

A Study on the Impact of Cross-cultural Communication Competence of Foreign Trade Specialist on Export Business in China :Taking the Export of Refined Copper and Copper Alloy Products as an Example

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ABSTRACT

With more and more Chinese enterprises joining the ranks of cross-border trade, China's export trade volume has been increasing year by year, and exports are playing an increasingly important role in China's economic development. To enhance the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry in export, it is necessary to improve product competitiveness as well as enhancing the soft power of foreign trade specialist in terms of professional capabilities. The cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialist is particularly crucial in import and export trade, as cultural differences can affect business negotiations, decision-making, contract performance, and other aspects. Foreign trade specialists need to learn the target countries' languages and non-verbal communication styles, values, ways of thinking, etc., to reduce misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences. Taking the export of refined copper and copper alloy products as an example, this essay analyzes the influencing factors and specific manifestations of cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialist in the export business. Based on practical experience, it puts forward methods to enhance the cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialists in this industry, aiming to provide momentum for the sustained growth of export business through the continuous improvement of foreign trade specialist's cross-cultural communication competence.

KEYWORDS

Foreign trade specialist; Cross-cultural communication competence; Export business; Refined copper and copper alloy products

1 Introduction

In today's world, international trade has become the core link of the global economy, profoundly influencing global economic development and the economic standards of various countries. In China's economic development, foreign trade plays a vital role as one of the main engines of economic growth. The Government Work Report of the People's Republic of China released on March 5, 2025, clearly states in the "2025 work tasks" that it is necessary to stabilize the development of foreign trade, strengthen policies to stabilize foreign trade, and support enterprises in stabilizing orders and expanding markets^[1]. This demonstrates that expanding foreign trade markets and scaling up foreign trade are important components of China's economic work. As an important part in the trade scale, China's refined copper and copper alloys products are growing quickly in recent years. While refined copper enterprises enhance their technological advantages and improve their hard power in export competition, there is an urgent need for a large number of foreign trade specialists with strong cross-cultural communication competence. The cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialists directly affects overseas market expansion, successful business negotiations, and overseas customer maintenance in the export of refined copper and copper alloy products, serving as the soft power influencing export business. Therefore, refined copper and alloy export enterprises should strengthen the cultivation of cross-cultural communication competence among foreign trade specialists to help sustain and enhance export momentum and vitality.

2 The importance of cross-cultural competence for foreign trade specialist

Cross-cultural communication refers to the process of mutual transmission, exchange, and understanding of information, knowledge, and emotions among individuals with different cultural backgrounds within cross-cultural organizations^[2]. Since cross-cultural communication involves subjects with diverse cultural backgrounds, its specific manifestations include but are not limited to language, non-verbal communication styles, values, ways of thinking, etc., thus making communication between the two parties difficult due to cultural differences.

In international trade, cross-cultural communication competence is one of the core competencies essential for foreign trade specialist. As a bridge between enterprises and foreign clients, the level of cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialist directly affects the success or failure of export business. A strong cross-cultural communication ability can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences, and promote mutual understanding and trust between business parties. Through effective cross-cultural communication, foreign trade specialist can better understand customer needs, provide products and services that comply with customers' cultural habits and market demands, and enhance the enterprise's competitiveness in the international market. Meanwhile, cross-

cultural communication competence also helps enterprises expand into international markets, establish a diversified customer base, reduce operational risks, and achieve sustainable development. Therefore, foreign trade specialists should recognize the importance of cross-cultural communication for improving their professional capabilities, base themselves on industry characteristics, study how cross-cultural communication affects the export of products in their respective industries, and learn methods to enhance cross-cultural communication skills.

3 The impact of cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialist on export business of refined copper and copper alloy products

3.1 The impact of foreign language competence

Language is the most important communication tool for humans, playing a vital role in cross-border communication. A high level of foreign language proficiency is one of the basic prerequisites for cross-cultural communication. Language communication ability is the most fundamental competence for foreign trade specialist in cross-cultural communication. The ability of foreign trade specialist to effectively communicate in the language of the client's country or an accepted foreign language directly affects work efficiency. The basic language abilities of foreign trade specialists, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are their main language application capabilities, while also requiring mastery of appropriate contexts and rich professional vocabulary related to products.

In cross-cultural communication, context must also be considered. In terms of contextual culture, China is a typical high-context culture country, where people are accustomed to embedding key information in the interlines or environment during communication and are unaccustomed to expressing it explicitly^[3]. Clients living in low-context culture countries, however, are more accustomed to presenting key information directly through language. Long-term living in a high-context cultural environment, when communicating with people from low-context countries, Chinese foreign trade specialist may make the other party feel uncomfortable due to expression habits, which can cause communication barriers or directly lead to communication breakdown, affecting foreign trade business.

