

New Zealand and Chinese Managers' Reflections on Language Use in Business Settings: Implications for Intercultural Communication

Yunxia Zhu

University of Queensland Business School, Australia

Culture, persuasion and language are closely intertwined in intercultural business communication. Hence it is important to study language and persuasion and solicit professional members' views about how effective communication is situated in different cultural contexts. This paper aims to report findings on differences in expectations for good writing between New Zealand and Chinese business cultures. A reflective model based on genre knowledge and Pan, Scollon and Scollon's (2002) reflective intercultural training method is developed as a major approach for soliciting managers' views. Specifically New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on their own culture as well as on their counterparts' were compared. It has been found that persuasive orientations underpin the criteria for good writing in each of the target cultures. However, what is insightful for both groups is that *pathos* or *qing* and *logos* or *li* should be seen as a continuum that can be adjusted appropriately when communicating with their counterparts.

新西兰及中国业务经理对语言在商业环境中运用的反思:

浅谈其跨文化交流的意义

文化, 劝说与语言紧密相关. 因此, 研究语言与劝说, 搜集专业人员有关语言在不同文化环境中的具体运用的看法极为重要. 该文旨在讨论新西兰与中国商业文化不同的写作标准, 并依文体理论及跨文化反思法为主要手段, 用来搜集新西兰与中国经理对自己及对方文体的看法. 研究表明劝说倾向起决定该文化写作标准的作用. 但劝说倾向具有延续性, 调节跨文化过程中的“情”与“理”的运用有亦于跨文化交流.

doi: 10.2167/laic178.0

Keywords: persuasive orientations, good writing, managers' reflections

Introduction

More and more countries are involved in doing business across borders alongside the globalisation and internationalisation of markets and businesses. Therefore, understanding the use of business language across cultures is essential for today's business world. One valid perspective of looking at

business language derives from genre study (e.g. Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Miller, 1984; Olikowski & Yates, 1994). This group of researchers sees language use as genre, which is situated in their sociocultural context and develops in response to social needs. The genre approach is of particular relevance to this study as it can help reveal in what way business genre is employed and situated in the specific cultural contexts.

Specifically, this paper attempts to report findings about New Zealand¹ and Chinese managers' views on authentic business writings using both intracultural and intercultural perspectives. Incorporating native speakers' views is not a novel practice in genre study. For example, Bhatia (1993) and Louhiala-Salminen (1997) solicited managers' views on English business letters and faxes. Researchers in this regard mainly adopted an intracultural perspective and tried to seek the managers' views about their own cultural practice. The exploration of the insiders' views has undoubtedly shed light on genre knowledge and practice. However, it is also crucial to solicit the professional members' intercultural reflections about other cultures in order to understand different sets of persuasive orientations used in genre writing.

An initial attempt of soliciting intercultural views has been made by Pan *et al.* (2002) who conducted both intracultural and intercultural interviews with business managers for international professional communication including meetings, telephone calls and resumes. Their findings offered insight to using a reflective dimension for studying different genre conventions. This paper will follow a similar thrust of seeking business managers' reflections. However, it also attempts to contribute further to developing the reflective model based on genre knowledge and persuasion.

In terms of persuasion, extensive research has been done in the area of English essay writing (such as Connor & Lauer, 1988; Kaplan, 1966; Young, 1994) in the light of Aristotelian tradition. However, their theoretical frameworks were largely drawn from English sources and there is a genuine need for incorporating local theories. Garrett (1993), as one of the pioneering researchers of Chinese rhetoric and persuasion, hence points to the needs of incorporating the classical Chinese rhetorical theories. This paper incorporates studies on persuasion from both of these sources. A similar dual perspective was also recommended by Bond *et al.* (2001) and Canagarajah (2002). Drawing on the research tradition of genre study and persuasion, it proposes the following research questions:

- What criteria of good writing do the New Zealand or the Chinese managers follow in their own writing practices?
- To what extent do the two groups' views differ? What accounts for these differences?

In order to answer these questions, this paper, first of all, discusses the specific components of cross-cultural genre knowledge which includes not only purposes, form and content but also persuasive orientations. Based on the literature review of genre knowledge, a reflective model is developed for analysing the manager's views. Secondly, data and research method is detailed. One authentic New Zealand² and one Chinese sales invitation are

chosen as exemplary texts for soliciting managers' views. Thirdly, New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on these two invitations are compared and analysed. The focus of discussion is placed on identifying different sets of criteria for good writing between these two cultural groups and their responses to different types of writing conventions. Finally, recommendations and implications for language and intercultural education and training are discussed and future research areas highlighted.

Literature Review

This section reviews research findings in the area of genre knowledge in order to highlight the important areas for soliciting professional members' views. With this stress on genre analysis, it also further develops the reflective model (Pan *et al.*, 2002) for understanding English and Chinese business writing through reflections.

