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Although intercultural communication has become an important area of research, practice, and teaching in the United States in the last 20 years or so, we have not heard many concrete stories on how intercultural technical communication is practiced in everyday workplaces. Such stories are usually tucked away in individual practitioners’ memories or shared with a few colleagues and friends over lunch or coffee. These stories, we believe, have value and must be told and studied in order to advance the research, practice, and teaching of intercultural technical communication.

Storytelling is a fundamental means through which human beings form identities, build knowledge, and handle human interactions. Telling and listening to stories is therefore an important way for people to form and understand their cultural identities. Allowing practitioners to tell personal stories also is a form of empowerment. By narrating their lived intercultural experience—the good, the bad, and the ugly—practitioners can share their lessons learned with each other and educate fellow practitioners and management who are not experienced in intercultural projects. These stories also relay the lore of practice, which almost always emerges in advance of formal research or codified knowledge. In the same way, stories provide opportunities to test current theories and knowledge paradigms.

Pedagogically, these narratives are instrumental for teaching intercultural competencies to students who do not, yet, have their own intercultural stories to draw on. In these cases, reading other people’s stories provides the best vicarious learning. Personal narratives contain concrete details, contextualized contradictions, and individual choices. Confronted by these, students will learn to see culture not as a monolithic entity that can be easily codified, but instead as complex, fluid, and personal realities that must be carefully and continuously negotiated.

Negotiating Cultural Encounters: Narrating Intercultural Engineering and Technical Communication fulfills these goals. This book includes 12 narratives from 13 technical communication professionals. These authors represent six nationalities, some with multiple cultural identities or experiences. Their stories portray interactions with people and organizations from at least 19 cultures or nationalities and cover a range of communication issues in at least ten different technical fields. Most of these stories are based
on the authors’ own experience, and a few are based on the experience of fellow colleagues. Some authors choose to tell their own experience in first-person narratives and others prefer to distance themselves and tell their own stories in the third person. Some stories reveal the complexities of working with globally dispersed teams, some focus on working with colocated teams who have diverse cultural backgrounds, and others focus on working with “domestic” teams that nevertheless include people of various professional, organizational, and regional cultural identities. Each story comes with discussion questions that can be used either as a self-study guide or for class discussion. Additional readings are also suggested at the end of each story for readers interested in learning more about particular topics.

The narratives in this book sometimes confirm but often challenge common notions of what working across cultural and linguistic boundaries involves in professional communication settings. They help readers discover the point at which analysis reaches the limit of its usefulness because the unique time, place, and circumstances of each story do not yield a solution based on cultural rubrics or heuristics. We see that people in such situations have to make judgments, take risks, weigh consequences for various possible actions, and learn to negotiate cultural encounters on their own.

Some of the stories have happy endings and feature culturally sensitive characters; others end with unresolved issues and reveal characters who may have narrow or biased worldviews. None of them, however, is simple or straightforward. Together, these stories make it clear to any reader that culture is never finished; it isn’t “something” for which you can provide a definition or theory and make it fit every intercultural situation. Negotiating cultural encounters requires sincere and deep-seated cultural sensitivity, a willingness and even eagerness to learn alternative practices and solutions, and the ability to always find new footing, consider contextual factors, question taken-for-granted knowledge, and never cease paying attention.

HAN YU
GERALD SAVAGE
The IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS), with Wiley-IEEE Press, is excited to continue its book series titled *Professional Engineering Communication* with this collection of insightful stories about the struggle for cross-cultural communication. Bringing together technical communication experts from around the globe, editors Han Yu and Gerald Savage have invited these authors to share their insights and experiences into the rewarding and sometimes frustrating important work of communicating across cultural borders. And while the authors reveal to us that, in the end, success and understanding can be built, we learn by reading their tales of how hard-won those successes can be. Someone once told me, “The technical work is easy. It is the people that are hard,” and that sentiment is beautifully reflected here with voices many and varied. We can learn much from their on-site and very real challenges to communicate with purpose, efficiency, strategy, grace, and professionalism.

As you read, you will encounter many Engishes. While some people turn to American Standard English or British Standard English as a baseline, the goal of this book is also to reveal the complexity of working with other Engishes, gaining respect for the incredible work that gets done by translators, localization experts, documentation managers, editors, and technical communicators worldwide. Certainly, in these pages, you will find a turn of phrase or usage that is not familiar. It is in these slightly uncomfortable moments that we all can learn just a bit more about how English, as the language of technical work, is a fluid and accommodating element that surrounds and embeds itself in our very perceptions of the world.

