

Chapter 28

Immigration Reform: Re[forming] Theories and Cyber-Designs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the theoretical preparation of students who design digital media for other cultural groups. Some designers of cross-cultural e-communication assume that the localization of document design is no longer preferable. However, the fact that we have the technical capability to distribute documents universally does not mean we cannot localize content. Universalizing some projects, such as online health care materials to address Spanish-speakers, when audiences with different needs speak Spanish in the U.S., can be less than effective. To address these ideas, this chapter first articulates the theoretical preparation of students to design online materials for different cultural audiences. Secondly, the author also discusses local application and pedagogy related to this process.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the theoretical preparation necessary for students to design digital media for other cultures. In so doing, the author uses a case study of a project designed for Spanish-speakers from Latin and South America, particularly for recent arrivals from Mexico, *Mexicanos*¹ to examine issues related to this process. The overarching

idea is to argue against the tendency to assume global or universal applications. In fact, localization of cultural communication is usually the most effective message-design process.

Within this context, some designers assume that the Internet means localization of document design is no longer viable or preferable over leaving materials “as they already are.” However, because we have the technical capability to make documents accessible to wider audiences does not mean that approach is best. Rather, much ef-

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fectiveness could be lost in universalizing some projects. For instance, one online health care site used for all U.S.-based Spanish-speakers can be problematic, for the U.S. actually contains a range of Spanish-speaking users from a variety of cultures and in need of different kinds and types of information.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine these issues in order to help readers better understand their complexity. Such an understanding is, in turn, essential to creating effective online materials for users from different cultures and countries. To examine these issues, the author first articulates the theoretical preparation necessary for students of cross-cultural health communication to understand and address such factors. The author then uses a case study to briefly discuss a local application of these ideas to the design of online health information for different cultural groups. In examining these issues, the chapter focuses predominately on theoretical preparation and appropriate pedagogy for preparing students to more effectively design online materials for cross-cultural interactions.

SIGNIFICANCE AND TERMINOLOGY

Most professional communication students are aware of translation issues in U.S. workplaces. In many cases, these translation issues involve not creating materials for overseas audiences, but developing texts for U.S.-based workers who are not native speakers of English. One particularly important kind of information within this context is health-related information that workers/individuals must have access to in order to get the treatment needed to address a variety of medical conditions and situations. In the U.S., the largest population most in need of non-English-language health materials and translators is Spanish-speakers.² This particular population, moreover, continues to grow – and to grow rapidly – in relation to other cultural and linguistic groups in the U.S.

Immigration from Latin and South America, for example, is still growing, and as a result, “the diversity of the United States population continues to change at a rapid pace” (Nelson, Brownson, Remington, & Parvanta, 2002, p. 209). In 2000, for example, an estimated ten percent of the U.S. population was not born in this country. At the same time, figures from 2005 show approximately 42,687,224 Hispanics in the U.S, out of which one in five speak English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). English is then a second or even third language for most of those persons born outside of the United States (Gudykunst & Mody, 2002). As a result, a growing number of individuals in direct need of medical attention are arriving at emergency rooms and doctors’ offices where they are unable to understand English and provide the answers needed to receive effective medical care. (This communication disconnect is only made more complex by the use of medical jargon in such contexts.) In such scenarios, translators are not always available or are often not available in the numbers needed to provide effective translation (i.e., effective care) to all non-English-speaking patients. These factors reveal a need for our students to learn how to develop effective online materials – particularly health and medical materials – for the increasingly diverse local workplace.

The first step in preparing students for such tasks involves defining the terms of cross-culture work, as the terms themselves carry political implications. For example, how do we talk about *international*, *global*, *cross-cultural* and *inter-cultural* issues? These terms are used interchangeably, and we often use them unreflectively, even as language and communication scholars. In this chapter, the terms *international* and *cross-cultural* will be used, but not the word *global*. The term, *global*, for many people outside the U.S., has become associated with the Americanization of their countries. As a result, the term represents a political agenda – that of *globalism* – which is often viewed negatively and not accepted as neutral by members of non-U.S. cultures.³ Additionally, the

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