الاستراتيجيات العملية لإدارة الصراعات في المفاوضات التجارية بين الثقافات

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المستخلص

تركز هذه الدراسة على الاستراتيجيات العملية المختلفة التي يمكن استخدامها لإجراء تواصل ناجح بين الثقافات في مشهد الأعمال المعولم. تركز الدراسة بشكل خاص على المفاوضات التجارية بين الثقافات والمجالات التي يوجد فيها الكثير من احتمالات التسبب في الصراع بين الأطراف المتفاوضة. استخدمت هذه الدراسة تصميمًا بحثيًا متعدد الأساليب لكل من التجارب القائمة على السيناريو والتي يمكن أن تعكس مفاوضات الأعمال بين الثقافات وبعض المقابلات مع المشاركين في التجارب لاكتشاف العوامل العملية التي تلعب دورًا مهمًا في حل النزاعات التي تنشأ في مفاوضات الأعمال بين الثقافات. . وكشفت النتائج أن بعض الاستراتيجيات العملية، مثل التواصل غير المباشر، وتقنيات حفظ ماء الوجه، والالتزام بمعايير المداراة، يمكن توظيفها لإجراء مفاوضات ناجحة والتغلب على الآثار السلبية التي تنتج عن الافتقار إلى التفاهم الثقافي المتبادل أو من سوء الفهم. سوء تفسير الإيماءات غير اللفظية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *الاستراتيجيات العملية، إدارة الصراعات، المفاوضات التجارية بين الثقافات.*

Pragmatic Strategies for Managing Conflicts in Intercultural Business Negotiations

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Abstract

This study focuses on the different pragmatic strategies that can be used in order to conduct a successful cross-cultural communication in a globalized business landscape. The study particularly focuses on intercultural business negotiations and the areas where there are a lot of potentials for causing conflict between the negotiated parties. This study employed a mixed-methods research design of both scenario based experiments that can mirror an intercultural business negotiation and some interviews with the participants in the experiments to detect the pragmatic factors that play an important role in resolving the conflicts that arise in intercultural business negotiation. The findings revealed that some pragmatic strategies, such as indirect communication, face-saving techniques, and adherence to politeness norms, can be employed to conduct a successful negotiation and to overcome the negative effects that result from the lack of mutual cultural understanding or from the misinterpretation of nonverbal gestures.

Key Words: *Pragmatic Strategies, Managing Conflicts, Intercultural Business Negotiations*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to conduct a successful navigate cross-cultural communication has become a critical skill in globalized business landscape nowadays (Gudykunst &

Kim, 2017). But the mere ability to speak a shared language does not necessarily guarantee the successful communication in this context, what this new context demands is a deep understanding and a strategic application of some pragmatic strategies that can make the difference between what can be called a successful intercultural negotiations and between what can be regarded as communication breakdowns (Stadler, 2011).

Intercultural business negotiations, in particular, are areas where there are a lot of potentials for causing conflict. A lot of studies have documented numerous cases where culture-based miscommunication have resulted in significant damage to Intercultural business negotiations (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2008). The inherent complexity of bringing the divergent viewpoints and goals closer in high-stakes business transactions adds more problems to this area which is already spotted with tendencies for conflict (Elmer, 1993; Von Glinow et al., 2004).

The effects of these conflicts can gravely impact the overall communication and working relationships between the negotiating parties even if these conflicts did not escalate into a complete breakdown, and for this reason, it is important that each party in the negotiation has a detailed understanding of the pragmatic strategies that can effectively manage conflicts in intercultural business negotiations.

1.1Problem Statement

Intercultural business negotiations are fertile areas for conflicts because they are spotted with complexities which are related to diverse cultural norms, values, and communication styles. A lot of negotiators find it difficult to bridge the gap between the different cultural expectations that lead to misunderstandings and conflicts particularly in today's increasingly globalized business landscape. The most urgent problem in such negotiations is that negotiators often find themselves in intercultural settings that demand not only the sufficient technical skills and fluency in a common language, which the negotiators commonly possess, but also the deeper understanding of the cultural pragmatics that are necessary tools for achieving the desired successful communication – which the negotiators most commonly neglect. This can result in escalating conflicts and jeopardizing the negotiation outcomes.

