The authors compared 214 letters of inquiry written by native and nonnative speakers of English to test the assumption that cultural factors beyond language greatly affect communication, factors such as the knowledge of the business communication practices and of the cultural expectations of other countries. Letters written by native and by nonnative speakers of English differed significantly from each other in number of mechanical errors in the complimentary closings, in tone (primarily through exaggerated politeness), and in length. The two groups also differed significantly in the type of information in the letters, specifically, unnecessary professional and personal information and inappropriate requests for evaluation or intercession. These findings indicate that the native speakers' letters overall deviated less from US business communication practices than did the nonnative speakers' letters.

**Differences Between Business Letters From Native and Non-Native Speakers of English**

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When business people must communicate with people whose native language is different from their own, they must not only know the receivers' language, but also their culture. Merely knowing how to speak and write a language does not ensure effective communication. For example, an appropriate piece of communication in the United States might not be appropriate or effective in China because the writers and receivers have different expectations for the format, tone, and information in the communication. If business writers are to communicate effectively internationally, they must understand the business communication practices of their receivers' countries.

The purpose of this study was to compare letters written to a reader in the United States (US) by nonnative speakers of English with those written by native speakers of English. We wanted to test our assumption that fluency in a language is not enough to prepare a writer to communicate successfully with readers of other cultures; instead, cultural factors beyond language greatly affect communication, factors such as the knowledge of the business communication practices and of the cultural expectations of other countries. To look at these factors, we compared the grammar, the salutations and complimentary closings, the tone, the information, and the length of the letters to determine to what extent both groups met the expectations of the US reader and followed standard business communication practices in the US.
PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous studies have suggested three cultural factors that affect international business communication: (a) content errors are more likely to impede communication than are language errors, (b) knowledge of business communication instruction in the reader’s country may improve communication, and (c) understanding the business communication practices and experiencing the lifestyle of other countries improve communication.

Content Errors Versus Language Errors

Several scholars have studied content (lexical) errors and language (syntactic) errors. Aziz Khalil (1985) asked native speakers of English at the University of Illinois to evaluate grammatical and semantic errors made by native Arab students in written English. The results of Khalil’s study indicate that semantically deviant errors are less intelligible and interpretable than are grammatically deviant errors (1985, p. 345). Jeremiah Sullivan and Naoki Kameda (1982) studied the semantic differences in US and Japanese students’ concept of profit. Their study suggests that Japanese and US firms may have difficulty communicating because they attribute different meanings to the word “profit” (p. 33). Terry Santos (1988) investigated the reactions of 178 professors at the University of California at Los Angeles to two writing samples, one written by a Chinese student and the other by a Korean student. The professors judged “the content [of the samples] more severely than the language” and the lexical errors more seriously than other types of errors (Santos, 1988, pp. 76, 80). Santos’ study indicates that nonnative speakers of English should “improve their skills in the areas that most directly affect content” and vocabulary (p. 85).

Unlike the previously cited studies, Roberta Vann, Daisy Meyer, and Frederick Lorenz (1984) studied faculty responses to sentence-level errors in the writing of nonnative speakers of English. In this study, 164 faculty members at Iowa State University viewed least acceptable “those errors which, for the most part, are global and/or are relatively rare violations for native speakers” (Vann, Meyer, & Lorenz, 1984, p. 432).

Eileen Blau, Ferne Galantai, and Robert Sherwin (1989) carried out their research in a partially nonacademic environment. They examined the reaction of employment interviewers to local lexical and syntactic errors in business writing done by university students who were nonnative speakers of English. They found that the interviewers were more
sensitive to local syntactic errors than to local lexical errors (1989, p. 136).

