



Writing Across Cultures: Understanding and Teaching Writer Responsibility and Reader Responsibility Writing

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Abstract

This paper addresses ways of understanding writing strategies, communication approaches, and the teaching of English-language writer responsible syntactic structure. First, we provide a definition of culture that positions intercultural writing in practical terms and then break down the problem into the three important dimensions of culture. Second, we compress all of the many ways that people can write into two types—writer responsibility and reader responsibility. Third, we provide a brief set of tools for how to understand different cultural writing strategies to help teach writer responsibility in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. The goal of our paper is to provide an understanding of writer responsible and reader responsible syntactic structures and then demonstrate a basic technique for teaching it to non-native speakers of English.

Keywords: *Reader responsibility, writer responsibility, intercultural pragmatics, inductive writing, deductive writing*

Introduction

Cultures use language to accomplish different goals, and this is certainly true for purposes of writing. The reason cultures use different writing strategies is because they have different ideas about what it means to inform and persuade (Connor, 1996). Some cultures find the concept of informing their audience about a topic to be rather odd, as anyone worth informing already knows it. By extension, these same

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people are sometimes unfamiliar with the rhetorical concept of persuasion. If everyone in a community already knows what is being said and why, then the community members also know and agree about how best to say it. This basic assumption about what it means to exchange information from one mind to the next is the beginning of a breakdown in the way that language is used by people from around the world, a problem that clearly bleeds over into writing.

We take all of the possible ways that people can exchange information in writing, and then distill them into two types—writer responsibility and reader responsibility (Ballenger, 2012; Connor, 1996; McCool, 2009). These are user-friendly terms to describe what linguists have long called “parallel syntactic structure” and “sequential syntactic structure.” “Parallel syntactic structure,” or “writer responsibility,” is commonly used in populations with diverse cultural and linguistic origins, assumes equality, believes that language is an ideal vehicle for communication, makes old and new connections between ideas, and aims to reach as many people as possible. In writer responsibility (parallel syntactic structure), if a misunderstanding arises then the “writer” is responsible for clarifying the point. Contrast this with “sequential syntactic structure,” or reader responsibility, a strategy normally used in homogeneous or collective cultures, generally assumes vertical and hierarchical social relationships, believes language is a flowery and ornamental vehicle for communicating, concerns itself with context instead of a main idea, and speaks to a specific group of people. If a misunderstanding arises, the “reader” or “audience” is responsible for clarifying the point (Connor, 1996; Kroll, 2003; Sadri & Flammia, 2011).

In this digitally globalized world, many assumptions under which research in intercultural communication used to operate are shifting dramatically due to the advent of social media, new media technologies, and advanced communication (Arasaratnam, 2011; Cohen, 2006). Also, globalization has deep historical roots, such as economic, political, and cultural ones, but due to the constant new media communication, many cultural characteristics overlap, or they influence one another over time (Lule, 2012, p. 31). Despite the influence of new media communication, social media, and transportation, the world is always multiple with numerous cultural rhetorics, emergences, and multiple communities mediated by social practices (Aneesh, Hall, & Petro, 2012, p. 2; also see Hawisher & Selfe, 2000). In short, intercultural characteristics always remain ambiguous as well as overlapping. And there are never any well-defined benchmarks that demarcate languages and cultures because cultures are constantly in-the-making.

As mentioned previously, we agree that these two communication differences—reader responsibility and writer responsibility—are far from perfect. Nonetheless, they provide an invaluable tool for novice intercultural writers and instructors. Further, such a distinction is particularly helpful for people starting to learn what it is like to communicate in a different country and culture. For instance, students who study English in Asia tend to practice both writer and reader responsibilities because they see themselves as members of a glocal (global and local) community who attempt to make local as well as global connections. Thus, this

article attempts to confer some strategies to cultivate their glocal writing strategies and communication approaches; however, these practices are not without complications.

Overall, if cultures use different strategies for communicating and writing then what makes them so different? Do these kinds of differences emerge from cultural and geographic sources? And most important, how can we use these differences to aid second-language writers (in Asia or non-native English speaking students in the writing classes)? The answers to these questions take us on a journey of three parts. First is to provide a definition of culture that discusses the study of language and writing in a more practical manner. Second, we address the intersection of culture, language, and writing by demonstrating issues of sentence cohesion, global coherence, and style. Our third goal is to create a bridge between language and culture by way of a brief set of tips that can be used in the multicultural writing classroom. First, however, we must settle on a definition of culture that may be applied to English-language writing in Asia.

