This case study examines international business letters of complaint written in English by U.S. managers whose first language (L1) is English and by Korean managers for whom English is a second language (L2). Important differences exist in rhetorical choices between the two groups. The U.S. writers used a direct organizational pattern and tended to state the main idea or problem first before sharing explanatory details that clearly related to the stated problem. By contrast, the standard Korean pattern was indirect and tended to delay the reader's discovery of the main point. The U.S. managers implied that a problem existed but requested action explicitly. The Korean managers were not uniform in their strategy for making complaints implicit and action requests explicit. These findings suggest that L1 writers must be sensitive to L2 features that can present obstacles to efficient communication in international business. Someone accustomed only to the U.S. pattern might find the L2 patterns of organization and style in the Korean letters vague, emotional, and accusatory. U.S. managers who can recognize the L2 rhetorical patterns identified in this study will be more likely to accept their Korean counterparts' rhetorical choices. Equally important, Korean business people should know that these patterns in L2 letters of complaint may not be tolerated by Americans who lack this understanding.

Korean Business Letters: Strategies for Effective Complaints in Cross-Cultural Communication

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Many South Korean business people regularly write business documents in English. This use of English as a foreign language reflects the economic "globalization" policy adopted by the Korean government in 1995, a policy aimed at reinforcing the country's economic strength so that Korea can compete with other developed countries in the world market. Indeed, the 1997 economic turmoil that required the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide US$114 billion in aid to South Korea, Indonesia, and Thailand (with South Korea receiving the lion's share – US$57 billion) underscores the importance of developing countries in East Asia to world commerce. Economic instability there is quickly felt around the world, so it is not surprising that the IMF moved quickly to intervene. East Asia will continue to attract the interest and attention of developed nations that seek to expand commercial ventures globally.

South Korea in particular promises an intriguing future. The inauguration of Kim Dae-Jung in February 1998 signaled a political move toward enhanced democratic processes and freer trade markets. If
implemented successfully, Kim's vision of an economically competitive Korea may radically alter business in the region. For Korean business writers, one consequence of this move toward a free-market economy is a growing interest in English, which remains the language of international business communication. The liberalization of the Korean market should encourage business communicators in developed countries to anticipate increasing contact with their Korean counterparts.

However, writers who use a second language (L2) for business or other purposes may continue to use the rhetorical patterns of their native languages. First-language (L1) readers may expect writers who use a second language fluently to have a similar fluency in culture and customs. Ironically, violation of these expectations by fluent L2 writers can damage relationships more than does similar behavior by a nonfluent L2 writer. In short, while becoming more fluent in a second language has benefits, it may also create a new set of problems (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996). Successful interaction thus requires some understanding of differences in styles and strategies that may otherwise hinder communication.

