



Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies in Digital Persuasive Discourse: A Comparative Study of Taobao and Amazon US

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Abstract. The rapid development of global e-commerce has made digital product descriptions an important form of cross-cultural online discourse. From the perspective of cross-cultural pragmatics and based on Hall's high-context versus low-context cultural theory, this study examines Bluetooth headset product descriptions on two representative online platforms—Taobao in China and Amazon in the United States. Through comparative discourse analysis, it investigates cross-cultural differences in emotional appeal, directive strategies, and information presentation. The findings indicate that Taobao product descriptions tend to employ higher emotional density and more direct persuasive expressions, reflecting communication patterns associated with relationship-oriented high-context culture. In contrast, Amazon descriptions favor objective parameter presentation and lower-involvement expression, reflecting low-context preferences for informational explicitness and consumer autonomy. These findings reveal systematic differences in digital persuasive discourse across cultural contexts. This study contributes to research on cross-cultural pragmatics and digital discourse by illustrating how culturally shaped communication preferences are reflected in online platform discourse. It also provides implications for intercultural communication and localization practices in global digital environments.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Pragmatics, Intercultural communication, Digital discourse.

1 Introduction

Global e-commerce has transformed product descriptions into a form of digital persuasive discourse that functions not only as informational content but also as a culturally embedded communicative strategy between sellers and consumers^[1]. As online marketplaces increasingly operate across national and linguistic boundaries, understanding cross-cultural differences in digital persuasive discourse has become important for communication research and intercultural interaction in global online environments^{[2][3]}.

Existing studies on e-commerce discourse have mainly focused on consumer behavior, product information description, advertising language, and multimodal communication in digital retail environments^{[1][4][5]}. However, relatively little attention has been paid to how pragmatic strategies in product descriptions vary across culturally distinct online communication contexts^[6]. Few studies have compared platform-native persuasive discourse between Chinese and US marketplaces from a cross-cultural pragmatic perspective^{[6][7]}.

To address this gap, this study examines product descriptions on Taobao and Amazon US through Hall's high-context and low-context cultural theory^[2]. Focusing on Bluetooth headsets as a relatively standardized product category, it investigates cross-cultural differences in emotional appeal, directive strategies, and information presentation through comparative discourse analysis and manual coding.

This study contributes to research on cross-cultural pragmatics and digital discourse by illustrating how culturally shaped communication preferences are reflected in online platform discourse. It also provides implications for intercultural communication and localization practices in global digital environments.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on cross-cultural pragmatics and Hall's high-context versus low-context cultural theory to examine how cultural norms shape persuasive discourse in e-commerce product descriptions.

Cross-cultural pragmatics emphasizes that communicative behavior is influenced by culturally embedded expectations regarding directness, emotional expression, and information organization.^[3] In e-commerce settings, product descriptions function not only as informational texts but also as persuasive discourse shaped by these communicative preferences.

Hall's theory provides an effective framework for interpreting such differences. Hall (1976) argues that in high-context cultures, communication tends to rely more on implicit meaning, shared assumptions, and relational understanding, whereas low-context cultures favor explicit, direct, and verbally detailed expression.^[2] This distinction is particularly relevant to digital commerce, where persuasion is primarily achieved through language rather than face-to-face interaction.

Based on this framework, this study focuses on three discourse features frequently associated with persuasive product descriptions: emotional appeal, directive strategies, and information presentation.

3 Research Methodology

This study adopts a comparative discourse analysis approach combined with manual coding to examine Bluetooth headset product descriptions on Taobao and Amazon US. Product descriptions are treated as persuasive e-commerce discourse in which linguistic choices reflect communicative intention and pragmatic positioning.^[7]

Corpus collection follows four criteria. First, Taobao and Amazon US are selected as representative e-commerce platforms targeting consumers in China and the United States, ensuring cross-cultural comparability. Second, Bluetooth headsets are chosen because their technical specifications, such as battery life and waterproof rating, are relatively standardized, enabling controlled comparison. Third, 20 best-selling product pages ranked by default sales-related sorting were collected from each platform. Finally, the price range was controlled at 50–200 RMB for Taobao and 10–30 USD for Amazon to reduce variation caused by product differences.

The unit of analysis includes persuasive textual resources on product pages, including titles, bullet points, detailed descriptions, and promotional expressions, as these jointly construct persuasive e-commerce discourse.^[5] Drawing on previous studies of persuasive e-commerce discourse and product description analysis,^[6] this study operationalizes cross-cultural linguistic differences into three dimensions.

First, emotional language density is categorized as high, medium, or low based on the frequency of emotional adjectives, exclamation marks, and hyperbolic expressions, reflecting the degree of affective persuasion.

Second, direct directive sentences refer to explicit persuasive expressions that encourage purchase intention, product evaluation, or consumer action, including imperative structures (e.g., “Buy now”) and overt evaluative prompts. Indirect descriptive statements without clear persuasive intent were excluded.

Third, the extent of data and parameter details is classified as high, medium, or low according to the amount of explicit technical information provided, such as Bluetooth version, battery hours, driver size, and waterproof rating, reflecting the level of informational explicitness.

