

*This paper presents empirically-derived models of expatriate-local staff oral communication patterns. The communication dynamics differed in three identified communication zones. The expatriates with the cooperation of the local Chinese were able to develop efficient but different communication systems in all three zones. The cultural influences on both expatriates and local Chinese interlocutors varied among these zones.*

## **Patterns of Expatriate-Local Personnel Communication in Multinational Corporations**

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Expatriate managers face cultural and language barriers in communicating with local staff. Terpstra (1991) in fact argues that the multiplicity of language use and the diversity of cultures have a constraining influence on communication in multinational corporations. Although the failure rate of expatriate managers, especially Americans, has been extremely high (Tung, 1987, 1988), the expatriate experience has included individuals who have been able to overcome cultural and language constraints and to develop effective and efficient communication strategies. This paper focuses on describing effective and efficient communication patterns, systems, strategies, and practices.

By examining the communication encounters of expatriates and local staff in 14 Taiwan branches of multinational corporations, this paper builds models of interpersonal and organizational intercultural and multi-lingual communication. Depending on their second-language fluency, the expatriates developed remarkably different communication strategies and ways of interacting with the local staff in three identified communication zones. The cultural influences on both expatriates and local Chinese interlocutors also varied among these zones. Developed communication models outline the communication patterns and systems in these three zones and take into account both cultural and language factors.

### **Literature Review**

In a comprehensive review article Teboul, Chen, and Fritz (1994) reported that there has been little content-specific management organizational communication research in multinational corporations (MNCs) conducted to date. After puzzling over the scarcity of research in such an important area, these authors attribute the deficiency to research difficulties in doing international and comparative studies.

Complexities relating to distant, language, and managerial policies all pose major obstacles to the study of communication in the multinational corporation.

Although there apparently has been little reported research on communication in the multinational corporations, cultural and language studies do provide the basis for theorizing on the nature of intercultural and organizational communication in multinational corporations. This connection is possible because such studies establish the link between (a) culture and language and (b) communication practices and processes (Triandis & Albert, 1987). The identified cultural variables include contextuality (Hall, 1976), power distance, masculinity-femininity, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term or short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). Comparative studies have found differences between specific cultures. For example, one study points out that Chinese individuals make extensive use of intermediaries in delicate communication transactions, whereas Westerners do not (Bond, Wan, Leung, & Glocalone, 1985). Collectivists (such as the Chinese) organize topics interdependently, whereas individualists (such as Westerners) organize topics independently (Yamada, 1990). In addition, language studies find that second-language speakers adopt a variety of strategies that either change and simplify the content or ignore difficult-to-express subjects (Corder, 1983).

These cultural and language studies unfortunately have been separate areas of inquiry and have not taken the mutual interaction of culture and language into consideration. In particular, intercultural research has ignored language competency although language studies point out that people at different competency levels communicate very differently. Low proficiency second-language speakers contribute fewer ideas than fluent second-language speakers or first-language speakers (Hamzah-Sendut, Madsen, & Thong, 1989). Taken together, these language and cultural studies provide a framework for understanding intercultural organizational communication in the multinational corporation. They do not, however, provide specific illustrations or research studies of intercultural communication in the multinational corporation.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study reports on the expatriate-local personnel communication in 14 organizations operating in Taiwan. An original sample consisting of four multinational corporations in Taiwan was later extended to the present total of 14 firms. The original data was collected over a three-month period. Using these data as the pilot study, the methodology broadened from a straightforward interviewing strategy in the pilot stage to a multi-faceted approach in later stages

that centered around using a technique described as objectifying interviewing (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). In this methodology, the researchers engage in interactive dialogues with the respondents. In effect the researchers supply background and a frame of reference in which both parties mutually explore issues.

The interviewing strategy was geared to cross-checking for validity – the American researcher focused on the expatriates and the American-Chinese researcher concentrated on the Chinese personnel. Confidants were developed in ten firms and extended conversations with these individuals provided the basis of follow-up interviews with other managers in these companies. The American researcher communicated in English while the American-Chinese researcher used Mandarin or Taiwanese. In interviews with Chinese personnel in which both the American and Chinese-American were present, the general approach was to have the American start the discussion in English and have the Chinese-American follow-up in Mandarin or Taiwanese. This research strategy enriched the data and allowed a comparison between English and Chinese language responses.

The research strategy followed in the tradition of Redding (1990) in his study of Chinese management. Realizing that “real data” could not be obtained through conventional methods, he collected data using the objectifying interviewing technique in a group setting after dinner and drinks. The present researchers used a similar methodology but one that differed in the following respects: (a) the use of individual rather than group interviews, (b) the relying on an extended series of interviews with the confidants rather than a one-time setting as was the case with Redding, and (c) the supplementing of the objectifying technique with preliminary and follow-up interviews. The researchers owe much to Redding as he paved the way for difficult cross-cultural research and for the collection of data that is secretive in nature.

To gain access the researchers promised confidentiality to the firms involved in the study. Table 1 provides a list of interviewee characteristics identified by industry, home country, number of confidants, and total number of interviewed expatriates and Chinese managers.

### **Conceptual Models of Expatriate-Local Staff Oral Communication**

This paper is organized around models of the verbal communication systems, processes, and interactions of the expatriates and local personnel. The focus is on the expatriates who initiate the communication process and the response of local personnel to these initiations. Distinct communication patterns arose in three communication zones. These zones are determined on the basis of second-language

proficiencies of the expatriates in the interactive communication process. In zone-one communication, expatriates might be able to use greetings, ordinary social expressions, and simple questions in their daily encounters; however, almost all expatriate-Chinese personnel communication is transacted in English as the expatriates cannot speak or understand enough Chinese to fulfill the complete communication process. In zone two, expatriate-Chinese communication is primarily conducted in English but some communication exchanges are in Chinese. Chinese-language communication transactions are possible because zone-two expatriates are partially bilingual. These zone-two expatriates have sufficient control of the language structure and adequate vocabulary to handle representation requirements and professional discussions in one or more specialized fields. Expatriates in zone three are fully bilingual; these individuals can choose to communicate in either English or Chinese.

