

# Understanding Cultural Preferences of Arab Communication Patterns

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**ABSTRACT:** This study focuses on how American public relations practitioners and scholars can incorporate the dynamics of intercultural communication into their work with Arab clients in the U.S. The study examines how two cultures—the Arab and the American culture—have two distinct perspectives for viewing the role of language, for structuring persuasive messages, and for communicating effectively with their audiences.

Several frameworks for viewing cultural variations were used to develop a chart on “cultural communication preference” for Americans and Arabs. For the Arab culture, emphasis is on form over function, affect over accuracy, and image over meaning. An awareness of these cultural differences can help American practitioners deal more effectively with their Arab clients in developing written and oral communication, in public relations programming and in understanding professional ethics.

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International public relations is one of the fastest growing specialties within public relations.<sup>1</sup> However, while the field itself is growing, much of the literature is anecdotal based on individual practitioner’s experience with different cultures. Scholars have increasingly been calling for the need for the literature to be more theoretically based and for practitioners to become more culturally aware.<sup>2</sup>

This study focuses on how public relations practitioners can incorporate the dynamics of intercultural communication into their practice. The study specifically examines how two cultures—the Arab and the American culture—have two distinct preferences for structuring persuasive and appealing messages and what these differences mean for American practitioners working with Arab clients in the U.S.

While the two styles are very different, most cultural differences tend to lie below the surface of one's awareness. Without a conscious awareness of how another culture is different from one's own, there is a tendency to see the differences of another through the prism of one's culture. This is how the phenomenon of ethnocentrism occurs. When ethnocentrism occurs, cultural differences are no longer neutral, but rather negative. As Norman Daniels said that when differences aren't perceived as differences, they are perceived as right and wrong.<sup>3</sup> This study, based on a cross-cultural rhetorical analysis,<sup>4</sup> seeks to bring the cultural differences of the Arab and American rhetorical styles into conscious awareness.

### **HOW THE ARAB AND AMERICAN CULTURES DIFFER: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Understanding the different public relations styles of these two cultures begins with an understanding of the fundamental differences between the two cultures. Most intercultural scholars tend to view the Arab and American cultures as cultural opposites.<sup>5</sup> Intercultural scholars have proposed several theoretical frameworks for distinguishing the two cultures.<sup>6</sup>

#### **High-Context and Low-Context**

Perhaps the most well-known cultural continuum is Hall's discussion of high-context and low-context cultures.<sup>7</sup> Hall views meaning and context as "inextricably bound up with each other."<sup>8</sup> The difference between high and low context cultures depends on how much meaning is found in the context versus in the code. Low-context cultures, such as the American culture, tend to place more meaning in the language code and very little meaning in the context. For this reason, communication tends to be specific, explicit, and analytical.<sup>9</sup>

In high-context cultures, meaning is embedded more in the context rather than the code. As Hall states, "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message."<sup>10</sup> Thus the listener must understand the contextual cues in order to grasp the full meaning of the message. Thus, a high-context person will tend to talk around a point and expect his listener to know

what he means.<sup>11</sup> It is not necessary for the speaker to be specific because the details are in the context, not the message. In other words, in high-context exchanges, much of the "burden of meaning" appears to fall on the listener. In low context cultures, the burden appears to fall on the speaker to accurately and thoroughly convey the meaning in her spoken or written message.<sup>12</sup>

### **Indirect and Direct**

Scholars have also distinguished the Arabic and American cultures in terms of direct versus indirect communication styles. Levine introduced the cultural variations of directness versus indirectness, and clarity (univocal) versus ambiguity in communication patterns.<sup>13</sup> Levine said that the American cultural preference is for clear and direct communication as evidenced by many common American expressions: "Say what you mean," "Don't beat around the bush," "Get to the point."<sup>14</sup> Levine also noted that the direct style strives to accurately represent fact, technique, or expectation and to avoid emotional overtones and suggestive allusions.

In contrast, ambiguous communication is more indirect and emotionally rich. Whereas univocal stresses openness, ambiguous styles would be more likely to conceal or bury the message. Additionally, the desire for precision is not as important as creating emotional resonance. The ambiguous style would likely omit specific factual and even technical aspects of a message. As Levine stated, "By alluding to shared experiences and sentiments, verbal associations can express and evoke a wealth of affective responses."<sup>15</sup>

### **Doing and Being**

Another dominant cultural divide stems from Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's two proposed value orientations.<sup>16</sup> One orientation focuses on activity, the other on being and becoming.