Contrastive analysis (CA) provides a useful methodology for illustrating cultural differences in rhetoric and for explaining the influence of first-language rhetorical patterns and norms on second-language writing behavior (Bell, Becker, & Dillon, 1995; Dillon, 1992, 1993; Hinds, 1987, 1990; Hinkel, 1994; Kaplan, 1966, 1972; Matalene, 1985; Liebman, 1988; Norton, 1987). One important implication of CA research is that what is rhetorically effective in one culture might not be effective in another, and vice versa. In general, researchers recognize the need for contrastive analyses that can inform strategies for effective communication in an international workplace (e.g., Beamer, 1995; Boiarsky, 1995; Bosley, 1993; Driskill, 1996; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Varner & Connor, 1996). However, studies that contrast business communication practices in two particular cultures are relatively rare: Bell, Dillon, and Becker (1995) contrast German and U.S. memos and letters; Connor, David, and Rycker (1995) compare U.S. and Flemish approaches to completing job applications; Dillon (1992, 1993) analyzes patterns of cohesion in Indonesian and Vietnamese business discourse; Varner (1988) compares U.S. and French business correspondence; Yli-Jokipii (1994) considers the ways that requests are presented in British, U.S., and Finnish business writing. Contrastive studies of business communication in Asia emphasize the Japanese experience (e.g., Barnlund, 1989; Connor, 1988; Jenkins & Hinds, 1987, who consider French along with English and Japanese business letters). To our knowledge, no rigorous contrastive analysis of Korean business writing exists. This case study begins to address the omission.
Discussions of Korean rhetoric in general and of Korean business culture suggest some of the differences that we might expect to find. In English, clarity is the norm, and the concept of clarity is linked to linear or direct development of the writer's main point. However, in Korean rhetoric, indirect forms of writing are valued, and making connections often is left to the reader (Hinds, 1987; Hinkel, 1994; Yum, 1987). U.S. authors Kenna and Lacy (1995) claim that Americans whose first language is English tend to think in a logical, sequential order and emphasize factual analysis, while Koreans tend to be more emotion-driven and more sensitive to the personal tone of the message rather than facts and figures. Kenna and Lacy also postulate that (a) Americans generally tolerate open discussion of errors in business transactions and accept criticism of performance while Koreans do not, and (b) Americans differentiate criticism of a person from criticism of that person's actions while Koreans view criticism as personal and “face-threatening”; this perception in turn can impede “initiative” and information flow (pp. 14-15). One therefore might expect L2 Korean business English to show evidence of transference of these cultural features of L1 Korean discourse preferences. Contrastive analysis reminds us that rhetorical strategies for “saving face” and politeness are not universal, and the extent to which such strategies are used differs among cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hagge & Kostelnick, 1989; Maier, 1992; Yum, 1988).

In the letters of complaint we studied, U.S. and Korean business writers prefer different organizational patterns and different styles. The majority of the letters written by the U.S. managers in this study follow the “direct” pattern of identification of the problem, discussion of relevant information, request for action, and buffer, with the buffer representing an optional move. The standard Korean move pattern, in contrast, is “indirect”: optional introductory buffer, discussion of relevant information, identification of problem, request for action, and optional closing buffer. The U.S. writers consistently use implicit style to present the complaint but an explicit style to request action. Categorizing the Korean letters as either explicit or implicit is difficult because the Korean writers use a variety of rhetorical strategies, with no one style seeming to dominate.

Although our case study of Korean L2 business writing is based on a relatively small sample of business letters, case study data is useful when one has no information at all. Our preliminary findings suggest the importance of further research on business discourse in Korea; at the same time, we encourage expanding such research to developing countries throughout East Asia and the world. The value to international business of increased understanding of cultural differences that may prevent effective communication cannot be overstated.
Methods

We studied rhetorical differences in organization and style in Korean and U.S. faxed letters of complaint. We employed what Nunan (1992) calls "categorical" as opposed to "interpretative" written discourse analysis. That is, data are analyzed according to a predetermined set of coding categories both for organization and style patterns. Our analysis of organizational patterns primarily follows Connor, David, and Rycker's model (1995) of the meaning components of business letters and adapts complementary features from textbook advice and research on effective strategies for writing complaints and claims (Bovee & Thill, 1995; Ewald & Stine, 1983; Harcourt, Krizan, & Merrier, 1996; Murphy & Hildebrandt, 1988; Swales & Najjar, 1987; Virtanen, 1995). For rhetorical styles, the study follows research protocol from a variety of precedents (Kim & Bresnahan, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Hatch, 1992; Salager-Meyer, 1994).

Sources of Data

Our data consist exclusively of faxed complaint letters from the "correspondence sent" and "correspondence received" files of seven companies in Korea. All of the letters are "international": They represent interactions between U.S. managers and Korean managers at different companies in different countries. All of the letters are written in English, 7 by U.S. managers whose first language (L1) is English and 14 by Korean managers for whom English is a second language (L2).

The seven companies — six Korean and one French — represent engineering, food, jewelry, shipping, importing, and exporting. Three of the companies are privately owned distributorships with only two to five employees. Three are branches of major Korean corporations and have about 2000 to 3000 employees each. The French company has a contract with the Korean government for constructing the public transportation system; we have no information about its size. Of the seven, one company is located in Changwon, a well-known manufacturing city in southern Korea, about 5 hours from Seoul by car and about 45-50 minutes by car from Pusan, which is a port city and the second largest city in Korea. The other six companies are located in Seoul, Korea's capital and largest city. English is the major language used in written discourse in these international businesses.