**Table 1**  
**List of Interviewees by Industry, Home Country,**  
**Number of Confidants, and Total Number of Interviewed Expatriates**  
**and Chinese Managers**

Industry	Home Country	Confidants	Expatriates Interv'd	Chinese Interv'd
Banking	United States	1	2	2
Construction	United States	1	5	13
Cosmetics	United States	2	2	8
Consumer Products	United States	2	2	7
Consulting	Canada	1	10	2
Electrical	Germany	0	1	1
Electronics/Computers	United States	0	1	6
Home Appliances	Taiwan	0	0	5
Home Furnishings	Taiwan	1	1	0
Health Care	United States	1	14	2
Packing/Seals	England	1	1	10
Petro-chemicals	England	1	1	10
Pharmaceuticals	Italy	2	0	10
Sporting Goods	Taiwan	0	1	1
Total		13	41	77

In each of these zones the expatriate communicated with Chinese personnel who possessed varying second-language proficiency, from mid- to upper-level managers who are fully bilingual to workers with limited English-speaking abilities. In general, of four basic language skills, the majority of Chinese personnel have much better receiving skills, that is, listening and reading skills than sending skills such as speaking and writing. Enough of the Chinese respondents had ade-

quate second language proficiency in English so that the use of translators was not necessary.

### **Zone-One Communication**

Figure 1 describes the model of zone-one communication patterns. The model is divided into four sub-parts: overall process, indirect communication patterns, direct communication patterns, and message content (primary channels).

#### **Overall Process**

To secure an efficient communication flow in the organization, zone-one expatriates modified their approach to communication because they could not replicate their previous home-country communication experiences. The overall process of communication can be divided into two sub-systems: direct and indirect strategies. The direct communication strategy refers to person-to-person interaction between expatriate and Chinese personnel (two patterns) and indirect communication describes communication encounters in which messages were relayed through intermediaries or language linkpins to the Chinese receivers. Indirect communication consisted of two phases: expatriate to intermediary or language linkpin (phase one) and intermediary to enterprise personnel (phase two). Language linkpins are individuals who translate the business transaction from one language into the other. Three types of language linkpins were used in indirect communication. These were primary language linkpins, secondary language linkpins, and secretary linkpins.

In direct communication, English was the communication medium, whereas in indirect communication English was used in phase one and Mandarin and/or Taiwanese was used in phase two. In indirect communication, as the zone-one expatriates passed messages through language linkpins, these individuals translated the English-language messages into Chinese before relaying the messages. In direct communication the zone-one expatriates communicated directly in English to the Chinese personnel.

There was specialization in the use of sub-systems as the expatriates selected a specific pattern to transact a specific phase of the communication process (sending, receiving, or feedback) or to send a specific type of message (production, maintenance, and innovation). Through developing a communication system which included both direct and indirect communication, the zone-one expatriates were able to create a two-way communication system that included the feedback and the reception of information from multiple sources.

This practice reduced uncertainty for the zone-one expatriates, a behavior consistent with the findings of the Ashford and Cummings

(1983) study. Their research findings revealed that individuals seek feedback from others when there is uncertainty.

The language in use (English or Chinese) introduced different types of communication loss or distortion (noise). There was a trade-off in the use of these two communication codes: translation error (with indirect communication) versus original content omission (with direct communication). As the message was translated from English to Chinese, indirect communication presented the risk of changing the message content. Conversely, when the message was directly transmitted in direct communication, there was the danger of over simplification in attempting to adjust the message to the English proficiency level of the Chinese interlocutors.

The second-language (English) proficiency levels of the Chinese personnel also had a determining effect on the patterns of communication. The higher the English-language proficiency of the Chinese personnel the less the zone-one expatriates had to modify their communication approach and the more they could communicate directly. In all 14 multinational corporations represented in the study, the level of English proficiency of the Chinese staff dictated the use of the sub-system patterns. The indirect communication sub-system in fact became the dominant mode of organizational communication with direct communication playing a supporting and reinforcing role.

#### Indirect Communication Patterns

In phase one, zone-one expatriates communicated English-language messages to the language linkpins whose levels of second-language proficiencies were such as to not require language simplification or the use of extra energy to send (encode) or receive (decode) messages. Zone-one expatriates reported that, except for significantly less use of slang or Western humor, they could communicate without feeling any inhibitions and could use sophisticated technical genre.

Through continuous interaction in English, the zone-one expatriates and intermediaries developed close working relationships with the language linkpins (phase one). By means of interaction with enterprise staff in Chinese, the language linkpins guided the processes of both downward and upward organizational communication (phase two). A feedback loop (see Figure 1) was an integral part of both phase one and phase two of the indirect communication sub-systems. The language linkpins, being included in both sub-systems, connected the two sub-systems to create an integrated whole.

*Primary Language Linkpins.* The primary language linkpins continuously interacted with the expatriates. It might even be said that they acted, along with the secretary linkpins, as the "ears and eyes" of the expatriates. In reference to the primary language linkpins, three

patterns were identified: the "chief-of-staff" or the "assistant-to" pattern, the board-room or the group pattern, and the specialization pattern.

In the "chief-of-staff" or "assistant-to" pattern, a designated Chinese individual linked the expatriate with the rest of the organization including managers who reported directly or indirectly to the expatriate. So there was continuous two-way interactions between (a) the expatriate and the identified "chief-of-staff" and (b) the "chief-of-staff" or "assistant-to" and the Chinese managerial staff. This language linkpin continually switched back and forth between the English and Chinese languages, and communicated in both languages at a sophisticated technical level without language simplification.

One example of the "assistant-to" pattern occurred in a packing and seals company. In this instance, the expatriate managed the Taipei and Kaohsiung offices. This particular expatriate had to split his time between Taipei and Kaohsiung. He also would visit the Hong Kong regional office on a regular basis. The expatriate appointed an "assistant-to" in both the Kaohsiung and Taipei offices. When the expatriate was not in a particular office, his identified linkpin would take charge of the daily operations. Contact was maintained through daily phone conversations between the expatriate and the "assistant-tos" in both Kaohsiung and Taipei.

