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Preparing for Cross-Cultural Communication at the Workplace

Introduction

This paper seeks to describe the discourse process deployed by Malay and Australian tertiary students in argumentation and negotiation. Implications for cross-cultural communication are also discussed to help address the issue of preparing undergraduates and young graduates to meet global challenges especially in the field of business and international communication.Effective communication includes the ability to interpret the cultural nuances alongside verbal and non-verbal communication.

Culture and communication

The definition of culture in the context of this paper is embodied in the concept of the totality of a group's thoughts,experiences and patterns of behaviour and its concepts,values and assumptions about life that guide behaviour(Jandt 1995).Communication and culture are intertwined and as Jandt points out:"Because communication is an element of culture, it has often been said that communication and culture are inseparable"(Jandt 1995:22)

Kress(1988),like Jandt,observes that every act of communication is a cultural event.One can then say that processes of communication always takes place in a specific social and cultural setting.Further,it is argued that structures of power,authority and solidarity influence how participants interact(Kress 1988).Thompson(1992) characterises culture as:"the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic

forms,including actions,utterances and meaningful objects of various kinds,by virtue of which individuals communicate with another and share their experiences,conceptions and beliefs"(Thompson 1992:132).In the context of this paper,it is significant only to note that Thompson stresses that the aspects of symbolic form can only be discerned by understanding the social contexts,institutions and processes within which speech is uttered,sent and received and by analysing power relations and authority forms among other characteristics of these contexts(1992:145)

Cross-cultural communication generally pertains to comparing phenomena in diverse cultures.Intercultural communication usually refers to face-to-face interactions among people of diverse cultures(Jandt1995:30).It is communication.It is communication between persons who identify themselves as culturally distinct from others.Nevertheless,as Scollon and scollon level of logical analysis from individual members of cultures.While cultures do not talk to each other,individuals do.Hence,"all communication is interpersonal communication and can never be intercultural communication"(1995:125).

This argument is valid and this paper supports it in principle but the paper also recognises that there are instances when misunderstanding in communication occur because of different cultural backgrounds,manifested in language use.In multicultural society like Malaysia,effective communication includes the ability to interpret the cultural nuances conveyed alongside spoken and non-verbal language.

The concept of communication among the three main ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians, is based on respect for age, authority, reverence for status, and group affiliation. This cultural concept is generally carried over to the workplace.

In general, Malay society stresses 'budi bahasa' (language of character) and 'sopan santun' (good manners). This includes not being assertive, not responding to a request with a direct 'no' and avoiding causing interpersonal conflict (Asma Abdullah 1992). It is a 'shame-driven' (sense of propriety) culture rather than a 'guilt-driven' one. At work Malays are comfortable when they are accorded respect and feel motivated if they feel their job contributes to nation building.

It is also claimed that they respond more positively to efforts to increase productivity if they can visualise benefits extending to their family, community and nation (Asma Abdullah 1994). The spirit of collectivism is more important than individualism. Malaysians, particularly Malays, prefer compromise to confrontation and often seek consensus and harmony in business dealings. Indirectness is an important aspect of Malay culture, as social harmony through conformity is stressed.

However, directness in communication is rapidly gaining currency, especially in the working world of urban modern Malaysian society. The rapid economic development in Malaysia over the last three decades has brought social change and transformation which has impacted upon Malay culture. Indirectness is used more in certain social situations such as weddings.

Asmah Omar (1995) acknowledges that directness in communication is employed in for example, advertisements and political campaigns but notes that it is something new to Malay culture and way of life.It is timely to investigate how Malay participants present their views and negotiate to come to a consensus in the tasks of the study *vis-a-vis* presentations by the Australian participants. The next section outlines, briefly, the methodology for the study.

Research design and methodology

The research enlisted the support of 48 student volunteers in two samples.* The first sample comprised 28 final year students who were native speakers of Malay from the Business Administration Faculty at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in Bangi. The second sample had 20 native speakers of English who were students from the School of Economic and Financial Studies at Macquarie University in Sydney. Information on the participants is tabulated below:

TABLE 1. Profile of participants

Sample	Number	Female	Male	Age Range
UKM (ESL)	28	15	13	23-25
MCQ (NS)	20	06	14	19-39

There were seven groups for the Malaysian sample and five for the Australian sample. These groups have been numbered ESL 1-7 for the Malaysian sample and NS 1-5 for the Australian sample. More participants were enlisted in the ESL sample as their pragmatic discourse competence was the focus.

The groups were instructed to conduct two simulation tasks in English. Malaysian groups had to conduct an additional task, similar to the first task, in Bahasa Malaysia. This task was included to investigate the cultural aspect wherein if there were a difference in how the Malay participants conducted the task in Malay, it would be relevant to determine whether the difference/s were due to language competence or culture.

Bearing in mind Levinson's (1979) concept of activity type, this study classifies these three tasks as workplace meetings (simulated) and as problem solving activities. In broader terms, these work meetings are speech events comprising several speech acts, following Hymes (1972).

The first task or Simulation 1 *"introducing a new product"* calls for a straightforward business decision to a business problem while the second, Simulation 2 *"improving work relations"* hinges on management of interpersonal (work) relationships. The task in B.M., a parallel to Simulation 1, was entitled *"making a decision"* in English.

The participants are referred to by their roles in the tasks. In Simulation 1, the roles are marketing director/chairperson (mar d.), finance director (fin d.), personnel director (per d.) and head of research (res h.).

In Simulation 2, the roles are personnel manager (per m.), promotions manager (pro m.), promotions staff 1 (PS 1) and promotions staff 2 (PS2). The roles in the B.M. task are marketing director/chair (mar d.), finance director (fin d.), personnel director (per d.) and head of research (res h.).