Genre knowledge

Genre is defined as 'social action' and typified responses to typified situations (Miller, 1984). According to Bakhtin (1986), genre is reflected in its 'deep semantics' and is the 'sites of actions' and 'ideologies'. Miller's and Bakhtin's concepts of genre have laid a foundation for genre analysis, which can be 'best conceptualised as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities' (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). In the professional settings, genre can be seen as a type of typified 'social stock of knowledge' (Schutz & Luckmann, 1984) shared by members of the 'discourse community' (Swales, 1990: 25). According to Swales, a discourse community shares discursal expectations in terms of appropriate use of topics, form and functions of the text. This feature can be used as an important clue for understanding genre knowledge the members have in common.

What exactly is this type of knowledge composed of? In what way is genre knowledge constructed and embedded in the professional discourse community's practices? Schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980) can be referred to as a useful concept for interpreting genre knowledge as well as its potential adjustability in an intercultural context. Within the Gestalt tradition, 'schema' refers to readers' previously acquired background knowledge when reading a text and meanings of text are thus constructed through the interaction of text and the individual's background knowledge. However, I am using 'schema' in a different sense: 'schema' refers to the shared knowledge of genre within a discourse community. I am also aware of the possible differences at the individual level of knowledge. However, my emphasis is placed on the shared knowledge for professional members. Several genre dimensions are used to show how genre knowledge can be typified and situated and they also indicate what professional members' shared schemata can be composed of.

First of all, genre is characterised by its purpose, form and content (Olikowski & Yates, 1994), which are often used as criteria for identifying business and professional genres such as faxes and emails (Gimenez, 2004;

Louhiala-Salminen, 1997). These features are also seen as fundamental components of genre knowledge for soliciting managers' views in this study.

Secondly, genre is situated and responds to social needs. Orlikowski and Yates (1994), in the genre tradition of social enactment (Bazerman, 1988), use the repertoire metaphor to represent genre dynamics. They point out that genre repertoire changes over time as new genres are improvised or otherwise introduced, and they suggest that studying these changes can help us understand changes in the community's communicative practices. The business managers understand the dynamic nature of genre as they are the genre users at the front-line of business writing practices. The concept of intertextuality will help interpret genre dynamics and is also the third type of knowledge.

Intertextuality originates from Bakhtin's (1986) 'dialogic interaction' in the writing and reading processes by which he means that an utterance is linked to the utterances in a complex organising system. Kristeva (1986) employs intertextuality as a property of text, which makes reference to previous texts. In this way, a text is no longer regarded as static and constrained by existing structure, and it interacts with the other types of text. More recently, Fairclough (1992) applies intertextuality as an important construct to investigate the relationship between text and the concurrent social structures, which can be related to the influence from Miller's (1984) concept of genre as a particular way of examining social issues exhibited in the text.

Persuasive orientations across cultures

Genre knowledge also involves different sets of persuasive dimensions, which may underpin genre writing across cultures. Culture serves as a basis for reasoning and persuasion and different cultures may resort to different types of rhetoric and persuasion (Connor, 2003). Aristotle and Confucius' views relating to persuasion are discussed as a point of comparison. According to Lü (1998), these two sets of theories are essential for understanding modern Western and Chinese persuasion. Aristotle, as a major representative of the Greek rhetoric, has developed a wide range of concepts in rhetoric, and the most relevant to this study is the persuasive appeals or orientations including *ethos* (character and standards), *pathos* (emotion) and *logos* (reason and evidence). Aristotle (1991) places major importance on *logos*, treating *pathos* only as secondary to the logical presentation of an argument. This stress on *logos* has a fundamental influence on modern academic writing (such as Connor & Lauer, 1988; Kaplan, 1966; Young, 1994) and on business writing (Chase *et al.*, 2003; Murphey *et al.*, 1997; Ober, 2001).

Chinese rhetorical tradition, which was developed in the vein of Confucian philosophical tradition (Garrett, 1993; Lü, 1998), is predominantly based on *ren tao* (the way of humans) and the moral codes he prescribes in his teachings. To Confucius, *ren* (benevolence) is seen as the highest standard of moral perfection. In order to achieve these virtues, Confucius sets the highest standards for adequate conduct in these five key role relationships between ruler and subject, neighbour and neighbour, father and son, husband and wife, and older brother and younger brother. Garrett points out *xin* or heart plays an

essential role in Confucius' moral standards. Therefore these five relations can also be seen as related to *ethos* and *pathos* and are often advocated as part of important criteria for effective persuasion in Chinese culture. As part of the most important persuasive orientations, *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason) exercise a profound influence on modern Chinese writing including both literary and business writings (He & Lu, 1991; Li, 1990, 1996). Specifically, Li (1996) points out that *qing* has great persuasive power and complements *li* and both represent an important dimension for understanding Chinese writing (Li, 1996). Relevant background information of the English and Chinese sales invitations is provided in the next section to further explicate the above-mentioned persuasive orientations.

