

**“Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and
Intercultural Communication”**

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Abstract This paper revisits relevant approaches used for the study of language and intercultural communication, in particular, in the area of comparing English and Chinese discourse structures. Kaplan's (1966) work has a great impact on the various approaches in this area such as Kirkpatrick (1991; 1993) and Zhu (1997). This paper specifically investigates the approaches focusing on Kaplan's proposal on the circularity and linearity of rhetorical structures. It has been found that these approaches were largely based on rhetorical rules such as pianzheng fuju or the subordinate-main structure (Kirkpatrick 1991; 1993). This paper then argues that the intercultural and language study should incorporate cross-cultural pragmatics and genre study in order to offer more holistic principles relating to cultural values, politeness, and communicative intent

Keywords : intercultural communication, circularity, rhetorical rules, linearity, crosscultural pragmaticsI.

Introduction

This paper revisits relevant approaches used for the study of language and intercultural communication, in particular, in the area of comparing English and Chinese discursive patterns. Kaplan's (1996) work has a great impact on the various approaches in this area such as Kirkpatrick (1991; 1993) and Zhu (1997). All these studies focus on the relationship between language and thought patterns, agreeing that there are culturally-defined differences which are also shown in the use of rhetorical structure.

However, they mainly differ in the use approaches examining the cultural differences. This paper specifically investigates the approaches focusing on Kaplan's proposal on the circularity and linearity of rhetorical structures. For example, pianzheng fuju or the subordinate-main structure proposed by Kirkpatrick (1991; 1993) is discussed as one particular approach. Pianzheng fuju is a complex sentence structure in Chinese and is composed of a subordinate clause and a main. It is thus named because the traditional Chinese grammatical theorising and studies (Cao, 1968; Gao, 1986) tend to rate pianzheng (subordinate-main, SM) as a priority² sequence pattern of complex sentences. The impetus for this research derives from Kirkpatrick's (1996) argument that SM or because-therefore sequence is an important structure at the discourse level in MSC (Modern Standard Chinese). This conclusion was reached primarily based on his analysis of Chinese requests in which a pattern progressing from reason for request towards request has been found. Take the following excerpt quoted from Kirkpatrick (1993: 2) as an example: The interaction took place in the office of the senior expatriate officer (EO) in a Hong Kong police station. The constable (CPC) wants to request a day's compassionate leave to take his sick mother into hospital. CPC: Sir EO: Yes, what is it? EPC: My mother is not very well sir. EO: So? EPC: She has to go into hospital sir. EO: Well, get on with it. What do you want? CPC: On Thursday sir. Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42 27 EO: Bloody hell man, what do you want? (At this point, the police constable mumbled something like 'Nothing sir' and left the office.) Kirkpatrick argues that the above rhetorical structure indicates an opposite tendency from English in which a request would normally precede the reason. The above request would be reworded into something like this in English: I am asking for a leave because my mother is sick in hospital. This can be related to This is an interesting observation that supports Kaplan's circularity of the Chinese discourse patterns. By circularity, Kaplan (1996) refers to the indirect way of coming to a point of argument. Based on this, Kirkpatrick concludes that English discourse tends to arrange arguments from request to reasons for request. The opposite is true of the Chinese who develop from reasons for request to the request, thus revealing a SM or 'because-therefore' structure in Kirkpatrick's terms. Kirkpatrick explains that the main reason contributing to a 'because-therefore' sequence is to reduce the imposition caused by the request. It can be seen that the starting point of his research