Discussion

In setting out the framework of analysis, this study took the position that interactions, in this case simulated meeting, have an inherent structure. This was borne out in the study. The study took the above as a starting point and utilised the concept of framing to study the analysis of the discourse

processes in the meetings/discussions. This was found to be a useful exercise as framing the stages in the discussions allowed one to identify the stages involved, which in turn made it easier to identify the speech functions or acts that were contained within the stages.

The structuring of the discourse of argumentation and negotiation formed a framework for investigating the related discourse strategies such as the reasoning process; the use of metaphor, humour and sarcasm; as well as the display of power and solidarity deployed by the participants. These discourse strategies were not preselected for examination, in order to avoid prejudgement. In this paper, I will discuss the speech acts of argumentation/negotiation and the display of the reasoning process by the two different cultural groups.

Speech acts of argumentation and negotiation

Speech functions or acts such as opinions, preferences, suggestions, justification, agreement, disagreement, countering are categorised under argumentation. They may be expressed explicitly or implicitly. In explicit expressions, speakers convey messages in which meanings or intentions are clearly, openly and often directly stated. Implicit expressions need to be identified from the context as they would not be directly stated.

A distinction can also be made between a strong expression of opinion/ view and a neutral one. The former includes phrases like *"I firmly believe that/ There's no doubt in my mind that/"* and so on while the latter comprises *"I think that/ In my opinion/"* among others. A tentative expression of opinion has structures like *"It seems to me/ I would say/"* among others. Modality could be used to either heighten (such as should and must) or reduce (such as could and is it possible) the strength of the sentiment expressed.

Overall, both the Malay and Australian students tended to be explicit in expressing their viewpoints. In Simulation 1 interactions, this involved making a case for their preferences and in Simulation 2 interactions this entailed working out compromises. Usually, the participants expressed the act, be it give an opinion, state a preference or disagree and then justified or explained the reason.

Generally, while the speech acts were expressed explicitly, they tended to be neutral rather than strong or tentative. The use of modality was not prominent in the data. These observations were reflective of both sample populations in their respective interactions. The following are examples from Simulation 1 interactions. The headings form the key for all examples cited.

SIMULATION 1:

Group/ Speaker/ Speech Acts/ Neutral - Explicit Discourse

ESL 3/ res h./ Supporting - Justifying/ Ahh from my opinion, I think we have, we have a good target market in calculator because nowadays, aaa students ah students in schools also using a calculator aaa due to the new curriculum so I think we, we have um a good market *for it.*

ESL 2/ fin d./ Disagreeing-Counteracting/ *My, my my opinion is computer when we want to market this computer we have many competitor in the in market aaa especially from hmm main main computer thatís say for example from IBM, IPC*

NS 1/ res h./ Supporting/ Well my market research has shown that uhm we we could go with the pocket calculator quite successfully.

NS 3/ fin d./ Countering- Justifying/ I mean I think it is I think itís a pretty tough way to go for a company thatís you know struggling to find its feet

Similarly, in Simulation 2 interactions, the grievances or views were usually presented explicitly in both samples again with participants mostly using neutral expressions. Some examples are given below:

SIMULATION 2:

Group/ Speaker/ Speech Acts/ Neutral - Explicit Discourse

ESL 1/ PS 2/ **Disagreeing-Opposing**/ *I don't think that they should be fired maybe they-we should give them a chance* (lines 235-236, p.143)

ESL 4/ pro m./ Justifying-Supporting/ I think aaa the managing director have have *right to do this because...*(lines 214-215, p.164)

NS 2/ PS 1/ Suggesting-Proposing/ *Wouldn't it be better to reward the whole department boost morale, in its entirety* (lines 152-153, p.203)

However, there were a few occasions where both ESL and NS participants expressed their views using stronger expressions. But for the ESL participants, this may mean that while their intention was clear, they did not always use the conventionally appropriate function words to verbalise the strength of the position taken. Some examples are given below:

There were even fewer instances recorded in the Simulation 2 interactions data. Two examples are given below:

SIMULATION 1:

Group/ Speaker/ Speech Acts/ Strong - Explicit Discourse

ESL 1/ mar d./ **Disagreeing-Opposing/** *I don't I don't agree with you all. I don't understand anything what you're talking* (lines 108-109, p.3)

ESL 1/ mar d./ Supporting-Justifying/ So, I *really think that I really believe that aaa that the manufacturing company really needs this kind of computers. So if they really need they really need the computer...*(lines 220-222, p.6)

NS 1/ res h./ Reiterating proposal/ So yeah, I *really strongly recommend the pocket calculator* (line 80, p.72)

SIMULATION 2:

Group/ Speaker/ Speech Acts/ Strong - Explicit Discourse

ESL 4/ PS 1/ Conceding/ I very agree a*bout this that opinion but what...(line 33, p.159)*

NS 3/ PS 2/ **Disagreeing**/ *I don't know where you got that information from, that's that's totally wrong* (line 110, p.209)

Referring to the examples cited from Simulation 1 interactions, in the first instance (ESL/1), the second statement serves as reinforcement of the view expressed and in the second instance the repetition of "really" denotes the strength of the sentiments expressed. In the NS data, other features of language projected the strength of the participants' expressed views. For instance in NS/1, in Simulation 2, the pro m. used a reminder phrase:

> *"Despite all of this, like I've said before, you are still going to have to work harder. You've got incentive"* (lines 260-261, p.194).

Sarcasm was also sometimes used by the NS participants to articulate their viewpoints which then reduces the explicitness of the view or statement but still gets the message across. It was also found that the Malay participants generally expressed their views explicitly in the task they carried out in Malay, a parallel task to Simulation 1. Again, these were usually neutral expressions. A number of participants expressed their opinions and views beginning with "I feel" ("Saya rasa") alongside with "I think" ("Saya fikir") and the like. Some examples are cited below:

SIMULATION 2:

Group/ Speaker/ Speech Acts/ Strong - Explicit Discourse

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SIMULATION IN B.M.:

Group/ Speaker/ Speech Acts/ Explicit Discourse

ESL 1/ fin d./ Giving opinion-Disagreeing/ *Saya tak bersetujulah ataupun boleh saya katakan tak puas hati untuk mempasarkan makanan baru ini. Ini adalah kerana* ..... (I don't agree lah or can I say I am not happy to market this new food. This is because .....)

