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Technical Communication in a Transnational World

CHAPTER LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Recognize and solve problems associated with writing for **transnational audiences**
- Account for **difference between transnational and transcultural** audiences
- Address the **roles of language** in transnational communication
- Understand the **roles of technology** in transnational communication
- Examine the roles of differences in **approaches to education** among transnational audiences
- Understand how differences in **politics and law** affect transnational communications
- Address **economic differences** in transnational communication
- Consider how **religious differences** affect transnational communication
- Avoid **stereotypes** in transnational communication
- Understand the **roles of translation** in transnational communication
- Understand reasons for and processes of **localization**

- Understand the goals of **internationalization**
- Understand the ramifications of **globalization**
- Develop strategies for **verbal communication** with transnational audiences
- Address **ethical issues** associated with transnational communication
- Establish **guidelines** for writing to transnational and transcultural audiences

DIGITAL RESOURCES

On the Companion Website www.prenhall.com/dobrin:

- Case 1: Translating Video Games to Foreign Markets
- Case 2: Big Owl's Goes Global: Internationalizing a Restaurant Chain
- Case 3: Learning about Chinese Business Culture
- Case 4: The Hawksbill Turtle Society: Securing International Protection for an Endangered Species
- Video Case: Collaboration and Writing a Request for Proposals
- PowerPoint Chapter Review, Test-Prep Quiz, Exercises and Activities

REAL PEOPLE, REAL WRITING

MEET HEEJONG HAAS • Transnational Business Consultant

How do you define transnational communication?

Transnational communication takes place between people and countries all around the world; it seeks to move beyond cultural and language barriers. Within the U.S. business community, a writer has one language with a common cultural and business background to communicate within. In transnational communication, that writer will be exposed to many different cultural aspects and different languages, which can create challenges.

What types of writing do you do as a transnational business consultant?

Like most workplace writers, I write a lot of e-mails every day. I also write many reports for my clients, most of which strive to develop successful relationships between Korean businesses and their partners around the world.

What is the most important thing writers should consider when writing for transnational audiences?

Using humor can be problematic when communicating with transnational audiences. What makes American audiences laugh may confuse or offend people from other countries. I think, as a general rule, writers should not use humor or jokes because the risks of miscommunication are high, whereas the chances of getting a positive response are low.

How can workplace writers learn to account for cultural differences when writing for transnational audiences?

The best thing they can do is to learn to be clearer writers. A good way to do this is to edit their writing to take out cultural references (like lines from TV shows, sports references, etc.), idiomatic expressions, "corporate-speak" (most nonnative speakers of English are not up-to-date with buzzwords), and ambiguous sentences. Most workplace writers need to consider that English is a second language for transnational audiences, so clarity is important.

What role does ethics play in transnational communication?

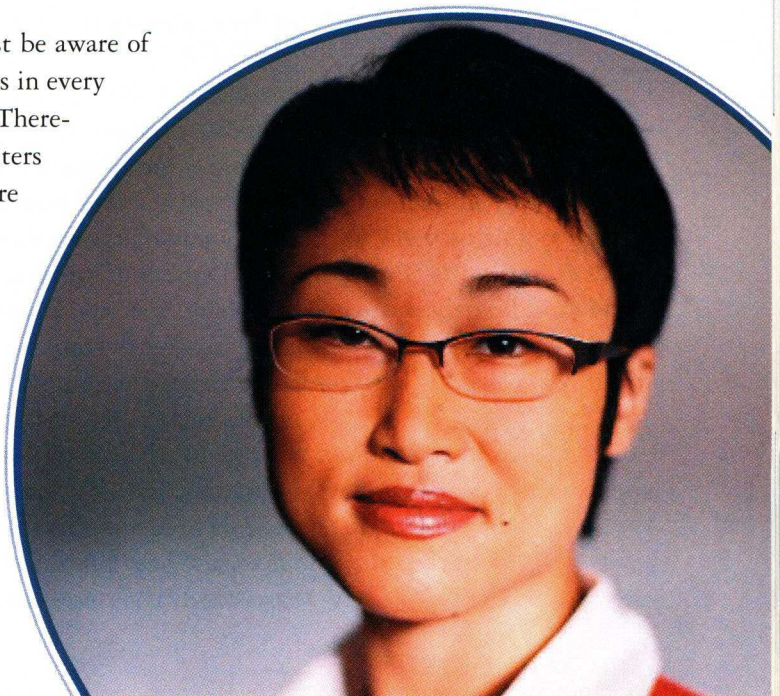
Ethics is an extremely important matter when it comes to transnational communication. The language barrier you often face means the trust level must be very high. Without trust in transnational communication, things can easily go wrong.

How do you address issues of document design or the use of visuals when writing for transnational audiences?

Using visuals in documents is a good thing, but writers must be aware of different cultural factors. There are certain colors and elements in every culture that have religious, cultural, or historical meaning. Therefore, when designing a document or preparing visuals, writers should always research the target audience's culture to make sure that the design and visuals are not offensive.

What advice about workplace writing do you have for readers of this textbook?

My general rule in communication is to be simple, to the point, and easy to understand. Most importantly, respect others and keep dignity in your communication. I often read e-mails, proposals, or reports that contain lots of buzzwords or big words with lengthy sentences. What these writers do not understand is that this kind of writing bores and frustrates readers. Clear and simple is always best.





INTRODUCTION

More than thirty years ago, Xerox established its Multinational Customer and Service Education organization (MC&SE). This division of Xerox was created to translate written documentation for worldwide use. The MS&CE writers and translators developed a system called Multinational Customized English to establish a set of standards for how Xerox documents would be translated. These standards were used to assist both machine and manual translations; the objective was consistency and accuracy in document translation. The MC&SE group also developed an Employee Development System, which worked to train Xerox employees in two key skills for global communication: “writing for translatability” and “global design.”

The creation of MC&SE (and similar divisions in other companies nationwide about this time) signified an important threefold shift in technical and professional communication. First, it acknowledged that commerce had become a global endeavor; no longer were businesses limited by national borders. Second, it recognized the role of technological advancement in opening lines of communication between international organizations, as well as the ways those technologies expedite international communication. Technology allows trade to happen farther and faster. Third, MC&SE marked a shift *away* from relying on International English (more on this later) as the standard language of international communication and a shift *toward* working in and with local languages, cultures, and customs.

You have probably heard phrases like “global economy,” “international business,” or “transnational commerce.” Business and commerce now commonly function in a global market economy. Companies not only exchange goods and services with companies in other countries, but many larger firms now have offices in other countries, employing linguistically and culturally diverse populations within one company. These different branches and offices must communicate with each other, and that transnational and transcultural communication affects internal and external documents.

This chapter uses the words *transnational* and *transcultural* to encompass concepts like global, international, multicultural, and cross-cultural, although later we address the specific terms *internationalization* and *globalization* as facets of transnational communication. In other words, we say that transnational and transcultural communication encompasses global, international, multinational, and cross-cultural audiences, although there are important distinctions among these terms. For instance, *multinational* suggests definitive borders between countries, whereas *transnational* envisions the global community without national borders. *Transnational* and *transcultural* suggest a sense of movement, particularly the flow of ideas, goods, and services and the flow of communication and information. *Transnational* and *transcultural* suggest connectivity despite differences.

Writing documents for transnational and transcultural audiences presents a number of problems for workplace writers, and this chapter is designed to help you consider those rhetorical and workplace problems and to provide approaches for efficiently solving these problems. For example, consider the situation that recently arose when Digibox, a growing digital imaging company based in New York City, acquired Digishare, a digital imaging company based in Bogotá, Columbia. As Digibox accountants began to take stock of and create documents about Digishare’s holdings, the accountants often called the Bogotá employees to ask for verification and explanation of information conveyed in Digishare’s financial records. In one conversation the accountants asked Digishare representatives to prepare tables to organize financial information. The Digishare personnel were confused by the request and never provided the data needed. After investigation the accountants realized that their use of the word *table* caused the problem because of varying linguistic and cultural understandings of that word. Look carefully at the three visuals in Figure 5.1, which represent ways

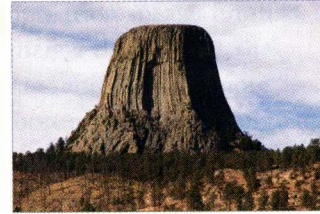
EXPERTS SAY

“International technical communication can be used by any audience that is culturally, linguistically, and technologically variant from the audience in the source country.”

