionally high ranking on the national college entrance examination, assuring that participants were academically able as well as motivated. Students' work experience was limited to part time entry level employment such as: restaurant
service, private tutor, factory work, door to door sales. They reported to have had no opportunity to learn or use English in these positions, and to have had no previous exposure to foreign business communications.

As a group these students aspired to work for joint ventures. Salaries and opportunities in these companies were viewed as professionally and financially superior to the government run Chinese companies. Students were well aware that future employment success might hinge on English language proficiency as most joint venture or foreign owned companies required demonstration of English language proficiency as a prerequisite to being hired. The students also had a high level of national identity and pride and viewed the opportunity of sharing Chinese socio-cultural norms very positively.

Gaining Access to the Setting

The setting was a university in the People’s Republic of China, located in the business center of the country. Many students selected this particular university not only because of its high reputation but
also because of the access it gave them to the business community. With residence established in this city and with a degree from this university students were likely to be the business leaders of tomorrow.

The particular methodology used required a prolonged involvement with the participants, allowing for frequent and varied data gathering sessions and repeated member checks to verify interpretation of data. Operating as an insider, as the participants' teacher, was an optimal way to accomplish this. Gaining access to the research site was not a problem. The political/economic climate of the early 1990's made foreign experts particularly welcome and with the move to a free market economy, students were eager to learn about business related subjects. The research topic was apolitical and did not have the potential to portray either individuals or groups in a controversial or negative way. Business students generally welcomed the opportunity to improve their English skills. Access was gained by working through the dean of the business college of the Chinese University. He was thoroughly briefed on the intended research and was very supportive.
Research Design

The research design for this study combined three methods of data gathering: participant evaluations of authentic American business texts; production tasks taken from business case studies and business communications text books; and extensive on site interviewing.

Comparison of data from the four data elicitation tasks served as a means of validating and cross-checking findings (Patton, 1990). Each of these data gathering contexts examined the same phenomenon, individual L2 language use preferences in a comparable situation, basically, in the communication of bad news.

Because English is the language most frequently relied on for cross-cultural business communication, the primary goal was to identify pragmatic strategies employed in English language business texts that were most likely to be favorably received by a Chinese audience.

The research design was two pronged. Student evaluations of authentic American business texts and analyses of participant produced texts were used initially to identify patterns of language use and
choice of strategies designed to accomplish a common goal. A description of common communication practices emerged from this data. Additional data, collected in informal interviews, member checks, and classroom discussion of writing assignments, was used to relate these practices to their socio-cultural underpinnings. This approach was based on the assumption that only a joint effort between an insider and an outsider can accurately reveal the underlying assumptions that govern participants' preferences (Schein, 1984). Because the rules and meaning systems that are used to explain behavior must be understood in their respective cultural context (Rosen, 1991), the goal of the research was to present, as closely as possible, the perspective of the participants. The process was emergent, allowing both categories and hypotheses to be modified as new evidence was uncovered.

Data Elicitation Tasks and Materials

Letter Evaluation Task

This task had three components. First, participants were presented with a series of English
language business texts (see Appendix A for sample texts and elicitation task) and were instructed to evaluate their effectiveness for the Chinese audience in terms of the use of strategies and rhetorical devices and their appropriateness to the accomplishment of stated goals. In response to each letter they drafted a memo stating the goals of the writer, whether they believed the letter accomplished these goals, and a critique of the writer's specific techniques for achieving intended results. Second, they rewrote the letter using language and strategies that they felt would be appropriate for the Chinese audience. This task elicited a range of responses from a complete redrafting of the text with required justification for changes made to only minor changes with support offered for existing strategies.

Finally, individual conferences and class discussions focused on explaining the meaning and motivation underlying language use preferences. Participant explanation is often sought via a semantic differential survey or structured interview questions in an attempt to circumvent the tradeoff "between the goals of richness and completeness and a competing one,
that of statistical significance" (Graham and Andrews, 1987, p. 75). Because the pilot study revealed that a semantic differential survey tended to constrain responses, a different research design was employed. It was felt that richer data could be obtained from a more open ended approach, and that a wider range of generic behaviors could be generated from a series of individual responses. This was confirmed by Schein (1985) who contends that formal questionnaires fail to reveal the underlying, taken for granted assumptions that surface in insider-outsider dialogue.

Each evaluation task included an interview and a group discussion to probe participants’ suggestions and to discuss why they thought particular language use and strategies succeeded or failed. The focus was on the text as a means of accomplishing specific goals and on strategies that were most likely to succeed in promoting positive relations with a Chinese audience.

**Individual Text Production Task**

In the second task the participants wrote a letter communicating bad news to a business associate (see Appendix C for task and samples). It was anticipated
that when participants were required to pursue a common set of goals in common situational contexts defined by the data elicitation tasks resulting data would reveal some of the characteristics common to a discourse community. These characteristics included: a broadly agreed upon set of common public goals; mechanisms for intercommunication among group members; common lexis and genre; and a threshold level of discoursal expertise required for group membership (Swales, 1990). At this stage of their professional lives, the participants' discourse community did not yet include a knowledge of the genre of international business English although, as business students, they were aware of the goals of business transactions. Thus the pragmatic and rhetorical strategies they identified would be relatively unaffected by L2 norms.

Situation based exercises taken from business and business communication instructional materials served as production tasks. In each task the participant had to produce a letter communicating bad news to a business associate. Participants read the situation based task, interpreted its meaning independently and drafted a written response in the form of a business
letter. In addition they drafted a memo (see Appendix C for sample responses) to explain what the goals of their letter were, to identify and explain their strategies for accomplishing these goals, and to explain why these strategies would be successful for the Chinese audience.

Exercises taken from Munsell and Clough (1984, pp. 8-13) were used in training sessions designed to orient students to the task of selecting a text's purpose and identifying strategies employed by the text's writer to accomplish these goals.

Individual conferences focused on explaining why specific strategies and language choices were considered to be effective or ineffective and on what socio-cultural norms these choices satisfied.

Data were analyzed by repetitive reviewing of student texts noting recurring characteristics. These characteristics were then coded, categorized and ranked according to frequency of use. Percent of participants focusing on a given strategy was computed. Those strategies referred to by at least 10% of the participants were considered salient and served as the primary areas for more in depth investigation.
Interrelationships of characteristics (i.e., use of complimentary language and attempts to build relations) were noted and explored. Students' memos, group discussions, and interviews, as well as member checks provided explanation and clarification of salient strategies and language use patterns. This process was applied to the letter evaluation, individual, and collaborative writing tasks and to the explanatory memos accompanying the production tasks.

**Group Writing Task**

This task, an in class writing assignment, was performed in groups of three to four students working cooperatively to produce a single text. Tasks were drawn from the same pool as those for the individual production exercise (see Appendix B for task assignment).

Students were directed to: brainstorm, sort, and evaluate ideas; state the purpose of their text; outline strategies to accomplish the stated purpose; write a draft; revise and edit; and produce a final document. As with the production task, participants were required to draft a memo discussing their goals.
and the strategies employed to achieve them. They were further required to provide written documentation of each step in the process. Conferences with each group, as well as class discussions served to identify and clarify the strategies and to explore their socio-cultural underpinnings.

Identification of Salient Group Norms

Students were oriented to the importance of audience in the selection of appropriate strategies. They were then asked to brainstorm about characteristics of the Chinese culture that might impact on the effectiveness of a text. They performed this task individually in class, then in small groups, and finally as an entire class, compiling an extensive written list. Each characteristic was clarified in group discussion and contradictory features were explained. Further clarification was sought in individual interviews and in informal discussions. The values and characteristics that emerged from this exercise served as a basis for evaluating the appropriateness of various pragmatic and rhetorical strategies for the Chinese audience.
Analysis of Data

A major goal of this study was to gain an insiders view of writing strategies deemed appropriate for the Chinese audience. A second goal was to explore the cultural relevance of selected strategies and to identify them as culture specific or common to American and Chinese cultures.

This study used the following process to gather and analyze relevant data:

* Participants' evaluation of authentic American business texts and production of texts appropriate for the Chinese audience
* identification, coding, and categorization of salient features of texts and characteristics identified in participant memos
* participants' explanation of the texts and memos in a cultural context
* coding and categorization of participant responses to identify their perceptions of goals and audience appropriate strategies.
* identification of salient group assumptions expressed by participants in class brainstorming sessions and in individual interviews.
* explanation of participant responses in light of these assumptions: relating participants’ text, memo, and interview data to data on Chinese cultural characteristics.
* identification of repetitive themes in the data
* formation of generalizations
* exploration of divergent characteristics
* frequent member checks to determine validity of data interpretations

A combination of analysis of participants’ texts, an ongoing process of participant interviews, and repeated member checks over a prolonged period of time yielded an immense quantity of data. A simple quantitative analysis of the data identified those strategies considered salient by at least 10% of the participants. This analysis provided an overview of participants’ responses from which data six strategies were selected for in depth qualitative analysis. These six strategies were chosen not only because participants indicated their importance in all three data elicitation tasks but also because they encompassed many of the less frequently employed strategies. Data elicitation devices and samples of
participants' responses are included in Appendices A-C. Participants' choice of specific strategies considered appropriate for the Chinese audience are included in the data analysis chapter.

This study emphasized the placement of pragmatic and rhetorical strategies employed in L2 within the cultural context of the user as a necessary condition for exploring the subjectivity of meaning. The research design therefore focused on uncovering the perceptions of the participants through extended researcher-participant collaborative exploration. The methodological approach was qualitative. It was based on the characteristics of qualitative research offered by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). These include: inductive data analysis, a focus on participant perspectives, concern with process in addition to product, the role of the researcher as key informant, and reliance on rich descriptive data rather than statistics (p. 27-30). The theory underlying the relationship between language and culture supported this approach.

Schein's (1985) specific methodology designed to uncover the underlying assumptions of an organizational culture served as a conceptual model for this study’s
methodology. The methodology is based on several assumptions: "only a joint effort between an insider and an outsider can decipher the essential assumptions and their patterns of relationship" (p.112); reliance on insiders' insights avoids the problems created by researcher bias; the role of the outsider serves to force an awareness of assumptions that may be so taken for granted that the insider is no longer conscious of them. Hypotheses were subjected to ongoing revision as warranted by insider evaluation, the collection of additional data and the reorganization of existing data.

Studies in cognitive anthropology assume that observable surface behavior is driven by a relatively clean set of underlying rules, and that cultures are composed of knowledge systems or networks of subjective meanings which members ascribe to in varying degrees (Nobuyuki, 1991). To minimize problems of researcher bias in interpreting these meanings, the participants' views were quoted extensively through what Geertz (1973) terms "thick description" and participant verification of data was an essential part of the research process. This approach, which focused on the
views of the participants as conscious, goal oriented, and rooted in a cultural context, was relied on to minimize the effects of researcher bias.

Based on information contained in students' memos and interviews, texts were examined for characteristics that were identified by the participants as sociolinguistically relevant to community members. Specific strategies were considered salient when they were used by at least 10% of the subjects (Blum-Kulka, 1982). Because no single characteristic, but rather the recurrence of a constellation or "gestalt" of these characteristics in each member of the community, serves to define a group's distinctive language system (Swales, 1990) this seemed a reasonable figure. The exploration of deviant strategies proved valuable for gaining deeper insights into salient strategies.

Data was analyzed inductively. This study avoided predetermined categories for viewing and describing behavior. Rather, common themes and patterns were identified and revised as they emerged from participants' input. Consistency of findings generated across separate and distinct data gathering tasks was used to validate and cross-check findings (Patton
The data collected were used to develop generalizations based on cultural attributes identified and confirmed by research and by the participants. These generalizations were then interpreted in the light of the body of literature on Chinese and American business writing conventions to determine which strategies were perceived similarly across cultures and which divergently. The focus was multiple: Participant perceptions of behavior, context, motive and reason were explored in an attempt to identify the insiders view (Popkewitz, 1984).