There is a significant gap in practical strategies that can be employed to manage these conflicts effectively in the available literature. While there is a vast and various theoretical research on cross-cultural communication and negotiation tactics, the studies did not propose enough concrete pragmatic strategies that are particularly designed to the meet the needs of conducting successful conflict-free negotiations in today's intercultural business settings. The lack of such pragmatic strategies is a dangerous gap which must be addressed to identify the specific pragmatic strategies that can be employed to resolve or even prevent conflicts in these contexts.

The problem that this research tries to address is not only an academic problem, but also a real-world problem that has a lot of implications for businesses in today's global scene. The inability to manage conflicts effectively can lead to huge financial losses, and deterioration of long-term business relationships. Therefore, addressing this problem is crucial for the success of intercultural business negotiations and the sustainability of international business partnerships.

1.2Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:
1- Identifying the main causes of conflicts in intercultural business negotiations and understanding both the bases and effects of these causes of conflicts.
2- Detecting the pragmatic strategies that are used to prevent and resolve conflicts in intercultural business settings.
3- Analyzing the relation between different strategies and the different contexts in which those strategies are applied.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the key sources of conflict that arise in intercultural business negotiations, and how do they manifest in terms of pragmatic misalignments and communicative breakdowns?
2. What pragmatic strategies do experienced negotiators employ to proactively prevent, de-escalate, and resolve conflicts in intercultural business settings?
3. How do the pragmatic strategies for managing conflicts in intercultural business negotiations vary across different cultural contexts, and what are the key contextual factors that shape their effectiveness?

1.3The Significance of the Study

The ability to deal with the cultural differences and the understanding of the communication-driven conflicts are essential to hold a successful intercultural negotiations in today's globalized business landscape, it is also fatally important to understand that the breakdowns in such negotiations can jeopardize not only the

individuals, but also the long-term inter-organizational relationships (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2008).
This study aims to detect the pragmatic strategies that can be employed to manage conflicts, and thus, this study is valuable as it will provide the people who work in multicultural commercial environments with the best understanding of the pragmatic strategies that they will need to conduct successful intercultural business negotiations. The findings of this study can inform training programs, negotiation playbooks, and decision-making frameworks to better equip business professionals with the tools necessary to navigate the inherent complexities of cross-cultural interactions.

2. Literature Review

2.1Speech Act Theory: Uncovering the Performative Power of Language

Speech Act Theory was initially proposed by philosophers J.L. Austin and John Searle, in order to provide a practical framework for understanding how utterances are not only important in conveying the needed information but also to perform some actions, particularly social actions. This theory is particularly important when analyzing conversations in cross-cultural settings, where diverse norms and conventions govern the execution of speech acts such as requests, promises, or refusals (Wierzbicka, 1985).

J. L. Austin challenged the philosophical assumption that the primary function of sentences is to describe states of affairs or state facts, which they must do either truly or falsely. Austin observed that many uses of language, though they may appear to be fact-stating, serve different functions entirely. For instance, performative utterances such as "You're fired" or "I quit" are not mere statements but actions performed through speech. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his Philosophical Investigations (1953), also moved away from viewing language as a system of representation, instead likening it to a toolbox for various social activities. He famously stated, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (p. 20).

While Wittgenstein adopted an anti-theoretical stance, Austin developed a systematic approach to language use, differentiating between the meaning of sentences and the actions performed by their use. Paul Grice further elaborated on this by distinguishing between the meaning of linguistic expressions and what speakers mean in using them. Grice's work emphasized the importance of speaker intentions in communication, an idea illustrated by Moore's paradox, where saying "Tomatoes are fruits but I don't believe it" presents a pragmatic contradiction rather than a logical one (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 190). This paradox highlights the distinction between semantic information (the literal meaning of words) and pragmatic information (contextual meaning derived from use).