ESL 2/ res h./ Supporting-Justifying/ Saya rasa kita patut cuba yang baru (I feel that we should try that which is new)

ESL 3/ mar d./ Agreeing-Supporting/ Ya, saya rasa saya bersetuju dengan pendapat *Saudari Fadzillah sebab* ..... (Yes, I feel I agree with Ms. Fadzillah's opinion because .....)

While the examples above appear to focus on speech acts of argumentation, these acts very often encompassed negotiating as viewpoints or grievances exchanged or conveyed were negotiated. Nevertheless, there were specific points in the discussions where terms of agreement were negotiated. This was more prevalent in the Simulation 2 interactions of both sample populations. When these points occurred in the discussions, the discourse while explicit was generally more extended. This was more noticeable in the NS sample where the classic stages were better observed: positioning, reflecting and bargaining.

For instance in NS/1 the fin d. started attempting negotiating when he posited:

> " OK we all agree weíve got two sides, one is to diversify and the other is to *stick at what we know best. OK so letís come to something something in between. As far as Iím concerned OK Iím prepared to forgo forgo the soap but the only thing that guys could really offer would be the pocket calculator* ..... (lines 241-245, p.76).

There was, then, an attempt at reflecting as the group participants discussed how sales had been affected by recession. The fin d. reiterated the two sides (lines 272-273, p.77) after which the res h. tried to convince the others of the

viability of marketing the calculator. It was the fin d. who conceded and verbalised what in retrospect was the resolution when he decided:

> *"I don't think I think the reason we'll go with the pocket calculator is because we don't have to hire new people, we don't have to retrain them ..... "*(lines 330-332, p.78).

In NS/4, when the idea of the Best Employee Award is broached by the per m. (line 209-211, p.232), it is discussed by the group with the interactants providing input and negotiating and the pro m. suggested:

> *" .....we'll give them away quarterly and that gives people a shorter term goal to work for ..... "* (lines 252-253, p.233).

This was agreed upon by the PS staff and it was decided that the criterion be formulated in a later meeting. The staff representatives also agreed with this suggestion. (lines 273-278, p.234).

Hence it was observed that suggestions and ideas were negotiated in the discussion leading to final decisions on the issue. Some participants and groups appeared to be more successful in getting their suggestions or proposals accepted. It was also of interest to observe how the student participants dealt with situations that arose in the interactions which were potentially confrontational. This is the focus of the following sub-section.

Instances of display of politeness

Politeness is the mutual awareness of "face sensitivity" so that one attempts to preserve the face of other people in terms of their self-esteem, worth and to minimise imposition (Brown and Levinson 1987). This notion of face is universal but subject to cultural elaboration. Our acts (including speech acts) can be face threatening in that they could upset othersí feelings or obstruct their plans and intentions. Hence we try to frame our utterances to minimise the threat to face for successful communication.

Overall, in both samples the participants tended to be polite to each other and tried to observe politeness principles. This was more obvious in the ESL sample. There was no evidence of deliberate ridicule or high-handedness in the ESL sample data (following the literature on politeness). I will focus on specific situations in the interactions where perceived face threatening acts (FTA) were performed.

The following instances are taken from Simulation 1 interactions.

In ESL/1, when the other participants were discussing ways of increasing sales and profits and the topic of workers was raised the mar d. challenged with: "Excuse *me, sorry to butt in but I don't I don't agree with you all, I don't understand anything what you're talking .....* " (lines 108-109, p.3). While disagreement was explicitly but neutrally expressed, there seemed to be a juxtaposition of politeness and a face threatening act (FTA) performed here.

On the one hand she interrupted politely, reinforcing the apology "excuse" with "sorry" but on the other hand, there was criticism which threatened the presentation of the other participants' faces with I don't understand ..... " She appeared to have realised the FTA performed as she giggled when she tried to justify her criticism. This giggle could be due to embarrassment at over-playing her hand.

In ESL/ 4, while it may not appear that the fin d. was performing an FTA as his co-interactants did not respond to challenge that he had underestimated their intelligence, it might appear to be so to an observer:

> *"No, you cannot say that if the other company collapse, that means we will collapse too. We have to see that, why the other company collapse. Maybe the management is poor and then the corruption and everything, we cannot simply compare because that the company collapse, that means we're going to bankrupt also"* (lines 256-260, p.32).

There were a few other such instances in the ESL data where some participants appeared to be sometimes didactic in their discussion of the problem and solutions. However, since their co-interactants did not appear to perceive their actions as face-threatening (based on their responses), this study will not consider them as such.

In the NS data, there were also a few perceived instances of face threatening acts performed. An obvious case was against one of the participants in NS/3. In this case three participants took it in turns to reject the soft drink (promoted by the per d.) and then the fin d. asked: *"And with it can we expel the personnel director from the room?"* (line 526, p.103) which was met with laughter.

However, there was no embarrassment displayed by any party nor any apology asked for or extended. Later the res h. repeated: *"Don't you think he should be expelled from the meeting? "* (line 755, p.108). This high handedness in rejecting the per d'sarguments was repeated when he made a query about the budget for soft drink and the fin d. said: *"It's already been crossed off the list"* (meaning the soft drink) which was again met by laughter (line 694, p.107). This was continued to the end whenever the per d. tried to promote the drink. It appeared that his co-interactants also rejected the per d. in his position:

Mar D: *And we could probably give the personnel director something to do and perhaps hire some better personnel that may sell stuff*

Others: *Yeah (laughter)*

Fin D: Or perhaps get a new pers-director (laughter) (lines 955-958, p.113)

Mar D: And I also move to remove the Personnel Director as well (line 992, p.113)

It could be said that apart from high-handedness, the treatment of the participant role-playing per d. in NS/3 amounted to ridicule. Perhaps this was caused by the per d's earlier attitude: *"Yeah, what what different tack are we going to take on the pocket calculator? Ah yes, Marketing Director, what different tack are we going to take on the pocket calculator?"* (lines 345-347, p.99).

