SO WHAT?

At the end of this book, perhaps the reader is asking “so what” or “what shall I do now?” I have argued across these twelve chapters that culture and rhetoric are strongly correlated around the world; and that often these cultural and rhetorical differences not only strongly correspond to a preference for communication styles, but perhaps, more importantly they connect to deep, implicit values such as sense of sense, thinking patterns, and appropriate social behavior. Thus, using a rhetorical pattern from one culture in another culture might strike a strong discordant chord with these deeper values. If the reader does not believe this, then I will refer him or her to the first reading of Letter O, from the Guayas Transit Commission. How easy was it to read that letter? Did it confuse, frustrate, or annoy you? Most likely yes. It is an extreme, perhaps uncommon rendition, of Ecuadorian cultural values, but it does resonate for many Ecuadorian readers. Interestingly, when I first read it 18 years ago, I could hardly process it, but after having lived in Ecuador for four years and on the U.S.-Mexico border for eleven years, Letter O is just as natural to me as Letter R, but I prefer to read Letter O in Spanish and Letter R in English. They seem more natural to me that way. That sense of naturalness for both Letters kind of un-nerves me on the one hand, but on the other, it shows that I can process each rhetorical and cultural system much like a language system.

When professional communicators are working in intercultural contexts such as Ecuador, do they need to culturally translate their equivalent of Letter R to be more like Letter O? This is a tough question because it essentially involves almost a total rewrite, drawing on each of the eight etic borders and using the appropriate medium at the writing document or communication cycling time. Translation theorists are trying to address these issues. James (2002) explains that the cultural implications for translation may take several forms ranging from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life in a given culture. The translator also has to decide on the importance given to certain cultural aspects and to what extent it is necessary or desirable to translate them into the TL (target language). (p.1)

James’ definition is especially telling in the context of this book, and she gives a translation continuum, from more literal translation to a full cultural translation. The variables she uses for the more cultural translation include the material culture, gestures and habits, vocabulary (terminology), and cultural references or touchstones (using an appropriate reference to the Eifel tower, for French culture). This cultural approach gives a “dynamic translation” (James, 2002), but I am not sure that it meets the criteria for effectiveness in intercultural professional communication situations. In other words, how would she suggest translating Letter O?
Localization is a similar term used originally by the information products and software industry, but now is a common term for many global services and products. Localization means to develop or adapt products that are usable for local cultures. For example, the Localization Industry Standards Association (www.lisa.org) sets basic localization standards explaining that linguistic, physical, business, cultural, and technical issues all must be adapted to meet the needs of the local contexts. Further, in order to make this adaptation as efficient and effective as possible, industries must internationalize their products, enabling the product to be localized easily across multiple local cultures. “In other words, an internationalized product does not require remedial engineering or redesign at the time of localization. Instead, it has been designed and built to be easily adapted for a specific market after the engineering phase” (LISA, 2007, p. 17). In many ways, internationalization is like the learning objects discussed in Chapter Seven, Distance Education, because they are products that can easily be integrated into a variety of cultures by adapting them to that culture’s local context.

Thus, all three terms—translation, localization, and internationalization—are key concepts for professional communicators working across cultures. And in many ways, this book has explored ways to do all three successfully, but I will leave it up to the reader, researcher, and practitioner to develop the level or depth of cultural adaptation. At least the book provides a comprehensive framework for doing it. However, I have some general recommendations: translation is minimal but most likely not adequate. Instead, I prefer to adapt the target communication to meet the etic borders or frameworks for the target culture. Just as I did for Letter R, professional communicators might have their target communication meet the sense of self, thinking patterns, and appropriate social relations of their target population, using the etic borders as a guide. This adaptation or meeting simply assumes the bell-curve values of the target culture, which in many ways is a deductive stereotype, but at least it will make the communication adapted. I prefer the approach of adapting, not imitation, a complex discussion well beyond this conclusion (see Stewart & Bennett, 1991). We have much research left to develop the most effective, ethical, and efficient methods for doing this cultural adaptation.

**Effective Rhetoric-Culture Model for Translation, Localization, and Internationalization**

In other words, the “so what” of this book is that it at least provides a framework for translating, localizing, and internationalizing communications and information products around the world. The book’s approach or framework is theoretically integrated, but holistic and provides the analytical tools and methods for doing this important work. First, this book shows how to examine the relations between culture and rhetoric, understanding the deep cultural foundation of rhetorical patterns, an approach that provides a very powerful tool for understanding how a given reader, from a target culture, might have distinct rhetorical expectations. Using the onion model of rhetoric and culture shows why a definition of the self corresponds to thinking patterns, both of which correlate to appropriate social behaviors, and all three reinforce—and are reinforced by—rhetorical patterns. This model powerfully connects rhetorical patterns to sustained, long term cultural and social patterns, exemplifying why the local, postmodern approaches are not useful in a global context. Further, it shows, for example, in Chapter Eight how to develop a more “universal” approach to a situation, providing a process and product model for developing international initiatives.
Conclusion

Etic Borders with Operationalizable Approaches and Units of Analysis

Carefully tied to this rhetoric-culture model are the eight etic borders or value sets, which provide a useful heuristic or a powerful tool for ensuring the cultural adequacy of translation, localization, and internationalization. First, the etic-then-emic approach assures as little ethnocentrism as possible, balancing the approaches to cultures. Second, the etic frame as operationalized as a border shows the dynamic, virtue-vice or cultural relativity approaching showing how one system may work well in a cultural context, and not in another. This moves intercultural analysis away from the taboo approach and into connecting behavior to structured, cultural situations.