The board room or group pattern utilized a second group of primary language linkpins. In this pattern the expatriates communicated directly with all of their immediate subordinates. At the chief executive officer (CEO) level, for example, this group was composed of functional or product divisional managers. Coordination through regularly scheduled meetings was the integrative mechanism of this pattern. In three organizations a sub-system was created where a designated person served as a spokesperson for the remaining board members by summarizing their informal pre-meeting Chinese language discussions in the scheduled meetings. These spokespersons had both outgoing personalities and excellent command of English. In the board room pattern the expatriates worked with all of the functional managers and product divisional managers directly or indirectly to achieve integrative decisions.

A third primary language linkpin pattern represented specialization. The expatriates interacted with designated individuals in specified areas related to technology and administration respectively. This pattern was observed in an electronics and computer firm where the company produced computer chips. In this firm, the American CEO was linked to the organization through two Chinese managers. One manager specialized in general administrative affairs and possessed native-like English communication skills. The other manager, while

lower in general English proficiency, was highly proficient in technical communication and specialized in overseeing technical affairs. The expatriate interacted with these two identified linkpins both individually and as a group of three, meeting with each individual linkpin on a daily basis and holding a weekly scheduled meeting for the three of them.

*Secondary Language Linkpins.* Secondary linkpins were Chinese individuals who stepped forward to serve as a bridge between the low English-proficient Chinese subordinates and the zone-one expatriates. These secondary linkpins, fluent in both Chinese and English, translated difficult-to-understand expressions, including slang or idiomatic expressions, from English to Mandarin, or vice versa. As expatriate managers met with groups of Chinese managers or workers, Chinese individuals emerged as informal secondary language linkpins. In the collectivistic Chinese society, the successful expatriate managers found that the Chinese personnel felt more comfortable in participating in a group setting for both cultural- and language-related reasons. The typical interactive communication sequence was that the expatriate asked a question and then the Chinese personnel conferred among themselves in Chinese. After concluding the Chinese conversations, the individual who possessed higher English proficiency and self-confidence emerged as a secondary language linkpin. This individual summarized and communicated the essence of the group discussion to the expatriate. This communication exchange allowed Chinese individuals with lower English proficiency to participate indirectly within the group without exposing themselves to potentially face-threatening situations because of their poor command of English.

Other secondary language linkpins served on a continuous and formal basis. In a petro-chemical firm, the secondary language linkpin was the public relations officer. Having continuous access to both the CEO and other members of the management team because of his job functions, this manager could informally convey information back and forth. This relationship allowed the Chinese managers to use this language linkpin as an intermediary and made it easier to convey sensitive information and to avoid direct confrontation and possible face loss. As face protection and confrontation avoidance are prominent elements of Chinese culture (Hsu, 1971; Bond, 1991), these practices were consistent with and reinforced by Chinese culture. This secondary language linkpin manager had earned the trust of the Chinese subordinate managers, and had the language capabilities to serve as a linkpin between these Chinese managers and the expatriate zone-one CEO.

In the consumer products company a work group was composed of native Hakka Chinese who spoke neither Mandarin nor Taiwanese,



but the Hakka dialect of Chinese. To assist in managing this particular group, a Hakka individual who was fluent in English, Chinese (Mandarin), and Hakka was assigned to assist in managing the work group. He served as the language bridge between the Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking managers and the Hakka Chinese who spoke neither Mandarin nor Taiwanese. Specifically hired for this role and also groomed as a fast-track candidate, this language linkpin split his time between managing this work group and carrying out special assignments. Because of his language abilities, he tied together many parts of the organization. He had access to various departments and carried out special assignments.

*Secretarial linkpins.* Executive secretaries, together with primary language linkpins, were at the core of the language linkpin system. These secretaries took on the role of linking the expatriate bosses to their immediate subordinates as well as with all Chinese throughout the organization.

Representative of this pattern was the relationship of an American manager in a construction firm and his executive secretary. Not being threatened by having his secretary hold substantive discussions with his subordinates, this expatriate was able to use this process to more closely monitor the design and construction projects. The subordinates were willing to provide informal progress reports to the secretary without feeling a loss of face in reporting problems or difficulties. Through messages relayed back and forth by means of his secretary, the expatriate developed an information base to give the subordinates constructive feedback.

### Direct Communication Patterns

In addition to communicating through language linkpins in the indirect communication sub-system, the expatriates also communicated directly with Chinese personnel. These communication transactions can be categorized into two patterns: selective communication and generalized communication (Figure 1).

*Selective communication.* The selective communication pattern was used by expatriates to disseminate ideas and information to selected groups in organized meetings. As the Chinese attending the meetings possessed varying second-language capabilities, the expatriates had to simplify their spoken English and attempted to adapt the language level to that of a particular group. Because of differences in language proficiency and for cultural reasons, the expatriates learned not to expect and did not force feedback in the communication transactions. By communicating directly rather than using intermediaries, the expatriates were able to add authenticity to important messages, and were able to reinforce as well as complement the mes-

sages sent through the language linkpins. From the standpoint of the receivers, this communication pattern allowed the Chinese to get a first-hand impression of the expatriates and to assess the communication through non-verbal signals sent by the expatriates. This pattern was chosen to accomplish a specific purpose – such as announcing a new program, soliciting support for organizational improvement, or supporting as well as confirming messages sent through the intermediaries.

Expatriates were also able to extend their influence throughout the organizations and to solicit cooperation and support for particular programs. These goals were accomplished through a two-step communication process. During the first step, expatriates communicated directly to all invited personnel who attended the meetings. In this step, there was direct face-to-face contact between the expatriates and selected organizational personnel. In the second step, these personnel were able to take the ideas expressed in the meetings, especially the enthusiasm conveyed by the expatriates, and spread these messages to other colleagues in their respective divisions and departments throughout the organization.

