Understanding sociocognitive space of written discourse: Implications for teaching business writing to Chinese students[*]

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Abstract

Confronted with various issues in teaching business writing to Chinese students in New Zealand, this paper sees the need for bridging the gap between genre-based research and teaching in an intercultural context. Specifically, it develops an intercultural reflective model in the light of Bhatia's sociocognitive genre study as well as cross-cultural persuasion. As an important part of the model, New Zealand and Chinese experts' intracultural and intercultural reflections on business writing are solicited and compared and the theoretical implications for teaching and learning business writing are discussed. It has been found, through a case study of analysing English and Chinese business faxes, this model can offer an in-depth understanding about discursive competence across cultures, and provide a link between genre-based theory, teaching practice and professional expertise.

1. Introduction

With more and more students from other countries, in particular, from China[1] coming to study in New Zealand in the past few years, the student components in New Zealand tertiary institutions are changing. Instructors of business writing are often faced with issues of finding appropriate models to teach students from different cultural backgrounds. What is happening in New Zealand is also typical of other countries that have witnessed an increase of international students in classrooms alongside the rapid developments of globalisation and internationalisation of education. The major reason for this paper to choose New Zealand as a focus of study is that the initial issues for teaching Chinese students were identified there, which consequently led to my intensive research into these issues. Therefore, this study uses New Zealand as an example to reflect the challenges of teaching students from other cultures in general. For example, what were assumed to be good models for teaching New Zealand

local students may no longer be appropriate for a class of mixed cultural backgrounds, in which a significant portion of the students may come from China. This issue was even more explicitly expressed by the participants who were also instructors of professional and business writing at a seminar[2] I delivered at the New Zealand Communication Conference in 2004. They not only expressed their concern about how to develop appropriate models for teaching but also highlighted their intention of wanting to understand the Chinese writing conventions their students may follow. It is therefore imperative to explore the cross-cultural issues of writing which may benefit both instructors and the students alike.

Alongside the pragmatic rationale, it is also imperative to develop theoretical models for the teaching and learning of English business writing. Genre-based views can be of relevance to this study as it deals with discursive competence and institutional knowledge. Extensive theoretical modelling can be found in genre-based research (e.g., Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993, 2004; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). However, genre-based research and teaching may not have a clear intercultural focus such as how to teach business writing to Chinese students, and it also tends to look at a task-based project in a specific context. In a related area of LSP (language for specific purposes), Bloor (1998) also points out that researchers fail to distinguish between the development of general psycholinguistic learning and second language acquisition, not to mention the intercultural learning of business writing as in this case. Besides, there also seems to be a gap in how to utilise research findings to teach business writing. As Basturkman (2002) has appropriately observed, there has been a genuine lack of theoretical exploration for the learning and teaching of LSP. A similar kind of lack of research also exists in teaching the professional writing and communication programs to a certain extent although these programs in New Zealand tend to enrol students with advanced English levels.

Bhatia's (2004) sociocognitive space of written discourse (SSWD) can offer a perspective of linking genre theory and teaching practice. By sociocognitive space, Bhatia means the specific way of analysing genre knowledge in relation to the discursive competence within the community of social practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). He also further extends the sociocognitive dimension of genre study (Miller 1984; Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995) to include written discourse in general.

This paper attempts to extend SSWD to the area of the learning and teaching of English business writing. As of great relevance to this attempt, there is a real need to incorporate research results into second language writing (Li 1996). To accomplish this, this paper looks at current issues for teaching English business writing to international, in particular Chinese students in New Zealand. Furthermore, it will also derive implications for other teaching contexts involving students from other cultures. It argues that understanding how

texts are constructed in different sociocultural and economic contexts is the key to understanding different sets of expectations across cultures. More importantly, it is essential to have access to professional expertise to see how professional members construct meanings from written texts. These reflective activities will have pedagogical implications for teaching business writing to Chinese students and the insight gained can be transferred to other teaching contexts involving students of other cultures as well.

Specifically, this paper uses English and Chinese business faxes as an example for discussion because faxes are also a popular type of written discourse for New Zealand and Chinese businesses (Zhu, in press). It aims to identify different types of expectations for professional writing across cultures, and explore how these differences can be made useful for teaching Chinese students. In the light of these purposes, the following research questions are proposed:

– What is the appropriate way of linking genre-based theories to the teaching of business writing to Chinese students?
– What does the research of cross-cultural writing, via English and Chinese fax analysis in this paper, entail for teaching Chinese students and enhancing their discursive competence?

