Linguistic and Cultural Online Communication Issues in the Global Age

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Table of Contents

Section I
Language, Culture, and Cyberspace

Section II
Global Virtual Communities and International Online Collaboration

Section III
Aspects of Online Design in International Environments

Section IV
Governance and Legal Factors in Global Cyberspace

Section V
International Aspects of Online Education

Detailed Table of Contents

Section I
Language, Culture, and Cyberspace

Chapter I

In this chapter, the author examines three challenges that can result in conflict and miscommunication in international online exchanges. Each factor, in turn, relates to a different aspect of what the author calls "Internet multilinguality"—or the increasing number of languages and dialects used by individuals in cyberspace. These three factors are language barriers, cultural differences, and technological difficulties. In the chapter, the author also provides recommendations for effectively addressing these factors in international online exchanges.

Chapter II

This chapter introduces the concept of embodied metaphor as a framework for studying the multifaceted context of cross-cultural interactions via computer-mediated communication (CMC). In the chapter, the author argues that the embodied metaphor approach offers a more reliable method for understanding, explaining and framing the user's adaptive response to CMC. The author also examines how culture has

the potential to shape online interactions by influencing the way metaphors are enacted. By examining how an embodied metaphor approach can be used to examine such situations, the chapter provides readers with a new means for understanding of the interplay between CMC and culture.

At present, two-thirds to three-fourths of the world's Internet users are not native speakers of English. Within this context, translation becomes important, for it would allow companies to tap a global—and multilingual—customer base via e-commerce. This chapter examines how machine translation—or the use of software programs to convert texts from one language to another—should be viewed within this global e-commerce context. In this chapter, the author provides an overview of how machine translation works and examines the benefits and limitations of using such systems to "customize" e-commerce Web sites for different linguistic groups. Through this examination, readers gain a better understanding of how to integrate machine translation use into global e-commerce strategies.

The authors of this chapter present an individual-based approach to understanding cultural similarities and differences in the borderless environment created by online media. In addressing this topic, the authors also present a typology of individual cultural value orientations that readers can use to understand how cultural factors might affect discourse in global online contexts. This typology, in turn, emphasizes the need for making distinctions at the individual level before group level comparisons in order to grasp the complexity of today's global culture. The authors then use the results of an empirical study to demonstrate the usefulness of this approach in international online contexts.

This chapter presents the results of a study that examined the effects of culture and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in relation to Chinese college students' use of English in online exchanges with U. S. college students. In presenting this research, the author uses an ethnography of communication approach to uncover four language patterns in Chinese college students' use of English. These patterns were others-oriented talk, mentor-mentee talk with limited relationship development, adoption of others' talk, and icebreaker talk. The experiment also revealed that Chinese cultural values have a strong effect on Chinese college students' use of English in CMC. The cultural values that seemed to have the greatest effects on these exchanges were Chinese significance of personal relationships, Chinese collectivism, Chinese understanding of authority, and Chinese use of CMC.

Section II
Global Virtual Communities and International Online Collaboration

Globalization has brought about or re-invents the concept of workspaces such that work is no longer confined to a traditional space in a specific geographical setting whereby individuals are restricted to face-to-face meetings and interactions. Within this context, virtual workspaces bring issues of culture and its effect on behaviors to the forefront of discourse in global cyberspace. To examine this situation, the author of this chapter explores the role of culture and its implications for virtual workspaces. In so doing, the author addresses how culture also plays a role in how behaviors are adapted from traditional to virtual workspaces. Through this examination, the author reveals how virtual workspaces provide organizations with a mechanism for fostering effective international relationships in a variety of professional contexts.

Virtual teams and their leaders are key players in global organizations, yet the dispersed nature of such teams has changed how people work in groups. It has also redefined the nature of teamwork. Within this framework, leadership issues in computer-mediated communication are vital because of the increasing prevalence of the virtual organization, the flattening of organizational structures, and the corresponding interest in managing virtual groups and teams. The authors of this chapter examine the communication behaviors of participants in two different case studies to determine if number, length, and content of messages are sufficient criteria to identify emergent leaders in asynchronous and synchronous environments.