There were other isolated instances in the NS data where participants tried to ridicule their fellow interactants if they believed that the interactant was not following the discussion or arguing the case as s/he should be doing. This was

demonstrated in NS/1 when the fin d. was sarcastic about the res h's argument of staying with office equipment as they had the equipment and infra-structure to make calculators but not for soft drinks.

The fin d. remarked: *"You've been keeping this girl in in the dark have you Andrew?"* (referring to the mar d.) (line 173, p.75). A little earlier he had told her not to get tunnel vision (line 157, p.74). Her response was usually to ignore his jibes, as in reply to another jibe of "Poor market research" (line 259, p.77) she said: "I'll just ignore that" (line 260, p.77).

Observations of Simulation 2 interactions reinforced the finding that overall, in both sample populations, participants tried to maintain a certain degree of politeness. Sometimes participants tried to avoid an FTA by using words or phrases that typify apology as a prelude. For instance, the pro m. in ESL/2 replied to a request of five extra leave days: *"I'm sorry I canít consider that. I, I can't negotiate that ....."* (line 244, p.149).

There were occasions when an ESL participant stated a point or asked questions that were explicit. These could be seen as face threatening (i.e. the phrasing of the words) but were not with reference to the tone used to express the proposition. One such example from the data was found in ESL/4. The PS1 appeared to challenge: *"And for me it's not fair that if you if you not check it first ..... I think better you, why why you why don't you try to find out their problem? "* (lines 17-19, p.159).

However, a challenge posed by PS2 in ESL/5 appeared to be face threatening as the management tried to justify their actions in response:

PS 2: Do you think that money *is only the fact?*
Pro M: *the fringe benefit*
PS 2: *Money is nothing*
Pro M: *Yes, I know, but if you feel satisfied if if we paid you may- uh paid you more in salaries.* (lines 300-304, p.173)

In NS/1, it was PS 2 who was sometimes challenging of the pro m., which could be perceived as face threatening. In one example PS 2 challenged:

> *"I'm I am not quite certain if he's the only stick in the mud here because I don't think- you've been a bit sort of uhm pro his his hard line hard nosed attitude yourself ..... "* (lines 483-485, p.199). The pro m. in his turn tried to defend his actions.

The challenging stance adopted by PS 1 in NS/5 from the start meant that certain points of the interaction became confrontational and hence face threatening. In his opening statement he questioned:

> *" ..... have you guys down in management sort of walked around on the shop floor recently y'know? Seeing what's been going on?"* (lines 14-15, p.238). He added a little later on:
>
> *"Well, I mean you haven't done a hell of a lot for us ..... you've been harassing us"* (lines 26-30, p.238).

This type of confrontational and occasionally rude remark was repeated at specific points in the discussion. Generally, in response, the management tried to justify their actions without getting drawn into a counter-attack, perhaps to avoid more disagreement.

In concluding this sub-section, that while generally, participants of both cultural groups observed the etiquette for meetings, sometimes a few interactants did not do so. This could be isolated actions on their part or a reflection of their personality. The data demonstrates that both cultural groups displayed politeness but that this concept could be manifested in different ways.

From the data it was observed that certain strategies were used by the participants to achieve outcomes. As noted earlier, a framework of analysis was set up, especially in terms of possible framing stages of the discussions and the type of speech acts expected. However, this framework was open to the discourse strategies displayed by the participants in the discussions. In other words, the strategies for achieving outcomes were not prescribed or predicted. Attention is now drawn to the strategy of reasoning process as displayed by the participants of my study.

Deductive and inductive argumentation

An argument implies an active controversy between conflicting opinions and seeks to influence (Brown 1987). The discourse of argumentation uses reason to prove or disprove a proposition. Because of its inherent nature of disagreement, argument has to be more strategic than other types of language activities such as exposition. Deduction and induction, two major types of logic, are employed to convince co-participants. As Scollon and Scollon (1995) point out, both the deductive (topic-first) and inductive (topic-delayed) patterns of discourse reduce the overall ambiguity of discourse.

A major requirement in both simulation tasks was for the participants to make presentations or proposals. It included proposing solutions to problems and all parties concerned were to reach agreement on measures suggested. It was found that participants of both sample populations employed rhetorical strategies to convince co-participants.

With reference to Simulation 1 when the participants introduced and proposed their support for a product the argumentation could be inductive or deductive. In this study, by deductive is meant that participants state or express their opinion or view and then justify or elaborate further. In inductive argumentation, a participant would either first counter why a product/s promoted by a previous participant/s should not be selected and then express support for the product s/he is to promote; or build the case for the product s/he is promoting and then verbalise the proposal.

The data demonstrated that when the participants apply the former rhetorical strategy of induction, they tended to use deduction afterwards. This is therefore termed inductive-deductive argumentation in this study. The argumentation, as evidenced from the data, can be made over a few turns. When initially presenting their proposals or support for a product, the tendency was for the Australian participants to use inductive first followed by deductive strategies. The Malay participants appeared to utilise more deductive strategies (when initially proposing a product) with the exception of students role-playing finance directors who were more likely to use a combination of strategies in initial arguments.

Some quantification of the type of strategies the participants applied when initially proposing their support for

a product should be made so that we can have some information on studentsí starting strategies for argument. It was harder to separate and categorise the two rhetorical strategies after initial presentations as there was recursive discourse, more interruption by co-participants, and the like. The validity of such a categorisation might have become questionable. Initial presentations do not include opening remarks by the chair (unless after these opening remarks the chair expresses their ideas in the capacity of marketing director); a query; a clarifying remark; or a backchannelling comment.