**Understanding Business Communication Instruction In Other Cultures**

Business communication instruction in other countries has been the topic of studies by Jeanne Halpern and by Baolin Zong and H. W. Hildebrandt. Halpern (1983) explains that if US readers are to understand English business communication in China, they must not only understand Chinese culture, but also understand how English business communication is taught in China (p. 52). Business communication courses in China suffer from the “lack of up-to-date, appropriate instructional materials” (pp. 49-50). These business communication courses have been more heavily influenced by formal British English than by American English; such influences create some “oddly blended British and American” business communication forms in Chinese letters (pp. 49-50). Zong and Hildebrandt (1983), in describing business communication in China, explain that “having a command of English” does not assure success in communicating with a foreign business person; the nonnative English speaker needs to have experienced the foreigner's culture to assure success (p. 27). Zong and Hildebrandt, like Halpern, specifically focus on business communication courses in China. They found that these courses have no “theoretical underpinning” and lack information about communication theory—about what happens between sender and receiver (pp. 31, 29). Instead these courses focus on translating from English to Chinese and vice versa and on examining examples of written business communication, many of which are out of date (pp. 29, 31-32).

**Understanding the Business Communication Practices of Other Countries**

Several scholars have studied the business communication practices of other countries and how they affect international business communication. Iris Varner (1988) shows that “communication is culture specific” (p. 55). Varner explains that French business persons expect a more formal writing style and organize some types of business letters differently than do their US counterparts (p. 64). Thus, whether a French business person is writing to a US business person or vice versa, the writer should understand the business communication principles of the receiver's country (p. 55).
Several studies discuss cultural differences specifically in Japanese and US business communication—such as studies by Saburo Haneda and Hirosuke Shima, and Dwight Stevenson. Haneda and Shima (1983) researched Japanese letter writing, focusing on the traditional format and style of Japanese letters and on Japanese ways of thinking and feeling as reflected in business letters. Using his experience in working with Japanese industries, Stevenson (1983) believes that business communication is “heavily influenced by the cultural baggage we all carry around with us” (p. 327).

Retha Kilpatrick (1984) looks at the cultural problems (as well as language and translation problems) encountered by US companies who do business with foreign companies. Kilpatrick queried 100 US companies to determine their “current practices in handling international business correspondence” (p. 33). This study suggests that “international business communication skills should be taught as an integral part of a course in business communication at the university level so that students can develop an awareness of cultural differences that may interfere with the communication process” (p. 39).

**METHODS OF OUR INVESTIGATION**

We compared letters of inquiry from native and nonnative speakers of English. These letters were from prospective graduate students writing to the University of North Texas department of English for application forms and information on its various graduate programs. The letters were from both prospective M.A. and Ph.D. candidates of various ages and backgrounds, from both native and nonnative speakers of English. The nonnative speakers resided both in the US and abroad.

We examined all such letters of inquiry that the Chair of Graduate Studies in the Department of English received between December of 1986 and September of 1989 except those letters signed by a person other than the nonnative speaker making the inquiry. The Chair personally read each letter and then either noted on the letter the proper reply or drafted a letter for the writer. From the 214 letters received and used for this study, native speakers of English wrote 105 letters, and nonnative speakers wrote 109 letters (36 of the nonnative speakers were currently residing in the US). The nonnative speakers were from five geographic areas: China and Taiwan, Korea, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. We looked at various features of these letters: the number and type of grammatical errors, salutations and complimentary closings; the tone of the letters; the type of information contained in the letters; and the
length of the letters. In all of these features, we compared the native letters to the nonnative letters to see to what extent the nonnative and native letters deviated from the reader's expectations and from standard US business communication practices. While we recognize that individual cultures and countries have different letter-writing patterns and practices, these individual patterns and practices were not significantly reflected in our study because we were looking at general categories of features. For example, we did not examine the specific type of unnecessary personal information that a letter included, instead we examined only whether or not the letter included unnecessary personal information. We assumed only that the nonnative letters would demonstrate a lack of knowledge or at least uncertainty of US business communication practices.