Quotes offered as examples of a particular strategy emanated from the participants. These were either directly indicated by participants in their memos or were discussed during the interview sessions. Confirmation of assumptions and examples was gained through member checks of participants and two key informants, a professor at the university and a Chinese businessman who has resided in the United States for four years. Although in depth studies focusing on improving cross-cultural communication are rare, one early attempt is worth reviewing.
Merchant (1980), exploring a broad range of communicative behavior, successfully used a systematic, descriptive research methodology in a wide range of contexts. In Merchant's study, data were gathered from: the interpersonal behavior of the researcher's university students; interactions among faculty members; a live-in housekeeper; daily personal interaction in the local economy; interview and discussion with Korean and American acquaintances. Frequently repeated behaviors in specific contexts were defined as patterns. The object of Merchant's research was to uncover characteristics of Korean communication behavior and to identify the variables that were most likely to impact on cross-cultural communication with Americans. These variables were identified in the context of communication embedded in culture as it was observed and described by the researcher. One shortcoming of Merchant's research design is that he failed to consult with the participants to get affirmation or denial of his inferences or even to have the insiders evaluate his observations. Because the goal of the current study is to interpret the meaning of language from the participants point of view, the
study relies heavily on the perceptions of the participants to help make sense of the data.

Issues of Analysis

Interpretative analysis does not lend itself to the same assessment criteria as statistical analysis. Questions focusing on validity, generalizability, replicability, and variance are redefined (Rosen 1991). Validity is measured by how convincing the illustrative descriptive data is and by how plausible an explanation is offered to account for the data. This study collected data using various forms of observation, interviewing, and document analysis. Data analysis was a cooperative participant-researcher endeavor. Several months were spent in the field evaluating and re-evaluating data patterns and resulting hypotheses.

Interpretive studies of cross-cultural communication pose particular issues: Should meaning be defined in the context of the sender’s or the receiver’s culture? What is the role of the researcher’s culture in the interpretive process? Because there is no absolute meaning to text, interpretation can only be built up subjectively
(Hannabuss, 1989). Receiver interpretation may differ from that of the researcher or the sender. The research focus in this study clearly indicated the participants' perspective as relevant. Participants were cast in the role of receivers of texts, in the text evaluation task, and as senders of texts in the production tasks. Although perceived meaning remained the same across tasks, evaluations of the appropriateness of a particular strategy varied according to context. This occurrence led to a deeper exploration of the meaning of a strategy.

Summary

A combination of text analysis, unstructured interviews, class and informal discussion, and member checks, over a prolonged period yielded an immense amount of data. This data was quantitatively analyzed and frequently occurring patterns were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis. A collaborative effort by the researcher and participants related these pragmatic and rhetorical patterns to underlying Chinese socio-cultural norms.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter begins with a presentation of the major strategies and relevant cultural norms that emerged from the text analysis and discussion sessions. To provide a comprehensible overview, this information is presented in table form. Six critical socio-cultural norms are selected for in depth analysis.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a qualitative analysis of the six critical socio-cultural norms and the way they are manifested in participants' use of English. Supporting data is derived from both written texts and participant interviews. The selection of these particular six norms was the result of quantitative analysis of the norms identification exercise with clarification gained from related classroom discussions, participant interviews, and from the literature on Chinese culture. Similarly, text analysis yielded the data for the strategy related categories. Again, the participants' comments offered
confirmation and clarification of data organization patterns. Quotes from the participants' written texts serve as illustrations of how the six critical norms were manifested in strategic choices. Data relating strategy and language use choices to the critical norms emerged from extensive group discussion and interviews focusing on this relationship.

Data from the three data elicitation tasks indicated a high level of agreement on what constitutes culturally appropriate strategies for the Chinese audience; however, the comparative popularity of a particular strategy as well as how it was employed, varied with the context it appeared in. The socio-cultural explanation for this variation became clear in the discussion/interview portion of the research process. Also, particular strategies were often cross-referenced by participants. For example, politeness strategies were seen as serving both to build face and to promote positive relations. A discussion of the relationship between these socio-cultural norms and salient language use patterns is the focus of the qualitative analysis section.
Quantitative Analysis: Presentation of Data

In this section data from all four tasks are presented in table form and are ranked both by percent of participants indicating a particular preference and by frequency of selection. Critical socio-cultural norms and primary strategies are identified and areas for more in depth exploration are indicated.

Identification of Critical Socio-Cultural Norms

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics and Norms</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*personal relations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*group centered</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard working</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*indirect</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patient</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honesty</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conservative</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*polite</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*value face</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deliberate/retrospect</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self sacrificing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helpful to others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family loyalty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obedient</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*flattering</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=characteristics evidenced in production and evaluation tasks. participants=32
Critical Socio-cultural Norms

From the mass of data, six socio-cultural norms were identified as critical. These norms were identified by the participants as motivators of specific language choices in at least 10% of the texts across all three tasks. In the production and evaluation tasks, manifestation of these norms was found to depend on perceived relative positions of power of the writer and reader, the situational and social context provided by the task, and the individual character of the writer.

The primary goals of each task were two fold: to convince the reader to do what the writer requested (to accept a particular piece of bad news) and at the same time to maintain good relations between the reader and both the writer and the writer’s organization. Various strategies were employed to accomplish these goals. Because these strategies were motivated by a set of socio-cultural norms that have particular significance in the Chinese culture, the following descriptions are offered.

Face-The loss, gain, or maintenance of prestige which is largely determined by such factors as criticism,
flattery, personal associations and publicly acknowledged accomplishments. Specific strategies suggested by participants that influence face are: direct or public criticism, shame or guilt producing language, degree of directness, organization and tone of text, placing blame on individual, praise or flattery, honorific language, overt politeness, affirming individual's ability, and leaving hope of success.

**Personal Relations**—relationships between individuals which are manifested in trust and the creation of strong emotional ties and which imply a sense of mutual obligation and interdependence which may far exceed those common in western relations. Text references to previous successful cooperation and possible future opportunities, expressions of apology, hope, and mutual benefits, and direct reference to the value of the relationship, past, present, and future, are designed to promote these relations.

**Group Centeredness**—strategies which reflect a group oriented culture include use of collective "we" in place of "I", overt appeals to group loyalty, power references, and the use of public criticism.
Individual face is embedded in the context of the group.

Indirectness—language use demonstrating an absence of categorical statements, avoidance of direct confrontation or blame placing, and the frequent use of tentative qualifiers. This is a means to maintain face and preserve personal relations.

Politeness Strategies—strategies designed to express a friendly respectful tone which in turn builds face and fosters good relations. These include formulaic phrases, face saving, indirectness, praise or flattery, avoidance of personal blame or criticism, and the use of honorific titles to superiors.

Text Organization—the order in which information is presented to the reader to maximize face saving and the creation or maintenance of good personal relations. In the case of bad news texts this generally involves some praise of the reader and/or explanation of the writer's situation before presenting the bad news.
Authentic Text Evaluation: Rejection Letter to a Job Applicant

The authentic text critique asked participants to write a memo evaluating the strategies of an authentic business text conveying bad news (see Appendix A for data elicitation task and sample text). The text, a rejection letter to a job applicant from a major American company whose presence in the Chinese market was well known to students, cast participants as the receivers of the bad news (the rejection). They were instructed to identify letter’s goals and strategies and to evaluate their appropriateness for the Chinese audience. The participants identified the following goals: inform the reader that you can’t offer him a job, and create or maintain the reader’s good feeling towards you and your company. They identified both successful and unsuccessful strategies and supported their evaluations with relevant Chinese socio-cultural norms. Finally they offered their own strategies for accomplishing the letter’s goals and supported these by relating them to their underlying socio-cultural norms. Table 2 presents strategies supported by 10% or more of the participants.
Table 2

Authentic Text Evaluation Task: Participant’s Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reject indirectly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>save reader’s face</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use polite friendly tone</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organize text suitably</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offer excuse for rejection</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praise</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave hope of success</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blame situation not applicant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintain company image</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintain good relations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show regret</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affirm receivers ability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total participants=32

Participants expressed the view that adherence to certain socio-cultural norms was sufficiently prevalent in Chinese society that a given number of stock strategies were likely to prove effective. Due to a lack of experience in the real world of business they did not focus on developing strategies to satisfy a specific reader. Rather, they assumed a generic view of the Chinese audience, a view that is often essential in the early stages of a relationship. Their texts demonstrated the strong value placed on establishing or maintaining an appropriate reader-writer relationship. The emphasis here is on appropriate. Stevenson’s
(1990) analysis of Japanese writing best describes this orientation as "to the space between the reader and the writer" (p. 237). Participants offered specific cultural support the strategies they relied on. These will be discussed, at length, in the qualitative analysis portion of this chapter.

**Group Writing Task: Conveying Bad News to Employees**

The work memo writing task was an in-class writing assignment where groups of three or four students were required to write a memo from the viewpoint of managers faced with the situation described in the elicitation task, informing workers that an improvement in work habits was necessary (see Appendix B for data elicitation task and sample texts). At the time of this writing students had worked together for several weeks in company groups and each group had developed a corporate culture which evidenced itself in group texts. Despite these distinct corporate cultures the texts contained numerous common strategies and also some notable omissions (i.e., the need for polite tone). On the surface, the strategies offered by participants seemed at odds with those strategies
suggested as successful in the letter evaluation task. These apparent inconsistencies were partially explained by the specific situational context, particularly regarding power relations within the group, offered by each task. The participants' rationale for these strategies, discussed extensively in the qualitative section of this study, indicate Chinese culture and the position of workers in the current economy as relevant factors. The reader was in a face-losing situation.

Strategies related to face are recorded under the categories of "criticize directly", "use shame and public criticism", "threaten punishment", and "use command form".
Table 3

Group Writing Task: Participant's Choice of Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>organize text suitably</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appeal to group loyalty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticize directly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threaten punishment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promise reward</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use collective &quot;we &quot;</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintain good relations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use shame/public criticism</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticize indirectly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use command form</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refer to position</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use polite tone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

total number of groups=10

Individual Production Task: Conveying Bad News to a Customer

The final production task required students to present a negative reply to a customer requesting a price reduction for one of their company's products. In addition to the parameters set by the task itself, participants were told that they could not meet the customer's price request. In this task participants viewed their readers as equals and were aware of the personal benefits (building relations, making a sale) resulting from successful deployment of strategies.
Table 4

**Individual Writing Task: Participant’s Choice of Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acknowledge problem</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organize text suitably</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain position</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use a polite tone</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refuse indirectly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintain good relations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refuse directly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express hope</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indicate mutual benefits</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologize</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offer excuses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counter offer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total participants=32

In this task students demonstrated broad consensus on those strategies likely to yield maximum success in accomplishing the dual goals of maintaining good relations and encouraging sales. The category labeled "explain position" included a number of typical sales related strategies: product quality and service, reputation of the company, and high costs of production. Text organization reflected the desire to maintain good will. Participants generally began with a polite acknowledgement and recollection of previous positive cooperation between the two companies, followed by some explanation of their company’s
dilemma, and finally by the refusal (see Appendix C for
data elicitation task and sample texts). No text
opened with a direct refusal. This is quite consistent
with American business communications strategies that
advocate buffering or burying negative information in
the middle of the message (Jenkins and Hinds, 1987;
Locker, 1989). Some closed with an invitation to
continue doing business and almost all maintained an
unyielding position regarding the price reduction: only
three participants made any attempt at a counter-offer.

