

Perception and Reality in Cross-cultural Business Communication :

A Study of Corporate Communication Management (I)

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Introduction

Internet, the computer communication network that spans the globe, which at first linked a few universities and advanced research laboratories, has now been rapidly evolved into a commercial service that has spread throughout the business world. Commercial users offered a full-scale service hookup to Internet will experience a transformation in their communication system.¹ For example, Internet would allow a businessperson working in Europe to input to his laptop computer reports about how a business negotiation is going, and this information would be sent to a host computer in Tokyo where it would become a database that any other employee in the

1 *The Nikkei Weekly* (Tokyo), June 27, 1994, p. 22.

other regions in the world could access as well. Thus employees working in different markets can constantly share information and adjust strategies, while managers can get an overview of what all their subordinates are doing, and provide assistance and guidance where necessary.

The “hard” aspect of corporate business communication thus has been far advanced these days. But, what about its “soft” aspect? Has the “soft” side of corporate business communication, or the corporate communication control including language and culture training and its management, been as much developed as the “hard” side of international networking? I don’t think it has been considered as so important. However, I presume corporate communication management is as necessary and important as the company’s personnel control, cost control, production control, sales control, etc.

Our nation’s imports and exports as well as direct overseas investment are showing dramatic growth in the past eight years. The 1994 white paper on trade released by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry notes that Japan’s exports reached US\$ 360.9 billion in 1993, almost double the 1985 record, and the total imports in 1993 recorded US\$ 241 billion which is about again two times the figure of 1985. Japan’s trade statistics also show a tremendous increase in our nation’s overseas direct investment and the offshore production which is now leading to a hollowing out of the domestic industries. What this fact means is the ever increasing personal contacts of Japanese business people with their overseas counterparts and the resultant increase in their communications. Chances are that those

who have different views, beliefs, and practices contact each other more and even work in and for the same company across nations and cultures more than ever.

Under these circumstances, like it or not, each Japanese company engaging in international business and/or having an overseas subsidiary or subsidiaries must pay due attention to effective communication control for its sound and vital management to survive and be successful in this competitive era.

Cross-cultural vs. International Business Communication

It is true, as we have observed in the introduction of this article, that international trading is conducted between nations. Therefore, if we would take up the subject of business communication for international trade or business, we will naturally call it "International Business Communication." However, when we shift our views to those who actually communicate with each other, we will soon notice that we cannot fully discuss the subject with this concept of international business communication. It is not a nation, which is mere a political concept, that does business internationally, but its people.

Our shared interest in the subject is not about a nation and its system of international trade, but rather its people who use a language for their actual business communication with people of other countries. Besides, we must understand that one cannot separate language from culture. Language reflects the values of a particular culture. It unites people into a community because it expresses their common experiences.

A language exists not because there is a nation, but because there is a culture. A nation can contain within it a variety of cultures like those in India or China. In the case of many European countries, Western Canada, and the western part of the U.S., they have very similar or even the same cultures though they are divided by national boundaries. If you go into a restaurant in Zurich, Switzerland, a charming waitress will greet you in German with "Guten Tag!" and send you off with a smile saying "Merci!" in French.

"National boundaries somehow become more tangible than cultural boundaries; and, of course, there are noticeable differences in many aspects of behavior as one passes from one nation to another. There are noticeable differences also as one goes from a remote rural village in a country to metropolitan centers of that country. It's the differences between and among people, irrespective of geographical boundaries. . . .² This is what this paper focuses on.

One reason why I persist in examining different communication patterns is based on my own business experience in the past 25 years. Many of my old business counterparts overseas have been operating their business activities not in their mother countries, but in foreign countries where they may experience cultural differences from their homelands. I can list more than 20 cases of successful entrepreneurs and executive managers of this kind, such as a Greek in Australia, an Indian in Portugal, an American in Germany, a Japanese in America, and overseas Chinese in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, etc.

2 L. E. Sarbaugh, *Intercultural Communication*, Rochelle Park, NJ, Hayden Book Company, 1979, p. 6.

It is said that when people speak (or, write), they are influenced very much by their own cultures. So, when they communicate with their overseas business partners or counterparts, it is conceivable that they are being influenced by the cultures they have inherited from their homelands, even though they do not notice it themselves. It is also likely that they are influenced by the cultures they have learned after they come to the place where they do business. In either case, such an influence on their language use depends on the length of their life experience in either place, the homeland or the place where they now live. If we focus our interest of study on the relationship between language and culture, we should handle the subject in the scope of "cross-cultural communication" rather than "international business communication." The difference between the two concepts is this: the language they use for their international business transactions is, in all the cases of the above, English regardless of their nationalities.