The background to English and Chinese sales invitation genres

Both the sociocultural contexts and textbook approach to these genres are introduced. The sociocultural context of New Zealand is characterised by the market economy which has been in practice consistently throughout its brief history of over one hundred years. The competitive nature of business would not indicate any difference from that of the other developed countries. Many tertiary institutions use American textbooks (e.g. Murphey *et al.*, 1997; Ober, 2001) in the area of business writing and even New Zealand textbooks (e.g. Chase *et al.*, 2003) are based on similar writing principle. These English textbooks tend to treat sales invitations as a type of sales promotion letter, which all fall under the rubric of persuasive messages. In essence, sales promotion letters are used to promote business opportunities, or products and service. The prevalent strategies employed by these sales promotion messages are related to the AIDA model, which involves a series of mental activities: attracting readers' attention, developing reader's interest and desire to buy the product and move the reader to action. The AIDA model can also be seen as related to the major *logos* in persuasion and is exemplified by the specific strategies such as promoting the trade show and providing incentives in the English best-case example (see the major content listed on the left-hand column in the Appendix).

The social context of Chinese business practice is, however, rather complicated and therefore deserves more attention. According to Zhu (2000, 2002, 2005), this genre has witnessed tremendous changes since after the economic reform in 1978. The year of 1978 represents a connection to the market economy. The nature of previous public ownership was attacked. The structure of selling has changed fundamentally and every enterprise is involved in the competitive market economy. This led to the increasing popularity of sales invitations to trade shows and also to the use of sales promotional strategies (Chen, 1991). However, Chinese textbooks tend to view sales invitations differently from the English textbooks in terms of their social functions. For example, Lu *et al.* (1993): 189) point out the purpose of sales invitations is to 'increase friendship and develop trade'. Lu *et al.* (1993) note the importance of promoting business; concurrently, they also pay attention to 'friendship', which goes beyond a business partnership. An intention for *qing*

(emotion) and a long-term relationship are both implied. The dual function also corresponds to the dual genre forms to which sales invitations belong.

On the one hand, they are seen as a type of *gongwen* (official letters). According to He and Lu (1990), *gongwen* refer to documents or correspondence used in government and business organisations and the former is more formal than the latter. Chinese sales invitations belong to the latter type of *gongwen* as they are a type of organisational correspondence. *Gongwen* (official letters or documents) are divided into *shang/ping/xiaying* genres (He & Lu, 1991) which can be translated into subordinate writing to superior, equals writing to equals and superior writing to subordinate genres. The division is still based on interpersonal relationships between the reader and the writer, which can also be seen as part of the *qing* and *li*. In modern business writing, according to Wang (1987), one of the pioneering researchers in this area, it is important to express appropriate feelings based on reader–writer relationships in the specific linguistic contexts.

On the other hand, sales invitations are often seen as a type of *shejiao xin* (letters of social networking) (e.g. He & Zhang, 1997; Zhuge & Chen, 1994). The meaning of *shejiao* (social networking) is readily apparent. Accordingly, Chinese sales invitations are treated as a genre for building relationships in which *qing* (emotional) plays an important role. A high level of respect is also required, as indicated by the frequent use of honorific address term and salutations such as *jing qizhe* (Respected Reader) and using *Yaoqing Xin* (Invitation) as a letterhead. The overlapping of *gongwen* (official letters) and *shejiao* (social networking) genres can be seen as a reflection of *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason). The Chinese sales invitation on a computer show in the Appendix is a *pingxing* (equals writing to each other) invitation and also uses the prescribed polite invitation format.

Textbooks offer useful information about sales invitations. However, they only provide prescriptive rules in relation to writing strategies. These gaps will be further highlighted and bridged by the business managers' reflections in the next section.

Towards an intercultural reflective model

The professional members' knowledge may not be readily available and one feasible way of accessing it is through their in-depth reflections on genre and intercultural communication. According to Pan *et al.* (2002: 5), effective communication in the international workplace requires a reflective understanding of the communication processes. They proposed an intercultural training method for members to exchange reflective discussion and feedback with their counterparts. They specifically suggest two areas for soliciting professional members' views: (1) soliciting views on their general expectations about a certain type of communication within their own culture and (2) soliciting their objective view about their counterparts' best-case communication practices. The former can be seen as intracultural reflections and the latter is intercultural. For example, Pan *et al.* (2002) solicited views towards resume writing from three cultural groups including Finnish, Hong Kong and mainland Chinese managers with both intracultural and intercultural

reflections. In the light of Pan *et al.*'s (2002) reflective training method, this paper proposes a two-culture reflective model on genre. More importantly, the model is based on genre knowledge, which is also the major contribution this paper has made to Pan *et al.*'s (2002) existing model, and specifically this model involves:

- (1) soliciting managers' views about criteria for good writing based on their own genre knowledge regarding:
 - purposes and persuasive orientations
 - genre form
 - genre content
 - intertextual features
- (2) soliciting views on the best-case examples of their own culture
- (3) soliciting views on the best-case examples of their counterparts' culture

This model solicits managers' views in three steps based on the earlier literature review. Drawn from Pan *et al.* (2002), and genre analysis, the first step mainly focuses on the professional members' general knowledge about good writing within their own culture. For instance, persuasive orientations (Aristotle, 1991; Garrett, 1993) are included in addition to communicative purposes (Swales, 1990), and are also seen as an underlying principle for genre form and content. In addition, intertextual knowledge (Fairclough, 1992) is incorporated as an important feature for understanding genre. These general criteria are seen as a basic framework for understanding business managers' schemata.