In order to answer these questions, this paper will first of all point out the issues in teaching business writing in New Zealand. It then reviews research findings in the area of sociocognitive genre knowledge and discursive competence and develop an intercultural reflective model for analysing business texts, and more importantly, for addressing the issues in teaching. New Zealand and Chinese managers' views as part of professional expertise will be explored. Finally, implications for learning and teaching English business writing and future research directions will be discussed and highlighted.

Background information about teaching business writing and the issues

Business writing courses in this paper refer to those taught in the communication or linguistic degree programs in New Zealand and both have a focus on training students to become professional members of the community of social practice. Students enrolled in these programs have often reached an advanced level of English. There seems to be a tendency to use a recipe approach (Freadman and Macdonald, 1992) to teaching of business writing in both programs. A typical example of this recipe approach can be found in the focus on teaching prescribed rules of idealised texts. Genres are seen as a category system, and each genre can be examined by assigning the text to a certain category. This approach represents the traditional preoccupation with genre as a series of rules corresponding to the prescribed generic classification. In this way, business writing is often taught as a product rather than as a process. Leki (1991) explains that with a result-oriented approach, it is assumed that schemata can

be taught directly. With a process-oriented approach, however, schemata would be induced indirectly and gradually.

Within the result-oriented framework, New Zealand instructors are currently facing an urgent issue of finding appropriate models to teach international students. For example, instructors in New Zealand institutions tended to use an interactive model of mixing local students with the international or Chinese students. This model is now challenged since the local students are not in a balanced proportion with students from other countries, and the majority of them can be Chinese.

The focal issue as shown above is about how to develop a theoretical model to enhance discursive competence through learning and teaching. Understanding the sociocognitive space of written discourse across cultures can be a good starting point. More importantly, using an intercultural reflective model to solicit managers' views will also contribute to this resolving this issue. The literature review in the next section will focus on both areas.

2.   The sociocognitive space: Bridging genre-based theory and teaching practice

Bhatia (2004) categorises the approaches for discourse analysis into three conceptualisations of space: the textual space, the sociocognitive space and the social space. The textual space revolves around the analysis of knowledge about language structure and its function. The sociocognitive space sees texts as genre as situated and contextualised. In addition, it also extends the notion of genre to refer to professional practice, hence offering a link between genre analysis and the professional expertise within the discourse community (Swales 1990) and the community of social practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). The social space functions within a much broader social context and examines social issues such as social structures. Of the three spaces, the sociocognitive space is of central interest to this paper because of its focus on the linkages between genre knowledge and professional expertise. According to Bhatia (2004), one major component of professional expertise is discursive competence, which goes beyond generic competence to include textual and social competence and is also seen as essential for addressing the aforementioned issues in the teaching of business writing.

As shown above, Bhatia further elaborates on the sociocognitive dimension of genre study (e.g., Miller 1984; Bazerman 1988; Berkokotter and Huckin 1995). The promising side of exploring the sociocognitive space is that it points to an inseparable link between research and professional practices, which will help with understanding the discursive competence of the discourse community. Bhatia also points out, however, that the concept of "discursive competence" is not fully theoretically explored and needs further research, which is

especially true in the area of cross-cultural genre research and teaching. In order to further explore discursive competence across cultures, the following section focuses on discussing genre knowledge in relation to persuasion across cultures.

2.1. *Genre knowledge and discursive competence across cultures*

Genre is defined by Miller (1984) as "social action" and typified responses to typified situations and can be "best conceptualised as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). The "social stock of knowledge" (Schutz and Luckmann 1984) or "institutional knowledge" (Paltridge 1997) is constructed and embedded in the professional discourse community's practices. Genre knowledge can be seen as composed of the following areas, which also indicate what the professional members' threshold discursive competence and genre knowledge can be composed of.