The Korean sample consists of 14 letters written between December 1991 and December 1996 by 11 Korean managers. The companies were not very forthcoming about the backgrounds of the authors, but we do know that these writers were born and educated in Korea and make infrequent trips to the United States. Since all seven companies employ U.S. managers as well as Korean managers, two research assistants reviewed the pool of letters from the Korean companies and
excluded letters that both agreed were written by L1 English writers working there. This exclusion ensured that the sample letters in English from the Korean companies represent L2 writers. The U.S. sample consists of 7 letters written between December 1995 and October 1996 by 7 U.S. managers from companies whose identity is blocked out in the letters we obtained but which we understand to be located in the Pacific Northwest. The Korean and the U.S. managers held mid-level positions in their organizations.

We adopted Yli-Jokipii's (1991) criteria for business letters; that is, to qualify for the study, the letter must be typewritten or word-processed (rather than hand-written), must have a date, must identify the recipient, and must specify the sender in the form of a signature. This procedure ensures that data are business letters between international companies rather than internal memos or other types of informal correspondence that are less likely to reflect a best effort at effective communication.

Because complaints (commonly called “claim letters” in U.S. business communication textbooks) are directly persuasive, they should, especially in cross-cultural business settings, reflect their writers’ awareness of the other culture’s rhetorical conventions and differing reader perspectives. After all, the writer wants to move the reader to some specific action and thus should be expected to take care in adapting the message to the reader’s understanding. Also, managers frequently must write letters of complaint, so one should expect the sample to reflect rhetorical choices and thought patterns that are typical of daily business correspondence. Complaints thus provide a rich set of rhetorical choices to subject to contrastive analysis in business discourse.

Methods for Analyzing Organizational Patterns

Connor, David, and Rycker (1995) found five meaning components in the letters they examined: (I) identification of the problem, (II) discussion of relevant information, (III) a request for action, (IV) a topic shift— that is, information that does not relate to the problem, and (V) buffer. Starting with the problem, discussing relevant information, and asking for action creates “direct” organizational development. “Indirect” organization also uses Category IV, information that does not relate directly to the problem. The buffer is an optional element. By definition, a buffer is a pleasant or “neutral, noncontroversial statement” often introduced to soften a negative message (Bovee & Thill, 1995, p. 269). Including a buffer in a negative message is conventional in business writing (Bovee & Thill, 1995; Ewald & Stine, 1983; Harcourt, Krizan, & Merrier, 1996; Murphy & Hildebrandt, 1988). Writers may begin with this preparatory statement in order to neutralize the complaint or may end with it to reaffirm the business relationship.
In terms of organization, an opening buffer delays the introduction of the writer's point, and a closing buffer de-emphasizes the negative message or request for action. Thus using a buffer suggests a preference for indirect development.

Coding the sequential order of meaning components involves identifying "moves" from one category to another (see Swales & Najjar, 1987). Each shift between categories represents a separate move. One move might contain several examples in the same category but cannot contain examples from different categories. In many of the sample letters, a whole paragraph consists of the same meaning component; therefore, it is coded as one move. When the next paragraph or statement contains the same meaning component, it is grouped in the same move. Occasionally, a single paragraph or a statement includes two or more different meaning components. In such cases, each category shift represents an independent move.

Consider the following sample of a letter written by a Korean manager. Categories appear in brackets at the beginning of the text they describe; movements are indicated with arrows. Grammatical irregularities in all sample letters presented below are preserved as in the originals.

[Problem] That is resulting in payment twice to one items,

[Request for Action] so we have solution under consideration.

(1) we want to return money 935.00 US$.

[Topic Shift] (2) another, we want to purchase your products as much as that price.

[Request] We hope to select one condition, and send response to us as soon as possible.