In Simulation 1 interactions, 17 of the 28 participants or 60.71 per cent of the Malay sample utilised deduction in initial arguments. In one of the ESL groups (ESL/6), all four respective participants applied deductive argumentation when they first presented their preferences. In three other ESL groups (ESL/1, ESL/3, ESL/7), three of the respective participants did the same.

This was not the case for the NS groups where only four of the 20 participants or 20 per cent of the Australian sample applied deductive strategies when first presenting their choices. For all those speakers who presented first, it would probably have been more difficult to counter something that had not been raised. For the purposes of this paper, a few examples would suffice to illustrate the use of the strategies.

Often the ESL participants did not develop their arguments. For instance, the per d. in ESL/2 made what appeared to be a limited case:

> *"I canít see any reason why we, we can't launch a soft drink because when we see in a market if he if he have a good potential and if we compare to our company to our company aaa maybe it is not same because our company uh associated with marketing office equipment but we still have a profit uh with asoft drink. OK that is all"* (lines 15-20, p. 12).

The argument above could perhaps only make sense to a listener who has knowledge of the brief for per d. Hence, while the principle of deduction was applied, the argument appeared to lack logic. This was perhaps due to the speakerís apparent lack of adequate competence to express his ideas coherently.

The initial argument the mar d. in ESL/7 made appeared to be even more limited:

> *"Now from er I'm as a marketing director umm I would like to market the new personal computer at as it has a rather uni-aaa unique features. And now I want hear about ah your op-op-opinion of you ..... "* (lines 9-11, p.60)

In the NS groups where the participants used deductive argumentation for initial presentations one of them, the res h. in NS/1, immediately started justifying her choice:

> *"Well my market research has shown that uhm we we could go with the pocket calculator quite successfully. This is an area that most companies have left out now with more sophisticated computers and and you know ..... "*(lines 35-53, pp 71-72)

The other participants developed support for their views in subsequent turns when they were queried by their peers for justification. This meant that to begin these participants did not attempt to build a case and that their initial arguments appeared to be limited or perhaps they were meant to indicate a starting point.

Generally, the NS participants preferred to first counter the product/s suggested for marketing by the others before giving their own preferences and then justifying them. This was probably because in the context of the discussion, it would seem relevant and logical to first counter what another party has expressed before announcing your own preference so that a setting is then created for what is to come. Also, as Scollon and Scollon (1995:78) point out, a speaker usually tries to go along with the topic of the previous speaker before introducing his/her own. The use of this type of argumentation is termed inductive-deductive in my study.

The study demonstrated that 80 per cent of the NS students predominantly utilised inductive-deductive argumentation when they first presented their proposals in Simulation 1 interactions. This is contrasted with that of 39.29 per cent of the Malay students utilising this strategy in initial presentations. In one NS group (NS/4) all four participants employed inductive-deductive argumentation and three participants respectively in the rest of the NS groups barring

one (NS/5) did the same. In two of the seven ESL groups (ESL/4, ESL/5), three of the respective participants used this type of argumentation when first presenting their preferences. The fin ds in all but one (ESL/6) ESL groups used inductive argumentation to propose the soap.

The following instances are taken from the data to demonstrate the use of inductive-deductive argumentation in initial proposals:

Group/Speaker/Instance of Induvtion-Deduction

ESL 4/ fin d./ I agree with you that er pocket calculator have the the the better market, in *the market, so in the future. So donít you think that, er, even though, donít you think that the er the company from Japan at at Sony and so on have their production skill compare to us with the, as we are new, new er new comer in this industry. So maybe we have aaa some disadvantage entering the product calculator. So, in my opinion, I think the bathing soap have the have the greater prospect in the future because er you know our, the bathing the bathing soap that one aaa we propose to launer relaunch have the the special, have the special quality that er, this bathing soap only has a bathing er, have the exciting herbal types (lines 41-50, p.27)*

NS 2/ fin d./ What happens if we put in on the research and we offer it to employees and it doesnªt work? ..... *OK so if we offer it to employees and it doesn't work then we're not going to have our money back. I think we should try for a new kind of product to mean something new to associate our name with, I like the herbal soap. It's got a sensuous fragrance that nobody else has, it's got innovative feature. It's a really good common household product ..... (lines42-43, 46-52, p.81)*

It can be discerned that the fin d. in NS/2 made the suggestion indirectly. She had first noted that the computer market was saturated and when the mar d. suggested a special purchase plan, she rebutted that as well and then explicitly but indirectly proposed the soap: *"I think we should try for a new kind of product to mean something new to associate our name with, I like the herbal soap ..... "* (see above).

Thus, in general, the trend when raising the promotion of the products was for the Malay participants (except the fin ds) to use deductive strategies and the Australian participants to use inductive followed by deductive strategies in Simulation 1 interactions. These conclusions were reaffirmed in Simulation 2 interruptions.

In Simulation 2 interactions the participants either presented their grievances or viewpoints regarding the situation using deduction or built a case before articulating their grievances using induction. Hence, when first presenting, it was either one or the other type of argumentation that was used and not a combination.

It was more difficult to categorise the type of argumentation deployed by participants in initial presentations in Simulation 2 interactions in comparison to Simulation 1 interactions. This was probably due to the nature of the task where there were basically two sides. Often some participants (who presented later) were supporting their colleagues and their contributions were a greater challenge to classify. In classifying these initial presentations, as with Simulation 1 interactions, introductory remarks by the chair or queries or backchannel comments by participants were excluded.

The distinction of rhetorical strategies employed was not so obvious between the two samples in Simulation 2 interactions. The Malay participants maintained the use of deductive strategies in initial presentations (57.1 per cent). But this time more Australian participants argued using this rhetorical strategy. Almost half or 40 per cent of them argued in this manner for initial argumentation. Overall, though, we can observe that it is still the Malay participants who appear to use this strategy more than the Australians. The participants who used it probably thought that they had every right to state outright their grievances and problems as they believed them to be true and that all they needed to do was to demonstrate that.

