

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Background of the Study

With the globalization and technology advancement as well as economic expansion around the world, English has gained the position of the most prominent international language. English plays an important role in facilitating business communication since business interaction often takes place among non-native speakers using English as a lingua franca more than between non-native and native speakers (Louhiala-Salminen, 1996; Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998; Nickerson, 1999). Given the fact that the nature of business operations tends to involve people from various national and cultural backgrounds, an understanding of intercultural business communication could contribute to a large extent in effective business communication.

The advancement in communication technology has changed the process of sending and receiving messages. For many years business messages were exchanged by letters and faxes, until the early 90s when electronic mail (e-mail) became the most common medium for exchanging messages in business environments (Louhiala-Salminen, 1996; 2001) because this means is not bound by geographical limitations (Van Mulken and Van der Meer, 2005). E-mail is a combination of the features of spoken and written discourse to be transmitted or received by a computer (Gimenez, 2000). It can either be used within the organization as a memorandum or between companies as a letter. Electronic format can be viewed as a distinct channel or medium which imposes its own register characteristics (Bhatia, 1997). It is evident as Louthiala-Salminen (1996: 48) pointed out that "in order to understand the nature of texts it is needed to study their use as instruments of communication, the roles texts play, and the way texts are related to their uses and users in special interest settings".

Although e-mail has become increasingly commonplace in internal and external communication in business environments, the possible emergence of new linguistic and stylistic conventions was documented in several research. Thus,

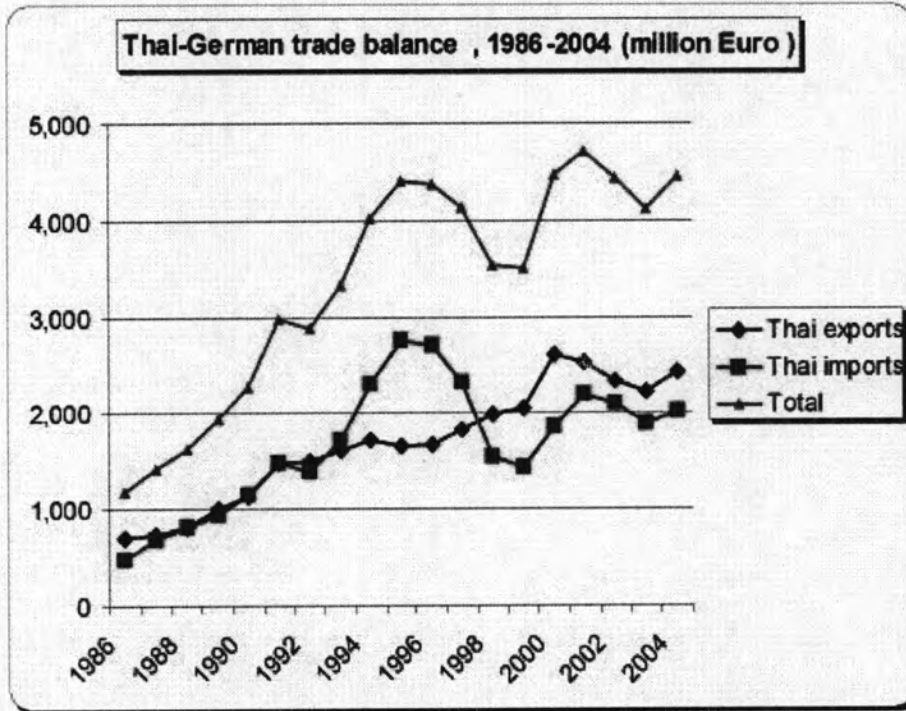
researchers on written business communication have called attention to the need for further investigation into the effects of electronic mail on business writing (Louhiala-Salminen, 1996; Gains, 1999; Nickerson, 1999; Gimenez, 2000; Chakorn, 2002; Van Mulken and Van der Meer, 2005) and the influence of national and corporate cultures on the choice of linguistic items (Flowerdew and Wan, 2006).