The activity orientation places a premium on "activity which results in accomplishments that are measurable."<sup>17</sup> Stewart calls the activity orientation "doing."<sup>18</sup> He noted that features of "doing" cultures are characteristic of the American culture's emphasis on the importance of achievement, visible accomplishments, and measurement of achievement.<sup>19</sup> The proclivity toward "doing" is found in such common American expressions as "How are you doing?" or "What's happening?" An important feature related to "doing" or activity orientation is that words should match actions. "Symbolic statements," as Gold states, "should not be a substitute for action."<sup>20</sup>

Opposite of the "doing" cultures are the "being" cultures such as the Chinese, Japanese, or Arab cultures. Okabe contrasts the American "doing" culture to the Japanese "being" culture. He observes that achievement and development are not as important in a traditional vertical society such as Japan where an individual's birth, family background, age and rank is much more important.<sup>21</sup> For an individual of the "being" culture, "what he *is*" carries greater significance than

“what he *does*.”<sup>22</sup> In Arabic, the equivalent of “How are you doing?” is literally “What is your condition?” In which you would respond with your emotional or physical state, or Thank God for his blessings.<sup>23</sup>

### **Oral and Literate**

Anthropologists have long studied the distinctions between oral versus literate dominant societies. The print or literate dominant society relies more on the factual accuracy of a message than its emotional resonance.<sup>24</sup> This may relate to the historical purpose of the written word—to record, preserve, and transmit.<sup>25</sup> Literate societies also favor evidence, reasoning, and analysis over the less rational, more intuitive approach.<sup>26</sup> This contrasts to the logic of oral cultures, where a single anecdote can constitute adequate evidence for a conclusion and a specific person or act can embody the beliefs and ideals of the entire community.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas literate cultures may place a higher premium on accuracy and precision than on symbolism, in the oral cultures the weights are reversed. In oral cultures there appears to be greater involvement on the part of the audience, and this in turn, affects the importance of style and devices that enhance audience rapport. Gold highlights numerous features of the oral tradition, including repetition as a means for keeping attention as well as making the speech “agreeable to the ear.”<sup>28</sup> In terms of message comprehension, Henle noted that auditors will “go to considerable lengths to make sense of an oral message.”<sup>29</sup> Thus listeners play a valuable part in constructing meaning within an oral exchange. As Gold states, “the audience cooperates with the speaker by trying to understand the meaning or ‘gist’ rather than the actual content.”<sup>30</sup> The audience is quite active.

With heightened listener involvement, the aesthetics of style and audience relations may supersede the informational aspects of a message. An oral message may be valued more for its affective power than its cognitive merits. Tannen noted the interpersonal involvement between speaker and audience, as speakers strive for a more emotional and participatory responses from their audience.<sup>31</sup> Clearly with style overriding substance, aural ornaments such as formulas, humor, exaggeration, parallelism, phonological elaboration, special vocabulary, puns, metaphor, and hedges are critical.

### **Linear and Non-linear**

Similar to the oral/literate framework, intercultural scholar Carey Dodd suggests linear versus non-linear thought framework.<sup>32</sup> The linear cultural pattern stresses beginnings and ends of events, is object-oriented rather than people or event-oriented, and is empirical in its use of evidence. Linearity also stresses presentation of singular themes; ie, one point followed by second point, followed by third, etc. Points or facts are presented sequentially, in a linear

progression. One "builds an argument" in a "step by step fashion" instead of "throwing things in all at once."

In contrast, the communication message of non-linear cultures normally has multiple themes, is expressed in oral terms and heightened by nonverbal communication. The non-linear thought framework, according to Dodd, involves the "simultaneous bombardment and processing of a variety of stimuli" so these people would think in images, not just words.<sup>33</sup> Time orientation is less important than people and events, and frequently, time is not segmented.

## **CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE**

Not only do the cultural factors shape how messages are designed, but socio-historical forces have also influenced them as well. The two cultures appear to have fundamentally different perspectives in how they view the role and function of language. Understanding language's role helps underscore the persuasive preferences of the two cultures.

### **English Language: Transfer of Information**

From a Western historical perspective, written language was viewed primarily as a means for record keeping and documentation.<sup>34</sup> Thus language was used as an instrument for conveying information across time and space. By necessity, focus was on accuracy of content. Style served primarily as a means for enhancing the accuracy and truth of the substance. This historical root bears through today as most Americans view language as a medium for conveying or "transmitting messages." Communication models reflect this transfer of information in the very names of the basic communication components: "sender," "message" and "receiver."