It's the English language which has truly become the language for international business, and this article discusses this fact. Let me add a full definition of "international business English," as follows: "Some observers regard international business English as a neutral, pragmatic means of communication among non-native users of the language. Andrew Fenner has labeled it *IBL* (*International business language*): 'In a European context, IBL is the sort of English a Norwegian would use when trying to communicate with an Italian in Belgium. In other words, it is a *lingua franca* used between those for whom English is not their native language, but the only

common language in which any sort of communication is possible. Its grammar and syntax vary, being modeled on those of the language of the person speaking in each case.³

Problems of Cross-cultural Corporate Business Communication

A Japanese professor of Marketing and Management once conducted an exploratory test with an intention to compare the mentality of business people from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. He presented a question for an answer of Yes or No. The question goes like this, "An executive director of a company A of a foreign country, with whom your company has had no relations before at all, visited your company B after asking for new business in cooperation with your company. He stayed in your place about a week and both he and your company negotiated the matter earnestly. However, neither your company nor he reached an agreement and the executive director was to go back home without any success at all. In such a situation, should company B give a cordial entertainment party to the director going back home in appreciation of his efforts?"

Those who answered "Yes" to this question amounted to 86.6% in Korea and 86.4% in Japan. In Taiwan the figure was 78.0%. He later tried a similar test among American business people and

3 *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, s.v. "Business English." It indicates "Lingua Anglica: The Emergence of International Business English," *Language International* 2: 1, 1990." as the source of this information.

got the percentage of 20.0% for the "Yes" answer from them.⁴

This type of cultural difference is based on a basic difference in the way of thinking of business people representing each nation or culture. We can see from the result of the above test that there exists a deep rooted gap difficult to overcome between the West and the East regarding social obligations in business.

Suppose that either a Korean or a Japanese businessperson who has inherited the perspective illustrated above communicates with a typical American businessperson. Even if the former uses English as a tool for his or her communication, his or her heart or way of thinking remains the same and will not change to that of the latter.

I presume that non-native speakers of English must first think in their mother tongues at the level of their deeper structure and merely encode what comes to their minds into a code called English. Although they use English primarily to communicate with each other, they cannot automatically change their mentalities and personalities to those of the native users of English in the occidental world, who are sometimes "dry" or hard-headed in their business and human relations.⁵

Let us propose a sample case of business communication between a Japanese businessperson and his or her counterpart in Indonesia. When neither party knows each other's language, both parties will have to resort to English as *an IBL*, international business language, which is quite a common way of communicating for business people

4 Shuji Hayashi, *Keiei to Bunka* [Management and Culture], Tokyo, Chuoh Kohronsha Co., 1993, pp. 173-174.

5 Naoki Kameda, Business Reports Across Nations and Cultures, *The Japan Business English Association Annual Studies*, Vol. 52, 1993, p. 115.

of these two countries. In this case, it is quite possible that the Indonesian speaks or writes English which is influenced by his or her native language, and the Japanese is apt to comprehend that English while translating it into his or her mother tongue, Japanese, though perhaps uncsciously in many cases. When the Japanese speaks or writes English to his or her Indonesian counterpart, the process goes backward but still holds true. If the Indonesian were an overseas Chinese, he or she may be further influenced by Chinese depending upon his or her age and how long he or she has been in Indonesia.

In actual business negotiations between business people from different countries, the above type of information reporting and information processing takes place quite frequently. The following cases illustrate how information is reported and processed during and after business negotiations:

- (1) A businessperson coming back from negotiations in English with a foreign counterpart reports to his or her boss in Japanese.
- (2) The same person as above reports to his or her boss in English.
- (3) A businessperson going to attend negotiations in English with a foreign counterpart receives order or instructions in Japanese.
- (4) The same person as above receives the order or instructions in English.

Although I will later discuss these cases in detail, from the communication management viewpoint the above (2) and (4) cases should

be ideal ones. In cases of (1) and (3), a boss cannot be free from anxiety that the manager may have wrongly translated the original information into Japanese or will correctly translate the original order or instructions into English.