Although praise was considered a valuable
technique for maintaining good relations, only one
participant offered praise to the text receiver. Face
building did not appear to be an important strategy in
this context either. When participants were
responsible for sending bad news texts to those in a
less powerful position they relied on shaming, public
criticism, and direct accusation resulting in
receivers' losing face. Interestingly, strategies
related to face building were considered very valuable
when the participants were in the less powerful
position but were the receivers of the bad news. The
golden rule was clearly not a motivating principle here
however, participant interviews and member checks offered satisfactory explanations for this seeming inconsistency. Insights gained in this part of the research contributed greatly to understanding the function of strategies in relation to Chinese culture.

Qualitative Analysis:

Presentation and Discussion of the Data

The primary goal of the qualitative analysis was to gain the participants' view of how the selected pragmatic and rhetorical strategies related to the agreed upon critical socio-cultural norms. The purpose of this line of research was to enable a wide range of L2 English speakers to gain an understanding of the norms underlying specific strategies resulting in more effective communication with the Chinese audience.

In the interview and discussion portion of this research, participants offered numerous comments and illustrative examples to support their selection of successful strategies and to defend their rejection of those they considered inappropriate. They related their preferences to relevant aspects of Chinese culture. From these extended discussions, a pattern of
relationships between specific pragmatic and rhetorical strategies and socio-cultural norms emerged. These were revised or confirmed via repeated member checks, in discussions with key informants, and through related literature.

The six critical socio-cultural norms (face, relations, group centeredness, indirectness, politeness, flattery) were sufficient to explain the primary strategies identified by the participants. Participants considered use of selected strategies essential to gaining the reader's favorable reaction both to the writer and the goals of the text.

Strategies motivated by face and relations building dominated. The value of the group was explicitly referred to in both production tasks. This direct reference was considered a potent weapon in achieving conformity to group standards and was also used to lend support to the statements of an individual.

The three remaining norms (use of indirect language, politeness, and suitable text organization) defined appropriate rhetorical strategies. These norms assumed the pragmatic role of promoting face, relations
building, and fostering group affiliation. This role was apparent in both the text evaluation and in the text production tasks. The participants related the rhetorical strategies to the socio-cultural demands they were designed to satisfy. In the qualitative analysis, participants' interpretations of the significance of these rhetorical strategies and examples of their use in participants' texts provide the basis for relating Chinese business communication practices to their cultural roots.

The remainder of this chapter presents the data in each of the six critical norm categories, first by individual task and then across tasks. Generalizations, interrelations, and implications are discussed and assimilated into the existing research base.

In the following chapter, a simple model is developed demonstrating possible barriers to communication between Chinese and American interlocutors.
According to the participants, face-related strategies were the most significant variable influencing the success of a text, particularly in the creation of appropriate relations between the writer and the writer’s organization, and the receiver. Strategies of politeness, indirectness, and text organization were relied on to both increase and diminish reader face.

The literature on American business communication emphasizes the importance of audience analysis, of anticipating the response of the reader and of adopting a tone that will be maximally effective in attaining the writer’s goals (Tebeaux, 1990). The participants demonstrated a practical awareness of this in both their evaluation and production of texts. Context and the power relationship of writer to reader were the main determinants of how and to what desired ends these strategies were employed. Although face was mentioned as a significant strategy by only 25% of the participants, other strategies such as flattery and politeness were so often related to it that they, in effect, appeared to be manifestations of face.

Strategies of Face
Text Evaluation Task

In the text evaluation task, students were asked to assume the role of a Chinese job applicant and to discuss the appropriateness of an authentic job rejection letter from a large American company. They were asked to make any changes they felt would make the letter more successful for a Chinese audience. They worked with the following text:

Dear xxx;

Thank you for your recent resume expressing interest in a position with xxxx. I have discussed your background and experience with other interested individuals in our office. In light of our needs at this time, we regret that we will not have a position for you.

This year xxxx will interview approximately 20,000 candidates and hire approximately 2,000 from leading universities. As you can see, the competition is extremely keen and there are a large number of strong candidates, such as yourself, to whom we cannot offer positions.

I suggest that you continue to aggressively pursue your business career; hard work combined with your educational background will enable you to achieve your goals.

I wish you success in your endeavors.

Very truly yours,

The student assumed the role of the rejected applicant, a role of some personal significance to a group of students about to enter the job market. In the
unenviable position of receivers of bad news, every participant indicated the importance of face building for establishing friendly relations and maintaining a positive external image of the writer’s company. In fact, emphasis on the positive effects of face building was far stronger in the evaluation task than in either of the production tasks. This is consistent with Graham’s (1984) finding that Chinese managers identify gaining the respect and confidence of others as a critical characteristic in business relations. Further confirmation of the importance of face is offered by Harris and Moran (1991): Clearly, successful cross-cultural negotiations with the Chinese demand careful avoidance of the appearance of condescension which may be threatening to an individual’s dignity. Because direct rejection was perceived to undermine confidence and self esteem, it was viewed as detrimental to maintaining face and therefore to building relations.

To communicate bad news in a tactful manner, American business texts generally avoid the use of flattery, accusatory language, a legalistic tone, and negative language. While in theory participants generally agreed with these guidelines, in certain
contexts violation of any, indeed all of them, was considered appropriate. The maintenance of reader face was a higher priority. In contrast to the American precept that "flattery can be as ineffective as rudeness" (Tebeaux, 1990, p.127), the use of flattery was defined as a successful and acceptable way to give face to the reader and thus to build positive relations.

The importance of face when relating to the Chinese was repeatedly stressed by the participants in their evaluation of the letter of rejection. To most participants the letter did not provide sufficient face saving language. As illustrated below, their comments indicated that the historical importance of this norm is not diminishing among members of the upcoming generation and that there are a variety of ways of satisfying it.

"Chinese have strong self dignity. Try to express respect for the applicant. Let him feel he still has a chance to get the job."

"The cause of the refusal is only due to the limited number of positions, not the applicant’s qualifications. Don’t hurt the dignity of the job seeker. For a Chinese this will be much better than to tell him the real reason."
"It is very difficult for a Chinese to accept failure. That will make them feel they lose face. So I tell him I keep his resume and he still has a chance to get a job in our company. That means he didn’t completely fail. Also he has something to explain to others."

The strong linkage between face saving and the creation of positive relations also surfaced in the interviews.

"Confirm that the candidate has ability and value. This will let the candidate be full of self respect and the candidate will have a good impression of the company although the company doesn’t hire him."

"A goal is to preserve the applicant’s dignity. Refusing him in an indirect way could help keep his face. This can build and confirm goodwill."

"If the job seeker thinks he does not get the job because his qualifications are too low it will hurt his self respect. That will give him a bad impression of the company."

Participants interpreted these face-saving strategies very realistically.

"When they say they’ll keep my resume I know that’s nothing but still--I still have hope."

"Readers understand that it [indirect rejection] means no job but it gives them confidence to look for another one."

The relationship of text organization to face saving was considered quite important. Participants felt that face saving strategies needed to precede the
bad news both to build readers' face and to create good relations between writer and reader. This confirms the American suggestion to buffer or bury bad news (Locker, 1990).

"As soon as I read no position I'll curse and throw it (the letter) away."

"In China people always tell the bad news at last and indirectly. If a Chinese job seeker reads we regret that we will not have a position for you he will be very sad and won't read the other paragraphs."

"Inform the receiver of the refusal last. Most Eastern people are modest and mild, easily affected by bad news."

"Chinese are usually more round about. If we tell the reasons and then tell the result to them they will feel more comfortable. They aren't used to knowing the bad news suddenly and directly."

"At the beginning of the letter the writer does not mention the refusal at all. This may make the job seeker feel respected."

"Stressing the job seeker's qualifications before the refusal gives the job seeker time to accept the fact. Chinese pay more attention to feeling than to reason so reaching a conclusion step by step, using kind words, helps the job seeker feel more at ease accepting the refusal."

**Group Production Task: Memo to Workers**

The acknowledged value of face building was much more apparent when participants were in the role of receivers than in either production task. In the group
memo, participants, assuming the relatively more powerful role of managers, used this double edged sword to shame and humiliate unproductive employees. While the memos used face strategies as the proverbial stick, they employed strategies related to group approval and loyalty as the carrot. Direct criticism, public condemnation, even the suggestion of self criticism were all identified as strategies designed to make the guilty party, in this case the workers, lose face. Pye (1990) affirms this strategy noting that Chinese use extreme language and an accusatory tone to put others on the defensive. This great disparity in the use of direct criticism was explained in participant member checks. Participants explained that when factors of power and influence are felt to be equal, behavior is different than when they are perceived as unequal. Degrees of directness will vary with situation and power relations: The following participant comment demonstrates the greater degree of indirectness accorded to equals, superiors, and those outside the group.

"The one with power is never afraid to say what he thinks in the work place. The workers can do nothing. Socially the managers will act differently."
Additional references to the competitive use of power in a business context were offered. While participants praised Chinese for being intelligent and hard working, they pointed out the problems resulting from power relations; "one Chinese can solve any problem but two Chinese will compete too strongly for power. We say one Chinese is a dragon, two Chinese are a worm." The memo was perceived as a context for a manager to confirm his power.

In the work memo task, readers were seen as "not fulfilling their duty", as the proverbial bad guys. Use of a potent weapon, direct criticism, was therefore appropriate. While strategies of politeness and indirectness were perceived in the text evaluation task to build face and relations, participants agreed that "lazy workers" should be made to "feel ashamed" and that in the memo task, strategies of politeness, text organization, and indirectness could be violated to achieve this goal. Sanctioned violations are clearly supported in the participants' memos to the workers.

"Our company disdains strongly those lazy, idle people who even exploit the benefits produced by those industrious and respectable people without feeling ashamed. They are indifferent to their work, lack spirit or enterprise, and don't show any enthusiasm."
"If anyone's work records are found false, he will lose that months bonus and get his name posted."

"The rules of our working time were regulated not only by management but by all the workers as well. It actually accords with the will of all of us. Shouldn't we put a high premium on it? Why not make a self criticism and think over your defects? Why don't you make more effort and relax less? Would you necessarily be inferior to the courageous and competent people?"

In addition to this direct criticism, most memos provided for punishing inefficient workers and rewarding productive ones. In this context, participants also acknowledged the dilemma of management in a socialist economy. With the movement towards a more capitalist view of companies, there appears to be some uncertainty as to the most effective strategies for improving workers' productivity. The participants viewed this as somewhat of a dilemma.

"Threat of punishment to lazy workers. If someone who works lazily will gain as much as one who is working hard the latter will feel it unfair and they won't work hard any more. But if you give the worker punishment too suddenly he will feel hurt and angry. It will also be bad for the company. So threaten before you do the punishment."

In the Chinese socialist system, workers in public enterprises have traditionally had roughly comparable and guaranteed salaries regardless of the economic viability of their company, a phenomenon known as the
"iron rice bowl". This has had some negative effects on productivity at all levels, a matter of increasing concern for those companies forced to compete in the market economy. In addition the worker has been considered the backbone of the socialist economy and as a result has often maintained great power in the corporate structure, a phenomenon which may currently be undergoing change. Management takes care to point out that when some workers choose to be unproductive, it is the whole group (i.e. the productive workers or the company as a whole) that suffers. Thus management, relying on two critical norms, indirectly, yet coercively, elicits worker support for their policies. This point will be discussed further in the section dealing with group-centric strategies.