In the export business of refined copper and copper alloy products, the foreign language proficiency of foreign trade specialists is directly influenced by their professional knowledge related to the industry, especially foreign language professional vocabulary. For example, mastering temper designation codes and the meaning for the codes give foreign clients the clue of professionalism of foreign trade specialist, which affects the establishment of business relationships. Additionally, foreign trade specialist's mastery of knowledge and vocabulary about downstream products, such as the professional knowledge that tellurium copper is used in relays, spring clips, coils, gaskets, and other related products, enables them to quickly respond to new clients' inquiries, identify corresponding products, and improve the effectiveness in cross-cultural communication.

3.2 The impact of non-verbal communication competence

In the export business of refined copper and copper alloy products, especially in the development and maintenance of new clients, participating in international exhibitions, customer reception, and video conferences are the main channels for communicating with clients. Therefore, foreign trade specialists of these enterprises need to have appropriate face-to-face non-verbal communication competence, including the aspects such as dressing, tone of voice, eye contact, and gesture language. For example, at international exhibitions of refined copper products, foreign trade specialists will face exhibitors and clients from around the world, requiring them to master appropriate cross-cultural non-verbal communication skills. First, in business attire, the clothing at exhibitions should be concise, elegant, and decent. Meanwhile, considering business people from the Middle East and South Asia, the coverage of clothing should be emphasized; in line with the customs of Arab countries, religious symbols, animal patterns, or politically sensitive color schemes should be avoided, which can lay foundation for friendly business language communication.

The second influencing factor to consider in non-verbal communication is the tone of voice. As a core element of non-verbal communication, the tone of voice acts as an "invisible conductor" in cross-cultural communication, directly affecting the accuracy of information transmission and the establishment of emotional resonance^[4]. In communicating with foreign clients, foreign trade specialists should pay attention to the appropriate use of tone of voice. For instance, a faster speaking speed and a higher pitch can be interpreted as enthusiasm and confidence by European and American clients, but East Asian clients may find it aggressive. Therefore, when conveying core transaction information such as prices, transportation methods, and payment terms, foreign trade specialists should understand the characteristics of how clients in their regions accept information through tone of voice, and thus improve cross-cultural communication effectiveness.

Eye contact and gesture language also play a pivotal role in cross-cultural communication. Foreign trade specialists

need to learn the meanings of common gesture languages in different cultural backgrounds and appropriately interpret and use eye contact and gesture language in client interactions. For example, in European and American cultures, eye contact represents confidence and sincerity; however, in parts of African and Southeast Asian cultures, staring at elders or those in higher positions is considered disrespectful; So as these differences in gestures. For example, the "OK" gesture means "no problem" in the UK and the US, but it is an insulting gesture in Brazil and Greece; "thumbs up" indicates "approval" in most countries, but it may be regarded as provocative in Iran and Iraq. Therefore, foreign trade specialists need to attach importance to the influence of non-verbal communication on cross-cultural communication and improve their ability to interpret and use non-verbal communication to enhance cross-cultural communication competence.

3.3 Influence of values and ways of thinking

Values are the standards by which subjects evaluate and choose objective things according to their own and social significance or importance, guiding or mediating individuals' thoughts and behaviors^[5]. People with different values also have different behavioral patterns. In the export business of refined copper and copper alloys, foreign trade specialists are influenced by traditional Chinese values, emphasizing collectivism and power hierarchy. They have limited decision-making power in negotiations and need to engage in collective discussions, layer-by-layer consultations, and departmental coordination, which significantly affects negotiation efficiency. In contrast, individualism occupies a core position in Eastern European traditional culture, highlighting individual values, emphasizing self-reliance, and clarifying individual rights and responsibilities, allowing senior management to make quick decisions. Therefore, foreign trade specialists should grasp the influence of other countries' value cores and power hierarchies, identify client needs and power scopes, and more accurately offer information for promotion in negotiations.

Ways of thinking refer to the methods by which people process information and form new information after acquiring it. Under the influence of different cultures, people develop ways of thinking with their own characteristics. In the export of refined copper and copper alloy products, foreign trade specialists should learn the distinct ways of thinking of different countries or regions. For example, German clients have a linear thinking pattern, attaching importance to details and the logical order of things' development. Therefore, it is necessary to present detailed technical manuals, display performance parameters with data charts and specific figures, and avoid vague descriptions in communication with German clients. In contrast, clients from India and Thailand focus on holistic thinking, and the overall cost-effectiveness and practicality of products have an important impact on their purchasing decisions. Therefore, in the export business of refined copper and copper alloys, differences in values and ways of thinking caused by cultural disparities have a significant impact on foreign trade specialists' cross-cultural communication.