A company president of my acquaintance would often inquisitively ask anyone of his staff coming back from negotiations with a foreign buyer, "Tell me how he said this or that in English." He may have wanted to receive information as accurately as possible in order to make a proper decision, or perhaps he was simply interested in English. In any case, because of his inquisitive questions, self-complacent, sometimes biased and incorrect reports were avoided. His staff always had to be careful to select the correct equivalent words when reporting to him.

On another occasion a Japanese businessman translated his boss's Japanese expression, "We can basically agree to your proposal, but..." into "We have no objection to your proposal." The first expression, which Japanese business people often use, is a typical euphemism peculiar to the Japanese. In many cases the person who uses this expression does not want to, or is not in a position to, agree to what his counterpart has said or proposed. He still has many things to discuss before finalizing the negotiations. It is just a tentative acceptance in many cases. Sometimes, it is also used as a euphemistic and polite refusal which is just an expression of courtesy to a foreign businessman who has taken the trouble to come from a faraway country. The words "basically" and "but" in this context are indeed tricky words.

Going back to the negotiation between the Indonesian and the Japanese, people in Indonesia say *besok* to mean tomorrow in their language. However, the time span of this *besok* seems a little longer than the English *tomorrow* or the Japanese *Asu* particularly when Javanese, the largest group of the natives, use the word. It means some time in the future, later on, etc., not just the next day.⁶ Think of a manager who will be waiting in vain for a telegraphic transfer remittance from Jakarta which is to reach him *besok* because of an insufficient report from his subordinate. This miscommunication is called "bypassing."

Here is another story relating this type of miscommunication or bypassing. In January fifty years ago in Casa Blanca the U.S. President Roosevelt and the U.K. premier Churchill met, decided the Normandy landing operations, and committed themselves to fighting until the Axis countries accepted unconditional surrender. A Spanish secret agent in Casa Blanca had reported the information of this planned meeting to the German authorities. But, since he cabled it in Spanish, the German intelligence bureau translated "Casa Blanca" into "White House" and believed that the summit meeting would be held in Washington, D. C.⁷

One more example may suffice to prove that bypassing easily

6 **besok** 1 tomorrow. - *lusa* 1 day after tomorrow. 2 some time in the future. - *malam* tomorrow night. - *paginya* the next morning. - *sore* tomorrow afternoon. 2 later on, in the future. *Anak ini - akan menjadi org yg terpelajar* This child will become a scholar later on. 3 (Coll.) later. *Ia akan pergi - bulan Juni* She will go later in June. 4 coming. *Beliau akan dilantik tgl 22 Januari* - He will be installed this coming January 22. the future. - *nya* the next day. KAMUS INDONESIA-INGGRIS [An Indonesian-English Dictionary], s. v. "*besok*."

7 *Asahi Shimbun Supplement* (Tokyo), March 14, 1993, p. 3.

happens if corporate communication is not properly controlled. One of Japan's top-notch flour mill companies received an invitation from the Australian Wheat Board. The letter said the Board wished to invite one engineer of the company to attend their convention in Melbourne. It further said all expenses during the attendee's stay in the city would be paid and a return trip would be offered if the invitation was accepted. This letter puzzled the management. The executives wondered why the Board would pay only the return part of a trip, why not both ways. They reluctantly accepted the invitation because they knew the value of the convention. A few days after they mailed their acceptance with thanks, one rep of the Board visited the company. One of the executives asked him a question about this "return trip." The man was aghast at the question. It didn't take them long before each one realized the words "return trip" in British English mean a "round trip" in American English.⁸

Similar bypassing problems or misunderstandings would happen even when translating Japanese into English, as in the above cases (3) and (4), if proper care is not taken before negotiations. It is often pointed out that for a Japanese the word "difficult" means "difficult and impossible," but for many Westerners it means "difficult, but possible." Likewise, it is often said that one should be careful if a Japanese businessperson in the Osaka area says, when asked for an answer, "Well, I'll think it over. Please come back again next week." When one comes across this expression, he or she should

8 Interview with Mataji Kameda, Executive Managing Director, Nisshin Flour Mill Co., Ltd., Tokyo, March 15, 1992.

not return to the office if he or she doesn't want to be embarrassed. It's a typical Osaka expression of euphemistic and polite refusal.