NANCY L. HOFT, Author of *International Technical Communication*

**North American Workplace**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
East	7	7	5	19
West	6	4	7	17
South	8	7	9	24
Total	21	18	21	60

European/North American**South American (mesa)****FIGURE 5.1** Various interpretations of *table*

different audiences have interpreted the term *table*. The first shows how workplace writers in North America might understand the term; the second shows how many European and North American general audiences are likely to understand the term; and the third shows how many South American audiences understand the term, as happened in the Digibox/Digishare situation.

This example shows that writing for transnational audiences can challenge even our basic assumptions about how diverse groups communicate and understand information. What may seem a common understanding—like the definition of the word *table*—may in fact be interpreted and understood in different ways among varied cultures and nationalities. This chapter provides strategies for better understanding the role of communication and writing in transnational and transcultural workplace situations. All writing requires careful consideration of audiences, but writing for transnational and transcultural audiences presents particular challenges for workplace writers.

**EXPLORE**

The U.S. Commercial Service (USCS) is a government agency that promotes global business. Its web pages offer advice about conducting business in many other countries. Read through the U.S. Commercial Service web pages (<http://www.buyusa.gov>), and locate discussion of suggestions for doing business with a specific

country—you pick the country. Then write a short summary of the advice the USCS offers for communicating with individuals and businesses in the country you have selected. (You can find information quickly by typing into your search engine “US Commercial Service” followed by the name of the country in which you’re interested.)

LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENCES

Chapter 2 explained that understanding audiences is a crucial step in producing effective workplace documents. This chapter explains that understanding transnational and transcultural audiences is difficult. Nonetheless, learning how to analyze transnational and transcultural audiences is crucial to reaching global audiences. There are seven key points of difference that writers should account for when writing to transnational and transcultural audiences: language, technology, education, politics, economics, society, and religion. The approaches suggested here are adapted from Nancy L. Hoft’s *International Technical Communication*; our simplified version is designed to help you begin thinking about transnational and transcultural audiences within the broader scope of workplace writing.

You might think of these seven areas of focus as components of culture, which can be defined in many ways. Some say that *culture* is how a group of people think about things together; it might be a combination of the group’s approaches to religion, politics, education, ethics, economics, and art. Others say that culture is really the same as a group’s method of communication, or at least that you can’t tell the difference



between culture and communication. Still others think of culture as a system of deeply held, shared principles among a group of people. Regardless of the definition chosen, workplace writers must recognize that culture greatly influences nearly every aspect of communication. But learning about those influences can be tricky because not all are visible or recognizable. Some aspects of culture may be evident, but others are unspoken or even inherent—simply the natural way of doing things.

One of the most important points in learning about cultures is understanding that you can never get the full picture. Each time you engage a culture, you learn more, and all of those moments compound into a better and better long-term view of how the culture functions. Consequently, it is important to develop a system of taking notes about a culture and updating those notes with each encounter. Because workplace writers' needs and expectations change and because transnational and transcultural audiences' needs and expectations also change, it is important to keep up with the shifts and the ways that cultures react to and account for those changes. The seven points of difference can help you organize your growing understanding of transnational and transcultural communication.

Language

Understanding the language requirements of a country or cultural group is important because it provides direction in how to write documents and offers insight into how audiences will read those documents. But language also affects how *they* write documents and *we* read them. Transnational and transcultural interaction entails more than just “writing for them”; it entails learning about how others write technical documentation, as well. Here are five key aspects of language to consider:

1. *The target language:* Most transnational communications experts and language experts agree that language is the key to how individuals express themselves and come to know and understand the world around them. For workplace writers, then, it is important to understand as much about a target language as possible, because understanding the language provides an understanding of the target audience. As an added benefit, it also helps writers understand more about their own language. Collaborating with a translator is one of the best ways to learn more about a language. Other resources are introductory language textbooks (like a first-year Spanish, French, or Japanese textbook) and audio lessons that teach languages (like Russian or Chinese on CD or MP3).
2. *Official national languages:* Many countries identify their official languages. Resources like IBM's *National Language Support Reference* identify both official and nonofficial languages. In many countries, numerous languages and dialects are commonly used, officially and unofficially. For instance, Singapore identifies four official languages: Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and English. It is important to be aware of a country's official language for legal reasons, as many laws require documentation to be presented in the official language. Also, knowing a country's official language can reduce the number of languages into which you translate a document.
3. *International English:* For many years English speakers could assume—or even require—that the business they conducted internationally would be conducted in English, which was considered the language of international business. International English is an attempt to standardize English as a global language for commerce. However, a true International English can never be attained; worldwide users will adopt any language to their own needs. Thus, International English appears in many dialects even though it works toward a single English to be used in all transnational communication. Realistically, we can no longer



expect International English to be the language that drives world commerce. For instance, less than 5 percent of the Japanese population speaks English. Although English is certainly used with great frequency throughout the global business world, it has become more common—and perhaps more appropriate—for transnational communication to occur in the local languages of the organizations involved in the exchange of information.



ANALYZE THIS

Do a web search for sites that address Global English or International English. Consider how they talk about these kinds of English? Write an analysis of some of the primary discussions about Global or International English.

4. *Text directionality*: Although most of us are used to writing left to right and thinking of a document as beginning in the top left corner and proceeding across a page and then down, some languages do not follow this directional path. Text directionality is not universal; Arabic and Hebrew, for instance, are written right to left, so that documents like manuals and books are designed to open and be read right to left. Some forms of Japanese used in marketing are read in columns from right to left instead of in horizontal rows. Thus, workplace writers accounting for transnational audiences must be sure to consider text directionality in designing documents.
5. *Writing style*: Like other facets of writing, writing styles vary from country to country, culture to culture. American English, for instance, tends to be more repetitive than French is. It is often a good idea to work with a translator to translate documentation into more appropriate target-country writing styles while maintaining accuracy in information dissemination.¹



EXPLORE

Within the borders of a single country, workplace writers may speak a variety of languages. For instance, the United States does not have an official national language, even though 82 percent of the population speaks English. Approximately 337 languages are spoken in the United States, and knowing where

various languages are spoken can be quite useful. The Modern Language Association's language map helps track the languages used in the United States. Take some time to explore the language map to see how diverse language usage is in the United States. You can find the map at http://www.mla.org/map_single.

Technology

The first issue to consider regarding technology is whether the target country has access to the same technology you are using. For instance, software developers need to know whether their applications can be used on existing technology platforms in the target country or whether they need to adjust the software to meet local needs—or whether the industry should make the technology available that supports their software. To understand the technological culture of a target country, you should first identify commonly used technologies and then assess the reliability of that technology.

¹Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).