I want to back up a bit and talk about this new PCS-sponsored project. As a series, *Professional Engineering Communication* (PEC) has a mandate to explore areas of communication practices and application as applied to the engineering, technical, and scientific professions. Covering the realms of business, governmental agencies, academia, and other areas, this series will develop perspectives about the state of communication issues and potential
solutions when at all possible. This book belongs squarely in this series because it discusses the essential work of communicating engineering, technical, and business ideas across languages, political lines, custom, and even generations.

The books in the PEC series will keep a steady eye on the applicable while acknowledging the contributions that analysis, research, and theory can provide to these efforts. Active synthesis between on-site realities and research will come together in the pages of this book as well as other books to come. There is a strong commitment from PCS, IEEE, and Wiley to produce a set of information and resources that can be carried directly into engineering firms, technology organizations, and academia alike.

We invite you to dive into these stories, where we come to understand how communication is never simple and never predictable. It is in those struggles that moments of clarity and purpose come into a stronger light, and the authors want to share those moments with you.

TRACI NATHANS-KELLY, PH.D.
Han Yu is an associate professor in the English Department, Kansas State University. Her research focuses on writing assessment, intercultural technical communication, and visual communication. Han’s work has appeared in Business Communication Quarterly, IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, Programmatic Perspectives, Technical Communication, and Technical Communication Quarterly. Han teaches classes in technical communication, business writing, engineering writing, and science writing. She worked as a technical editor for State Farm Insurance and as an editor and translator for the New Oriental Publishing Group in Beijing, China.

Jerry Savage is a professor emeritus of Rhetoric and Technical Communication at Illinois State University. His research focuses on diversity and social justice issues in international and intercultural contexts of technical communication practice. He is co-editor with Dale Sullivan of Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job and with Teresa Kynell Hunt of Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication, Volumes 1 and 2. His work has appeared in numerous books and professional journals. He is a fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Communication and has been awarded the Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication by the Society for Technical Communication and the Distinguished Service Award by the Council for Programs in
Technical and Scientific Communication. In addition to teaching, he worked for many years in technical, management, editorial, and writing roles in business, industry, and government.

A PROLOGUE FROM HAN: WHERE IT ALL STARTED

The idea for this collection came from a graduate class that I regularly teach at Kansas State University. The course, Introduction to Technical Communication, is typically filled with students who are not technical communication majors (at the time of this writing, my department does not offer a technical communication track for graduate students but does offer courses toward a certificate). These students come from all backgrounds: literature, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, modern languages, and communication studies. Rarely do I have a student who has technical communication work experience. Many of them choose to take the class because they want to know more about technical communication or because they believe that technical communication is about gaining "practical" skills such as writing "technical" manuals which may help improve their odds for employment upon graduation.

This scenario should not sound unfamiliar to many technical communication teachers. As a young, interdisciplinary, and growing field, technical communication seems to defy definition, as Jo Allen argued in "The case against defining technical writing" back in 1990 [1]. What Allen wrote made sense then and still makes epistemological sense today, but to tell students that "we cannot define what technical communication is" in a class that is supposed to introduce the discipline just won't do. So I have my students read the field’s landmark works and learn about its major issues, from Connors' historic study [2] to Miller's rhetorical turn [3], from the discussion of audience to ethics, visuals, and usability.

These readings are helpful for students to form a theoretical and conceptual understanding of the field, but they do not give students a realistic sense of what technical communicators do day in and day out on the job and how theories and concepts play out in the real workplace. Ideally, students should gain this realistic understanding through internships or other empirical experiences such as client projects, but these are unfortunately hard to do (at least do well) in an introduction class or even through a short certificate program.

In the absence of actual experiences, stories provide an excellent alternative for supplying empirical knowledge. As scholars in anthropology, psychology, and sciences have argued, stories (or narratives) are a primary thought and discourse process for human beings to form identities, make sense of experiences, develop rationality, build knowledge, and handle human interactions [4–6]. The hunting expeditions and other events painted on cave walls from prehistoric times are the cave dwellers’ attempt to, among other things, preserve the history and identity of their communities. In oral cultures, story-telling is a powerful way for people to obtain knowledge and sustain tradition. Even in print cultures, stories retain their visceral power in human communications. Fundraising campaigns, for instance, often use stories of individuals in need to evoke empathy and inspire philanthropy. And the act of reading stories is believed to strengthen one’s rationality and ability to form
argument because of our constant habit of testing narrative fidelity against lived experiences [5].