seems to be sound, in particular, when he mentions that he intends to explore how politeness affects the structure of the language. A similar notion is stressed by Scollon and Scollon (1983, 1994) and Wierzbicka (1985). However, there is room for a variant analysis and conclusion as drawn in this paper. Indeed, further exploration of this issue is in order, as posed in the following questions: 1. Can approaches such as circularity and pianzhen fuju reflect the information sequence of the discourse in general? 2. Is the answer to the above question is negative, what then are the factors that may contribute to an appropriate framework for the exploration of approaches for language and intercultural communication? In order to explore these issues, this paper will look at literature from both English and Chinese sources. First, the debate evolving Kaplan's circularity and linearity will be discussed followed by a definition on the SM structure. Second, cross-cultural pragmatics will be reviewed and relevant theories of speech acts incorporated into the theoretical framework. Third, genre approach is introduced for further incorporation. Fourth, Chinese genre study is examined with an emphasis on the communicative purposes and reader-writer relations. Finally, as further illustration, the theoretical framework based on the literature search will be used to examine two particular genres. Zhu Yunxia © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 8 (2), 2008, pp. 25-42 28 II. FROM CIRCULARITY-LINEARITY TO SUBORDINATE-MAIN Kaplan's pioneering work on circularity and linearity needs to be discussed first since it prompted the subsequent research for examining language and intercultural communication. Kaplan (1966) analyses the organisation of paragraphs in ESL student essays, in which linearity and circularity stands out as a dominant issue. In his research, Kaplan found that linearity of paragraphing is basically in line with directness, while circularity is seen as relating to indirectness and digression. Some Germanic languages such as German, Dutch, and English tend to be linear, while some Oriental languages such as Korean, Japanese and Chinese tend to be circular. His findings made a major contribution to the teaching of writing across cultures. In the meantime, it also makes its impact felt in the area of intercultural communication (Campbell, 1998; Ulijn and Strother, 1995). Kaplan's model gave impetus to further research activities in contrastive rhetoric across a range of cultures. Relevant to this study, are the debates on the circularity of Chinese style in both written and spoken discourses. Kaplan (1996) argues that similar to other "Oriental" writing, Chinese is indirect mainly because of earlier influence from classical Chinese

writing style. Contrary to his argument, Mohan and Lo challenged Kaplan's view and claim that both classical and modern Chinese taught at school today favour a direct style. Zhu (1997) also found that Chinese sales letters follow a style linear to Chinese native speaker, which means these texts represent straightforward meanings to the Chinese readers. On the other hand, in agreement with Kaplan, Scollon (1991) and Matalene (1985) support Kaplan's hypothesis. However, they do not attribute the indirectness to the organisational pattern of classical Chinese. Instead, according to Scollon, the indirectness in Chinese writing is related to a different view of self from the West, which disallows the use of thesis statement at the beginning of a piece of writing. Interestingly enough, the Scollon's attribution goes beyond the topic of rhetorical structure, but deals with an essential issue(cultural differences in concepts. Supporting Young's argument (1994), Kirkpatrick (1993) comes up with similar findings. However, he attributes them to a different syntactic rule(subordinate-main (SM) structure in which a main clause is preceded by a subordinate clause. Kirkpatrick argues that while English tends to follow a sequence that develops from the main to the subordinate information sequence, the opposite is true in Chinese. He further argues, that the SM structure Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42 29 has a great impact on the way Chinese organise an argument. As substantiation, Kirkpatrick (1993) found that Chinese request letters tend to be written with a preference of a subordinate-main (SM) structure with the main information of request placed towards the end of the text. The debate on Chinese rhetorical structure also triggered Zhu's (1997) exploration of Chinese sales genres. According to Zhu, sales letters are direct and linear because the writer is making an offer to sell products, and any delay of the offer would dilute the reader's interest. She thus claims that it is the communicative purposes that should have an impact on the choice of the rhetorical structure, rather than syntactic structures. Zhu's research, in spite of its limited focus on argumentation, invites a combination of contrastive rhetoric and genre analysis, which also coincides with the focus of this paper to a certain extent. In sum, these approaches in contrastive study of language and culture focus on the discussion of communication styles in relation to textual structures. In Connor's (1996) words, it is a mainly a study on argumentation and that is why later Connor (2002) calls for developing a broader approach. This paper will make an attempt to look at the constraints of the pianzheng fuju and explore further

approaches for the study of language and intercultural communication. III. WHAT IS PIANZHENG FUJU? The concept of pianzheng fuju or subordinate and main information originate from traditional Chinese grammar (Cao, 1968; Gao, 1986). It is also known as pianzheng fuju (subordinatemain complex sentence), zhucong guanxi ju (sentences indicating main-subordinate relations) and fuhe ju (complex sentences). Despite the difference in names, traditional grammarians tend to agree that SM structure is the priority sequence pattern. According to Gao (1986), pianzheng fuju is composed of two clauses: the main clause and the subordinate clause, with the latter often proceeding the former. Unlike the main clause, the subordinate clause is related to the main clause and cannot stand alone as a sentence. The major purpose of the sentence resides in the main clause. The subordinate-main clauses are often linked by connectives. Gao (1986:426) provides the following translated sentence from Cao Yu, a wellknown Chinese writer: Because your father did not want her, (therefore) she drowned herself. Wang Li (1955: 228) and Gao (1986) confirm that the SM sequence is preferred in a complex sentence, although it can be reversed on certain occasions such as for emphasis and rhetorical Zhu Yunxia © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 8 (2), 2008, pp. 25-42 30 effect. The SM sequence, at the same time, indicates a difference from English. According to Longacre (1985), a subordinate clause can be placed in English either before or after the main clause and neither sequence is preferred. However, the question is: Can this single traditional preference be used as a reliable criterion for the choice of textual or discourse structure? How much influence does this syntactic pattern exercise on the discourse patterns of MSC? We may ask the same questions in regard of English discourse patterns. As mentioned earlier, English tends to have both SM and MS sequences for complex sentences as composed of a main and subordinate structure. This does not mean that the textual patterns will follow the same structures determined by the syntactic rules. Instead, the choice of textual structure is very much based on other principles relating to politeness and communicative purposes to be discussed later in this paper. Supposing the Chinese SM syntactic structure influenced the discourse structure, the SM claim would not be valid any more for the following reasons. Since the May 4th Movements of 1919, many works have been translated into Chinese. The main-subordinate sequence of complex sentences began to emerge in translations. Under this Western influence, main-subordinate sequence in argument has also become popular. In