We used Chi-square tests to determine the significance of all of our data except that of the grammatical errors and the length of the letters. For the length of the letters, we used a t-test; and for the grammatical errors, we did not use a statistical analysis.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Our findings indicate that the native speakers' letters deviated less from the reader's expectations and from standard US business communication practices than did the nonnative speakers' letters. Many of the nonnative speakers seemed to misunderstand the expectations of the reader and the context in which their letters were received. They mistakenly seemed to view their letters as applications for admission to the university or for assistantships when the reader expected a letter merely requesting information on graduate programs in the Department of English.

Grammatical Errors

Perhaps because these letters were from potential graduate students in an English department, the native and nonnative letters contained only a small number of grammatical errors. All of the grammatical errors can be grouped under the general heading of local errors, rather than global ones—errors which are easily decipherable in the context in which they occur and do not lead to misunderstanding. The most common type of error in the nonnative letters was in verb tense ("I am [was] so disappointed to receive your letter. I could not [cannot] express how I want to study in your department."), article use ("I got [a] BA...and am now attending xxxx university for [a] Master's degree," "I took [the]

TOEFL test”), preposition choice (“in English major”), and word form (“one thing makes me embarrassing”). Several of the nonnative letters also contained numerous spelling errors (“sponswrs” [sponsors], “Merch” [March]) as well as nonstandard abbreviations and punctuation (“jul.” [for July], “Thank you!” [for Thank you.]). The native letters were relatively free of grammatical errors; the few errors that did occur were spelling or minor lexical errors.

While the nonnative letters were not free of grammatical errors (though most were), these errors did not seem to affect the comprehension of the letters. However, we cannot refute Blau, Galantai, and Sherwin's finding (1989) that local syntactic errors are more offensive to nonnative readers since we did not have the letters read by a group of nonnative evaluators.

**Salutations and Complimentary Closings**

To determine standard salutations and complimentary closings for these letters of inquiry, we examined 30 current business communication and technical writing textbooks. We identified the following salutations as standard based on guidelines in the textbooks:

1. “Dear” followed by the reader's complimentary title, last name, and a colon.
2. “Dear” followed by the reader’s full name and a colon.
3. “Dear” followed by the reader's position or job title.
4. “Dear” followed by the title of the department.
5. “Dear” followed by “Sir or Madam.”
6. “Good Day” or “Hello.”

We considered “Dear” followed by only the reader’s first name a nonstandard salutation since the letter writers would probably not know the Chair of Graduate Studies in the Department of English well enough to use the Chair’s first name in conversation. We considered the omission of a salutation as standard since most of the textbooks advised using this simplified letter format when the reader’s name is unknown.

Of the native letters, 67 percent contained errors—53 percent of these errors were nonstandard salutations and 7 percent were mechanical errors (incorrect punctuation and capitalization). Of the nonnative letters, 82 percent of the salutations contained errors—66 percent of these errors were nonstandard salutations and 16 percent were mechanical errors. The native and nonnative letters did not differ significantly in the total number of errors or in the number of nonstandard salutations or
mechanical errors. However, in both groups, many letters included the previously standard salutation of “Dear Sir.” In fact, the majority of nonstandard salutations used by the native speakers were “Dear Sir” or “Dear Sirs.” While many nonnative speakers used “Dear Sir,” many more used nonstandard salutations that the business community in the US does not currently or has not previously considered standard, such as using the reader’s title(s) and full name (“Dear Mr. Eugene P. Wright” or “Dear Prof. Dr. Eugene P. Wright”), using the reader’s title and first name only (“Dear Dr. James” when the reader’s name is James Lee), and using a title followed by the reader’s position (“Dear Mr. Director”).

We identified eight standard complimentary closings based on guidelines in the 30 business communication and technical writing textbooks:

1. Sincerely,
2. Sincerely yours,
3. Yours truly,
4. Yours very truly,
5. Very truly yours,
6. Respectfully,
7. Respectfully yours,
8. Yours respectfully,

We considered as nonstandard the less formal closings of “Cordially” or “Cordially yours” since most of the textbooks recommended using these closings only when the writer knows the reader well.