Machine Translation

One way technology helps to overcome differences is through the use of machine translation software, which automatically translates documents into different languages. However, machine translation programs are limited in their capabilities. Because they use formulaic translation schemes, these programs rely on restrictive grammars, such as the standardized grammars called controlled English. These forms of English grammar are designed to aid in automatic translation programs but have not yet proven to benefit transnational readers. Controlled English is a rule-bound English that does not allow writers many options in how they convey information; restrictive grammars limit what can be said and how it can be said. One primary objective of using machine translation is to reduce the amount of editing needed for the translated language, but this goal has not been reached. Machine translation software is expensive and thus beyond the budgets of most companies, so few companies use it.²

Education

Education systems and approaches vary greatly from country to country, and understanding those systems and approaches greatly influences how documents are written. Three facets of education should be considered in learning about a target country:

1. *Literacy*: Literacy is calculated differently from country to country, and many countries inflate their announced literacy rates. Nonetheless, having a sense of a country's literacy rates can influence how you approach documentation. A number of online resources present international literacy rates, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Brigham Young University's *Culturgrams*.
2. *Common body of knowledge*: Understanding what most people in a country know is important. If your research into literacy rates reveals that most people in the target country have, say, seven years of education, it would be valuable to learn what people with seven years of education in that country are expected to know. Good sources for researching this information are professors of education and professional education journals. You should also check to see what information is available through the target country's official educational body on the national level. For example, in the United States this would be the U.S. Department of Education; in Greece it would be the Ministry of Education; in Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology; and in France, the National Ministry of Education.
3. *Learning style*: Identifying a target country's learning styles can be difficult, particularly since you may find many approaches and learning styles within one group. But identifying how people are taught to learn can provide a good deal of insight into how you should write technical documents, especially documents that include instructional material like tutorials, manuals, or technical instructions. You should explore the methods of education, the role of teachers and technology, the role of apprenticeships and mentoring, and the role of credentials and degrees in different learning styles.³

²Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

³Ibid.

Politics and Law

All target audiences are influenced by the laws and governments of their countries. When writing for transnational audiences, workplace writers should examine the differences and similarities between the legal and governmental influences on the writer and those on the target audience. Workplace writers must consider and account for the following:

- *Trade issues*, such as import/export practices
- *Legal issues*, such as laws governing copyrights, trademarks, intellectual property, liability, and fraud
- *Political traditions and symbols*, such as forms of government, voting rights, politically significant dates (e.g., most American companies are closed on July 4), flags (e.g., the colors and symbolism of a country's flag, as well as cultural conduct in respecting it), national documents, and national symbols

To research these kinds of differences, it is a good idea to check not only with international legal and political experts, but also with any professional organizations that have developed lists of standards.⁴

Economics

Accounting for economic differences and similarities is important in understanding transnational cultures, and also central to effective transnational business practices. Along with the basics of currency value and exchange rates, it is helpful to understand how transnational audiences assign monetary value to products and services. For instance, in February 2008 a businessman from the United Arab Emirates purchased a vanity license plate for \$14 million. In many countries that would be considered excessive; in others it may be taken as a sign of status, conveying important information about the owner of that vehicle. Such differences underscore the ways economic values vary from one culture to the next. One way to document such differences is to create a comparative chart that examines the costs of common items (e.g., grocery items, real estate, technology) and the relative value they have in different cultures, taking into consideration who has access to those items and what owning them says about the owner's role in the culture.⁵

Society

In most countries and cultures there are noticeable differences in various aspects of life. For instance, how one functions in the workplace may be very different from how one functions in family settings. Thus, to investigate social factors, it is important to consider different components separately, while understanding that they all contribute to a cultural atmosphere. Here are three of the factors you should be attentive to:

- *Age*—A culture's attitude toward age can impact some business practices and can shed light on other cultural attitudes, such as those toward education.
- *Business etiquette*—Business etiquette varies not only from culture to culture, but also from industry to industry. Understanding how various transnational audiences approach business etiquette can enhance your ability to interact

⁴Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

⁵*Ibid.*



with them, as well as with members of your own organization from different cultural backgrounds.

- *Family and social interaction*—Many factors contribute to family and social interaction within a culture. Considering the roles of marriage, funerals, and birth ceremonies, for instance, can give insight into how a particular culture envisions family life.⁶

Religion

In many countries religion plays a significant role in all aspects of cultural life, including government and law. To better understand a transnational and/or transcultural audience, it is important to examine the target countries' indigenous religions, most of which can be studied through books and online research. It is a good idea to understand which religions are prevalent and what the basic tenets are of those religions. You should know the significance of a religion's symbols and colors; reproducing some religious images is considered offensive. In addition, many religions influence dietary habits. For instance, some religions forbid eating pork, and in others eating lamb or fish is customary on particular days. It is important to respect another culture's religious practices, although you should not feel compelled to sacrifice your own beliefs in the process.⁷

AVOIDING STEREOTYPES

A difficult problem to overcome in transnational and transcultural communication is stereotyping. Traditionally, when textbooks and other instructional resources provide lists of cultural issues to consider in working with specific transnational audiences, that information might be presented like this: "When writing for a Japanese audience, you should always. . ." or "Spanish readers tend to. . ." This kind of cultural-guidebook approach promotes typecasting and stereotyping by reducing differences to simple formulas. *Effective* awareness of cultural, linguistic, and national differences cannot result from such formulaic approaches; important differences exist within seemingly monolithic cultural units.

Ethical and responsible workplace writers must be diligent in developing accurate understandings of their transnational audiences. A number of methods exist for becoming culturally aware, but all require dedicated research. None of the suggestions here can provide a nonnative with a perfectly accurate vision of another culture, but actively pursuing these approaches can prepare workplace writers to make more effective rhetorical choices and solve transnational communication problems in productive ways.

Avoid Assumptions

A common mistake in learning about other cultures, languages, and nations is to make assumptions about them. For instance, people often assume that an entire cultural group can be addressed in the same way, that everyone within a given culture will respond similarly. But such a culture-specific stereotype does not allow for intra-cultural differences. Likewise, one cannot make assumptions about individuals within

See chapter 6 for more on research strategies and methods.

⁶Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

⁷Ibid.



a cultural group. For example, one should not assume that a woman who wears the traditional clothes of her culture is or is not fluent in English, that she is or is not a professional, that she does or does not work outside the home, that she is or is not technologically literate, or even that she has certain beliefs about or ways of conducting business. In short, assumptions don't lead to an accurate understanding of other cultures, languages, or nations.

Ask Questions

The best way to learn about differences is to ask questions. Whenever possible, workplace writers should find answers to their questions before they meet a new transnational or transcultural client, customer, or colleague. However, if they cannot anticipate or ask their questions beforehand, they should develop relationships with individuals in the target audience whom they can comfortably approach with questions.

It is important to ask culturally sensitive questions, being careful that the phrasing or context of a question is not offensive in itself. Good questions can create connections between you and your audience, rather than highlight differences or manifest biases. In addition, you should remember that you are asking for one person's perspective and should not consider his or her response to be a universal or final answer on the subject, nor should you treat the person as a representative of the entire country or culture.

Collaborate with the Translator

Most professional translators are not only proficient in a language but are also well-versed in the culture. For instance, it is likely that a translator of French is familiar with the differences between French and French Canadian cultures, as well as with the linguistic differences between the two populations. It is important to see the role of the translator as a collaborator on transnational documents, someone who is able to explain linguistic and cultural nuances that can assist you in crafting effective documents for specific groups. Most translators gladly provide such guidance. And the more your writing reflects audience awareness, the easier it is for good translation to occur.

ENHANCING TRANSLATION

The difficulty with translation is that most workplace writers aren't translators, so they must hire translators. Thus, workplace writers must anticipate that their documents will be translated by someone else, and translators must work with documents that others have prepared. This can create a difficult division of labor. In addition, few translators are able to translate in more than one language direction, for instance English to Japanese. And since documents often require translation into multiple languages—perhaps a company distributes software to a number of European countries—companies often hire translation agencies that employ translators in many languages. Few workplaces are able to staff dedicated translators.



EXPLORE

Many translation companies maintain websites that explain their approaches to translation and the kinds of work they do. Locate three translation company web pages, and compare and contrast their approaches.

Then write a letter to your instructor that explains the similarities and differences among the companies' approaches to translation.



The responsibility of most workplace writers is not to translate documents but to prepare documents that can accommodate translation—that is, documents that are attuned to the countries, cultures, and languages of the audiences and that adhere to the guidelines explained here. Such documents make the job of the translator more efficient and assure that the documents will be understood as intended.