[Topic shift] also want to receive answer our fax message on May. 3. 1996 (about delivery of pressure transducer)

The first paragraph contains two meaning components: the first component identifies the problem (I), and the second component states action requests by giving options (III). Category I shifts to category III at the first comma in the first sentence, creating the move from I to III. The second paragraph also contains two meaning components: the first restates requests for action (III), and the second introduces a topic shift to new information that is unrelated to the business complaint (IV). Thus, category III in paragraph one continues into the first sentence of paragraph two. The second sentence of paragraph two rep-
represents a third move from III to IV. When the topic changes more than once, each change to a new topic represents a separate move.

**Methods for Analyzing Style**

"Style" denotes the writer's rhetorical strategy at the level of linguistic choice and usage. We identify the writer's rhetorical style as either "implicit" or "explicit" and consider four factors that might influence this choice: lexical hedges, impersonalization of complaint sources, use of "intense" adjectives or adverbs, and type of action request.

Lexical hedges are "words or phrases whose job is to make things more or less fuzzy" (Lakoff, 1973, p. 462). Brown and Levinson (1987) consider hedges as a politeness strategy to minimize "losing face" in communication. These views associate hedges with indirect organization. We use Salager-Meyer's (1994) two functional categories: shields and approximators. Shields include all modal verbs, semi-auxiliaries such as "appears" that suggest a condition while avoiding a direct statement or accusation, and probability adverbs such as "probably." Approximators include expressions of "rounders" of quantity or degree such as "somewhat."

Impersonalization of complaint sources represents a second hedging strategy (Hatch, 1992). In composing business complaints, writers need to indicate that they are in a problematic situation because of something that readers did or did not do. Writers use "impersonalization of complaint sources" as a rhetorical strategy to avoid the absolute statement that "the behavior injured the complainer alone or [that] the offender alone is responsible for the problem" (Hatch, 1992, p. 142). Impersonalizing — removing the writer and/or the reader from discourse — helps writers deal with an uncomfortable situation without personally offending the reader. Thus, impersonalization tends to make complaint acts implicit. For example, a writer might opt for the statement, "A possible conclusion is that an error has been made in calculations," instead of saying, "I think your calculations are wrong." Use of the passive voice further impersonalizes the entire situation.

"Intense" adjectives or adverbs provide a third strategy in dealing with negative information. The use of these adjectives and adverbs is a common linguistic tool used to convey "emotional intensity" in communication (Frank, 1990, p. 17). By choosing to use or to omit intense adjectives or adverbs — such as "poorly," "honestly," "wrongly," "absolutely" — writers can reveal or conceal their dissatisfaction, or threaten the reader.

Different cultures approach the request for action in different ways. While one culture may prefer an explicit statement of request, another culture may perceive an explicit request as inappropriate. Cultural preferences thus should influence the writer's linguistic choice; additionally, awareness of the cultural differences between writer and
reader also should influence this choice. We follow Kim and Bresnahan's (1994) model and classify the writer's request strategy as either direct or indirect.

**Limitations**

As a pilot case study, our analysis has limitations that suggest the importance of further research. First, limited availability of data resulted in a relatively small overall sample size and a large difference in size of the two groups (7 U.S. samples and 14 Korean samples). These factors prevent us from generalizing our findings to all international U.S. and Korean complaints. To collect our data, the participating companies required us to make contact at the company level instead of contacting individuals, and all names of persons and organizations were deleted prior to delivery of data in order to preserve confidentiality. These experiences confirm St. John's (1996) observation that many companies consider their business correspondence confidential, hesitate to give researchers access to it, and prefer not to explain the business contexts.

**How Writers Organized Complaints**

Even though they are writing to businesses in Korea, the U.S. writers in our sample prefer a direct pattern of organization. The standard U.S. move pattern is (I) identification of the problem, (II) discussion of relevant information, (III) request for action, and (V) optional closing buffer. The U.S. writers state the main idea or problem first, then share explanatory details that clearly relate to the stated problem. This immediate statement of the problem is intended to help the reader understand the writer's point so that the reader need not infer the problem or the writer's request. Buffers, which occur infrequently, come at the end of the complaint discourse and thus do not interrupt the direct development of points. The U.S. rhetorical pattern of organizing the business complaint message thus is "direct" or "linear."