Below are some instances cited from the data to demonstrate the use of deductive argumentation in Simulation 2 interactions:

Group/Speaker/Instance of Induvtion-Deduction

ESL 6/ PS 1/ In my opinion, I think that management is only interested in maximising *profit and not in the welfare of the employees. I, I think that because no one appears to have job security and this affects loyalty to the company. As you know loyalty is very important to our company to uhm to* ..... (lines 36-39, p.175)

NS 1/ PS 1/ *There's there are strong grievances in our-amongst the staff and there's a hint of of actually undertaking industrial action for an*

extended period of time if our their demands are not met or if changes aren't drastically introduced. What the problem is, is that the employees have, have lost morale ..... (lines 25-28, p.188)

The Malay students maintained their use of induction in Simulation 2 interactions with 42.9 per cent of the sample using this strategy in initial presentations. Just over half or 60 per cent of the Australian participants used inductive argumentation when first presenting their grievances or views in Simulation 2 interactions. While it is clear that more Australians than Malays used the inductive strategy for argumentation, the number using this strategy for initial argumentation was lower when compared to that in Simulation 1 interactions. It could be that the nature of the task demanded that the participants be more direct about the problem/s so that solutions or alternative measures could be suggested.

Some instances to demonstrate the use of inductive argumentation in initial presentations in Simulation 2 interactions are given below:

Group/Speaker/Instance of Induvtion-Deduction

ESL 4/ PS 1/ I have information about about two employees two employees that you *dismissed ah. Actually that er employees umm have a have a medical problem so, so on that day, they, they did not come they didn't come work because of the medical problem. And for me it's not fair that if you if you not check it first and you just straight ah dismiss that employee. I think better you why why you why don't you try to find out their problem?*

NS 2/ PS 2/ *What's what's the uhm cause of being sick though? Perhaps they've been worked too hard, maybe we need some more annual leave. I mean, now we're getting um 15 days and you're working us so hard that a lot of people are close to burn-out. I think we need at least another five days a year* (lines 36-39, p.200)

NS 5/ Per M/ *Yeah we've been walking around on the floors, we've noticed that er the the attitudes of the staff isn't right, em you don't seem very motivated and enthusiastic so we have some ideas here that weíre gonna introduce thatís gonna reward our employees who're working hard, some kind of incentive programmes* (lines 19-24, p.238)

At this point it is also relevant to note that even in the task that the Malay participants carried out in Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) which was parallel to Simulation 1, they predominantly used deductive argumentation when first presenting their views.

The data above advises us on the extent of the strategies deployed by the students in the study. These students are representative of students of similar background and there is nothing to suggest otherwise. These observations thus open to question the stereotype that Westerners tend to use more deduction and Asians more induction in the reasoning processes.

Preparing for workplace communication

A better understanding of Malay students' discourse strategies would help curriculum planners, materials designers, teachers, and students themselves prepare for workplace communication. It is argued that the UKM sample is typical of the type of students under review. The examination of the discourse strategies deployed by Australian students suggests that we could use some of the findings on these students for the benefit of ESL students.

I had also observed interactions at a number of Malaysian commercial/corporate workplaces to find out how people use discourse strategies for argumentation and negotiation in that domain. This was to bring that knowledge back to the classroom to help prepare tertiary students. My study suggests that conclusions drawn from observations of discourse strategies utilised by interactants at Malaysian commercial/corporate workplace meetings support the findings made for the students.

Identifying positions or directions for outcomes are usually necessary in the context of argumentation and negotiation (unless one wishes to be deliberately secretive about oneís position). Yet, demonstrations of this nature were limited among the UKM students. Negotiating was also limited among the UKM business administration students. In conjunction with this their attempt to appeal to others explicitly and make concessions appeared to be inadequate and yet this is necessary when one wishes to reach successful outcomes. The tendency was to rely on those perceived to hold

authority in the interactions to lead the direction of the discussion. This implies that a number of individuals were not empowered to be independent in debating.

In Simulation 2 interactions data, it was found that the UKM students did very little clarifying, checking and querying when compared to the MCQ students. When dealing with issues that need to be resolved, it is important that those personnel perceived to hold the authority check that they have properly understood the context so that solutions/outcomes can be reached. In fact, it is argued that even the parties perceived to hold less power ought to query contributions put forward to ensure that the context of the discussion is clear.

The data also demonstrated that the UKM students roleplaying managers in Simulation 2 interactions tended to avoid commitment and leave it up to top management to decide on final outcomes. According to Asma Abdullah, a multicultural specialist at a Malaysian corporate workplace who was consulted in the study, this fits in with the concept of collectivism of Malay culture. While this may be seen by some as part of Malay culture, the position taken by the study is that the Malaysian scenario is rapidly changing and if the country wishes to take its place among the developed nations in the world, then university students have to be taught to be more assertive and to be empowered as they will mostly occupy executive positions in the global corporate workplace.

This argument is strengthened by the fact that the Malay participants in the study reported that they were receptive to acquiring more argumentation skills as this was in their interests. The contradiction between their apparent behaviour (of avoiding commitment in decision making) and their voiced interest could be due to their limited linguistic (argumentation and negotiation) skills. As Malay culture tends to favour collectivism over individualism, the challenge is to develop a person's argumentation capacity without displacing group orientation.

For instance, in situations where a speaker who has been asked for some information does not provide it, students could be informed that if they are the questioner, they have the option of using the discourse strategy of challenging to renegotiate their position in the interaction. Hence, basic patterns of interactions can be taught as well as specific discourse strategies that students need to acquire for possible

problematic or difficult exchanges in an interaction (Burns, Joyce and Gollin 1996).

