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# Working in a Second Language

Nicole V. Lyu  
*Kennesaw State University*

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Working in a Second Language

By

Nicole V. Lyu

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of  
English

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

2013

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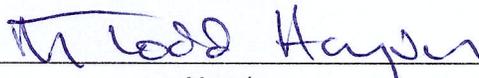
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Nicole Vejjajiva Lyu

Has been approved by the committee  
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Capstone committee:

  
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Member

  
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Member

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## ***Chapter 1***

### ***Working in a Second Language***

Communication does not necessarily result in understanding. Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. When the sender of a message comes from one culture and the receiver from another, the chance of accurately transmitting a message are low.

Nancy Adler, *Communicating Across Cultural Barriers*

#### ***Introduction***

Companies all over the world work internationally. When companies work internationally, it means they usually have to work with more than one language. When working with more than one language, things can get lost in translation, so to speak. Products, manuals, product boxes, advertising, reference guides, websites, computer tips, and many other things must be translated, reworded, or completely rewritten in order for companies to sell their products in multiple countries. In order to translate the wording on items, companies must work with their counterparts in other countries to ensure the same meaning is conveyed in all languages. Since languages are not codes that can be directly translated word-for-word, it takes a lot of time, patience, and discussion with co-workers across countries to ensure the meaning is not lost.

Communicating with co-workers in another country can be difficult when it comes to translating the reading material that accompanies a product. Phone conferences, computer conferences, face-to-face conferences, and e-mails are sent back and forth between co-workers in an attempt to solidify exactly what both sides want for the wording on the materials. It takes a lot of trial and error between different languages to come up with something that works for both

sides of the company. This paper takes a closer look at the difficulties workers have when working with other co-workers who speak a different language. This paper also takes a look at how co-workers perceive each other when working across two continents and two languages and which type of communication they feel is more difficult: written or oral.

Working with co-workers across countries requires communication. A key question for companies and the one that informs this work is which type of communication: written or oral, is more difficult for employees communicating across languages? This question is examined through studying the perceptions the native Mandarin speaking employees have about their personal ability to communicate with their native English speaking co-workers and the perceptions the native English speaking employees have about the native Mandarin speaking co-workers' ability to communicate with them. Mandarin and English were chosen, because the employees being interviewed all work at the same company; it is a company that has Mandarin speaking employees and English speaking employees. The Mandarin speaking employees all live and work in Taiwan. The English speaking employees all live and work in the U.S. In order to do business both offices must communicate and work with one another.

### ***Cross-Cultural Communication***

Whenever people work in an environment where there is cross-cultural communication, there will be understanding difficulties to overcome. How employees feel about these difficulties and what employees think will help them overcome these difficulties will be explored throughout this paper. The objective of the interviews is to find out the perceptions the employees have about working across cultures. For example, the U.S. employees may find it frustrating to understand what the Taiwanese employees are trying to tell them, and the Taiwanese employees may find it difficult to figure out the correct wording to get their point across. Are these things

truly the types of difficulties and frustrations employees face when working with two languages, or are there other concerns that employees have when communicating with one another? Written communication lacks inflection and body language, which help lend understanding between speakers of two different languages. Also, when writing something such as an e-mail, employees cannot instantly reword what they are saying to their co-worker if their co-worker does not understand him/her. The best way to find out how people feel about communicating across cultures is to interview people who experience first-hand the challenges that come with working with co-workers who speak a different language. Many companies work across cultures and have experienced communication difficulties. Since there are communication difficulties when working across cultures there have been studies about cross-cultural communications in the workplace.

### **Previous Studies of the Use of Multiple Languages in the Workplace**

In order to understand intercultural communications, it is important to understand the people who are communicating. Discovering employees' preconceived notions about each other's cultures and their own may lead insight into how and why employees interact with each other in a multicultural workplace. Cooke, Brown, Zhu, and Mamman all looked at employees in an intercultural workplace and how they interacted with one another. Cooke, Brown, and Zhu's research focused on the verbal interactions between co-workers whose first languages were not the same. They did this by taking real discussions between two different employees with different first languages and analyzed the interactions, through tone and language that take place. Mamman's approach was slightly different; he looked at the human factors that affect intercultural communications such as behavior, attitude, cognitive, and personality. Learning

about how people from different cultures interact with each other will help employers learn how to teach their employees to be culturally aware.

Cultural awareness is important in multicultural workplaces. Kavar and Adler discuss the importance of cultural awareness in their essays. They explain that companies without cultural awareness often face a breakdown in communication. Kavar focuses on management and explains that it is up to management to learn about the various cultures within their company and teach their employees. Adler discusses how misinterpretation can cause communication failures across cultures. She also discusses how stereotypes, cultural blindness, and the lack of self-cultural awareness also contribute to miscommunication. Both researchers express the importance of learning about the different cultures within a workplace. Adler explains that what one person may view as being polite, another might view as rude. Kavar discusses how different cultures have various views on the hierarchy within the workplace. If co-workers are not aware of each other's culture, then conflict may arise.

Working in a multicultural workplace means that employees will have to learn to interact with different cultures. Having formal cultural training and ESL classes is something that Marin, Navarro, and Brooks suggest will help employees understand each others' cultures better. These researchers explain that having training in the workplace for employees will help employees learn how to interact with other's cultures. They stress that to be successful, people must learn to adapt and change when faced with working among different cultures. Along with different cultures comes different languages, and ESL classes in the workplace would be beneficial to businesses that have employees whose first language is not English.

All of these scholars discuss the need for understanding and teaching in the workplace. These researchers all point to the perceptions and observations of people who work in a multicultural workplace;

however, none of them have really gathered firsthand information about how employees actually feel about working with co-workers that speak a different language and are from a different culture. Mamman comes the closest when he suggests the need for and the importance of research into how employees interact and view one another. It is important to find out how both sides of the language barrier feel about working with each other. Finding this information out will help employers better understand the needs of their culturally diverse work environment. Also, if employees had a better understanding of how each other felt about communication issues it might help them realize the difficulties that both sides face and allow them to feel more empathy and work harder to make communication breakthroughs. In order to give employees a better understanding of one another, they need to understand how they perceive one another.

### ***Methodology***

To discover employees' perceptions about one another, employees from a company that has an office in both Taiwan and the United States were interviewed. The company is based in Taiwan and manufactures and sells computer accessories to other companies. This company will be referred to as TC throughout the paper. All of the names used in this paper will be pseudonyms for each participant. The participants all work for the same company, TC, and have experienced working with co-workers that speak a language other than their own.

The employees at this company usually communicate through e-mail and conference calls; however, they have had a few face-to-face interactions as well. Face-to-face interactions are important because they give an idea of the differences in perception between an intimate communication environment and a more separated communication environment. When these employees attend a conference call, there are usually three to four people on the call at one time. Having several people on the phone at one time gives the employees a little time to decide what they want to say; however, sometimes there are only two people on a conference call and the

employees have to decide what they want to say on the spot. These different types of communication situations can have an effect on how the employees feel about interacting with one another. If employers learn about these perceptions, it will help them to better understand their employees who communicate across cultures. TC is the perfect company to interview employees who communicate across cultures because their Taiwan office has employees who speak some English and communicate with their U.S. co-workers in English. (The U.S. office only has one non-native English speaking employee. That employee speaks Mandarin and English fluently. That employee was not interviewed since his communication with both offices was not an issue.) The other employees in the U.S. office were all first language English speaking employees who did not speak any Mandarin. These employees rely on the Taiwanese employees' abilities to speak and write English in order to communicate with them. These Taiwanese employees, however, are not fluent in English and communication can prove difficult at times. Interviews about communication perceptions were analyzed at both the U.S. and Taiwan offices.

The employees at both the Taiwan office and U.S. office were interviewed to find out what their perceptions were. No translator was used with the Taiwanese employees, because they could speak enough English to answer the questions that were asked. Some of the Taiwanese employees did not understand the questions that were asked, but after rewording and describing or giving examples, most of them were able to answer the questions. Both the U.S. and Taiwanese employees were enthusiastic about sharing their thoughts and perceptions on the difficulties they have when it comes to communicating with one another. They also readily gave suggestions as to what they felt could help further communications between each other.

The employees at the Taiwan office were asked a series of questions, and the employees at the U.S. office were asked a separate set of questions. The native Mandarin speakers were asked the following questions:

1. What is your first language?
2. Where did you learn English?
3. What cultures do you communicate with at work?
4. What differences do you notice between communicating in your primary culture and communicating with other cultures?
5. If you use English at work, do you feel comfortable communicating with English speaking people at work?
  - a. Do you prefer writing or speaking in English when communicating? Why?
6. Do you have to communicate using written English?
  - a. If so, do you feel comfortable using written English?
  - b. What types of documents do you write in English?
  - c. Do you have any samples of writing that I may use for my paper?
7. If you go to trade shows, how do you feel about speaking to your coworkers, consumers, and buyers in English?
  - a. Do you feel like they understand you?
  - b. Do you understand them?
8. Do you have any emails from native English speakers that you find difficult to understand? If so, why?
9. Is there anything that you think would make communication easier for you?

Some of the questions asked of the Mandarin speaking employees did not pertain to the U.S. employees, so the U.S. employees were asked a separate set of questions. The native English speaking employees at the same company were asked the following questions:

1. What difficulties do you come across when communicating with your first language Mandarin speaking coworkers?
2. Do you understand what they are trying to tell you?
3. Do you feel they understand what you are trying to tell them?
4. If you go to trade shows, how do you feel about speaking with your Mandarin speaking coworkers face-to-face?
  - a. Is it easier to understand them, harder, or about the same? Why?
5. When you work on English writing that was previously written by your first language Mandarin speaking coworkers do you find it difficult to decipher?
  - a. Do you see any errors in their writing that seem to repeat?
6. Do you have any emails from native Mandarin speakers that you find difficult to understand? If so, why?
7. Is there anything that you think would make communication easier for you?