By contrast, the Korean rhetorical pattern of organizing the business complaint message is "indirect" or "non-linear." This conclusion supports the findings of several contrastive analyses of general Korean rhetoric (Hinds, 1987, 1990; Hinkel, 1994; Kaplan, 1966, 1967, 1972; Norton, 1987; Yum, 1987). The standard Korean move pattern in our sample is (V) optional introductory buffer, (II) discussion of relevant information, (I) identification of problem, (III) request for action, and (V) optional closing buffer. Only 4 out of the 14 Korean letters follow the U.S. model despite the fact that they are written in English to conduct business with U.S. companies. Instead, most lead with relevant information about the problem before identifying the problem. This delay often requires the reader to absorb details, sometimes relevant and sometimes not, before discovering the problem. The use of buffers
in opening and middle paragraphs delays the identification of the problem and interrupts the sequential flow of "moves" (I, II, III) in direct complaint discourse. U.S. readers therefore may feel that they must guess or interpret the writer's meaning.

The following U.S. example uses the standard U.S. pattern:

[Problem (a)] We have been informed by our customer XXX Trading Corporation that upon receipt of shipment XX-268 the product was found to be damaged and unacceptable for sale.

[Problem (b)] In addition to damaged goods, it was found the order not to be complete with several pieces of merchandise missing totally from the container.

[Relevant information (a)] Attached is copy of a memo our Customer Service department received from Mr. XXX XXXXX, marketing director at XXX Trading Corporation. Mr. XXXXX has supplied us with documentation and photographs taken at arrival of the container.

[Relevant information (b)] It was found this load has missing product, empty cartons, scrap wood enclosed within sealed packaging, dirty cartoning, and product with missing components. Attached is the original copy of the "Certificate of Expert's Examination" and a translation of this document.

[Request for action] XXX Trading Corporation has proposed a credit of $9655.00 be made to the invoiced total. Please review with your people and advise as to the alternatives XXXXX suggests to satisfy this customer's position with this shipment.

[Buffer] Your involvement into order XX-268 is appreciated. Thank you and we are awaiting your quick response.

In this example, the U.S. writer starts with category I, shifts to category II, and continues to category III sequentially; finally, the writer makes the optional move to category V. By contrast, only 4 of the 14 letters by Korean writers follow this pattern. The majority of moves in the Korean sample follow the general pattern of V, II, I, III, V, or optional opening buffer, discussion of relevant information, identification of the problem, request for action, and closing buffer.

Interestingly, within this general pattern, the Korean writers make frequent deviations. That is, the U.S. writers are more likely to follow the template I, II, III, V consistently while Korean writers more often break sequential ordering of meaning components, thereby exhibiting a circular or indirect pattern. The following Korean example illustrates this pattern:

[Buffer] First of all, we would like to thank you for your kind cooperation during last year.
[Relevant information (a)] As you know well, JJJ activity needs a long time to make a final conclusion. Last year at the management level meeting, which were held 2 times, and through so many times JJJ international meeting, we had requested for JJJ activities so many times (JJJ-MJ-Q038, JJJ-MJ-Q045, JJJ-MJ-Q046, etc).

[Problem] In spite of our requests, we don't have any clear answer from you about that. Now we are very anxious for schedule impact and additional expenses very seriously.

[Request for action (a)] Then we would like to remind you of our request one more time as follows:
- Full B.O.M.
- A, B, C, D classification in according to B.O.M.
- supplier list (minimum 2 suppliers) in according to B.O.M.
- Homologation procedure
- Vendor qualification procedure
- Procurement spec, and its related document
- Detail procurement activity schedule

[Relevant information (b)] Considering XXX's production schedule in XXX, present situation in JJJ could result in a XXX's human resource & material loss, delivery schedule impact.

[Request for action (b)] We think the only thing to solve these problems should be proposed and drawn from by you.

[Buffer] In 1996, to solve all problems, we wish your good cooperation and best efforts would be awaited.