Culture, social relationships, and intercultural communication strategies

Culture means different things to different people. Some people think of culture in terms of what is fine or sophisticated, as in the appreciation of western classical music, painting, or literature. Other people think of culture in terms of what is popular, such as the latest movie, musical group, technology, and other cultural artifacts. We also understand that culture means something indigenous or primitive, as in the dwindling number of tribes who live in the Amazon forest. Culture may even be about gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, and politics. In some respect, all of these areas of human interest are part of what it means to have culture (Sadri & Flammia, 2011). There is no question that life seems quite different if you are a native of Berlin, Germany who has just deplaned in the high altiplano of La Paz, Bolivia. Brightly colored textiles, domesticated alpacas, and the soulful tunes of a panpipe say something important about the culture of this part of the Andean range. Yet, despite the fascinating lenses with which these kinds of matters help us understand people unlike ourselves, they do not really get to the core of culture (Connor, 1996; Sadri & Flammia, 2011); for that we must dig far deeper (Hofstede, 2002).

One definition that is especially useful is simply to think of culture as a "pool of local expertise." Everyone has the same basic desires about being in the world, such as finding food, water, safety, shelter, mates, and navigating complex social networks (Pinker, 2002). Even though each of us attempts to satisfy these same basic needs, the culture in which we were raised usually has a significant influence on which ones we find most important and how best to satisfy them. Take the problem of status. Among achievement-oriented cultures, providing recent practical results is typically a prominent method for acquiring status, or acquiring status for what you have done (also see Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000, pp. 191, 202-3). In other cultures, especially those that adhere to more ascriptive values, status may be obtained through social harmony, longevity or tenure, age, and other factors, such as family

surname and educational prestige (also see Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000, pp. 191, 198). This is not to say that one is better than the other, although each clearly has a home in a specific culture (also see Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000, pp. 129-36). Despite these more important dimensions to culture, its deeper study is not without problem.

Two extraordinary obstacles prevent people from seeing culture—its inherent abstraction, and one's own culture. Depending on the society in which you were raised, it is entirely possible that the values and beliefs of your home country have actually made it more difficult to understand people from different parts of the world. In the U.S., where the presumption of equality runs deep, each person is treated as a unique individual (at least in theory) with different goals and beliefs. The value of individualism stems from the country's unusual origins in which diverse people escaped varieties of religious and social persecution to reboot their lives in the new world. The modern history of the U.S. is eclectic for this very reason, thereby creating the conditions for people to be more or less treated as equals. This value is quite different in other parts of the world where the presumption of equality is not only absent, but actually seems downright strange.

People are treated differently among collective or more group-oriented cultures. In group-oriented (collective) cultures, society is seen as a complex series of vertical relationships in which people are always above, equal, or below one in status. In Japan, one will always address a professor in a way that shows deference and respect (Davies & Ikeno, 2002). Similarly, one author of this paper has taught exchange students from China for several years, and has never been able to convince any of them that he should be addressed on a first name basis. His American students, by contrast, are far more likely to use his first name, absent of any honorific.

A second problem plagues the perception of different cultural values and beliefs, and that is its inherent abstraction. One cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell culture. In every sense, culture is invisible, which makes it a tough concept for many people to accept. It is impossible to touch individualism or to taste indirect forms of communication. Its invisibility is what makes culture such a difficult concept, especially among people who already view everyone as more or less the same, as with people among individualistic cultures. In societies where differences between groups of people are assumed is true in many parts of Asia, culture is far easier to grasp. The difference between equality and inequality is just one way that cultures differ in their perception of the world; another way is to see how people from different societies communicate.

Without question, communication is positively affected by culture. In the U.S., where language is seen as a nearly perfect vehicle for communication, language tends to be used in a clear, concise, and concrete manner. Although language may often be used as a social lubricant, in the U.S. it is typically viewed as a way of exchanging information between two or more minds (Sadri & Flammia, 2011). The most important dimension to American communication, though, is the desire to find a "common language" (Heath & Heath, 2007). For instance, instead of communicating

a complex topic with technical terms and abstract concepts, it is assumed that one is better off using non-technical language and anchoring abstractions in concrete examples. The attempt to make complex ideas understandable to a wide audience is a value specific to American culture, although it is not universally shared (Heath, 2007).