**Individual Production Task: Letter to Customer**

In this task participants assumed the role of marketing managers faced with the task of refusing a requested price to an old customer. Due to the nature of the task, they relied much more heavily on strategies directly stressing the benefits of maintaining relations, nostalgic recall of a mutually
beneficial and agreeable relationship with the reader
and discussion of current and future mutual benefits,
than on face building strategies.

However, stressing loyalty and devotion to the
customer, and flattery were used frequently and were
identified as face building strategies. Participants'
letters also were characterized by a polite, apologetic
tone, consistent with Pye's (1990) contention that
social correctness is perceived as a strategy which
assures protection of face. They felt that it was
important to show the customer that you appreciated,
even treasured them, to say directly how important they
were. Text organization was also an important means of
giving face and building goodwill. "Praise the customer
first, of course" was the prevailing sentiment. The
logic participants offered in support of this strategy
was:

"When someone looks up to you, you won't let them
down."

Participants' texts relied on politeness
strategies that made abundant use of both honorific and
formulaic devices and a polite, humble tone and that
stressed the writer's loyalty, gratitude, and devotion
to the reader. They agreed that this deferential
language was a valuable device for maintaining relations. The participants suggested the following strategies as effective builders of reader face: deferring, flattering, and maintaining a polite, modest, and apologetic tone. Their letters provide numerous illustrations.

"It's our honor to do business with you. You have a very good reputation through all airlines of the world."

"We loyally hope we can keep our friendship."

"We will be honored if you decide to continue our cooperation."

"Thank you for caring for our company. It's our pleasure to have such an old customer like you."

"We are very glad to get your letter. We are very regretful that we can't offer a lower price to you."

A few participants violated the demands of the task and made a counter offer. They felt that such face saving concessions were essential to maintain a relationship with the customer.

"I am sorry but the price is as low as we can offer but if your company buys more than $50,000 worth of health food tea you can get a 5% discount."

Participants felt that a reasonable explanation of why they had to maintain their prices would also serve
to preserve reader face. This was considered particularly effective if the writer could demonstrate that, in fact, he/she had no choice. Customers would feel that, given the circumstances, they were receiving the best possible treatment, or at least were being treated fairly. Some creative excuses were offered.

"Our company is independent but for materials, supplies, and price setting we are only a member of the civil system. You know this means we can't break our system's agreement."

"You know the price we offer you is the result of the long term partnership between us. It is the lowest price we can accept. Otherwise we would run in the red."

"I am very sorry to tell you that I can't make you a special deal because our company offers the same price to everyone."

Participants identified the reader as one equal in status to themselves and also felt that both writer and reader would benefit from a successful resolution of differences, a sort of win-win situation. In this case, there was a close relationship between face building and the creation and maintenance of mutually beneficial personal relations.

Strategies to Foster Good Relations

The role of relations in Chinese society is widely acknowledged in the related literature as well as in
participants' responses. Stress on mutual interests, an emphasis on trust and mutual connections, and expectations of long continuous relationships characterize Chinese business practices (Pye, 1990). Stewart and Keown (1989) also emphasize the importance of good personal relations in the success of Chinese-American business negotiations. In the participant brainstorming task of this study the most frequently suggested characteristics of Chinese culture were personal relations and the group centered nature of Chinese society.

Strategies of face, politeness, indirectness, even text organization were perceived as having a direct bearing on the successful functioning of personal relations and it would appear on the context specific definition of power relations within the group. Thus the different situational contexts provided by the tasks elicited quite different uses of the same strategy to establish and maintain desired relations.

Goodwill building strategies suggested by American business communications literature were quite similar to those used by the participants. Such devices as buffering or burying bad news, highlighting reader
benefits, showing concern for the reader and maintaining a polite tone (Janis and Dressner, 1972; Jenkins and Hinds, 1987; Locker, 1989) are relied on to establish or maintain the desired reader-writer relationship. In addition to these strategies, the participants made frequent direct reference to both past and future benefits of the reader-writer relationship in their text production tasks. In addition, negative consequences of failing to maintain relations were directly stated.

**Text evaluation task**

Although building and maintaining relations was named as an important norm by only 22% of the participants in the text evaluation task, the value of this norm is actually far greater when related strategies such as politeness, face saving or building, praise, providing suitable excuses, and leaving hope for eventual success are considered. In their letters, participants relied on these related strategies to build relations.

"We hope there will be a chance for us to become work mates in the future. Give hope to the job seeker...**confirm our relationship."
"Set up a good relationship between the job seeker and the company. Tell them once our business is developed your application will be the first reconsidered."

"Keep the applicant confident so that he will not feel depressed and hate you. Do this by singing high praise for him."

"If the reason for the refusal is indirect, not because of the job seeker but because of the company’s situation, the job seeker won’t feel angry at the company though he may feel disappointed."

"Chinese have this characteristic: Once they get a bad impression they will remember it for a long time so when the job seeker gets a job with another company which does business with us the feeling may influence cooperation."

A key informant reacting to this quote said, "I think that’s right. I feel that way deep down." He then proceeded to relate a story about a business associate who failed to help him some time in the distant past.

"I still remember that. I don’t like him because when I needed help he didn’t help me. Sometime in the future maybe I can help him but I won’t."

Some reference to the belief that current actions affect future opportunities was repeated in almost every text evaluation. The following quotes show that participants generally perceived relations building as a potential window of opportunity.
"I may refuse my applicant in a gentle way but I still need to establish a rapport. Chinese come up with ideas not only based on present situation but also the future. Chinese strategists attach much importance to future possibilities."

"Save for rainy days. Maybe the company will really need the job seeker some day in the future."

"Avoid unexpected risks, It’s hard to say whether this poor applicant will become a top manager of some big company one day. It would be good to let him remember that while we could not receive him we really were kind to him."

**Group Production Task: Memo to Workers**

In this task, where the writer assumed a position superior to the readers, the benefit of cultivating relations with the workers did not appear to be a strong motivator. The references to relations were indirect and focused on the responsibilities of the individual to the group. The strategy of relations was used as a reminder to individuals that they were, indeed, related to the group and that this relationship bore with it a sense of responsibility for other group members. Direct reference to the relationship of the individual to the group was used to encourage conformity to group standards of behavior, in this case the group work ethic. A key informant provided the following explanation of the effectiveness of this
strategy.

"China is a collective society. If you do something bad everybody will know so we are much more careful about what we do. The social pressure here is very strong. If you want to have a social life you have to be careful. In the U.S. you don't care. You don't even know your neighbor."

Faced with the task of criticizing workers' behavior and at the same time trying to elicit their cooperation, participants made frequent and direct mention of the individual’s obligation to the group.

"I hope that everybody realizes that our company’s profit is connected with individual’s hard work. We also know each clerk’s pay depends on our company’s profit."

"Now I have to emphasize our working relations again. Nobody may go to have coffee breaks. If someone breaks this regulation we will cut down his salary. I hope nobody will encounter this and we can have good relations forever."

"As we shall work together every day to make more profit for our company, I hope we can get on well with each other and try to do our best. Let’s work hard together to make more profits for our company and ourselves."

"I want you to work, but not just for our company. I want you to work for yourself and for the well being of society."

Participants explained that in China personal actions and values were carefully scrutinized by the group and that the individual belonged simultaneously
to many groups. A traditional way to earn group approval was to work for the good of society.

One memo took an interesting approach to the strategy of group relations as a work incentive by referring to the individual's relationship to his family.

"Your parents, your wife, and your children are expecting that you will bring them a prosperous life. If you try your best our company is sure to present all the things you need---your salary will go up faster and faster."

This same student clarified her strategy by noting that managers "build a good relationship with the worker's family" because "to the workers, what their families say is more effective." A key informant confirmed this.

"Yes, in China, a collective society, they will involve everybody to accomplish what they want. Don't just consider the individual, consider the family, people around you, society. Maybe in the U.S. you can just do what you want."

**Individual Production Task: Letter to a Customer**

In this task the mutual benefits of creating or sustaining a relationship were stated very directly. While both the group memo and the individual letters referred to relations frequently, it was clear to the participants in this second task that both reader and
writer could accrue substantial benefits from their relationship. Writers relied on this strategy very heavily, referring to it directly in 47% of their texts and indicating it indirectly in another 25%

"We have enjoyed our trade relationship for years. Both of us make good profit from our good relationship."

"We have done business for a long time and we build up a good relationship. You are our old customer and we trust each other. We believe in each other. It’s our pleasure to have such an old customer as you."

"As you know we have cooperated for 20 years. You are our sincere friend. In the past years we have exchanged our products and made great profits. Our cooperation is successful and unforgettable."

The importance of relations building in the Chinese business context cannot be exaggerated. According to Lubman, Chinese "spend a prolonged period, often months, assessing foreign interlocutors and are reluctant to consider a breakdown in the relationship (Kapp, 1983, p. 83)." This characteristic appears to be an essential ingredient of conducting business successfully. In the words of a Chinese businessman who has been living in the United States for four years: "It is the common rule for Chinese that if you have developed the relationship you need, you have already done half of your business."
Strategic Use of Group Affiliation

The group orientation of the Chinese is reflected in a sense of interdependency rather than individualism (Binnendijk, 1987) which in turn has a specific effect on communication. Chinese tend to avoid self-centered conversation including the excessive use of "I" (Harris and Moran, 1991; Hildebrandt, 1988). This manifestation is apparent in the majority of participants' texts.

Although the group centered nature of Chinese relations was indicated by 47% of the participants, it was referred to only indirectly in the evaluation task and was employed as a strategy in the individual writing task by less than half the participants, primarily in the use of the collective "we". It was, however, a primary strategy in the group memo where the power of the group was invoked by 80% of the participants as they attempted to increase worker productivity. A primary difference between the group memo and the other two tasks was the relationship between writer and reader. In the memo the writers are addressing readers within their own company: They are all members of the same group. In the other two tasks,
writer and reader do not share a common group which apparently diminishes the value of this strategy.

Text Evaluation Task

In this situational context, group related strategies played a very selective role. Because face was defined by the individual's prestige in the group, rejection that was based on individual and personal factors was particularly painful. Consequentially, certain strategies of refusal were supported by participants.

"Chinese tend to compare themselves with others. If they are told that others, even more qualified than themselves have failed to get the job they will feel better."

Also the policy of not slamming the door, that is holding out hope of eventual employment was thought to provide the applicant with "something to explain to others." Maintaining a sense of personal worth within the group was extremely important.

One more reference to the group was offered. Although the following idea was discussed by only one participant it provides a very interesting view of the group centered nature of management.
"Sentences like 'I regret not being in a position to respond more favorably' means if I were the head maybe I would give you the job. This comment gives the impression to the public that the management system doesn't work well."

The participant viewed this statement as symptomatic of division within the management team, a characteristic which is highly incompatible with the Chinese aversion to open discord within the group.

**Group Production Task**

The work memo made extensive use of group oriented strategies. Every text referred to the group at least indirectly and most made direct reference to the obligation of the individual to the group. The group unit in this task was the company, commonly referred to by participants as "our company." Although there was some use of "I" the collective "We" was predominant. Group affiliation and compliance to group norms appeared to be powerful motivating strategies and were relied on heavily to gain worker cooperation. A corporate culture that relied heavily on company pride was also evident in most texts.

"As you all know our company is one of the big names and has a long tradition. I think you must be proud of being a part of such a great company."
"I have to lay emphasis on our regulations. The rules of our working time were regulated not only by management but by all of the clerks as well. It actually accords with the will of all of us. Shouldn't we put a high premium on it?"

"A company is like a big family. Every worker is like a member of this family. The company not only belongs to the boss but also to the workers. Everyone should be efficient when he is at work."

"You are a member of our company. Your interests cannot be separated from hers."

In addition to using group identity to exert pressure on members, one team devised a scheme to use the power of the group in a competitive way.