Within a single business day, employees might be required to work with colleagues located in a variety of nations in a series of online intercultural dialogs (OIDs). Preparing individuals to work effectively within such contexts, however, is no easy task. The author of this essay examines the importance of doing research on such situations. The author also presents a methodology for examining and assessing such situations and discusses how the results of such research can be applied to business and academic practices worldwide.

Section III
Aspects of Online Design in International Environments

The world's cultures are becoming much more interdependent, and the development and the use of the World Wide Web has dramatically increased cross-cultural contact in many areas. This growth in cross-cultural contact should influence the rhetorical and cultural patterns at the local, national, and international level. The authors of this chapter examine these factors through a method uses to analyse international Web sites. The chapter begins by presenting a theoretical approach to Web site design, cultural values, and rhetorical traditions. The authors next describe how they used this approach as the focus of a research project that involved analyzing Web sites designed by nine cultures. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the results of this comparative analysis and the implications these results have for Web site design in the global online context.

Several technological developments have altered our world in the last half-century. Among these were the new information processing and distribution platforms supported by computer-mediated communication (CMC). For many designers and Web usability researchers, addressing this situation seem limited to translating Web interfaces or content. The authors of this chapter advocate that the cultural cognitive styles of Web designers ultimately affect the performance and preferences of online users. In this chapter, the authors examine how this cultural cognitive approach should be considered in relation to international Web site design. They also explain how and why specific attention should be paid to the impact of the Web designers' culturally shaped cognitive style on the design and development of online information.

Though the Internet continuously gains much popularity on a global scale, marketing research reveals enormous national differences and disparities in the numbers of Internet users worldwide. As a result, a growing body of research on global Internet usage, interface design, and Web site usability has been undertaken by human-computer interaction (HCI) and localization specialists. To address these issues, the author of this chapter presents a foundational examination of this situation. In presenting this approach, the author also discusses the implications such a foundational examination has for professional practices related to marketing and to researching online consumers.

Early discussions of the Internet often advocated the idea that nation states would have either limited or no control over this exclusively electronic domain. The subsequent need for protocols and standardization of the Internet, however, led to the development of formal institutions such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). It also led more nations to adopt policies designed to promote, control, and mold the Internet culturally and politically within their jurisdictional boundaries. The author of this chapter outlines the characteristics and intrinsic qualities of the Internet which make it a global entity and examines how it has been deemed ungovernable in conventional terms. In so doing, the author examines how different legal and political developments shaped public policy related to online access in different regions and examines the tensions between local and international interests in attempting to control cyberspace.

By adhering to cultural expectations, a Web site can build credibility—or ethos—with an intercultural audience. In this regard, laws create certain expectations in audiences, and when a seller violates such laws, or appears to violate such laws, it can create a loss of consumer confidence. The authors of this chapter examine certain legal and cultural issues that will instantly brand a Web site as unreliable to users from certain backgrounds. In presenting these ideas, the authors wish to provide a method for raising awareness of diverse legal cultures. Such increased awareness, in turn, can help organizations and individuals reduce the need to make costly changes as a result of legal advice given outside of an appropriate cultural context.

The conceptualization of privacy has been the subject of much debate for more than a century in scholarship ranging from social philosophy and sociology to law, finance, and medicine. Legal issues concerning the right to privacy, moreover, are part of a complex web of state and national laws. To understand these factors from a more focused perspective, the authors of this chapter examine the international legal issues resulting from the EU's 1998 Data Protection and Privacy Directive and its effects on online interactions in a global context. Through such a focus, the authors hope to provide readers with the knowledge needed to understand and to adapt to varying cultural and national perspectives of privacy when interacting in international online exchanges.