Despite the evidence that English is used as a lingua franca in business settings where the majority of the users are non-native speakers of English, Nickerson (1999) claimed that there has been little research on the nature of authentic electronic correspondence between non-native corporate users of English. Besides, the previous research has not caught up with investigating and validating similarities or differences in intercultural English business e-mail message exchange between speakers who belong to the expanding circle of English (Kachru, 1992) like Thais and Germans.

According to Clyne (1994), there are three main approaches in the study of intercultural communication. The first approach and the most familiar one is the contrastive approach. This approach aims to study the role of culture in discourse by comparing native discourse across cultures. The second approach is the interlanguage approach. It attempts to analyze the discourse of non-native speakers in a second language. The present study, however, relies on the least investigated approach of intercultural communication which is the interactive intercultural approach. This approach endeavors to explore and compare the discourse of people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting in a lingua franca. The data from the Department of International Trade Negotiations (2004) reveals that during the year of 2000-2003 the average Thai-German trade value was 4,135.9 million US dollars per year making Germany the largest EU trading partner of Thailand. The German-Thai Chamber of Commerce on the basis of figures supplied by the Federal Statistical Bureau, Wiesbaden reported that the Thai-German trade balance in July 2006 was 2,795.057 million Euros. Germany is Thailand's 12th major export market with the average export value of 1,533.091 million Euros and the 8th largest import market with the average value of 1,261.966 million Euros per year. From the intercultural point of view, it is interesting to study the business communication between Thai and

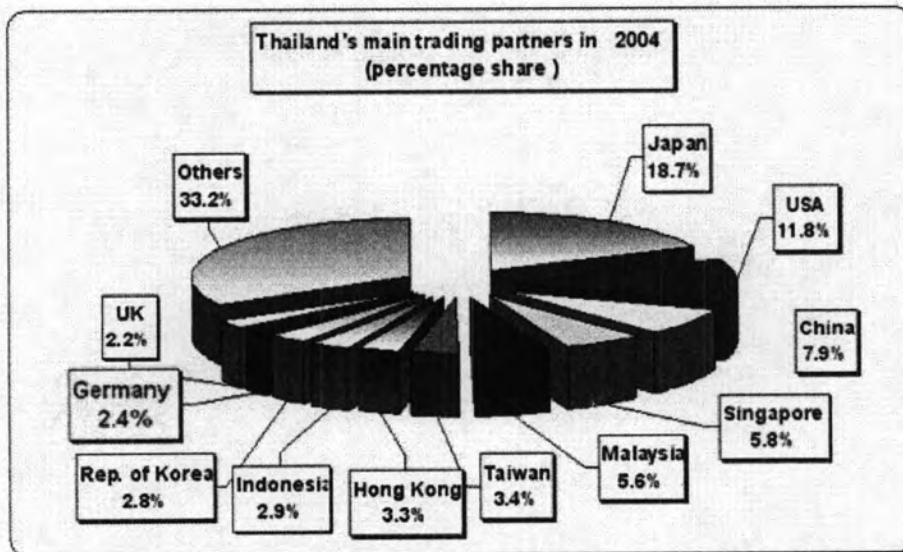
German business people since both of them represent non-native speakers of English from different cultural contexts.

Figure 1.1: Thai-German trade balance 1986-2004



Source: German Federal Statistics Office

Figure 1.2: Thailand's main trading partners in 2004



Source: BOT

At present, there are a few Thai academics interested in intercultural business correspondence between Thai business people and other nations (Hiranburana, 1996; Chakorn, 2002). Their studies, however, focused on different linguistic aspects. Hiranburana (1996) explored letters, faxes and telexes in terms of the rhetorical strategies, discourse structure, patterns of moves, and turn-taking while Chakorn (2002) investigated the rhetorical moves, linguistics realizations, rhetorical appeals and politeness strategies.