First of all, genre is characterised by its purpose, form and content (Olikowski and Yates 1994), which are also the first type of genre knowledge and are often used as criteria for identifying business and professional genres such as faxes and emails (Louhiala-Salminen 1997; Gimenez 2004). These features are also seen as fundamental components of genre knowledge. As a second type of genre knowledge, one needs to understand that genre is situated and responds to social needs. Orlikowski and Yates (1994) in the genre tradition of social enactment (Bazerman 1988), use the repertoire metaphor to represent genre dynamics. The concept of intertextuality will help interpret genre dynamics and is also the third type of knowledge. Intertextuality originates from Bakhtin's (1986) "dialogic interaction" in the writing and reading processes by which he means that an utterance is linked to the utterances in a complex organising system. Kristeva (1986) employs intertextuality as a property of text, which makes reference to previous texts. In this way, a text is no longer regarded as static and constrained by existing structure, and it interacts with the other types of text.

In an intercultural situation, culture serves as a basis for reasoning and persuasion and different cultures may resort to different types of rhetoric and persuasion (Connor 2003; Lü 1998). As part of the important Chinese persuasive orientations, *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason) exercise a profound influence on modern Chinese writing including both literary and business writings (He and Lu 1991; Li 1990; Li 1996). Specifically, Li (1996) points out that *qing* has great persuasive power and complements *li* and both represent an important dimension for understanding Chinese writing (Li, 1996). The preferences of *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason) may indicate a different stress from the concept of *logos* in English writing which has a fundamental influence on today's contrastive rhetorical research (such as Kaplan 1966, 1987; Connor and Lauer

1988; Young 1994) and on business writing textbooks (Ober 2001; Murphey, Hildebrandt and Thomas 1997; Chase et al. 2003).

However, the above types of genre knowledge as an important part of the discursive competence may not be readily available for access in the process of learning or teaching business writing, hence the need to introduce the intercultural reflective model in the next section.

3.   Towards an intercultural reflective model

This section develops an intercultural reflective model with an additional intention of marrying the genre-based theory and teaching practice. According to Pan, Scollon and Scollon (2002: 5), effective communication in the international workplace requires a reflective understanding of communication processes. They specifically introduce the procedure of a communication display portfolio exchanges which may consist of documentation from any media for conducting business activities such as résumé. As part of their model, each party will exchange best-case examples of their own professional communication for reflective discussion and feedback. The reflections usually embrace these two areas of communication: (1) to solicit members' generalisations involving a group of cultural expectations and (2) to seek the objective views from an external observer's standpoint. For example, Pan, Scollon and Scollon solicited views towards résumé writing from three cultural groups including Finnish, Hong Kong and Chinese managers. They report that participants tend to view a résumé in a negative light if it deviates from their own expectations. Therefore it is important to understand the expectations of different cultural groups. In the light of Pan, Scollon and Scollon's reflective model and also the above literature review on SCWD, this paper proposes a two-culture reflective model for cross-cultural genre learning and teaching:

1. Comparing sociocultural contexts
2. Comparing persuasive orientations and communicative purposes
3. Comparing best-case examples
4. Comparing managers' intracultural and intercultural views on the best-case examples
5. Studying the implications of genre-based theories for learning and teaching writing across cultures

The first process provides contextual knowledge about cultures and situatedness of texts. This type of knowledge is also essential for learning and teaching business writing as part of social competence (Bhatia 2004). Vygotsky claims (1978, 1986) that cognitive development or learning is socially situated. The second process compares the persuasive orientations and communicative purposes. More importantly, the cross-cultural persuasion theories can be applied to business writing practice to see how a certain genre such business faxes

actually employ the persuasive orientations to communicate with the reader. The third process compares best-case examples to show how successful texts are actually written. In the analysis both rhetorical structure and intertextuality are studied. The fourth process solicits New Zealand and Chinese managers' views towards the English and Chinese examples as a means of reflecting their expertly knowledge. Specifically both intracultural (on their own culture) and intercultural views on their counterparts' are collected and compared. The final process attempts to point out the implications of understanding the SSWD, and explore the possible directions of applying the research findings to learning and teaching while addressing various issues as noted earlier.

4. Methodology

The research method, the data and participants are detailed in this section. The model discussed earlier is used as the major research method for analysing the best-case examples and managers' views.