"We'll divide the employees into groups. Each group has a manager. We'll have competitions among them to see which group is best. And every month our general manager will meet with the best group."

The memo went on to describe a scheme for orienting new employees to the group culture. The students in this group stressed the advantage of assimilating new workers into the group and having these workers realize their importance to the company.

"When new employees join our company our manager will meet them and show them around our company. Some good and skillful employees will give advice to them."
Individual Production Task

Direct references to group affiliation did not seem to play a significant strategic role in the context of intergroup relations. References to group were limited to the use of collective "we" and to "our" company. Although texts using the personal "I" and those using the collective "we" relied on many of the same strategies there was one interesting difference. Those texts using "we" presented bad news indirectly in 66% of their texts while only 25% of the texts using "I" were indirect. No firm explanation could be found for this relationship as participants themselves were not able to explain it. Both the use of the collective "we" and the use of indirectness are considered characteristic of Chinese rhetoric. It is possible that those participants with less exposure to American writing traditions adhered more closely to Chinese standards or it may be a personal reflection of the individual writer's sensitivity to the feelings of the reader.

Almost half of the texts appeared to conflict with Harris and Moran's (1991) description of Chinese negotiators as avoiding extensive use of "I" as well as
with the participants' assessment of the Chinese as indirect. It would appear that the employment of both of these strategies varies with situational context as well as with the individual writer.

**Strategic Use of Indirectness**

In this study indirectness has been discussed as it relates to strategies of face, relations building, and group membership. In this section, the discussion focuses on participants' comments regarding the use of indirectness as a strategy specifically designed to build or diminish face.

The literature on Chinese rhetoric acknowledges the importance of this strategy in a business context. Chinese communication is characterized by indirectness (Kapp, 1983). As a result negotiations with the Chinese are described as focusing on general principles before details, using stalling tactics, and requiring enormous patience (Pye, 1990). In fact, in some written texts this indirectness may leave the reader, particularly the cultural outsider, unsure of what the writer’s message is.
Although indirectness was indicated as a valuable strategy in 62% of the text evaluation responses and was used in 60% of the individual writing texts, it was employed in only 30% of the memo texts. In situations where the saving of face is a consideration, where "direct words hurt the receiver's heart, make him feel disappointed", "avoid putting the reason for failure on the reader and blame it on objective factors." In the case of the work memo, face saving was generally not perceived as a valuable strategy. To the contrary, participants' saw the basic goal of the memo as placing blame on less efficient workers and shaming them into more productive behavior without producing counter productive behavior, a situation tantamount to putting them in their place.

Although some memos were extremely and directly critical of the readers, others went to great lengths to protect workers' face and blamed company policy or management for the undesirable behavior. Participants explicitly referred to what they perceived as an American tendency towards directness both as senders and receivers of communication, a characteristic that was considered, by participants, to be highly
unsuitable for the Chinese audience.

"Chinese always refuse someone in an indirect way. Only in this way can the refusal not hurt the applicant so much. We can't tell him that he is not able, but only that there is no job suitable for him. In this way the applicant can keep his pride although he has failed and he will have a good impression of our company."

"Americans are very direct--to know the reason and result is enough. They will think, 'never mind, I'll find another position.' Chinese are indirect. First we thank the applicant and praise him, then we tell him the result and the reason."

"In the American letter the refusal is too direct. It is better to be indirect, to center on the situation and not on the qualifications. The Chinese have the habit of being indirect. They want to keep face."

In fact, the literature on American business communication does suggest buffering or burying bad news (Locker, 1990). However, Tebeaux (1990) notes that "delaying negative information too long will anger the reader, particularly if you suggest that your message will be positive. The optimal timing for breaking the bad news appears to have cultural determinants and probably individual ones as well."

Most participants felt that the letter writer did not go far enough to preserve the reader's face. They felt that although the reader might be aware of the real message it was still necessary that "the refusal
reason was indirect to make the reader think that the company always thinks of the reader’s benefit first."
They expressed great appreciation for those letters that "preserved the reader's dignity" even though the texts were perceived as misleading.

"How cunning the company is by saying 'We don't have a job that meets your career objective'. We know that they turned down the applicant because they thought he was not suitable for their company but this strategy makes the applicant feel that the company is considerate of his situation."

"Chinese have strong self-dignity. Try to express respect for the applicant. Let him feel he still has a chance to get the job. Refusing him in an indirect way can help preserve his dignity."

Closely related to indirectness were strategies of both politeness and text organization or the order in which information was presented. Effective use of these strategies enabled the writer to demonstrate respect for the reader.

Strategic Use of Politeness

Participants felt that the tone of a letter imparting bad news should be "polite and friendly" as well as "humble." They suggested several devices to achieve this tone, notably use of formulaic phrases, expressions of regret and sympathy, praise, and a text
organization designed to protect the reader’s feelings.

Comparable attributes of tact and courtesy are also recommended characteristics of American business writing. Particularly in negative messages, the writer is expected to make an effort to state the information "as positively as possible" at the same time trying to avoid "sounding insincere" (Tebeaux, 1990, p.127). At this knowing your audience is critical. Tebeaux (1990) provides the following suggestions for achieving effective tone:

1. Analyze "the reader’s frame of reference toward both you and the subject" (127).
2. Avoid language that indicates "an attitude that is not appropriate to your reader or to the relationship that you want to maintain with that reader" (127).
3. Avoid words with a negative tone.
4. Avoid writing that sounds rude or flattering.

Participants generally supported the first three points in both the evaluation and production tasks, however, there was some disagreement on the use of negative language in specific situations. While everyone agreed that rude language was unacceptable,
direct criticism was sometimes to be appropriate in some cases and flattery was generally considered an effective strategy for building face and maintaining good relations with the reader. In the words of the participants, "Chinese are always ready to offer praise", so to keep the reader confident Chinese will "sing high praise even without solid foundation."

Flattery was offered by 13% of the participants as a significant characteristic of Chinese culture. They also expressed frequent appreciation of this strategy in the text evaluation task. More than 50% of the participants suggested praising and affirming the reader's ability as a strategy likely to succeed. Even in the memo criticizing the workers, 20% indicated that praise was a valuable strategy. Language perceived as flattery in the context of an American audience was not similarly perceived by the participants.

The following quotes, examples of flattering language that was likely to be perceived as insincere (Tebeaux, 1990) were judged to be appropriate and polite by the participants.

"It is indeed my greatest pleasure to accept your offer to serve as local chairman of Youth Against Drugs."
"Our organization eagerly anticipates the great privilege and opportunity to offer your outstanding firm a proposal to redecorate the reception areas of your corporate headquarters." (Tebeaux, 1990, p. 127)

In fact, they offered similar language of deference and praise and felt it was quite effective in promoting positive relations.

"It is my great pleasure to have met you last friday when we had an agreeable talk on Chinese business. I appreciate your point of view and the good reputation of your company so much that I sincerely hope we can do business."

"It’s our honor to do business with you. You have a very good reputation through all the airlines of the world."

"It’s very kind of you to spend time reading this letter. It’s fortunate that I have a chance now or in the future to cooperate with you because your company is so perfect."

The participants felt that they communicated a humble tone by strongly expressing their appreciation of the excellence of their potential trading partners. In addition, by indicating the superiority of the reader, they were laying the ground work for establishing guanxi which if successful would bring great benefits to them and to their organizations.

There was also considerable reliance on formulaic language to express politeness. This is demonstrated in one participant’s definition of the successful use
of politeness strategies in the letter evaluation task

"The letter is successful because it is polite. At the beginning of the letter the writer says 'I regret' and at the end he says 'thank you for your letter'. This is very important."

According to this participant, the language conveys both politeness and an expression of sympathy which "shows that the company attaches importance to talented people." The conveying of writer respect for the reader is "a great comfort to the job seeker." It "will satisfy the Chinese pride and set up a good relationship between the job seeker and the company."

Participants acknowledged that the use of formulaic phrases of politeness was due, in some part, to limitations on their knowledge of alternative appropriate language but maintained that such language was also consistent with Chinese standards of formality and social acceptability. The following quotes illustrate some structures frequently employed in participants' texts. In the task requiring writers to deny a price cut to a customer, the opening lines were designed to be both polite and friendly as well as to express gratitude.

"We are very glad to receive your letter. We have enjoyed our trade relationship for many years."
"We have much pleasure in receiving your letter. It's our pleasure to have such an old customer like you."

"Thank you for corresponding with our company. We will be honored if you decide to go on with our cooperation."

Closing lines often repeated the writer's appreciation of the reader's patronage and affirmed the friendship between reader and writer. The writer also sought to underline his sincerity, sometimes quite directly.

"We loyally hope we can keep our friendship."

"We will be honored if you decide to go on with our cooperation."

"We sincerely hope to maintain the relationship between us, that we can reach mutual understanding, and develop bilateral profit."

"I promise our cooperation will be happy. We will do our best to serve you."

Participants stated that the use of politeness strategies such as thanking the customers for both their letters and their business, and explicitly expressing the value of the relationship was important in building reader face and in maintaining a positive relationship. In addition one participant wrote, "this lets the people know that the company is friendly and polite."
The value of achieving a positive tone was frequently commented on in the text evaluation task. Often this tone was accomplished by the writer’s use of indirectness. For example, one participant suggested "say that our job didn’t fit him rather than his qualifications didn’t suit our company." Participants generally suggested blaming the situation, not the applicant’s credentials, for the rejection and also taking care to use language that would break the news gently.

"Wording should be humble. Maybe the vulnerable people can accept the news more calmly."

"In a refusal letter the Chinese will use a polite and respectful tone to comfort the reader."

"Using gentle words is characteristic of Chinese culture."

"I feel a letter is not too successful if the words of the letter are too stern. It will injure the applicant."

A final strategy for maintaining reader face in the case of conveying bad news was the order in which the writer presented information. In the area of text organization the preferences suggested by the participants were quite specific in what constituted a successful sequence for the presentation of bad news. This sequence was substantially different from that
generally suggested for American texts and was deeply rooted in relevant aspects of Chinese culture.

Text Organization Strategy

Participants considered the order in which information was conveyed as critical to maintaining reader face, building good relations, and conveying the bad news in a gentle way.

Similarly, commenting on American text organization, Tebeaux notes that "conveying concern and respect" for the reader in a way that is perceived as sincere is essential when conveying bad news. Tebeaux (1990) suggests the following format for communicating bad news:

"First paragraph - Opening sentence to prepare the reader. The unfavorable news is stated near the end of the paragraph."

"Middle paragraphs - give the reasons for the unfavorable information."

"Final paragraph - tells the reader what to do now." (Tebeaux, 1990, p. 138)

In the context of Chinese readers the suggested order for presenting bad news appeared to be quite different. Participants generally felt that bad news should be presented towards the end of the text and
should on no account appear early in the letter (see sample texts in appendix A). The prevailing sentiment is expressed in the following quote.

"Reject the job seeker at the end of the letter. If he is rejected at the beginning he will be very disappointed and have no interest to read it over. Then our other goals can’t be reached."

The actual texts produced by participants generally did not reflect this sentiment as strongly as their critique statements would suggest. The bad news frequently appeared in the second paragraph buried in the explanation for the refusal. It was preceded by a first paragraph which tried to build reader face and buffer the bad news through strategies of praise and deference. The bad news was never offered either directly or prominently in the text.

In the text evaluation task, the necessity of building good relations and future possibilities for cooperation was again stressed as an essential strategy for the successful conducting of business.