This role of language is mirrored in the cultural communication style as well. A low-context individual would expect language use to be specific, technical and detailed. Speakers would be held responsible for being as accurate and factual as possible. In terms of direct, univocal culture, preference is for clarity, objectivity, and directness. Both linear and literate patterns emphasize accuracy, factual presentation of information for documentation purposes and for "doing things," as well as for argumentation and reasoning purposes.

### ***Sibr Halal* (Lawful Magic): Creating a Social Experience**

The major socio-historical forces that influenced the role of Arabic for the Arabs stem from the language's association as an art form, a religious phenomenon, and an identity tool. These forces appear to have shaped the role of the Arabic language in an entirely different fashion than English. Rather than viewing language as a means for transferring information with a

stress on factual accuracy, language appears to be a social conduit in which emotional resonance is stressed.

First is the role of Arabic as an artistic form, specifically poetry. As an early scholar noted, the "magical sounds of the words" combined with the images, have a powerful effect on the psychology of the Arab.<sup>35</sup> Hitti perhaps summed it up best when he stated,

Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic...The rhythm, the rhyme, the music produce on them the effect of what they call 'lawful magic' (*sibr halal*).<sup>36</sup>

The melodious sounds of the phonetic combinations and plays on words in Arabic prose and poetry has been likened to music.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as one Arab colleague once remarked, recitation of the Koran may be the Western equivalent of classical music. Because of their talent with words, poets throughout Arab history have been revered. As Chejne noted, "there had been hardly any scholar of consequence in Arab-Muslim society who did not try his hand at poetry."<sup>38</sup> In Arabic, with the stress on style, "eloquence and effectiveness were equated."<sup>39</sup>

The power of the Arabic language for Arabs is also derived from its religious association through the Prophet Mohammed and the Koran. For the believer, the majesty of the language of the Koran is considered a miracle from God for the Moslem prophet was illiterate and unschooled. "It was the Koran—the Revealed Book—that was conceived to represent the highest linguistic achievement of the Arabic language."<sup>40</sup> The Koran was not only revealed in Arabic, but Arabic is the language used in prayer by Moslems throughout the world.

Finally, Arabic is associated with contemporary nationalism. Many throughout the Arab world have defined "an Arab" as anyone who speaks Arabic.<sup>41</sup> Language not only served to define, but to distinguish as well. Chejne explained the intimate link between Arabic and the growth of Arab nationalism: "both Arabic and the nationalist movement have complemented each other to such a degree that they could hardly be separated."<sup>42</sup>

When looking at the three major socio-historical forces associated with the Arabic language—poetry, religion, and nationalism—one can see that symbolism is embedded in the very essence of the language. Each is also participatory, representing a subjective social experience in which the communicator cannot be truly disengaged from either the message or the audience. This contrasts dramatically with the very function of the written word—to record, preserve and transmit—which presupposes that the speaker may be physically separated from his audience. Similarly, whereas orality or public speaking, by nature, is a group experience, reading and writing tend to be a singular experience.

Thus, for the Arab culture, language serves as a social conduit. As Cohen observed, "(Arabic) language is a social instrument—a device for promoting social ends as much as a means for transmitting information."<sup>43</sup> The dominant communication preferences for the American and Arabic cultures are outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Cultural Variations of Messages In American and Arabic Communication Preferences