The second and third steps have a specific focus on soliciting managers' views on best-case examples of their own culture, as well as their counterparts'. Besides commenting on their own writing, they will also respond to different types of expectations of their counterparts'. As indicated above, the basic genre knowledge is still used as the major rationale. This reflective model will be used to solicit New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on the genre of sales invitations and specific methodology about the research is detailed next.

Methodology

Research method, data and participants are detailed in this section. The reflective model discussed earlier is used as the major research method for analysing the New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on the use of sales invitations. These two cultures were chosen because of the convenience of my location in both countries and also because of the imperative for these two countries to understand each other in their on-going business relations. The data is composed of two sets: the first set includes one authentic English and one Chinese sales invitation. These two texts were chosen based on the major criterion that they were considered best-case examples by the managers of each of the corporations where they were collected. They were also an initial correspondence sent to potential participants. The New Zealand trade

corporation was located in Auckland and the Chinese was located in Zhengzhou. According to the managers of these two companies, both sales invitations were successful in attracting participants to the trade fairs advertised.

The second set of data was drawn from New Zealand and Chinese managers' reflective views on sales invitation writing. Focus-group interview was used as an appropriate means for collecting managers' views in order to gain insights into the managers' shared understandings of genre. As pointed out by Morgan (1997: 12), one of the advantages of the focus-group interview lies in its interaction within the group about the topics supplied by the researcher. The recommended number of people per group for a focus-group interview is usually six to ten (MacIntosh, 1981). Accordingly, I conducted one focus-group interview with each of the groups, each composed of ten managers from three international trade companies in the two cities. These managers' responsibilities varied from the managing director of a certain department to marketing communication managers. The managers were chosen based on their experience of writing business letters and also based on their availability. The Chinese and New Zealand managers all had at least an undergraduate education, worked in their enterprises for at least three years and had experience in reading and writing business letters in an international business context. Therefore their attitudes can be taken to represent professional attitudes, and reflect the shared conventions of the business community.

The venue for the interviews was a meeting room on a company site. The duration for each of the focus-group interviews was approximately one hour as planned. The whole interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. At the interview, I played the role of a facilitator, making sure the discussion followed the proposed interview tasks.

The first task was to let them reflect on general criteria of good writing for sales invitations. I gave them this scenario for them to reflect on: supposing you were to write a trade fair invitation to your potential customers, what criteria do you think are appropriate for writing it up? They were pretty much left alone brain-storming and discussing the criteria themselves for slightly over 10 minutes. They seemed to be supportive of each other and sometimes also complemented each others' views with some examples they had at work. However, they also expressed their different views where relevant.

As the second task for the interview, I distributed the handout of the English invitation first for them to comment on. After that, the Chinese invitation was distributed following a similar procedure. It took them approximately 20 minutes to discuss each invitation and they spent the rest of the time commenting on each of the invitations.

I used the original version of the English invitation for the Chinese managers and a translated version of the Chinese invitation for the New Zealand managers. This was done because all of the Chinese managers understood or spoke fluent English while very few of the New Zealand manager participants spoke Chinese. This can be seen as a limitation of the research method as it would be more appropriate to use the original version in both languages. In order to reduce the limitations, I conducted focus-group

interviews in both English and Chinese languages respectively, and the Chinese managers were encouraged to use their mother tongue although sometimes there was a linguistic mix of using English phrases during their discussion. For example, they had to refer to the English text and discuss some of the concepts in English occasionally.

Comparing Managers' Views on the Best-case Sales Invitations

This section uses the proposed reflective model to compare New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on the two best-case sales invitations (see Appendix).

The managers' criteria for writing sales invitations of their own culture

As noted earlier, each group was asked to respond to a writing situation and comment on what good writing should be composed of. The New Zealand managers seemed to have a clear understanding about what a good sales invitation should be like and they generally agreed that the following criteria were essential:

- (1) have a clear purpose on promoting the trade fair and the advertised products;
- (2) be brief and to the point and ideas should be developed from point to point;
- (3) be clear in style;
- (4) use you-approach and engage the reader as a potential individual customer; and
- (5) include Internet link to detail sales fairs and products.

The New Zealand managers' comments stress the *logos* using AIDA as a major point of persuasion. The first criterion is related to the purpose of promoting the trade fairs and products, which has a clear business orientation or the *logos* for this genre. The second criterion focuses on content and idea development, which should evolve around the purpose. The third and fourth criteria are about using appropriate linguistic forms and styles which should be clear and informal. Here clarity can be closely related to *logos* as it helps further clarify ideas and purposes. Note that the New Zealand managers stressed informality as a kind of *pathos* appropriate for sales invitations. In general, their comments coincide with the textbook approach. However, the managers also pointed out the need for incorporating the intertextual information from the company's website.

Following a similar procedure, the Chinese managers during the focus-group interview came to agreement about these criteria for good writing, which should consist of:

- (1) have dual purposes of both promoting the trade fair and inviting the reader respectfully depending on the reader-writer relationships;
- (2) making sure to invite all the relevant company members;

- (3) have a clear style including relevant information about the trade fair;
- (4) invite the reader courteously as a host; and
- (5) using *Yaoqing Xin* (Invitation) as a headline and using respectful language.

