

## Negative Impact of Chinese Thinking Mode on Cross-Cultural Business English Writing

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**Abstract:** With the prosperity of various world trade organizations, the ability of cross-cultural business English writing is becoming more and more critical. As one form of language output, cross-cultural business English writing is profoundly affected by huge differences existing in the way of thinking between Chinese and westerners. This article, combining with Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and Kaplan theory, mainly focuses on studying the negative effects of Chinese thinking mode by analyzing the common mistakes in daily business English writing from three levels of vocabulary, syntax, discourse and then puts forward countermeasures for improving the ability of cross-cultural business English writing and communication.

**Keywords:** Business English writing, Chinese thinking mode, Countermeasures.

### INTRODUCTION

It's generally known that cross-cultural business English writing has played a crucial role in international corporation and communication with economic globalization. Most people, however, even English majors, always fail to write fluent and appropriate business texts for ignoring the thinking differences between westerners and Chinese. Among all differences existing between Chinese and Westerners, thinking difference can be the deepest one, which affects every aspect of English learning, such as reading, translation and writing. (Lian, Shuneng. 2002; Luo, Mingli. 2011)

As English learners, most people have acquired basic English grammatical knowledge and a certain amount of vocabulary, but they still fail to write or speak idiomatic English. From past experience, the author found that articles and verbal expression by most of English learners had obvious Chinese traces, namely, Chinglish. Thus, it's safely to say that language learning is not only determined by basic levels, including word, grammar and culture, but also by thinking difference (Miyamoto, Y. 2013). Because thinking and writing are closely linked, it is of great importance to

study the common mistakes caused by thinking difference in the process of cross-cultural business English writing and to find ways to overcome the negative impacts of Chinese thinking model in order to improve the ability of cross-cultural business English writing.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

Some scholars (Sapir, E. 1982; Whorf, B. L. 1952). have studied the relationship between Language and thinking, chief among those popular but controversial theories is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which firstly claims that our language in some way determines the way we perceive the world, hence the strong notion of linguistic determinism. Owing to language differing in many ways, Whorf[15] also thought different language speakers perceive the world differently, in other words, related to their linguistic background, hence the notion of linguistic relativism (Sapir, E. 1982). This hypothesis is controversial, but it's obvious that language and thought are closely related (Lian, Shuneng. 2002). Chinese thinking mode, therefore, must exert negative impact on business English writing. The author believes that the difference

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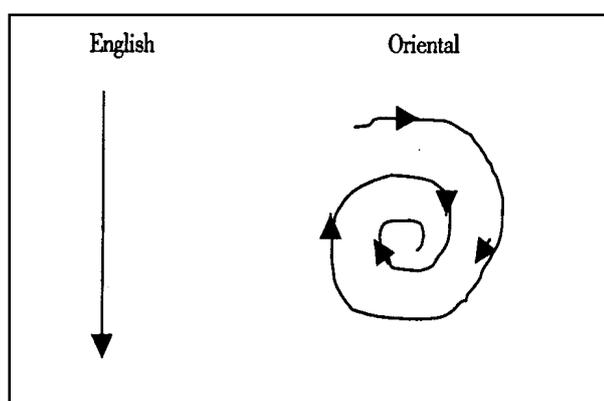
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in language expression reflects the difference in thinking patterns. The differences in thinking patterns stem from different philosophies, cultures, and beliefs (Whorf, B. L. (1952).

### Kaplan Theory

Apart from that, Robert Kaplan (Kaplan, R.B. 1996, American applied linguist, also studied the relationship between writing and thinking by analyzing people from Orient and Occident, and then drew a set of graphs, which showed the Oriental are inclined to write in a spiral type while the Occidental tend to write in a straight type ( Kaplan, R.B. 1996) . That is to say, Chinese people will present the main idea of the article after a great many statements while Westerners will present the topic sentence at the first paragraph. The relationship is clearly reflected on the following graphs.



### THINKING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERNERS

Influenced by Chinese traditional philosophies (seeking peace and stability), Chinese people tend to express their idea and feeling in an indirect way (Lian, Shuneng.(2002). Therefore, Chinese people often use independent phrases or clauses, which, however, are completely related in terms of meaning. On the contrary, westerners influenced by logical argumentation are inclined to be pragmatic and rigorous so that they always focus on the form of language (Li, Deyu., & Zhang, Huixin. 2002). And different linguistic units are often linked by various functional words like conjunction, pronouns. English focuses on the hypotaxis for rich forms of combination of means, such as affixes, morphological changes, tense, while Chinese mainly depends on the intrinsic cohesion of meaning to form a vague sense of context (Yang, Weiguang. 2007). Chinese is scattered but not chaotic.

There is a simple fact that the organization of English discourse develops in a straight line. English paragraphs usually start with a topic sentence and then develops this central idea in the following sentences. In the process of developing the central idea, each sentence in the paragraph naturally comes out of the preceding sentence to make the meaning of the paragraph appear in a linear sequence (Wen, Qiufang.,

& Liu, Runqing. 2006). This is related to the traditional mode of thinking where westerners attach great importance to logical analysis.