In this example, the Korean writer follows a V, II, I, III, V pattern; the (b) information and request for action represent slight deviations. This arrangement of meaning components in Korean letters suggests that the writer provides preparatory or explanatory information before stating the main idea. In other words, the indirect organizational pattern is dominant; direct development is rare in the Korean letters. Moreover, similar information within one meaning category is placed randomly within the text. This separation requires additional moves and therefore might make the Korean letters appear discontinuous and digressive from the point of view of a U.S. counterpart, who more often places the main idea (problem) first and then provides explanatory details.

Buffers appear in both the U.S. and the Korean letters but with two important differences. First, the Korean letters use buffers far more often: buffers appear in 10 of the 14 Korean letters, with 14 buffers in
all, while only 3 out of the 7 U.S. letters contain buffers, with 4 in all. Second, in the Korean letters, the majority of buffers are intentional buffers rather than conventional buffers. Conventional buffers, such as a “Good day, Mr. X” greeting, generally reflect customary usages and do not necessarily represent the writer’s attempt to introduce content that will shape the reader’s reaction to the message. An intentional buffer, however, represents a rhetorical choice to divert attention away from the negative message. Consider the following example from a Korean writer, who introduces an intentional buffer to neutralize the impact of a threatened legal action:

[Threat] we don’t want to develop legal problem in this situation.

[Intentional buffer] if you did not connect our fax (82-XXX XX XXXX), we introduce another fax number (82-XXX XX XXXX) to you.

Opening and middle intentional buffers create indirect development because they delay the immediate introduction of the problem and interrupt the sequential flow of problem, relevant information, and request for action. Though closing intentional buffers do not interrupt the flow of meaning components, they might be considered indirect as well because they provide superfluous information.

**Style in the Sample Letters**

The U.S. writers consistently use an implicit style to present the complaint but an explicit style to request action. Categorizing the Korean letters as either explicit or implicit is difficult because the Korean writers are not consistent in their use of rhetorical strategies. Some are implicit, some are explicit, some are vague, and some combine these styles in a single letter. A U.S. reader is likely to find the specific words that create these styles make the U.S. letters seem polite, deliberate, and non-accusatory, while the words used to create these styles in the Korean letters might often seem vague, emotional, and accusatory to a U.S. reader.

**Lexical Hedges**

Although both U.S. and Korean letters use hedges, different kinds of hedges create different effects. Hedging expressions in complaint acts appeared in 4 out of the 7 U.S. letters and in 6 out of the 14 Korean letters. Important differences exist between U.S. and Korean writers’ use of shields and approximators. In the U.S. letters, words that shield the writer’s or reader’s ego are more prevalent than approximators: Of 4 total hedges, only 1 is an approximator. In the Korean letters, in contrast, approximators are more prevalent than shields: Out of 10 total, only 3 are shields. The Korean writers in this study tend to depend
on "rounders" that "serve to make things vague" (Salager-Meyer, 1994, p. 154).

The U.S. writers soften the statement of complaint and/or avoid placing blame directly on the reader by choosing hedging expressions that allow the possibility of complainer error (e.g., "This could be a problem in that," "It appears a discrepancy exists"; emphasis added here and in the examples that follow). The writer is shielding the reader from the accusation of direct fault. However, the Korean writers most often use the hedging expression "some" (e.g., "so we have some problem," "we find against our expectation some of important transmittals," "but it is some different total amount"). While the Korean writers may use the hedge "some" to introduce the complaint implicitly, the choice of this approximator could make the discourse vague and leave a U.S. counterpart uncertain as to whether the writer fully understands the problem that gives rise to the complaint. In business discourse, "pragmatic clarity" is an important feature when complaining (Connor, David, & Rycker, 1995, p. 470). In the Korean letters studied here, the degree of this "pragmatic clarity" is questionable.