"In China good relations is the most important thing. There is a saying ‘Even if we can’t make a bargain we can still make a friend’ so we should try our best to keep good relations with the reader even though he has been refused because one day we may have to do business with him."
The order in which information was presented, or the task of buffering and burying bad news, was seen as critical to implementing this strategy. To maintain the reader's confidence and to build positive relations between reader and writer, extensive reader preparation for the bad news was deemed necessary. Participants felt that a higher level of burying and buffering than was provided by the sample American letters of rejection was necessary. This preparation involved presenting information in the following order:

1. polite and grateful acknowledgement of the applicant's interest in the company;

   "Thank you for taking the time to send us your recent correspondence. We appreciate the interest you've expressed in our company."

2. praise of the applicant's qualifications;

   "We have studied your personal information carefully. We regard you as a well educated and skillful individual."

3. an explanation of the company's situation which served to explain the lack of a job offer, coupled with a very indirect rejection which expressed regret and kept open the possibility of the applicant being hired at some future date;
"On account of our current situation we regret to tell you we have no proper position for you. What a pity. We will keep all information on you on file for two years. If there is an opportunity for you we will inform you immediately."

4. some confidence building advice and suggestions for the applicant’s future success;

"With your high ability and abundant experience you can soon get a high position."

"We know a good worker like you always wants to have a job suitable for him so that every one can have benefits from him very soon. Write to the JOAA information organization. You can get help from them."

Participants’ awareness of the impact of the reader-writer relationship was apparent both in the evaluation and production of texts. Strategic use of text organization, like other strategy use, varied with the demands of the specific task. In the role of receivers of bad news, participants demonstrated a high level of concern about the feelings of the reader and they strongly emphasized the importance of breaking the bad news gently. Quite the opposite was true in the work memo where the writers frequently broke the bad news in the first paragraph and even in the opening line. As with degrees of directness, participants felt that the workers, as a consequence of their position and their unacceptable behavior, did not merit the same
consideration of feelings accorded the readers in the other tasks.

Summary

The text analysis portion of this study revealed some highly repetitive patterns of language use. These were identified and categorized. Six salient socio-cultural norms were identified by participants in a norms identification task. The relationship between these patterns of language use and related socio-cultural norms was explored through participant interviews, focused class discussions, member checks, and key informants.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

The data in this study demonstrate the strong relationship between L1 socio-cultural norms and L2 pragmatic and rhetorical choices. They support Blum-Kulka’s (1992) contention that although particular speech acts may be universal, their manifestations may differ systematically across cultures and across languages (p. 36). In this study, the goals of given business texts were similarly interpreted across cultures. The strategies for achieving these goals however, showed some marked differences between the Chinese participants and the strategies suggested by American business communication experts.

In the context of business communication, language is a tool to achieve varied and specified goals which cut across cultural boundaries. The selection of culturally appropriate strategies to accomplish this task is a primary focus for message senders.

Cultural values related to social and pragmatic acceptability exerted a strong influence on the
participants' choice of both pragmatic and rhetorical strategies, providing evidence of language "reflecting rather than creating socio-cultural regularities" (Stern, 1981, p.206) in an L2 context. Language use reflected conscious cultural imperatives. Participants gave careful consideration to the effect of their strategies on the Chinese audience and selected those strategies they deemed most likely to succeed.

A primary objective of this study was to explore the relationship between L1 culture and the selection of L2 pragmatic and rhetorical strategies. Production and evaluation tasks therefore assumed a Chinese audience. Resulting data indicated some strategic choices that were appropriate for both American and Chinese audiences as well as some that appeared culture specific. Chinese socio-cultural norms clearly supported participants' strategic preferences. The more subtle context dependent applications of these strategies also surfaced in the task specific nature of strategy selection. Knowledge of these subtle differences is particularly important in situations involving cross-cultural communication. Further research on individuals with varied cross-cultural
experience might indicate evidence of convergence in some areas. This study suggests that while some strategies might adapt to audience culture, others would not be compromised. While there was some common ground between Chinese and American strategies for conveying bad news, the Chinese participants indicated some essential strategies that were either unimportant or inappropriate for the American audience. Most notable among these were the overt creation and maintenance of relations, strategies designed to save face such as indirectness, strategies related to the value of group membership, and flattery as a technique for building face.

Prevailing second language acquisition theory suggests that appropriateness of language needs to be considered within the context of the target language culture (Koika, 1989) however, in the arena of business communications, audience culture is central. With the widespread use of English as an international language, communication often occurs between groups of non-native speakers whose cultural norms may be more similar to each other than to the target language norms.
Historical Roots of Socio-cultural Norms

In this study, the culture embedded nature of language was apparent in participants awareness of a common stock of culturally appropriate strategies and language, and in the relationship of these choices to relevant Chinese socio-cultural norms.

A recurring theme among participants was the attribution of cultural characteristics and values to Confucian roots. This confirmed the importance of the evolutionary development of frames of reference (Green, 1983) and "the cultural history behind the participants" in determining the cultural significance of a linguistic interaction (Halliday and Hasan, 1968, p.6). The link between specific strategy choices and related Confucian precepts proved useful for interpreting the cultural significance of a strategy.

In the anthropological study of behavior we try to discover the reasons for particular acts, provided by the actors, themselves (Waley, 1938). In discussing this process Waley points out that there may be no "real reason" for many ritual behaviors particularly in a culture as ancient as the Chinese whose moral education is still based on Confucian thinking.
"In any community where the performance of such acts is linked to a general system of thought, they will be explained in terms of that system. If the system changes... they will be reinterpreted in terms of the new system. Where such acts have not been linked... to any system of thought they sink to the role of mere etiquette, and will be explained as customary, as good manners (p. 58).

Although it is recognized that appropriate language choices depend on application of cultural elements of meaning (Kleifgen, 1988; Rosette, 1990), these may not be easily accessible. Participants gave general credit to Confucius as the architect of Chinese cultural values and frequently defined their thinking as Confucian, even attributing specific values and characteristics to Confucian doctrine. However, they showed a tendency both to reinterpret Confucian thinking and to explain certain behaviors as simply the acceptable thing to do.

The roots of these acceptable behaviors may be seen in the Confucian social values of "loyalty, honesty, and respect for elders" (Waley, p.67) and in several of the maxims of Confucius.

The emphasis on ritual politeness and the aversion to direct criticism was believed to derive from the Confucian emphasis on order, ritual, and mutual
"Keep order among [the people] by chastisement and they will flee from you; keep order among them by ritual and they will come to you of their own accord" (Waley, p. 67).

"In the service of one’s prince repeated scolding can only lead to loss of favor; in friendship, it can only lead to estrangement" (Waley, p. 106).

According to the Analects, successful management was believed to be attained by a policy of "giving way" or circumventing as opposed to one of "push and grab or direct confrontation" (p. 65). Accomplishing a task according to proper ritual was considered vastly superior to gaining a "temporary success by irregular means, not honestly come by" (p. 67).

Although honesty was considered a primary virtue, this was more narrowly defined as "keeping promises" or "fulfilling undertakings" (p. 43). Whalen notes that "Lies that lead to no harm are considered quite acceptable, particularly when they demonstrate an adherence to good manners" (p. 44). Flattery had the additional positive effects of building face and showing deference to one’s elders or superiors.
Despite the credit given to Confucian values, which tend to be absolute, the participants showed an intuitive awareness of the importance of reader and situational context. The strategies selected varied according to the writers' perceived and desired relationship with the reader and also according to their own personal values. This context dependence is strongly emphasized in American business communication instruction with its stress on audience awareness.

Discussion and Conclusions

Participants in this study showed a high level of agreement on the identification of six strategies to maintain good relations with a PRC reader in a situational context of presenting the reader with bad news. They also employed a common stock of rhetorical devices to implement their strategies. Both the strategies and the rhetorical choices conformed to those suggested by the research on Chinese rhetoric and Chinese negotiating practices (Graham, 1987; Pye, 1994; Kapp, 1983; Solomon, 1987; Harris and Moran, 1991). In all three data elicitation tasks as well as in the brainstorming of values activity, participants
indicated the value of:

- strategies related to face
- direct reference to personal relations
- reference to group affiliation
- use of indirectness/directness strategies
- politeness strategies
- appropriate text organization

Although there was general agreement on the value of these strategies, qualitative analysis demonstrated that their use was by no means universal among the participants. Rather it varied both quantitatively and qualitatively depending on the situational demands of each task and on the character of the individual participant.

Participants stressed that they selected those strategies deemed most likely to advance their goals suggesting a willingness to compromise socio-cultural norms for the sake of success. More in depth discussion revealed that some norms were less likely to be sacrificed. It is these norms that appear to be critical for successful communication with the Chinese audience. To the extent that these norms are compatible between the communicating parties they are
not likely to adversely affect the communicative process. In the case of U.S.-Chinese communication some areas of incompatibility surfaced. The following differences were identified in this study as potential barriers to communication.

Socio-cultural norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>group orientation</td>
<td>individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relations</td>
<td>directness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indirectness</td>
<td>sincerity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flattery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hierarchal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence of these norm differences surfaced in the letter evaluation task and was confirmed by the strategies employed by the participants in the production tasks. Although the literature on business communication stresses the critical nature of audience analysis on a case by case basis, this study suggests that some, more generic, culture specific guidelines may be identified. In the case of the participants in this study there appeared to be some conventions that were so strongly rooted in culture that they were unlikely to be compromised with extended exposure to
both the English language and the American culture. These critical socio-cultural norms must be respected if cross-cultural communication is to be effective. However, even these critical norms demonstrated variations of usage based on specific aspects of the text’s message and situational context as well as on perceived nuances of the reader-writer relationship. Perceived relative power of sender and receiver emerged as a powerful influence in the selection of appropriate strategies.

The major findings of this study indicate that specific pragmatic and rhetorical strategies expressed in L2 may be clearly identified as related to L1 culture, that some of these strategies have particularly strong socio-cultural underpinnings which are unlikely to be compromised, and that both the selection of a particular strategy and the way in which it is used varies, even when the goals and message of a text are perceived by participants as identical. This last conclusion was inevitable due to the fact that the participants were insiders, instructed to address a Chinese audience, an audience where the more subtle distinctions were known to them. A comparable study
assuming an American audience would likely have yielded results that were, at best, considerably less fine tuned.

Data from the four elicitation tasks, showed that even in a narrow situational context, many variables influenced the choice of both rhetorical and pragmatic choices of communicators. Participants selected those strategies they felt would best accomplish their goals. Use of a given strategy tended to be idiosyncratic, influenced by the character of the individual writer and the writer's perception of both the reader and the situation. The identification of universals will require consideration of a number of variables in a variety of situational and cultural contexts.

Because this research relied on a variety of data elicitation tasks, the effects of context were more easily discernable, allowing for a more complete description of strategy choices and for a deeper analysis of the factors motivating these choices. In this study, a general text type (texts conveying unfavorable news) elicited common strategy choices among participants but the way in which these were employed or evaluated varied by task. Not
surprisingly, participants, in the role of text receivers, were far more sensitive to issues of face and those rhetorical strategies designed to protect and build it, than they were in the role of writers. Particularly in roles of comparative power, the participants did not feel compelled to offer the same courtesies that they so valued as receivers of texts. For a more complete picture of strategy choices, researchers might want to provide both evaluation and production tasks which cast participants in roles of senders as well as receivers of messages.

The results oriented nature of business communication also suggests that with extended cross-cultural exposure strategies will tend to adapt to local contexts and readers. This results in what is termed convergence, a moving towards the strategies employed by the other culture. Or, the evolution of strategies may follow the path suggested by Blum-Kulka (1989) where they are characteristic of neither L1 nor L2 cultures but exhibit the characteristics of an interlanguage couched in L2 structures. Some evidence of an emerging interlanguage in International Business English has already surfaced. James et al. (1994)
identified several pragmatic strategies that were acceptable to a range of non-native speakers of English but were unacceptable to native speakers. Further evidence of L2 structure employed to fulfill L1 norms was demonstrated by the participants extensive use of formulaic speech to express highly valued strategies of politeness and deference.