In many parts of Asia, language is used as a social lubricant. In other words, people tend to see language as an imperfect vehicle for exchanging information in many parts of Asia, (Connor, 1996; Kroll, 2003, Sadri & Flammia, 2011). In this setting, it is entirely normal to use language as a social lubricant and people are encouraged to use language in a flowery, ornate, and abstract manner. The notion that language should be used as a social lubricant is heightened in some, but certainly not all parts of Asia and not in all situations. Taken to the logical extreme, some societies in Asia push the importance of communication into the non-verbal realm. By “reading between the lines” or inferring from mannerisms, gestures, and intonations, communication in Asia often takes on a higher order of complexity. The American, accustomed to direct forms of communication, is likely to get puzzled by indirect communication strategies; whereas in most of Asian cultures and communities, direct communication seems mostly blunt, coarse, and rude (Connor, 1996).

The link between individual or collective social relationships and direct or indirect forms of communication are just two of many possible ways to study culture. Thus far we have addressed communication as it takes place between people in face-to-face conversation. As we will see, these dynamics are central toward understanding intercultural writing and, in particular, parallel syntactic structure and how can and should be taught.

A glimpse into intercultural communication and writing strategies

At this point, we have looked at two different dimensions to culture—social relationships and communication strategies. Some cultures are more individualistic while others are more collective; some cultures value direct communication while others value indirect communication. For instance, individualistic societies, such as U.S., U.K., and Canada tend to value direct communication, whereas collective societies, such as Nepal, China, and India tend to value indirect communication. The relationship between culture and communication strategies is imperfect although it is far from arbitrary. Regardless, an adept practitioner of language and culture should be able to discern when this link is true versus instances in which the exception is the rule.

This part of our essay connects these dimensions of culture with two different writing strategies, reader responsibility (reader-based writing/communication) and writer responsibility (writer-based writing/communication). We do this not to demonstrate that one particular approach is a more perfect means of

correspondence over the other one; we are not suggesting that one culture is superior or one writing style is more systematic. We are, however, trying to provide a useful and practical pedagogical tool for professors and students about how they should learn to navigate different cultural writing patterns.

As shown in Table 1., writer responsibility tends to be associated with individualistic social relationships, direct communication, deductive pattern, linear *AB/BC* syntax, connections between old and new information, as well as clear, concise, and concrete writing styles. Reader responsibility tends to be associated with collective social relationships, indirect communication, inductive rhetorical patterns, a nonlinear *AB/CD* syntax, details and context, as well as a flowery, abstract, and ornate prose. Of course, these two monolithic categories are far from perfect, as many individual and cultural exceptions may be found. Instead of being a problem, though, these simple categories have proven remarkably effective in one author's classroom, as well as several noted scholars in contrastive rhetoric and intercultural pragmatics (Connor, 1996; Thatcher, 2001).

Table 1. Relationship between culture and writing strategies

Writer Responsible (parallel syntax)	Reader Responsible (sequential syntax)
1. Individual identity	1. Group (collective) identity
2. Direct communication	2. Indirect communication
3. Deductive writing	3. Inductive writing
4. <i>AB/BC</i> syntax	4. <i>AB/CD</i> syntax
5. Old/new links	5. Detail and context
6. Clear, concise, concrete style	6. Flowery, ornate, abstract style

Three concepts are especially important for novice intercultural writers. These include sentence cohesion, global coherence, and style. Sentence cohesion is about the relationship of one sentence to the next. Global coherence refers to the overall structure of a paper. Style, that most elusive aspect of writing, probably has more to do with emotion (pathos) and credibility (ethos) than logic (logos). Together, these three aspects of writing go a long way in helping the novice intercultural writer, especially for student's first learning English-language writer responsibility.

Sentence cohesion and intercultural variations

The relationship of one sentence with the next is a matter of sentence cohesion. Cultures, such as the U.S. and Canada prefer a tight link between sentences while other cultures, such as China and Nepal are more comfortable with a little latitude and flexibility. Differences in sentence cohesion are rooted in the deep values and beliefs of culture.