Even though expatriates encouraged feedback during the meetings, due to the Chinese cultural influence of not wanting to risk the possibility of publicly losing face (Bond, 1991), there were few questions in the official meetings. However, individuals from key departments would stay after the meetings to ask follow-up questions. These selectives had higher levels of English proficiency and were able to ask clarifying questions that represented the concerns of their respective departments.

To ensure successful communication with these invited personnel who possessed varying levels of English proficiency, the expatriates prepared extensively for the meetings. Special attention was paid to language use. Expatriates avoided using complicated language patterns, advanced vocabulary, and slang. In transmitting messages, expatriates simplified the content of their verbal messages. This language simplification process allowed the Chinese to expand and interpret the messages sent by the expatriate managers. At scheduled meetings, the expatriate managers used a blackboard or newsprint to emphasize key points. They would write key words and phrases to amplify and reinforce their verbal messages. Even though most Chinese did not completely understand the simplified explanations and discussions that surrounded these written summary statements, the Chinese subordinates took these key points away from the meetings.

In a home appliance company that was experiencing an increasing number of accidents and needed to implement a company-wide safety program, expatriates held meetings with departments throughout the

organization. The meetings were utilized to announce the program and to solicit cooperation from the employees to improve the safety record at all organizational levels. The expatriates felt that their direct involvement was the best proof of management support.

A second example is a consumer products company introducing a brand of ice-cream to Taiwan. To introduce and give an overview of the program, an expatriate at the VP level invited the marketing and production personnel to a general meeting. By communicating directly with key marketing and production personnel the expatriate demonstrated his support for the program and was able to provide a descriptive overview of the program. However, he avoided discussing implementation details.

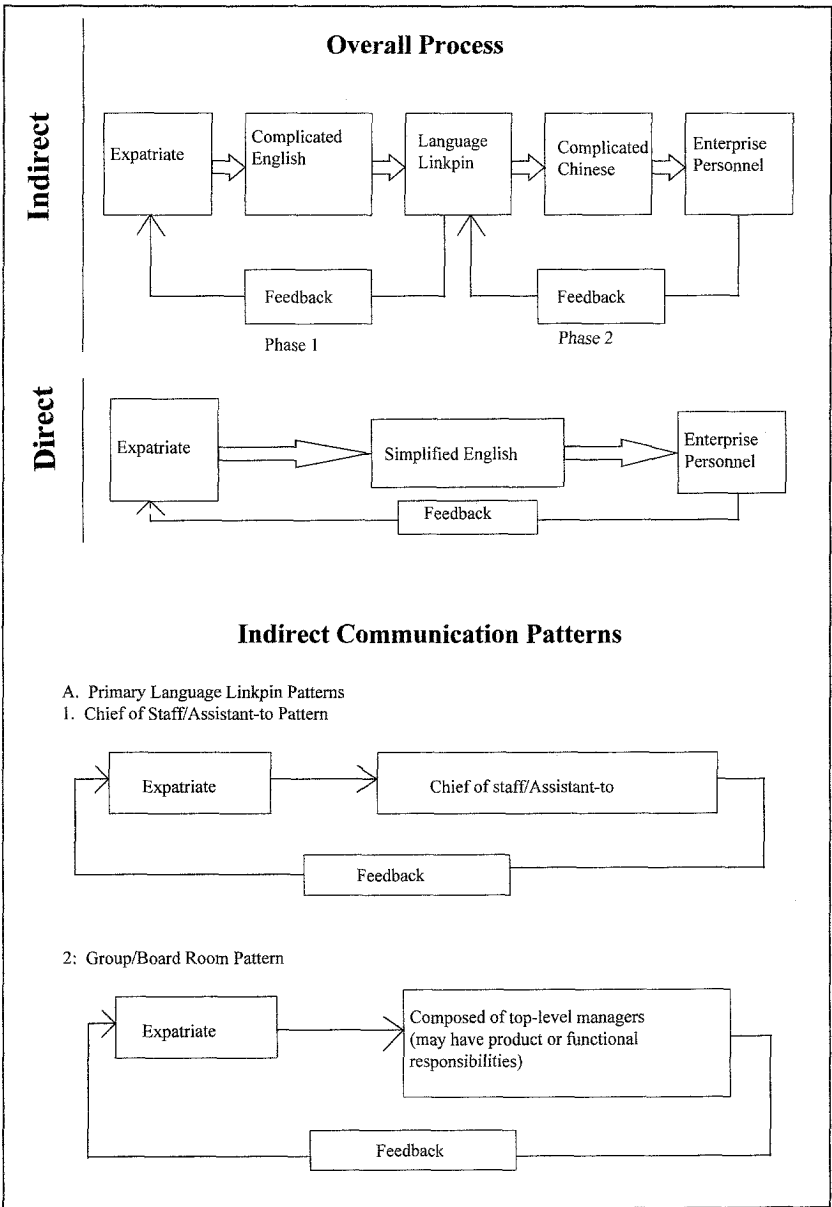
*Generalized Communication.* The generalized communication pattern represented symbolic communication. The expatriates used this pattern to establish their images throughout the organizations. By making themselves visible, the expatriates were communicating with a wide range of personnel at all organizational levels. Through direct observation the expatriates also secured unfiltered information about the organization. In general, this pattern could be described as a version of "management by walking around."

In the communication process, the expatriates would randomly engage in conversations with enterprise personnel as they wandered through various departments, especially in production departments. The medium of communication can be described as "ritualized English" and "token Chinese." Because of the constraint of second-language competency, the expatriates could communicate only a few understandable words in English and say only a few token words in Chinese. Non-verbal communication also played an important role in the communication process.

### Message Content

Farace, Monge, and Russell (1977) have viewed the communication of information and messages in organizations as having three main functions: production, maintenance, and innovation. Using this framework to categorize the expatriate-language linkpin communication, distinct patterns arise and there was a tendency for the expatriates to receive and disseminate information in these three areas differently (see Figure 1).