The answers to these questions are analyzed and discussed throughout the following paper. The analysis and discussion of the questions lend insight into how the U.S. employees and the Taiwanese employees perceive not only how they feel they understand each other, but also how they feel the other office perceives them. Their perceptions of one another did not always match up. Suggestions about how to better communications between the two offices and the possible causes behind the communication breakdowns between the two offices are analyzed and discussed to further the understanding of working across cultures.

The first section of the research discusses the Taiwan interviews and the types of daily communications that transpire between them and their U.S. co-workers. The Taiwanese employees were interviewed over the phone. The Taiwanese employees were unable to use video conferencing at the time the interviews were conducted; however, the phone interviews allowed for the acknowledgement of pauses in speech, tones, inflections, and accents. The Taiwan interviews were discussed and analyzed to obtain a better understanding of how the Taiwanese employees viewed their own ability to speak English and how they felt the U.S. employees viewed them. Samples of e-mails and other various forms of written documents were analyzed to interpret what types of difficulties arise from written communications between cultures.

The second section addresses the U.S. interviews and the types of communications that they experience throughout their work day. The U.S. employees were interviewed face-to-face. The U.S. employees gave much more in-depth answers than the Taiwanese employees. The U.S. employees were able to express the types of difficulties that they encountered when communicating with the Taiwanese employees. Primary and secondary sources were quoted to support the analysis and suggestions given. Samples of e-mails and other written materials were used to help further explain the difficulties and challenges that both offices face when communicating with one another. The e-mails provided a look into the back and forth communications between the two offices that occur when one side is unable to understand what the other side is trying to tell them.

### **U.S. Office**

In order to gather the perceptions of employees who communicate across cultures, this study used qualitative research methods. This study includes the use of interviews and sample e-mails sent between co-workers. Six employees from the U.S. based office were interviewed. All of these employees were first language English speaking employees who did not speak Mandarin. These employees were asked questions about their personal feelings about working

with first language Mandarin speaking co-workers, how well they understand what their co-workers are trying to tell them, and what type of communication is the most difficult for them. These questions will help the U.S. office understand the extent and types of difficulties that employees are dealing with when trying to do their jobs. By understanding the difficulties employees face communicating across cultures, employers can work on solutions to help bridge the communication gap between the two offices.

### **Taiwan Office**

A different set of questions were asked of the Taiwan office. Nine employees from the Taiwan office were asked what their first language is, how they learned English, what differences they notice when communicating in their primary language and their secondary language, their comfort level when communicating in English, how they feel about using written and oral English, and what they feel would make communicating easier for them.

When deciding on what questions to ask the U.S. employees and the Taiwanese employees, the difference in perspective and job roles were taken into account. The U.S. employees do not speak Mandarin at all, so they cannot compare the differences between working in a primary and secondary language. The U.S. employees can, however, express their feelings about what is or isn't difficult about understanding the communication between them and their Taiwanese co-workers. It is important that people who work in culturally diverse workplaces understand how, in this case the Mandarin speaking employees, feel about their communication skills with their English speaking co-workers. This information will give insight into whether or not the Mandarin speaking employees' fears about how well the English speaking employees understand them coincide with the difficulties English speaking employees face when trying to decipher the meaning from Taiwanese employees' communications.

### **Data Analysis**

I initially separated the interview results by location, dividing those results between the U.S. and Taiwanese employees. Once the interviews were separated, the written communication issues (i.e. e-mails, manuals, and the company website) and oral communication issues (i.e. phone conferences, webinars, and face-to-face encounters) were analyzed. Prior to opening the Georgia office, native Mandarin speakers wrote many of the manuals and the website which were later redone by native English speakers at the Georgia office. This data was used to bring to light the challenges this company experiences everyday with the communications between native English speaking employees and native Mandarin speaking employees. This was done by comparing answers that were similar. Even though there may be several ways to answer each question they were grouped according to similarity. For example, two employees from the U.S. office may find written communication to be the most difficult for them, but they may express this difficulty through different examples or by directly saying it is more difficult than oral or face-to-face communications. Once, I determined which answers went together among the interviews, the information was further broken down by examining what the difficulties and frustrations were that these employees faced when communicating across two different languages. This knowledge may help employers understand how they can better assist their employees when communication breaks down among cross-cultural businesses. One of the main types of communication the Taiwanese employees use is e-mail. E-mail is a good tool for cross-cultural communication because it can be sent to someone even when they are asleep.

#### **E-mail**

When doing their jobs, the employees in the U.S. office rely on e-mail to communicate with the employees at the Taiwan based office. The employees were asked to share e-mails that

have been sent back and forth between the U.S. office and the Taiwan office that may have caused confusion or had to be sent back and forth several times in order to clarify meaning. E-mail is important because when a company works in two completely different time zones, it is difficult to communicate with both places at the same time. E-mail provides a solution because it can be written during one side's working hours and read during the working hours of the other time zone. These e-mails were reviewed and used as examples to show where a breakdown in communication occurs and to discuss the frustrations experienced from this breakdown by both the Taiwan office employees and the U.S. office employees. It may also show how miscommunication through e-mail affects the outcome of a written product. If employers understand the difficulties of written communication, then they might be able to work on ways of making communication easier between international business divisions. To help employers understand the difficulties, I interviewed the employees at the Taiwan office first.

## ***Chapter 2***

### ***Taiwan Interviews***

The purpose of the Taiwan employee interviews was to discover how Taiwanese perceive their ability to communicate in English with their co-workers in the U.S.. They were asked questions pertaining to how they feel they are perceived and understood by the U.S. employees and how they feel about their own communication skills. The interviews for the employees at the Taiwan office were conducted over the phone during their working hours. The phone was used because some of the employees either did not have access to video conferencing or were more comfortable talking over the phone. While video conferencing would have allowed a more face-to-face experience, which would have allowed the observation of facial expressions, the phone still provided the pauses during speech and the tones and inflections, which allowed for a sense of their comfort and confidence level when answering the questions. Overall, the phone conversations were very informative. A total of nine Taiwanese employees were interviewed. The interviews themselves proved challenging with some employees because they had difficulty understanding the questions. There were, however, only a few employees who were able to understand the questions in their entirety and were, subsequently, able to answer more completely than their co-workers who had difficulty understanding the questions.

When employees had difficulty understanding questions, the questions were reworded to try and make them clearer. If that did not work, examples were used to help the interviewee understand. For the most part, this strategy worked and answers were received that pertained to the questions. Still, a few of the employees gave answers that did not necessarily answer the question being asked. When asked if she preferred writing or speaking in English, one of the

Taiwanese employees said, “no...I am Taiwanese.” She did not seem to understand that I was inquiring which type of communication was easier for her when she had to use English. Another Taiwanese employee gave the answer, “both English and Mandarin are okay for me” when asked the same question. The interviews shed light on where the Taiwanese employees learned English and how that affects their command of the English language, the confidence levels of the Taiwanese employees and their ability to use the English language, the differences in e-mail communications between the U.S. and Taiwanese employees, how comfortable they are speaking English at trade shows, and the Taiwanese employees’ preference of either speaking or writing in English.

The first question, which asked them their native language, was one that everyone understood easily. Of the nine employees interviewed, six were first language Mandarin speakers, two were first language Taiwanese speakers, and one was a first language Korean speaker. Mandarin is the most spoken language among the Chinese people. Taiwanese is a local language spoken in Taiwan that is mostly spoken only in the home. Those whose first language was Taiwanese also spoke Mandarin, and Mandarin is what is mostly used among the employees in the Taiwan office. The one employee whose first language was Korean speaks Mandarin in the office as well. All of the employees interviewed communicate in some form in English with the U.S. office.

### **Learning English**

Since communicating in English is essential for the Taiwanese employees, they all had to learn how to speak and write in English. English is taught and learned in many places all over the globe. The Taiwanese employees learned English in several different places. All of the employees interviewed said they learned English in school and three of them continued learning

English in college. One of them, Jackie, even went to college in the U.S.. Anna, whose first language was Korean, learned English at a school in Taiwan that specializes in teaching the English language. Where these employees learned English is important because people may assume that if a person learned English in the U.S., then they should communicate better in English than someone who did not. This is the case for several U.S. employees who expressed how they were surprised that one of their Taiwanese co-workers, who did not learn English in the U.S., spoke better English than her other co-worker who went to school in the U.S. After the interviews, I found that the results vary when it comes to the level of command the Taiwan office employees have of English. Some of the Taiwanese employees spoke and understood English surprisingly well, while others did not have a firm command of the English language.

It was clear to see who had a better command of the English language after interviewing the employees at the Taiwan office. For instance, Jackie, whose first language is Mandarin and who went to college in the U. S. and Katie, who learned English in school in Taiwan, gave the most complete and thoughtful answers of all the interviewees. Sally, whose first language is Mandarin and who learned English in school and college in Taiwan, gave mostly complete answers as well. Others, such as Rachel, whose first language is Mandarin and who learned English at college in Taiwan, and Justin, whose first language is Taiwanese and who learned English in high school, both were able to answer the questions, but gave very short answers. They both seemed unsure of their ability to answer in English and took longer to deliver an answer than the others.

### **Confidence**

Another factor that seemed to affect how employees at the Taiwan office answered the interview questions was their confidence level when speaking in English. A person's confidence

in themselves can affect how they sound to others. It is important to understand how the Taiwanese employees feel about their own ability to use English, and if they are outgoing or introverted because these factors can affect their communication in English. A look at how the Taiwanese employees gave answers and what answers they gave can be found in this section. Their confidence level was determined by their responses given over the phone. Some of the Taiwanese employees felt that the U.S. employees could understand them without any problems, and others felt that they were not understood at all. One Taiwanese employee expressed that she was shy and introverted and did not feel comfortable speaking in English. She seemed to lack confidence in her ability to speak in English; however, her responses were clear and easy to understand. Most of the Taiwanese employees seemed to be outgoing and extroverted. They were ready to answer the interview questions, but sometimes it took them a few minutes to process the question and then figure out how to answer. The way in which the Taiwanese employees answered also gave insight into their confidence level. The employees who seemed apprehensive or shy gave very quick, short answers. Those who felt confident in their use of the English language gave more detailed responses. However, just because they felt more confident did not necessarily mean they had a better command of the English language. Those who showed more confidence were more apt to say what they wanted and did not seem to worry too much about whether or not they said things correctly. On the other hand, those who were more hesitant took longer in answering and tried to think about how to say things before they said them.