Societies with inclinations toward individualism and directness usually subscribe to what is called parallel progression (writer responsibility), which is an *AB/BC* syntactic structure. The structure of parallel progression is one in which a familiar idea is presented at the beginning of a sentence and then followed by an unfamiliar or new idea at the end. What is noteworthy about this structure is that the beginning of the next sentence does not start with a new idea, but instead picks up where the previous sentence finished. Each idea transitions smoothly from one sentence to the next, creating a seamless flow of ideas. The rationale behind a writer responsible structure is that the reader is likely to come from one of many different cultural, geopolitical, and linguistic backgrounds, which means that one must find a common language and cohesive structure. If the reader is likely to be quite different from the writer then it is imperative that one present information in a way that even a non-specialist can understand.

Societies with inclinations toward collectivism and indirectness usually subscribe to what is called sequential progression, which is an *AB/CD* syntactic structure. The structure of sequential progression is one in which a new idea is presented at the beginning of a sentence and followed by yet another new idea at the end. This structure is interesting because the beginning of the next sentence may very well begin with a new idea, leaving the previous sentence behind. Ideas do not necessarily transition smoothly from one sentence to the next; instead, sentences are more often than not marked by gaps between ideas. The rationale behind reader responsible syntactic structure is that the reader is likely to come from the exact same cultural and linguistic background, which means the writer can assume a common language, knowledge, and context. Because the reader/audience is assumed to be essentially from the same discourse community, there is little motivation to modify or adapt one's writing. The reader is either in or outside of the group. Sequential writing patterns also reflect and refract cultural and linguistic hierarchies in which people are always above, equal, or below in status. Such complex social settings tend to create complex social dynamics.

These differences may seem surprising as well as brief, but they can be better tools for understanding different cultural rhetorical patterns. Such differences arise because the culture in which each method is preferred addresses a number of key aspects of the society in which they reside. The link between language, culture, and sentence cohesion is one part of the writing process, but another is known as global coherence. As we mentioned, though the differences we show are surprising, they will assist instructors who meet diverse student populations in their writing classes to

channel cultural differences and teach “parallel syntactic structure” and “sequential syntactic structure.” Further, familiarity with these similarities and differences will help instructors navigate diverse student populations with different communication strategies. More important, perhaps, is that instructors will be able to network how they can better contextually teach and understand parallel and sequential syntactic structures.

Global coherence in writing

The way the overall “big picture” perspective of an essay makes sense is referred to as global coherence. It is sometimes difficult to define, and even more difficult to extract its technical nuances, but global coherence is essentially the degree to which an essay makes sense. Most interesting about global coherence is that, like sentence cohesion, global coherence differs according to the culture in which it is used. To simplify, we will briefly break down the difference into reader and writer responsible patterns.

Reader responsible cultures—collective, indirect, flowery—may not necessarily use a type of global coherence that may be extracted from sentence-level concerns. Reader responsible cultures use a sequential progression syntactic structure, which in logical terms follows the *AB/CD* pattern. This means that one sentence indirectly feeds into the next thereby creating a transition that appears to contain gaps. If scaled up to the level of an essay, instead of just sentences, we occasionally find a similar pattern. Reader responsible cultures use an essay not so much to advocate for a particular argument or make a specific claim, but to provide several detailed points in support of an argument. Although there may be an underlying pattern at either the sentence or section-level of an essay, sequential syntax does not guarantee this kind of structure. A clearer view emerges when we look at parallel syntax.

Writer responsible cultures—individualistic, direct, and concrete—typically use a type of global coherence that may be extracted from sentence-level concerns. Writer responsible cultures use the parallel progression syntactic structure, which in logical terms follows the *AB/BC* pattern. This means that one sentence directly feeds into the next, thereby creating a smooth and seamless transition. If scaled up to the level of paragraphs or sections we find a similar pattern. Writer responsible cultures use an essay to not only inform, but also persuade, an approach one expects from societies that presume equality among most or all of its people. In a very deep sense, there is an underlying pattern at not only the sentence-level, but also at the level of paragraphs, sections, and even between introductions and conclusions. Zoomed in or zoomed out, writer responsible prose relies on a fractal-like syntax in which an essay, analyzed at any level, is composed of smaller iterations of the same parts.

