

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology of the study. The description begins with the rationale for the sample size proportion and the research instrument. Due to the confidential nature of internal business e-mail messages within organizations, access to the data necessary for the analysis is problematic. However, the author of this study has been fortunate enough to obtain access to such data, thus the data can provide a description of a genre to which access is normally denied to those outside the participating discourse community. The data were collected on linguistic and ethnographic perspectives. The main source of data was from English business e-mail messages and another was from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the e-mail composers. The analysis is displayed both in quantitative and qualitative patterns. The cultural predominance is evidenced by the test of significant differences across cultures and organizations. The e-mail composers' verification of the findings opened up possibilities for comments on the researcher's interpretation and analysis. The confirmation of the findings from all parties validated the present analysis.

3.2 Samples

A sample of 327 authentic business e-mail messages written by Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations was used in this study. This sample size was tested using the statistic equations for computing the sample size and maximum tolerable error for proportion. In this case, the population proportion is not known or can not be estimated, it is thus assumed to be 0.5. This is a conservative approach since using 0.5 results in the largest sample size possible. At the 95% confidence level, the sample percentage of successful determination, based on the sample size of 327, is within approximately 5 percent of true population percentage.

These e-mail messages were written and exchanged by Thais and Germans within profit and non-profit organizations (internal communication) from the last quarter of 2003 to the third quarter of 2006.

Table 3.1 Sample size in each category

E-mail messages	Profit Organizations	Non-Profit Organizations	Total
Thais	84	81	165
Germans	82	80	162
Total	166	161	327

By mutual consent from the e-mail composers, 166 e-mail messages from profit organization and 161 messages from non-profit organization were given for the analysis. Of all e-mail messages, 165 e-mail messages were written by Thais and the other 162 messages by Germans. The corpus of 327 e-mail messages contains approximately 80 words per e-mail. The communicative purposes of the e-mail messages are to provide information for decision processes and to make requests.

3.3 Discourse Community

The samples were obtained from 71 e-mail composers consisting of 28 Thais and 43 Germans. Of all informants, 36 composers work for the profit organizations and 35 for the non-profit organizations. Four profit organizations and four non-profit organizations participated in this research. Businesses of these profit organizations are automobile, technical maintenance of transportation system and trading. Their informants are managers, secretaries, and merchandisers. The non-profit organizations are the organizations that provide technical collaboration, assist international applicants for patents, foster liberal democracy, and promote cultures and exports. The informants in these non-profit organizations are project director, project managers, project advisors, experts, consultants, secretaries, and coordinators.



3.4 Research Instrument

The research instrument of this study is Fisher's exact test. Fisher's exact test was used to detect significant differences between the e-mail messages written by Thais and Germans within profit and non-profit organizations. Fisher's exact test is computed by SPSS using a crosstabs option to detect group differences using frequency (count) data. The chi-square test of independence can also be used in such situations but it is only an approximation whereas Fisher's exact test returns exact one-tailed and two-tailed p -values for a given frequency table. Fisher's exact test is useful for highly imbalanced tables as found in this study that one or two of the cells in a two by two table have numbers in the hundreds and one or two of the other cells have numbers less than five and the two by two table does not result from missing rows or columns in a larger table (UCLA Academic Technology Services).

3.5 Data Collection

Research in business setting is challenging due to the problem of confidentiality (St. John, 1996; Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 2003; Gimenez, 2005). It was not easy to obtain authentic samples of business e-mail messages because most of companies prefer not to disclose them to outsiders. This means researchers' ability to access the data are limited to quantity and quality of the data. The letter requesting the cooperation in providing the authentic business e-mail messages (See Appendix A) was distributed to the organizations by hand, fax and e-mail. The e-mail messages were collected from profit and non-profit organizations on a voluntary basis upon the request. The data were not being collected anonymously because it might be needed to contact the e-mail donors for data clarification. All of the e-mail messages were first converted to computer text files. The names of the related persons and companies in the e-mail messages were removed to preserve confidentiality. The messages were numbered according to the organizations and nationalities of the e-mail composers.