The analytical approach chosen for this study is that of genre analysis in the tradition of Bhatia 1993. Genre analysis represents the study of linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic and professional settings. It explores communication among people by avoiding a formalized way to describe communication. The key feature of genre analysis is that it places the discourse into the communicative context within which it occurs and takes account of aspects such as culture and situation in a way that earlier discourse analysis was unable to do. In addition to a description of the language used, genre analysis focuses also on an explanation of why language is used differently within specific cultures. The specific language is demarcated into a smaller element called a “move”. Specific moves and structures within a text can be isolated and examined to discover the structure of certain genres with reference to their allowable move sequence, move construction, and linguistic features. Accordingly, genre analysis has been considered a very important development in English for specific purposes (ESP) (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998: 31).

Though considerable research has been conducted on the genre analysis, most of them have been interested in the well-established academic genre (e.g. Hopkins and Dudley-Evan, 1988; Swales, 1990; Weissberg, 1993; Brett, 1994; Thompson, 1994; Nwogu, 1997; Holmes, 1997; Rowley-Jolivet, 2002; Martin, 2002; Peacock, 2002; Badger, 2003; Ruiying and Allison, 2003; 2004; Hyland, 2004; Samraj, 2005; Kanoksilapatham, 2005) while only some of them are purely about the professional genres (e.g. Henry and Roseberry, 2001; Flowerdew and Wan, 2006). Many researchers studying professional genres would rather pay attention to cross-cultural communication (e.g. Bhatia, 1993; Louhiala-Salminen, 1997; Akar and Louhiala-Salminen, 1999; Upton and Connor, 2001; Pintos dos Santos, 2002; Vergaro, 2004;

Van Mulken and Van der Meer, 2005; Arvani, 2006). However, they overlook the corporate culture which is also essential in writing an effective business message and seems to dictate the nature and linguistic realizations of these genres in real life professional settings in multicultural environments as Gunnarson (1997: 41) noted that

“Writing in an organization is not only a matter of knowing how to write a certain document for a specific audience but also a matter of how to fit into the organizational structure and how to adapt the organizational subculture and its norms, attitudes and values”.

This research, therefore, takes account of the two basic types of business organizations categorized according to their business goals, namely profit and non-profit organizations. A profit organization exists primarily to generate a profit, that is, to take in more money than it spends. A non-profit organization is founded to provide a particular service to the community under rules that forbid the distribution of profits to owners. Considering the different goals they pursue, one could expect that their cultures and communications may somehow differ in certain aspects. This requires an empirical investigation.

Teachers of Business English as a major strand of ESP teaching, therefore, should keep eyes on current business genres, national and corporate cultures and movements of communicational technology affecting the language practice via internet and e-mail. Business genre-specific corpus within the mode of communication and cultural contexts in which the texts are generated is needed. The corpus provides not only a pattern for understanding, but also a pattern for behavior because the mental representation of a particular situation should contain not only information on participants and activities, but also on the appropriate use of language determined by specific knowledge. Particular business tasks require additional strategies beyond general writing ability. Each situation and context may require different types of language depending on cultural backgrounds of language users in interpreting purposes and genres (Upton and Connor, 2001). In writing a sales promotion letter, for instance, Thais do not offer incentives and rarely use pressure tactics as opposed to native speakers of English (Chakorn, 2002). Different

dimensions of culture require different sets of organized knowledge. To investigate such an issue, this research adopts a perspective that shows how and why national and corporate cultures interact in contributing to the achievement of the communicative purpose of a genre.

1.2 Research Questions

This research addresses the following questions:

- 1) What are the features of business e-mail messages written by Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations?
- 2) Are there any differences in move structures and linguistic realizations in English e-mail messages written by Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations?

If yes, - can the differences be explained in terms of variability in culture e.g. low and high context cultures?

If no, - what are the reasons for that? Is it possible that business discipline or corporate culture prevails over the national culture of e-mail composers?