Understanding these distinctions is crucial in intercultural business negotiations, where misalignments in pragmatic understanding can lead to conflicts. Effective communication in such settings requires not just knowledge of language but also the ability to navigate and align with diverse cultural norms and expectations.

2.1.1 Performative Utterances

Interestingly, certain actions can be accomplished merely by stating that one is doing them. For instance, one can apologize by saying "I apologize," make a promise by saying "I promise," and express gratitude by saying "Thank you." These are known as explicit performative utterances—statements in form but not in function. Austin (1962) introduced this concept, distinguishing performatives from constatives. Performatives explicitly convey the action being performed through the utterance itself. Austin challenged the prevalent philosophical notion that indicative sentences are inherently devices for making statements. He argued that an explicit promise is not a statement that one is promising but an act of promising itself.

While one can promise without explicitly using the performative verb "promise," using it makes the action explicit without merely stating it. Austin eventually recognized that explicit constatives function in a similar way. For example, a statement can be made by saying "I assert..." or "I predict...," just as a promise or request can be made with "I promise..." or "I request...". As a result, Austin replaced the distinction between constatives and performative utterances with a distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. He categorized assertions, predictions, and other constatives alongside promises, requests, and other performatives as illocutionary acts.

Austin's later work acknowledged that illocutionary acts need not be performed explicitly; one does not have to say "I suggest..." to make a suggestion or "I apologize..." to apologize. Nevertheless, explicit performatives' unique self-referential nature seemed to require special explanation. Austin proposed that illocutionary acts, in general, should be understood on the model of explicit performatives. He famously noted that using a sentence with a specific illocutionary force is "conventional in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula" (1962, p. 91). This implies that explicit performative utterances are conventional in a straightforward sense.

However, the necessity of a convention to explain performativity remains debatable. It is not inherently part of the meaning of the word "apologize" that an utterance of "I apologize" counts as an apology rather than a statement. There may be a convention governing this usage. If such a convention exists, it likely extends to all performative verbs. Nonetheless, the existence and necessity of such a convention warrant further investigation.

Thus, Austin's exploration of performative utterances opened up a broader understanding of how language functions not just as a system of representation but as a means of performing actions. This insight has profound implications for our understanding of communication and the various ways language can be used to accomplish different social acts.

2.2 Politeness Theory: The Delicate Art of Interpersonal Rapport-Building

Politeness Theory was proposed by sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson to analyze the manner by which different individual use their linguistic abilities and social norms to conduct a successful interpersonal communication and insure the success of this communication by using the proper linguistic forms (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This theory divides the strategies that are usually accepted as "polite" into two different categories: positive politeness strategies, which aim to increase the positive feelings that can be created between the two parties of the communication, some positive strategies are used for example to enhance solidarity and friendliness between the two parties, whereas negative politeness strategies seek to avoid imposition of one of the parties which may result in causing conflicts and breakdowns in the communication process. The emphasis on one or another politeness strategy is susceptible to a lot of factors in which the most important factors are related to the different culture from which each party has come from, because some societies place a great importance on maintaining the social harmony and saving face, while others do not. In the context of intercultural business negotiations, it is critically important to understand the cultural differences between the different cultures and languages in order to avoid the unintentional offense to the other party which can further escalate into a conflict.

The study of politeness across various cultures has been extensive, with Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's politeness theory emerging as particularly influential in the field (Kazemi & Salmani Nodoushan, 2018; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). In 1987, Brown and Levinson proposed that politeness is a universal concept rooted in speech act theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Despite some academic contention, their theory has become foundational in understanding politeness.

Politeness is defined as the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats inherent in certain communicative acts toward the listener (Capone & Salmani Nodoushan, 2014). Another definition describes politeness as "a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction" (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013a,b). Politeness can therefore involve efforts by the speaker to protect their own face or that of the interlocutor (Salmani Nodoushan, 2019a,b).