Third, the etic borders have clear units of analysis, which are powerful tools for analyzing cultures and communications. Thus, instead of vaguely defining culture as habits, gestures, or vocabulary (translation model) or language, culture, and business context (localization), intercultural professional communication have clearly defined, operationalizable, systematized, and validated units of analysis to conduct their work. The units of analysis are summarized as follows:

The I/Other border describes independence or dependence between one person and a group;
Rules orientation examines the development and application of rules;
Specific/diffuse looks at crossing public and private boundaries;
Inner/outer direction assesses sources of virtue and guidance;
Achievement/Ascription assesses performance and status in getting things done;
High and Low Context assesses role and relevance of context for communication;
Time assesses conception and operation of time, including past, present, and future, and monochronic and polychronic time.
Power Distance assesses the handling of interpersonal inequality in communications.

As demonstrated throughout this book, these etic borders have been studied consistently around the world and provide a useful starting point for researchers, practitioners, and teachers of intercultural rhetoric and professional communicators. The chapters in this book systematically connect these etic borders to concrete communication or rhetorical patterns, providing a useful model for intercultural professional communicators.

Chapters Devoted to Critical Areas of Inquiry and Intercultural Contexts

Once intercultural professional communicators understand the culture-rhetoric model and can integrate this model into the etic analysis of a target culture and corresponding rhetorical patterns, they can then draw on much of the research in this book to carry out their work. As explained in Chapters Three and Four, professional communicators can now understand how languages and technologies might encourage cultural and rhetorical patterns. Armed with this knowledge, communicators can assess how one language, such as Chinese, might predispose certain cultural patterns, as compared to English. Further, Chapter Four explains how communication media, such as orality, writing, email, hypertext, and Web 2.0 have strong correlations to the eight etic borders, reflecting relationships based on fit, reciprocity, and kairos. Thus, intercultural professional communicators can make sure that the medium they choose fits the rhetorical situation well, or they can adapt their communication to effectively re-purpose the communication to make up for the problem of fit. This knowledge also helps communicators understand the
kairos of the different communication technologies, showing when each one of the technologies might best fit the different stages and purposes in the communication process. Chapters Three and Four also explore and predict the future of culture and communication patterns, based on the predominance, for example, of English and Chinese in the world, and the rapidly developing communication technologies, such as the internet and Web 2.0 technologies. All of this knowledge can help professional communicators internationalize and localize their products.

As examples of how to carry out this process of localization and internationalization, Chapters Five through Twelve explore specific contexts where intercultural professional communication is critical. Chapter Five shows that website designs strongly correlate to the local cultures, regardless of the forces of globalization. Thus, it provides specific units of analysis to tie website design to the etic borders, showing professional communicators how to both internationalize and localize websites. Chapter Six explores the relations between organizational structures and corresponding cultural and rhetorical patterns. Its baseball, football, and tennis doubles models provide specific analytical tools for assessing division of task, roles and relations, types of interaction, and corresponding communication patterns. Further, it demonstrates the great inter-organizational complexity of international business, showing the great need for effective communication across multiple federal, state, and local entities.

Chapter Seven, Distance Education, provides a comprehensive framework for developing and evaluating distance education and e-learning across cultures. This chapter is framed around seven distance education assessment criteria from five countries, UNESCO, and industry, showing how the eight etic borders influence the seven basic criteria or assessment guidelines. This includes understanding the local situation, including government policies, the curricular frame, and delivery to students, evaluation of student performance, and concrete issues such as student-teacher and student-student interactions. All of these capacities are helpful for both internationalizing and localizing e-learning projects.

Chapter Eight connects rhetoric and culture to law, providing intercultural professional communicators the ability to ground comparisons of law with the eight etic value sets. This connection is becoming critical for a variety of reasons, especially in the global context. First, it allows organizations to develop internal policies and procedures documents that are usable both across and for multiple local situations, that is, both international and local. Second, it provides a ground for understanding how cultural and rhetorical values, as exemplified in the eight etic borders, are the foundation for much law and legal processes around the world, which also demonstrates the great role of professional communication in these international legal situations. Third, this Chapter and the book grounds the discussion of privacy, intellectual property, and information and communication technologies in relevant legal and cultural foundations, showing professional communicators how to manage these complex relations and why certain cultures approach privacy and intellectual property differently. All these capacities are critical for both internationalizing and localizing communications, services, and products.