The first criterion is related to promoting the trade fair and using inviting behaviour, which can be seen as underlined by the persuasive orientation of both *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason). *Qing* (emotion) should be used appropriately based on the reader–writer relationships. This criterion also indicates the Chinese managers' intertextual knowledge of *gongwen* (official letter) and *shejiao* (social networking) invitation genres, which shows a clear contrast with the New Zealand managers' views about the purposes of English sales invitations.

Criteria 2–4 concentrate on the content of the invitation. The second and third comments were about the *gongwen* (official letter) features and the Chinese managers thought it was appropriate to include all the relevant members in the invitation as part of the social networking ritual. This collectivistic view seems different from the New Zealand managers'. In addition, the third criterion also coincides with the *logos* of promoting the trade fairs as shown in the English sales invitations. The fourth criterion stresses the *qing* required by *shejiao xin* (letters of social contact). In this way, the managers' criteria for writing sales invitations indicate a balanced combination of both *qing* and *li*.

The final comment is concerned with the form, which should be formal and respectful. Politeness rituals were seen by the Chinese managers as crucial for invitation writing. In general, the Chinese managers preferred to be seen as collaborative, host-like, sincere and respectful, thus indicating a stronger *qing* or *pathos* as compared to the New Zealand managers' criteria.

The two groups' views also correspond to Gao and Ting-Toomey's (1998) findings about face and images in different cultures. They point out that people from high-context cultures (Hall, 1976) such as China tend to stress a collaborative public self-image which differs from the individualistic public image in the low-context cultures such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

The managers' views on the English sales invitation

The New Zealand managers seemed to follow the criteria they agreed on consistently while commenting on the English sales invitation (see Appendix). First of all, they agreed that the purpose of the invitation was clear and focused on promoting the trade fair. In terms of the content, they pointed out that this was a well written invitation which started straight to the point. It provided details about the incentives for preregistration which made the invitation more appealing. Detailed on-line information was also provided for registration for the reader's convenience.

They also commented favourably on the form of the invitation. For example, one manager pointed out: 'This sales invitation is quite clear in structure, and the writer gives necessary details and provides relevant reasons for writing the invitation to the gift fair.'

As a further comment, they indicated that the style of the invitation was professional and there was no unnecessary exaggeration in the invitation. They agreed that it had an informal and a conversational writing style. As part of the intertextual understanding, they thought the Internet address was relevant and useful. As one manager pointed out, 'The website information is very clear and concise and those who are interested in the trade fair would find it very handy and informative.'

It needs to be pointed out that no comments have been made in relation to the importance of emotional appeal, which may further indicate that the priority was given to *logos* as the underpinning principle for sales invitations in New Zealand. However, as a minor point, the New Zealand managers did recommend the appropriate 'calm' and 'informal' tone, which seems to indicate a different type of *pathos* of formality from the Chinese sales invitations.

The Chinese managers generally agreed that the English invitation had a clear purpose of advertising the trade fair. However, they seemed to split in opinion amongst themselves regarding the use of *qing* (emotion) and purpose of inviting the reader. The majority of them felt that although it was important to stress *ren qing* (human emotion), less stress on *qing* (emotion) should be acceptable as the most important purpose was to promote products anyway. Besides, the invitation showed an informal *qing* (emotion) to the reader. They further commented, although the invitation did not have the politeness rituals as would be expected of the Chinese invitations, it was clear and easy to read. While agreeing that the politeness rituals were important, they had no problem accepting an informal and friendly approach in the English invitation. In addition, they also hinted that it would be more appropriate if the writer knew the reader well.

Others didn't agree, saying that an invitation should have a more formal *qing* (emotion). For example, it didn't have the appropriate linguistic rituals as required of *shejiao xin* (letters of social networking) as discussed earlier in Zhuge and Chen (1994). For example, one manager commented, 'The invitation should be more formal to reflect the features of *shejiao xin* (letters of social networking).' This manager's comment also raises an interesting question about the possible different criteria Chinese managers have followed regarding formality for writing sales invitations.

Those who approved of the English sales invitation did not seem to follow their proposed criteria for good writing consistently, which tended to stress a stronger *qing* (emotion). However, a closer look indicates that their splitting views represent intercultural responses to different types of *qing* (emotion) of other cultures. As they appropriately commented, they would not probably use the same tone when drafting a sales invitation, but they would accept it as a reader in an intercultural situation.

Their views imply that *qing* (emotion) can be seen as a continuum in terms of warmth and formality in this case rather than a discrete element of persuasion. This point of view also corresponds with Kaplan's (1987) multiple forms of rhetorical structure and Hyland's (2000) pluricentricity of genre construction within a culture. However, as the Chinese managers appropriately pointed out, *qing* (emotion) should be carefully handled based on

specific reader–writer relationships and could be adjusted in an intercultural context. In addition, their agreeable response may indicate that the most important thing is to communicate the information about the trade. We can see the influence of business orientation of promoting trade fairs here, which is also closely related to the *logos* of sales invitations. However, appropriate use of *qing* (emotion) can help with the interpersonal relationships as well as the promotion of the trade fair.