For production information, the expatriates relied primarily on the primary language linkpins. The complexities and details could best be captured through this channel; that is, the expatriates could communicate without simplifying the messages. For maintenance information, the expatriates used direct communication to provide an overall and general direction, and indirect communication through their



**Figure 1.** Model of Zone-One Communication Patterns. Continued on next page.

secretaries for follow-up with key individuals. Through direct communication, the expatriates provided authenticity and personalized the communication while the secretaries clarified and followed up on the direct communication messages. For innovation information, the

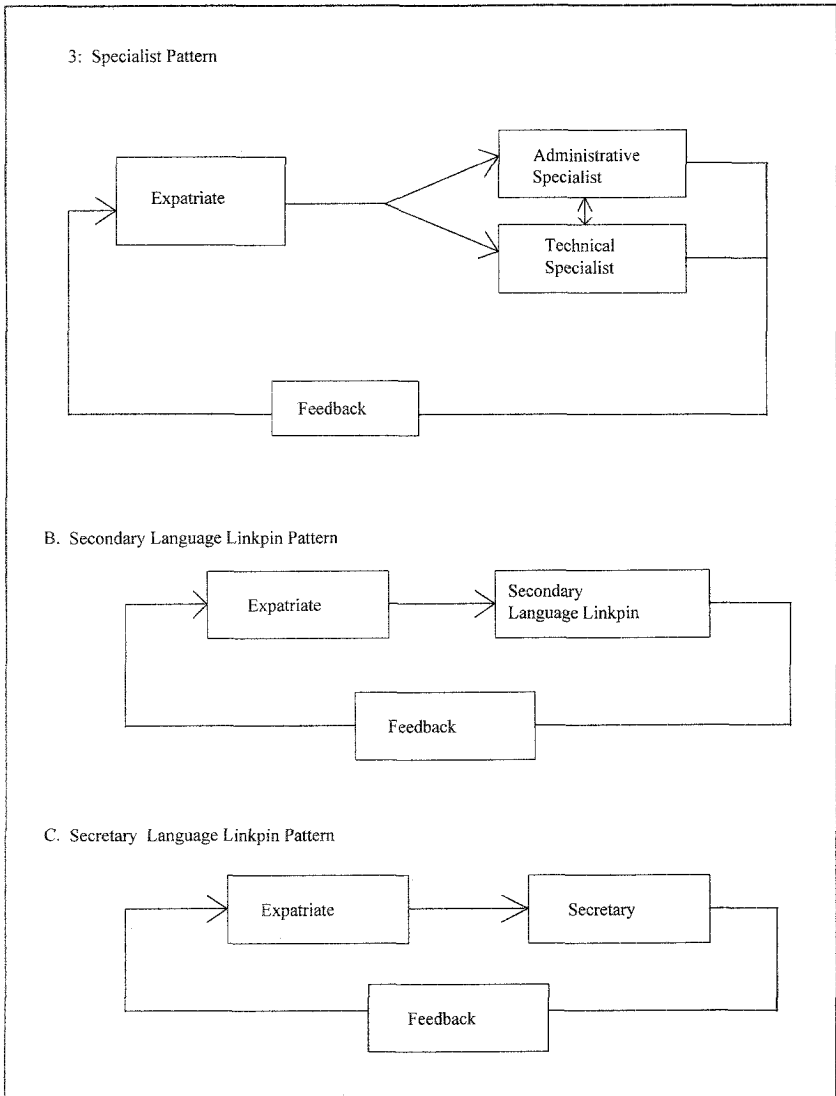


Figure 1 continued. Continued on next page.

expatriates used direct communication to announce the innovation and primary link-pins for its implementation.

### Zone-Two Communication

Zone-two expatriates used the same communication patterns and communication strategies as the zone-one expatriates, but were able to engage in a higher proportion of direct communication and conversely

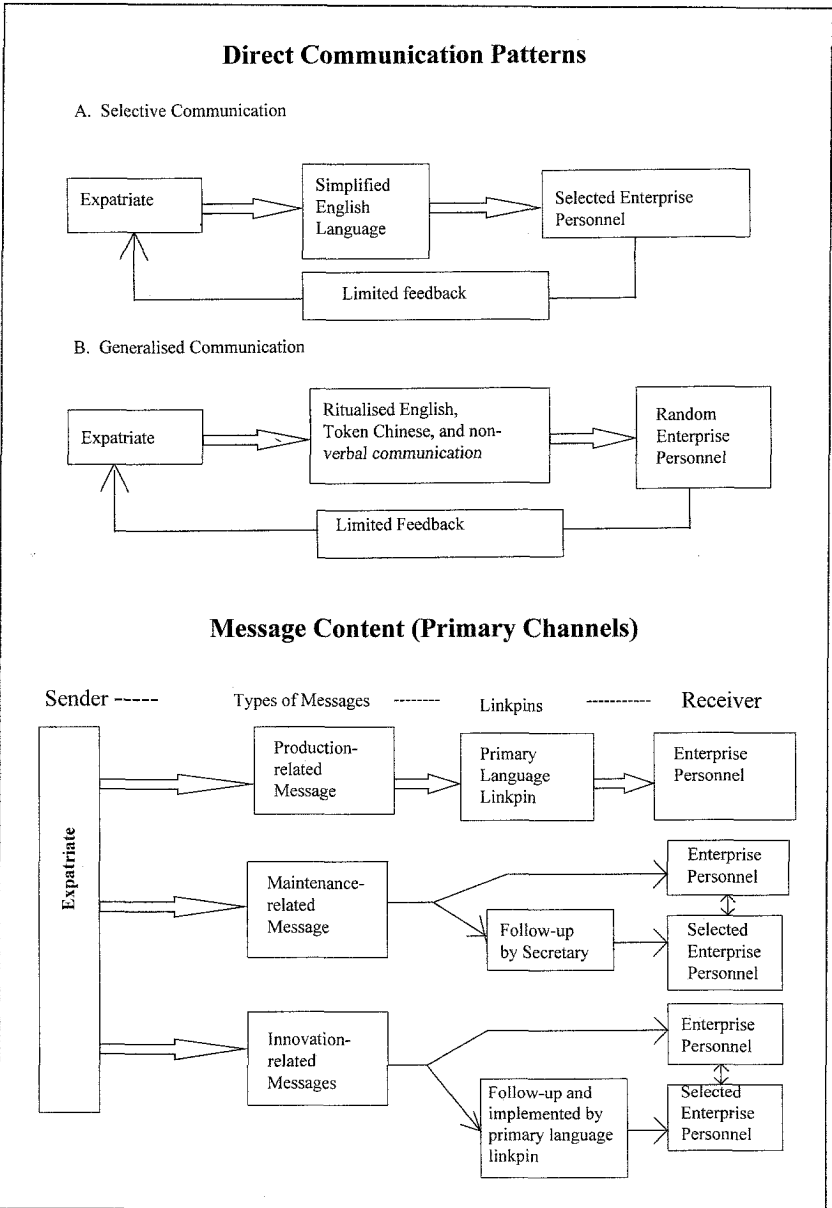


Figure 1 continued.