The data comprise two sets: the first includes two best-case examples of one English and one Chinese business fax, which were selected from a corpus of 40 English and 40 Chinese order-related faxes collected in 2001 from business organisations in China, Australia and New Zealand. All the companies were of a reasonable size dealing with both international and domestic businesses. The company names remain anonymous in this paper for the sake of confidentiality. These two texts were also rated the most effective in the corpus by the respective mangers. Specifically, I followed this procedure to determine the most effective texts. I started with a pilot study in which all the 40 English and 40 Chinese faxes were given respectively to five Chinese and five New Zealand managers to grade based on a five-grade scale with 5 as the highest score and 1 the lowest. The fax that gained the highest or lowest scores, and those that gained medium level scores were chosen to reflect the whole corpus. The five selected faxes were then delivered with a questionnaire form to 100 managers from each group, and subsequently the most effective fax was chosen based on the same grade scale. The English fax was graded 3.1 and the Chinese got an average rating of 4.0.

The second set of data was drawn recently from New Zealand and Chinese managers' reflective views on business fax writing. Focus group interviewing was used as an appropriate means for collecting managers' views in order to gain insights into the managers' shared understandings of genre. I conducted one focus-group interview with each of the groups, each composed of ten managers from the international trade company (one in China and one in New Zealand). These companies were also the sites where the two best-case examples were collected. The venue for the interviews was a meeting room on a company site. The managers were chosen based on their experience of writing

business faxes and their availability. The Chinese and New Zealand managers all had at least an undergraduate education, had worked in their enterprises for at least three years and had experience in reading and writing business faxes. Their attitudes can therefore be taken to represent professional attitudes, and reflect the shared conventions of the business community. The duration for each of the focus-group interviews was planned to be approximately forty minutes. The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. At the interview, I played the role of a facilitator making sure the discussion followed the proposed interview tasks.

As the major task for the interview, I distributed the handout of the English fax for them to comment on first. After that, the Chinese fax was distributed following a similar procedure. It took the interviewees approximately twenty minutes to discuss each fax; questions focused on the three major areas of purposes, content and form, which are also the major criteria for genre identification as noted earlier (Olikowski and Yates, 1994). I used the original version of the English fax for the Chinese managers and a translated version of the Chinese invitation for the New Zealand managers. This was done because all of the Chinese managers understood or spoke fluent English while very few of the New Zealand manager participants spoke Chinese. This can be seen as part of the limitations for this research method since it would be more appropriate to use the original version in both languages.

5.   Applying the model to analysing business faxes

This section applies the proposed model to a specific case of analysing English and Chinese faxes.

5.1.   *Comparing the sociocultural contexts*

It is important to understand the different sociocultural contexts for writing English and Chinese faxes. This type of situated knowledge is also essential for learning and teaching business writing as part of social competence (Bhatia 2004). Vygotsky (1978, 1986) claims that cognitive development or learning is socially situated. The market economy has been a dominant feature in the Western economic structure such as in Australia and New Zealand. Business faxes are often used to promote products. This also coincides with Hofstede's (1991) individualistic and result-oriented culture, in which it is the individual's responsibility to promote products and achieve sales. The strong business orientation thus forms a basic principle underlying the writing of business faxes as part of the business discourse. The social context of Chinese business practice reflects a mixture of both marketing economy and the traditional cultural values. On the one hand, the economic reform connects China to the market economy and sales promotions also have become an essential factor. This ten-

dency has become even stronger and more evident since China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Western marketing strategies also apply to Chinese faxes to a large extent. On the other hand, traditional values relating to Confucian 'five relationships' and group orientation as in high-context cultures (Hall 1976) and collectivistic society (Hofstede 1991) also prevail as part of the sociocultural environment.

In terms of the technological environment, nowadays many businesses are conducted via fax for its speed and the ability to attach copies of original documents. As a consequence, recent years, particularly the past ten years, have witnessed a rapid increase in the use of faxes in business settings. For example, all the companies where I collected my data use faxes as an important means of communication and receive faxes on a daily basis.

Besides the macro-context, organisational and interpersonal relationships can also be part of contextual factors for understanding genres. The Chinese faxes collected so far mainly reflect the organisational relationships since the sender and receiver represent their own organisations. Faxes are seen as a type of *gongwen* (official documents) and are used to conduct businesses in Chinese organisations. The English faxes, however, very often reflect a relationship between an organisation and the customer as an individual.

As a consequence of the above contextual influence, both English and Chinese faxes[3] indicate a certain level of intertextuality: English faxes are characterised by a mixed form of memos and letters (Zhu and Hildebrandt, 2000) and Chinese by both *gongwen* (official documents) and personal letters (Zhu, in press).