But the field of technical communication, Perkins and Blyler argued, has a rather low regard for stories and narrations [6]. This attitude, Perkins and Blyler speculated, has to do with "the Western tradition of privileging logic and science" and "the linking of professional communication to an objective view of rhetoric" [6, p. 11]. Logic and science are regarded as fundamental truth independent of human subjectivity; stories, because they are based on personal experiences, belong to literary genres such as novels and epics but are not objective enough for technical and professional communication. Narratives are seldom mentioned in textbooks. When they are, they are recommended only for supposedly low-level and uncritical writings such as recording chronological events or catching readers' attention [6].

A notable exception is Savage and Sullivan's 2001 collection Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job [7], A first of its kind in the field, Savage and Sullivan's collection has practicing technical communicators tell stories about their work and life. Together, these stories give a sampling of what it is like to be a professional technical communicator in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century: what they do, whom they work for and work with, how they get their education and training, and the ups and downs of their work and life. Advice and lessons learned, some explicit and others implicit, are offered.

My students enjoy reading these stories. As they put it, these stories help them to experience, vicariously, what it is like to be a technical communicator and to see whether that kind of work/life is what they would want. I like assigning these stories too. They provide lively class discussion and are much easier to arrange than inviting guest speakers to share narratives in person.

There is, however, one thing that I wish Savage and Sullivan's collection could have done, which is to include stories about intercultural technical communication. An increasingly important topic in the field, intercultural technical communication is now being taught in a variety of classes at various levels. In my Introduction to Technical Communication class, for instance, the class discusses the importance for today's technical communicators to reach international audiences and to work with colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds, reads about the communication needs and rhetorical preferences of audiences from different parts of the world, and discusses the tools, processes, and challenges of intercultural technical communication.

Although intercultural narratives did not find their way into Savage and Sullivan, I did find something else: intercultural technical communication case studies. Case studies have been widely used in educational settings, especially in business and law. They are "designed to move business students from the abstract to the specific by forcing them to grapple with realistic details and situations ... to provide mock contexts in which students can practice their legal arguments" [8, p. 21]. Case studies have also become a familiar teaching method in technical communication and regularly appear in textbooks such as Markel's Technical Communication [9]. For instance, a case on ethical communication may describe an ethical dilemma faced by a technical communicator and ask students to put themselves in the communica-
tor's place to try to solve the dilemma. Johnson-Sheehan and Flood call these cases the "closed cases" [8]. They are "closed" because "the rhetorical situation for the case is almost wholly contained within the assignment itself.... an enclosed technical setting is described for the students: a problem or issue is identified, and the students are given roles to play.... students are asked to respond within a set of guidelines that are wholly prescribed by the teacher" [8, p. 21].

Similar case studies can be found that address issues in intercultural technical communication—although they are few and far between. One title stands out: Deborah Bosley's 2001 collection *Global Contexts: Case Studies in International Technical Communication* [10]. This collection contains 12 cases, from developing technical documentation with Taiwanese partners, to adapting to South American communication patterns, to building a cyber university with a Malaysian company. Each case is consistently presented: "background information, to place the case in context; a description of the problem and the people or agencies involved, including pertinent graphics and communication examples; background for analysis, which introduces relevant theory, such as Edward Hall's concept of high- and low-context cultures or Lawrence Kohlberg's schema for cognitive moral development; and a brief analysis" [11, p. 128].

Bosley's cases are considerably longer and much more complex than the typical closed cases. But having used them with my students, I started to see their similarities: in Johnson-Sheehan and Flood's words, "an after-the-fact detective game in which given clues lead students to discover who or what did it" [8, p. 22]. The consistent format of the cases, in particular, helps to create this impression: The "background of the case" section confronts students with a baffling communication problem; the "background for analysis" then provides students with the clues that they need to unravel the mystery; and "analysis of the case" walks students through the process, putting the different clues in place.

No doubt, when my students follow these sections and read through the cases, they encounter valuable intercultural communication scenarios, and they gain important knowledge and problem-solving skills, but as the teacher, I wish these scenarios could be less like closed case studies and more like open stories. Case studies and stories share many similarities. To start, they both contain scenarios, characters, and exigencies, and both can use contextual details to engage and educate readers. But they also have important differences. Case studies, with their origin in the structured and regulated fields of business and law, are expected to offer some, if not always definitive, answers. Their focus is on analytical learning: helping students to piece together clues toward those answers. Stories, with their origin in everyday human life, are more fluid, unique, complex, and open to individual interpretation. They offer opportunities for students to develop critical learning: presenting problems and engaging readers to think about those problems and explore their own answers.