make less use of intermediaries because of their better second-language (Chinese) speaking abilities.

Given these additional second-language speaking abilities, zone-two expatriates had to decide whether to use a passive or an interactive

strategy. The communication issues and communication process of zone-two expatriates are presented in Figure 2. Passive and interactive communications are represented by opposite poles of three sub-dimensions: frequency (less to more), situation of second-language use (social or business), and activities (passive listening or interactive listening and speaking). The cumulative impact of the sub-dimensions indicates movement toward either the passive communication mode or the interactive communication mode. Placement on the insider-outsider continuum represents an expatriate's relative position as a cultural insider or outsider, and is a function of the expatriate's relative position on the passive communication and interactive communication dimension.

**Passive and Interactive Communication: Interrelated Factors**

With a passive strategy, the expatriate and Chinese interlocutors confined their Chinese language exchange to social situations. In moving to an interactive strategy, the exchange was gradually broadened to include business conversations – especially those conducted away from the office and in a social situation. In the passive stage, the expatriate was solely or primarily a receiver. Upon moving to the interactive stage, the expatriate initially responded and increasingly initiated conversations. This movement from passive to interactive communication carried with it social implications; that is, the expatriate was gradually moving from being an outsider to becoming an insider.

Successful zone-two interlocutors (expatriate and Chinese) developed a balance of English and Chinese communication. As the Chinese proficiency of the expatriates increased, the possibility of using

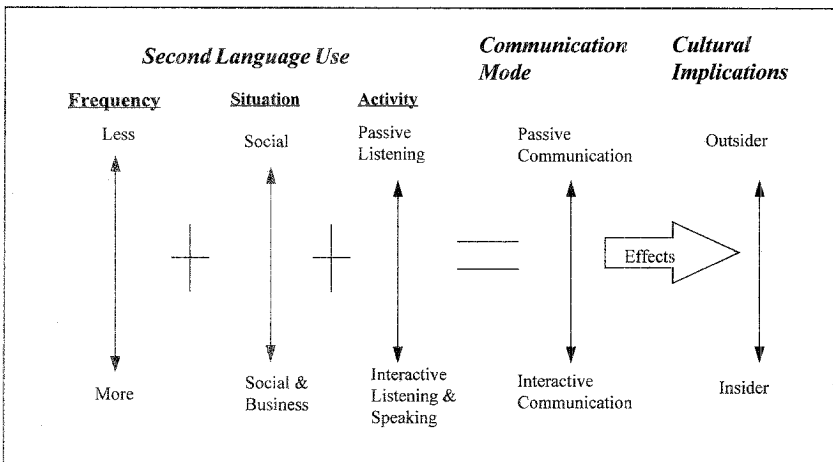


Figure 2. Model of Zone-Two Communication Patterns.

Chinese in various occasions also broadened. In a parallel development, as expatriates initiated more social conversations in Chinese, the Chinese responded by talking more with the expatriates with a greater number of business-related conversations in English and social exchange in Mandarin. The dual use of language was mutually reinforcing and in effect increased the total amount of verbal communication between the expatriates and the local Chinese.

The zone-two expatriates, although they could communicate in Chinese, still spoke less fluently in Chinese than their Chinese counterparts did in speaking English. The challenge for the zone-two expatriates was to match English or Chinese with appropriate situations. With Chinese individuals having limited English speaking abilities, zone-two expatriates used Mandarin to their obvious advantage. Without speaking in Chinese, these zone-two expatriates would not have been able to effectively communicate with their limited English-speaking Chinese subordinates.

One zone-two expatriate effectively participated in polite Chinese conversations with the plant operatives in his periodic plant tours. He would ask about the workers' families and, in some cases, would gather information ahead of time so he could express his special concern. At other times, he visited employees in hospital and used Chinese during these visits. By following this practice he was developing his image as a benevolent leader (adopting the positive part of Chinese leadership behavior) and reinforcing the Chinese imagery of family. This expatriate was replicating behavior that equated with the honorable gentleman and faithful Chinese father (Hsu, 1981).

Balancing the use of Chinese and English was the challenge of the zone-two expatriates. In the passive stage, the expatriates selectively used Chinese, and English remained as the major medium of exchange. In the interactive stage, the balance of English and Chinese became more equal.

Moving from the passive communication stage to the interactive communication stage, the expatriates gained the potential for improved communication but this also carried with it the dangers of misunderstandings and conflicts. Communicating in a second language brought the zone-two expatriates in close connection with Chinese individuals and, at the same time, created pressures for the expatriates to abide by Chinese cultural norms. In effect, the increased second-language use by expatriates meant that the expatriates were more connected to the Chinese social system and were moving from being outsiders to becoming insiders.

The following are two examples of unsuccessful zone-two expatriates to illustrate the zone-two model. A sales manager of a consumer products firm conducted his quarterly meetings in Mandarin. Using



what he called a "narrow window approach" over a two-year period, this sales manager identified and learned essential Chinese marketing-related vocabulary. In spite of the effort expended by this expatriate, the Chinese did not react favorably to his extraordinary effort. The Chinese managers would rather have had the meetings conducted in English and had Chinese translations to supplement the English language communication when necessary. It appears that the second-language proficiency level of this expatriate manager was not adequate to handle the nuances in Chinese, and the Chinese peers and subordinates felt that he over simplified the marketing issues. He fell into the simplification pattern as described by Faerch and Kasper (1983). Those Chinese managers with low-level English-language competency could pick up the essence of the presentation by studying hand-outs and looking at visual aids. More importantly, there were few Chinese personnel with better command of English able to serve as language linkpins for those Chinese individuals with low-level English proficiency.