Among reader responsible cultures, sentence cohesion and global coherence are only loosely related, as the level of detail and context for a given idea or concept is not necessarily the same as another section in an essay. Conversely, writer responsible cultures use a logical structure that readily scales either up or down

regardless of whether one looks at sentences, paragraphs, sections, or the ends of an essay. Given the simplicity of this structure, and the fact that it has been advanced since the beginning of the 20th century in the U.S., it is surprising that these differences have not been advanced more clearly by university professors, two exceptions being Thatcher (2001) and Connor (1996).

Style: Intercultural writing strategies

In this section we are going to examine and apply techniques for teaching intercultural writing strategies despite the fact they are potentially ambiguous and complex. There are not any unmistakably defined benchmarks between these styles based on language and culture (Connor, 2008; Limbu, 2012; McCool, 2010; Thatcher, 2010). Style is perhaps the most difficult and puzzling aspect of writing. In one corner is an assumption that style should be first and foremost lean and functional. In the other corner is a belief that the functionality is already known, therefore allotting time for elegance and beauty. This difference between aesthetics and pragmatism provides a useful lens with which to study the enigmatic mystery that is style, especially from a global perspective.

In writer responsible cultures, nearly every book on style cautions one against overwriting, the most popular of which is Joseph Williams' *Style* (2012). What is meant by this maxim is that adjectives, qualifiers, and clichés should be used sparingly. Such advice assumes that adjectives do more harm than good, or at least provide information that lacks a practical use. Qualifiers, such as “good” and “very good” should be avoided for precisely the same reason, mainly because they compound the problem of ambiguity. It is difficult to make a qualitative distinction between a “good professor” and a “very good professor,” although there may be an emotional difference (also see Ong 1987). And clichés are most certainly to be avoided. If one should accidentally use a cliché, all hope is lost because it indicates that the writer has an unoriginal mind incapable of critical or analytical thinking. Encompassing all three of these concerns—adjectives, qualifiers, and clichés—is an implicit assumption about overwriting, which is saying more than is necessary to convey an idea. Outside of creative writing, overwriting is synonymous with poor writing because it emphasizes the aesthetic instead of the pragmatic.

The maxim that one should avoid overwriting is nearly non-existent in reader responsible cultures where adjectives, qualifiers, hedges, and clichés or proverbs are the norm. From a reader responsible perspective, adjectives help transport the reader to a specific time and place, or add an otherwise aesthetic quality to the experience. Qualifiers do the same in that they add an extra dimension by way of detail and context. Hedges come in handy among reader responsible cultures, especially when writing for superiors who expect to be acknowledged for their social position and rank. Clichés and proverbs are also welcome, as they indicate the writer is well-versed in an appropriate intellectual tradition. One of our authors was on a hiring committee in the U.S. a couple of years ago in which a Chinese candidate, in the very first paragraph no less, cited none other than Confucius. The position he

was applying for was information architecture, a discipline relevant to computers, but not ancient wisdom traditions (Smith, 1991). There is certainly nothing wrong with using Confucius in a cover letter, so long as that application takes place in an Asian country, such as China. And to provide a little contrast, if an American were to cite the country's first president, George Washington, in his cover letter then a hiring committee would certainly find that amusing, the only exception being if the position were for a historian of American politics.

The relationship between language, culture, and writing is complex, and it is impossible to do the problem justice in a brief essay. Because of the complexity of culture, and the need to teach the practical problem of writing in Asia, we have focused on two dimensions of culture and three of writing. Writer responsible cultures tend to be individualistic and communicate directly, use a clear and concrete writing strategy, and avoid overwriting. Reader responsible cultures tend to be collective and communicate indirectly, use a flowery and abstract writing strategy, and may even embrace overwriting. These, of course, are just a few of the many possible variables that one may consider when studying language, culture, and writing. The task is made even more difficult in that culture is rarely so simple, and the same is certainly true of writing. But that is precisely the point because novice intercultural writers are rarely aware of different cultural values and beliefs and would certainly be surprised to learn that such factors influence how one uses language to write. Yet, the real goal is to figure out how best to teach these patterns of culture and writing to non-native speakers of English in Asia and cross-cultural classroom settings.