Both case studies and stories are important pedagogical tools in different contexts. Stories can be more instructive for teaching intercultural communication. This is because cultural issues are almost always complicated and defy a neat list of clues—they are more like a web of multiple, fluid, and interwoven factors. What's more, how we negotiate those issues and interpret those factors is influenced by our own cultural bias, rendering it impossible for us to arrive at set answers—who, after
all, do we exclude when we say “we” have the answer? An example should illustrate my point.

Because of my Chinese background, I have been asked, often enough, by students in my intercultural technical communication class and by curious colleagues about the preferred color choices for communicating with Chinese people. Having gleaned some information from cultural handbooks or online and anecdotal sources, they want to confirm if white is, indeed, a “bad” color for the Chinese because it is the color of mourning in China whereas red is a “good” color because it is the color of festivity.

Every time, I begin my answer with “No, it is not that simple.” This kind of response, I suspect, disappoints some of my questioners who want a straightforward answer or expect, consciously or unconsciously, an answer that reinforces their idea of China as a different culture where interesting rules govern such matters as color choices.

White and red, I continue to explain to my questioners, are used in different contexts in China—as everywhere else. White can indeed be a symbol of mourning (and “bad” in that sense) because traditional Chinese funerals, referred to as the “White Event,” use white as a primary color. The blood relatives of the deceased will dress in white, women will wear flowers made of white paper, and white fabric is used to decorate the service area. However, black is also an important color in Chinese funerals: It is worn by non-blood relatives, friends, and other attendees of the event to show respect and soberness. Because of the influence of Western traditions, black is even replacing white as a dominant color in contemporary Chinese funerals, especially in urban areas. To add to the twist, white can also be a primary color at an important celebratory event (and “good” in that sense) in China: weddings. Influenced by Western traditions, contemporary Chinese weddings, especially in urban settings, feature white bridal dresses, white flowers, and white decors to symbolize purity and elegance.

The color red is an equally complex matter. Celebratory events such as weddings and birthdays in China are traditionally known as the “Red Event” and red is the dominant color used at those events. White dresses may have become the default choice for China’s urban brides, but many of them, for parts of their reception ceremonies, will change into traditional Chinese Qipao, a dress made of red fabric in various shades and with various patterns. At traditional celebratory events, the Chinese characters “joy” (喜) and “happiness” (福) are cut out in red paper and pasted on walls and doors, red lanterns are raised, red-colored firecrackers are played, and red envelopes are used by parents and friends to give money to children. So, indeed, red is often associated with joy and prosperity (and “good” in that sense). But the same bright red can also have very different meanings: It symbolizes blood, and in the political context, blood that was shed by the Chinese people and troops in founding and defending the People’s Republic of China. The emblems of the Chinese Communist Party and the People’s Liberation Army and the national flag of China are predominantly red. Red therefore represents the Party, the Army, and the China that we know today. For people who are devoted to the Party, red is a “good” color that suggests patriotism; for people who are not, it can be a “bad” color associated with suppression and bloodshed of an altogether different type.
If the use of two colors in one culture can be so complex (and this is only a glimpse into that complexity), we can only imagine the amount of intricacies our communicators face in intercultural encounters that are associated with a variety of characters, events, deliverables, timelines, technologies, and numerous other factors. To try to present all of these as clues from which some kind of answers will always emerge seems idealistic at best. Instead, a mode of learning and teaching that is less prescriptive and more exploratory and less teacher centered and more learner centered seems more appropriate. Open-ended stories about intercultural technical communication can help realize this education. Through stories, students can see and hear, from practicing communicators, what intercultural technical communication is all about: what tasks do practitioners work on, whom do they work with, what issues do they encounter, and what processes and skills are involved. With these stories, students are expected to think on their own, to raise questions, to suspect assumptions, and to debate possible solutions; they will need to juggle logic, probability, ethics, justice, creativity, and even an attempt at wisdom. A good narrative will provide a situation to which students and readers can apply the intercultural communication principles and concepts we want them to know analytically. The narrative will also help them discover the point at which analysis reaches the limit of its usefulness because the situatedness of the story will usually involve some key aspect that is unique and does not yield a solution based on analytic terms. That’s where they will have to make judgments, take risks, weigh consequences for various possible actions, and learn to negotiate cultural encounters on their own. Essentially, that is the real decision making our students and practitioners will have to make in real-life intercultural communication.