The managers' views on the best-case Chinese sales invitation

No major split of opinion was found in the Chinese managers' views on the Chinese sales invitation (see both the original and translated version in Appendix) and they all agreed that this was a well written sales invitation. One manager's comment is quoted here to reflect the whole group's views: 'This sales invitation is an example of good writing. The reader is sincerely invited and the computer show is well advertised.' This view echoed their criterion on both *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason) for invitation writing.

The Chinese managers agreed that this invitation gave essential details to describe the computer show with all the necessary information. Apparently, AIDA is also important for Chinese sales invitations and so it can be seen as a universal strategy for business promotions. It is only a recent trend in China as a result of Western influence in the Chinese business environment.

They applied their intertextual knowledge to comment on the inviting behaviour, agreeing that this was a formal and respectful invitation and the writer sincerely invited the reader with warmth and host-like attitude and even with embedded invitations (see the Appendix).

They also liked the form and thought that the structure was clear and it was easy to follow the main ideas. One manager further commented that it was good to insert an invitation card and he sometimes collected well designed cards which not only carried companies' information but also their respectful images.

The New Zealand managers, however, expressed very different views from the above and they were concerned with the *qing* (emotion) embedded in the Chinese invitation. One manager said, 'The approach is too emotional and is not appropriate for writing business promotional letters.' Apparently, they made no major distinction between sales letters and sales invitations and did not seem to share the intertextual knowledge as their Chinese counterparts did.

The New Zealand managers further pointed out the pros and cons about the content of the invitation. They agreed that the outline of the products was appropriate and the writer also discussed credibility of products. Note that this comment resonates with the universal AIDA sales strategies. However, they pointed out that the background information at the beginning of the invitation should not be necessary. This is an interesting point relating to Chinese *gongwen* (official letter) writing style, which often requires contextual information about current economic development (He & Lu, 1991). They also thought it would be much easier if on-line information was provided about the

computer show. There seems to be lag in technological development. While the Internet is frequently used by companies advertising trade fairs in New Zealand and other developed countries, it is less frequently used by advertising companies in China at this time.

Their comments on the form of the Chinese invitation seemed to follow a similar argument. They didn't think the salutation 'Respected Reader' was appropriate and insisted that the writer should address the reader by name. In a similar light, they also commented that wishing for good health was inappropriate, as health was private. Furthermore, one manager pointed out, 'Repeating the invitation was redundant and inviting the reader once should be sufficient.' The New Zealand managers seemed to have different views in terms of the use of *qing* (emotion). Two managers commented that they didn't mind about the warmth of the invitation, and all they wanted was the essential information anyway about the trade fair. It was just a matter of finding it in the sales invitation. It is interesting to note that they may not recommend the emotional style. However, they could accept it as a kind of communication style if needed. Note the *qing* (emotion) was also interpreted as a continuum in terms of the warmth and formality.

None of the politeness rituals of invitation such as the formal salutation, good wishes and embedded invitations recommended by the Chinese group were seen as part of good writing by the New Zealand managers.

In sum, both groups of managers have basically followed their own criteria of writing in judging the English sales invitation. The New Zealand managers thought that the English invitation was well written and reflected the major purposes the writer intended to achieve. They also agreed with the informal and friendly style. The Chinese managers also agreed with the clarity of style employed by the English invitation. However, they were split in opinion about the *qing* or *pathos* employed by this invitation. The Chinese sales invitation seemed to incur even more different views between the two groups: the Chinese managers agreed that the formality and *qing* were appropriate for sales invitation writing; the New Zealand managers sometimes thought that the *qing* or *pathos* was a bit too strong for a sales promotion text. This finding may indicate that sales invitations are seen as belonging to different genres: the New Zealand managers regard them as a sales genre while the Chinese treat them as a *shejiao* (social networking) genre.

Conclusion

This paper has further developed Pan *et al.*'s (2002) intercultural reflective model based on genre knowledge and used it to solicit New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on writing sales invitations to trade fairs. It has been found that persuasive orientations underpin genre knowledge in each culture. As a universal generic feature for sales invitations, both groups tend to accept AIDA as part of the promotional strategies for writing sales invitations which is an underlying value in the business world. A stronger and more formal *qing* (emotion) is advocated as part of good writing for sales invitations by the Chinese group and a more *logos*-orientated view is shared by the New Zealand

managers. Each interview group generally share similar criteria for good writing, further confirming Swales' (1990) claim about the shared knowledge within a discourse community.

The two groups mainly differ in opinion regarding invitation rituals and politeness behaviour of another culture, which is also underpinned by the persuasive orientations. These persuasive orientations can be interpreted as a continuum and can be adapted in an intercultural context. For example, although a lesser *qing* (emotion) in invitation may not be considered as part of good writing criteria by the Chinese managers, it can still be accepted as a different style in an intercultural context. Both groups indicated a promising level of understanding for their counterparts.