1978, the year of the economic opening-up, saw the beginning of much wider Western influence in terms of MS sequence pattern. As a result, both SM and MS sequences of complex sentences are well accepted as unmarked patterns in contemporary grammar theory (Zhang, 1996). As a consequence, SM sequence is no longer a priority structure, and MS structure is popular as well. Therefore the SM and MS sequence tendency may weaken Kirkpatrick's argument immensely. One obvious reason can be that his argument is based on traditional language use which may not account for the contemporary Chinese rhetorical structure. Even if we adopt his approach to derive discourse structure based on priority sentence structures, we need to be aware of the existence and increasing popularity of MS pattern. Consequently we have to accept an equal validity in both SM and MS sequence patterns which will eventually nullify the SM sequence as a appropriate approach for studying Chinese language and culture. We need therefore to explore the possibility of incorporating other theoretical dimensions. Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42 31 IV. CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS AND SPEECH ACTS First, a look at the cross-cultural pragmatics and speech-act-theory is imperative inasmuch as Kirkpatrick bases his arguments mainly on requests, which is one type of the directives of speech acts. Cross-cultural pragmatics research focuses on the use of speech acts across cultures. Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) explore various degrees of indirectness of requests strategies across eight different cultures. Wierzbicka (1985; 1991) in her case study of several speech acts, compares Polish and English expressions, in particular, the use of speech acts. She found that there is a clear cultural difference in the degree of indirectness in illocutionary force. Wierzbicka also found that in either language expressing opinions tend to be more affirmative than making a request, thus the need to introduce the speech act theory in more details. By looking at the speech act theory we may have a clear picture about where requests stand and whether the SM structure can represent the structure used in expressing other speech acts. Searle (1969) summarises Austin's (1962) speech acts and groups them into five categories of speech acts including assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The major contribution of the speech act theory is in drawing attention to the different illocutionary forces between direct and indirect speech acts. For example, a declaration may not be expressed in exactly the same manner as a directive. Even within the

category of directives the degree of indirectness or directness may vary. An order may not be indicated in the same form of a request. In his research of discourse study in workplace English, Clyne (1996) found that some speech acts are explicit, while others are implicit. Using indirect forms may be related to politeness behavior. Leech (1983) contends that indirect illocutions are more polite than the direct, because the former can offer more options for the addressee. A polite utterance is likely to be seen as minimizing the addressee's costs and maximizing his/her benefits, and the opposite is true for the addresser. Therefore indirectness is often used as a politeness strategy across cultures (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989). The indirectness of politeness can also be further explained in the light of Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-saving theory. Many actions we do with words are potential facethreatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987), such as requests and invitations. The addresser is thus often confronted with negative face and has to address it by applying Leech's (1983) principles, in which indirectness is the dominant strategy to gain politeness. Although the above requests are all related to the use of speech acts expressed at the sentence level, the preference of polite strategies in making a request across cultures is readily Zhu Yunxia © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 8 (2), 2008, pp. 25-42 32 apparent. Besides some of the strategies employed at the sentence level, Chinese discourse also exhibits indirectness at the text level; this can be considered as a cultural-specific feature. For example, Chinese requests, according to Kirkpatrick (1993) and Lustig & Koester (1998), are often expressed indirectly or in a 'because-therefore' sequence as indicated in the example at the beginning of this paper. However, the SM or 'because-therefore' sequence is used as a politeness strategy to save the negative fact and reduce the imposition on the reader. This strategy may also be used for similar purposes in other speech acts, but it may not reflect all other speech acts. Therefore a certain finding drawn from one directive such as requests may not reflect the discourse structure of the language in general. In addition, other cultures may not use exactly the same strategy for making a request. Therefore it is also essential to study cultural values and strategies across cultures. For example, cultural dimensions (Hofstede,1991) and face maintenance (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998) should be incorporated in the analysis where appropriate. V. THE IMPERATIVE TO INCORPORATE GENRE STUDY Since a single speech act structure cannot reflect the discourse structure in general, we need to incorporate genre and communicative purposes (Swales, 1990) which help highlight