This confidence or shyness among the employees when speaking in English may also stem from the frequency in which they use the English language at work. In their work environment, all of the employees I interviewed communicate with both the U.S. and Asia. These employees all communicate with the company's base location in Georgia, and some also

communicate with vendors, shipping companies, trade show consumers, and many other U.S. based components. There are a few that also communicate in English with their consumers in Japan and Korea.

### **Culture**

When companies work with multiple cultures, such as Taiwanese, American, Japanese, and Korean, they have to learn to interact with very different cultural beliefs. The Taiwanese employees were asked what differences they noticed between their culture and the U.S. culture and how that affects their communication with the U.S. culture. An interesting thing that came up during the interviews with the Taiwanese employees was that the employees who also work with buyers in Japan and Korea said that it is easier for both sides to communicate in English, since both sides speak at least some English. The Taiwanese employees noted that for most of their business done outside of Taiwan and China, they communicate in English. Katie, one of the Taiwanese Employees, said that she likes to use English “because not everyone do speak Chinese and English is a national language.” Just this statement alone gave me insight into how Katie views the English language. Katie was expressing how she felt that English is a language that is known around the world and especially in the business world. Katie also said that “almost people in the world do speak English. To avoid misunderstanding with what I say, I prefer to using English when I communicate with people.” Katie expressed that she can always find common ground when speaking in English, more so than when trying to use Mandarin with other cultures. One of the other Taiwanese employees, Stacy, referred to the cultures she worked with as “East cultures” and “West cultures”. Stacy was the only one to refer to the cultures she worked with as East and West. The other employees simply stated the different countries they

worked with. It would seem that Stacy views the East as one culture and the West as another culture, whereas the other employees viewed each country as having its own culture.

Culture plays a significant role when it comes to understanding people from other parts of the world. Even business culture is vastly different from one country to another. The Taiwanese employees noticed cultural differences between working with people in their own office and working with people in the U.S. office. A few of the Taiwanese employees felt that U.S. culture was not as polite as the Asian culture. Mary, a Taiwanese employee, states, “Asian cultures are more polite than Western culture, but Western culture behave more direct to let you understand what they require.” Mary, whose grasp of the English language is strong, seemed to understand that these differences were cultural and accepted them as such. Katie, another Taiwanese employee, also noted that “attitudes” were different between the Asian culture and the U. S. culture, but she did not elaborate on those differences. Anna noted that in Taiwan their attitudes were more enthusiastic, and that they are more casual when doing business in the office and between offices.

These perceptions of the differences in attitudes between the Asian and U.S. culture may stem from the type of language used and the ability of the receiver of the language to understand what is being said. Cooke, Brown, and Zhu point out that L2 workers

may or may not trust their own ability to clarify items through their speech. L2 workers may also miss subtlety and nuance in spoken or written language, thereby affecting interpretation of multiple meanings, sub-texts, coded messages, reading between the lines (88).

The Taiwanese employees reflected this by explaining the difficulties they have understanding the U.S. employees when they use colloquialisms, either in their speech or in their writing.

### **Written Communication**

E-mail is the most common form of written communication between the Taiwan and the U.S. offices. The Taiwanese employees were asked to provide samples of e-mails that were sent between the U.S. and Taiwan offices. They were also asked how they feel about communicating through e-mail and how well they could understand e-mails sent from the U.S. office. The e-mails were looked at to determine patterns and strategies used by both the Taiwan and U.S. offices in an attempt to better understand one another. The strategies they used and why they used these strategies were deciphered through the research of multiple e-mails sent back and forth between the Taiwan and U.S. office. E-mails sent to the U.S. office from the Taiwan office were often very short. These short e-mails may be the result of the Taiwanese employees being unsure of their English proficiency. Even when the Taiwanese employees are unsure of their proficiency in English, they still try to be as polite as possible. The employees in the Taiwan office use an abundance of pleasantries in their e-mails because they feel that they are being polite by doing so. For example, many of the e-mails the U.S. employees receive from Taiwan begin with “please kindly” and end with “many thanks.” These phrases display the Taiwanese employees’ strive to be polite. They use these pleasantries to explain what they need done by the U.S. employees in the nicest possible way.

Pleasantries are used by the Taiwanese employees to express their desire to be polite and accommodating. The Taiwanese employees feel that using pleasantries is necessary to maintain a good relationship with the receiver. While the Taiwanese use several of these pleasantries in one e-mail correspondence, they view the lack of the pleasantries in the U.S. e-mails as being less polite. The Taiwanese employees feel that they have a more polite and casual way of doing business. Some of the Taiwanese employees feel that the U.S. employees skip the polite phrases

and get directly to the point. Stacy, one of the Taiwanese employees, summed up her thoughts of the U.S. employees' way of doing business in one word, "utilitarianism." She said that she viewed the entire western culture as being utilitarian. This view ties in with the Taiwanese employees' views that they work differently than the employees in the U.S.. The Taiwanese employees felt that not only do the U.S. employees work differently than they do, but that their thought processes on how things should be done are different as well.

These differences that the Taiwanese notice are due to the differences in cultural backgrounds between the Taiwanese and U.S. employees. One of Kavar's definitions of culture explains that it is "the way people think, feel and act in accordance with the values and norms dominant in their society" (105). This definition of culture can be seen in the responses the Taiwanese employees gave for the differences they notice between their culture and the U.S. They responded that they notice differences in attitude, ways of thinking, and how work is done. The cultural diversity among the employees in this organization is especially easy to see by the employees themselves because both sides are literally working in their own culture. Since the Taiwanese employees work in Taiwan and the U.S. employees work in the U.S., neither side is fully exposed to the other's culture. Even with this extreme cultural separation, the Taiwanese employees seem to accept that the communications they receive from the U.S. employees will not be the same as the ones they receive from their co-workers in their own office.

E-mailing is never simple and almost always requires multiple replies in order to clarify what each side is trying to say. When the Taiwanese employees send an e-mail, they generally have to wait until the next business day to receive a reply. When a Taiwanese employee responds to a U.S. employee, the U.S. employees also have to wait until the next business day to receive that response. This can be problematic because oftentimes the U.S. employee is seeking an answer to

a customer's question. Delayed response time, especially when it involves customers, can affect consumer ratings. When responding to a U.S. question, the Taiwanese employees separate their sentences by a space and give the shortest answer possible. This contrasts greatly with how the U.S. office asks questions. The U.S. employees write in paragraphs with complete sentences, single space, and give as much detail as possible; however, they have learned a few techniques when e-mailing the Taiwan office. The U.S. office has been numbering their sentences in an effort to help the Taiwan office focus on the questions that the U.S. office wants answered. The e-mail and reply below are an example of this contrast.

*Thank you for sending me the suggestions. Below are a few comments. I have also attached screen shots with explanations of issues I had with the product. Below are a couple of other notes.*

- 1. The issue on Tuesday about making the second computer the main display and then switching back to the first and the icons on the home screen staying on the second screen also occurs with the product and that is with the driver that is online.*
- 2. Hitting the refresh button did not solve the problem.*
- 3. In the meantime I will see what I can do to find a solution.*

*Thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Kevin*

This was an e-mail sent from the U.S. office to the Taiwan office. Kevin has numbered his sentences to help the receiver better understand the points he is trying to make; however, the small paragraph at the beginning and the long sentence for the first numbered sentence are quite a bit longer than any sentences that the Taiwan office would use when responding. The Taiwan office relies heavily on Google's translation tool to try and make sense out of the e-mails they receive from the U.S. office. Since languages are not simply a code for one another, in other words, not everything can be directly translated word-for-word; automated translation tools are far from perfect. The U.S. employees do not have to use a translation tool because the Taiwan office sends the U.S. office e-mails in English. Below is the reply to the above e-mail.

*Dear Ryan:*

*The best solution is , manually draw Back to your icon and Re Plug in your abc graphics*

*But This is not a real good way*

*R & D department is testing a new driver now*

*Hope to solve this problem*

*Please use this solution Until the new driver released*

*If you have other solutions are also welcome to share with us*

*Thank you*

*Best Regards*

*Justin*

In this example, the triple spacing was reduced to double spacing. This reply shows how the Taiwanese employees use short, one-line sentences to get their point across. These short sentences also display the level of English the employees have. Using short sentences also means that there is less for the Taiwanese employees to translate when writing in English. In the last

part of this e-mail, Justin uses the terms “Thank you” and Best Regards” to end his e-mail. The use of both these terms is typical of the Taiwanese and shows the effort they put into trying to be very polite and pleasing when doing business.

The Taiwanese employees rely heavily on the translation tool to help them understand e-mails and other written communications sent to them in English. Even though using a translation tool is not the ideal way to translate between languages, it allows the Taiwan office to at least obtain a better understanding of what the U.S. office is telling them.

### **Written or Oral Communication**

Communications from the Taiwanese employees are in English. When asked if they were comfortable using English, either written or oral, they answered with either a definite “yes” or an unsure response. Only one employee gave a definite “no” that she was not comfortable using English. Five of the employees said that they felt comfortable communicating in English. Three of the five prefer writing in English as opposed to speaking in English; the remaining two did not understand the question about which type of communication they preferred. Of those who were not as comfortable using English, two of them also preferred writing to speaking. Why the Taiwanese prefer writing or speaking and what makes them comfortable using writing or speech is discussed in this section.

The five that preferred writing over speaking in English did so because of the detachment writing allows. The detachment they experience is having the time to think through and arrange their thoughts before expressing them. They expressed that they take comfort in having time to think about what they want to say. They explained that when speaking in English, they have no time to think about what they would like to say. Not being able to think about what they want to say causes them to pause during their speech, making them feel embarrassed or self-conscious

about speaking in English. The Taiwanese employees think that this type of nervousness causes their speech to be more erratic. When speaking in English this erratic speech makes it difficult for the receiver to understand what they are saying. When the U.S. employees have difficulty understanding the Taiwanese employees, the Taiwanese employees become frustrated and the line of communication is broken.