It is recommended that linguistic and intertextual knowledge is essential for understanding persuasive orientations in business writing, which can apply to both the Chinese and New Zealand managers. A grasp of the stress on *logos* in persuasion can help the Chinese managers to appreciate the straightforward style in the English sales invitations. In addition, speaking the language can also help understand these persuasive orientations as shown by the Chinese managers' interpretations about the English invitation. From the New Zealand managers' perspective, an understanding about the overlap of both *gongwen* (official letters) and *shejiao xin* (letters of social networking) may help New Zealand managers understand the inviting behaviour in Chinese sales invitations. This finding also shows the major difference between English and Chinese sales invitations.

The model can be applied to the study of genres beyond sales invitations as it focuses on the main features of purposes and persuasive orientations. In addition, persuasive orientations can be utilised as a useful dimension for understanding genres of other cultures. In particular, it is essential to learn different types of *pathos* or *qing* (emotion) in relation to specific reader–writer relationships and sociocultural contexts. In addition, managers' views about persuasion can be incorporated into research to reflect the experts' genre knowledge.

Further research should also be conducted to solicit managers' views from a wider range of cultures about how they actually apply different types of knowledge in their professional practice. The specific use of language by practitioners of different cultures will provide us with a rich source of knowledge to better understand culture and its interaction with language and communication.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Yunxia Zhu, UQ Business School, the University of Queensland, Brisbane 4072, Queensland, Australia (yzhu@business.uq.edu.au).

Notes

1. New Zealand refers to European New Zealand culture which is also the majority culture in business communication although I am also aware of the existence of other ethnic groups. Chinese culture refers to the mainland China where my data were collected and interviews conducted.

2. The New Zealand sales invitation is written in English, as New Zealand is one of the major English-speaking countries. The Chinese invitation is written in Chinese originally and is translated into English (see the Appendix).

References

- Aristotle (1991) *Aristotle on Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (G.A. Kennedy, trans). New York: Oxford.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1986) *'Speech Genres' and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bartlett, F.C. (1932) *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bazerman, C. (1988) *Shaping Written Knowledge: Studies in the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Berkenkotter, C. and Huckin, T.N. (1995) Rethinking genre from a sociocognitive perspective. In C. Berkenkotter and T.N. Huckin (eds) *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition/Culture/Power* (pp. 1–25). Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bhatia, V.K. (1993) *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings*. New York: Longman Group, UK Limited.
- Bond, M.H., Fu, P.P. and Pasa, S.F. (2001) A declaration of independence of editing a new international journal of cross-cultural management. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 1 (1), 24–30.
- Canagarajah, S.A. (2002) *Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Studies*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Chase, P., O'Rourke, S., Smith, L., Sutton, C., Timperley, T. and Wallace, C. (2003) *Effective Business Communication in New Zealand*. Auckland: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Chen W. (ed.) (1991) *Shunxin daquan [A Comprehensive Introduction to Letter Writing]*. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe.
- Connor, U. (2003) Changing currents in contrastive rhetoric: Implications for teaching and research. In B. Kroll (ed.) *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing* (pp. 218–241). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Connor, U. and Lauer, J. (1988) Cross-cultural variation in persuasive student writing. In A.C. Purvers (ed.) *Writing Across Languages and Cultures: Issues in Contrastive Rhetoric* (Vol. 2, pp. 138–159). San Francisco: Sage Publications Inc.
- Fairclough, N.L. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gao, G. and Ting-Toomey, S. (1998) *Communicating Effectively with Chinese*. London: Sage.
- Garrett, M. (1993) Classical Chinese conceptions of argumentation and persuasion. *Argumentation and Advocacy* 29, 105–115.
- Gimenez, J.C. (2004) Unpacking business emails: Message embeddedness in international business email communication. Paper presented at the ABC Europe Conference, Catholic University, Milan, 21–23 May.
- Hall, E.T. (1976) *Beyond Culture*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.
- He, Q. and Lu, Z. (1991) *Yingyong xiezuo [On the Writing of Practical Documents]*. Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Chubanshe.
- He, X. and Zhang, Z. (1997) *Shenjiao yingyong wen [Social Networking Genres]*. Zhengzhou: Henan Renming Chubanshe.
- Hyland, K. (2000) *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. New York: Longman.
- Kaplan, R.B. (1966) Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education. *Language Learning* 16, 1–20.
- Kaplan, R.B. (1987) Cultural thought patterns revisited. In U. Connor and R.B. Kaplan (eds) *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text* (pp. 9–22). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Kristeva, J. (1986) Word, dialogue and novel. In T. Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Li, D. (ed.) (1990) *Caijing yingyong xiezuo* [On the Writing of Practical Documents in Finance and Economics]. Beijing: Zhongguo Caizheng Jingji Chubanshe.
- Li, X. (1996) 'Good writing' in Cross-cultural Context. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Louhiala-Salminen, L. (1997) Investigating the genre of a business fax: A Finnish case study. *Journal of Business Communication* 34 (3), 316–333.
- Lu, P., Zhang, Y. and He, S. (eds) (1993) *Waimao yu shangmao yingyong wushu yuedu xiezuo 200 ti* [Two Hundred Topics on Reading and Writing Skills of Practical Documents in Business and Foreign Trade]. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe.
- Lü, X. (1998) *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- MacIntosh, J. (1981) Focus groups in distance nursing education. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 18, 1981–1985.
- Miller, C.R. (1984) Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, 151–167.
- Morgan, D.L. (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (2nd edn; 1st edn: 1988). London: Sage.
- Murphy, H.A., Hildebrandt, H.W. and Thomas, J.P. (1997) *Effective Business Communication* (7th edn; 1st edn: 1972). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Ober, S. (2001) *Contemporary Business Communication* (4th edn). New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Orlikowski, W. and Yates, J. (1994) Genre repertoire: The structuring of communicative practices in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39, 541–574.
- Pan, Y., Scollon, S.W. and Scollon, R. (2002) *Professional Communication in International Settings*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rumelhart, D.E. (1980) Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In R.J. Spiro, B.C. Bruce and W.F. Brewer (eds) *Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension* (pp. 33–58). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Schutz, A. and Luckmann, T. (1984) *The Structures of the Life World* (R.M. Zaner and D.J. Parent, trans., Vol. II). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Swales, J. (1990) *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, D. (1987) *Yuti luelun* [An Introduction to Genres]. Fuzhou: Fujian Jiaoyu Chubanshe.
- Young, L.W.L. (1994) *Crosstalk and Culture in Sino-American Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zhu, Y. (2000) The use of sales genres in Chinese business communication. *The Journal of Business Communication* 37 (2), 156–172.
- Zhu, Y. (2002) Genre change in the historical development of sales invitations. In C. Candlin (ed.) *Research and Practice in Professional Discourse* (pp. 663–684). Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press.
- Zhu, Y. (2005) *Written Communication across Cultures: A Sociocognitive Perspective on Business Genres*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Zhuge, R. and Chen, X. (eds) (1994) *Duowai maoyi wenshu xiezuo* [Practical Writings in Foreign Trade]. Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe.