The Cause of Miscommunication and the Scope of Meaning

What is the cause of the miscommunications illustrated in the previous section? I would now like to discuss why miscommunication takes place between people from different nations and cultures. A very simple answer to this question is that words in themselves have no meanings. When the message sent goes across nations and cultures, the possibility that the same words will contain different meanings arises. Here is my hypothetical answer:

Each word has its own meaning within a culture. That meaning has a certain range which is not limitless. To translate a word into an equivalent in a foreign language means to overlap the meanings of the two words. However, this overlap varies from minimal to maximum, depending on the degree of the managers' foreign language acquisition and/or the similarity of the two given cultures represented by the words in question.

I presume that miscommunication between two people from different cultures arises from the extent of this overlap. Minimal overlap represents minimal similarity of experience, and maximum overlap the maximum similarity.

In business negotiations the sender of a given fact perceives the fact through the frame of his experience and knowledge. He, then, encodes not the fact but his perception into language during the information reporting process. The receiver, when he decodes the language, is apt to decode some signs or codes wrongly because of the experience- and knowledge-tinted glasses he wears. And then, during the information processing period, he is apt to give his deformed judgment to the fact thus reported. This deformed judgment by the receiver often becomes the basis of his decision making or action. It is a difficult task to convey a fact without any misinterpretation to people having different experiences and ways of thinking that form their consciousness.

It has been repeatedly reported in various books on linguistics or anthropology that it is difficult and sometimes even impossible to convey the meaning of snowballing or a snowman to those having seen no snow before or living where no snow falls. However, I think this well known notion has in a sense become outdated these days because of the spread of color television over the world. Today is the day when people of the Tropics watch the Winter Olympics on their TV sets. However, no matter how widely color television spreads in the world and how well people can visualize snow and all that it relates in terms of plays and sports, some people still cannot truly perceive what snow is. They cannot touch it, hand-roll it, nor taste it on the TV monitor.

The overlap question I have raised is closely related to this question of perception. One day in a Russian newspaper there

appeared an article with a very shocking lead which reads, "Deadly Poison in Olive Oil from Spain!" A consumer had bought high quality olive oil from Spain, but noticed the smell and the taste were different from domestic olive oil. Wondering if the oil was spoiled, she brought it to a public facility and asked for an inspection. The result said it surely was spoiled, and the news triggered so much upheaval that every Russian newspaper took up the news. The punch line of this report from Moscow is the fact that Moscow people have been out of the imported goods markets for too long a time. The Spanish oil in question was later proven perfectly all right in its ingredients. The cause of this confusion was that neither the consumer nor the inspection facility were familiar with the aroma and the flavor peculiar to high quality olive oil.⁹

I think "perception of reality" affects our business communication across nations and cultures. We can say that miscommunication problem, or in other words the question of the less overlapped meanings, could be directly related to the "perception" problem. The fact that the Spanish oil was marked as deadly poisonous was simply because the Russians had not known the real aroma and flavor of high quality olive oil; it was nothing but their lack of perception of reality.

The question of perception and reality could be classified into the following three categories:

- (1) To be or not to be familiar with an object

9 *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (Tokyo), February 3, 1994, p. 8.

(2) To have or not to have experience

(3) To be or not to be influenced by culture

1. Familiarity

We are often surprised to see that things look quite different if we try to look at them from a different position where we have not stood before. It is also well known that the same thing gives a different meaning to those who stand on different places from ours. One must be familiar with a cliché, “‘Democracy’ to an American is not ‘democracy’ to a Russian.”

Nobuo Satoh, a professor of philosophy who wrote a wide range of unique books on linguistics, semiotics, rhetorics, etc., introduces an interesting idea in one of his books.¹⁰ He claims the logical and positive style of the following two sentences is equal to each other:

A one hundred yen coin is a circle.

A one hundred yen coin is a rectangle.

He notes that the utterance of the second sentence represents an observation that is less frequently perceived. It is a matter of the frequency of perception of one hundred yen coins. He supports this claim by telling us that we put a one hundred yen coin into a thin and rectangular hole on a vending machine whenever we buy tickets or cigarettes. The rectangular shape of that hole exactly represents an aspect of the coin. We may call this issue a matter

10 Nobuo Satoh, *Retorikku No Kigou-ron* [Semiotics of Rhetoric], Tokyo, Kohdansha Co., 1993, p. 51.

of familiarity.