The first step in producing such documents is to become aware of your own language. Learning how English, for instance, differs from other languages provides a sense of how your language use might be interpreted by nonnative speakers and how it might be translated. The following four elements are central to developing a sense of your own language use.⁸

Terminology

Pay attention to how you use specialized terminology and jargon in your documents because specialized terms usually don't translate directly. One method of accounting for terminology is to maintain an annotated glossary of specialized terms, jargon, and new words used in your documents. Such a glossary can include definitions, contexts, and even the frequency of use of the specialized terms. Glossaries like this serve two purposes within a document: First, they provide a method of keeping track of the specialized words used—including how and how frequently you use them. By understanding the contexts in which you use specialized language, you will learn more about how your writing functions. Second, glossaries of specialized terms can be given to translators as a resource to explain how you use specialized terminology. Thus, a glossary can help ensure that the translator understands precisely what you mean and can prepare a more accurate translation.

For more about jargon use, see chapter 10; for more about writing definitions, see chapter 15.

Clarity

Documents that will be translated should be written clearly and concisely, as all workplace writing should be, but this characteristic is especially important with transnational and transcultural audiences. Translators that must work with poorly written, unclear language have difficulty producing accurate and effective translations. Keep in mind that the translator's job is to translate, not to rewrite.

Specifically, you should avoid linguistic features such as idioms, acronyms, ambiguous antecedents, use of synonyms, modifying phrases (i.e., adjective or adverb phrases), gerunds, shifts in person, and dropping *that* at the beginning of clauses. All of these can lead to ambiguities that are difficult for translators to work with.⁹

See chapter 10 for more on clear, concise writing.

Cultural and Rhetorical Differences

Workplace writers cannot know everything about all cultures and languages. However, you should remember that idiomatic phrases, references to popular culture, and even humor can be problematic for translators. You should actually avoid humor in *all* professional workplace documents since you can never know how an audience will respond. But it is especially important to avoid humor with transnational and transcultural audiences since humor does not usually translate well. What you may think is funny—even a simple joke—might be construed as inappropriate or insulting by a transnational reader. Similarly, idiomatic expressions might not make sense to a nonnative speaker and might not be easily translatable into other languages.

⁸Bruce Maylath, "Writing Globally: Teaching the Technical Writing Student to Prepare Documents for Translation," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 11 (1997), 339–352.

⁹Ibid.

Design

According to translation research, most languages require 30 percent more space than English requires to convey the same message.¹⁰ Furthermore, some languages like Arabic, Hebrew, and certain forms of Japanese don't follow the left-to-right directional flow of English. Because translators focus on language translation and not necessarily on design, workplace writers need to attend to design in order to accommodate shifts in space requirements.

Design architecture becomes important in organizing information clearly and guiding transnational and transcultural readers through a document. Documents that are deductively organized and that provide clear headings, topic sentences, and summaries are easier to translate.¹¹

See chapter 9 for more on document design and design architecture.

ACCOMMODATING TRANSNATIONAL AUDIENCES

Localization

Localization refers to adapting a product and/or translating a document for a specific local audience. The key to effective localization is to begin with a high-quality original document. According to Hoft, there are two degrees of localization:

1. *General localization*, which addresses superficial cultural differences like language, currency, and date and time formats. General localization often requires little more than adjustments made in translation.
2. *Radical localization*, which focuses on more substantive cultural differences that affect how readers and users think, feel, and act, including learning approaches and culture-specific examples. Radical localization can drastically change the language, design, and approach of a document.¹²

Localization offers four key benefits:

1. *Localized products improve sales.* Localization is a form of marketing; it makes products and documents more applicable to a transnational or transcultural audience and thereby makes selling the product or distributing the documents more effective.¹³
2. *Localized products overcome cultural differences.* If a target country's cultural differences are understood, products can be adapted to local needs in ways that make them more attuned to cultural needs. Hoft offers an interesting example of a wood products industry. In the 1950s, Japan, which has limited wood resources, approached U.S. and Canadian wood manufacture's about supplying Japan with wood. One of the restrictions was that Japan would import only wood that had been cut to meet traditional Japanese building customs, including specific sizes and shapes (the 2x4 is not a universal building size). The U.S. wood industry was shortsighted, did not foresee

localization adapting or creating a document for a specific target country or market.

EXPERTS SAY

"If the technical information is poorly written in the original language, even with the best translation and design in the world, the information will still be poor."

CHARLENE NAGY, President of NCS Enterprises, LLC, a full-service global communications company in Pittsburgh, PA

¹⁰Bruce Maylath, "Writing Globally: Teaching the Technical Writing Student to Prepare Documents for Translation," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 11 (1997), 339–352.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

¹³Ibid.



Japan's becoming an economic force, and rejected its proposals. Canada, on the other hand, localized wood production for Japan and now dominates the wood suppliers industry.¹⁴

3. *Localization helps overcome inherent resistance.* As an example of this benefit, Hoft explains that when American-based McDonald's decided to expand its worldwide business into India, it met with an inherent cultural resistance to its primary product: the all-beef hamburger the Big Mac. India, which has the world's second largest population and, thus, a massive consumer market, has a significantly large percentage of vegetarians. Cows hold a culturally different position in some Indian cultures than they do in the United States. So, to overcome this inherent resistance, McDonald's developed the meatless Big Mac.¹⁵ McDonald's also offers localized variants of the Big Mac, which originally used lamb instead of beef but now use chicken. These versions are called Maharaja Mac. Likewise, because Jewish dietary laws restrict the mixing of meat and dairy products, McDonald's in Israel offers a Kosher version of the Big Mac that does not include cheese. McDonald's has also made efforts to localize the Big Mac to cultural attitudes toward nutrition. The Big Mac offered in Australia, for instance, contains 20 percent fewer calories and 24 percent less sodium than the Big Mac sold in Mexico.
4. *Localization is a good approach to being the first to reach world markets and entering global niche markets.* By ensuring that company products and documentation are localized from early stages of development, companies can more rapidly reach markets not yet tapped by their competitors.¹⁶

Despite these benefits, localization can be expensive, time-consuming, and legally complicated. The Boeing Company, for example, has stopped translating and distributing maintenance manuals with the airplanes it exports because of the liability Boeing would assume if the translation of the manuals was incorrect or misleading. Many countries now require standardized product documentation written in the official language of the target country.¹⁷

Internationalization

Localization often requires adapting documentation to specific target audiences, which may mean identifying the writer's embedded cultural markings and shifting them to localized approaches. This can be a difficult and complex process.

For instance, think about the simple act of alphabetizing a list of names. If a U.S. writer was documenting the list, the order would follow the U.S. alphabet; but if the writer was alphabetizing the same names in Spanish, the order would be different because the Spanish alphabet includes the letter "eñe" (ñ) between *n* and *o*. Similarly, translating the list into languages such as Russian, Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, Mandarin, Arabic, or Tamil would require translating or transliterating the names to fit those alphabetic needs and then reconfiguring the order based on those languages.¹⁸ In addition, not all languages rely on alphabets. Cherokee, for example, uses a syllabary, a system that uses a set of written characters to represent syllables.

¹⁴Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.



internationalization the process of writing documents so they can be easily localized for transnational audiences

Because of countless cultural factors like these, it is often difficult to localize documents that are written for native English speakers and are already embedded with cultural markings. **Internationalization** is a process of developing software that can be easily adapted to various transnational audiences without changing the core of the software design. Internationalization (which is often referred to as *i18n*—the first letter in the word, the number of letters between the first and last letters, and the last letter in the word) can also be adapted to technical communication in general. We can apply the goals and approaches of internationalization to the process of writing, rewriting, designing, and redesigning documents so that they can be more easily localized to any transnational audience.¹⁹

Most workplace writing is comprised of core information that is constant among various documents, despite their differences in design or audience. *International variables* are those parts of documents that can be localized, and internationalization is the process of identifying the international variables that come into play in specific documents and determining which parts must be localized.²⁰

Internationalization is necessary for companies that work transnationally; because it anticipates localization, it helps these companies save time and money in their localization processes. Internationalization also compounds its efficiency over time by continually adding to a company's database of localization strategies and standardizing many of those processes.