Teaching parallel syntactic structure to Asian students (or in cross-cultural and multicultural classroom setting)

Many, but certainly not all, countries and cultures in Asia subscribe to some variation of reader responsibility. This means that many cultures throughout Asia tend to be more collective than they are individualistic and value indirect instead of direct forms of communication. Because of these general patterns, many Asian students approach English-language learning and writing from a reader responsible perspective. Even though English may be a second, third, or sixth language, they are likely to impose a reader responsible structure on the writing process. Such reader responsible rhetorical strategies are certainly forgivable, but they do not help one write in and for another culture.

University professors in Asia are faced with a challenging task, which is not only to instruct on speaking English, but to also explain how best to put that language into writing (Limbu, 2011). It is not enough to say that learning English is the same as learning the writing pattern used by the English-speaking world. The challenge is based on the differences between learning to speak a language and the ability to put that language in writing. The problem is nothing short of the difference between nature and nurture.

Aside from a fraction of the global population, every person on the planet is born with a language instinct (Pinker & Jackendoff, 2005). Such an instinct gives rise

to the stunning ability to acquire language by simply being immersed in it, as in being around friends, family, and acquaintances. No one has to be drilled in a language to speak it, as one might do when studying for an exam. Instead, the human mind is equipped with a language instinct that starts to seal itself off rather early in life. By the age of around twenty, if a person has never acquired a language then he perhaps never will. The instinct has forever been sealed (Pinker, 2002). Writing and naturally reading are different. Unlike learning language and the instinct to acquire it, writing is a skill that must be drilled into students whether it is the first, third, or sixth language. Nobody acquires an ability to write by simply being immersed among other writers. The ability to write is a skill that must be practiced, re-practiced, and honed over many years. It is unsurprising, then, that the values and beliefs in which one writes should take on those of the culture in which they were learned.

Americans are normally exposed to English as an infant and continue acquiring it throughout adolescence. Early in this process, young Americans are exposed to a particular writing style that is honed throughout their entire educational process, so long as they attend school in the U.S. But when these same students go abroad, perhaps to study at a university, they are faced with having to use language, writing, and rhetorical patterns in a very different way. The same problems an American faces at a university in the east are nearly identical to Asian (international) students learning how to write in English, although the problem gets flipped around. Instead of an American learning, at least implicitly, about the nuances of reader responsibility (audience-based writing), the Asian student has to figure out writer responsibility (writer-based writing). This continues to be a problem when even the professor is either unaware or misunderstands the importance of paying notice to the likelihood of these differences. All of this leads us to the question of how best to teach English language writing patterns—especially the kind found in the U.S. and Canada—to Asian university students learning English-language writing?

One possibility is it to first focus on a simple solution, which is to remove as many of the complexities as possible to focus on core differences. Naturally, these concerns are centered on the differences between reader responsibility and writer responsibility, the way sentences are strung together, and how language should be used to write those sentences (as shown in Table 2).

As previously stated, most, but not all Asian students are taught their native language in a tradition that probably values the doctrines of reader responsibility (reader-centered rhetorical strategy). This means that the typical Asian student learning to write in English assumes they should write in a way that conforms to the group, and does so in an indirect manner. In this rhetorical strategy, the writer assumes that her/his audiences share the common knowledge (which is one of the prominent theoretical concept of collective oral culture, whether it is true or not). For instance, in one of the author's writing classes, he commented on one of his international students' cultural literacy essay that he did not understand what she was trying to say. In response, she stated that he was a well-educated university professor and should have understood her implication. This situation implies that the student grew up in a collective culture where writer and reader not only commonly

share many cultural materials and other ideas, but instructors are considered all-knowing purveyors of knowledge. Therefore, the student expected her professor to have known her indirect inferences.

Table 2. Basic differences between reader and writer responsibility. Many Asian students and professors should focus on how best to adapt their English-language essays in a writer responsible format.

Writer Responsible	Reader Responsible
1. AB/BC sentence cohesion	1. AB/CD sentence cohesion
2. global coherence (old and new)	2. global coherence (new)
3. short introductory sentences	3. long introductory sentences
4. begin sentences with related topics	4. begin sentences with new topics
5. build ideas with more ideas	5. add detail and context

Among reader responsible cultures, sentences should not necessarily overlap, detail and context are encouraged, and verbosity is usually prized. Oral and written discourse in Asia presumes that language should be flowery and ornate and tends to follow an AB/CD sentence structure. These are some rules to follow in many parts of Asia, but they appear flowery, ornate, or even AB/CD sentence cohesion and sentences with new topics (which might appear to be unfocused) in many parts of the native English-speaking world. To make this concept clearer, a resume is a good place to start.

