An Overview of the Cross-Cultural Business Negotiation between Malaysia and Australia

UNE VUE D'ENSEMBLE SUR LA NÉGOCIATION D'AFFAIRES TRANSCULTURELLE ENTRE LA MALAISIE ET L'AUSTRALIE

Jumiati Ismail[1]

Michael Azariadis[2]

Kamaruzaman Jusoff (Corresponding author)[3]

Abstract: This paper aims to explore communication deviances and strategies in the negotiation discourse of Malaysian-Australian business encounters, from both a linguistic and non-linguistic perspective. Specifically, it sees miscommunications/deviances as factors that may hinder the business communication process and prevent the negotiators from achieving their objectives. The study also focuses on strategies, or those discourse skills which promote successful business Malaysia-Australia negotiation.
Key words: Cross-cultural; intercultural; intercultural competence; deviations; strategies; miscommunication; negotiation

Résumé: Cet article vise à examiner les déviances et les stratégies de communication dans le discours de la négociation entre la Malaisie et l'Australie lors des rencontres d'affaires, d'un point de vue linguisitique et non linguistique. Plus précisément, les malentendus/déviances pourraient devenir des facteurs qui entravent le processus de communication et empêchent les négociateurs de parvenir à leurs objectifs. L'étude met également accent sur les stratégies, ou les compétences de négociation qui favorisent la réussite de négociation d'affaires entre la Malaisie et l'Australie.

[1] Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam 40450, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.
Email: jumyismail@gmail.com
[2] The University of Western Australia (M302), 35 Stirling Hwy, Crawley WA 6009, Australia.
E-mail: michael.azariadis@uwa.edu.au
[3] Faculty of Forestry, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Selangor, Malaysia.
E-mail: kjusoff@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this paper is to uncover the linguistic and non-linguistic features which either promote, or hinder, the success of cross-cultural [4] business negotiations between Malaysians and Australians. This study has analyzed negotiation discourse between Malaysians and Australians, using the English language as the medium of communication, in business meetings in the city of Perth, Western Australia (WA). The research has been undertaken with the objective of looking into how Malaysian-Australian business people might develop a greater awareness of the importance of intercultural competency [5] in order to build on or improve their current strategies of business negotiation discourse. With the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, there is a possibility for Malaysians and Australians to confront mismatches in business interaction. This research will make sense of the discursive aspects of Malaysian-Australian business negotiations. The main focus is to be able to recognise and understand the sources of miscommunication so that strategies can then be applied to enhance the effectiveness of the negotiation process. In other words, the study attempts to identify the skills or know-how which business practitioners can employ to increase the likelihood of a successful outcome in Australian-Malaysian business dealings.

Negotiation is a process which involves the meeting of two parties with common or conflicting interests, who try to reach agreement on matters of mutual interest (Bichler & Kersten, 2002). In this study, negotiation is defined as 'a discourse-based and situated activity ….. [which is] interactionally constructed in concrete social settings' (Firth 1995, p.3). According to Ghauri (1996), the negotiation process is divided into three stages: pre-negotiation, negotiation and post-negotiation. The content of these stages is informed by factors such as culture, strategy, background and context. Using these three phases of negotiation, negotiation episodes can be identified and recognized. (For a detailed description of the methodology used in this study see chapter 3).

A meeting becomes a *cross-cultural encounter* when the parties have different cultural backgrounds. In such situations, both parties may have different ways of understanding the negotiation process as their norms, values systems and attitudes may differ. When negotiating with someone from one's own cultural background, making reasonable assumptions about the other party based on one's own experience generally makes successful communication possible (Firth, 1990, 1996). There are, of course, limits to this if one takes into account, for example differing socio-economic status, gender, age and regional variations. However, this situation is likely to be more complex when two cultures are involved. Often misunderstanding and miscommunication occurs in a cross-cultural negotiation, even though the language of communication is a *lingua franca*, such as English.

Research focussing on spoken discourse and, in particular, business language, has become increasingly important. Furthermore, many researchers have become interested in business language in the international context. This review of literature will investigate the role of spoken communication in English in a business context. The research identified reflects a variety of different business encounters, such as joint venture negotiation, buying selling negotiation and inter organizational management level business meetings. The following section initially and concisely surveys some of the work that has been done in this area. This is followed by a more in-depth discussion of some of the most significant research undertaken. Seidlhofer (2004) notes that researchers who are involved in the field 'illustrate the potential that empirical research holds for a better understanding of how English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) functions in international business setting' (pp. 221-222). Maggie-Jo St. John, in her introductory paper

---

[4] The term 'cross-cultural' is defined in detail in section 1.2 – Defining key terms.
[5] The term 'intercultural competency' is defined in detail in section 1.2 – Defining key terms.