Another source of data came in forms of questionnaire (See Appendix B) and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was designed so as to obtain the personal information of the e-mailers and their attitudes towards the management

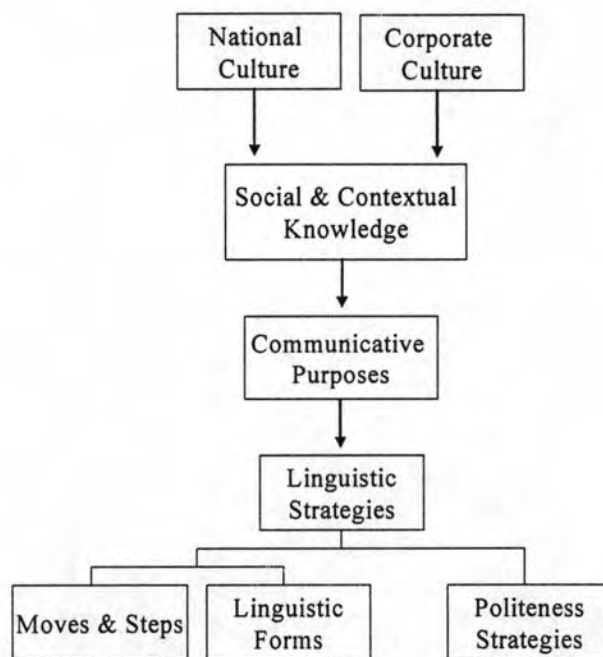
style in their organizations as well as to better understand the relationship of the e-mail composers. However, in writing up the results of the study, the names of the organizations and the writers were not revealed so as to preserve confidentiality. The interview was aimed at complementing and validating the textual analysis. The representatives from each participating organization were interviewed in group. The questions focused on the way they organized the messages, the factors influencing on their writings including the corporate cultures, and intercultural communication barriers.

3.6 Data Analysis

Swales's genre analysis triggers the interest in studying genre in other professional settings. Bhatia (1993) applied Swales's model of genre analysis originally developed for the study of academic texts to business letters. Therefore, the present analysis of business e-mail messages draws on Bhatia's framework of genre analysis, which is more relevant. It is also supported by Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness strategies.

To overcome the shortcomings of previous research in genre analysis, this study also paid attention particularly to the cultural factors. Culture here was examined in the traditional sense as referring to people from different countries, i.e. national cultures, and also in terms of the corporate cultures of the e-mail writers that may affect the rhetorical structure and the business language use. Hall's (1981) context of culture and Hofstede's (1984, 1997) study of national and corporate cultures are applied in discussing the results of move analysis. According to Hofstede, awareness is the first stage in dealing with intercultural issues, the second stage is knowledge of cultures and the last stage is skills to apply this knowledge to the communication situation. Consequently, this research brings out the framework illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Research Framework



Both national and corporate cultures play an important role in intercultural business communication. The social and contextual knowledge of business people are shaped by the combination of national and corporate cultures. One organizes this knowledge on the basis of one's experience of the world. In communication, business people apply this knowledge differently depending on their communicative purposes and use this knowledge to predict interpretation and relationship regarding new information, events and experience. Each purpose requires different linguistic strategies such as move structures and linguistic forms within the moves as well as politeness strategies.

The analysis of this study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Qualitative analysis of genre was performed on the e-mail messages according to Bhatia's framework (1993) of move analysis. According to Swales (1990), content and linguistic criteria are used to identify move boundaries. The absence of rules for determining move boundaries leads to questions of the reliability and validity of the analysis (Paltridge, 1994). To solve this problem, the author of this study asked the e-mail composers to clarify the uncertain content of the messages before determining

move boundaries. The comparison of the moves across cultures and organizations is displayed in quantitative patterns using a descriptive statistic analysis. The occurrence of the various moves in the corpus were counted and recorded in the tables of distribution using percentages (relative frequencies) calculated by dividing the actual frequency for each data class by the total number of observations being classified. The significant relationship between the move structures and the nationalities/organizations of the e-mail composers was tested with Fisher's exact test. Fisher's exact test is used when one wants to see if there is a relationship between two categorical variables, but one or more of the cells has an expected frequency of five or less. The data were entered into SPSS as three variables in the following manner:

Table 3.2: Fisher's exact test in SPSS

Move	Thais in Profit Organizations	Thais in Non-Profit Organizations	Total
Move 2 Establishing Correspondence Chain	48	33	81
No Move 2	36	48	84
Total	84	81	165

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.439(b)	1	.035		
Continuity Correction(a)	3.807	1	.051		
Likelihood Ratio	4.459	1	.035		
Fisher's Exact Test				.043	.025
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.412	1	.036		
N of Valid Cases	165				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 39.76.

Fisher's exact test provides exact one-tailed and two-tailed p -values for a given frequency table. Interpreting Fisher's p is straightforward. In the example above, p is .043. Since social scientists ordinarily consider .05 to be the cut-off for acceptability of significance levels, the distribution in the observed table leads to the conclusion that the difference in the occurrence of Move 2 in the messages written by Thais in profit and non-profit organizations is significant. In this study, the e-mail messages introduced seven moves. Therefore, the calculation was repeated in this

manner 21 times to find out the relationship between the moves and the organizations of the e-mail composers, the relationships between the occurrence of the moves and the different nationals in profit organizations, and the relationships between the moves and the different nationals in non-profit organizations. Another 21 calculations were conducted to discover the relationship between the occurrence of the moves and the nationalities of the e-mail composers, the relationships between Thais in the different types of organization and the existence of each move, and the relationships between Germans in the different types of organization and the presence of each move. Eventually, the *p*-values were complete in each blank cell of the below tables.