The resume: Differences between reader and writer responsibility

Resumes in many parts of Asia are radically different from those in the U.S., U.K., and Australia. For instance, Chinese resumes tend to be standardized in which everyone uses the same structure. Education and work experience are provided in reverse chronology, starting with the earliest job first. Personal information, such as date of birth, place of birth, marital status, number of children, political affiliation, and personal hobbies are included in all Chinese resumes. A personal photo is also required and an objective statement, if used at all, is found at the bottom. Similarly, in Nepal (including many South Asian cultures), an applicant's personal data, such as date of birth, marital status, father's name, permanent address, personal photo, skills, hobbies, education, and work experiences are required. These differences may seem peculiar at first, but they actually reveal deeply held cultural values and beliefs about language, culture, and writing.

The presumption of equality, or inequality, is the most striking difference. Photos, date of birth, marital status, and political affiliation are just a few of the things that are illegal in the U.S., yet they are required in countries such as China, Nepal, Korea, and Japan. An objective statement, if used in the U.S., is always the first on a resume. If an objective statement is used in China or Japan then it will normally be found at the bottom. This is noteworthy because an objective statement is analogous to a thesis statement, which is crucial in the U.S., but delayed or non-existent in Japan, Nepal, and India. American resumes also value the latest educational achievement or place of employment, although it seems to be the opposite in many parts of Asia. Again, these differences are not just a few odd inconsistencies, but are actually deeply ingrained differences of seeing the world.

Once Asian professors are able to get their students accustomed to the nuances of writing an English-language resume they may want to then focus on writing a cover letter. In the U.S., an applicant gets to the point, explaining why she is the best candidate for the job, an argument made on her educational and professional achievements. This is not the case in many parts of Asia where an ability to work well in teams is seen as far more important. This is likely to take some time for students to fully grasp. Writing a cover letter is already an odd request for some students in Asia, and this obstacle will seem all the more difficult when aimed at a different country and culture. The same differences in writing resumes and cover letters can easily be adapted for letters of application to graduate school, or most any use of writing that has a practical purpose.

The differences between reader and writer responsibility are far more extensive than we have suggested in this essay. Instead of being a problem, though, we suggest that this degree of simplicity is necessary for university students throughout Asia who are not only honing their English-language skills, but are also trying to improve their writing skills from local and global perspectives. University students in Asia may also have trouble seeing the practical use of audience-based writing in English (Zeng, 2009). An obvious countermeasure to this criticism is to point out that societies, which speak English as a native language (specially in the U.S., Canada, and U.K.), are also cultures that privilege writing. This too may seem unusual for Asian students, but its practical implications should provide adequate motivation.

Conclusion

Breaking the writing process down into two different types, connecting them with culture, and then explaining their differences through resumes should be only the beginning. Cover letters, letters of application, and brief expository papers on new subjects are outstanding opportunities for university professors to instill the characteristics deemed so necessary in the English-speaking world.

While the complexities of language, culture, and geography are too vast to simplify in a brief essay on intercultural writing, this kind of simplification is a necessary first step for the vast majority of novice writers having to adapt their work

for a different country and culture. One of the greatest obstacles toward effective intercultural communication is not language or writing, but the extraordinary differences in cultural values and beliefs. An author who values individualism is by definition one who is accustomed to persuading people who have differences of opinion. The opposite may be said about authors who value group-orientation or collectivism, which emphasizes harmony and conformity more than dissent and disruption. Naturally, one is neither better nor more effective than the other, at least within a purely objective framework. Such differences, though, make for an excellent foundation from which to work when directing one's ideas toward a vastly different audience.

As we have seen, language and culture are intimately connected. Language both reflects and refracts a society's deepest values and beliefs. Conversely, language is analogous to a living organism that is subject to the whims of how it is used. Thus, culture also affects language and its use, which helps explain its dynamic and ever-changing nature. Addressing these differences is central for people who must navigate complex social networks from every corner of the globe. While such linguistic and cultural differences may be found in a wide range of discourse communities, the resume provides clear and concise access to a culture. This is why studying and analyzing language and culture through a letter or resume makes an ideal first project for novice intercultural writers from any part of the globe.

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