The Taiwanese employees prefer to avoid this breakdown in communication with e-mail as opposed to verbal communication with their co-workers. The Taiwanese employees explained that when they write an e-mail they can take their time and think about the correct way to say what they want to say in English. They have more time to translate what they are thinking into English. This extra time allows them to pause, whereas in speech they would feel rushed to say what they needed to say, and in that rush they may leave out things or become nervous and shorten what they were originally thinking. Not only does writing allow for extra time, but it also takes away, for the most part, the speaker's accent. The Taiwanese employees believe that their accent may make it difficult for the U.S. employees to understand what they are trying to say. An example of an e-mail with the accent mostly removed was sent from a Taiwan employee to a U.S. employee and it read:

*I will have designers to collect all final design file for uploading to server soon.*

*We might have pdf file for you to check, I will let you know the link of server.*

The employee who sent this spelled out each word correctly, which eliminated her stress on individual words. Her accent can be seen in her lack of using the article "the". So while e-mail may not completely remove a person's accent, it does significantly reduce it in some cases.

The Taiwanese employees who prefer writing in English also prefer to receive written communications instead of verbal communications. They prefer receiving written communications for much the same reason they prefer sending written communications. Receiving written communications gives them time to think about and decode the meaning of the message.

Even though most of the Taiwanese employees preferred writing in English as opposed to speaking in English, there was one person who said she preferred speaking. This person was Rachel, who explained that speaking made it easier for her to understand when she was speaking with English speakers. She feels that it is easier to understand when speaking because if she does not understand what the other person is saying, then she has the chance to clarify right away instead of having to wait for an e-mail response. Rachel prefers speaking in English with everyone she communicates with outside of her own office. This, she explains, is because more people speak English around the world than Mandarin, and it makes understanding easier. Rachel does business with people all over Asia and in the U.S.. She says that she even speaks in English with the people she does business within other parts of Asia. Another employee who uses English when doing business in other parts of Asia is Katie. She says that she finds more people can communicate in English with her better than they can in Mandarin. Katie says she prefers using English “because not everyone do speak Chinese and English is a national language,” meaning she finds that no matter what country she does business with, she can usually find someone who speaks English; thereby, creating a common language that both companies can work with.

Even though these two employees find communicating in English the best way to communicate with businesses around the world, it is not clear if they actually fully understand each other. As Nancy Adler points out,

Communication does not necessarily result in understanding. Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. When the sender of a message comes from one culture and the receiver from another, the chance of accurately transmitting a message are low (2).

Adler may be correct because the ability, of both the Taiwanese employees and the U.S. employees, to understand the first message sent from one side is usually low, if at all. The Taiwanese employees expressed the frustration of having to go back and forth in a single discussion in order to even come close to understanding what both sides are trying to tell each other. Oftentimes, it takes intervention from the single bilingual manager in the office to clarify the meaning for both sides. The U.S. office at least has a bilingual speaker who can clarify what both sides are trying to say; the other countries around the world do not always have someone who can speak both Mandarin and their first language or English and their first language. The Taiwanese employees do the best they can to communicate in English with these other countries in hopes that they understand each other enough to do business with one another.

Doing business in English with other countries may be convenient for the Taiwanese employees and, in fact, maybe the only way they can communicate with one another; however, there is no way for them to know if they truly understand each other. The way, for example, that a Mandarin speaking person uses English may be completely different from the way a Japanese speaking person uses English. The Mandarin speaking person often uses their first language grammar rules when speaking in English and the Japanese speaking person may do the same with their first language. When the syntax of a language is changed from its standard form, the

meaning of a word or sentence can also change. The same effect happens when the Taiwanese employees speak with the U. S. employees. Both sides either misinterpret or completely misunderstand what each other is saying.

Language structure and thought processes can affect understanding. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams explain that “the claim that the structure of a language influences how its speakers perceive the world around them is most closely associated with the linguist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Whorf, and is therefore referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” (25). This hypothesis explains that language and thought are related. The Sapir –Whorf hypothesis discusses how language shapes thought and controls how people perceive the world around them. This would explain why the Taiwanese employees speak English using their own language’s rules. Sapir explained that:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society...we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (25)

Based on this interpretation of language, the Taiwanese employees and the U.S. employees may misunderstand each other because both sides are depending on their first language to interpret the meaning of the information being received. When the Taiwanese employees tell the U.S. employees something, they rely on their first language to try and translate what they want to say. The Taiwanese employees’ first language tells them that using the terms “best regards” and “thanks so much” means that they are being polite, but to the U.S. employees it seems redundant.

## **Face-to-Face**

The U.S. and Taiwanese employees experience the language differences face-to-face when they attend trade shows with one another. Since many of the Taiwanese employees who communicate with the U.S. employees go to trade shows with the U.S. employees, they were asked how they feel about communicating with consumers, buyers, and their U.S. co-workers face-to-face. In this section what trade shows are, what type of communications occur at trade shows, and how the Taiwanese employees handle these communications will be discussed.

Trade shows are a place where frequent misunderstandings occur. During trade shows, the employees stay at a booth surrounded by their products. People buy tickets to go to these trade shows to check out the latest technology. Buyers also go to trade shows to pick out products for their stores. The employees have to interact with these different types of consumers and show them what their products can do. All of the Taiwanese employees who were interviewed participate in these trade shows.

At the trade shows, these employees must talk to consumers face-to-face. In these face-to-face conversations with native English speakers, two of the Taiwanese employees feel that they do not understand what people are telling them, and they do not think the people they are talking to understand them either. The other six employees feel that they do understand what people are telling them, and they believe that people understand them as well. Even if the Taiwanese employees do not understand what someone is asking them, they have comfort in the fact that they can continue the conversation by asking questions to obtain a better understanding of what the consumer wants to know about their product.

Consumers at the trade show may be willing to rephrase their question or use gestures or point to products to try and help the Taiwanese employees understand their question; however, if they do not understand what the Taiwanese employees are trying to tell them, they may not always express that and instead they may just walk away. Luckily, the company always has a few employees who are either first language English speakers, or who are fluent in English, at the trade shows. Whenever the Taiwanese employees feel that someone does not understand them, they ask an English speaking employee to help them out.

By having the assurance of an English speaking person being readily available, the Taiwanese employees get a chance to practice their English. They get to practice their English by talking about something they are very knowledgeable in, which they say makes them more comfortable when speaking in English. Having a strong knowledge of the subject gives the Taiwanese employees a sort of advantage over the native English speaking consumers. This is because the Taiwanese employees can at least feel confident in what they are trying to tell the native English speaking consumers. The Taiwanese employees also have the advantage of having the actual products set up for demonstration. This allows them to not only tell the consumer about the product, but to also show them how it works. One employee, Katie, described her feelings towards trade shows, “happy and maybe a little nervous, happy for that I have a chance to practice my English. Nervous, because I’m afraid I might not understand what they saying, if they speak too quick or use too much words I don’t know.” Her feelings were a bit mixed, but overall she seemed to appreciate the opportunity to practice her English language skills. She expressed nervousness about misunderstanding what people say to her and about the speed at which people speak to her in English.

## **Understanding**

The speed at which native English speaking people speak to second language English speaking people can affect understanding. When asked how well they feel they understand the U.S. employees, the Taiwanese employees had varying answers. Some of them felt they understood the U.S. employees very well, but others felt their understanding was hindered by the speed at which the U.S. employees spoke or the words they used. Several of the Taiwanese employees expressed that they had a difficult time understanding the U.S. employees because the U.S. employees spoke too fast. The reasoning behind why Taiwanese employees may feel this way is discussed in this section. The Taiwanese employees expressed that they need time to process what a native English person is saying. To do this, they suggested that it would be helpful for the native English speaking person to slow down his/her speech when talking to a second language English speaking person. A second language always sounds faster to the person learning it. The first language speaker of a language may be speaking at a normal rate of speed, but for a learner of that language, it will sound fast until the learner becomes more fluent.

One Taiwanese employee, Sally, said that “if they feel like I can speak and read English well, then they will start to use very spoken style English and sometime that makes me misunderstand something.” Sally is one of the employees whose English was easier to understand when interviewing. She knows she can speak quite well, but it takes her time to process what native English speakers are saying in order for her to understand them. Some of her answers took a few minutes to say in English, but when she did answer the interview questions it was easy to understand exactly what she wanted to say. She noted that often she thinks about the answer in her native language and then works on expressing her answer in English. During the time between when the question was asked and her answer, Sally was doing her own translations

in her head. Sally responded quicker when I asked short questions instead of long or two-part questions. Shorter questions left less for her to have to process at one time.

Not only does slower speech or shorten sentences help the Taiwanese employees understand the U.S. employees, but so does being able to speak with each other face-to-face. Several of the Taiwanese employees pointed out that oral communication with the U.S. employees would be easier if it was face-to-face, instead of over the phone. This is because body language, facial expressions, and hand gestures all lend a hand in helping the receiver understand the message being given. Being able to experience this kind of face-to-face interaction can be difficult in a company that works between countries. Besides trade shows, another way to incorporate face-to-face interactions is through the use of video conference calls. These video conference calls can be done between as little as two employees, which may actually be better for understanding purposes. Video conference calls allow employees the face-to-face experience without actually being face-to-face with one another. At TC the employees have been able to use video conferencing; however, because of the vast time zone differences, they often use the phone instead. The video conference may also be used if an understanding between employees cannot be had by using the phone. Video conferencing is often better for the employees than phone calls because video conferencing allows employees to use gestures, and they can actually show each other what they are talking about instead of just telling each other.

## **Conclusion**

The employees were able to give answers that pertained to the questions being asked. Even though some employees had difficulty understanding the questions, through rephrasing and shortening the questions the employees were usually able to figure out what was being asked. The employees' first languages were not all the same, but most were from a dialect of Chinese.