	<i>American</i>	<i>Arab</i>
Socio-Historical Influences	<b>Legal Documentation</b> <b>Record Preservation</b> Need for Accuracy Technical, Concrete Lanaguage Used to Transmit Information	<b>Poetry, Islam</b> <b>Nationalism</b> Reliance on Symbols Emotional Resonance Abstract Language Used to Create Social Experience
Hall (1976)	<b>Low-Context</b> Meaning in Message Explicit Include Details in Message Speaker Responsible for Message Comprehension	<b>High-Context</b> Meaning in Context Implicit Details in Context Listener Responsible for Understanding Message
Levine (1985)	<b>Direct/Univocal</b> Direct, to the Point Clear Simplicity Valued Objective (Avoid Emotion)	<b>Indirect/Ambiguous</b> Indirect, Circular Ambiguous Embellishments Valued Subjective (Deliberately Use Emotion)
Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961)	<b>Activity/"Doing"</b> Emphasize Action, Measurable Action Tie Between Word and Deed	<b>"Being &amp; Becoming"</b> Emphasis Relationship in Social Context Words for Social Effect
Dodd (1982)	<b>Linear</b> One Theme Organized with Beginning & End Object-Oriented <b>Literate Society</b> Written Word Valued Singular Experience Factual Accuracy Stressed Logic & Coherence Speaker Detached from Audience Analytical Reasoning	<b>Configuration/Non-Linear</b> Not Necessary Have One Theme Organization Not Stressed People & Event-Oriented <b>Oral Society</b> Oral Experience Valued Group Experience Imagery and Sounds Stressed Emotional Resonance Speaker & Audience Linked Intuitive Reasoning
Cultural Preferences for Messages	<b>American</b> Simplicity Accuracy Understatement Actions	<b>Arabic</b> Repetition Imagery Exaggeration Symbols

## **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN MESSAGE DESIGN**

Taken together, these cultural differences produce dramatically different views on what does and does not constitute "effective" communication. Highlighted below are some of the specifics that practitioners should be alerted to when working in cross-cultural public relations.<sup>44</sup>

### **Repetition versus Simplicity**

Repetition in Arabic is a decidedly positive feature. It is not uncommon to find a string of descriptive phrases or words all referring to one phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Not only is there repetition within a message, but often times repetition is used as a strategy among messages. Repetition—to repeat something over and over again, or to be wordy or verbose—for Americans may have negative implication. For the speaker, it could imply that the statement was not heard or not taken seriously, and thus necessary to repeat it. For the listener, repetition can imply that the listener was not paying attention or perhaps is not mentally capable of comprehending. Repetition, even as a rhetorical device in public speaking, is used sparingly for emphasis.

### **Accuracy versus Imagery**

Because of the powerful group experience in the oral tradition, a speaker seeks to engage the imagination and feelings of the audience. It is not uncommon for an Arab speaker to use metaphors that may seem outlandish to an American. "The mother of all battles," is a ready example. However, creative metaphors, analogies, and story-telling are part of the rich fabric of the oral tradition. In fact, whereas an American may insert facts and figures to illustrate a point, and Arab speaker may use one strong, vivid example to convey a point. An Arab speaker also tends to be very generous in her use of descriptive adjectives and adverbs.

### **Exaggeration versus Understatement**

As scholars have noted, distinct cultural preferences exist regarding how much one may stress an event or feeling. In that exaggeration can be instrumental in constructing vivid, powerful imagery, it is often used by oral cultures. In Arabic, both the words "exaggeration" and "eloquence" come from the same root source. Further, some scholars have observed a tendency of overassertion by Arabs and understatements by Americans. Prothro found such a pronounced cultural distinction that he cautioned that "statements which seem to Arabs to be mere statements of fact will seem to Americans to be extreme or even violent assertions."<sup>46</sup> Overassertion may have contributed to the American stereotypical perception of Arabs as violent, boasting, or insincere.



### **Words versus Action**

Because of the symbolism inherent in the aesthetic realm of art and spiritual realm of religion—both associated with Arabic—words may be more tied to emotions rather than concrete realities. From the Arabic perspective, words do have power and sometimes more power than actions. In contrast, the American cultural preference tends to directly link word and action. The American preference for “words matching the deeds” is evident in many common American expressions such as “Practice what you preach,” “Do what you say,” and “Walk the walk, talk the talk.” Indeed, action appears preferable over verbal statement: “Actions speak louder than words.” If one does not “keep one’s word,” by fulfilling a promised action, then one’s “words ring hollow.” The “word versus deed” gap in Arab rhetoric may have contributed to a stereotypical image of Arabs as “lazy,” or “dishonest.”

### **Vague versus Specific**

As evident in the cultural analysis, the Arab cultural preference is for indirect, vague, and ambiguous statements. This again stems from the function of language as a social lubricant aimed at promoting social harmony. Any direct question or answer could expose the other to a public loss of face. Americans may perceive such ambiguity as frustrating, confusing, and devious. This is because the American preference is for direct, frank and open communication which they tend to associate with honesty. Also an American would tend to give the specifics and details, describing “the whole in terms of its parts.” In contrast, an Arab speaker would simply speak in terms of the whole without feeling the need to dissect the phenomenon. Another reason for the vagueness stems from “contexting” cited earlier. Rather than putting the meaning in the message, the environment will contain critical elements.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING ARAB CLIENTS**

These differences in cultural preferences for message design have several broader implications for American practitioners working with Arab clients in the U.S.<sup>47</sup> While there are many areas which are affected, I highlight four general ones below.