In requests for action to solve the problem, hedging strategies appear in 2 out of the 7 U.S. letters and in 3 out of the 14 Korean letters. The differences in requests for action resemble differences in complaints: Most U.S. hedges represent shields whereas most Korean hedges are approximators. Lexical hedges in requests again produce different effects in the U.S. and Korean letters. U.S. hedging devices tend to deliver the request for action in a polite manner (e.g., "any assistance you may give us," "do contact us with any question you may have"). Additionally, hedging adverbials suggest the probability that the requested action will achieve the desired effect, but this probability remains open-ended (e.g., "If we can get the rate, we can probably get it done," "If we could, perhaps they would match"). While Korean hedging devices intend politeness, to the U.S. reader they may appear to make the request ambiguous (e.g., "if we require something after discussion of our import agent," "Anyway we hope to receive some information," "Besides, we have not yet received some drawings"). Hedges in these examples obscure the action the writer requires, and thus, from the viewpoint of an U.S. counterpart, Korean hedging strategies may tend to create vagueness in request acts as well as in complaint acts.

Although the hedging strategy itself contributes to an implicit discourse mode, this effect appears only in the U.S. letters because the Korean letters heavily depend on "approximators" or "rounders," devices that function to make the request act obscure (Salager-Meyer, 1994). In the U.S. letters, therefore, the hedging strategy works to make the request implicit, while in Korean letters the hedges tend to make the message ambiguous.
Impersonalization of Complaint Sources

One of the most striking differences between the U.S. and Korean samples is in the impersonalization of complaint sources. Five out of the 7 U.S. letters impersonalize both the writer and the reader by referring to the company name, using the plural "we," or employing passive voice; the 2 remaining U.S. letters mix strategies of impersonalization and personalization. By contrast, only 3 out of the 14 Korean letters impersonalize both the writer and the reader. Ten letters impersonalize the complainer while personalizing the reader (e.g., "In spite of our requests, we don't have any clear answer from you," "XXX [complaining company name] think you may not pay your attention"). The remaining Korean letter personalizes both writer and reader ("You should have discussed this matter beforehand with me").

"Intense" Adjectives and Adverbs

A greater percentage of U.S. letters use "intense" adjectives and adverbs: 4 out of the 7 U.S. letters and 6 out of the 14 Korean letters employ this strategy. However, the U.S. letters usually contain only one intense adjective or adverb in each letter, while in the Korean sample, multiple intense adjectives and adverbs occur within individual letters. As a result, the Korean letters seem to show more emotion in discussing the business problem.

As "attitude markers" (Vande Kopple, 1985, p. 85), "intense" adjectives and adverbs help to ensure that the message is conveying the writer's personal attitudes or feelings regarding the problematic situation. Generally, the U.S. writers use intense adjectives and adverbs to call ethics into play (e.g., "I am disappointed that XXX has not dealt honorably with us," "We entered this order with good faith and assumed that they would be honorable and trustworthy"). While the Korean writers sometimes use intensifiers when they invoke ethics, they are more inclined than are the U.S. writers to use intense adjectives and adverbs to convey personal emotion. Furthermore, most Korean examples contain amplifiers such as "so much" and "very" that intensify the emotional tone (e.g., "We are so much concerning," "XXX is much sorry to hear," "We are very surprised to receive," "We are very anxious for schedule impact"). As a result, U.S. readers could consider their Korean counterparts' messages as either unprofessional or unclear because the writers' emotional reactions to the problem seem to take precedence over its resolution.

Indirect and Direct Requests

In each sample, direct action requests occur approximately 60% of the time and indirect action requests occur approximately 40%. Sev-
eral U.S. and several Korean letters include both direct and indirect request strategies, so the number of occurrences does not match the number of letters; one U.S. letter omitted a request for action altogether.

"Please + imperative" structure is the most frequent usage for direct requests in both U.S. and Korean letters (e.g., "Please advise us as soon as possible," "Please resolve this matter honorable by sending," "Please review with your people and advise"). In indirect action requests, the Korean letters show a preference for "wishful" requests (e.g., "We hope you can make a replacement order for this," "XXX wishes that ZZZ provide the Block Diagrams," "We hope the following matter can be released"). These examples illustrate that the Korean writers' request acts are not declaratory, but anticipatory. To U.S. readers, the verbs "hope" and "wish" might diminish the requests for action; the Korean writer might seem to be unsure whether the reader can or will comply. For instance, stating "Please make a replacement order" instead of "We hope you can make a replacement order" would clarify that the writer definitely expects results.