The employees all learned English in different places and how well they spoke and wrote in English varied. It was surprising to find that just because someone learned English in the U.S. did not mean they spoke or wrote better in English than someone who learned English in Taiwan. It was also interesting to learn how the Taiwanese employees viewed the cultural differences between themselves and the U.S. employees. The Taiwanese employees felt that they were more polite and felt that the U.S. employees were all about business and did not bother with pleasantries. These observations were made mostly in regards to e-mails. When asked about their preferred form of communication, the Taiwanese employees had different answers. Some preferred writing in English because they said it gave them more time to decide what they wanted to say. Others preferred speaking face-to-face because it allowed them to see body language and express through visuals what they wanted to say. Trade shows were discussed because it is a big part of their business, and it gives them a chance to communicate face-to-face with other English speakers. The Taiwanese employees mostly felt that they could effectively speak to people in English during a trade show because they had a lot of visuals they could use for demonstrating. They also felt more confident because native English speakers from the U.S. side of TC also attended the trade shows with them. The Taiwanese employees had some difficulties when it came to understanding what the U.S. employees were trying to tell them, but through multiple communications they expressed being able to figure out what was being said. These were the perceptions of how the Taiwanese employees felt about their ability to understand and be understood by the U.S. employees. Some of their feelings about understanding were shared by the U.S. employees, while others were not. To find out the perceptions of the U.S. employees and to gain a better understanding of how perceptions can be different depending

on perspective, the U.S. employees were also interviewed. Their interviews can be found in the following section.

## ***Chapter 3***

### ***U.S. Interviews***

The study was to determine how both the Taiwanese employees and the U.S. employees perceived themselves as well as each other. Since the U.S. employees were more accessible, their interviews were all done one-on-one and face-to-face. A total of six U.S. employees were interviewed. All six were first language English speakers with little to no knowledge of the Mandarin language. The interviews were all done in the office setting, and all of the employees interviewed were very relaxed and enthusiastic about having the chance to discuss the difficulties they face when working with their Taiwanese co-workers. The U.S. employees were asked questions that would explain their perceptions about how they viewed communications with their Taiwanese co-workers and how they felt their Taiwanese co-workers viewed them. The U.S. employees were asked about what types of communication difficulties they come across in their day-to-day communications with their Taiwanese co-workers. The U.S. employees stressed the difficulties they face when communicating through e-mail with their Taiwanese co-workers. They also gave examples of how they are trying to overcome these difficulties and work with the Taiwan office to better serve the needs of their consumers. These answers given by the U.S. employees are analyzed in order to explain how and why different strategies and communication efforts either work or not when communicating across cultures. One major issue between the two offices is whether or not they actually understand what the other is trying to say. The U.S. employees were asked if they feel they understand their Taiwanese co-workers and various answers were received. These answers were analyzed and a discussion of why the U.S. employees may or may not understand what the Taiwanese employees were trying to tell them

follows samples of their e-mail communications. Tactics used by the U.S. employees, in an effort to better understand the Taiwanese employees, are also analyzed. In contrast to the Taiwanese employees, the U.S. employees preferred face-to-face communications. A look at why the U.S. employees preferred face-to-face communications is discussed. Since the Taiwan side of the business has been in business much longer than the U.S. side, the Taiwanese employees had already written many business materials in English for the English speaking consumers. Once the U.S. side of the business was officially opened, it was up to the U.S. employees to rewrite all of the English business materials. The difficulties with rewriting these materials and an analysis of the materials is given to show the difficulties faced when having to rewrite and interpret the meaning of English text written by a second language English speaker. The various communications and the difficulties faced by the U.S. office when communicating with the Taiwan office are discussed and analyzed throughout this section.

### **Communication Difficulties**

The U.S. employees communicate with the Taiwanese employees through phone calls, video conferencing, e-mails, and face-to-face communications. Their primary form of communication is e-mail; this is due to the time zone differences between the two offices. The U.S. employees come across many difficulties when trying to understand their Taiwanese co-workers. They use several strategies to try and make understanding easier. The U.S. employees were asked about how they handle the difficulties in understanding and their answers were discussed and analyzed. Samples of e-mails and written communications were also analyzed to gain a better understanding of what makes communication between the U.S. and Taiwan office difficult. The first question the U.S. employees were asked was, “what difficulties do you come across when communicating with your first language Mandarin speaking co-workers?” All six

employees said that actually being able to communicate with their Mandarin speaking co-workers is the biggest difficulty. Two of the U.S. employees, Christy and James, said that the communication is difficult because the Taiwanese employees often use Google translation to create the e-mails they send to the U.S. office. The problem with understanding the translated text is that it translates the text word-for-word. Languages cannot usually be translated word-for-word and continue to carry the same meaning. Usually the Taiwanese employees who have difficulty writing in English compose their e-mails in Chinese characters and then use the translator to change it into English. Below is an example of a Taiwanese employee using the translation tool to translate an e-mail.

*Dear Kevin:*

*Attachment is Update Tool*

*Please update try to solve his problem*

*Please try product application In the firewall or antivirus software Is setup to agree to run this product application*

*By the way*

*Can you tell me He complained that the website address ?*

*I will pay you back ^^*

*I just want to know what he was complaining*

*Thanks very much for your hard work !*

***Best Regards,***

*Justin*

The direct translation makes this e-mail difficult to decipher, but after reading this e-mail several times the receiver was able to decipher, for the most part, what the sender meant. This e-mail was sent between a Taiwanese employee who finds solutions to customer questions and the customer service representative in the U.S. who was in contact with the customer who had a question. The e-mails are sent from the Taiwan office to the U.S. office instead of being sent

directly to the customer because of the problem with being able to understand what the Taiwan office is trying to say. The U.S. employees figure out the context of the e-mails and then pass them on to the customer either through a phone conversation or through e-mail.

Sometimes the U.S. employees cannot figure out the meaning of the e-mails from Taiwan. Kevin, a U.S. employee, said that “It is hard to make sure things are clear when receiving e-mails and it is hard to tell exactly what they (the Taiwanese employees) are talking about.” Below is an example of an e-mail that went back and forth between Kevin at the U.S. office and Justin at the Taiwan office.

*Dear Kevin :*

*Please make sure the customer have install ABC driver and DEF! Software ?*

*Justin,*

*I do not understand this email. Do you want him to install the software that you list. He tells me that he cannot find this software anywhere on his computer and I'm not sure how to access the "X" drive, if that is where it is.*

*Thanks,*

*Kevin*

*Dear Kevin :*

*Sorry*

*I mean is Please confirm the customer Is installed ABCdriver and DEF! Business Edition V7.22 Final software?*

*The two software Will cause the system to crash*

*If he had installed Please the Customer update ABCdriver and Sonic DEF! Business Edition New version*

*New version (ABCdriver and DEF! Business Edition) will not cause a system crash*

*If you can not solve Please update product FW*

*Attached is product update tools*

*Thank you*

The second e-mail from Justin was enough for Kevin, after reading it a couple of times, to understand what Justin wanted him to do. When communication between the U.S. and Taiwanese employees takes several e-mails, it causes the customer to have to wait for a response to their question. This particular e-mail exchange took three days to complete. The customer service representatives, Kevin, Jeff, and Lee, all said that this type of delay is a problem because it slows down their customer service responses.

Another communication issue that the customer service employees noticed was that they receive answers, but not necessarily ones that answer their questions. Kevin said, “Taiwan sends answers that don’t necessarily match up with the inquiry. When questioned again, we still receive the same response.” Kevin also said that when he asks the question again he rewords the question to try and help the Taiwan office understand what he is trying to say. When the Taiwanese employees are unable to answer the question with an answer that pertains to the question asked, it shows that they are having trouble understanding the U.S. employee’s question. The U.S. employees reword the questions because they know that the Taiwan office uses the translation tool to try and figure out what the U.S. employees are asking. It is the hope of the U.S. employees that if they reword their questions, then maybe the translation tool will translate it in a way that the Taiwan employee will be able to understand. For the Taiwanese employees who do not understand much English, it helps them to at least figure out what the U.S. employees are trying to say. Most of the time, the Taiwanese employees are able to get the gist of what the U.S. employees are inquiring about, by using the translator tool; but, when questions have to be asked multiple times, and the incorrect answers are still given, then the U.S.

employees conclude that the translation tool is not helping. The U.S. employees expressed their frustration over this type of situation, but did not blame the Taiwanese employees.

To help alleviate some of these situations, the U.S. employees have been testing and using the products themselves. By testing and using the products, the U.S. employees learn the dynamics of the product and are able to troubleshoot customer's products and answer customer's questions from firsthand knowledge. Having firsthand knowledge allows the U.S. employees to answer many questions without the need to ask the Taiwanese employees first; however, since the research and development team are in Taiwan, there will continue to be questions and issues with products that must be addressed by the Taiwanese employees.

When asking the Taiwanese employees a question, Bob, from the U.S. office, felt that the Taiwan office did not read all of his e-mail. Bob said he felt this way because, "They don't answer my questions or they only answer some questions." Since there is such a big language barrier, it is difficult to tell if the Taiwanese employees just don't read all of their e-mail or if they simply do not understand everything that is being asked. If, after several e-mails have been sent back and forth, the U.S. employees do not get an answer that makes sense to them, then they have to have a conference call with the only person in the U.S. office who is fluent in both Mandarin and English. Having to have a conference call means that there is a long delay between a customer asking a question and receiving an answer.

Asking questions can be confusing for both sides. Jeff noted that, "Justin said, in a phone conference, that he had two questions, but he never asked a question. Instead, he gave two statements about products that were coming up." Jeff was left wondering if Justin forgot to ask him the question or if Justin just had two things to tell him. This confusion Jeff felt was due to cross-culture miscommunication. Adler explains what cross-culture communication is,

Cross-cultural communication occurs when a person from one culture sends a message to a person from another culture. Cross-cultural miscommunication occurs when the person from the second culture does not receive the sender's intended message. The greater differences between the sender's and the receiver's cultures, the greater the chance for cross-cultural miscommunication" (2).