In addition to these pedagogical effects, simply allowing practitioners to tell their stories is significant. As Perkins and Blyler state, telling stories about what we do can empower our profession [6]. Although intercultural technical communication has become an important part of our field’s research and teaching, it is nonetheless still an emerging topic and demands more innovative research, meaningful pedagogies, and research-based attention in industry. By telling stories about their work, their lives, their frustration, and their accomplishments, our intercultural technical communicators can have their voices heard. Through workplace narratives, intercultural professional communicators relay the lore of practice, which almost always emerges well in advance of formal research, theory, or codified knowledge. Such narratives provide opportunities to test current theories and knowledge paradigms and suggest directions for new research. By following these narratives, managers, professionals in related fields, students in training, and educators and researchers can hope to develop more effective and appropriate intercultural technical communication.

To sum it up, in early 2010, I started to consider putting together a collection of narratives of intercultural technical communication. I approached Gerald (Jerry) Savage with this idea, who enthusiastically agreed to join me. From there, we started talking, face to face, on the phone, and through lengthy e-mails, to hash out the best way to realize my ideas. By the summer of 2010, we had a plan of what we wanted.
We Thought We Planned It All

First, we wanted to hear from practicing technical communicators who can share the most pertinent and current stories. It is true that many university educators and intercultural scholars have intercultural experience and have valuable stories to tell, but they also have more venues to have their voice heard: journals, conventional textbooks, and previous case study collections such as Bosley’s. Practicing technical communicators, on the other hand, have fewer opportunities (beyond such venues as conferences and trade publications) to reach students, teachers, researchers, and fellow practitioners; many of them also lack the time to do the reaching-out beyond their professional duties. So engaging these practitioners (without excluding researchers and educators) can help us get fresh perspectives and essential information that we may otherwise never realize existed.

Second, we hoped that our authors would have diverse backgrounds in terms of their cultural identities, professional affiliations, workplace roles, and communication assignments so their stories could demonstrate a variety of scenarios, challenges, possibilities, and complexities. Current intercultural technical communication publications, especially textbooks, are predominantly authored by U.S. writers or those who reside in the United States. As a result, the intercultural interactions we read the most are those between U.S. culture and “other” cultures—and primarily from the U.S. perspective of how to “cope with” those cultures. While these interactions and perspectives are important for our students and readers to know, focusing only on those is a rather instrumental, even ethnocentric, way of learning intercultural communication. So we hope our collection can give students and readers a chance to look beyond the U.S. worldviews and glean some non-U.S. perspectives.

Third, we wanted concrete narratives, not general overviews or descriptions of our authors’ work. The familiar 5Ws and 1H are the guidelines we gave them: Who was involved? What happened? Where did it take place? When did it take place? Why did it happen? And How did it happen? Jerry also coined a SCAD system to coach our writers:

- **S for Situation.** The occasion that makes the story. This may be an incident, a crisis, or a typical occasion that illustrates what it’s like to be an intercultural technical communicator.
- **C for Character.** People, especially the main characters. These should be real human beings with distinctive nature, character, personality, temperament, and so on.
- **A for Action.** Important, significant, or interesting things that happen in the story.
- **D for Dialogue.** Verbal communication as well as other modes of communication.

We insisted on concrete stories with rich details so we could provide the contexts that are essential for students and readers to meaningfully learn about culture and in-
tercultural interactions. These details help the book to stay away from uncritical instruction of cultural heuristics such as those developed through studies by Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. These heuristics were widely taught and include such well-known dimensions as low context–high context culture and individualism–collectivism. But an uncritical instruction of cultural heuristics tries to use preestablished dimensions to map out the characteristics of a culture and ignores contextual details that influence intercultural communication.

In his essay, "Culture and cultural identity in intercultural technical communication," Hunsinger pointed out various problems with such an approach—although he did not differentiate critical and uncritical uses of heuristics and argued against the heuristic approach in general [12]. Operating from the heuristics alone, one may ignore extracultural elements (political, economic, historical, technological, and personal ones) that shape intercultural interactions—an act of oversimplification and essentialism [12]. Furthermore, because it is tempting to read heuristic factors as binaries (e.g., individualistic vs. collectivistic) even when they are meant to describe tendencies, the heuristic framework can perpetuate differences or lead some to believe that "our" way is better than "their" way—an act of ethnocentrism.

To avoid these difficulties, as Hunsinger suggested, drawing from Arjun Appadurai, we planned to distinguish "culture" and the "cultural" in our collection of narratives [12]. According to Appadurai's critical cultural theory, culture as a noun describes some monolithic and definitive substance, whereas cultural as an adjective (as in "cultural identity") is situated and embodied [13]. When we do not sufficiently separate the two, we inevitably assume that cultures (which we have confined, a priori, to static heuristic descriptors) determine the fluid and multiple cultural [13]. Appadurai argued that this assumed causal relationship should be reversed: "rather than trying to identify the ways culture manifests itself in the cultural, Appadurai studied the ways the idea of culture is constructed from the apparently cultural" [12, p. 38].