The phenomenon described by Blum-Kulka has also been identified among managerial values after extended cross-cultural exposure. While some convergence results, and some divergence is maintained, a set of unique values emerges which is not characteristic of either culture (Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung, and Terpstra, 1993). Additional studies in the area of cross-cultural business communication are needed to support the existence of a pragmatic interlanguage. Using this study as a base line, further research on cross-cultural adaptation, using a sample of Chinese business students or practitioners in the United States, may provide this support.
Review of Primary Strategies and Critical Norms

The interrelationship of primary strategies and critical socio-cultural norms was apparent in this study. The following strategies were used by the participants to accomplish the goals defined by the three tasks. These goals were generically interpreted as building goodwill and responding favorably to the requests of the writer.

1. the strategic use of face building,
2. the calculated development of personal relations and the obligations inherent in this relationship,
3. the power of the group to mold behavior

These strategies were implemented by means of a variety of rhetorical devices. The rhetorical strategies most frequently employed related to degrees of directness, ways of conveying politeness, and choices related to text organization. The following three tables, a selection of quotes taken from the participants’ written texts and interviews, illustrate the use of L2 to promote L1 pragmatic strategies and demonstrate the participants view of what is considered appropriate. Some clear differences between Chinese
and American perceptions surfaced.

Table 5

**Rhetorical Strategies For Building Face**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>polite tone</td>
<td>We have much pleasure in receiving your letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flattery (praise)</td>
<td>You have a very good reputation through all the airlines of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deference</td>
<td>It’s very kind of you to spend time reading this letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excuses</td>
<td>I am very sorry to tell you that we can’t make a special price for you because our company must offer the same price to everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degrees of directness</td>
<td>A goal is to preserve the applicant’s dignity. Refusing him in an indirect way could help keep his face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>text organization</td>
<td>Reject the job seeker at the end of the letter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the participants, considerations of face were primary. Evidence of the pervasive influence of this norm was evident in all four tasks, often placing pragmatic and rhetorical demands that were at odds with American norms.
In the Chinese culture, the influence of losing or gaining face, based as it is on gaining and maintaining prestige, results in the frequent use of personal insults, an accusatory tone and strong language designed to put others on the defensive, and face building flattery (Pye, 1994, p. 102).

The strategies relied on to influence face are quite incompatible with American norms which advise that "flattery can be as ineffective as rudeness (Tebeaux, 1990, p.127).

While the role of face as a motivating socio-cultural norm was apparent in all four data elicitation tasks, its use varied from task to task. As receivers of bad news participants were particularly sensitive to the effects of reader dignity, repeatedly stating that the good of both writer and reader hinged on the success of the writer in communicating the bad news without disturbing the reader's self confidence. A humble deferential tone and flattery were used to mitigate the effects of the bad news. However, when the participants were cast in the role of writers, conveying bad news in the form of criticism to inferiors, texts displayed the personal insults indicated by Pye (1994) as strategies designed to promote face loss. In this situation participants
indicated that in their management position they could openly criticize their inferiors without risking the open discord that Lubman (Kapp, 1983, p. 83) states the Chinese are so adverse to. While the manipulation of face was considered a powerful strategy it was evident that the specific application of this strategy depended on situational context, particularly on the perceived relative power relations between writer and reader. Furthermore, while participants both recognized and appreciated face saving strategies, this awareness did not seem to distort their sense of what the real message was. They clearly recognized bad news. It is particularly interesting that although they received bad news, they remained appreciative of the writer's efforts to maintain their dignity. Attempts at face saving were perceived as sincere and respectful of their feelings. Thus, while the employment of language to build or diminish face may strike the western reader as ineffective, having a tone that might seem rude, or insincere (Tebeaux, 1990), perhaps even in conflict with the American ideal of clearly communicating intended meaning (Locker, 1989), these strategies appear to be highly suitable for the Chinese audience.
Failing to respond to the high value that the Chinese place on face could seriously undermine the effectiveness of a given text. Conversely, building or saving face in situations where the sender’s case might be strengthened by the receiver’s losing face could also mitigate against goal achievement. A superficial knowledge of a culture would likely not provide enough insight to employ a generically acceptable strategy in a contextually acceptable way. To date, the research on speech act pragmatics offers no quick and easy rules of appropriateness.

Further evidence of both the culture and context specific nature of strategies may be seen in the participants attempts to build personal relations. To satisfy this norm they expressed themselves in language that was uncharacteristically direct and that might easily be interpreted as patronizing by an American audience.
Stewart and Keown (1989) note that personal relations, emphasis on trust and mutual connections (Pye, 1994), are a critical factor in the success of Sino-Western negotiations. Knowledge of how to cultivate these relations is therefore of primary importance.

The participants relied on two basic strategies. In addition to the offer of tangible benefits, they employed a number of face related strategies for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mutual benefits</td>
<td>We have enjoyed our trade relationship for years. Both of us make good profit from our good relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reader benefits</td>
<td>If you try your best our company is sure to present all the things you need...your salary will go up faster and faster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct reference</td>
<td>We loyally hope we can keep our friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reminiscing</td>
<td>It's our pleasure to have such an old customer like you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worth noting that Chinese and American perceptions of relationship may be quite different. In addition, the rhetorical strategies associated with relations building might serve to initiate vastly different understandings across audiences. According to Pye (1994), the cultivation of a sense of friendship and obligation plays an important role in the negotiating process, allowing the weaker party to seek protection and support from the stronger party. It is important for Westerners to understand the ramifications of relations in the Chinese context before indulging in culturally appropriate rhetoric which may be interpreted as making a commitment to such a relationship. Failure to do so might result in a choice of being compelled to make massive commitments or to risk breaking an association. An interesting area of research would be a study of the rhetorical strategies employed to cultivate this relationship and culturally acceptable strategies for maintaining a more western style relationship. Participants confirmed that relations still play a major function in the conducting of business in the PRC.
A related, though not strictly comparable, strategy of American business communication is that of creating good will or a positive image of the writer and the writer's organization. This is accomplished, in part, by showing a concern for the interests of the reader, explicitly stating reader benefits, and maintaining a positive and personal tone (Janis and Dressner, 1972). The impression these devices seek to create in the mind of the reader is that serving the reader is the real concern of the writer (Locker, 1989). There is no inherent presumption of an enduring relationship between writer and reader.

It is generally recognized that when individuals communicate across cultures a text may be both comprehensible and grammatically correct and yet be at odds with the reader's language and culture (Stevenson, 1983). While some similar strategies are employed by both American and Chinese writers, the more direct and personal references to reader-writer relationships, and the deferential tone used by the Chinese imply a different kind of relationship than that assumed by the Americans. Appropriate use of this strategy by a cultural outsider would require both general knowledge
of the Chinese audience and rhetorical habits and specific awareness of the demands of a particular reader-writer relationship. There is a high risk of being misinterpreted if cultural adaptation is attempted based solely on generic information.

The third socio-cultural norm that emerged as critical was group affiliation and the powerful influence of group pressure on individual's behavior.

Table 7
Rhetorical Strategies Related to Group Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>use of &quot;we&quot;</td>
<td>Nobody may go to have coffee breaks. If someone breaks this rule we will cut his salary. I hope nobody will encounter this and we can have good relations forever.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct reference</td>
<td>I want you to work for yourself and for the well being of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threat</td>
<td>The company belongs to the workers. Everyone should be efficient when he is at work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinese culture is characterized as focusing on the group rather than on the individual (Harris and Moran, 1991) and as providing a high level of
management of interpersonal relations (Solomon in Binnendijk, 1987). While the participants strongly endorsed this norm in their discussion of Chinese cultural values and in most situational contexts. A notable exception to this was their use of condescension towards inferiors and use of the first person "I" when assuming the role of a manager addressing employees.

While this behavior seems at odds with descriptions of Chinese culture (Harris and Moran, 1992) it is consistent with the appropriateness of pragmatic and rhetoric strategies in the context of reader/writer relations. The participants showed a strong tendency to defer to those in positions of higher power and to be direct and even accusatory to those perceived to be in lower positions. Language use in both of these contexts was more extreme than is generally suggested in American business texts.

A strategy that was common to both Chinese and Americans was the attempt to gain the goodwill of the reader through the indication of reader benefits. It is important to bear in mind that benefits may be audience specific. For the Chinese audience, the
suggested benefits included face building flattery or praise, direct reference to the benefits likely to result from the relationship, nostalgic reference to the value of the relationship itself, attempts to cultivate a guanxi relationship by deferring, and voicing sincere concern for the well being of the reader. The participants indicated that the critical norms of face and personal relations were the driving force behind these strategies.

Although general strategic patterns emerged in this study, the writers maintained some degree of individuality in both the qualitative and quantitative use of specific strategies. In addition, while certain strategies (text organization and politeness) were recognized as important in both Chinese and American business writing, their implementation varied across cultures; Chinese participants demonstrated a higher level of indirectness and formal politeness which they felt conveyed respect for the reader. Although Chinese indirectness may be compared with the American strategy of "buffering and burying" bad news, it is actually a much more complex procedure designed to protect reader feelings, one that places politeness above honesty.
The protection of reader feelings was considered critical in the text evaluation task. The participants praised some of the strategies used in the American texts and voiced their discomfort with others. Some strong areas of incompatibility emerged in this task.

Maintaining reader face appeared to be both a more important and a more delicate task for the Chinese. This norm defines strategies such as flattery and indirectness as clearly more appropriate than sincerity and clarity in maintaining reader dignity, and building good reader-writer relations. The use of politeness strategies that are explicit, if not formulaic, are more likely to be understood and appreciated by the Chinese reader. In addition, the importance attached to a modest, gentle tone may preclude use of hard sell techniques, praise of self or company, or use of more colorful or extravagant language.

The participants in this study had little or no previous contact with American business texts and had no practical work experience which might have modified use of their suggested strategies. It is quite possible that either of these factors would have altered their ideas of what strategies would serve them
best, perhaps resulting in a greater degree of similarity to American texts. A comparable study of Chinese business people actively engaged in international trade would quite likely provide a different set of data, data that showed evidence of interlanguage as writers interacted with non-Chinese audiences.

Finally, this research was limited to a particular category of business texts, those conveying bad news. Data on appropriate strategies for persuasive letters or texts conveying good news, information, or requests would shed further light on the relationship of context variables to language choices. It would also provide useful information for individuals engaged in global business. Such data could serve as an information base for establishing an awareness of differences in rhetorical style and for developing an appreciation of the significance of a strategy in a given cultural context. Although it is still premature to suggest a particular approach for a given culture, acknowledgment of differences and identification of specific culturally relevant strategies should facilitate the job of effectively communicating across cultures.
Evidence supporting the existence of a pragmatic interlanguage will require the study of various groups of participants communicating in L2 and having a range of exposure to audience cultures other than their own.

Implications and Recommendations

Because language use in the area of business is very results oriented it is important to focus on the specific communication needs of the learner and to provide the language necessary to satisfy these needs, to provide alternatives to a narrow field of formulaic speech. The focus is on what the learner wants to communicate and what alternatives exist in L2 for doing this. In a very real sense, the learner will define the specific language to be studied and the teacher will function as a resource expert. Some obvious implications for the teaching of English for Business Purposes (EBP) include negotiation of a needs based syllabus, consideration of the intended audience's culture, a focus on the context and purpose for L2 language use, and the necessity of updating cultural information frequently to reflect rapid changes brought about by convergence and cross-vergence in the sphere
of global business.