The two groups did differ significantly in the total number of errors (Chi-square = 5.334, df = 1; p<.025) and in the number of mechanical errors in the complimentary closings (Chi-square = 10.889, df = 1; p<.005): 26 percent of the closings in the native letters contained errors—24 percent of these errors were nonstandard closings (such as “Thank you” or “Yours in Christ”) and 2 percent were mechanical errors. Of the nonnative letters, 44 percent contained errors—29 percent of these errors were nonstandard closings and 15 percent were mechanical errors. The nonstandard closings in the nonnative letters were more archaic sounding and overly polite (such as “Very respectfully yours” or “Best regards”) than were the closings in the native letters.

The Tone of the Letters

We identified a polite, personal tone as acceptable for a letter of inquiry written to native speakers (Markel, 1988; Houp & Pearsall, 1988). Figure 1 illustrates this tone in one of the native speakers’ letters requesting information on the graduate programs in the Department of English. As the letter in Figure 1 illustrates, a letter using the ap-
appropriate tone contains personal pronouns and uses active voice (Kilpatrick, 1984, p. 43)

I am planning to begin work on my doctoral in English in the fall of 1988, and I am interested in your school. Please send me information about your program at your earliest convenience. My address is... 

Figure 1. The body of a letter of inquiry illustrating acceptable tone.

The nonnative letters deviated significantly from the tone expected by a US reader primarily through exaggerated politeness (Chi-square = 11.704, df = 1; p<.001). In examining exaggerated politeness, Patricia Carrell and Beverly Konneker have shown that nonnative speakers show an "oversensitivity" in the area of politeness in English (1981, p. 27). Our study supports Carrell and Konneker's findings because 44 percent of the nonnative letters contained instances of exaggerated politeness while only 18 percent of the native letters used exaggerated politeness to influence the reader. The following words and phrases included in the nonnative letters might indicate exaggerated politeness included in the nonnative letters might indicate exaggerated politeness to the US reader: "very grateful," "kindly," "most grateful," "eager," and "esteemed." This exaggerated politeness also occurred in such phrases and sentences as "if it is not too inconvenient, please send me informative materials," "I humbly request you to take into consideration my ardent desire to continue my studies," "kindly excuse me for troubling you in this matter," and "if you show me the kindness to send me." These instances of exaggerated politeness indicate that the nonnative speakers may not have understood that requesting catalogs and application information from universities in the US is reasonable and common. They, therefore, may have mistakenly thought that they had to persuade the reader to send the requested information. The native speakers' letters overall did not indicate such a misconception.

This exaggerated politeness also resulted from obvious compliments to the university, its professors, and the state of Texas. The following passages from nonnative letters illustrate these obvious compliments:

Once I saw a British film Paris of Texas. It seemed that I was deeply impressed by the grand pictures of the wild fields of Texas and the beautiful music and songs in the movie. For many days those were always lingering in my mind. Yes, I am interested in Texas.
NTSU [North Texas State University, now University of North Texas] is one of the best universities in America.

It is my strong desire to continue my study of English and American literature in your department under the guidance of such distinguished scholars as you. . . . I hope you understand the eagerness of a Chinese applicant who desires so strongly to study under your guidance.

To the US reader, these passages may indicate that the nonnative speakers assumed that they had to favorably influence or convince the reader of their desire to study at the university. These nonnative speakers possibly misunderstood the expectations of the US reader and thought that requesting application information from the university is an uncommon and possibly an unreasonable inquiry.