When I was in a village near Lagos, Nigeria, a girl at the age of about 10 cried horribly when she saw me on the other side of the street. When some adults teasing her tried to hold her so that they could carry her to my place, she just screamed in horror of me as if she was facing a ghost. Yes, I was "a ghost" for her because she had seldom seen a man with white skin, who supposedly would do something horrific if she got into mischief—this is what she had been told, as I later learned from my business associate there. This is again the question of familiarity or the frequency of perception.

2. Experience

"It should not be surprising that people raised in different families, exposed to different events, praised and punished for different reasons, should come to view the world so differently... Industrialist and farmer do not see the "same" land; husband and wife do not plan for the "same" child; doctor and patient do not discuss the "same" disease; borrower and creditor do not negotiate the "same" mortgage; daughter and daughter-in-law do not react to the "same" mother... The world each person gets inside his head is the only world he knows. And it is this symbolic world, not the real world, that he talks about, argues about, laughs about, fights about."¹¹

This passage of Dean C. Barnlund well explains the cause of

11 Dean C. Barnlund, *Public and private self in Japan and the United States*, Tokyo, The Simul Press, 1975, p. 11.

miscommunication or the inability to overlap properly the range of meanings of words used by the people of different cultures.

Arabic world specialists often say that the celestial body that the Arabs like the best is the moon and that they don't like the sun. In the region where people live suffering with a scorching sun all the year round, the sun does not signify the source of life having mercy on people, but just a disgusting entity endangering people's lives if the worse comes to the worst.¹²

Their image of the sun is thus entirely different from the one we Japanese hold or have inherited from our ancestors; the first emperor some thousands of years ago was believed to be the Sun-god. Actually in Japan there are many companies in various industrial fields which put a brand mark of the sun on their products, such as canned foods, textiles, etc. Those who tried to export their products with that trade mark to the Arab world all failed to market their products in the region. The quality and the price were perfectly all right. But, simply because of the brand mark of the sun, they failed in their marketing efforts. This fact offers a perfect example of the perception gap in cross-cultural business communication. "People see the world through templates which force them to construe events in unique ways," as George Kelly has noted.¹³ Arabic people and Japanese people do not see the "same" sun, if we borrow the expression of Barnlund.

Business communication breakdown occurs when two people refer

12 Takao Suzuki, *Nihonngo To Gai kokugo* [Japanese and Foreign Languages], Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten Co., 1990, p. 48.

13 Barnlund, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the "same" word to a different entity based on their own different experience in their lives. When he accepted the plea of one African customer to send his staff for technical assistance, a company president of a speaker manufacturer attached one condition, that is, to provide the staff with a first class international hotel. He remembered from his last talk with the same African customer who said there was now an international class hotel available in the place of the visit. He knew, through his own experience living in a rough place for the same kind of hard work, that his engineer needed a nice place to relax as a minimum requirement. A week later, when the staff phoned to him from the factory, because there was no phone at the hotel, the president was just aghast with the report. At an old bungalow where he was staying, the engineer could not take a bath nor a hot shower because the shower cord had been taken away, and also he had to save up drips of water run from the faucet into two buckets for bathing every evening. The company president was also surprised to learn, in response to his later complaint, that the hotel was definitely classified as a five-star hotel according to the local tourist bureau's assessment. It was too late for him to learn that they had not been talking about the "same" international class hotel in the first place.

3. Culture

One's perception is also influenced by his or her own cultural background. This is the area where general semanticists may claim with confidence that "Words do not mean anything, but people

mean. Meanings are in people, but not in words themselves.”

One summer day in a famous Japanese garden in Kyoto, a Japanese guide was pointing out the various plants, bushes and trees and explaining them to an all-American tour group. The weather was fair, the sky was blue, and the sun was out. The guide said, “You are very lucky to be here today because in this month there are no flowers to detract from the beauty of the garden.” Many of the tour group laughed. They thought the guide was making a joke. She continued, saying, “But in another sense you are unlucky because today the sky is blue and the sun is out; it is too bad it is not raining a little bit so that you could really appreciate the beauty of the garden.” Even more American laughed. They were sure she was being sarcastic and making a joke, while the guide was serious right from the beginning.