To improve coding consistency, criteria were defined before analysis, and the dataset was re-examined after initial coding to ensure classification consistency across samples.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Results

This study conducted a coding analysis of 20 Bluetooth headset product descriptions from Taobao (TB-01 to TB-20) and 20 from Amazon (US-01 to US-20). Statistical results across the three dimensions are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, clear differences were identified between the two e-commerce platforms. In terms of emotional language density, Taobao descriptions were mainly characterized by high emotional density (65%), whereas Amazon descriptions were concentrated in the medium-density category (65%). Regarding direct directive sentences, all Taobao samples contained at least two direct directives, with 45% containing four to five sentences. By contrast, 90% of Amazon samples contained no direct directives, with only a few including one soft persuasive sentence. For data and parameter details, Amazon showed a predominantly high level of specification (95%), while Taobao displayed a more dispersed distribution, with high, medium, and low levels accounting for 40%, 25%, and 35%, respectively.

Table 1. Comparison of Pragmatic Features in Taobao and Amazon Product Descriptions

Coding Dimension	Category	Taobao (20 items)	Amazon (20 items)
Density of Emotional Language	High	13 (65%)	5 (25%)
	Medium	6 (30%)	13 (65%)
	Low	1 (5%)	2 (10%)
	0 sentences	0 (0%)	18 (90%)
Number of Direct Directive Sentences	1 sentence	0 (0%)	2 (10%)
	2-3 sentences	10 (50%)	0 (0%)
	4-5 sentences	9 (45%)	0 (0%)
	More than 5 sentences	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Extent of Data/Parameter Details	High	8 (40%)	19 (95%)
	Medium	5 (25%)	0 (0%)
	Low	7 (35%)	1 (5%)

4.2 Density of Emotional Language

Taobao descriptions show notably higher emotional density than Amazon. On Taobao, 65% of samples were high density, featuring emotional adjectives, exclamation marks, and hyperbole. TB-05 uses "ultra-thin" and "ultra-comfortable"; TB-01 employs "panoramic sound," "dual anti-leakage"; TB-08 combines "half the weight, double the comfort" with "weighs only 5.5 grams."

On Amazon, 65% were medium density, relying on factual statements. US-05 lists "10mm drivers," "30H playtime," "22 preset EQs" with few emotional words. US-01 includes mild terms like "immersive" but remains factual. Some emerging brands (US-08 Kinglucky, US-11 Haqqio) adopt higher emotional density, but these are exceptions.

This difference may be interpreted through Hall's (1976) high- and low-context communication framework. Taobao's stronger emotional language suggests a greater reliance on affective engagement, while Amazon's relatively restrained tone reflects a preference for clearer and information-centered presentation.^[2]

4.3 Direct Directive Sentences

Direct directives are frequent on Taobao but almost absent on Amazon. All 20 Taobao samples contain directives (e.g., "claim now," "buy now"), with 45% reaching four to five per page. TB-02 features "claim 15% government subsidy," "claim now," and "buy now" together. TB-17 combines urgency words like "limited time" and "flash sale."

In contrast, 90% of Amazon samples have zero directives. US-01 through US-20 (except US-09, US-11) lack imperatives. The few exceptions used mild persuasive wording rather than overt directive expressions.

This contrast reflects face strategies and cultural preferences regarding authority and autonomy.^{[8][9]} On Taobao, merchants actively guide decisions, which is more acceptable in collectivist communication settings.^[9] On Amazon, directives are often minimized to respect consumer autonomy and individual choice.^[8]

4.4 Data/Parameter Details Extent

Amazon descriptions provide far more detailed specifications than Taobao. On Amazon, 95% achieved high extent (three or more parameters). US-04 lists "60H playback," "470mAh battery capacity," "IPX5 waterproof," "0.14oz weight." US-11 provides "14.3mm drivers," "48-hour playtime," "3.5g per earbud." US-06 includes "55H playtime," "IPX8 waterproof."

On Taobao, only 40% reached high extent; 35% were low. TB-05 lists "Bluetooth 5.4" and "40-hour battery life" but with less precision. Low-extent samples: TB-02 mentions only "42-hour battery life"; TB-09 features only "Bluetooth 6.0" with qualitative phrases; TB-16 has no quantitative support.

This contrast may also be interpreted through Hall's high- and low-context communication framework. Low-context cultures often prefer explicit and quantified information to reduce uncertainty and purchase risk; Amazon's parameter-heavy descriptions may serve this function.^[10] High-context communication may rely more on relational and socially embedded persuasive cues. Taobao's dense social proof—TB-02's "Over 100 people bought in 24h," TB-05's "over 100,000 units sold"—serves similar risk reduction via a different pathway.^[2]

5 Conclusion

This study, framed by Hall's high-context and low-context cultural theory, compared pragmatic strategies in product descriptions on Taobao and Amazon US, focusing on Bluetooth headsets as a representative digital product category. Based on coding analysis of 20 product pages from each platform across three dimensions, the findings revealed consistent cross-cultural differences in online platform discourse.

The findings show that Taobao descriptions generally relied more on emotional language, direct directive expressions, and social-proof-based persuasion, whereas Amazon descriptions emphasized restrained tone and detailed parameter-based presentation.

These findings are broadly consistent with Hall's high- and low-context communication framework. Taobao's strategies reflect high-context features, including relationship orientation and socially embedded persuasive communication. Amazon's strategies reflect low-context preferences for informational explicitness and individual autonomy.

This study contributes to research on cross-cultural pragmatics and digital discourse by illustrating how culturally shaped communication preferences are reflected in online platform discourse. It also provides implications for intercultural communication and localization practices in global digital environments.

Limitations include the relatively small sample size and focus on a single product category. Future research may expand to additional product categories and incorporate consumer perception surveys.

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