The core principles of politeness theory are presented in Brown and Levinson's seminal work “Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage” (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Drawing on Erving Goffman's notion of "face" (1972), Brown and Levinson identify two fundamental human needs: the desire for approval and appreciation by others (positive face) and the desire to maintain independence and freedom of action (negative face). Politeness, therefore, is understood as the ability to employ interactive strategies suitable for the communicative context. These strategies enable a communicator to create a positive self-image and make a favorable impression, or alternatively, assert their personal space (Holmes, 2006).

Brown and Levinson's theory considers each communicative act from the perspective of its potential threat to an individual's face. They posit that individuals naturally strive to protect their own face in communication, often resulting in indirect communication. From this framework, they distinguish between positive politeness strategies (e.g., expressing interest and sympathy) and negative politeness strategies (e.g., showing pessimism and apologizing). Evaluating face-threatening acts involves considering three socio-cultural variables: social distance between interlocutors, the degree of power they hold over each other, and the ranking of the imposition (Salmani Nodoushan, 2016).

2.3 Relevance Theory: The Pragmatic Pursuit of Mutual Understanding

Relevance Theory was developed by linguists Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson order to provide a different perspective on the communication process that is more focused on the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of the communication (Sperber &

Wilson, 1986). This theory claims that the most important aspect of the communication process is to express the speakers' relevance to each other, because each party in the communication process wants to convey the information that is appropriate and relevant to the other party and at the same time which is beneficial for the speakers to be conveyed to the other party. Particularly in this context, the Relevance Theory is the best approach in providing the needed bases to understand how different negotiators interpret and respond to each other's communicative acts in an intercultural business negotiation.

Basic Claims of Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory (RT), as summarized by Wilson (1994), posits four key statements:
(a) A sentence's decoded meaning is compatible with multiple interpretations in a given context.
(b) These interpretations vary in accessibility.
(c) Hearers use a powerful criterion to select the most appropriate interpretation.
(d) When a first interpretation matches the intended meaning, the hearer stops searching.

2.3.1. Code versus Inference

Contrary to the code model, where communication is seen as a straightforward process of encoding and decoding messages, Sperber and Wilson advocate for an inferential model. In this model, decoding is just the starting point; interpretation relies heavily on inference. The gap between sentence meaning (coded) and speaker meaning (inferred) is bridged by contextual understanding. Comprehension begins with identifying the logical form of an utterance and enriching it to yield explicit (explicatures) and implicit (implicatures) information.

2.3.2. A Post-Gricean Theory

Relevance Theory builds on Grice's ideas but departs from them in significant ways, earning its label as a post-Gricean theory. Grice emphasized the role of speaker intentions in communication, proposing that hearers infer speakers' intentions to understand utterances. Sperber and Wilson (1986, 2002), however, refine this by distinguishing between informative and communicative intentions. In their view, effective communication involves the speaker's intention to inform and the recognition of this intention by the hearer.

RT explains the hearer's inference process not through Grice's cooperative principle and maxims but through cognitive principles of relevance. Specifically, it posits that ostensively communicated utterances generate expectations of relevance that guide the hearer's search for meaning. Unlike Grice, who proposed specific maxims like the Maxim of Quality ("tell the truth"), Sperber and Wilson argue that all language use, whether literal or figurative, operates under general expectations of relevance without requiring adherence to such maxims.
Relevance Theory proposes two key principles to elucidate the underlying mechanisms of human communication. The first is the Cognitive Principle of Relevance, which asserts that human cognition is inherently geared towards maximizing relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). This means that our minds are naturally inclined to process the most relevant inputs available, as this provides the greatest cognitive benefit for the least amount of mental effort expended.

The second principle is the Communicative Principle of Relevance, which is the primary focus of analysis within the field of pragmatics (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, p. 158). This principle states that every act of ostensive communication, where the communicator's intention is made overtly manifest, carries a presumption of its own optimal relevance. Sperber and Wilson (1986) define optimal relevance as having two key components:
1. The ostensive stimulus (e.g., an utterance) must be relevant enough to warrant the addressee's effort in processing it.
2. The ostensive stimulus must be the most relevant one that the communicator is both willing and able to produce, given their own abilities, preferences, and constraints.