Why did this discrepancy occur? Because the American sense of gardens is something with a lot of flowers and a blue sky. For the guide to say that they were lucky because there were no flowers and unlucky because the sun was out didn't seem to make any sense. Here is a difference in aesthetic values, the idea of what is beautiful.¹⁴

I once collected samples of references to the moon shadow by people of different cultural backgrounds. Here are some examples:

1. “The man in the moon,” in English speaking countries. In Europe, more or less the same reference as the English one.

14 NHK, “TV Talk Show,” November 7, 1975, “Intercultural Communication,” John C. Condon.

2. "A very old man named 'Charng Kua Lao' cutting a tree," in the southern part of China.
3. "Two farmers, namely 'Tar Inn and Tar Nar,' working in the paddy field," in Thailand.
4. "A lady Buddha in white costume looking at you," in Cantonese-speaking regions in China.
5. "An old woman milking a goat for her grand child sitting next to her," among Sindhi in India and Pakistan.

It was interesting to know that many respondents to my question all agreed to my claim that I, as a Japanese, can hardly change my own image of the moon shadow as a rabbit pounding rice cake in a mortar. It's hardly possible for a member of one cultural group to change this type of frame of reference which his or her mind holds and which was formed in the past.

One's beliefs and customs are all like this frame of reference—formed in a given culture, which can hardly be changed. "Speaking of the Indonesian term related to works, I still remember the expression 'jam karet' which literally means 'rubber time'... In Indonesia a planned schedule for any gathering ranging from a private party to a university study meeting expands and contracts just exactly as this expression signifies. This 'rubber time,' meaning 'not on time,' is really a great annoyance to Japanese resident business people who are in general known as being punctual..."¹⁵ This remark is not far-fetched at all. One Indonesian-born Chinese who is always

15 Tadashi Ogawa, *Indonesia, Taminzoku Kokka no Mosaku* [Indonesia, The Grope of A Multiracial Nation], Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten Co., p. 172.

at least one hour late for an appointment once answered a question from an angry business associate of mine who had been irritatingly waiting for a remittance from Jakarta, which was promised to be sent ASAP. "ASAP" is the acronym of "as soon as possible." Believing the term ASAP to refer at most to the end of that week, he asked, "What is the maximum length attached to ASAP when you use the term?" The bewildered Indonesian answered, "Well, about 30 days?"

Once an American colleague asked each of the managers in a local public accounting firm in the State of Washington to tell him the maximum amount of time attached to each of several words. Responses are listed in the following table:¹⁶

	Immediately	Soon
Right now	3	
One hour	7	
Two-six hours	4	
End of day	16	
Twenty-four hours	3	2
1.5-3 days	2	3
End of week	2	
One week	4	10
Two-three weeks		4
One month		4
Two-six months		5
One year		7

"Notice that immediately means anywhere from 'right now' to 'one week' in this firm, with 'end of the day' as the most frequent response. When the 'right now' boss tells the 'one week' subordinate

16 Jerry Sullivan, Naoki Kameda, and Tatsuo Nobu, Bypassing in Managerial Communication, *Business Horizons*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1991, p. 76.

to get project X finished 'immediately,' the subordinate will salute and finish it up by the end of that week.¹⁷ Communication is thus not as easy as many managers may treat it. Although each manager's hometown is not disclosed in this research, the local or sub culture, in other words where he or she is from, may have affected one's perception, i. e., the definition of these time words. The American co-author later told me that in New York "immediately" means *right now* and "soon" means *within one day*.

Perception and Culture: The Need for Classifications

I don't think the relationship between perception and culture is persistent. It has a certain aspect which is subject to change. The people in the world today can share the perception or the meaning of phenomena and words much more than in the past. This is thanks to the rapid progress of mass media, the rise in the number of overseas travelers and the resultant increase in the knowledge of foreign countries, the improved standard of living, etc.

In a book of Marketing Management the author writes, "The variation in meaning attached to words by different culture is well known and need not be labored here. One other instance will suffice. In a study comparing Koreans with Americans, it was noted that Koreans, when asked to associate other words with 'hunger,' used such terms as 'rice,' 'poor,' 'beggar.' Americans, on the other hand, almost always associated 'hunger' with food items alone. It

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

is apparent to any marketing manager that a Korean should write food advertisements for Koreans, or at least be consulted concerning the imagery evoked.”¹⁸ I don't think, however, this comparison study is valid these days. It has become a kind of funny story nowadays, because the Korean living standard has been much improved since the days when this study was made.