5.2. *Comparing communicative purposes and persuasive orientations*

The purposes of English and Chinese faxes are examined in relation to the sociocultural and technological environments as well as the persuasive orientations. The following purposes have been ascertained by the author in the English and Chinese faxes:

As shown in Table 1, some similar purposes are found in both English and Chinese faxes. In particular, in the category of business-related purposes, there are more similarities than differences. The similarities indicate a strong convergence of business contexts which are characterised by market economy and competition.

The Chinese faxes, however, appear to have more purposes than the English ones. For example, they include "keeping a record of on-going communication" as a purpose while there is no such a purpose for English faxes. This purpose can be related to the *gongwen*'s (official documents) social function. According to Li and Zhu (2002: 30), besides exchanging information, *gongwen* (official documents) have *fading xing* (legal sense) and play an important role

Table 1. *Communicative purposes of the English and Chinese business faxes*

Purpose	Fax Type	
	The English business faxes	The Chinese business faxes
Business related	To promote business To advertise product To create a positive image To encourage further contact To inform the reader To communicate an issue	To promote business To advertise produce To create a positive/respectful image To encourage further contact To inform the reader To communicate an issue To keep a record of on-going communication
Relational	To seek cooperation	To seek cooperation To maintain long-term relationships

in keeping a record of on-going communication about the business processes. Bearing in mind of this role will help understand the purposes and formation of Chinese faxes.

With regard to the relational purposes, both English and Chinese tend to establish and seek business co-operation. Chinese faxes, however, have an additional purpose – that of maintaining long-term relationships, which is a reflection of the collective society with a clear emphasis on contacts and relationships.

The English faxes have a predominant emphasis on *logos* which is mainly related to sales and business transactions. Both *logos* and *pathos* or *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason) are embedded in the purposes of the Chinese faxes.

5.3.   *Comparing the best-case examples*

The best-case examples (see the English and Chinese faxes in the Appendix) are discussed in this section to show how the texts are actually written by professional members. Table 2 details the moves identified in the corpus.

These moves are used as major areas of discussion in the following sections of analysis of rhetorical structure and intertextuality.

5.3.1.   *The English fax.*   As shown in Table 2, the English fax is composed of six moves: salutation, referring to previous contact, providing order details, encouraging further contact, good wishes and signature. At the textual level, this fax focuses on the main purpose of equipment rental with no other embed-

Table 2. *A breakdown of rhetorical moves identified in the faxes*

Move	Fax type	
	The English fax	The Chinese fax
Salutation	+	+
Greetings		+
Reference to previous communication/contact	+	+
Sales order	+	+
Complaint		+
Stress cooperation		+
Polite closing	+	+
Good wishes	+	+
Signature	+	+

ded messages, and it is also typical of the features found in the English corpus as a whole.

This fax has an informal style as shown in the first two moves of the salutation and the beginning. The third move provides order details and is composed of three items. "Item" is preferred here in the analysis as it more appropriately reflects a feature of memo-like style. These three items are factual and informative about the specific business dealing, in this case the loan equipment. The writer does not seem to be too much concerned about the choice of words, and her major objective in writing the fax is to make the meaning come across. The fourth move of polite closing winds up the fax message politely by offering further services. The final two moves of good wishes and signature use standard forms also frequently found in English letter writing.

Intertextual features include reference to previous contact which is also the second move and the English faxes in the corpus tend to interact with other forms of communication such as telephone conversations and emails, which shows the interactive nature of English faxes – a feature Chinese faxes also echo to a certain extent but in a slightly different manner. This point will be discussed further later in this paper.

5.3.2. *The Chinese fax.* As shown in Table 2, the Chinese fax contains nine moves: salutation, greetings, previous contact, order-related information, complaint, cooperation, polite closing, good wishes and signature. Compared to the English fax, the Chinese fax has a more formal style as shown in the formal salutation and a series of greetings; *qing* or *pathos* is embedded in the greetings, and also lays the background for the collaboration the writer intends to stress later. The third move, providing order details, acknowledges the receipt of the sales contract and also associates signing the contract or the business progress

with the New Year. It means good luck to have something good happen at the beginning of the year according to Chinese mythology. Both the business purposes and the *qing* or feelings are thus mixed and each reinforces the other. The fourth move begins with detailed information about the deferred payment, followed by the fifth move – an implicit complaint in which the writer tactfully makes a polite request for further payment. The *qing* (emotion) persuasive orientation is achieved in this request followed by pointing out the possible negative consequence of the delay. The sixth move, which is to stress cooperation, occurs twice in the text. It is essential here as a collectivistic practice, and the delay in payment is seen as a threat to the cooperation. The eighth and ninth moves, good wishes and polite signature, reiterate the collaboration, thus *qing* is well implemented.