By insisting on concrete stories and rich details, we hope this book will achieve the same thing: Rather than asking that students and readers remember static heuristics, we want to show them how cultural performance shapes our understanding of culture. We want readers to see what happens in intercultural interactions; what is said or done and by whom; what are people's motives, concerns, and emotions; what arguments break out; what compromises are made and how they are made; and what solutions are reached or not reached. We hope that by reading these apparently cultural narratives, students will learn to critically approach culture and cultural heuristics.

Last, we planned to refrain from interjecting our own interpretations and explanations of the narratives. We want our writers to share their perspectives, beliefs, and solutions of cultural encounters, but we will neither endorse nor prescribe their views as if they are the "right" ones. Each writer is a cultural agent so their understandings are necessarily influenced by their cultural backgrounds and upbringings, and yet, they are also able to learn and move beyond their prior culturally constrained viewpoints. For readers—who are also cultural agents—it is important that they learn to negotiate cultural encounters on their own: to read the stories presented
to them, ask questions, examine the writers’ biases, examine their own biases, and eventually get at a more sophisticated way of thinking about and approaching cultural encounters.

Without set answers, our students and readers may feel lost or they may question their own ability to arrive at the right answers. But once again, there is no right answer and getting answers is not the goal of the book. We want readers to accept the complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions that are inevitable in intercultural interactions and not expect that a book (or a college degree or a certain level of experience) will ever get them to a point where they have all the knowledge necessary to communicate across cultures without misunderstandings or difficulties in a particular—and always in some sense new—situation. The best we can do in a book or class is to engage students to critically think about cultures, to problem-solve cultural issues, to participate in intercultural communications, and to continue this process even after they leave the book or class behind. Certainly, some instructional parameters are needed to guide students and readers in their learning, so we decided to add discussion prompts and questions to each story and suggest additional readings when that is appropriate. We also decided to use an additional, theme-based table of contents that groups the stories into broad categories to help teachers and readers see various commonalities and connections.

We Realized We Didn’t Know It All

Having firmed up our plans, we set to work. For a while, things were going well. By the end of 2010, we had identified a group of excellent writers whose profiles fit what we were looking for. Most of them are industry practitioners, including freelancers, consultants, and corporate employees. We also have a few educators who have experience in industry, or who have close contacts in industry whose experiences became the basis of their narratives. Our authors have diverse cultural identities and backgrounds, as their biographies show. Their stories also cover a range of communication issues in technical, engineering, and related fields, including web design, documentation management, translation, developmental projects, workplace safety, business presentations, and more.

Some stories reveal the complexities of working with globally dispersed teams, others focus on working with colocated teams who come from different national cultures, and still others focus on working with “domestic” teams who nevertheless have diverse cultural identities. We are very glad to include this last type of “cultural encounters” because national cultures and international contexts should not be the default anchor point in the studies of cultures—although they often are in current literature and textbooks. Within nation states, there can be various subcultures based on geographic locations, social/economic statuses, professional circles, and other factors. We only wish we could have more of such domestic cultural narratives. But then, again, we wish we could have more of every type of narratives, since there is simply no end to the complexities in intercultural interactions—but a book has to end somewhere.

In the early months of 2011, initial drafts started to trickle in from our writers. We would read drafts separately, add side comments and queries, make tracked
changes, and write up summaries of major questions or concerns. While these are common processes we had expected to go through as editors, we quickly realized that we had not planned for everything. And that revelation, clichéd as it may sound, was a true learning experience for both of us—and for our writers too, as many of them tell us.

We had, from earlier on, made the plan not to present our writers’ cultural perspectives and solutions as if they are the right ones or to interject our own interpretations of the stories in our editing process. But we conveniently overlooked the fact that with the array of cultural and professional backgrounds of our writers, ourselves, and our potential readers, things are never going to be that easy. Let’s consider a hypothetical example: A U.S. writer writes about a U.S. manager who was parachuted into a Chinese company, was all wise and confident, offered his Western experiences, triumphed over all the Chinese employees, and rescued the company’s faulty documentation practices. With such a story, we can justifiably be concerned about sending a “neo-colonial” message or at least be concerned that some readers will see it that way. But what if the writer is Ghanaian, whose nation was subject to centuries of colonialism? Wouldn’t that make a difference, if just an unconscious one, in how our readers see the story? And what if the protagonist in the story was a Ghanaian manager? Shouldn’t we consider how Africa’s colonial history might have shaped his cultural identity and how he conducted himself in a foreign country? Then what if our Ghanaian writer and/or manager turned out to be Western educated and employed—westernized, as we often say? And so the complexities continue.