Globalization

As Hoft points out, internationalization is part of a two-step process: internationalization of a transnational document and then localization of the document for each specific context. Both internationalization and localization increase the amount of time and resources that must be dedicated to each cultural variation of a document beyond the planning, researching, drafting, reviewing, and distributing of the original document. When a company invests in localizing documents for many target audiences, the associated cost will likely outweigh the return on the investment. As a result, the company may have a difficult time justifying the cost of internationalization and localization.²¹

The ultimate goal for writers working with transnational target audiences is to develop a single document that can be read and understood by any audience. The question, of course, is Can there be such a document? Business professionals talk about global products, which can be used by anyone anywhere, but those conversations typically identify the near impossibility of developing such items. A paper clip might be a global product, but only if all cultures agree on its function and only if all have a use for it.²² The Onge tribe is a seminomadic tribe living in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Is there a need for a paper clip in Onge tribal life?

Global is a relative term, and we must understand that a truly global document is probably not a possibility. For practical purposes a global document is one that can be read and understood by as many transnational and transcultural audiences as possible. One way that many workplace writers try to produce global documents is by increasing the use of visual representations to account for linguistic differences, but visuals are also culturally influenced, as chapter 8 explains, so writers must make their visual rhetorical choices very carefully.

¹⁹Nancy L. Hoft, *International Technical Communication: How to Export Information about High Technology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.



FIGURE 5.2 A safety information card using visuals to convey global information

One example of a global visual document is an airline safety card (see Figure 5.2), which is generally provided in multiple languages and with visuals designed to convey information even to those who cannot read the available languages. Despite these efforts, however, most experts agree that airline safety cards are not intuitive for many readers and attempt to convey too much information in one document. Notice, for instance, in Figure 5.2 the use of numbers to direct readers—numbers that are not used in all languages. Notice, too, the need for a preliminary understanding of what a seatbelt is used for, what a cigarette is, and what the red circle with a slash through it indicates. Finally, notice the visual depiction of the plane's passengers.

Despite the obstacles that hamper total globalization, workplace writers with transnational audiences should still strive for global documents.

Verbal Communication

Translation, localization, internationalization, and globalization can all help to adapt workplace writing for transnational audiences, but workplace writers often find themselves needing to communicate verbally, too, with their transnational and transcultural audiences, perhaps even with nonnative speakers of English within their own multinational company. In these instances it is important to remember that native speakers often speak rapidly, making it difficult for nonnative speakers to understand. In addition, cultural differences can come into play, and native English speakers may inadvertently offend nonnative speakers through their body language, tone, or humor.

In an article for the Society for Technical Communication, Bill Gruener offers nineteen guidelines for communicating with nonnative English speakers, guidelines he devised after polling multilingual colleagues:

- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Have face-to-face conversations whenever possible because body language adds meaning (a point stressed by every respondent).
- Avoid noisy locations where multiple conversations are taking place.
- Keep conversations one-on-one in order to avoid potential distractions.
- Remember that phone calls are difficult because of the lack of face-to-face contact.
- Pause often and ask if you've been understood.



- Speak slowly when giving a phone number, address, or some other number.
- Use simple sentences, especially when writing (e.g., “Click OK” instead of “Select the OK button and press”).
- Use widely accepted international business terms, such as *invoice*.
- Use common English words found in small, simple dictionaries (e.g., Please read the specification” instead of “peruse the specification”).
- Choose a single common verb that explains the action of a sentence. (e.g., “Analyze the profit margins in the ACME report” rather, than “Give me your take on the margins”).
- Avoid two-word verb phrases ending with *off*, *up*, or *on* (e.g., “She quit” instead of “She gave up”).
- Be careful with verbs that have varied meanings, such as *get*, *look*, *take*, or *put*.
- Avoid verbs used colloquially (e.g., “Deliver the work order to Bob in manufacturing” instead of “Hoof it over to Bob”).
- Avoid everyday jargon and local expressions.
- Avoid idioms, idiomatic phrases, and metaphors (e.g., “He was robbed” instead of “He was taken to the cleaners”).
- Avoid words adopted from other languages into English (e.g., use “appetizers” instead of “hors d’oeuvres”).
- Avoid humor based on knowledge of the language.
- Assume that your listener does not understand everything you’ve said.²³

TRANSNATIONAL ETHICS

See chapter 4 for more on ethics.

International business ethics and the ethics of economic systems have become important to ethicists and to the international business community. However, because culture determines ethics, workplace writers must know that ethical understandings don’t always cross borders; in other words, what you may see as an ethically appropriate choice may not appear so to other audiences.

A number of ethical issues exist that should be considered in writing for transnational audiences. The following issues arise from a broad perspective:

- Are there values that transcend national or cultural borders that might be thought of as universal ethics?
- How do different countries and cultures tend to address ethical issues, particularly in relation to business and workplace communication?
- Does the target country or culture traditionally hold nonnative business people in a different regard than it does native business people?
- Do various target countries or cultures have different ethical traditions? How might workplace writers account for such discrepancies?
- Do religious perspectives inform a target country’s or culture’s ethical approaches?
- How do certain business practices—fair trade agreements, for instance—interact with a target country’s ethical understanding of business practice?

²³Bill Gruener, “Communicating with Nonnative Speakers,” http://www.stcsig.org/itc/articles/0309-nonnative_speak.pdf.



- Does the target country have certain industry-specific ethical expectations—for example, in pharmaceutical industries, food industries, or biotechnology industries?
- How do localization, internationalization, and globalization of documents as well as work toward Global English affect cultural imperialism?
- Do target countries or cultures have varying expectations of and ethical approaches to labor issues, such as child labor?
- Does working with transnational target audiences open the door to taking advantage of cultural differences? (Think about how companies outsource production, like clothing manufacturing, or service support, such as call centers.)
- Are there ethical concerns with engaging in commerce with countries that are at political odds with the source country?

Other issues arise from a specific perspective:

- Does my language in any way obscure information in the document?
- Have I accurately translated the document?
- Has the document accounted for the cultural differences of my target audiences?
- Has my document obscured or accurately represented liability issues?
- Have I used visuals to highlight or distort information?

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING FOR TRANSNATIONAL AUDIENCES

Even though we cannot offer approaches for specific cultural, linguistic, or national audiences (because to do so would encourage stereotyping), we can offer a series of general guidelines for writing for transnational and transcultural audiences that encompass the strategies discussed in this chapter.

Write Clearly

Translators can more accurately and easily translate documents that are written clearly and concisely. Likewise, nonnative readers of English are more likely to understand clearly written documents.

See chapter 10 for more on how to write clearly.

Use Correct Punctuation

Ensure that your documents are punctuated correctly. Misuse or lack of punctuation can confuse nonnative readers and, more important, can lead to misinterpretation of information. Also be sure that translators are working with the most accurate version of a document; punctuation errors can result in translations that differ from the original intent.

See chapter 10 for more on punctuation.

Include Definite Articles

Leaving definite articles out of sentences can confuse nonnative readers. For instance, although it may sound appropriate to say, “Products will be shipped Tuesday,” it is more complete to write, “The products will be shipped Tuesday.”

Avoid Using Pronouns

Native English writers tend to use pronouns that refer to nouns preceding the pronouns. Often, this backward reference can confuse nonnative speakers. In addition, because other languages use and position pronouns differently than English does, exact

translation can be linguistically difficult. Instead, repeat the specific noun to clarify. This practice is also helpful in writing for mechanized translation programs.



ANALYZE THIS

The pronoun *you* can be particularly tricky for translation. Explore the ways in which the pronoun *you* is used in German, French, and Spanish. Then write

an explanation about why it might be difficult to translate the U.S. use of *you* into these three languages.