From the intertextual perspective, the Chinese fax also interacts with telephone conversations. Being different from the English fax, however, it has embedded messages as a characteristic of *gongwen* (official documents), which is also evident in other Chinese faxes in the corpus.

5.4. *Comparing managers' reflections on the best-case examples*

This section discusses New Zealand and Chinese managers' reflective views drawn from the focus-group interviews. Here only a summary of their views is provided for discussion because of space limitations and the summary derives from the key points focusing on the three major components of genre: purpose, form and content (see Tables 3 and 4). The managers' views can be used to further confirm the findings regarding different types of genre knowledge across cultures and can also be utilised for the learning and teaching of business writing.

5.4.1. *The managers' views on the English fax.*   The New Zealand and Chinese managers' reflective views on the English fax are summed up in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, the New Zealand managers' comments on the English fax mainly focus on clarity of structure, and idea development, which are seen as the major criteria for fax writing. In addition, the last comment points to "inviting further contact" as a further merit of the fax. To the managers, using precise linguistic forms and editing the letter are not a major concern as long as the meaning comes across. This comment is consistent with the findings discussed earlier and this kind of lack of editing can be seen as part of important features for English fax writing since fax messages are meant to be sent out quickly.

In general, the Chinese managers shared a similar view with the New Zealand managers in terms of purposes and content. They agreed, for example, that the text was clear about the key information, which further confirms that they share

Table 3. *The New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on the English fax*

	The New Zealand managers' reflections	The Chinese managers' reflections
The purposes	This fax effective with clear purposes and ideas.	The sole purpose of providing loan information is very clear to the reader.
The content	This fax message has a clear focus and would answer the client's query. The message develops logically from one point to another.	This fax gives essential information about the loan equipment.
The Form	The style is informal and acceptable as a business fax.	The salutation is not appropriate for a formal fax. Perhaps the writer should show more warmth.

a similar criterion relating to the major content of this genre. They seem, however, to be more concerned with the formality of the fax and "Hello" is seen as an inappropriate or informal salutation for written communication. Apparently they followed a more formal type or different type of *qing* (emotion). In addition, they do not seem to like the informal style expressed in the text, and, for example, they particularly pointed out the need to build interpersonal relationships with the reader.

5.4.2.   *The managers' views on the Chinese fax.*   Table 4 sums up the New Zealand and Chinese managers' reflective views on the Chinese fax.

As shown in Table 4, the Chinese managers' comments on the Chinese fax reflect their professional expertise for fax writing, and both *qing* (emotions) and *li* (logic) are well commented on in the areas of purpose, content and form. For example, they regarded warm greetings and cooperation messages as important and adequate. Furthermore, they also commented on types of intertextuality such as including embedded messages. The other comments such as on greetings are related to a balanced view towards *qing* and *li* (the emotional and logical approaches). Besides this, the managers were conscious of the distinct features of genre. For example, the mixed features of some *gongwen* and personal-letters features were mentioned and seen as appropriate.

The New Zealand managers' views seem to be very different from those of the Chinese managers as shown in Table 4 in all the three major areas of genre. First of all, the New Zealand managers thought that there were too many purposes for one fax message. In addition, they could not see the point of having more than one message embedded, nor did they accept the numbering of these messages. Furthermore, to them, the embedded messages relating to collabo-

Table 4. *The New Zealand and Chinese managers' views on the Chinese fax*

	The New Zealand managers' reflections	The Chinese managers' reflections
The Purposes	The fax should focus on one purpose only. But it seems to have so many purposes.	The purposes are clear to the reader and the writer also expresses his wish for collaborations.
The Content	It looks like a threat with "possible collaboration". It has so many points with the paragraphs numbered.	It is good to make some promises relating to collaboration. This fax includes a number of messages which are characteristic of Chinese fax writing.
The Form	It is a bit too emotional for a serious fax with exclamation marks. The humble tone is not appropriate for a business fax.	To write a fax with warmth such as greetings is important for relationship building and good impression. It is appropriate for the writer to adopt a humble tone and uses quite a few honorific forms.