From what the U.S. employees have said, cross-cultural miscommunication occurs quite frequently between the U.S. and Taiwanese employees. James expressed that he becomes frustrated with receiving answers that have nothing to do with the questions he asked. He feels that they, "...don't usually understand, but act like they do and produce something unrelated and it is a waste of time." James is unsure if the Taiwanese employees really do think that they understand him and therefore try to answer in the best way they can, or if they feel awkward having to ask him several times what he means and so they simply come up with an answer in hopes that it pertains to James' question. This type of situation is a clear example of cultural miscommunication because neither side really understands the other. When neither side is able to understand the other, Adler points out that, "Perhaps the most difficult skill in cross-cultural communication involves standing back from yourself, or being aware that you do not know everything, that a situation may not make sense, that your guesses may be wrong, and that ambiguity in the situation may continue" (14). Both the Taiwanese employees and the U.S. employees experience ambiguity when communicating with each other. They also both realized that they do not always understand what the other is trying to say, especially when sending e-mails.

Cultural miscommunication occurs in e-mails quite often. One type of miscommunication with e-mail results from a lack of tone and inflection, which leaves the receiver to assume the tone and inflection on their own. Christy, from the U.S. office, says, "People seemed angry in their e-mails, but it is because of their short wording – e-mail doesn't allow for tone." Christy

felt that the people who sent the e-mails from Taiwan were upset or mad when they e-mailed her with responses; however, she now thinks that most, if not all of the time they are not angry, but it is their limited English that causes them to use short sentences. Justin often sends short numbered sentences to the U.S. employees, such as the one below.

*Please make sure :*

- 1. Give the customer update tool Try to solve the problem*
- 2. Use another usb port connection is working ?*

*Thank you*

Since this e-mail has the words “please” and “thank you” in it the U.S. employees assumed that his tone was informative and not angry. Without the pleasantries words, the two numbered sentences could be taken a variety of ways depending on the tone the receiver assumes. The lack of tone in an e-mail makes it feel very impersonal and leaves the tone and inflection in a message ambiguous. There are however, words that can help set the tone so that the receiving end has a better perception of how to interpret what he/she is reading. Adding pleasantries and being aware of capitalization, using bold letters, red letters, and punctuation can all help in keeping the tone pleasant. Several of the Taiwanese employees try to keep the tone of their e-mails pleasant by adding emoticons; however, while the Taiwanese employees view this as being polite, the U.S. employees think it is unprofessional and should not be used in workplace e-mails. The U.S. employees are not as formal with the Taiwanese employees as they are with outside business communications. The Taiwanese employees, on the other hand, use the emoticons with both internal and external business communications. This is a cultural difference and each side has their own preference.

Emoticons are not the only cultural difference when it comes to miscommunication. Kevin said that sometimes the Taiwanese employees “want things to be done the Taiwan way, but in an American market” and that they are “not flexible when it comes to changing things.” Kevin expressed the need to have direct communications with the research and development department so he could ask them questions directly, but Justin wants the questions to come to him first and then he sends them on if he does not know the answer. Justin sent Kevin this e-mail when he did not know the answer to Kevin’s question,

*Dear Kevin :*

*I have transferred to the R & D department to identify problems  
Please wait some time to have the answer, I will reply to you quickly*

***Best Regards,***

*Justin*

What Justin does not seem to understand is that it is not good for business to have a customer waiting several days or more for a reply to their inquiry. Kevin also says that once the research and development department have the information he never receives updates on the progress of finding an answer for his inquiry. Eventually, Kevin receives an answer from Justin, but it comes several days to a couple of weeks later. Kevin is the one who speaks with the customers and understands that they are upset when they do not receive an immediate answer. If Kevin were to be updated on the progress of the research and development team about his inquiry, then he could keep the customer up-to-date as well. Kevin feels like Justin does not understand the importance of giving the customer an immediate answer to their question. This situation is the result of cultural differences and not understanding one another’s point of view. These types of

cultural misunderstandings will continue to occur unless both offices learn about each other's cultural aspects.

### **Rewriting**

The Taiwan office has been communicating cross-culturally since before the opening of the U.S. office. The Taiwan office wrote quite a few documents in English in order to satisfy the needs of its customers. Since the U.S. office opened, several of the U.S. employees have been going over the various documents written in English by the Taiwanese employees. All of these documents had to be rewritten. The different types of documents include installation manuals, user manuals, website content, product box content, fliers, and several others. Because of the vast amount of documents, all of the U.S. employees have had the chance to work on these various documents. Some of the repeated errors that the U.S. employees came across when working on these documents were the misuse of tenses, plurals, and lack of articles. Below is an example of the misuse of tenses, plurals, and lack of articles.

*TC today announced that it has been named a trade show BEST CHOIC Awards Honoree for product... we sincerely invite you exploring our most recent the latest innovation product & winning product showcase.*

This example was taken from a brochure announcing the award one of their products won at a trade show. The lack of articles and misuse of articles can be seen in these two sections of the brochure. The capitalization and misspelling of "BEST CHOIC" shows that the Taiwan employee wanted to emphasize the type of award given, but did so in a way that looks odd to native English speakers. Luckily, the Taiwanese employees knew that their English use in this document needed to be looked over by a native English speaker and had one of the U.S. employees rewrite it so that it would look more professional. James noted that "it takes more time to edit these documents than it does to simply rewrite the whole thing." Many of these

documents have so many grammatical errors in them that it takes less time to figure out what is supposed to be said in them and write up a new document, than it does to try and fix what is already written.

The website is another type of document that had to be revised. The U.S. employees felt that the website was not at all user-friendly and were embarrassed by the grammatical errors. They thought it looked very unprofessional since it was being accessed by buyers and consumers whose first language is English. Kevin wanted to change the website, but noted that at first the Taiwan office “did not want to relinquish control of the website and insisted on using their English.” However, after Kevin produced several unfavorable comments from buyers and consumers, the Taiwan office realized that changes needed to be made. The first approach to changing the website was to have the U.S. employees tell them what needed to be changed; however, this did not work like it was supposed to. The first correction submission Kevin made showed up on the website the next business day and this is what it said:

*You'll be able to extend your desktop across multiple displays or select a mode to clone one screen onto another. Stop there and do not add the rest to the same sentence. If it is added it will be a run-on, thus confusing. The video playback will perform...*

The problem with this is that the Taiwanese employees obviously did not understand what Kevin was trying to tell them and instead, inserted exactly what Kevin e-mailed directly onto the webpage. The U.S. employees soon figured out that they could take a screen shot of the web page they wanted corrected and type out the whole page exactly as it should appear on the website, and then the Taiwanese employees would simply copy and paste the webpage onto the website. This process was not perfect and it took a considerable amount of time for the website to be changed. Finally, after about a year, the Taiwan office released the U.S. website to the U.S. office and allowed them to create their own website. This allowed the U.S. office much more

flexibility with the website, and they were able to tailor it to the needs of their buyers and consumers.

The resistance to give up control of the website was a cultural one. They believed that since they were the main office and in charge, then they were responsible for taking control of the website. After having the chance to work with the U.S. culture, the Taiwanese employees eventually realized that it was not about the U.S. office wanting to take control over the website, but more about making the company look better to U.S. buyers and consumers. After having the U.S. office revise the English content on the website, both offices were happy with the results and the comments about the website turned positive.

Not only did the U.S. employees have to rewrite the website, but they also had to fix question and answer guides that were to be added to the website for customer reference. Upon reading the original question and answer guides, the U.S. employees realized they could not understand some of the questions or their answers. An example out of one of the questions from the question and answer guide is below.

***Q11 : Can I installed other brand USB display adapter to extend more monitor via the USB Port of TC product name?***

*A11 : if you need to extend more monitors through the USB port of TC product name, please choose TC USB Display adapter series not other brand USB Display adapter to avoid unknown & compatible issue , you don't need to install the driver again and TC USB Display adapter series will be compatible with all TC products for sure.*

Incorrect tense is used in the question where it says “installed” it should say “install,” but because of all of the grammatical issues, the entire question had to be reworded. The answer section has an inconsistent use of capitalization and spacing. Christy noticed that the documents often contain “incorrect terminology.” A good example of incorrect terminology can be seen at the end of the answer section where it says, “for sure.” This term should have been left off

completely, as it was not needed. It is also inappropriate terminology for a business document. The U.S. employees fix these types of errors every time a new document is created by the Taiwan office.

The U.S. and Taiwanese employees communicate with each other in many different ways. When asked what would make communication easier, the U.S. employees had a few suggestions. Kevin suggested that it would be nice if the Taiwanese employees would give the U.S. employees more room to make decisions on their own. At the time, the U.S. employees had to ask the Taiwanese employees before they did anything. This causes many delays due to the method of communication being mainly e-mail. Kevin says, "It is aggravating when trying to do the best for the company, but time issues cause problems with the customers." The Taiwanese employees do not communicate directly with the customers in the U.S., so they do not feel any pressure to send an answer quickly. To help eliminate these time delays, Kevin also suggests that the "R and D (research and development) team come over and train the U.S. employees more extensively on products." By receiving training on the products, the customer service team will better understand what the customer is asking about when they call in for help with a product. The customer service team has also been testing the products on their own and would like the chance to share their findings with the research and development team in Taiwan.

Not only would being able to share their findings with each other help, but Kevin also suggest giving each other daily updates on their findings. By sending an e-mail each day with the latest updates, the U.S. employees may not have to wait a day to answer a customer question that the Taiwanese employees already know about. Kevin thinks that having a regular conference call, between whoever is working the later shift in the U.S. office and Justin, may also help to answer customer questions faster. Instead of a conference call over the phone, Christy suggests

using a video conference program so that they can communicate in more of a face-to-face environment. Christy would also like to have a translator on the video conference to clarify any possible misunderstandings. Not all of the U.S. employees feel that a translator would help. James thinks that when the only bilingual employee at the U.S. office is translating for him, the message is still unclear. James says when things are being translated for him, he receives “funny” looks from the Taiwanese employees, which leads him to believe that what he is saying may not have a direct translation and so the translator does the best they can, but the message received by the Taiwanese employees is altered from its original meaning.