As Wilson and Sperber (2002a, pp. 257-258) aptly observe, communicators cannot be expected to disregard their own interests and preferences when formulating their messages. There may be relevant information that they are unable or unwilling to provide, and more concise ways of conveying their intentions that they are nonetheless reluctant or incapable of using. The second part of the definition of optimal relevance accounts for these practical limitations faced by communicators.

The Cognitive Principle of Relevance is also significant, as it underscores the fact that our capacity to anticipate and comprehend the mental states of others, which is crucial for successful communication, is rooted in our evolutionarily-shaped disposition to process the most relevant information available (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that makes use of two methods of collecting data, namely; scenario based experiments that can mirror an intercultural business negotiation, and interviews with the participants in the experiments to detect the pragmatic factors that play an important role in resolving the conflicts that arise in intercultural business negotiation. The study utilizes an eclectic approach that will use the analytical tools that were used by Austin (1962) and Wittgenstein (1953) that were discussed previously in section 2.1 in addition to Serper and Wilson's (1995, 2002) inferential model that was discussed in section 2.3.1.

This study designed a series of controlled experiments which involve some scenario-based simulations. Ten participants who were selected from different cultural backgrounds, and were presented with realistic negotiation scenarios which are rich with potential sources that can cause conflict between the negotiated parties.

All the participants worked as online salesmen who are working for international companies. The researcher closely watched and analyzed the negotiations that were held between the participants and recorded the strategies that were used to deal with and avoid the conflict, the analysis was particularly focused on the use of different pragmatic features such as language, speech acts, and politeness norms and on the overall success of the negotiation process.

In addition to the scenario-based experiments, the study also used the qualitative research design by conducting interviews with the participants to understand their ideas about the overall experience in the scenario-based experiments and the criteria that stood behind their decision-making process.

The qualitative method is the proper methodology for the purposes of this study because it focuses on the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as texts, images, themes, and observations, to explore the subjective experiences of the participants and gain insights into the underlying structures and processes that gave the data in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4. Data Analysis:

The application of the inferential model on the scenarios uncovered that there are a plethora of patterns that are commonly used to deal with the conflicts that may arise in such intercultural context, conversely, the analysis found that there are a lot of other patterns that cause the occurrence and escalation of conflicts in an intercultural business negotiation. On the other hand, the qualitative interviews provided clear results that can detect the cognitive and cultural factors that interface with the pragmatic abilities of the participants and for this reason, which are important in shaping the final result, whether the final result is a successful or unsuccessful negotiation, some of the examples are the following:

One of the participant showed a great knowledge and understanding of the pragmatic strategies that he can use to deal with causes of conflicts. A conflict arose over a pricing issue during the negotiation simulation, and the participant - rather than immediately pushing back and making a firm counteroffer, he demonstrated pragmatic awareness by first acknowledging the other party's perspective using an indirect, face-saving statement: *"I understand this price point may be challenging for your company. Let's explore whether there are any creative solutions we could consider."*

In contrast, another participant did not show the same awareness or flexibility when a conflict was about to arise during the negotiation, instead of behaving like the aforementioned participant, she raised her voice and made an accusatory statement, saying: *"This is unacceptable! You're trying to take advantage of us"*. Her lack of pragmatic awareness regarding the appropriate conflict management styles in that particular cultural context caused the situation to escalate, making it more difficult to find a mutually satisfying resolution.

During a negotiation, one participant realized that the European team was becoming defensive about a proposed contract term. To preserve mutual face, this participant said, "I appreciate your perspective on this. Perhaps we could find a middle ground that addresses both of our concerns."