ration only added threat to the existing reader-writer relationships. In terms of forms, the emotional *qing*-related expressions or punctuation marks were not seen as appropriate for a "serious" fax. They seem to prefer to isolate personal emotions from business writing while the opposite was true with the Chinese managers. It is also worthwhile to note that many of the New Zealand managers' comments focus on various types of intertextuality identified in the Chinese faxes, which may indicate that these two cultural groups tend to follow different criteria about what can be considered appropriate intertextuality for writing business faxes.

It can be seen from the above that the two groups have followed two sets of discursive competence and writing expectations that are also culturally defined although their views also overlap to a certain extent.

6.   Implications for learning and teaching business writing

The above exploration of the sociocognitive space of business fax writing has a number of implications for both learning and teaching business writing across cultures. At a practical level, both the authentic best-case examples and the manager's reflective views can be used as learning and teaching materials for engaging the Chinese students' participation. Further implications are discussed in the next section.

6.1. *Implications for learning*

Learning business writing for Chinese students can be seen as a process of understanding the SSWD and getting closer and closer to the professional expertise of the discourse community in new target culture. Throughout this learning process, cross-cultural persuasion can help distinguish between different sets of writing expectations and discursive competence. Using best-case examples such as business faxes is an appropriate way of having initial access to authentic texts written by professional members. In addition, these members' reflections may give students a feel about what discursive competence can be composed of and how it may differ from that of their own culture. Additionally, students will have the luxury of interacting with professional expertise from both cultures, which may prepare them for two types of professional fluency.

Understanding SSWD and discursive competence is, however, is only the beginning stage along the continuum of learning genre knowledge within the community of social practice. The learners should be encouraged to play an important role in participating in the learning process. For example, they can compare their knowledge with the professional members' knowledge and expertise. Based on the gaps identified with the professional members, the learners can also be further motivated to take part in exploring the SSWD further. So, knowing the gaps can help motivate the learners. Through a gradual induction of schemata (Leki 1991), this kind of process-oriented learning can offer the learners an opportunity to reflect on possible legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) in the future and as part of the apprenticeship training. In this way, the student learning experience starts with the classroom but can go beyond it. This question can be of relevance for the learners' journey of achieving discursive competence and fluency in business writing:
– How do we continue to negotiate interaction between the learning of English business writing and professional practice in the new sociocultural context?
– What is the possibility of further exploring the SSWD through LPP?

6.2. *Implications for teaching*

Teaching business writing, such as the writing of business faxes, can also be seen as a process of helping enhance Chinese student discursive competence in the new sociocultural context. Concurrently, it is also a process of developing and experimenting with teaching models that can encourage student participation. As shown in the analysis of business faxes, the intercultural reflective models can be used to uncover the SSWD through comparisons and reflections.

Teaching should stress the importance of linking theory and practice and provide process-oriented activities including, in this case, incorporating authentic data and managers' views. Take the business faxes as an example, the

instructor may include the Chinese and New Zealand managers' responses to the two best-case faxes. However, their role is very much providing guidance of carrying out the project in class and the most essential task is to let the students draw inferences themselves from the experts' views. In this way Chinese students can interact with experts of both cultures and can also compare these with those of the New Zealand culture.

It is also essential to debrief the meta-genre features shared by both English and Chinese faxes as common features for business fax writing. Chinese students can be encouraged and motivated when they begin to realise that some of their previous knowledge about business writing can be of relevance in the new learning context.

Finally, more models should be explored towards the ultimate goal of enhancing discursive competence across cultures. Leki (1991) once gives a touching account of a Chinese student learning different rhetorical expectations. This student finally learns to develop an English voice for her literature class in order to meet the expectations of the American academics. This research question can be of relevance for exploring further models:

– How do we engage students from different cultures fully in reflective exercise and prepare students with fluency and adaptability for future participation in the business contexts?