Table 3.3 Fisher's exact test relationship table

Move	Organizations		Profit Organizations		Non-Profit Organizations	
	Profit	Non-Profit	Thais	Germans	Thais	Germans
Move 1 Opening Salutation						
Move 2 Establishing Correspondence Chain						
Move 3 Introducing Purposes						
Move 4 Attaching Documents						
Move 5 Soliciting Response						
Move 6 Ending Positively						
Move 7 Closing Salutation						

Move	Nationalities		Thais		Germans	
	Thai	German	Profit	Non-Profit	Profit	Non-Profit
Move 1 Opening Salutation						
Move 2 Establishing Correspondence Chain				0.43		
Move 3 Introducing Purposes						
Move 4 Attaching Documents						
Move 5 Soliciting Response						
Move 6 Ending Positively						
Move 7 Closing Salutation						

Hall's (1981) context of culture and Hofstede's (1984, 1997) study of national and corporate cultures were applied for discussion on the influence of national and corporate cultures on the patterns of the moves, linguistic forms and the politeness strategies. The choice of politeness strategies, the degree of indirectness and the level of politeness depend on the power difference, social distance and cultural ranking between the speakers. Nevertheless, those factors are also bounded

by culture. As proposed in Chapter II, this present research combines the relevant factors in intercultural communication as shown in Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2: Factors in intercultural communication

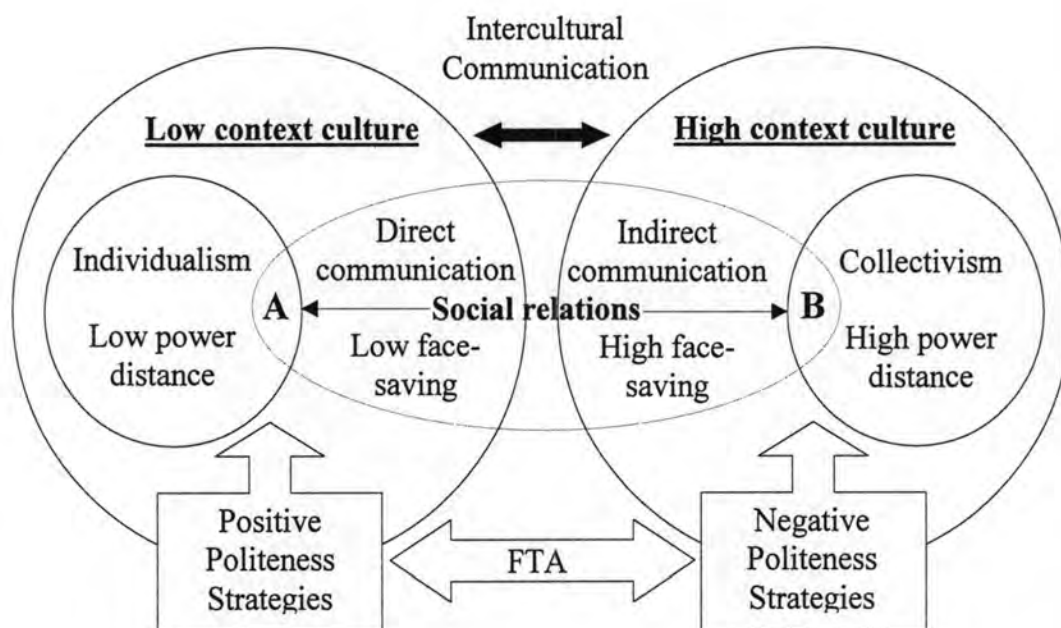


Figure 3.2 was used to support the discussion on the findings for the better understanding of the factors in intercultural communication. It illustrates intercultural communication between A and B. A is from a country which belongs to low context culture of communication such as Germany whereas B is from a country that belongs to high context culture such as Thailand. People in A's country think of themselves as an individual whose power distance is relatively low. On the contrary, B is from a collectivistic country where people are interdependent and their relationships are governed by the hierarchical system of power distance. In communication, A and B have to consider their social relations and be aware of their counterpart's culture. A's preference in direct communication may be considered to be impolite in B's culture. If A and B have to engage in a face-threatening act, A should apply negative politeness strategies to influence B to act in his/her interests by pointing out a number of options and providing enough information to enable him/her to take the desirable

decision by him/herself while B should employ positive politeness strategies to show that B and A are cooperators and share common interests.