Use Terminology Consistently

Consistency helps nonnative speakers contextualize information. Use of a single term throughout a document also helps translators convey meaning. Even though English may offer multiple synonyms for a concept, other languages may not accommodate such word shifts. Consistency in terminology also ensures that transnational audiences understand that you still mean the same thing; shifts in words can suggest nuanced shifts in meaning.

Avoid Idiomatic Language

Remember that idioms do not translate well, so you should avoid idiomatic expressions. The same is true for acronyms, abbreviations, jargon, and slang. If you must use specialized language, provide definitions of the terms early in the document. Glossaries can also be of use.

Avoid Comparatives

Comparing things makes sense only if the two things are culturally understood as similar. Promotional materials often use comparatives to show how products or services compare with other products or services. In the United States, for instance, it is common for advertising or promotional materials to indicate that Product A is better than Product B or that Product A has 25 percent more meaty goodness than Product B. Such comparatives rely on familiarity with Product B, which you cannot be sure transnational audiences have. And in some countries, such as Germany, it is illegal for advertising and promotional materials to use these kinds of comparatives.

Localize Your Writing

Recognize Alphabetic Differences

Not all languages use the same alphabets; in fact, not all languages use alphabets. Consequently, alphabetized lists may not translate exactly, and using letters as organizational markers—as in an outline—may not provide readers with directional information they understand.

Use Local Numbers

Remember to localize numeric information like dates, time, currency, measurements, telephone numbers, and addresses. Also, confirm that the target audience uses traditional Arabic numerals (i.e., 1, 2, 3...).

Be Alert to Time Differences

Time zones shift between most countries, and you don't want to miss deadlines or meetings because of time differences. This may also be a factor if you provide time-sensitive information or time-restricted support—say, for instance, a help desk that is



not open 24 hours a day. In addition, you should recognize that many cultures do not use forty-hour, five-day work weeks.

Avoid References to Holidays

Remember that not all cultures or countries celebrate the same holidays, nor do they celebrate holidays on the same dates or in the same ways. Furthermore, certain celebrations in one culture or country may be seen as offensive to another. Be sure to avoid using visuals that reference holidays for the same reasons.

Avoid Cultural References

Most transnational and transcultural audiences will not understand references to culturally specific items. Many things that you know well—like eating or cooking utensils, sports equipment, or holidays—are probably not common reference points for most of the people in the world. Similarly, references to celebrities, movies, or music should be avoided because they do not always cross borders. In addition, you should not make cultural references to a culture that you are unfamiliar with; doing so risks displaying your ignorance about the culture and perhaps insulting or offending your audience.

Avoid Humor

For the most part, humor doesn't translate universally and risks insulting or offending target audiences. You should also not try to use another culture's humor unless you are well versed in the target language, culture, and humor. The result could be even more offensive than a poorly translated joke.

Account for Visual and Auditory Perceptions

Consider Visual Interpretations

Remember that visual rhetorical choices are culturally informed; images can convey different meanings to different people. For instance, in the United States an image of an owl (adopted from Native American lore) might symbolize wisdom. However, in parts of Central and South America, an owl might represent the blackness of night, implying death, black magic, or witchcraft.

Workplace writers should also avoid using religious symbols. From 1996 to 2004, the web page askjeeves.com (now simply ask.com) used a cartoon version of a butler as its logo. But when the company began to move into Asian markets, it was noted that the butler image would not translate with any real meaning. One suggestion was to replace the Jeeves butler with an image of a monk—another figure one might ask for answers. However, research showed that such a depiction would be considered offensive to several cultures.

In addition, you should be sure to understand cultural interpretation of color variations.

Avoid Images of People and Hand Gestures

Because body language and gestures are culturally defined, it is best to avoid using images of people or gestures; those images may not be interpreted as you intended. For example, you might use the icon  as a bullet or to indicate a correct step. In the United States that hand sign communicates correctness or that everything is OK. However, in France that same gesture or icon would likely be interpreted to mean zero or that something is worthless.

Reevaluate Design Elements and Principles

Be sure that your document designs—for both print and electronic documents—are easy to access and that navigation is clearly explained. Because not all languages are

For more about visual rhetoric, using visuals, and transnational use of visuals, see chapter 8.



See chapter 9 for more on design elements.

read left to right, what you consider to be a logical document flow may not seem logical to a target audience. Also, keep in mind that most languages require about 30 percent more space than English does.

In addition, don't forget that computer access varies worldwide. Individuals may have limited time to work with documents online because of shared work spaces and varying phone rates and Internet availability. Since it is common for transnational recipients to print hard copies of online documents, you would be wise to produce small files that require minimum download time. Remember that large graphics and image files slow downloads.

Account for Differences in Sound Interpretation

Like visuals, sounds can mean different things to different people. Because multimedia documents often include sound, workplace writers should account for cultural differences in sound interpretation, just as they would account for visual interpretation. For example, in the United States we are comfortable with a computer beeping to indicate an error; however, in Japan the same sound is considered embarrassing because it calls attention to a mistake.

SUMMARY

- Transnational and transcultural communication occurs internally and externally for many companies.
- Transnational and transcultural communication must account for how nonnative speakers will read documents written in English and how documents will be translated from English into other languages.
- Learning how to analyze transnational and transcultural audiences is crucial in order to reach global audiences.
- It is important to learn as much about a target language as possible.
- It is also important to identify official national languages.
- Workplace writers can no longer anticipate that International English will be the language of world commerce.
- Some languages do not follow left-to-right directional flow.
- Workplace writers must account for various levels of technology in target countries.
- Machine translation software automatically translates documents. It relies on controlled English, but the software is unreliable.
- Educational systems and approaches vary greatly from country to country.
- Workplace writers must account for differences in laws and politics in target countries.
- Economic factors and perceptions affect workplace writers who write transnational and transcultural documents.
- Family and business life must be kept separate when considering transnational and transcultural audiences, but they both contribute to cultural atmospheres.
- In many countries religion plays a significant role in all aspects of cultural life.
- When writing for transnational and transcultural audiences, writers should avoid stereotyping.
- It is the responsibility of most workplace writers not to translate documents, but to prepare them for translation.
- Localization is the process of adapting or preparing a document for a specific local audience.



- Internationalization is the process of writing, rewriting, designing, and revising documents so that they can be more easily localized.
- Globalization is the process of preparing documents to be readily understood by as many transnational audiences as possible.
- Workplace writers often find themselves having to communicate verbally with transnational and transcultural audiences and nonnative speakers within their own company.
- Because culture determines ethics, workplace writers must realize that ethical understandings don't always cross borders.
- It is important to develop guidelines for writing for transnational and transcultural audiences.

CONCEPT REVIEW

1. What are some problems associated with writing for transnational and transcultural audiences?
2. What factors contribute to national and cultural differences?
3. What linguistic differences contribute to transnational and transcultural communication?
4. What role does technology play in differences among transnational and transcultural audiences? How does technology contribute to approaches to transnational and transcultural audiences?
5. How do educational differences affect how you would write a document for a transnational or transcultural audience?
6. What are some issues of politics and law that workplace writers must account for in writing transnational and transcultural documents?
7. What economic factors affect how workplace writers should think about transnational and transcultural audiences?
8. How does religion affect transnational and transcultural communication?
9. What are some methods of avoiding stereotypes?
10. What issues pertaining to translation should workplace writers account for?
11. What is localization, and how are documents localized?
12. What are the goals of internationalization, and how are documents internationalized?
13. What are the goals of globalization, and how are documents globalized?
14. What are some strategies for communicating verbally with transnational and transcultural audiences?
15. What ethical issues are associated with transnational and transcultural communication?
16. What are some guidelines for writing for transnational and transcultural audiences?