- 3) Do the business e-mail messages contain any recognizable electronic discourse and exhibit a new genre of international English written communication?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold:

- 1) To investigate the electronic discourse in English business e-mail correspondence in internal communication between Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations;

- 2) To compare and contrast move structures, politeness strategies and salutations used in English business e-mail messages across cultures and organizations; and
- 3) To provide some suggestions for writing effective business e-mail messages and for developing a course syllabus and materials for business English.

1.4 Statements of Hypotheses

Even though English is used as a lingua franca in business communication, the move structures in business e-mail messages written by Thais and Germans are not necessary identical. There may be the interference from the first language and culture as well as the convergence towards norms of target language and of business conventions.

After conducting the pilot study, the author of this study has come up with the following hypotheses:

- 1) the e-mail correspondence presents the predominance of corporate cultures over national cultures;
- 2) Thais and Germans share common move structures and linguistic realizations in English business e-mail messages resulting from corporate cultures;
- 3) Thais use more negative politeness strategies but Germans use more positive politeness strategies to achieve the communicative goals in English business e-mail messages;
- 4) positive politeness strategies are more often used by the staff in profit organizations than those in non-profit organizations; and
- 5) the business e-mail messages contain a recognizable electronic discourse and exhibit a new genre of written communication.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the genre analysis of English business e-mail correspondence in internal communication between Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations on an intercultural and contextualized basis. The e-mail messages were analyzed in terms of move structures in order to identify the relationship between the communicative purposes and the typical linguistic features of the moves. Furthermore, this study tried to investigate the influence of the new communication media and culture on the choices of language pattern to achieve the rhetorical functions. Focusing on the intercultural patterns, a further description of this genre may be able to provide information about what is universal or conventional to the genre, and whether these features bound to corporate culture or national culture of the writer as questioned by Pinto dos Santos (2002).

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

Although many variables may be involved in genre analysis such as nationality, gender, age, and socioeconomic status of the e-mail composers; the relationship between the senders and receivers; and the setting and social situation, this study, however, focuses only on the two macro contexts of the e-mail mode of communication which contribute to the e-mail correspondence, namely national and corporate cultures.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Genre analysis

Swales's study (1990) of move structures in the introduction to an academic article has paved the way for genre analysis in ESP. According to Swales, a "genre" is the "structure, style, content, and intended audience" which the members of a specific discourse community share in order to achieve their communicative purposes. Genres can differ within the same culture as well as across cultures (Martin, 2002; Samraj, 2005; Kanoksilapatham, 2005); in other words, genres contain cultural

and traditional expectations as required by specific purposes and tasks (Connor, 1996).

A genre consists of a series of “moves and steps”. A “move” is a meaningful semantic/functional unit represented in linguistic forms in relation to the communicative purposes of the activity in which members of the community are engaged (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Upton and Connor, 2001; Vergoro, 2004). “Moves” are discriminating elements of the generic structure which are subject to the overall communicative purpose of the genre (Bhatia, 1993). Analyzing the move structures of a text thus means assigning a pragmatic function to a stretch of language and building the schematic structure through which its communicative purpose is achieved (Vergoro, 2004). Moves are typically made up of several “steps” which are smaller language functional units embodied by linguistic realizations or exponents (Swales, 1990; Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998; Henry and Roseberry, 2001). According to Bhatia (1993) “steps” are non-discriminating because they do not affect the overall communicative purpose of the genre, but provide a detailed perspective to the move. Steps are tactical units exploited by individual experts to enhance the effectiveness of that particular genre and determined by socio-cultural factors or other constraints. Consequently, genre analysis aims to identify the moves and steps, the order of the moves and steps, the linguistic features, the strategies and use of a genre to achieve the communicative purposes of a discourse.

Intercultural communication

The term “intercultural communication” was first introduced by Edward T. Hall in 1959. Intercultural communication occurs whenever the exchanged messages between people from different cultures create dissimilar perceptions, interpretations and expectations (Samovar, Potter, and Stefani, 1998; Lustig and Koester, 2003).