### **Written Materials**

For various reasons, a Arab client may insist on providing written material for the practitioner to use. Most American practitioners will immediately encounter several disconcerting features about these materials, whether they be press releases, statements, or promotional brochures. First is the problem of literal translations. In Arabic there is an economy of words. One word

in Arabic may stand for an entire sentence in English. Second, meaning is usually derived from the context, words may be literally tied together. Trying to translate literally, or even "thinking in Arabic and writing in English," produces sentences that are a paragraph in length, have little or no punctuation, and abound with compound and complex sentence structures and LOTS of adjectives. Too often even the best of editors find themselves struggling with rewrite after rewrite on translated pieces. A better approach may simply be to write a synopsis of the piece and to get the client's approval.

Another challenge with written material is how to get over the rhetorical hurdle. A press release, for example, may read more like a political proclamation than a news announcement. Incorporated in the piece are many cultural peculiarities outlined earlier, including exaggeration, repetition, and vivid imagery. An effective technique for using this material without losing the client's trust, is to write the piece in a standard press release form and use some of the rhetorical statements as quotes. In this way, the client's tone has been preserved, but the material itself is in a form that the American media can digest.

### **Oral Communications**

An American practitioner will find several dominant features again when preparing clients or spokespersons for interviews and speaking engagements. First, it is very important to alert the client to the various cultural differences outlined earlier so that the client can understand that media training is not about doing things "wrong," but about doing them "differently." There is a big distinction between training one to "be American" versus training someone to speak before an American public. This distinction along with the cultural awareness helps the Arab client to take the training less personally and, in the process, become more flexible in adapting to the new techniques. The result is a more natural-looking presentation.

In terms of content, there are two major concerns. First, is that the Arabic speaking style tends to be more "holistic." Instead of presenting a case by building an argument point by point, the Arabic speaker tends to present the whole picture. The end result. The catastrophe. The victory. Rather than providing a step-by-step sequential explanation, the speaker may stay focused on the broader context and treat details as if they were self-explanatory. By doing this not only does the central message fall flat, but the presentation lacks any organized structure. Additionally, instead of using points to build a case, a speaker will often present so many points that the message becomes diluted. This relates to Dodd's observation of the "multi-theme" style. A skillful practitioner can help her client by describing the process and rationale of "packaging information." A wonderful analogy is how airline food is packaged for presentation; your utensils are in one package, your entree in one container and your dessert in another. Similarly in speaking, content is separated into an introduction, body, and conclusion. Again, it is important to remember that in Arabic public speaking, the focus is not on content, but on emotional resonance with the audience.

Thus, if there is any building or sequential process it is in terms of building an emotional climax within the speech.

A very important factor that American practitioners should be alerted to is "contexting" and "indirectness". Part of the Arab tendency to treat details as "self-explanatory" relates back to what Hall pointed out that the meaning is not in the message, but in the relationship between the speaker and his audience. The burden for understanding falls not on the speaker speaking clearly, but on the listener deciphering the hidden clues. In fact, the better the speaker, the more skillful he may be in manipulating the subtlety of the clues. The Arab audience, which is participatory, delights in finding these hidden clues.

For most American practitioners, this practice of burying the message is a public relations nightmare. However, there are ways to discern when this is happening. The most common stylistic techniques used are humor, sarcasm, word plays, analogies, and metaphors. Sarcasm is particularly deadly. As anthropologists have pointed out, all forms of humor are culturally relative, meaning what is funny in one culture may not be considered funny in another culture. Often times an Arab speaker will make a sarcastic statement and then smile at the irony. Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization, for example, uses this technique often. Unfortunately, the American audience, who may not have sufficient background information to understand the irony, will take the Arab's words literally and become confused. An American practitioner may alert her client to this and aide him in understanding forms of American humor.

### **Public Relations Strategy & Planning**

Strategizing and planning are cornerstones in effective public relations programming. Again, there are cultural differences that the American practitioner should be alerted to in working with Arab clients. The first in the "holistic" approach of the Arab and the "parts" approach of the American. While the American will tend to break the process down into steps, phases, tasks, etc. the Arab will tend to stay locked on the bigger picture. An American practitioner may be more successful in getting a plan accepted if he presents the end goal first, and then shows how each step is necessary and related to reaching the end goal.