In conjunction with framing stages, students can be made aware of the importance of context. If they understand the context in which a discussion or meeting is set, then they can make certain predictions about sequential actions or speech acts. This will also help them interpret the illocutionary force of an utterance of a speaker. We know that the force of an utterance could be ambiguous but that the context helps to reduce that ambiguity (Searle 1969, Gumperz 1982). For instance, "Can you go to the meeting?"could be a request, order, question or even a complaint, but understanding the context will reduce the different propositional meanings possible.

Overriding structure is the activity itself which will also help set the context. Types of activity play a central role in language usage (Levinson 1979). They constrain what will be considered an allowable contribution for a particular activity as well as help determine how what one says will be interpreted. This knowledge of constraints on allowable contributions and being able to infer from the discourse is part of communicative competence. This is also linked to the finding where the task demands determined the framing of argumentation. Hence, for the activity of argumentation, students can be exposed to the features underlying argumentation. This would develop the studentsí communicative competence, especially their discourse strategies.

Furthermore, if students are made aware of the different interactive signals which encompass discourse markers that signal different acts, then again they can formulate more informed judgements in interpreting their co-interactants' intentions. These range from minimal cue signalling (as in a slight change in tone of voice or a single lexical clue) to more explicit transition devices (as in a phrase such as ìIíll give you a reasonî to support a point). At the same time, these students learn that they ought to use the appropriate discourse markers to signal their intentions in an interaction so that these intentions can be correctly interpreted. For instance to signal that they are about to impart new information or begin a new topic and so on.

More importantly, in being made aware of the framing process, students can be taught that they have the option of reframing their acts to adjust to the context and situation based on their listenersí responses if they perceive that they could be heading for communication breakdown and wish to avert that.

The use or lack of use of a combination of discourse strategies - inductive and deductive has to be examined. For effective argumentation in terms of succeeding in achieving one's goals in communication, the students can be made aware of, as well as given the opportunity to use, the strategies deemed fit or appropriate. Findings from the workplace reinforced the notion that it is individuals who are effective communicators (from practice or exposure) rather than communication per se at the workplace itself being a good role-model for students to adopt.

Students also have to be exposed to the use of metaphor and made aware of the fact that light humour helps forge ties and creates an atmosphere for negotiating. This was demonstrated in the NS interactions and to a certain extent in the Malaysian workplace meetings.

Arguments usually follow patterns and metaphorical concepts allow us to conceptualise arguments in terms of battle and this can influence the shape an argument can take (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). As Levinson (1983:159) points out, metaphor involves mapping one whole cognitive domain into another, permitting the tracing of out of multiple correspondences.

Students ought to be given the opportunity to practise the use of metaphor and humour in their communication. While it is accepted that humour creates ties and solidarity, it may have to be treated with some caution as it would depend on an individual's personality in terms of how that humour is conveyed. Further, appropriateness in using the humour must also be emphasised.

If there are some who believe that teaching argumentation is not part of Malay culture, that it is hard to promote an alien aspect into the system, then from a linguistic point of view, the problem could be solved. Students can be taught how to contradict politely, how to draw attention to common points of view, how to come to conclusions and achieve outcomes in English.

The point is that students can become empowered linguistically in order that they become effective and assertive communicators in situations where there is potential for conflict. This does not imply cultural dislocation. When students graduate and go out to the workplace, they can exercise discretion in use.

The interactions in this study were conducted separately for the two sample populations. However, one can still draw certain inferences for cross-cultural communication based on the findings.

Implication for cross-cultural communication

Language users abide by communication rules whether known explicitly or implicitly. Among the categories of rules that Clyne (1985:13-14) notes have great intercultural variation are:

1. Speech act rules (for example rules for making requests) which may involve formulaic routines and include other speech acts. Clyne argues that there will be cultural differences in utilising one speech act to perform another and the point of time where this merging takes place. He cites, as an example, the stage in a complaint where a threat may be introduced.
2. Honorific rules or the rules governing politeness/ deference. In performing a particular speech act in some cultures the polite rule will be a direct one and in yet other cultures the opposite may hold true.
3. Discourse rules (for example rules for the conduct of meetings or for business transactions). Turn-taking rules as well as formulaic routines are conspicuous in verbal interaction.
4. Linguistic creativity rules which indicate the scope of language play in a particular culture. According to Clyne, verbal irony which is included under this rule is understood and tolerated in different situations in different cultures. He adds that the rules for returning irony also differ.
5. Interlocutor rules which cut across all the other categories of rules. Thisset of rules include who is allowed to speak to whom and who can start the conversation et cetera.

All the rules above are intertwined with the ethos of a culture and its value system. How then are they related to the present study? Since the ESL and NS participants in the study are of Business Administration, Finance or Economics background, there is a high possibility that a number of them will have cross-cultural encounters at some stage in their future career. What are the conclusions that can be drawn from the data with reference to cross-cultural communication between Malaysians, in particular Malays, and Australians?

First, because fundamentally both groups have similar framing stages in work-related discussions, the power of expectations and schema for what is to take place when they have to communicate in work-related situations can be activated without concern. However, sometimes, there are subtle differences in how these stages are realised in the two different groups. Certain acts within some stages are more developed in one group than in another. For instance, challenging openly is less prevalent among Malays, although the data does not demonstrate that it is common among Australians. In starting, Malays tend to use a little more time explaining the background of the meeting than Australians do.

By utilising the stages, we can go further to look at the realisation of the speech acts in the two groups. As noted, both groups tended to express their views in an explicit but neutral manner. Similar findings are reported for the meetings observed at Malaysian workplaces. There was occasionally some indirectness in two of the workplace meeting observed. Among the two student population samples however, it was some of the NS participants who were occasionally indirect in communicating their intentions. However, the extent to which language competence has a role to play is not known.

One might have thought that the use of modality would be important in expressing the degree of strength of views, especially toning down the expressions. It was found that most interactants, whether ESL or NS or Malaysian personnel, tended to be rather explicit in their arguments.