some of the fundamental principles underlying the rhetorical choices within a certain cultural context. In his view of genre, Swales (1990) stresses the importance of communicative purposes. It is these purposes that tie all the ideas together to represent the whole communicative events in a text. There have been a number of studies (Hymes, 1974; Miller, 1984; Saville-Troike, 1984; Martin and Rothery, 1986) that focus on the discussion of genre in relation to communicative purposes. The communicative purposes will always offer reliable criteria because any genre may have purposes and they will determine linguistic choices (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). Swales further explains that the communicative purposes of genre can be realized in 'moves' and 'steps'. A 'move' is a unit in a text and is sometimes defined as a communicative event (Zhu, 1999a). A 'step' is a smaller unit under the move. Swales' approach has been applied widely in the study of both academic and professional genres (Bhatia, 1993; Crookes, 1986; dos Santos, 1996; Duszak, 1994; Taylor and Chen, 1991; Zhu, 1999a; 2000). Swales' genre approach may apply very well in a request Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42 33 letter. The major purpose of making a request may impact the choice of text structure. Since making a request may pose imposition to the reader, SM sequence can be a tactful strategy to make the request feasible or more acceptable before the request is raised. SM sequence can be seen in genre study as one particular strategy to achieve the purpose of making requests, and may not be appropriate to achieve other purposes such as issuing an orders to subordinates. For example, Zhu (1999b) found that SM is not a preferred structure in Chinese tongzhi, which is a letter involving orders and instructions sent to a subordinate. Her findings show that tongzhi is a genre representing the voice of authority and power. The SM structure would not be inappropriate because it will only delay the information thus undermining the influence of the authority. This is particularly true with the Chinese culture which would to be a culture of great power distance (Hofstede, 1991). VI. XIA/PING/SHANGXING GENRES IN CHINESE WRITTEN DISCOURSE In Chinese written discourse, in particular, in the area of practical writing, there is a tendency to divide genres according to relational factors besides the usual division such as poetry and prose. Namely, Chinese can be seen as having three genres: Xiaxing (the superior writing to the subordinate), pingxing (equals writing to each other) and shangxing (the subordinate writing to the superior). These

genres will be examined in relation to speech act theory, and this may shed light on the choice of structure in a specific genre such as request letters. The requests Kirkpatrick examines belong to the shangxing genre as requests often tend to be. There is a close link between these genres and specific speech acts as well. Some speech acts such as orders tend to be xiaying while others such as requests tend to be shangxing. This may show that the division of the three genres is a cultural-specific way of classifying speech acts, and Chinese scholars are also very much aware of the effective use of illocutionary force. Each genre is determined by the specific reader-writer relationship and the writer has to be careful in choosing the appropriate register. For example a shangxing request should not be written in the same way as a xiaying order. The above discussion shows that xia/ping/shangxing genres may involve a wide range of speech acts, and both direct and indirect styles may be adopted as a means of realizing communicative purposes. Even within the shangxing shu (letters), SM structure is not the only scheme used. Therefore we may say that the three genres may employ various strategies Zhu Yunxia © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 8 (2), 2008, pp. 25-42 34 to communicate to the addressees depending on politeness principles and the purposes, and it would not be appropriate to say that SM structure can represent the rhetorical structure in all the shang/ping/xiaying genres. These shang/ping/xiaying genres have different purposes, consist of different speech acts, therefore we need a more holistic approach than SM to study Chinese written discourse. Genre study in both English and Chinese can be used as a guideline to study the discourse structure and will be applied in the following analysis of specific genres.