7.   Concluding remarks

This paper has pointed out that the central issue for teaching business writing to Chinese students is how to enhance their discursive competence across cultures. In order to address this issue, it has developed an intercultural reflective model for understanding sociocognitive space and for bridging the gap between genre-based research, the teaching practice and professional expertise. This reflective model also has implications for teaching students of other cultures besides Chinese students since it focuses on developing students' intercultural discursive competence and genre knowledge. In a similar thrust, the aforementioned implications for both learning and teaching can also apply to a broader scale to other learning and teaching contexts involving students from other cultures. Furthermore, the study also has implications for native speakers of English in the same class as well and they can also have the opportunity of reflecting on the differences between their own cultural writing practice and other cultures and this kind of insightful comparisons may contribute to a better understanding of other cultures.

It has been found that genre knowledge and professional expertise are culturally defined as shown in the English and Chinese faxes and reflected by the New Zealand and Chinese managers' views. These findings have implications for both learning and teaching of business writing.

One the one hand, classroom teaching of business writing should viewed as an initial stage for students to learn to become full members of the community of social practice. The reflective model can help initiate Chinese student interest and enthusiasm in the real-world LPP (Lave and Wenger 1991) so that they can develop their discursive competence in the new target culture more comprehensively. In addition, with both types of fluency in English and Chinese business writing, students will also be able to adapt themselves to business contexts in the future.

On the other hand, the reflective model can also be extended and adapted to teaching students from other countries. Business writing classes should be seen as a genre-based platform on which new theoretical models for learning and teaching can be explored, created and tested.

Finally, this paper proposes further research questions for both students and instructors to continue with their journey of exploring SSWD through critically reviewing genre-based theories and professional expertise across cultures and through negotiating interactions among students, instructors, genre researchers and expert members.

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Notes

1. The students are mainly from mainland China; some are permanent residents while others are international students.
2. This paper is based on the presentation given at the New Zealand Communication Conference and the topic was on comparing English and Chinese faxes. English and Chinese are used in this paper with confined meanings. The former refers to the English faxes used in Australia and New Zealand and the latter to those used in mainland China.
3. I am aware of the discussion of stressing faxes as a genre (Louhiala-Salminen, 1997). However, these are not part of the concern of this paper which looks at text as part of written discourse but views it from the genre perspective.

Appendix

The English Fax

Fax Letter-Head (Omitted)

Salutation	Hello Paul,
Prev. contact	I trust your trip went well. I have spoken to my colleagues in Hamburg
Order details	who confirm that they have the following available for loan for ANUGA:
Item 1	1 × water banner 2 × greenstone banners 8 × aluminium doweling (for hanging banners)
Item 2	Philip Jones will be at ANUGA from 12–15 October and Catherine McLaren from 15–17. Philip said he can bring the material with him and Catherine can bring it back assuming this fits your requirements. Grateful if you can confirm this, alternatively they can courier the items to Cologne for you (there will be a courier charge for this).
Item 3	Once arrangements are confirmed I will forward a loan document to you for signing for this material and also the stand signage being provided via Display Equipment Ltd.
Further contact	If you have any queries please phone me on (09) 333 8888.
Good wishes	Yours sincerely,
Signature	Cassandra Leslie Promotional Manager International

The Chinese fax

Fax Letter-Head (Omitted)

Salutation	To Mr Wang Jiawei,
Greetings	How are you (H)?
	Happy New Year! Wish you prosperity! Order details
1[1]	I have recently received Contract AS-6589 signed by your (H) company. Thank you for ordering 60×58 cotton shopping bags. We are extremely grateful to you for your cooperation and support at the beginning of the New Year. In order to guarantee the time of delivery now we are making adequate arrangements to design samples and prepare materials according to your order. You (H) can trust our commitment to collaboration.
Complaint	
2	At the same time, our company sent over 104,000 cotton bags and the delivery number is CVC/B 98055. We haven't received your payment yet. According to Mr Zhang, the payment of US$ 35,490 was sent on November 30. However, we consulted with Henan Branch, China Bank and found that no payment had been made by your (H) bank so far. We kindly ask Mr Liang[2] to help check this as soon as possible because deferred payment may affect directly the carrying out of our sales orders. Please think about the possible further collaboration between you (H) and us. Hope that you can help Mr Zhang sort out this issue.
Stress co-op	Thank you for your cooperation!
Polite closing	
Good wishes	Happy New Year!
Signature	Zheng Liangchen (*shang*)

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