Dr. Tidwell, a senior lecturer in conflict management and resolution at Macquarie University who was consulted for part of this study, confirmed that this would be reflective of Australian workplaces also if the purpose was argumentation and negotiation. He notes: "Most people see negotiation as a classic win-lose paradigm. Expressions of threat and promise

are prominent" (personal communication, 1997). Thus negotiators tend to take hard-line positions because tenuous expressions would be seen as weak. He said, with respect to people who express views toned down by the use of modality, that "those who do it are perceived to be unusual". Language of modality is about possibility and tentativeness, which Dr. Tidwell observed, "something that people who wish to drive home the issue would avoid as they want solutions to the problems."

Professor Stan Glaser, an expert in negotiation at Macquarie University, who was also consulted for part of this study notes: "At the end of the day an effective relationship (in a business encounter) is how the participants perceive it" (personal communication, 1996). To rate the effectiveness of a negotiation, he suggests the use of a rating scale to assess participants' happiness with outcomes.

Second, in general, both groups observe features of politeness to ensure that an interaction runs smoothly. Whenever face threatening acts were performed in the groups of either sample population, there was a danger of breakdown in communication. Overall, neither group spent time initially building rapport (as in small talk) with co-interactants. Both groups felt that there was a task to perform and got down to it. This finding is further strengthened with similar observations made at two Malaysian workplace meetings. This does not mean however that there was no understanding or rapport between the interactants at the workplaces. Rapport was realised in the course of carrying out the tasks. Australians in a situation of negotiation in cross-cultural setting may wish to note that social niceties like greetings at the start of a meeting/discussion and thanking at the end of it will not go amiss with Malaysians.

One might question the importance of building rapport in business meetings. Instinctively, one knows that interpersonal relationships, displayed by solidarity and demonstrated by the use of vocatives, slang and humour, are important in an interaction. In three of the four workplace meetings (in four different organisations) observed, little time was spent on initial building of rapport because the interactants were familiar with each other. However, in the fourth meeting, it was observed that the starting stage was rather extended due to the two sides being unfamiliar with

each other and hence rapport-building was undertaken. From this it could be surmised that in cross-cultural encounters some time could be spent on building rapport if the parties were unfamiliar with one another.

Third, while overall one could say that both groups observe rules of discourse, in this case pertaining to the conduct of meetings, there is a difference in how some of these rules are realised. Turn-taking rules appear to be different and this includes allowances for interruptions. The Malays should be aware that in a cross-cultural encounter they may have to play a more active role in turn-taking so that their views are not left unheard or under-developed. Australians on the other hand may have to be made aware that they ought not to interrupt a Malay speaker when he/she is speaking as they would be considered rude (*"kurang ajar"*) by the Malays.

Fourth, Australians tend to be more creative in their use of language of argumentation and negotiation by employing devices such as metaphor, sarcasm and humour. The fact that the Malay group did not employ a great deal of linguistic creativity in their discussions could perhaps be attributed to the fact that English is not their first language, However, even in the parallel task conducted in Malay, this use was not apparent. While it is acknowledged that there is cultural variation in "the literal", that is an expression that constitutes a metaphor in one language may be literal in another and vice-versa (Goddard 1996), the Malay data did not demonstrate this.

Further, while there was use of some humour in the Malaysian workplace meetings, the use of metaphor and sarcasm/irony was not common. Australians on the other hand have been recorded for their use of humour, especially cynical humour as well as use of understatement (Eggins and Slade 1997; Renwick 1976) and the findings of this study confirm this. Hence, in cross-cultural communication Australians may have to exercise caution in their use of humour and sarcasm while Malaysians need to recognise not to take things too personally.

Fifth, the two groups display an almost opposite attitude to those perceived to hold power. The Australians appear to have a more open working style where egalitarian relationships are valued. Hence, the display of authority and power by NS students roleplaying chairperson (Simulation 1)

and managers (Simulation 2) was limited. The other NS participants did not appear to defer to those roleplaying positions of authority. However, Malays tend to observe hierarchical relationships in an interaction.

This finding confirms other studies on workplace culture (for instance Hofstede 1980, 1991; Renwick 1976). Renwick (1976) who prepared a comparison study on Australian and American cultures for Esso (multinational oil company) based on its Australian and American employees found that the Australians' feeling for democratic equality meant that employees appeared to lack deference in their dealings with employers. The interesting fact is that this study's findings demonstrate that student participants already manifest these features of behaviour associated with workplace interactions (some of the NS participants were working people).

Dr Tidwell expressed the view that in his observations, interactants who are perceived to hold less power try to assert their views in workplace communication in Australia. He cautioned that this did not imply that Australians were necessarily more egalitarian in their work relationships than people of other cultures. In cross-cultural communication then, both sides have to take cognisance of each others' observance of hierarchy rules so as not to offend either party.

One is aware that there is usually an organisation-based work culture that permeates the organisation and this will apply particularly to multinational companies (Hofstede 1980, 1991). This implies that personnel working at these companies tend to act in accordance with workplace culture and those in cross-cultural contact would certainly need to take note of this aspect.

It is to be expected that each organisation has its, mostly unwritten, rules regarding presentation of views and negotiation that personnel comply with or conform to implicitly and this would probably apply to situations involving cross-cultural encounters. This would also have to be considered in the dimension of creating or enhancing cultural awareness.

In concluding this sub-section, it is reiterated that in presentations of views, the Malaysians who are perceived to hold power by virtue of their position exert influence over the others while this may not necessarily be so for Australians. Australians who hold expert and personal power as

demonstrated by their knowledge and personality tend to play an active role in an interaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is reiterated that young graduates entering the workforce have to be prepared for the challenges in communication in a global world. The study offers some insights into the discourse of Malay students and their Australian counterparts and addresses how the challenges in the discourse of argumentation and negotiation can be met.

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