Another participant knew that showing politeness by using honorifics and formal language was important in her culture. When proposing a compromise, she said, *"I respectfully suggest we consider a potential solution, if that would be agreeable to your esteemed organization."*

One Participant from the USA, noticed that his Japanese counterpart, was frequently nodding his head during their discussion and assumed that the Japanese participant was agreeing with everything the American participant is saying, the American participant was shocked when he discovered that the Japanese participant did not agree with a lot of ideas and propositions made by him. The reason of this breakdown in mutual understanding is that the American participant interpreted nodding the head as a sign of agreement, but in Japanese culture, nodding can also signify active listening without necessarily indicating agreement with whatever being said. This misunderstanding led the American participant to make false assumptions about the Japanese participant's position about the point at hand and this caused a breakdown in the communication process.

During the post-simulation interviews, one participant explained how her pragmatic approach was shaped by cultural norms of politeness and harmony preservation that are particularly appreciated in her culture. She said, *"In my culture, it's important to avoid direct confrontation and save face for all parties. Even when there are disagreements, I try to use softening language and suggest compromises to maintain a good relationship."*

Another participant highlighted the role of interpersonal rapport in his pragmatic decision-making. He shared, "*Building personal connections and trust is crucial in my culture. Before getting down to business, I made an effort to engage in small talk and learn about the other negotiator's background. This helped me understand their communication preferences and adapt my pragmatic approach accordingly."*

4.1 Pragmatic Strategies for Managing Conflicts:

Pragmatic Strategy	Example
Indirect Communication	Participant used a softening statement like *"I understand this may be challenging for your company"* instead of a direct rejection
Face-Saving Techniques	Participant acknowledged the other party's perspective before proposing an alternative solution to preserve mutual face, like saying: *"Let's explore whether there are any creative solutions we could consider."*
Politeness Norms	Participant used formal language to show a respectful tone by saying: *"I respectfully suggest we consider a*

Print ISSN 3006-3256 Online ISSN 3006-3264

	potential solution, if that would be agreeable to your esteemed organization."
Nonverbal Cues	Participant paid attention to the other party's body language and adjusted their own gestures to convey openness and receptiveness
Contextual Sensitivity	Participant modulated their communication style based on cultural differences in negotiation preferences and decision-making processes*: "It's important to avoid direct confrontation and save face for all parties in my culture.*

4.2 Potential Conflict-Causing Reasons:

Conflict-Causing Reason	Example
Divergent Communication Styles	One participant preferred direct, assertive communication, while the other valued indirect, face-saving approaches: *"This is unacceptable! You're trying to take advantage of us."*
Lack of Shared Cultural Understanding	Participants were unaware of the cultural norms that are prevalent in the other participant's culture, this is why they failed in conducting a successful negotiation, like what happened with the American participant who interpreted nodding the head as a sign of agreement, but in Japanese culture, nodding can also signify active listening without necessarily indicating agreement with whatever is being said.
Misinterpretation of Nonverbal Cues	One participant misunderstood the other's facial expressions or gestures, leading to incorrect assumptions about their intention or emotional state: "*I made an effort to engage in*

	small talk and learn about the other negotiator's background"
Disregard for Contextual Factors	Participants failed to adapt their negotiation strategies to account for differences in decision-making processes, time orientation, or power dynamics within the specific cultural context

5. Conclusion

The study found that successful intercultural business negotiations require that the negotiator must possess the sufficient knowledge about the pragmatic strategies that can be used to achieve the successful and conflict-free business negotiations. The study uncovered how language and the selection of the particular linguistic terms and the way by which they are spoken is crucial in cross-cultural settings where norms and conventions governing speech acts can vary significantly.

The study found that some pragmatic strategies, such as indirect communication, face-saving techniques, and adherence to politeness norms, can be employed to conduct a successful negotiation and to overcome the negative effects that result from the lack of mutual cultural understanding or from the misinterpretation of nonverbal gestures.

The study also found that the most important techniques that were used by the participants to avoid conflict in the intercultural business negotiations are: politeness, preserving the harmony between the different parties, using a soft language even when there is a disagreement, less use of assertive and direct communication style, building personal connections and gaining the trust of the other party at the very start of the negotiation or even before it starts.

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