**Type of Information**

To determine the appropriate type of information for a letter of inquiry requesting information on graduate programs and assistantships at the university, we talked with the Chair of Graduate Studies in the English department and in other academic departments at the University of North Texas. We found two types of information acceptable and customary: an inquiry or an inquiry plus a brief history of a prospective student's current academic status (see Figures 2 and 3). The inquiries were for information on application procedures, degrees offered, financial aid, or assistantships.

| Please send me information concerning your master's degree and doctoral degree program in English. I am especially interested in writing programs that you may offer. |
| I would also appreciate any information concerning financial aid that is available. |

**Figure 2.** The introduction and body of a letter of inquiry with inquiry

We found that both the native and the nonnative letters deviated from the accepted and customary information through unnecessary professional and personal information and through inappropriate requests for evaluation or intercession.
I am a graduate student currently completing course work for a Master's Degree in English at the University of xxxxx at xxxxx. After graduation, I would like to continue my education and, to this end, I am trying to gather information about doctoral programs in English literature. I would be very thankful for any information that you could supply me about such programs at the University of North Texas.

Also I would like information about any assistantship programs that you might have and who[m] I would need to contact to get more information about them.

Figure 3. The introduction and body of a letter of inquiry with inquiry and brief academic history.

In the area of unnecessary professional information, the native and nonnative letters differed significantly (Chi-square = 23.010, df = 1; p<.001). Of the nonnative letters, 64 percent contained unnecessary professional information, including very detailed job and educational histories and academic goals, while 21 percent of the native letters contained unnecessary professional information. The following passages illustrate unnecessary professional information often included in the nonnative letters.

I am an honorable diploma holder of the xxxxx College which is now evolving to a recognized university. In 1988, more than 90% of the disciplines (including the Department of English Language and Literature) will be converted into honorable degree courses. . . . Though I am working as a personal assistant in my Alma Mater, I also serve as tutor of two courses in the College. In addition, I think my part-time teaching expedience as private tutor for the past 7 years entitle me to get a post of teaching assistant. . . . It has been my life-long wish to energize the youth to reflect their oriental culture in the face of the western culture and introduce the oriental civilization to the western world. These ideals are . . . my life motivations and my responsibilities as an intelligentsia.

I major in twentieth century American Literature, especially, the modern playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill, whose drama Mourning Becomes Electra has become the motif of my MA theses. I have been learning English for eight years, French for four years and Japanese for two years. During my graduate studies in China, it took me only two years to gain forty credits in fourteen courses.

In 1981, I was one of only two young teachers to attend the National Teachers' training class, a program that ran from March to September. In 1982 my students scored higher than any other class at xxxxx
University in the National English Test. An important award in my teaching career at xxxxx University is my receiving the Outstanding Teachers' Prize in both 1982 and 1983. This competition was judged both by students' votes and by evaluation by a department committee. The teaching of both senior and junior faculty members in the English Department was considered.

The above passages present information about the writers that the US reader would probably think is inappropriate and unnecessary in a letter merely requesting information on graduate programs or on graduate assistantships. We should also point out that the above passages may present information that is expected and common in similar inquiry letters in other cultures. From the nonnative letters, the US reader possibly inferred that the nonnative speakers mistakenly viewed their letters, at least indirectly, as applications for admission to the university or for an assistantship. This misconception could create great disappointment and confusion when these writers receive only a graduate catalog or an application for the assistantship with a form letter or could cause the writers to assume that they were being admitted to the university and granted assistantships.

The letters also contained unnecessary personal information such as the age, gender, and nationality of the writer and excessive biography. In this area, the two groups differed significantly (Chi-square = 15.015, df = 1; p<.001). Of the nonnative letters, 51 percent included unnecessary personal information as opposed to 20 percent of the native letters. The following passages illustrate typical personal information in the nonnative letters:

I was born in xxxx Province [Province] in 1954. I am a 25-year-old young man, studying English in the department as a first-year graduate student.

I am a Korean woman . . .

I am twenty-seven years in age . . . . I invariably endeavor, as widely as I can to read in various scope, say, from culture to popular science. I benefit substantially from it. I find that my life is made kaleidoscopic by what I read in novels and poetry.