Section V
International Aspects of Online Education

More than half of all institutions of higher education in the U.S. now offer entirely online or blended courses. Within this context, a central question emerges—how well suited are these contexts for students from different cultures participate in such courses? The answer to this question can have pronounced implications for the future of online education and to teaching in general. The authors of this chapter provide a first step toward answering this complex question. In this chapter, the authors explore the nature of cyberculture and describe how cyberculture affects the online learning experiences of international students. Through the exploration of cyberculture and online education, the authors reveal what increased global online access could mean for participants in online educational contexts.

New technologies and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in general seem inherently suited to create constructive cross-cultural communication. As a result, the new possibilities for cross-cultural teaching and learning through dialogue and negotiation in the online environment compel us to reconceptualize the traditional role of the instructor. To this end, the author of this chapter seeks to answer the question, "What does it mean to teach collaboratively, interactively, and open-endedly within a global context?" To address this question, the author first examines several other questions related to such educational contexts. The author then provides an overview of the dialogue-enabling properties of the online environment and its potential to support of multiple learning styles.

Workplaces are transforming in the global age. Workers are increasingly participating in a global workforce comprised of people who are socially and demographically diverse. Further complicating this situation is the fact that e-learning is increasingly gaining in prominence as a method for training such a workforce. The author of this chapter examines these new trends by first providing an overview of the changing nature of the workplace and then discusses the emergence of e-learning within this context. In providing this overview, the author also examines the social and cultural implications such developments have for adult education and training in the global age.

The author of this chapter examines the impact of commodification on education when institutions of higher education sell knowledge as a commercial good. In addressing this topic, the author provides insights on the impact multiple sociocultural and communicative norms have on virtual communication and does so through research results that examine a case of distance education related to an Australian university. Through this case study, the author presents ideas for informing the change in policy, the administration, and the delivery of distance education and virtual communication in global environments. The author also discusses the kinds of skills leaders and participants in such educational environments need in order to interact effectively with each other in such situations.

Foreword

This volume is of interest and value on several levels. First, for individuals beginning their exploration of the complex, interlocking issues entailed by cross-cultural communication online, the essays collected here both serve as a helpful introduction *and* provide important new insights and inspiration for further research. Second, for researchers and practitioners already working in these domains, several chapters (e.g., Chapters IV, X, and XI) expand on significant contributions in these fields. In particular, as these and additional essays (e.g., Chapter VIII) explicitly connect the research and insight gathered here with the larger literatures of intercultural communication and of online discourse, they provide helpful context and orientation to understanding culture and communication online (see also Macfadyen, Roche, & Doff, 2004; Sudweeks, Hrachovec, & Ess, 2006).

Most importantly, the volume provides crucial insight for a much broader audience—namely, anyone who uses the Internet and the World Wide Web to communicate across cultures. As several chapters in this volume exemplify, much extant research in these domains has focused on the very practical work of cross-cultural collaboration for the sake of business, research, and distance learning. The contributions of such research to more effective cross-cultural communication online are critically important, of course—and not simply to a relatively small number of academics and professionals collaborating in virtual teams, but to anyone who undertakes such communication. Simply put, this increasingly means a sizable majority of Internet users *per se.* That is, as the Internet continues its dramatic expansion across the globe—so as to include, at the time of this writing, nearly one-sixth of the world's population—more of us will inevitably communicate across multiple cultures. Of course, the great danger here, especially for those with no previous experience in cross-cultural communication, is the naïve presumption that "everyone else is just like me," an ethnocentricism whose consequences only begin with communication *failures*, because we fail to understand and respect "the Other"—first of all, as we fail to understand the critical *differences* at work in cross-cultural communication, much less take these differences into account in our own communicative efforts (a failure I have called "computer-mediated colonization"). At worst, such naïve ethnocentrism ends in cultural and political imperialism. Hence in a *communicative* world increasingly interconnected across multiple cultures by the Internet and World Wide Web, what is desperately needed is a guide for effective cross-cultural communication online. Such a text, to my knowledge, remains to be written; but the chapters and insights collected here constitute much needed and significant contributions towards developing a resource of this sort. This text will thus be of interest and value to researchers in particular and to anyone more broadly who desires to communicate more effectively in cross-cultural exchanges that take place online.