Furthermore, Lusting and Koester (2003: 52) pointed out that “whereas intercultural communication involves interactions among people from different cultures, cross-cultural communication involves a comparison of interactions among people from the same culture to those from another culture. The goal of cross-cultural

investigation is to conduct a series of intracultural analyses in order to compare one culture to another on the attributes of interest”.

As the author of this study intends to investigate the interactions of the business e-mail messages exchanged by people from different cultures, rather than conduct a series of intracultural analyses in order to compare one culture to another; therefore, the term “intercultural” is used in this study.

Corporate culture

Culture in organizations is often referred to as corporate culture. Corporate culture is defined as “the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organization’s history. These patterns tend to be manifested in its material arrangement and in the behaviors of its members” (Brown, 1995: 5). According to Scollon and Scollon (2001), corporate culture and professional group are “goal-directed” or “voluntary” discourse system. An organization may be founded to make profits for the owners, or spend some or all of the profits on the business itself, or share some of them with employees through the use of various types of compensation plan, the so-called “profit organization”; or to render some services to some constituency without making profits to the owner, the so-called “non-profit organization”. The ways in which organization members utilize a variety of discursive activities and resources in order to perform and coordinate their roles is the corporate discourse, which is a major type of discourse system (Swales and Rogers, 1995; Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 1998; Iedema and Wodak, 1999).

Low and High Context Cultures

The term “low and high context cultures” proposed by Hall (1981) distinguishes two distinct characteristics of people in those cultures. People in low context cultures tend to be direct when communicating with others and rely on verbal messages. Context is less important; most information is explicitly spelled out. On the other hand, directness is often considered rude and offensive in high context cultures.

In high context cultures, most of the information is inferred from the context of a message. Non-verbal messages are sometimes more important.

Politeness Strategies

The term “politeness strategies” was made known by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to them, all human beings have self-esteem and want “face” or the public self-image in their society. They expect their “face” to be recognized and respected. A person with positive face wants to be accepted as a member of the group whereas a person with negative face wants to be independent, unimpeded in their action, and not to be imposed on by others. Politeness is a strategy that attends to the mutual awareness of “face” sensitivity. Politeness is an important linguistic strategy affecting language choice. To save people’s face, therefore, two different strategies related to their face wants are required, the so-called, positive and negative politeness strategies.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The author of this study anticipates that this study will extend the boundary of genre analysis from texts to the understanding of the contexts based on the knowledge that rhetorical organization may vary considerably from culture to culture. The definition of culture here is multi-dimensional which includes both national and corporate cultures working together to affect linguistic output. The genre analysis of English business e-mail correspondence in internal communication between Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations will provide

- 1) A complete description of the English language and practice in business e-mail correspondence and the interaction of business writing convention and cultures;
- 2) an insight for effective intercultural business writings;
- 3) a guideline for genre-based instructions; and
- 4) some suggestions for developing course syllabus and materials on business English.

1.9 Structure of the Dissertation

This chapter describes the background of the study concerning the importance of e-mail in intercultural business communication. Therefore, the genre analysis is proposed in the study with the aim to identify move structures of business e-mail correspondence across cultures and organizations. Chapter II reviews the theories underlying principles of the genre analysis, and the past research work that investigated the evolution of e-mail and the factors affecting intercultural business communication. The framework of the present analysis is the product of these reviewed principles. Chapter III introduces the research methodology including the justification for the sample size, the instrument facilitating the data analysis, the data collection techniques, and the analysis process. In Chapter IV, the findings of genre analysis of business e-mail messages are presented as related to the research questions and hypotheses. In Chapter V, the discussion on the findings of this study is given with reference to the national cultures of the e-mail composers and the culture of their organizations. This Chapter also provides some guidelines for genre-based instruction and recommendations for business people's strategic management of their communication, for business English materials development, as well as for further research.