CASE STUDY 1

Nola-Cola Goes Global

The Coca-Cola Company has a long history of working with transnational audiences. In the 1920s, Coca-Cola executive Robert W. Woodruff initiated an effort to market Coca-Cola internationally. By the 1930s, Coke had established bottling and distribution centers in France, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Belgium, Italy, Peru, Spain, Australia, and South Africa. By the time the United States entered into World War II, Coke was being bottled in forty-four countries. During the war Coke established more than sixty bottling plants worldwide to supply American troops with Coke. Ac-



cording to the Coca-Cola Company, this effort began after General Eisenhower requested bottling equipment for his North Africa base of operations. After the war the Coca-Cola Company converted many of its military bottling plants into civilian bottling centers, positioning the company for rapid growth in the international market. Sales in the United States also increased as soldiers returned with a taste for Coke and created a larger demand for it.

Like any other company, the Coca-Cola Company faced a number of challenges in bringing its product to transnational audiences. It has long been rumored that when Coke was introduced to China, the transliteration of the Coca-Cola name was expressed in characters that sounded like “ke-kou-ke-la,” which means “bite the wax tadpole” or “female horse stuffed with wax,” depending on the dialectal pronunciation. However, these bits of industry lore have also been shown to be nothing more than urban legend.

Consider that you have recently been hired by Nola-Cola, a New Orleans-based soft drink manufacturer seeking to expand into international markets. Nola-Cola has been in operation for more than fifty years, but its products are not recognized outside the southern Louisiana region. The newly acquired executive officer believes the time is right to extend sales nationally and internationally of Nola-Cola’s three best-selling products: the premiere product, Nola-Cola; Tangeraide, a citrus soda; and Joggle, a double-caffeine, double-sugar energy soft drink that gained some attention when riders in the Tour de Louisiana cycling event began drinking it in place of other caffeinated colas.

The Nola-Cola CEO is familiar with the Coke-in-China legend and is also well aware of Coke’s success. The CEO has asked you to learn what you can about the Coca-Cola Company’s move into international markets, including the controversies that surrounded some of its business dealings. Your task is then to use what you learn about Coke to devise an internal manual or guidebook that can be used in localizing the Nola-Cola products for three large international markets: China, India, and Brazil. You will need to conduct some research to learn what you can about each of these soft drink markets (hint: the American Beverage Association web page can be of use here), about the Coca-Cola Company’s experiences in these markets, and about localization. You should then create a series of guidelines to direct Nola-Cola through the localization processes for these three markets. Be sure to consider everything from product name to advertising campaigns to cultural positioning of soft drinks.

CASE STUDY 2

Emergency Evacuation on Peligo

The island nation of Peligo relies on tourism as its primary economic industry. The island’s vast beaches and calm, clear water on its south side and the heavy, rolling surf on its north side attract tourists from the United States, Europe, Asia, and India. Saltwater enthusiasts of every kind find that Peligo offers just about any activity they could desire: snorkeling, scuba diving, flats fishing, offshore fishing, kayaking, surfing, sailing, spear fishing, and more. Peligo’s warm climate draws tourists year-round, and its beaches and top-rated resorts and restaurants provide world-class facilities. Despite Peligo’s paradise-like qualities, however, its location in the Caribbean leaves it susceptible to hurricanes and tropical weather systems.

Peligo’s geography, like that of many other small islands, is dominated by its shoreline. The entire country is only thirty miles long and six miles across at its widest



point. With the exception of a two-mile stretch of coastline along the northwest shore that is a mix of rock and mangrove, most of Peligo's shoreline consists of broad beaches. And lining those beaches are rows of resorts, restaurants, and shops. Before tourism brought investors to build the resorts, Peligo's coastline was home to the island's lowest economic classes. Peligo's wealthier residents, many of them of European descent, built homes in the central part of the island, in the mountains away from the coastline, where storm surges and floods were less likely to wash their homes away. As is the case in many island nations, Peligo's wealthiest residents took the safest locations, forcing its poorer citizens to occupy the more dangerous regions along the coast. But Peligo's tourism industry then forced the residents away from the beaches as hotels, resorts, and shops were built to appeal to tourists from around the world. Finally, Peligo's poor were forced to move to an intermediate zone between the tourist beaches and the mountains.

In 2004 Peligo was devastated by three hurricanes: Charlie, Francis, and Ivan. The island suffered extreme property damage and a large number of fatalities. Many of those that died were native Peligans whose homes could not withstand the storms, who had no other place to go, and who could not afford to leave the island before the storms arrived. A number of tourists were also stranded and died when Peligo Air could not shuttle people off the island fast enough. Because Peligo serves tourists from all over the world, one of the difficulties with emergency evacuation was an inability to communicate evacuation procedures to all tourists.

In the wake of these tragedies, the Peligo Tourism Ministry has insisted that new evacuation plans be developed and that evacuation procedures be presented in ways that will be easily understood by tourists, no matter their place of origin. In addition, the Tourism Ministry has created new policies to ensure that Peligo's citizens are provided with accessible evacuation plans and that the Peligo tourism industry provides the resources for evacuating resident Peligans when necessary.

The Peligo Tourism Ministry has contracted with the U.S.-based company Safety International (SI) to develop the evacuation plans and information cards and brochures that explain evacuation procedures. SI currently provides safety information cards for a number of airlines worldwide and has also developed evacuation plans and resources for companies, militaries, and governments around the world.

As one of SI's safety strategy engineers, you have been assigned to work on the Peligo plan. For this assignment you are charged with developing a plan to account for all of Peligo's needs and detailing it in a written report. You will need to create a list of the kinds of documents that should be developed to publicize the evacuation procedures. Then, write a description of the kinds of transnational and transcultural concerns SI will have to account for in writing those procedures.

CASE STUDIES ON THE COMPANION WEBSITE

Translating Video Games to Foreign Markets

This case focuses on Lateral Designs Unlimited, a company that specializes in re-releasing successful U.S. video games in foreign markets. Your team of technical writers prepares game documents for localization to target markets outside the United States.

Big Owl's Goes Global: Internationalizing a Restaurant Chain

As a technical writer for a U.S.-based chicken wing franchise, you have been asked to research the feasibility of opening a chain restaurant in several Middle Eastern countries. You will need to determine how to best transfer your product to a different market in a culturally sensitive manner.



Learning about Chinese Business Culture

As an employee of THC Industries, you find yourself having to make an extended business trip to Beijing in order to negotiate a number of new contracts. You decide to do a bit of a preliminary research to familiarize yourself with some of the basic cultural issues that you will need to consider when working with Chinese business people.

The Hawksbill Turtle Society: Securing International Protection for an Endangered Species

In this case you will consider the problems faced by the Hawksbill Turtle Society as the members attempt to convince legislators in other countries to adopt better protection measures for this endangered species. The economic and social role of this turtle in certain cultures creates complex rhetorical problems.

VIDEO CASE STUDY

DeSoto Global

Collaboration and Writing a Request for Proposals

Synopsis

DeSoto Global's automobile navigation systems are popular with North American markets because they all feature DeSoto Global's patented Tracker1 system, which allows DeSoto Global to locate stolen units through a GPS tracker chip embedded in each unit. Dora Harbin reports that Japan has launched an aggressive campaign to combat increased car theft. Of greatest interest to DeSoto Global is the campaign's desire to use more efficient vehicle-tracking devices—like DeSoto's Tracker1 system. The snag for DeSoto is that, in order for the Tracker1 system to work, it needs to be tied into a local security company with connections to local law enforcement agencies.