In this study, participants generated and expressed their own communication strategies and individuals sought help at the more micro level of vocabulary choice and grammatical structure as the need arose.

The conclusion that some strategies are particularly acceptable to the Chinese audience while others appear to be mutually acceptable to both a Chinese or American audience has some practical implications for the teaching of EBP. James, Schofield, and Ypsiladis (1994) suggest that strategies that are deemed either successful or unsuccessful across cultures might allow the identification of both pragmatic and rhetorical universals. This would be particularly valuable data when learners are business people with a wide variety of international contacts. Similarly, indicating strategies that did not appear to be mutually acceptable across cultures might serve to increase communicative effectiveness for a particular audience.

This study identified several strategies compatible with Chinese socio-cultural norms that were
either ineffective or unacceptable for the American audience. Notable among these were indirectness, the use of flattery, and the power of group relations. These strategies may be seen as potential barriers to Chinese-American communication. Pragmatic alternatives would need to be offered for cross-cultural communicators. James et al. (1994) suggest providing systematic explicit instruction on both "pragmatic choices and the nuances of difference between them" (p. 18).

In negotiating a syllabus for ESP in the field of business, both senders and receivers of texts should be considered. Because English functions as the international language of business it is frequently used between groups of nonnative speakers (NNS). It is possible that in some cases the strategies employed by these individuals will be highly compatible. James et al. (1994) note that some strategies that are unacceptable to native English speakers may be quite acceptable to a wide range of NNS. Thus the pragmatic and rhetorical strategies taught in this context would not be those of the target language. In the area of EBP the needs of the learners are generally immediate.
and specific and the time frame relatively short, so the ideal of offering both target language and target audience strategies may not be practical.

The rapidly emerging use of English as the international language of communication raises some interesting questions. In cases where the consensus among non-native norms is at odds with those of native speaker norms whose norms would receive a higher priority? James et al. (1994) indicate that the native speaker would be obliged to rely on non-native norms in the context of a non-native audience. However, might this violation of expected norms run the risk of appearing culturally inappropriate, if not patronizing or insincere?

Clearly more research is needed on the production and reaction of audiences to L2 cross-cultural texts. In addition, the relationship between audience expectation and the perceived effectiveness of a text needs to be investigated. For example, if, in the case of the Chinese text sender, the receivers expect to be flattered and are not, might they feel a bit cheated?

Many gaps remain in both the theoretical and applied areas of contrastive pragmatics. The
increasingly widespread use of English across cultures should provide a wide variety of cultural contexts for studying the evolution of L2 pragmatics. The practical need to communicate across cultures should serve to heighten interest in this field of research.
Appendix A

Text Evaluation Task: Authentic American letters
  Rejecting a job applicant

Appendix A 1 Data Elicitation Task
This is a letter written by an American company in
response to a letter of application from a job seeker.

Task 1
1. Identify the sender and receiver of the letter.
2. Identify the goals of the letter
3. Identify the strategies used by the writer and tell
   why these strategies will or will not be successful
   for the Chinese audience.

Use your knowledge of Chinese values and culture to
support your answer.

Task 2
Rewrite the letter making any changes that you think
will make it more successful for the Chinese audience.
Use your knowledge of Chinese culture and values to
explain why your strategies will succeed.

Appendix A 2 Sample Letters

Dear Mr. Jones;

Thank you for your recent letter and resume expressing
interest in career opportunitues at Hill and Knowlton.

Although your background is impressive, we do not have
a position that is compatible with your experience. We
will, however, retain your resume in our files. If an
appropriate position becomes available, we will contact
you for an interview. Meanwhile, best of luck in your
job search.
Dear Mr.

I have received your recent correspondence with regard to possible employment opportunities at Raytheon Company.

Your qualifications have been carefully reviewed. At the present time, however, we do not have an employment opportunity available that meets your career objective. Considering our employment forecast, this situation is not expected to change in the immediate future.

Your interest in Raytheon is appreciated, and I regret not being in a position to respond more favorably.

Best wishes in attaining your career objective.

Sincerely,

Dear Mr.

Thank you for taking the time to send us your recent correspondence. We appreciate the interest you've expressed in employment with Procter & Gamble.

It's clear that you are a motivated individual with some important skills to offer. Unfortunately, after reviewing your qualifications and interests as they relate to our current opportunities, we've concluded that we do not have a suitable position available.

This decision is certainly not a reflection on your qualifications or capabilities. We are only in a position to assess your qualifications as they relate to our present opportunities.

We do, however, keep all applications on file for a period of one year. In the event our situation should change, we would be happy to reconsider your application within that time frame.

In the meantime, best of luck in finding a challenging position in your field of interest!

Sincerely,
Appendix A 3  Samples of Participants’ Texts

Dear---,

We have read your application letter. We appreciate the interest you’ve expressed in employment with P and G and thank you for your confidence in our company.

Surely you are an excellent graduate from a Z.S. University which can be inferred from your graduation certificate and recommendation. But, unfortunately, we do not have a suitable position available for you. We regret to say that, but we’re powerless.

Meanwhile, best of luck in your job search.

Sincerely,

Dear Mr. ---’

Thank you for taking the time to send us your recent correspondence. We appreciate the interest you’ve expressed in the application.

Your letter proved you to be an intelligent and responsible person. In addition, you’ve a good handwriting. You belong to that kind of welcome employees. But we have to inform you with great pity that we can’t employ you at present. The reason is quite complex. Just as you said, our company has a good reputation. There is a strict interview and examination before a new employee comes into our company. Now, our head is out on business. We couldn’t decide without his final permission. Now, we have to keep your application on file. You still have good opportunities.

In the meantime, if you find a better post or change your mind, we still wish you sincerely find a challenging and satisfying position in your field of interest.

Sincerely
Dear Sir,

I have received your correspondence. We have carefully looked into your resume. We find that your ability and experience prove you are the right person for the position. But, unfortunately, we have no position available. What a pity.

But, I dare say, with your high ability and abundant experience you can soon get a higher position somewhere. Now if you like I can help you. I know another company is looking for a person like you to fill an important position. I can recommend you.

It is because of your interest in our company that I am willing to help you. I and my company are willing to make friends with you.
Appendix B

Group Production of a Bad News Text: Writing a Memo to Workers to Improve Their Productivity

Appendix B 1  Data Elicitation Task

Your company's work hours are 8:30 to 5:00. Most workers are there early but at 8.30 they're still sitting in the breakfast room talking. Many people also take extra long coffee breaks during the day and long lunch hours too.

All of the workers are on salary rather than hourly pay; there is no time clock. Workers are expected to work until the work is done so some of the workers frequently work past 5:00 but they get no pay for this extra time. The company has a very tight budget with no extra money for overtime. As manager, you think it looks unprofessional for the office to be empty during work hours and you feel it makes you look like an inefficient manager.

Write a memo to the workers discussing the problem and asking their help in solving it. (adapted from Locker, 1990)
Appendix B 2  Samples of Participants' Texts

From: Great Wall Hotel
Subject: Ways to improve work efficiency

Ladies and gentlemen working in our company. Today I must disclose something bad which appears in our company. As we all know, we must go to work at 8:30 a.m. but many people take long coffee breaks during working time. It is quite unreasonable. We must work according to our time table so that our company can produce many products. So now I have to emphasize our working regulations again. Nobody may go to have coffee breaks. If someone breaks this regulation we will cut down his salary. I hope nobody will encounter this and we can have good relations forever.

From: Super Runner
Subject: Workers should do work at work time

In the past years most of you have done well. Some of us even overwork. All this affords me much satisfaction. But some of you haven't done your best. You are chatting and wasting much time. According to this I have set up new rules and everyone should obey them.
Work time: 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Coffee break: 15 minutes twice a day
Lunch time: 12:00-2:00
Every supervisor is to keep a record of his own groups behavior.
From: Angel Garden manager  
Subject: coffee breaks and lunch time

1. You are a member of Angel Garden. Your interests cannot be separated from hers. Please work hard for Angel Garden and yourselves.

2. The workroom and the office is not your bedroom. Everyone should be efficient when he is on duty. If you go to work only for the coffee break, Angel Garden has to fire you, lest you waste time, waste your ability, waste her money.

3. Your parents, your wife, and your children are expecting that you will bring them a prosperous life. If you try your best, Angel Garden is sure to present all the things you need. Your salary will go up faster and faster.

Successful strategies for getting employees to do their work.

1. A company is like a big family. Every worker is like a member of this family. We must make the workers think that the company belongs not only to the boss but also belongs to themselves.

2. Threat of punishment. Everyone should be efficient when he is at work or be fired.

3. Build a good relationship with the workers’ families. To the workers, what their families say is more effective.

From: Fortune Bank  
Subject: Work hours

Our works are more than routines because they are associated with our benefits and targets. Your incomes depend largely on your accomplishments, that is your effort and ability. Our company disdains strongly those idle, lazy people who even exploit the benefits produced by those industrial, and respectable people without feeling ashamed. They are indifferent to their work, lack spirit or enterprize, not showing a single enthusiasm. If they go on like this we will be justified in removing them.
Appendix C

Individual production of a Bad News Text: Refusing to meet a Competitor's Price

Appendix C 1 Data Elicitation Task (adapted from Locker, 1990)

You are the sales manager for your company, a large company with a competitive product line.

You have just received a letter from a customer saying that another company will make him a special deal on a product he has always purchased from you. He wants to know if you can match the price.

You must refuse to do this. You charge the same prices to everyone through your catalog. The prices are as low as they can be to still give you an adequate profit. On most of your products you think your prices are as low as any of your competitors.

Write a letter responding to your customer. (adapted from Locker, 1990)
Appendix C 2  Samples of Participants' Texts

Text illustrating direct refusal

Dear Mr. Chen
Since we have a long history of doing business I am very glad to have the prospect of doing it again, but I think there are some problems standing between us. As far as the price of computer paper is concerned I dare to say what I offered you is the minimum price. As you know the material's price has increased by more than 10% but we still keep our original price instead of increasing it. Why do I do this? Because it is my belief that your company is not only a company doing business with us but also my friend. So I hope we can continue our cooperative relationship. Long term business relationships are hard to find and build up. Why not keep ours. After this dark time I think we will have a bright future. If you want to purchase the paper at my original price and should you require further details please don't hesitate to let me know in the nearest future.

yours sincerely

Text illustrating indirect refusal

Dear Mr. Zhao:
We're glad to hear from you. In your letter you said our product's price is higher than other company's which offer the same product. That may be true. But we want to remind you that other company's products are similar to ours only partly, not completely. Twin Rivers Beer is our patent. At the present time it is the official drink of the Guangdong football team. Though our product's price is a little higher than others it has higher quality. And we also have good service such as delivering our goods to customers free. Furthermore we have a buyers privilege policy=the more you buy the cheaper the price is.
We loyally hope we can keep your friendship. If you still have some questions about our product please tell us directly. We hope to get a positive answer.

Yours sincerely
Dear Mr. Chen,

I've received your letter. Thank you for telling us our competitor's price. It showed your trust and frankness to our company. I regret we can't match our competitors special price but you will find this not a loss but a gain. Soon after they buy our product most of the businessmen see that there is no lowest price and highest quality. The way to succeed in business is to have a long term interest. With this point of view you will find Sky Hawk's price does match its high quality and considerable service.

We offer the same price to everyone through our catalog. Good service and free training after purchase must also be considered.
It's our honor to do business with your company. You have a very good reputation throughout all the airlines of the world. We are sure that our product will not reduce it. Being one of the worlds most successful airlines, I believe you will make the best choice.

Yours sincerely
Bibliography