The second example describes the experience of a CEO from a consulting firm who possessed an intermediate level of Chinese language proficiency. This zone-two CEO had increasingly been accepted by his Chinese colleagues and subordinates. As opposed to another CEO in zone one, whose efforts to become an insider were resisted by his Chinese subordinates, this CEO possessed sufficiently high-level Chinese language skills to be accepted as an insider. His language skills in fact enhanced his reputation and authority in the eyes of his Chinese subordinates. His communication problem arose in his evolving relationship with the Chinese Chairman of the Board. As described by Redding (1990) and Hsu (1971), these two individuals increasingly mixed business and social activities. The zone-two expatriate CEO went from being an outsider to gradually becoming an insider. This transition created a new set of expectations; that is, the expatriate CEO was expected to conform to the norms of the Chinese culture. Because the Chinese person was the senior individual in this relationship, the junior Westerner was implicitly expected to respect and honor this relationship. Their relationships should be tempered by the Chinese concepts of "jen" and "li" (Hsu, 1971). "Jen" can be translated as "humanness" and "li" as "propriety." Being interrelated concepts in Confucian tradition, they suggest that humans should show compassion toward one another in established relationships (jen) and show this compassion in structured ways (li).

Over a one-year period, these two individuals evolved into the above-mentioned roles and this created an environment of rising expectations. The researchers' interpretation is that the Chinese Chairman of the Board, perhaps unconsciously and being influenced

by Chinese tradition, expected the newly culturally-integrated expatriate to act according to these Confucian codes.

At a Board of Directors' meeting, the expatriate CEO did not conform to the insider role he had established for himself with the Chinese Chairman of the Board. Thinking he had a policy agreement with the Chinese chairman before the meeting, the expatriate CEO was shocked to hear a modified policy announced by the Chinese chairman. Reacting instinctively, the expatriate CEO interpreted the Chairman's intention, and this led to an open disagreement. Having "above average" but not native-like Chinese speaking ability, the expatriate's disagreement came across as more crude and blunt than intended. The expatriate CEO still lacked the Chinese-language skills to deal with sensitive issues effectively; and, more importantly, he did not follow the cultural mores and traditions of the host country of which he was now a part. On the next day after the board meeting, the Chinese Chairman resigned his post and called for repayment of a personal investment that he had made to the company.

#### Dual Chinese and English Conversations

The Chinese personnel could both send and receive English and Chinese messages to and from the zone-two expatriates. With the zone-two expatriates being able to communicate in both English and Chinese, the local Chinese had opportunities to communicate directly with expatriates in communication encounters in which they had superior language proficiency (Chinese conversations) and in communication encounters in which they had inferior language proficiency (English conversations). This dual language communication process allowed the Chinese to compare the behavior of the zone-two expatriates in English and Chinese conversations and to have a broadened and comparative base to judge and assess the styles and personalities of the expatriates. Chinese personnel reported that they were able to form a firmer impression of zone-two expatriates than of zone-one expatriates. By communicating with zone-two expatriates in Chinese, the Chinese personnel could direct their attention and energy toward gaining a direct impression of the expatriates. These impressions could not have been gained in an English-language conversation.

Both the quantity and nature of the communication process were different in the passive and interactive stages. The Chinese interlocutors, although there were wide differences among Chinese individuals, initiated more communication with interactive communication. After the expatriates initiated the process by speaking in Chinese and thus demonstrating their Chinese-language fluency level, Chinese personnel felt more at ease and responded by communicating more frequently with zone-two expatriates. Chinese personnel reported that

it was much easier to initiate Chinese-language social conversations and that this process freed up and made it easier to engage in English-language business-related conversations (a mutually reinforcing process).

One research confidant described the process. She stated that her colleagues would inquire about some aspect of eating and then extend the conversations to a wider and wider range of topics. As the fluency of the expatriates increased, the amount and frequency of communication in both Chinese and English language correspondingly expanded.

### Language and Cultural Pitfalls

The combined language and cultural pitfalls of zone-two environments are illustrated by both language-related and culture-related difficulties that the expatriates experienced in their companies. Zone two offers both additional opportunities and pitfalls. If the expatriates confined their Chinese conversations to social situations, the use of Chinese language was a positive factor that could broaden and deepen the relationship with the local Chinese. The Chinese appreciated the expatriate's effort and the language exchange did not interfere with business communication. In the case of listening, this was definitely a plus; the expatriates were able to monitor the Chinese conversation and felt less excluded. Indirectly, as the Chinese realized that the expatriates could understand their conversations, they felt a pressure to transfer their speech to English. It was in fact easier to exclude the expatriate and speak Chinese in front of that individual if the expatriate did not know any Chinese. There was much more language switching initiated by the Chinese when the expatriate had even low-level Chinese language skills.

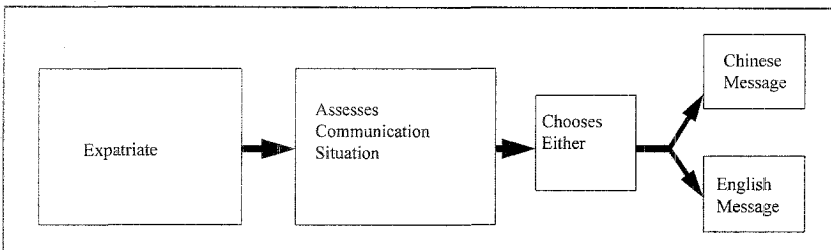


Figure 3. Model of Zone-Three Communication Patterns.