Since only one person at the U.S. office is bilingual, it makes communication in Mandarin nearly impossible. None of the other U.S. employees speak any Mandarin at all; however, all but one of the U.S. employees suggested learning Mandarin and learning about the Chinese business culture would greatly help communication efforts between the U.S. and Taiwanese employees. The U.S. employees also suggested that it would be useful for the Taiwanese employees, who communicate with the U.S. employees, to learn about U.S. business culture and to work on their English speaking abilities.

Besides working on their language abilities, Jeff suggests that more immediate things can be done to improve communication between the two offices. He says, “using visuals, and being able to show each other what we are talking about will help us understand each other.” The visuals Jeff is talking about are using screen shots, pictures, or videos. Jeff says that videos are the best visual, and he has used them to reinforce his text when he e-mails Taiwan. He has received better responses by using videos to show the Taiwanese employees what he is talking about. Jeff likes to use the visuals because when he tells the Taiwanese employees about a problem he often receives the response, “It works fine here, why doesn’t it work there?” By

using the video he can show Taiwan exactly what he is talking about and is less likely to receive a contradictory response.

Since receiving a response is a sometimes a problem between the U.S. employees and the Taiwanese employees, it was suggested by Kevin that the U.S. employees have their own research and development department. If the U.S. employees had their own research and development department, then they could figure out the answers to the customer's questions on their own and not have to wait several days for an answer.

The last suggestion the U.S. employees had was to have a "U.S. representative in the Taiwan office." Kevin thinks that by having a U.S. representative in Taiwan the communication between the two offices would improve because then each office would have a native English speaker.

### **Face-To-Face**

An even quicker way to clarify what each other is saying is by speaking face-to-face. All of the U.S. employees thought that face-to-face communication was the best way to communicate with the Taiwanese employees. One of the Taiwanese employees, Sally, has visited the U.S. office several times. Her command of the English language is very strong and she is easy to understand. Bob likes speaking in person because, "it provides instant clarification and you can read the other person's body language, which helps you understand them." Seeing a person face-to-face when you communicate with them, allows for multiple communication tools to take place. As Kavar puts it, "Humans communicate through many means other than language such as facial expressions, gestures, body language, posture, etc." By being able to talk with the Taiwanese employees face-to-face, the U.S. employees feel they can understand them better and they have the chance to immediately ask questions if they do not understand.

Several of the U.S. employees also get the chance to speak with some of the Taiwanese employees face-to-face, when they attend trade shows for their products. At the trade shows, the U.S. employees say they like being able to show the Taiwanese employees what they are talking about. It also helps that the Taiwanese employees can show the U.S. employees what they are talking about as well. The employees from both offices take advantage of these meetings and show each other things about the product they may have had difficulty explaining over e-mail.

While speaking face-to-face helps to clarify things for both offices, the U.S. employees did notice a few things that they did not experience when communicating through e-mail. Jeff noticed that the Taiwanese employees “use pause words when speaking such as “um” and “ah.” When the Taiwanese employees are talking, they sometimes have to stop and think about what they want to say. Jeff notices that it “takes a while for them to say what they want, whereas when they type, they have time to change it.” Since it takes some of the Taiwanese employees a little extra time to say what they want, it may make them feel self-consciousness about speaking in person. They seem to feel pressured to hurry up and say what they want to say, but when they write an e-mail it takes the pressure away. Sally does not seem to feel the same pressure when speaking in English; perhaps this is due to her stronger command of the English language. James says that when he speaks to Sally face-to-face, “It is easier to read her reaction, which makes it easier to figure out if she understands what I am telling her.” This type of observation goes back to body language or facial expressions. When talking to someone in person, their facial expressions and body language can tell you a lot. They can tell you if the person you are talking to is nervous, if they understand, and if they seem confused. This type of nonverbal language can help out greatly when it comes to cross-cultural communication.

## Understanding

Trying to understand second language English speakers is not always easy. Understanding can be especially difficult when much of the communication is done through e-mail. To better understand the difficulties faced when trying to understand what the Taiwan office is trying to tell the U.S. office, samples of e-mails were analyzed and discussed. These e-mails lend insight into the techniques and strategies used by both the Taiwan and U.S. office in an effort to try and understand what the other is trying to say. A look at whether or not the U.S. employees understand what the Taiwanese employees are trying to tell them in their e-mails and if the U.S. employees feel they are being understood by the Taiwanese employees is looked at throughout this section as well. When asked if the U.S. employees understand what the Taiwanese employees are trying to tell them, I received one “yes” answer, two “sometimes” answers, and three “no” answers. Christy was one of the U.S. employees who said they do not understand what the Taiwanese employees are telling them. She said that the Taiwanese employees “do not know how to word things correctly” and that they “do not know how to use slang properly, but they try to use it anyway.” The Taiwanese employees may think they have an understanding of certain slang words, but unfortunately, the U.S. employees do not always understand what the Taiwanese employees are saying. Jackie, a Taiwan employee, wrote the following e-mail,

*Dear Jeff & Justin:*

*Well noted!!*

*Thanks for reporting and feedback.*

*Jeff~Please try your best to clear more issue and information case by case. We will try to help you out as soon as possible....*

*we need to get enough information in order to find out why ,how... especially in the program. We need to have more information and in order to limit down the problem...*

*best regards*

*Jackie*

The “Well noted!” expression in this e-mail sounds odd to the U.S. employees, but they understand that she means she understood the information they sent her. The part that says, “Please try your best to clear more issue and information case by case,” is confusing. Jeff perceived her to mean that she wanted him to solve any issues he found with the product and to give her information about the issues he found; however, he was unsure if his interpretation was correct or not. Jeff assumed when she wrote, “We need to have more information and in order to limit down the problem...,” that she meant she needed as much information as possible about the problem in order to reduce the effects of the problem or to reduce the amount of problems. The way Jackie wrote the e-mail left the receiver with several possible interpretations.

Other e-mail issues that Lee, a U.S. employee, noticed were that the Taiwanese employees do not use “plurals, conjugation, or contractions” correctly, if at all. Several of the U.S. employees also noticed that the grammar in general was incorrect and that there were usually words missing. In some instances, the missing words were easy to figure out, but in others it was hard for the U.S. employees to decipher the meaning. An example of the grammatical errors that are present in the e-mails sent from the Taiwanese employees is below.

*Dear Kevin :*

*This is the same problem*

*In fact, this issue is not a bug. the structures are different from the keyboard of notebook & the universal keyboards . You can see the position of notebook key setting is different from the universal keyboard. Especial number keys on the side of main keyboard, And also some functional keyboard can let user set the key function . For not making the key missing typing for universal keyboard & particular keyboard of notebook , we have set the default to the number lock to universal keyboard when the cursor switch to other computer, it will be off, and user will need to manually turn in on. we can suggest the customer to use on the top number of keyboard to type first at the beginning. Because it is universal function for keyboard.*

*However we heard the customer needed for this , we will need a time to figure out and create a other solution that might make it more friendly use for the future. We will update to you all soon.*

*Thank you very much*

***Best Regards,***

*Justin*

This e-mail is full of grammatical errors, which makes it hard to understand. The first sentence is missing the period, and several places throughout the e-mail are missing articles. The spacing between words and punctuation are arbitrary and inconsistent. The syntax in these sentences is unusual and makes it challenging for native English speakers to interpret. Capitalization is not always used where it should be and the use of bold letters seems odd. All of these errors combined make deciphering the meaning of this e-mail very difficult. As it was, it took Kevin reading this e-mail several times before he understood what Justin was trying to tell him.

Lee also mentioned that it takes reading an e-mail several times before he can understand it. Another problem, according to Lee, with understanding e-mails was that they “use English words, but they don’t make sense.” The reason some of the English words used by the Taiwanese employees do not make sense is because they either use the wrong word or they use the word too many times, making the message very confusing for the receiver. Below is an example of words being used too many times.

*Dear Kevin :*

*There is another solution*

*When the screen mode, Another screen resolution screen resolution to keep the same host  
Resolution can not be greater than the host*

*Please try to adjust to the same resolution*

*Thank you*

This e-mail uses “screen resolution” back-to-back and the word “resolution” several times. Using words multiple times, especially in the case of the “screen resolution” term, may be due to the use of the translator. When reading e-mails like this one, the U.S. employees said that it is easier to read one line at a time to try and figure out what it means; otherwise, if read altogether it can be confusing and overwhelming.

Reading one sentence at a time is usually easy for the U.S. employees because the Taiwanese employees typically write their e-mails so that each sentence has its own line. They rarely write their e-mails in paragraph form. In fact, the U.S. employees often write their e-mails as either individual or numbered sentences because they found that they are more likely to get answers for all of their inquiries that way. Writing to the Taiwanese employees in paragraph form seemed to overwhelm them and they would not address all of U.S. employees’ questions. The U.S. employees felt that the Taiwanese employees may not even be reading everything when it is sent in paragraph form. Jeff said that if he “writes long e-mails, and they are not broken down by separate sentences, he (Justin) does not understand or won’t read it.” The U.S. employees assumed that it must be too much for the Taiwanese employees to understand.

All but one of the U.S. employees that were interviewed felt that the Taiwanese employees did not usually understand what they were trying to tell them. The U.S. employees said that they almost always have to ask their questions more than once in order to receive an answer that goes with the question asked. Jeff noted that when he sends an e-mail to Justin, Justin will sometimes respond back in an effort to try and clarify Jeff’s meaning. Jeff said he much prefers to have the Taiwanese employees ask him to clarify, than just never reply. When Justin tries to clarify the meaning of the U.S. employees’ e-mails he does so in the following way,

*The Customer say : " When I tried the online update on the Mac, it gave and error -- No Data"*

*Please send update file to him*

*I do not understand what is meant "bad Mac" ? meant is connect PC to Mac is ok?  
Mac to Mac is Not ok ?*

When Justin does not understand something he uses a lot of question marks, mostly incorrectly. However, the U.S. employees said they understand that wherever there is a question mark, it means that is something the Taiwanese employee is unsure of and needs further clarification for them to understand. Even though the question marks are inappropriate, as far as correct grammar is concerned, they are effective in letting the U.S. office know what the Taiwanese employees are unsure of. The problem with having to clarify e-mails is that it takes time to receive a response and just as much time to send a response back. One question usually takes at least one business day to answer; however, if there is a misunderstanding on either side it takes even longer to receive an answer. This is problematic because something that would take another business a couple of hours to clarify and complete takes this company several days.