Unlike that in the nonnative letters, the unnecessary personal information in the native letters rarely included the age, birth information, gender, or nationality of the writer; instead, this unnecessary personal information usually was excessively biographical as illustrated by the following examples from native letters:
I have maintained an extremely nourishing lifestyle through studies in literature, music, working as a resident assistant, and even being named the college's 1986 Homecoming King.

Currently I volunteer to help an ESL program run by World Relief.

I have also been actively involved in student activities on campus, having most recently served as President of Student Government.

The excessively biographical passages in the native letters were much shorter and less frequent than those of the nonnative letters.

The excessively biographical passages in both the native and nonnative letters may indicate that the writers of these letters thought they had to persuade the reader to send them information on the graduate programs or to convince the reader that they were worthy to receive the requested information. However, the inclusion of the age, gender, birth information, or nationality of the writers in the letters suggests that these nonnative speakers may have also viewed their letters as applications for admission to the university.

Finally, the two groups did differ significantly in the appropriate requests for evaluation or intercession (Chi-square = 5.559, df = 1; p<.025). Of the nonnative letters, 43 percent included at least one request for evaluation or intercession while of the native letters, only 24 percent included such requests. The native speakers' inappropriate requests were primarily for evaluations of their qualifications. However, the nonnative speakers requested tuition and admission fee waivers and dismissal of GRE or TOEFL requirements as well as evaluation of their qualifications. The following passages illustrate some of these requests:

Now please review my qualifications and, if you find me eligible for your doctorate program, send me information on foreign student admissions and an application form.

I would appreciate it very much if you excuse me from the TOFL [TOEFL].

If you think I am qualified to apply, please send me the application form and other materials as soon as possible.

I intend to continue my study in your university for M.A. degree next year. I want to know if students like me are competent enough to be admitted to your university.

The requests for evaluation are inappropriate in timing and audience since at the University of North Texas the graduate college, not the English department, admits the students to the university. Thus, the US
reader would probably view the above passages as inappropriate requests before the writers had received admission to the university or before they had filled out the appropriate forms. These passages also indicate to the US reader that the nonnative writers possibly assumed that the reader had the power to excuse them from required tests and fees or that these writers did not have adequate information about the application process. When receiving these letters of inquiry, the US reader did not expect to be asked to evaluate students' qualifications before they applied or to waive required tests and fees. In fact, the reader, as Chair of Graduate Studies, does not have the power to make such waivers. To the US reader, then, these letters possibly imply that the nonnative speaker did not understand what the reader expected or what the reader could do in the university community.

Table 1 summarizes our findings concerning the tone and the information of the native and nonnative letters. As the table shows, the nonnative letters differed significantly from the native letters in all the categories.

Table 1
Tone and Information in Letters of Inquiry
Written by Native Speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone and Information</th>
<th>NATIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exaggerated Politeness</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary Professional</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary Personal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate Requests</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>&lt;.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length of the Letters

To determine the length of the letters, we counted the number of words in the body of each letter. We excluded the date line, inside address, salutation, and complimentary closing in the word count. We used a t-test to determine significance. The nonnative letters differed significantly from the native letters in length (t = -17.023; p < .00001. The nonnative letters averaged 164 words while the native letters averaged only 88 words. The difference in length between the two groups underscores the fact that the groups differed significantly in the type of information included in the native and nonnative letters. Interestingly, the longer letters of both groups overwhelmingly included unnecessary professional information. In fact, in the nonnative letters, the average
The number of words used for unnecessary professional information was 68 and for the native letters 46. For the unnecessary personal information and inappropriate requests, the nonnative letters averaged 17 and 21 words, respectively and the native letters averaged 16 and 15 words, respectively. Finally, the exaggerated politeness included in some of the native and nonnative letters did not dramatically affect the length because the nonnative letters averaged only 9 words for exaggerated politeness and the native letters averaged 7 words.