Eventually, we learned to accept what, in retrospect, seems so obvious (but then again, nothing in cultural learning is obvious): To even try to block out our cultural identities or those of our writers from the narratives is simply not possible. As soon as we put pens to paper and start writing or editing, we are allowing our cultural selves to guide what we say and how we say them. We want to make this inconvenient truth clear to our readers so they can feel free to “judge” the stories but at the same time remember to judge themselves, for the readers are cultural agents just as we are, and they should be aware of the biases they bring to the interpretation of the narratives. Ultimately, this is what intercultural interactions are about: None of us can or should erase our cultural identities, but we can and should be mindful of those identities and how they are projected in intercultural interactions. As Geertz put it, the central question is not “how to prevent subjective views from coloring objective facts,” but “how best to get an honest story honestly told” [14, p. 9].

How, then, can we get these honest stories honestly told? A distinction needed to be made between two voices in the story: the voice of the protagonist and the voice of the story author. The protagonist is free to present to the world his or her cultural perspectives, beliefs, and solutions, but the author does not necessarily share the views of the protagonist—even if in many situations the two are one and the same. This distinction is rather significant when we think about the Foucauldian concept of author.

As Foucault argued, author, or what he calls the “author function,” is not an individual but arises from and comes to stand for a complex set of social operations and constraints that determine how we interpret text: “the comparisons we make, the
traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice” [15, p. 127]. This author or author function is not the protagonist or the individual narrator of a story. Given a novel that is narrated in the first person, it is easy for readers to remember that the protagonist “I” is not the author but a “second self” whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book” [15, p. 129]. With this tacit understanding, there is less danger of readers confusing a protagonist’s (possibly troublingly narrow and biased) worldview with what the author endorses. But given our narratives, which are presented as real-life experiences, readers will be tempted to equate the protagonist “I” with the authorial voice of a story and even that of the book as a whole. At the same time, the other characters in the narrative, because they are not “authors,” have no authority to tell their versions of the story so their emotions, concerns, and beliefs are excluded.

We shared this concern with our writers and asked that they do the impossible task of separating their personal voice from their authorial voice—And so they did. They include more self-reflections in their stories to create the Foucauldian “alter ego”; they candidly and bravely admit the protagonist I’s (which was often their own) helplessness, doubt, ignorance, and mistakes; and they avoid applying cultural labels to other characters in the story but instead tell what they did or said, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions.

Presenting the “apparently cultural,” as we planned, also proved difficult because everyone’s understanding of what is apparently cultural is different. At the earlier stage of the editing, we often prompted our writers to give concrete details about the cultural incongruities, differences, or even conflicts that pertain to their stories. We were not trying to exaggerate the performed cultural differences. Rather, we thought that our writers, being immersed, day in and day out, in their intercultural environments, might have become so used to the diversities and challenges of those environments that they overlooked details that would be educational to our readers. But gradually, we started to wonder whether, in our attempt to create learning moments, we were doing nothing but emphasizing differences that we thought “mattered”—when in some situations it is not at all obvious whether communication challenges are based on cultural factors or on interpersonal, personal, stress-related, task-related, or any other possible factors. Nor is it obvious that the interpersonal, personal, stress related, or task related is not cultural.

In addition, as some of our writers reminded us, although cultural differences do exist, today’s globalized economy, communication networks, and widespread diaspora are creating a growing number of working professionals who share similar work habits and professional standards. The situation of Europe is a telling example. As our writers tell us, industry standardization across Europe means that people share a similar technological infrastructure, working practices, and organizational structures. In particular, the emergence of the European Union brought cultures across Europe much closer. Peoples can freely move across country borders to live and work, and organizations and businesses across Europe also conform to basic standards.

At that point, we realized (again, what seems clear in retrospect) that our focus should not be on what “cultural differences” exist but, as Kubota and Lehner sug-
gested, we needed to move "toward questions such as: How have we come to believe that a certain cultural difference is true?, What political purposes have motivated the construction of particular beliefs about cultural difference?, and What alternative understandings of cultural difference, or counter-discourses, are available to transform our taken-for-granted knowledge?" [16, p. 17].