Another more difficult hurdle lies at a deeper cultural level. As anthropologists have noted, the American cultural perspective tends to be future-oriented while the Arab is more past-oriented. These different time orientations become particularly apparent in public relations programming. For the future-oriented American, such activities as planning, strategizing, formulating time charts, etc. may come "naturally." For an individual from the Arab culture, envisioning future activities as certainties may be very unnatural. Technically in Arabic there are only two verb tenses—an action completed and an action not yet completed. To speak of an action in the future is often followed by "In sha allah," or "God willing," because it is only God who knows for sure if an action will or will not occur. It is not uncommon to hear even the radio news announcers state, "We

will return with the news again in another hour—God willing.” American practitioners can deal with this hurdle by using words such as “suggests,” “proposes,” “plans,” “envisions,” etc. instead of “will”. Even for the Western educated Arab, such words may sound more rational than stating what one will or will not do a year from now.

### **Professional Ethics**

Just as humor is culturally relative, standards and norms of acceptable business and social practices are culturally based as well. A skillful American practitioner will not only explicitly state what the practices are but explain why they exist. A particularly helpful technique is to provide a historical example of what happened when a practice was violated and what the negative ramifications were. Accuracy may be a particular concern for American practitioners to watch for, remembering that in Arabic, emotional resonance through vivid imagery is more important than facts. Additionally, from the Arab perspective, preserving the social bonds and a positive “public face” are much more important than facts. Thus, a “little white lie” can readily become a BIG white lie if public face or social relations are threatened.

American practitioners may face another underlying issue in dealing with ethics. Many Arabs feel very much offended by the negative stereotyping in the American popular media which often portrays them as rich oil sheiks or diabolical terrorists. Additionally, with regard to the political issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, many Arabs also feel that the American news media has not presented the Arab side fairly or sufficiently. While conditions are changing, many Arabs may feel distrustful of the American media. The recent focus on Islam as “militant” or “violent” has fed concerns of many Arabs who are Moslems. The result of such negative experiences and the concern for the American audience’s perception of them may make some Arabs skeptical of dealing with the American media and public. It may make them even more skeptical of claims of American “ethics” and “objectivity.” An American practitioner may or may not chooses to deal with this issue. However, the practitioner who is sensitive to these concerns may be more effective in helping her client build media rapport and audience trust.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

As anthropologist Norman Daniels once observed, when intercultural differences are not perceived as “different,” they are perceived as right and wrong. This is especially true when cultural differences are hidden below the level of awareness. This study explored differences in how the Arab and American cultures view the role of language and by extension, the techniques involved in constructing persuasive messages.

Several frameworks for viewing cultural variations were used to develop a chart on “cultural communication preference” for Americans and Arabs. For the

American culture, language appears to be a medium of communication used to convey information. Emphasis is on function and by extension substance, meaning, and accuracy. A message may tend to be valued more for its content than style. For the Arab culture, language appears to be a social tool used in the weaving of society. Emphasis is on form over function, affect over accuracy, and image over meaning. Accordingly, content may be less important than the social chemistry a message creates. In light of the recent events in the Middle East, the possibility exists for increased involvement by Americans with peoples from the Arab culture. The study highlighted specific concerns for American practitioners who work with Arab clients in the U.S. While knowing the different cultural preferences is important in message design and client relations, it can also aid American practitioners to more effectively explain the American cultural nuances of written and oral communications, public relations programming and professional ethics.