Chapter Nine, Health and Medical Traditions, illustrates the complex, but holistic connections between assumptions about medicine/health and health communications. This chapter greatly expands the definitions of culturally sensitive and appropriate health care communications, demonstrating why cultures need specific rhetorical approaches to their health communications, especially doctor-patient communications. It also greatly expands the definitions of health literacy, showing that different rhetorical traditions, literacy education, and assumptions about medicine and health treatment have long, historical, cultural, and economic structures and values. This is perhaps why many current forms of health communications, such as informed consent forms, are not effective for a large variety of intercultural
or multicultural context. Professional communicators now are enabled to connect health and medical traditions to the eight etic borders, thus preparing them to develop effective communications for the local, target populations. Chapter Ten, Instructions, shows how instructional designs vary around the world, and why different cultures approach the teaching or instructional situation differently. It provides in-depth analysis of four manuals, operationalizing the etic borders effectively. This knowledge provides critical tools for technical and professional communicators who write instructions for intercultural contexts, which, given our global situation, is an increasingly common situation. This Chapter also combines nicely with Chapter Seven, Distance Education, showing how to develop international modules or learning objects that can quickly and effectively be culturally adapted to the specific etic borders or value sets of the target population.

Chapters Eleven and Twelve discuss research, teaching, and curriculum for intercultural professional communication. Chapter Eleven provides very clear assessment criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of research and teaching approaches, in all their varieties, showing in many cases why the local, post-modern approaches are ill-suited for global contexts. Chapter Twelve evaluates the implicit curriculum in three popular U.S. rhetoric and professional communication textbooks, denaturalizing the implicit U.S. foundations, thereby, providing a scaffolding or framework for helping ESL and other students develop U.S. rhetorical capacities. Chapter Twelve also exemplifies an intercultural rhetoric and writing course that I routinely teach, modeling the process, competencies, activities, and projects that can enable intercultural and global competency in our student writers.

LIMITATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS

Although these chapters provide a comprehensive look at theory, research, and practice of intercultural professional communication, it is just a start, and the book has some limitations, some of which are severe. First, most of the chapters could be a book, in and of themselves. Thus, my list of works cited is extremely long, demonstrating that I just scratched the surface with each chapter and that much more extensive, detailed work is needed for each area. This also means that I could not cite or explain in detail many of the views, resorting, instead to high-level analysis and framing. This was necessary and planned because the book is meant to frame the work for years to come. By the way, it also probably speaks to my becoming more Mexicanized (Kras, 1991), because I prefer larger, more diffuse or holistic approaches to issues. In this larger analysis, I had to generalize at a level that made me uncomfortable at times, but I hope I did justice with such a larger, interdisciplinary project. I am sure that experts in the rhetoric of law, technology, second language studies, organizational behavior, distance education, health/medicine, and instructional design will find some faults and errors in my approaches. That’s ok; it was a lot of material to cover.

The second limitation or weakness is that this book obviously draws on my rich, lengthy, deep, and varied experience in Mexico and Latin America. Every chapter is grounded in either my previous research or professional experience in U.S.-Latin American contexts. Thus, I cannot do justice to the many other cultures around the world. But I am quite proud of the varied experiences I have in this context, as a professor, professional communicator, project administrator, researcher, expatriate, and resident in Ecuador and Mexico. But oh, that I had the time to develop the same capacity in Chinese-U.S. relations or German-U.S. relations! But I am still learning much about the U.S.-Latin American issues, and will probably spend the rest of my career doing so.
Most of the chapters also reflect the weaknesses in the body of intercultural research. Chapter Four does not integrate well the characteristics of online communication theory into intercultural contexts because that research simply does not exist. Chapter Five is mostly my work and analysis because not much research exists on intercultural website design, at least work that gets beyond superficial issues of translation. Chapter Six is notably weak because I chose not to integrate the work into existing organizational theory and information models, which I found to be particularly useless for intercultural inquiry. Chapter Seven powerfully assesses the assessment criteria from around the world, but I do not provide specific examples of intercultural distance education because I either did not have access to or have not experienced it. Regardless, it does draw on the growing body of literature discussing the intercultural elements of it. Chapter Eight provides a strong theoretical framework for intercultural rhetoric and law, but this connection is mostly mine; and much relevant research needs to take place. Chapter Nine points to great research and theory gaps in intercultural and multicultural health communications and practices; I just wish I could have analyzed better the significance of these gaps, especially as the U.S. Federal government approaches culturally appropriate care and service.

Chapter Ten is mostly my intercultural rhetorical analysis of four manuals with which I have lots of experience, pointing to the great dearth of research in this area. Chapters Eleven and Twelve show limited approaches to teaching and research. I found very little discussion of explicit intercultural research methods or teaching that I found valid and worth discussing. Thus, Chapter Eleven provides a broad assessment frame and Chapter Twelve critiques the curricular approach in three textbooks, both of which are quite inadequate; but they are both a good start and provide analytical and practical models for continuing the research.

Despite these efforts, though, I feel the book is comprehensive, yet integrated, theoretical, yet practical, draws on a large body of research, but is grounded in my experience, and addresses key issues with enough clarity to motivate further research, but provides enough answers to influence current practice.

REFERENCES