4 The methods in improving cross-cultural competence of foreign trade specialist

4.1 Improving the competence in foreign language of foreign trade specialist

Foreign language communication competence is the most critical ability affecting cross-cultural communication of foreign trade specialist. Therefore, to enhance their cross-cultural communication competence, the first step is to improve their foreign language proficiency. Foreign trade specialists should continuously improve their foreign language skills: firstly, they must familiarize themselves with daily conversational terms, especially by enhancing mastery of common vocabulary to improve response speed in foreign language communication environments. This can be achieved through participating in language training courses, daily communication with foreign clients, watching foreign language movies and TV series, etc., to enhance language sensitivity. Secondly, it is necessary to expand professional vocabulary and master fixed expressions related to specialized fields. In the export business of refined copper and copper alloy products, foreign trade specialists should master basic copper designations, such as the tellurium copper series (e.g., C14500), including composition content, performance characteristics, application scenarios, which can enable them to analyze and recommend products based on different clients' usage scenarios. With specific product knowledge of refined copper and copper alloy, the foreign trade specialists can show their professional knowledge and can convince the clients and increase the success rate in business negotiations. Therefore, enterprises should create a foreign language learning atmosphere, establish assessment and reward indicators for foreign language improvement, stimulate foreign trade specialists' initiative and enthusiasm, and foster a good atmosphere of team learning, proactive learning, and self-driven learning, so as to enhance cross-cultural communication competence through language ability enhancement.

4.2 Cultivating cultural adaptability of foreign trade specialist

In enhancing cross-cultural communication competence, foreign trade specialists need to strengthen their cultural adaptability, which is mainly reflected in the mastery and application of non-verbal communication skills. In practical

work, they should actively adapt to different cultural environments, respect clients' customs and values when interacting with foreign clients, and avoid judging others by their own cultural standards. They should learn to empathize, attempting to understand and solve problems from the clients' cultural perspective. Additionally, they must develop flexibility and adaptability, adjusting communication styles and behaviors according to different cultural contexts to better meet the needs of cross-cultural communication. Refined copper and copper alloy enterprises should organize cross-cultural training courses for foreign trade specialists to systematically learn cultural knowledge of different countries and regions, including history, religion, values, customs, and business etiquette. Meanwhile, encourage foreign trade specialists to learn about different cultures by reading relevant literature, watching cultural documentaries, and participating in cultural exchange activities. In summary, by deepening the understanding of cultural differences, expanding cultural knowledge reserves, and cultivating adaptability to diverse cultures, foreign trade specialists can enhance their cross-cultural communication competence.

4.3 Establishing cross-cultural communication teams in exporting department

Refined copper and copper alloy enterprises should form cross-cultural communication teams in the exporting department. Through division of labor and collaboration, teams of foreign trade specialists can deeply study regional cultures and professional knowledge of different copper materials, learning from and supporting each other to leverage team synergy and enhance overall cross-cultural communication competence. In the export of refined copper and copper alloys, some enterprises have a small number of foreign trade personnel, undefined international market regions, and diverse client sources—each foreign trade specialist may encounter clients from around the world. When facing a new country, it takes significant energy and time to learn new cultures and adapt to new requirements, posing great challenges to individual foreign trade specialists. Therefore, teams should be organized to according to different regions (e.g., Northern Europe, Western Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, East Africa). Different teams should deeply research the cultural characteristics of their regions, especially the non-verbal communication, values, and thinking patterns that significantly impact cross culture communication. Based on division of labor, teams should collaborate in learning and member allocation to serve clients from different regions with targeted sales strategies. In conclusion, establishing cross-cultural communication teams can deepen research on regional characteristics and product classifications, thereby enhancing the overall team's cross-cultural communication competence.

5 Conclusion

In the export business of copper and copper alloy products, the cross-cultural communication competence of foreign trade specialist plays a vital role in business development. Foreign language competence, non-verbal communication skills, values, and ways of thinking significantly influence client relationship building, business negotiations, client needs, and transaction implementation. Therefore, foreign trade specialists need to enhance cross-cultural communication competence through measures such as strengthening foreign language skills, cultivating cultural adaptability, and establishing cross-cultural communication teams, so as to promote the smooth development of copper and copper alloy export business and enhance enterprises' competitiveness in the international market.

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