On the other hand, one of the U.S. employees feels that the Taiwanese employees she usually e-mails do understand what she is telling them. The Taiwanese employees have different levels of English proficiency and so Christy may communicate more with those who are more proficient in the English language. Christy says this of the Taiwanese employees' ability to understand her, "most of them speak English, but we (the U.S. employees) don't speak Mandarin." Christy thinks that the Taiwanese employees she communicates with understand her, but Christy does not always understand their replies. Christy also writes her e-mails to the Taiwanese employees in separated sentences to try and make her communications easier for them to understand. Christy's communications with Taiwan usually only take two business days

to complete, one to send the inquiry and one to receive a reply. This is due to the international nature of the company. The Taiwanese employees work during their business hours and the U.S. employees work during their own business hours. This means that while one side is working, the other is sleeping. If there is a major problem or concern, one side will work late in order to directly contact the other, either by phone or by using a video conferencing tool.

Using the phone or video conference allows the employees to hear and/or hear and see one another. The U.S. employees prefer this more direct form of communication because it allows them to hear the tone and inflections of the Taiwanese employees' speech. The U.S. employees say that being able to hear tone and inflection helps them to better understand what the Taiwanese employees are telling them. The U.S. employees also feel that the Taiwanese employees understand them better when speaking over the phone or on the video conference. Jeff indicated that Justin will sometimes call him when Justin does not understand what Jeff is asking him in an e-mail. Jeff prefers this form of communication because he is able to receive more immediate answers for his customers. Justin on the other hand, has told Jeff that he prefers to use e-mail. Justin is not comfortable speaking in English with Jeff. Justin feels self-consciousness and worries about his English speaking abilities. Jeff thinks Justin does fine and speaking over the phone allows them to instantly clarify what they are saying to each other. The problem with calling between the offices is that it will be late at night for one side or early in the morning for the other side. Sometimes when they call to clarify with each other, they still have to work with the product to figure out an answer for the inquiry. This means that even though the employees can speak with each other, they still cannot receive an answer until the next business day; however, it still cuts down on the amount of e-mails, sent over several days, in order to clarify meaning before they can even begin to research an answer. Lee said that even when speaking on

the phone he has to repeat what he says multiple times and that each time the Taiwanese employees gather a little more understanding of what he is trying to say. Lee is not sure whether it is really easier to understand each other better over the phone or not, but he does like that it provides a more immediate way to clarify and figure out what each other is saying.

### **Working Together**

Both the U.S. office and the Taiwan office recognized that there are cultural communication issues between the offices. Both sides also communicated primarily through e-mail. Some of the employees feel they understand each other, while others do not. The e-mails they write to each other are in different formats. The Taiwanese employees like to add several pleasantries because they feel they are being polite. The U.S. employees view these pleasantries as excessive and inappropriate for business e-mail. The U.S. employees started out sending their e-mails as formal business e-mails, written in paragraph form. This, however, changed after the U.S. employees realized that the Taiwanese employees, either were not reading the whole e-mail or were too overwhelmed by so much information, that they did not respond to all of the inquiries within the e-mail. After this discovery, the U.S. employees began writing their e-mails in single sentence form, often numbering each line. The Taiwanese employees see the U.S. employees' e-mail style as unfriendly and very serious. If both sides had a better understanding of each others' culture, then they would realize the cultural differences between their e-mails.

When asked about their preferred form of communication, the majority of the Taiwanese employees preferred using e-mail. The Taiwanese employees preferred this form of communication because of the detachment it allowed them from the receiver. Most of the Taiwanese employees were not overly confident speaking in English and were more comfortable using writing. Writing e-mails gives the Taiwanese employees the time to think about what they

want to say prior to saying it. On the other hand, the U.S. employees preferred to communicate face-to-face with the Taiwanese employees. The U.S. employees liked the immediate response from speaking face-to-face. They also liked having the added communication tools such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. These additional communications tools help the U.S. employees understand the Taiwanese employees better.

Overall, the Taiwanese and U.S. employees seem to be learning how to work with one another in a way that allows them to understand each other better. The Taiwanese employees have learned to call the U.S. employees if they cannot decipher their e-mail. The U.S. employees have learned to number and write their sentences separately, in order to help the Taiwanese employees understand what they are asking.

On top of trying to work with each other, the U.S. employees also gave several suggestions to help make understanding easier for both sides. They suggested having both offices learn about each others' cultures and language. In the U.S. office some of the employees were so enthusiastic about learning Mandarin that they purchased language software to get them started. One of the employees at the U.S. office also bought all them a Mandarin language book to help them get started.

The Taiwanese employees also expressed the desire to learn about the U.S. culture. They were also interested in expanding their knowledge of the English language. With both sides willing to learn about the other it is clear that they understand there are cultural differences between them.

If given the right tools, these employees, both in the U.S. and in Taiwan, can learn about each other's culture and language. If both sides could speak some of the others' language, then

their communication abilities would be greatly expanded. Keeping communication open and working on expanding it is very important when it comes to working in a second language.

Expanding communication within each office is also important. It is up to the managers and leaders within the offices to provide an environment which allows its employees to feel free to give suggestions, especially when it comes to communication with an office in another culture. The best people to ask about how to make improvements in the area of communication, between offices in different cultures, are the employees who actually communicate across cultures in the workplace. These employees are the ones who actually experience the difficulties and have the ability to test cross-cultural communication ideas.

Cross-cultural communication is difficult for all cultures involved. Written communication seems to be the most difficult for employees to understand; however, it is also the form of communication in which those who are working in a second language prefer. Cross-cultural communication is something that seems to be becoming more wide spread as companies expand internationally. Learning how to work with employees and understanding their perceptions, of what makes communication with other cultures easier for them, will help companies obtain a better grasp of the tools they need to provide to their employees.

### ***Conclusion***

Many companies today are global companies that depend on international communications. Working internationally means that companies have to have all of their materials written in more than one language. Product boxes, manuals, quick installation guides, websites, flyers, advertisements, announcements, and many other things all require being translated, reworded, or rewritten in order for consumers of different languages to be able to understand them. For TC this means working together to make sure both sides agree on how each piece of material is written. This can be difficult because the Taiwanese employees may not fully understand why the U.S. employees may want to reword something. Understanding plays a big role in communications between the Taiwanese employees and the U.S. employees.

In the interviews with the Taiwanese employees, they expressed that they felt they understood what the U.S. employees were telling them. On the other hand, the U.S. employees felt that the Taiwanese employees were not fully reading their e-mails and were only answering some of the questions. To try and encourage the Taiwanese employees to answer their e-mails the U.S. employees began writing short numbered sentences, in order to try and help the Taiwanese employees focus on what was being asked. The U.S. employees felt that this was the best approach because they received answers to all of their questions when they used this tactic.

Another difference in the perceptions between the Taiwanese employees and the U.S. employees was how they viewed each other culturally. The Taiwanese employees felt that the U.S. employees were more direct in their e-mails and that they themselves were more polite. The U.S. employees, however, felt that the Taiwanese employees used too many pleasantries and

were not very professional. Both sides did attribute the differences to culture and felt that it was probably a difference in their cultures that affected the way they compose an e-mail. Through the analysis and discussion of e-mails sent back and forth between the Taiwan office and the U.S. office, it is clear to see how miscommunication and confusion can occur between the two languages. The e-mails showed that the Taiwanese employees use several pleasantries within their e-mails in an effort to be as polite as possible when requesting action from the U.S. employees. The Taiwanese employees also use short single line sentences to try and break up their information. This tactic can sometimes be confusing to the U.S. employees since words may be missing or misused. In turn, the U.S. employees' e-mails showed that they tried to mimic the Taiwanese employees' style of e-mailing in an effort to help the Taiwanese employees understand them better.

Overall, the Taiwanese employees expressed that they prefer using written communication because it allows them a detachment from the receiver of the information and gives them more time to think through what they want to say. The U.S. employees had the opposite preference and instead, preferred to use oral communication with the Taiwanese employees because it allowed them instant clarification if they did not understand something. These interviews brought to light the perceptions of the employees towards themselves and one another. The U.S. employees, when speaking face-to-face with the Taiwanese employees, were not impatient with them and felt that the ability to see facial expressions and body language, as well as using demonstrations, greatly assisted in them being able to understand their Taiwanese co-workers. The Taiwanese employees, however, felt that they needed to answer quickly and felt as though it was too much pressure to speak to the U.S. employees face-to-face.

Through the interviews, it was also found out that the Taiwan office relies heavily on the Google translation tool to read their e-mails. This translation tool may also affect how well the Taiwan employee understands what the U.S. employee is trying to tell them. Now that the U.S. employees have learned to use shorter separate sentences, the translation tool may be able to assist the Taiwanese employees better since there are fewer words to translate. The problem with the translation tool is that languages are rarely able to be directly translated and since the translation tool does just that, it can change the meaning of the message.

Both offices realized that it takes several communications back and forth in order for both sides to understand one another. It is important to know what the employees feel about the communication difficulties since they are the ones experiencing them first hand. When asked about what could be done to improve communications both sides were interested in finding out more about each other's cultures and most of them were interested in learning each other's language. After analyzing the interviews it was clear that the employees are all well aware that there are cultural differences between them and they accept that many of the frustrations they have with communication issues have a lot to do with the culture. The employees were quite interested in finding ways to help reduce misunderstandings and frustrations in communications between the two offices. In fact, both sides felt that it was important for themselves to learn the language and culture of their co-workers and that it was up to them to try and find ways to make communications easier.

From these interviews, I would suggest that employers of international businesses have material written in the employee's first language that gives them information on cultural and business practices of the people they will be working with. This will help them understand why certain cultures do things the way they do. It would also be helpful if there are only a couple of

languages, like in the case of the TC company, if the offices could have language classes available for their employees. The better the employees can speak each other's languages, the better the communication between the employees will become.

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