In overview, the researchers found that expatriate second language competence almost always aided effective communication if confined to social situations for speaking and listening and in business situations for listening. Expansion of the use of Chinese to business

situations carried with it the potential of improved communication but also the potential pitfall of miscommunication and cultural alienation.

### **Zone-Three Communication**

Figure 3 describes the language communication process of the zone-three expatriates. Language deficiencies did not constrain the communication transactions of the zone-three expatriates; these managers could choose to communicate in English or in Chinese. The zone-three expatriate, however, faced the same insider-outsider dilemma as the zone-two individual but had much greater control in the use of language.

Having other personnel serve in the role of linking the expatriates and the Taiwanese personnel was essential in zones one and two but less of a necessity for the zone-three expatriates. This function could now be performed, at least partially, by the expatriate manager. The danger in a zone-three environment is that if the expatriate spends too much time working with the Taiwanese operations the expatriate may lose contact with the corporate headquarters. The possible result is that the expatriate will become less effective in communicating the corporate philosophy and culture and that the Taiwanese operations will become less successfully integrated within the corporate family. Because the zone-three expatriates were not constrained by language, these expatriates had to strike a balance between (a) maintaining contact with the corporate headquarters and thereby not losing touch with the corporate culture and (b) implementing the corporate philosophy throughout the Taiwanese operation by being deeply involved in day-to-day operations.

One zone-three expatriate manager was raised in Taiwan and then spent 30 years in the United States before he assumed the CEO position in a wholly-owned subsidiary construction firm in Taiwan. He chose to remain an outsider even though he spoke fluent Mandarin (his native language). To abide by the policy of using English as the official company language, he spoke only English to all company employees. This policy extended to social situations and he noted there was only one exception: he spoke in Mandarin to the elevator operator in his building every morning. In other situations, he would respond in English even if an initiated conversation was in Mandarin.

Another example of a zone-three expatriate is an engineering superior who had extensive language training before assuming his position in Taiwan. His style represented a Western participative approach to leadership with a mixed language environment. Because English was the official company language this expatriate manager used English as his prime language in business situations in the office. He, how-

ever, would switch to Chinese when communication could be improved by using that medium. Unusual for Chinese culture, this expatriate manager had extensive social relations with his work group. At least once or twice a month, he, together with his departmental engineers, would have a Friday evening TGIF party in much the same way as do Silicon Valley firms in the US. Once a month, the group had an official meal together, and these scheduled activities were supplemented by informal socialization. The language used in these social gatherings was Mandarin exclusively. This expatriate had imposed a Western style participative work environment together with a mixed English-Chinese language environment. The self-selected Chinese who associated with him responded positively to this culture-language mix.

### **Implications**

Both home-country culture orientations and second language fluency impact the communication processes between expatriates and locals in international business transactions. Building models to reflect the influence of both language proficiency and culture orientations, this paper describes the interactive communication process between foreign expatriates and local Chinese personnel. The communication dynamics differed in three communication zones, but the expatriates with the cooperation of the local Chinese were able to develop efficient information exchange systems in all three zones.

Since their second language deficiencies were obvious the zone-one expatriates knew that they had to alter their communication styles in order to communicate effectively. One characteristic or attribute that describes the managers in zone-one communication was cultural sensitivity. The Chinese identified the expatriates as compassionate outsiders, on the one hand, but also as reflecting behavior that the Chinese could identify with. By being disconnected because of language deficiencies, the behavior of the zone-one expatriates resembled that of successful Chinese leaders (Redding, 1990). However, not all expatriates were successful. While maintaining the requisite sensitivity, one expatriate had not identified Chinese linkpins to bridge the exchange of information from English to Chinese. Chinese subordinates also judged this individual as too inflexible, and the designated linkpins only served to widen cultural misunderstanding. In another company, the expatriate had progressed to zone two and communicated without the aid of linkpins. The direct interaction intensified and highlighted the cultural differences so that in a stressful situation the expatriate reverted to his primary direct and confrontative style with seriously negative consequences.

Through their second-language competency, zone-two and zone-three expatriates enhanced the possibility of improving both the ease and

efficiency of verbal communication. At the same time as second-language competencies were increasing, there was a parallel development of new responsibilities and challenges. As the expatriate moved into zone two and finally into unrestricted communication in zone three. Rather than "show off" their second language ability, the expatriates would be well advised to exercise restraint and to make modest use of their language abilities. Even in cases in which expatriate managers possessed an intermediate level (zone two) of Chinese proficiency, many Chinese subordinates could still speak better English, as compared to the expatriates speaking of Chinese. The expatriate could, however, utilize listening skills. This was the area of constantly increasing returns. With even modest listening skills, the expatriate reduces the psychological sensation of isolation and increases the amount of information at his or her disposal. Potential problems arose when the expatriates attempted to use the second-language competencies in oral business communication. The exercise of modesty and of not showing off new skills until perfected is an important Chinese value and the perceptive expatriate managers adhered to this practice. In addition to constructive listening, as Chinese-language proficiency improves, the expatriate can make use of Chinese language skills in situations after work. Since there is not a clear distinction between social and business situations in Taiwan, the expatriate can carefully and gradually make the transition from zone one into zone two. However, to make this transition, the expatriate needs to make a long-term investment in language training.

The present study looked at expatriates from individualistic or low-context cultural countries (Americans and Western Europeans) who had communication transactions with local personnel from a collectivistic or high-context cultural society, that is, Chinese. Since the relationships in the study's model are directly based on only 14 organizations and secondarily on cultural insights, broad generalizability cannot be assumed. The model needs to be further tested in other companies from these cultures and also extended to further study in other cultures.

The researchers hypothesize that the major relationships in the models will hold true, however, between all high and low-context cultures. The sub-relationships may be cultural-specific and follow-up studies are needed to see if there is a communication fit in specific areas of communication. To illustrate, face is a general phenomenon impacting communication in all cultures but the specific manifestation of face behavior and communication are culture specific. For example, face communication between a Japanese and a German manager could well be different than communication between a Korean and a Swedish or

an American manager. Further investigation of these more specific aspects of the model will add to its generalizability.

#### NOTE

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