There is no one-size-fits-all answer to these questions when it comes to our stories. Each time something came up, we pondered, questioned our own assumptions, and negotiated for tentative solutions. We would then send lengthy comments to writers, explaining our concerns, inviting their feedback, and suggesting possible revisions. We continued these conversations with each writer, we debated, and we made compromises, until all felt relatively comfortable with the end product. We cannot say that we are convinced every decision we made is perfect, but we made the best decisions we know on how to get honest stories honestly told.

A Note on Styles and World Englishes

Readers who are sensitive to stylistic issues will notice inconsistencies in style from chapter to chapter in this collection. Here, we refer to style in the sense of spelling, punctuation, and some aspects of syntax. Some of these inconsistencies may well appear to be errors and oversights in the copyediting process. But, in fact, they reflect different cultural, language, and national conventions of style. As we began reading first drafts of the stories, we found ourselves "correcting" a number of stylistic elements, making them conform to U.S. style conventions. Quickly, however, we realized the ironic contradiction, in a book about cultural diversity, for the editors to attempt to homogenize the styles used by writers from diverse cultural backgrounds and who write in diverse cultural contexts using different stylistic conventions.

So, instead, we contacted the editorial staff at Wiley/IEEE Press to ask that we be allowed sufficient latitude to keep the stylistic conventions and choices to which our writers are accustomed. We recognize the potential for stylistic chaos in this decision and we have agreed to some degree of compromise. We have attempted to distinguish between errors (style elements the writers did not intend and would want to correct if they caught it themselves) and choices based on local conventions.

The choices we have elected to keep in the text include syntactic choices and word choices that may seem like errors to some readers but which represent the English spoken in some nations. For instance, unlike U.S. English, British English tends not to use serial commas (the last comma placed before "and" or "or" in a series). In U.S. English, collective nouns that refer to a group of people (such as "team" or "company") often take on singular verbs or pronouns, but in British English, both singular and plural forms are readily used (e.g., "The company was formed in 1993. They have attracted many talented people over the years"). Whether to use the singular or the plural depends on whether one thinks of the group as a singular, impersonal unit or a collection of individuals.

Our decision to accommodate multiple styles is based on studies in the emerging linguistic and rhetorical field of world Englishes. The field of world Englishes is interested in the ways various regions of the world have appropriated or inherited the English language, often from colonial occupation but also as a lingua franca used in
global trade or diplomacy. A key argument of world Englishes studies is that no nation or culture is the sole proprietor of a language. English is not the exclusive property of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, or Australia. It is widely spoken in countries such as India, Ghana, South Africa, Singapore, and many other nations and regions of the world. However, it is spoken in ways specific to those locations, reflecting the indigenous language and cultural conventions of those places and picking up many words and expressions from those local languages and customs. Thus, Indian English may seem "foreign," exotically structured and accented, to a speaker of South African English, and vice versa. These Englishes or, as Wierzbicka calls them, "post-Englishes, are sometimes given hybrid names: Hinglish [Indian English], Singlish (from 'Singapore English' or 'Sri Lankan English'), Pringlish (from 'Puerto Rican English'), and so on" [17, p. 305].

Although the topic of world Englishes is in a sense relevant to all stories in international technical communication, it appears to us to be central in a number of our narratives, which we have categorized under world Englishes in our theme-based table of contents.

A Note on Translation and Localization

Readers who are familiar with the concepts of translation and localization will notice that we combined these two in our theme-based table of contents. This may again appear to some as an error or an editorial oversight, but in fact, it reflects the reality we encountered in our learning process. Although in academic and classroom discussions, we often separate these two concepts, it appears that a number of our industry practitioners use them interchangeably.

Translation, an important stage in producing international technical communication, is about putting documents into the languages of users in various parts of the world. A basic strategy for translation is for the technical writer to compose the documentation in English in a way that makes it translation ready. This usually involves simplifying the language by means of limited vocabulary and eliminating complex syntactic structures. This helps to avoid mistranslation and to help the translation go faster. It may also reduce errors in machine translation or machine-assisted translation.

Localization, another important stage in producing international technical communication, is harder to define, partly because it is a relatively new concept within the field of technical communication. Localization is defined by the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) as follows [18]:

Describes the process of adapting a product to a specific international language or culture so that it seems natural to that particular region, which includes translation, but goes much farther. True localization considers language, culture, customs, technical and other characteristics of the target locale. While it frequently involves changes to the software writing system, it may also change the keyboard usage, fonts, date, time and monetary formats. Graphics, colors and sound effects also need to be culturally appropriate.