VII. EXAMINING THE MODERN PINGXING AND SHANGXING GENRES

Differences in text structure as exhibited in ancient texts discussed above are still in existence in modern Chinese discourse. This section will give a close examination of the pingxing and shangxing genres used today. Only these two genres are included in this discussion because of space limitations. These two genres will be sufficient to indicate a clear contrast in discourse preferences. However, reference can be made to Zhu (1999b) for a detailed discussion of xiaying genres. Two letters reflective of each genre will be discussed in order to provide a glimpse of the diverse rhetorical structures. These letters are taken from authentic letters. The pingxing letter are from Zhu's (1999a) sales letter corpus and the shangxing is taken from Kirkpatrick's (1993) request letters. It needs to be pointed out that although each genre may have various characteristics such

as the use of honorifics and formality of language (Zhu, 1999a, 2000), the discussion will focus on the rhetorical structure. All of these letters will be discussed in the light of the theoretical framework based on genre study and speech act theory as noted earlier.

VIII. AN EXAMPLE FROM THE PINGXING GENRE The following is a sales letter taken from Zhu (2001) and this letter is rated the best by Chinese managers in her twenty-letter corpus. Chinese sales letters are sent to pingxing organizations with an intention to advertise and promote the product. As Chen (1991: 260) puts it, "Sales letters have to arouse the buyer's interest, and stimulate his/her desire to buy the product". The letter goes like this. Salutation Dear computer customers, Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42

35 Greeting How are you? Product offer Do you wish to own a 500WA reserve UPS with extraordinary function, good quality and exquisite looking at the lowest possible price? It has the following special characteristics: Product details (It can run on direct current; (Further details omitted). In order to thank customers who are interested in this product, and at the same time, in order to provide your computer with the most reliable protection, we offer a special price for 500WA from September 21 - December 31. Original price: 1790 yuan Special offer Special price: 1380 yuan!!! Now you (H)2 must be anxious to know what brand of UPS this is. Of Positive course it has to be UPSONIC. It is the crystallisation of American appraisal technology, and has a production history of more than 20 years. Models range from 100VA - 600 VA, among which PCM - 50R (500VA) is the most outstanding product, and will also be your most sensible choice. Request The offer only lasts for three months, if you are interested, please you can: (Ring us directly; (Fax the response form to us; (Mail the response form to us. Pressure tactics Attention: the offer only lasts till December 31. Signature Xingda Survey Control Company and date (Date) The major purpose of the letter is to persuade the reader to buy the product. To start with, a brief greeting is employed as an important strategy to build a personal relationship with the reader. However, this is a ritualistic practice in Chinese culture and should be considered as relating to cultural-specific purposes and should not be considered as subordinate information. Apart from this, the moves are very much focused on promoting the product. First of all, the offer which is the major speech act in the letter, happens at the beginning of the letter: Zhu Yunxia © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES,

vol. 8 (2), 2008, pp. 25-42 36 Do you wish to own a 500WA reserve UPS with extraordinary function, good quality and exquisite looking at the lowest possible price? The offer is raised in a question form with a you approach which is a sales strategy to focus attention on the reader. Here there is no subordinate information to prop up the offer. Firstly the writer is trying to commit the reader to doing something of great benefit as indicated by all the adjectives. Secondly, the writer is trying to stimulate the reader's interest by describing how excellent the product is. This is one of the important strategies used in sales promotion. This also shows that the choice of the sentential structure is related to the major purpose of selling the product. This choice is also related to the textual level. As a matter of fact, most of the moves and steps are similar to the communication strategy called AIDA: (A) attracting the reader's attention; (I) arousing the reader's interest; (D) Creating desire to owe the product; and (A) stating the action the reader needs to take. Such formulaic patterns of persuasion appear in some American business texts (eg. Murphy, et al., 1997) as well as other approaches to persuasive written messages. The Chinese sales letter echoes this pattern very well. For example, essential details of the product are provided to make the reader interested, a special offer is made to tempt the reader to buy the product, and the reader is called to react in a certain way. From this we can see that this pingxing letter does not follow the subordinatemain structure at all, which may not contribute significantly to the realization of a sale offer. Instead it focuses very much on a linear structure of promoting the product. IX. AN EXAMPLE FROM THE SHANGXING GENRE Chinese native speakers rate the following shangxing genre letter, taken from Kirkpatrick (1993), as one of the best letters in his corpus which is composed of forty request letters sent to Radio Australia (RA). Salutation Respected Radio Australia (RA) producers, Praise I have been a loyal listener to Radio Australia's English teaching programs and to 'Songs You like' for several years. I consider both programs to be extremely well produced. Intro Me Let me describe myself a little: I am a middle school student, I am eighteen and my home is in XXX, a small border city. The cultural life really isn't too bad. Because Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42 37 Reasons for I like studying English, I therefore follow those programs closely. But because the request Central Broadcasting Station's English programs are rather abstruse, they are not Interest in RA really suitable