Unlike the Korean letters, the U.S. letters contain no "wishful" requests; when employing indirect requests, they reveal no specific preference for request types (e.g., "I would be willing to go to different lines" [hedged want], "We would like to request" [hedged performative], "Any assistance you may give will be appreciated" [passive]). Although the requests are indirect because they are hedged, they are still declaratory and assertive because the main verbs express the writers' desire, calling for a specific action.

**Business English in Korea**

The nature of English instruction in Korea helps us understand Korean discourse choices. First, manuals of business English in Korea are rare. Second, terms such as "Trade English," "Business English," and "English Business Communication" often are used interchangeably. Thus even university texts focus on business letter writing as a tool to facilitate foreign trade. Kim's *Trade English* (1993) and Kong and Jeon's *Trade English* (1996) are currently used as textbooks in two Korean universities; other manuals include Yoon's *Practical English Correspondence for Foreign Trade* (1993) and Nakamura's *Introduction to Trade English* (1996). These manuals do not cover other written discourse forms such as memos, reports, and proposals. Instead, they focus on foreign trade terms and useful expressions. Most translate special trade terms (e.g., "quotation," "invoice," "delivery terms") into English after giving detailed grammatical explanations in Korean. Examples and exercises focus on correctness in sentence-level composition (e.g., grammar, syntax, vocabulary) while ignoring discourse-
level strategies such as style, tone, and organizational pattern. Furthermore, discussion of the writing process – including pre-writing, drafting, and revising – is minimized or ignored. In U.S. texts, a typical exercise presents a hypothetical situation and asks learners to compose a business letter responding to that situation. By contrast, Korean texts rely on models and rarely contain practical case exercises. Finally, Korean texts do not offer perspectives on intercultural communication.

Three models of business English writing exist in Korea: British, U.S., and translated Japanese. Only the Kong and Jeon text (1996) is written in English. Kim's 1993 text and Yoon's 1993 trade book are written in Korean and give examples of model English letters. Nakamura (1996) is translated from Japanese. Translation of Japanese texts into Korean is not unusual, but one must be aware that Korean instruction in business English thus may reflect yet another culture's L2 transference as it uses English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, the pedagogy does not differentiate among these models. As a result, Korean learners can become confused by inconsistencies in the teaching of rhetorical strategies.

**Implications for Managerial Practice**

The findings of this study strongly suggest that awareness of rhetorical differences can benefit both Korean and U.S. managers by facilitating clear communication. L1 writers of business English in international settings should understand that different rhetorical habits and preferences will shape the discourse of their L2 counterparts. U.S. managers who can recognize the L2 rhetorical patterns identified in this study will be more likely to understand their Korean counterparts' intentions (Eggington & Ricento, 1983). Equally important, Korean business people should know that these patterns in L2 letters of complaint may not be tolerated by Americans who lack this understanding. This is not to say that L2 writers of business English should be expected to mimic the discourse features of their U.S. counterparts, only that they too should increase their understanding of how cultural differences can affect business communication. As Beamer (1994) points out, understanding the L2 rhetorical pattern is important “because of its use” in business, not because one rhetorical pattern is better than another (p. 16).

**Implications for Further Research**

Future research is needed to study a larger sample. Also, having the contexts of the letters available to the researcher will aid in a more accurate data analysis. In addition, within the realm of cross-cultural business discourse, it is important to raise the issue of communication breakdowns in actual business settings: Do differences in rhetorical patterns in the English writings of Korean and U.S. business people...
affect cross-cultural communication? That is, how do readers respond to the linguistic patterns we have identified? Interviewing both Korean and U.S. recipients would allow one to isolate specific rhetorical differences that cause communication breakdowns in L2 business writing. The analysis here offers its findings as a prelude to continuing study.

NOTE

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