Chinese paragraphs, however, develop in a spiral way, which means the topic of the discourse is often not straightforward, but rather elaborated by twists and turns. The preceding sentence, implying the subject, does not explicitly discuss the main idea of the discourse but uses a spiral repetitive hint to pave the way for the theme gradually (Huang, Yiping. (2006). This is consistent with the traditional Chinese thinking mode in which people put great emphasis on overall harmony.

China is located in the southeast of the continent of Europe and Asia. The landform are changeable and the resources are abundant, so Chinese people have formed a colorful and concrete thinking mode (Hiroshi, Y., & Norhayati, Za. 2019; Swan, M. 2002). The evolution of Chinese characters can be a case in point. Nevertheless, influenced by traditional geometry and mathematics, Westerners are good at abstract thinking.

### NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THINKING DIFFERENCE ON CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS ENGLISH WRITING

As stated above, thinking differences can exert huge impact on the process of writing. With respect to cross-cultural Business English writing, writers can easily get into the trap of thinking differences and then produce ridiculous sentences. The main purpose of cross-cultural business English writing is to effectively promote business communication. If one is fixed in the interference of thinking differences, it may violate his or her will and causes unnecessary losses. This part, combining with common mistakes and examples in daily business English writing, will illuminate the negative impacts of thinking difference on cross-cultural writing in detail from three levels: lexical level, syntactic level and textual level.

#### LEXICAL LEVEL

It's known to us all that cross-cultural business English writing usually is very short, brief and direct as businessmen hold the view that time is money. They want to obtain more at the expense of less time and energy. Hence, business English writing often chooses simple words to convey information in order to achieve successful interaction. Too many complicated words combined together have a negative effect on the business communication. Compare the following two pairs of words, you will find A is too complicated and stuffy.

**Table-1: Complicated word & Simple word**

<b>A</b>	terminate	visualize	metropolitan
<b>B</b>	end	see	big city

To conclude, the writer should avoid complicated words, which make others confused, but it does not mean that simpler words are always superior (Pallister, J. 2001). For example, people prefer to use beneficiary rather than choose salutary.

Lexical redundancy is another kind of typical mistakes violating the principle of conciseness in cross-cultural business English writing. Influenced by Chinese writing habit, a majority of people are inclined to select wordy vocabulary when organizing a sentence or an article. To be concise, the words you choose should be as short as possible. In other words, compared with phrases and complete words, a single one and acronym may be better in business English writing. The following pairs of words or phrases can be good examples.

**Table-2: Redundant word & Short word**

<b>A</b>	for the purpose of	Document against payment	at price of 9\$	free on board
<b>B</b>	for	D/P	at 9\$	FOB

From the above pairs, you can learn the merits of shorter words, which will save a huge amount of time and cost and enhances the efficiency of communication. Verbalization can be conducive to be idiomatic in cross-cultural business English writing (Jiang, Guihua. (2000).

documents. Therefore, business letters not only cover the basic information, but also state all the information by the shortest sentence, striving to transmit more information by less words. The conciseness of business English is not only reflected by the lexical level but by the syntactic level. As a result, in cross-cultural business English writing, brief sentence structure may be more preferred because readers can get the core information in the shortest time. Based on observation, the average number of a business letter is less than 30. The following examples abstracted from *International business English Writing* (Zhunming, C., & Jianping, C. 2009) can be a case in point.

**SYNTACTIC LEVEL**  
**Complicated Sentence**

Business English, also called ESP, has developed its own unique style on the syntactic level. Inflected by the traditional belief (Time is money), businessmen may not have enough patience to read long

**Table-3: Complicated sentence & Brief sentence**

A	B
I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter of May 2 with the check for \$200 enclosed and wish to thank you for the same.	We appreciate your letter of May 2 and the check for \$200 you sent with it.
I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your kind cooperation.	Thank you for your cooperation.

From the above pairs, it's self-evident that sentences in A column are wordy and stuffy. It's much better to express directly like B. In the first sentence, A and B have expressed the same meaning, but you can find the sentence structure used in the sentence B is clearer.

sentence are always different when they state the same fact. Date sequence is a typical example which can make this point clear. Furthermore, adverbials are usually placed before subjects and predicates, and modifiers before modified words in Chinese writing on the ground that people in China affected by spiral thinking mode tend to state unimportant information firstly. Westerners, however, put attributives after the modified words. The following examples are quoted from daily business English writing.

**INAPPROPRIATE ORDER**

Owing to differences in the way of thinking between Chinese and westerners, the sequences of

**Table-4: Inappropriate order & Appropriate order**

A	B
We have received your July 1st letter.	We have received your letter dated July 1st.
We could through negotiation solve the disputes.	We could solve the disputes through negotiation.