### NOTES

1. Carl Botan, "International Public Relations: Critique and Reformulation," *Public Relations Review* 18 (1992), pp. 149-159; and A. Modoux, "The Growing Role of Public Relations in a Changing World," *International Journal of Public Relations* 12 (1989), pp. 4-9.
2. See, for example, Jean Farinelli, "Needed: A New U.S. Perspective on Global Public Relations," *Public Relations Journal* (November 1990), pp. 18-19, 42; John Reed, "International Media Relations: Avoiding Self-Blinding," *Public Relations Quarterly* (Summer 1989), pp. 12-15; and Debra Miller, "Introduction," in *Multicultural Communications: A Bibliography*, (Booklet) PRSA Foundation, April 1993.
3. Norman Daniels, *The Cultural Barrier: Problems in the Exchange of Ideas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975).
4. R.S. Zaharna, "Rhetorical Ethnocentrism: *Time* Magazine and Arab Rhetoric," paper presented to the Speech Communication Association, Atlanta, November 1994.
5. I should remind my reader that in speaking of cultural frameworks, I am referring by necessity to cultural generalities or cultural tendencies. It is not uncommon for an individual's unique idiosyncrasies, personality or experience to override any number of cultural generalities. Further, with regard to the "American" culture, America is quickly becoming a multicultural society of many cultural groupings, each with its own communication style. However, in the discussion that follows "American culture" refers to characteristics documented by intercultural scholars. Many of these characteristic are still prevalent in the American mass media and public communication campaigns in the U.S. Similarly with regard to the "Arab culture," the cultural patterns vary across the 21 Arab countries.
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10. Edward Hall (1982), op. cit., p. 18.
11. Edward Hall (1976), op. cit., p. 98.
12. For a more extensive discussion of intercultural differences between high and low context cultures see Edward T. Hall, op. cit., and Stella Ting-Toomey, op. cit.
13. David Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
14. Ibid., p. 29.
15. Ibid., p. 32.
16. Florence Kluckhohn and R. Strodtbeck, *Variations in Value Orientations* (Evanston, IL: Row Peterson, 1961).
17. Florence Kluckhohn, "Some Reflections on the Nature of Cultural Integration and Change," in E. Tiryakian (ed.), *Sociological Theory, Values and Sociocultural Change: Essays in Honor of P. A. Sorokin* (New York: Free Press, 1963), p. 17.
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23. For a more detailed analysis, see R.S. Zaharna, "The Ontological Function of Interpersonal Communication: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of American and Palestinians," *Howard Journal of Communications* 3 (1991), pp. 87-98.
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27. Ellen Gold, op. cit., p. 159.
28. Ibid., p. 160.
29. M. Henle, "On the relations between logic and thinking," *Psychological Review* 56 (1962), p. 371.
30. Ellen Gold, op. cit., p. 170.
31. Deborah Tannen, "Introduction," in D. Tannen (ed.), *Spoken and Written language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* (Neuroid, NJ: Able, 1982).
32. Carley Dodd, *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication* (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, 1992).
33. Ibid., p. 163.
34. B. Stock, op. cit.
35. E. Shouby, "The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs," *Middle East Journal* 5 (1951), pp. 284-302.
36. Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 90.

37. See, A. Almaney and A. Alwan, *Communicating with the Arabs* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1982); Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973); and E. Shouby, op. cit.
38. Anwar Chenje, "Arabic: Its Significance and Place in Arab-Muslim Society," *Middle East Journal* 19 (1965), p. 450.
39. H. Sammeul Hamod, "Arab and Moselm Rhetorical Theory and Practice," *Central States Speech Journal* 14 (1963), p. 98.
40. Anwar Chenje, op. cit., p. 454.
41. Raphael Patai, op. cit.
42. Anwar Chenje, op. cit., p. 459.
43. Raymond Cohen, "Problems of Intercultural Communication in Egyptian-American Diplomatic Relations," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 11 (1987), p. 31.
44. Other intercultural scholars have identified some of problems inherent in these communication differences. See, for example, Edward Hall (1976), op. cit.; Raymond Cohen, op. cit.; Mara Alderman and Myron Lustic, "Intercultural Communication Problems as Perceived by Saudi Arabian and American Managers," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 5 (1981), pp. 349-363; Janice Anderson, "A Comparison of Arab and American Conceptions of 'Effective' Persuasion," *Howard Journal of Communication* 2 (1989/90), p. 81-114; O. Dean and G. Popp, "Intercultural Communication Effectiveness as Perceived by American Managers in Saudi Arabia and French Managers in the U.S.," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 14 (1990), pp. 405-424.
45. E. Shouby, op. cit.
46. Ibid., p. 10.
47. It is important to note that this study focuses on *American* practitioners assisting *Arab* clients in the *U.S.* I am not sure that one can use the Arab cultural patterns outlined here to design a public relations program in an Arab country. Trying to do so would be similar to trying to translate an advertising slogan from English into Arabic after one learns the grammar rules and vocabulary. If the translation sounds good in English, it probably doesn't make much sense in Arabic. This is because all forms of Arabic communication are extremely context bound. One cannot even know the meaning of a word unless one knows the context in which the word is used. This process becomes even more complex when one factors in the social rules, cultural myths and humor preferences.