The longer length of the native and nonnative letters was due to the same factors, primarily unnecessary professional information. The writers of these longer letters, both native and nonnative speakers, seemed to think they had to explain their past professional and educational experiences to convince the reader to send them information about the graduate programs. Or perhaps these writers again assumed incorrectly that they were actually applying for admission to the university or for an assistantship instead of merely requesting information.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

From our study, we draw the following conclusions: (a) the letters written by nonnative speakers of English differed significantly from those written by native speakers in the use of accepted salutations, complimentary closings, tone, and information; (b) the letters written by native speakers of English deviated less from the accepted business communication practices in the US than did the letters written by nonnative speakers; (c) the nonnative speakers seemed to misunderstand the expectations of their readers and the context in which their letters would be received to a much greater degree than did the native speakers. This particular conclusion supports the findings of native speakers. This particular conclusion supports the findings of several studies which show that the nonnative speakers need to understand the reader's culture to assure effective written communication (Halpern, 1983; Stevenson, 1983; Varner, 1988; Zong & Hildebrandt, 1983). Since our research is limited to business communication by native and nonnative speakers of English in an academic setting in the US, we cannot propose direct applications of our conclusions to teaching business communication to native or nonnative speakers of English. However, our conclusions can provide us with useful implications about teaching US business communication practices to nonnative speakers and about teaching international business communication practices to native speakers of English in the US.
Based on our research, the nonnative speakers of English need more instruction concerning the cultural expectations of their US readers, specifically US business communication practices. The nonnative speakers in our study who deviated from standard US business communication practices may not have received current information about these practices from textbooks or instructors; or perhaps they had not received any information or instruction about these practices. Unlike most native speakers of English, the nonnative speakers probably had not been extensively exposed to US business communication practices through the mail they received or perhaps through their business communication textbooks and courses. Without such information and exposure, nonnative speakers cannot be expected to follow and understand US business communication practices (Varner, 1988, p. 55).

Furthermore, our research indicates that the deviations from standard US business communication practices were not specific to one or more nationalities. The deviations did not occur among specific nationalities but were spread throughout the sample of nonnative letters used for the study. Therefore, we can speculate that US native speakers of English might have similar difficulties in international settings. In other words, a significant number of native speakers in the US might deviate from the standard business communication practices of other cultures. Therefore, these native speakers need specific training in the business communication practices of the major cultures of the world so they can communicate successfully and acceptably with readers in those cultures.

**FURTHER RESEARCH**

Although our study examined only letters of inquiry, we believe that similar studies are possible using other categories of business communication. These studies could also be conducted in nonacademic environments to learn if native and nonnative letters in the business communities show similar cultural differences. Further research should be done comparing native and nonnative communication written to readers other than those in the US. This research could also show us the cultural variants among writer's countries of origin.

**NOTES**

1. We determined writers' native languages from the content of the letters, the writers' nationality, their surname, and their first name. (In fact, most
nonnative speakers of English directly stated their native language in their letters or indicated that they were not speakers of English). If we were uncertain about whether a writer was a native or nonnative speaker of English, we did not use the writer's letter in our study.

2. We grouped the nonnative speakers' letters in two ways: by geographic location and as one group. For the geographic location, we grouped the letters into the following categories: China and Mainland Taiwan (65 letters), Korea (12 letters), Aisa (13 letters), Middle East (4 letters), Europe (6 letters), and unknown (9 letters). We conducted Chi-square tests to see if the individual geographic regions were significant in the various features that we examined (salutations and closings, tone, and type of information); the tests did not produce any significant differences. The data from the geographic location grouping suggest that the lack of knowledge of US business communication practices and of US culture affected the features that we examined. We expect that with other features the geographic location would produce significant results.

3. All of the excerpts from letters in this article are actual letters used in the study. In all of these excerpts, we have deleted the writers' names, their addresses, and the names of their college or university.

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