for me and therefore I get all my practice in listening comprehension and dialogue from Radio Australia's English programs. This practice has been of great benefit. As I progress, step by step through the course, I am keenly aware that not having the teaching materials presents several difficulties. Because of Requests this, I have taken time to write this letter to you, in the hope that I can obtain a set Request 1 of radio Australia's English program's teaching materials. Please let me know the cost of the materials Request 2 In addition, I hope to obtain a radio Australia calendar. Wishing Radio Australia's Mandarin program even more interest. Signature Listener XX and date (Date)

First of all, this is a shangxing letter and the writer is in a subordinate position to the program producers. Education is very much valued in China and the provider of it is thus often considered in a higher position than the receiver. In a context like this, appropriate politeness strategies have to be employed to indicate a higher respect level. For example, the honorific (H) salutation "respected" and pronoun you are used in the Chinese text to achieve this purpose. This letter applies the underlying politeness principle very well all throughout the letter, in particular, in the rhetorical structure. The letter follows the sequence progressing from reasons for request to the request and the main information of request happens at the end. Praising the RA is placed at the beginning; in this sentence loyal is the key word to gain trust from the writer. The reasons for request seem to be sound and are also intermingled with further praises for RA. Gradually, the writer's keen interest in this marvelous program leads to a natural development of the request for teaching materials. In this way, the imposition of a request is reduced tactfully. Note that the request itself is also made in the SM structure: Because of this, I have taken time to write this letter to you, in the hope that I can obtain a set of radio Australia's English program's teaching materials. Zhu Yunxia © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 8 (2), 2008, pp. 25-42 38 This sentence is introduced by the reason connective yinwei (because), and the request of "obtaining a set of radio Australia's English program's teaching materials" only occurs after this clause. This may show that the appropriate use of SM structure at the sentence level based on politeness principles. The second request is placed after the first and the imposition is further diluted by a good wish for RA. The letter therefore follows the SM or a becausetherefore sequence. However, this structure does not seem to follow some syntax principle, rather it adopts the politeness principle to save the negative face in request making. The above detailed discussion of the two genres

indicates that different principles can be applied in the choice of rhetorical structure. It also indicates that SM structure is not a distinct feature shared by all. In fact, only the shangxing request letters tend to adopt this sequence as a specific communication strategy. These findings further substantiate the main argument that we need to develop a broader approach to study language and intercultural communication.

X. CONCLUSION

This study revisited the relevant approaches for the study of language and intercultural communication, and the following findings need to be highlighted. It has been found that it would not be appropriate to use one particular rhetorical structure, being it circular-linear or SM structure, as a major approach to examine language and culture. This paper therefore proposed a synthesised approach based cross-cultural pragmatics, genre theory and intercultural communication. This approach can be used for the study of language and intercultural communication in general. As illustration, shangxing and pingxing genres were examined and the findings indicated that various rhetorical structures have been employed. Findings also showed that request letters belonged to the shangxing genre and SM structure was used as a strategy to back up the request and reduce the imposition. While agreeing that SM structure may be appropriate for a shangxing request it may not help achieve the purposes of the pingxing sales letters. In addition, the principles underlying the use of xia/ping/shangxing genres can offer important clues. For instance, a specific genre has to be examined in the cultural and social environment in which it is employed. Revisiting Relevant Approaches for the Study of Language and Intercultural Communication © Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. IJES, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 25-42 39 In sum, we need an all-round approach to study language and intercultural communication. Therefore we should always be aware of the limitations of our research findings and evaluate them in the light of appropriate models such as employed by the current study. Furthermore, other perspectives such as intercultural persuasion and sociocultural cognition can also be incorporated into the approach in future language and intercultural studies.

NOTES:

1. The author thanks Professor Herbert Hildebrandt, Dr Tony Liddicoat, and Dr Tony Diller for their insightful feedback and valuable comments on the previous versions of this paper. Special thanks are given to Dr Beverly Hong for her comment on

the preliminary ideas for this paper. 2. Priority pattern refers to a pattern of arrangement or organization of linguistic elements, such as clauses or sentences which is generally chosen or preferred by members in a given population of language users, in their own spontaneous use of the language, to achieve a communicative purpose. 3. All translations in this paper are the author's unless otherwise indicated. 3. All translations in this paper are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

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