Just as what we have discussed in Chapter 2, English focus on hypotaxis. So English sentences are mainly produced by the subject-predicate structure, which links different sentences with many grammatical

words like conjunctions, adverbials, thus showing close connection. This is also the reason why English sentences are logically rigorous, and have a relatively fixed meaning. On the contrary, Chinese emphasizes

parataxis, which connects different sentences by invisible logical relationship. Therefore, the structures of Chinese are loose, and people in China will write some sentences in an improper order like sentences in A. Simple sentence

In cross-cultural business English writing, compound sentence can be more popular. Sometimes,

we can choose passive voice or compound sentence to organize an article. compound sentences can not only convey more meaning but make the text rigorous and strict. Compare the following examples quoted from *International Business Writing* (Zhunming, C., & Jianping, C. 2009 ).

**Table-5: Simple sentence & Compound sentence**

A	B
We would like to inform you that all firms have accepted our above terms of payment. These firms have business relations with us including such firms as ABC, CCB. We suppose that they are certainly known to you.	We would like to inform you that our above terms of payment have been widely accepted by all firms having business relations with us including such firms as ABC, CCB, which we suppose are certainly known to you.

Affected by Chinese thinking mode, passive voice is rarely used in Chinese writing. But passive voice does not show one’s own subjective emotion, complying with the characteristics of cross-cultural business English writing. Furthermore, passive voice demonstrates a great deal of courtesy. At the same vein, we also opt to integrate single sentences into a compound one as sentence B.

**TEXTUAL LEVEL**

**Irregular Paragraph Order**

In general, “one paragraph one idea” is a basic principle in cross-cultural business English writing. And a business correspondence is usually constituted by three parts, namely, the beginning, the main body, the ending. The beginning is for the purpose, the main body for business points, and the ending for wishes. However, due to Chinese thinking mode, Chinese people usually state their purpose after a long phatic communion. Westerners are more direct so that readers can learn the main information as quickly as possible. The following example is a successful business correspondence abstracted from *International Business correspondence* (Wu, Wen. (2015).

**Dear Alicia:**

Thank you for your email dated November 18 asking us to amend the subject L/C.

In conformity with your requests in your letter, we have accordingly amended it through our bank. Please check the attachment and send us your confirmation immediately. We will ask our bank to fax the attachments to your bank upon receipt of your confirmation.

We are looking forward to your timely shipment. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

**Best regards**  
Jeremy

**COUNTERMEASURES**

From what we have analyzed above, we may safely draw the conclusion that Chinese thinking mode

has exerted huge influence on the business English writing. Namely, lacking of sufficient business terminology and business knowledge, cultural differences. In this chapter, we will discuss how to write correctly and appropriately in English from three aspects.

**IMPROVING CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS ENGLISH-RELATED VOCABULARY**

Brick is to a house what vocabulary is to writing. So writing is to build a house with vocabulary. As a specialized subject, Business English has a great many terminologies, which have been a difficulty for most learners. Furthermore, some words in general English may have utterly different meaning in business context. Lastly, with the advent of the era, many brand-new words emerge. Therefore, mastering business terminology is the key to being proficient in business English writing. We could memorize these words by putting them into specific context, polysemy, hyponym, and word-formation etc.

**LEARNING MORE ABOUT WESTERN CULTURE**

The reason why Business English writing is deeply affected by Chinese thinking mode is partly because the influence of the mother tongue is deeply ingrained, partly because the majority of learners fail to understand the differences between Chinese culture and Western culture. As English majors, we should pay attention to the study of traditional Chinese history and culture. Only by truly understanding and mastering Chinese culture, can we effectively compare it with Western one, clarify the differences between both countries in ways that being proficient in writing business correspondence. In addition, English majors should broaden their horizons, expose themselves to foreign cultures, and understand traditional customs and manners of each country so that they can handle business letters efficiently in accordance with nationality of different partners.

### Reading More Cross-Cultural Business Texts

We all know the importance of reading in language learning. Similarly, reading business English texts is an effective way to learn the characteristics of cross-cultural business English writing. For example, we can master the core of cross-cultural business English writing by observing such business correspondences as letters, reports and emails. In addition, we can utilize the business articles on economic magazines or websites so that knowing how to organize a idiomatic business correspondences from layout, word choice and writing style. Only by accumulating a large amount of business corpus, can we select the most suitable expression to complete the task of cross-cultural communication.

### CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural business English writing plays an important role in promoting the skills of English application. However, due to the lack of business awareness and the poor foundation of cross-cultural business English writing skills, many mistakes have inevitably appeared. These mistakes have seriously affected the effectiveness of business communication between the two parties. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the common mistakes of cross-cultural business English writing caused by thinking difference and put forward corresponding countermeasures. In addition, by error-analysis, we should learn some skills to improve cross-cultural business English writing ability, such as transforming English learning concepts and fostering English thinking habit. Through long-term and arduous efforts, cross-cultural business English writing ability can be effectively enhanced. The “difference” between Chinese and Western thinking model does not mean “gap”, but knowing “difference” is the prerequisite of effective communication. Under the background of rapid development of international trade and cooperation, cross-cultural business English writing will remain a cornerstone. Studying cross-cultural business English writing further has profound meaning.

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