In another book with the title of “English for Citizens” the author writes, referring to the different ways of thinking between Japanese and Americans, “When they see a dog standing on three legs with the fourth missing from a traffic accident, Americans feel it great that the dog stands firm by itself instead of feeling pity for it.”¹⁹ However, I believe that there must be a lot of Americans who would feel pity and a lot of Japanese who might feel great. I don't think one can generalize this type of feeling.

What about the aesthetic value difference between Japanese and Americans on a Japanese garden. I believe that there has been a steady increase in the number of Americans who really appreciate the beauty of Japanese gardens. However, as I claimed before, it is still hardly possible for one to change the image of the moon shadow which was formed in him or her in a certain cultural background. Therefore, when we discuss the matter of perspectives on language and culture, we should classify the basic thought and the behavioral standard of the people belonging to the culture and

18 Perry Bliss, *Marketing Management and the Behavioral Environment*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1970, pp. 11-12.

19 Susumu Suzuki, *Shakaijin No Eigo* [English for Citizens], Tokyo, Maruzen Co., 1991, p. 142.

clarify the matrix in terms of whether or not we can say they are:

1. General which means over 70% of the people have and follow them.
2. Personal which means less than 30% of the people have and follow them.
3. "Yes" in the past, but "No" at present.
4. "No" in the past, but "Yes" at present.
5. "Yes" all the time.

I know that it is sometimes very difficult to draw a clear distinction between these five categories, depending on the issue at stake. For instance, it is said "Many Japanese firms like to promote people out of blue collar jobs into management, but they find that sharp division between 'blues' and 'whites' exists in America."²⁰ On the surface level this type of business practice in America can be classified into the above 1. and 5. But, the more Japanese owned companies in America practice their Japanese way of management with success, the more American companies will probably abolish someday that sharp division between "blues" and "whites." Thus, this American business practice may be classified as Nos. 2 and 3 of the above in the near future.

If we would compare the styles and expressions used in a product's Instruction Manual or Owner's Manual in Japanese and in English, we can see clear distinctions between the two languages which

20 Jeremiah J. Sullivan, *Invasion of the Salarymen: The Japanese Business Presence in America*, Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 1991, p. 59.

apparently are much influenced by their peculiar cultures. When we turn our attention to the "Caution" section of the Japanese manual, we see the following typical warnings:

Don't take off the lid behind the cabinet...

Don't place the XXX under direct sunshine and where it's humid.

Don't use thinner, wax or detergent to clean the cabinet...

While every single Japanese sentence is negative imperative, the typical English sentences are as follows:

Keep the XXX dry. If it does get wet, wipe it dry immediately.

Use and store the XXX only in normal temperature environments.

Wipe the XXX with a dampened cloth occasionally to keep it...

I presume that the above Japanese style warnings starting with negative imperative is due to the influence of the Chinese way of instruction; there is a saying in the Analects of Confucius, "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you."

In the Golden Rule, however, we have a famous saying, "Do unto others as you would be done by." We have other examples such as "Do not enter!" for "Keep off" and "Do not swim here" for "Swim at your own risk." Thus different cultures bring about different style of expressions which can be hardly changed though people try hard.

Some parts of the basic thought and the behavioral standard of the people belonging to a given culture can be changed through the increase of people's encounters across cultures and/or the effect of learning. Yet, some other parts cannot be changed easily because of the persistent nature of the culture and its people. If we seek an effective international management, we should classify the basic thought and the behavioral standard of the employees into what we can change and what we cannot change, and adjust them to fit into a local culture.

The growing pressure for corporate restructuring as a result of the prolonged recession is prompting Japanese corporations to make necessary changes. The findings of a survey clearly indicate that most Japanese companies operating in the U.S. have a communication gap with their local employees.²¹ And, I think the matter is not limited to the case of those operating in the U.S., but in almost all the places where Japanese companies operate. In order to avoid such a communication gap between management and their local employees, too, companies must pay more attention than ever to communication problems caused by language and culture and establish an effective communication management system taking concrete measures as soon as possible. They must reduce their structural and communication problems at their overseas facilities to an absolute minimum by providing their employees with sufficient language and cultural training.

21 Satoko Watanabe, "Perception gap plagues Japanese firms in U.S.," *The Nikkei Weekly* (Tokyo), May 16, 1994, p. 6.