In written communication, politeness strategies can be examined at the macro level through the structure of the message and at the micro level through the lexical choices. At the macro level, politeness strategies can be analyzed in accordance with the moves (Pilegaard, 1997). The move structure can convey the degree of directness and formality of the messages. As opposed to positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies are reflected in the indirectness of the messages resulting from the more distribution of moves. Each move in the sample e-mail messages threatens the reader's face differently depending on its function. The expressions of disapproval or disagreement threaten the reader's positive face while the actions that threaten the reader's negative face are, for example, suggestions, advice, and requests. Each mood type of the request indicates the different degree of imposition. People may minimize the degree of imposition of the request by avoiding the imperative mood and employing interrogative mood as well as softening mechanism like "please kindly". In doing so, the requester downplays his/her expectation while emphasizing the addressee's freedom of action. Thanks, acceptance of thanks, or offers threaten the writer's negative face in that he/she accepts a debt and humble their own face. Apologies and acceptance of compliments threaten the reader's positive face in that he/she may feel that such activities have to be played down or reciprocated in kind (Watt, 2003).

Politeness is an important linguistic strategy affecting language choice. At the micro level, the politeness strategies are combined within sentences. Positive politeness strategies are most evident in the statements which express interest, gratitude, and optimism. Negative politeness strategies could be realized through apologizing, going on record as incurring a debt, and being pessimistic. By being pessimistic, the addressee is shown that the requester does not intend to force the addressee to act in a particular manner, and thus the addressee has the freedom of action. Pessimistic statements can be recognized through modals that serve to qualify statements, i.e. "would", "can", "could", "may", "might", "shall", and "should" (Upton and Connor, 2001; Arvani, 2006).

Upon the completion of the analysis, the main findings were briefed to the representatives from each participating organization. Their verification of the findings opened up possibilities for comments on the researcher's interpretation and analysis. The confirmation of the findings from all parties validated the present analysis. In addition, this research also looked into the ethnographic dimension through a semi-structured interview for their attitudes towards intercultural business communication.

3.7 Stages of Research

The business e-mail messages were firstly framed within the linguistic analysis and finally within the context of national and corporate cultures. Within the frame of linguistic analysis, the e-mail messages were analyzed at two different levels. The first level was the e-mail format features. The second level included the rhetorical analysis of the move structures, namely the use of opening salutations, the address forms, the content of the messages, and the closing expressions. Apart from the textual analysis, the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the e-mailers were also conducted in order to better understand the corporate culture, management styles, and hierarchical relationship within the companies. These frames of contextualization reveal how national and corporate cultures could affect certain aspects of communicative practice.

All sample e-mail messages were analyzed step by step as follows:

Step 1 - Categorize the business e-mail messages according to the types of organization and the nationalities of the e-mail composers.

Step 2 - Identify the communicative purposes of the e-mail messages, status and relationship of the correspondents in each e-mail message, for example, boss and secretary.

Step 3 - Analyze and describe moves and steps of each message.

Step 4 - Compare and contrast the move structures by the types of the organization and the nationality of the writer.

Step 5 - Identify similarities and differences for determining areas of potential problems of business e-mail message exchange across the organizations and nationalities of the e-mail composers.

Step 6 - Discuss the influence of the national and corporate cultures on the patterns of the moves, the linguistic forms and the politeness strategies.

Step 7 - Verify the findings with the composers of the business e-mail messages. This process opens up possibilities for comments on the researcher's interpretation and analysis. The confirmation of the findings from all parties validated the present analysis.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

This corpus-based research has a number of limitations mainly because the data for the analysis were collected based on a voluntary basis which means the researcher of the study could not control the selection process of the e-mail messages. Due to business confidentiality, the messages may not be randomly sampled from the inbox. As a result, the researcher could not balance the quantity and quality of each data type.

3.9 Summary

Genre studies focus on the content analysis of a text type in a particular context. A sample of English business e-mail messages in internal communication between Thais and Germans was collected from profit and non-profit organizations with the consent from the e-mail composers. The corpus of this study is 327 e-mail messages. The sample proportion was tested using the statistic equations for computing the sample size and maximum tolerable errors for proportion. The research analysis is twofold. Linguistically, the rhetorical structure of the texts was identified in terms of moves drawn on Bhatia's (1993) framework of analysis. The comparison of each move is presented in quantitative patterns using the percentage. The significant differences of the moves across cultures and organizations were tested using the Fisher's exact test. Brown and Levinson (1987)'s politeness strategies were applied in discussing pragmatic aspects of language. Ethnographically, the

questionnaire and interviews with the e-mail composers were conducted in order to acquire the information regarding their corporate cultures. Hall's (1981) context of culture and Hofstede's (1984, 1997) study of national and corporate cultures were taken into account to support the findings. Finally, the reliability and validity of the analysis were confirmed by the e-mail composers as the specialist informants.