WRITING SCENARIOS

1. Listed here are thirty-eight idioms commonly used in American business communication. First, select fifteen of these terms, and learn their origins/etymologies. How did these come to mean what they do? Then create a glossary that explains what each of the expressions means in contemporary communication so that a translator who encounters any of them will be able to provide a more direct translation.

across the board
at a loss
bail a company out
ball park figure
bang for the buck
banker's hours
bean counter
big wheel/cheese/gun/wig
black and white
bottom fell out
bottom line
budget crunch
buy out

captain of industry
carry the day
cold call
company town
cut and dry
cut back
cut your losses
deliver the goods
face value
finger in the pie
give the green light
heads will roll
in the long run

in the red
jack up
kickback
number cruncher
on the chopping block
piece of the action
red ink
sell like hot cakes
strike while the iron is hot
take a nosedive
throw money at a problem
write off



2. In a 2008 letter to potential clients, the Sphere Group Distributors included these two sentences: "Although updated figures have not been confirmed, ballpark figures suggest a 34 percent increase over last quarter" and "It would seem that with the QuadOne notification process, we've hit a homerun." Of the 2,500 copies of the letter that were distributed, more than 750 were sent to potential European clients. Why might these sentences be problematic for a European audience? How might these two sentences be rewritten to better reach a European audience?
3. In the United States, written contracts between companies, individuals, and organizations are considered binding, legal documents and are regarded as critical to most professional relationships. Generally, no work or trade takes place until contracts have been agreed upon and signed, and they are then highly regarded as defining the relationship. Writing contracts is itself a massive industry in the United States, as is contract law. However, contracts do not have the same kind of legal or social status in many other countries. For instance, in China, contracts are much less important than developing a relationship between organizations, and many business arrangements never require contracts.

Consider this situation: A small U.S. gaming software company is attempting to establish its newest line of social-space games in Asian markets. Because it does not have the resources or the local knowledge to effectively place its product in local retail locations, the company must work with local distribution companies. After a number of telephone conversations with a Chinese software distribution company, the U.S. company agrees that the distribution company meets its needs and verbally acknowledges that it would like to work with the distribution company. The U.S. company then suggests that the two companies should reach an agreement and develop a contract. The Chinese representatives, however, seem less concerned about a contract; their words suggest that they accept the conversation as contractual. In fact, their final statements indicate that they will begin including the gaming software in their distribution catalogs and that they are looking forward to receiving the first 10,000 units for distribution.

Given that contracts are important to U.S. business and culture and are less so to Chinese counterparts, how would you explain to the distribution company the gaming company's need for a contract? Write a document that explains the need for the contract and then attempts to explain this need to the distribution company executives.

4. Select a food item that is made and distributed in the United States. Pick something that is culturally situated (and perhaps marketed) as "American": hot dogs, frozen dinners, pies, cake mixes, individually wrapped slices of cheese food, potato chips, candy bars, and so on. Take some time to analyze the package in which the food item is distributed. What text is included? What visuals are used? How is it designed? After you have analyzed the package, imagine that your company handles the item and has asked you to look into marketing and distributing it in three countries: Ukraine, Moldova, and the Kyrgyz Republic.

The item you are working with has not been previously distributed in these countries, and there has been little attempt to create a market for it. Because of the political situation in these countries, only recently have they been opened to U.S. trade. Your company's venture into these market areas will prompt



consideration of them as potential long-term markets, but the uncertainty has caused your company to offer only limited resources for the project. You will not be able to develop three new packages and three new market strategies; your supervisors want a single, global approach to distribution.

Develop a document that outlines what your company needs to know about each of these three countries in order to market the item you have selected. Identify factors like language, religion, political history, and so on that might affect how you market the item. Consider specifically how the kind of food you have chosen fits within the countries' culinary cultures and what advantages or disadvantages this might cause. Be sure to identify factors that will lend themselves to a single market approach, such as common customs, languages, and visual approaches.

5. Recently, your Chicago-based company has been negotiating with a South Korean company to enter into a long-term agreement that could open up new Pacific-rim markets for your company. You have been central in these conversations. Last Friday morning when you arrived at your office, you found an e-mail in your inbox from your counterpart with the South Korean company, asking you to call him Monday morning at 10:00 to plan the details of a phone conference the two companies have scheduled for Tuesday. The relationship you have developed with your counterpart has been positive and, you believe, partly responsible for the success of the negotiations. You respond to the e-mail, agreeing to call.

On Monday when you call, there is no answer. You call back fifteen minutes later, still no answer. Assuming that your counterpart has been delayed by other business, you decide to wait for an e-mail. On Tuesday morning when you arrive at the office, there is a terse e-mail waiting for you from your South Korean counterpart. He is insulted by your not calling, and the conference call has been postponed.

Why did he assume that you did not call him? What mistake did you make? Write a letter of apology to the South Korean representative, explaining what happened (the clues are in the assignment), apologizing for the situation, and attempting to reschedule both the independent and the conference calls.

6. Using English as culturally neutral as possible, write a step-by-step set of instructions for a global audience on how to use a paper clip.
7. Pick a country other than the United States. Conduct a bit of research, and then create a chart that outline's what you have learned about that country's approaches to politics and law, economics, society (including attitudes toward age, business etiquette, and family and social interaction), religion, education, technology, and language. Once you have finished the chart, write a list of guidelines based on what you've learned that would assist someone who is writing to that target country.
8. Many industries have developed networks of professional conversation about transnational communication within their industries. Many have also begun to develop industry standards for transnational communication. Select an industry in which you might be interested in developing a career. Then research how that industry approaches transnational and transcultural communication. Are there established standards? If so, what are they, and who maintains them? Who in the industry is talking about transnational and transcultural communication? Are there companies and/or organizations that are leading these conversation? Write a document explaining how the



industry you have selected talks about transnational and transcultural communication. Don't limit your research to simple web searches; do talk with professionals in the industry.

9. Writing documents for audiences in third world countries (also known as developing countries or the global south) taps into specific kinds of economic, technological, and educational issues that differ from those of first and second world audiences. Think about what those issues might be, and develop a set of guidelines for writing technical documentation for third world target audiences.
10. When U.S. businesspeople work in countries outside the United States, they often find local business customs so different from what they are accustomed to that they have difficulty adjusting to the new working conditions. For example, many U.S. workers—particularly managers, professionals, and upper-level executives—are accustomed to having their own offices. But in some countries where space is at a premium and social practices emphasize community over individuals (e.g., Japan), those workers often find themselves working at desks in large rooms with other employees in the same room. U.S. workers often find such conditions distracting. As another example, business meetings in some countries often begin with informal conversations that U.S. workers might consider small talk. Actual discussion about business matters is delayed until each person present has had the opportunity, for instance, to diligently inquire about the health of the families of others in attendance. And in some countries it is considered impolite to begin addressing business matters until everyone present has had a chance to take refreshment, like a cup of tea.

Conduct some research to learn about the business culture of three other countries that differ from the United States in practices and expectations. Then write a document that explains these practices and offers strategies for how U.S. workers might best acclimate to such practices should they find themselves working in those countries.

11. This chapter explains the problems of stereotyping that might arise from guidebook approaches to communicating with particular target audiences. Despite these concerns there are endless resources available whose strategies for doing business or communicating with various target audiences rely on methods that can be construed as stereotyping. Locate a resource that offers advice on how to communicate with others in a specific target country other than your own. Analyze the advice, and determine whether any of the suggested strategies contribute to stereotypes. Then write an analysis of the resource, explaining what you found.
12. This assignment comes from Bruce Maylath:

Many translation companies report that, while the largest segment of their work is for documentation heading in and out of the United States, the fastest growing segment of their business is for documentation staying within the United States. Part of the growth is a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Go to any store in the United States, and you'll see many package labels in English, French, and Spanish for the joint U.S., Canadian, and Mexican market. The labels are just as useful for French speakers in Maine, northern New York, and Louisiana and for Spanish speakers in Florida, Texas, and California as they are for French Canadians and Mexicans. More striking, perhaps, is the increase in translation into Navajo, Chinese, Somali, Hmong, and other languages for communities within the United States. In what ways will the emphases on niche marketing, multiculturalism, and reaching



populations in their native languages affect the way American firms conduct business both at home and abroad? In what respects is the situation today different from 1900, when quite a few documents were translated into German, Swedish, Yiddish, Italian, and other languages for immigrant groups settling in the United States?²⁴

Write a detailed letter to your instructor explaining your answers to these questions.

²⁴Bruce Maylath, "Translating User Manuals: A Surgical Equipment Company's 'Quick Cut,'" in *Global Contexts: Case Studies in International Technical Communication*, ed. Deborah S. Bosley (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 79.