Appendix

Example 1. English sales invitation

	(Date)
Headline	Autumn Gift Fair
Salutation	Dear Alan,
Inviting	<p>The Autumn Gift Fair – the nationally recognised expo for the retail industry – takes place at the Auckland Show Grounds, Greenlane, from Sunday 26 – Tuesday 28 March, and promises to feature a huge range of hot new products.</p> <p>You will find it all at the Autumn Gift Fair. More than 300 suppliers from all over the country, with products from all over the world will be there, making this expo crucial to your buying programme for the year.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Our Gift to You</p> <p>Registration Pre-register today and go into the draw to win an incredible trip for two Buenos Aires flying</p> <p>Incentives Qantas Airways. Stay for two nights in four star accommodation in the centre of this fascinating city, then fly to the breathtaking Iguacu Falls for two nights, staying in the Sheraton Hotel with a view of the Falls.</p> <p>By Pre-registering you will complete the first step to ensuring a place in the draw. You will also avoid the queues and receive your shown catalogues in advance. Attend the show and place orders with 10 different exhibitors and you are in to win this fantastic trip!</p> <p>To pre-register, simply complete the enclosed Registration Form and return it by fax to (09)3335588, or seal and post the form to Autumn Gift Fair 2000. If you miss the pre-registration deadline (Friday 10 March), simply bring this form with you to the show and exchange for a badge at the entrance.</p> <p>Further Contact For more information about Autumn Gift Fair please call 0800 AUT XPO (0800 288 976) or check out our website at www.autumnfair.co.nz.</p> <p>Polite closing We look forward to seeing you at the show.</p> <p>Signature Yours Sincerely, Greg McLaren Marketing Manager – Gift Fairs</p>

Example 2 Chinese sales invitation (translation)

Headline	Banking China Invitation to China Computer Show (date)
Salutation	Respected reader,
Background Information Introducing Inviting	The Chinese economy is developing rapidly. Every industry or business has to promote its technology so as to increase its competitiveness. In order to meet the needs of the industries and businesses concerned, Banking China and China Computer Show (this year) are to be held in December in Beijing. We sincerely invite your (H) company to participate.
Advertising	<p>This show is to be held on a grand scale. (Names of the participating countries omitted). Internationally well known companies dealing with bank security, computers, tele-communication and automation equipment will exhibit their latest advanced equipment for financial, banking and other industrial and commercial enterprises.</p> <p>The commercial councils from Australia, Singapore, and Colorado State of the United States will also organise delegations to take part. This show will exhibit all kinds of latest equipment and systems used in banking and financial enterprises. (The detailed exhibits omitted).</p>
Incentives	<p>Through participating in this exhibition, your (H) company can meet more than seventy producers or suppliers from more than ten countries and districts, and talk about co-operative plans with them. (You are) welcome to leave your on-site exhibited products for sale.</p> <p>In addition to this, many technology exchange discussions will also be held so that visitors may have a further understanding of all the participants' advanced products.</p>
Inviting again	Our company sincerely invites managerial and technical representatives from your (H)
Registration	company to visit (H) this Exhibition. Enclosed is an invitation card. Please bring this invitation card with you when you come to the International Exhibition Centre to go through admission formalities.
Further Contact	If you need further details, you can contact the Beijing agency of Exhibition Services Ltd:

Miss XXX

Contact details (Phone number and mailing address
Omitted)

Polite closing
Signature and
Date

Wish (you) good health (H)!

XXX Exhibition Services Ltd.

(Date)