to the 1996 Special Issue of *English for Specific Purposes in Business English* has commented that, '[t]here is a definite need to understand more of the generic features of different events, such as meetings, to identify common features of effective communications, to understand the role of cultural influence and the way in which language and business strategies interact' (1996, p.15). Researchers like Marjiliisa Charles (1996) have pioneered work in negotiations as spoken discourse. Meetings have been investigated by researchers such as Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini and Sandra Harris for British and Italian meetings (1997); by Grahame Bilbow (1997) and Pamela Rogerson-Revell (2002) in Hong Kong, and most recently by Gina Poncini (2004) in her account of the types of multicultural and multilingual meetings. Most of the findings are related to this research and will be discussed in the following sections.Being English is an intrinsic part of communication in multinational settings; it has meant that researchers have examined many different international perspectives. These perspectives include, for instance, the European business context (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997; Charles, 1996; Poncini, 2002; Rogerson-Revell, 1998), the North American business context (Rogers, Wong and Connor, 1998); and in Asia (Bilbow, 1997; Marriott, 1997; Mulholland, 1997). There has been a shift in focus from language skills, which was formerly the driving force in research, to an increasing concern with language strategies associated with effective communication in business, regardless of whether the speaker is a native or a non-native speaker (Nickerson, 2005). The remainder of this section on ELF in international business contexts examines more closely the work of those scholars whose research involved cross-cultural business encounters, which is similar to that being undertaken in the present study. All but one of these studies involved Western (NS) and Asian (NNS) business negotiations. In addition, these are studies in which both negotiation parties are using English as the medium of communication. The work of Charles (1996); Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris (1997); Bilbow (1997) and Rogerson-Revell (1998) will be considered.

Charles (1996, p.20) drawing both on discourse analysis and studies of business negotiation, has convincingly demonstrated how the linguistic choices made in negotiation situations are determined by the nature of the relationship between the participants involved. The data were based on six authentic, audio-recorded British negotiations, divided into two categories, New Relationship Negotiations and Old relationship Negotiations. In the first instance, Charles was able to identify whether the participants' relationship was already established, or whether it was relatively new. By introducing the concept of 'professional face', which may be either threatened or saved by the action taken by the participants involved in the negotiation, Charles highlights the strategic nature of communication. Charles' influence can be seen in an exemplary work by Spencer-Oatey (2000) on cross-cultural negotiations, whereby she provides a comprehensive framework accounting for the processes involved in the management of rapport between participants. This again has been extended by Vuorela (2005) where the focus is still strategic in nature, but as it is realised by both native and non-native speakers of English.

The work of Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) has been influential because they were among the first linguists to study how business people 'operate linguistically [particularly in relation to discourse] in order to achieve particular goals' (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997, p.2) within cross-cultural encounters. Their work has focused primarily on British and Italian business meetings. The research included a cross-cultural analysis of both the structural and pragmatic properties of British and Italian business meetings. The study also included an cross-cultural analysis of the specific meetings that took place in an Anglo-Italian joint venture, one which revealed countless examples of the mismatch between the language taught for meetings, and the language actually used in meetings.

Bilbow (1997) applies speech act theory to look for specifically commissive speech acts in a range of business meetings between Western expatriates and local Chinese staff at a large corporation in Hong Kong. The aim of the study was to investigate the processes of self-presentation and impression-formation through spoken discourse in inter-group meetings. His definition of commissives refers to those speech acts such as *promises* and *statements of commitment,* in which a speaker expresses an intention to undertake a commitment associated with the action specified in the proposition (Fraser 1983: p.36). In this study, Bilbow finds that there were differences in the way commissive speech acts were used and how they were realised, both between Western and Chinese participants, as well as between the different types of meetings. The author observes that national culture and organizational

practices may be factors that determine the strategic choices of speakers, and the linguistic realizations they choose. The findings suggest that different cultural groups interpret 'discoursal features' differently. For example, Bilbow's research suggests that Chinese and Western speakers hold different values when it comes to speaking out. The attitudes of the Chinese are influenced by Confucian philosophy. Bilbow identified five aspects of Confucianism which he claims inform the behaviour of the local Chinese participants in his study. These aspects include collectivism, the importance of social relationships, face, obligations, and a negative attitude towards conflict. This study also recognizes that other socio-cultural factors, such as corporate culture and the individual's level of power within the organization, have a role to play in determining the outcome of inter-group communication.

Similarly, Rogerson-Revell's (1998) study, set within a Hong Kong based international airline corporation, investigated a series of four internal-management meetings. Three of these meetings were considered to be cross-cultural in that they involved Asian (Hong Kong Chinese, Singaporean, Malaysian and Indian) and Western (British, Irish, Australian, American and Canadian) participants. Rogerson-Revell looked specifically at *interactive strategies* and *interactive style*. The former refers to the linguistic choices used to negotiate rapport. Specifically in terms of *facework,* Rogerson-Revell asserts that positive face strategies are employed to heighten social cohesion and 'interdependence between speakers' (1999, p.346); whilst negative face strategies serve to create 'social distance' or a sense of 'independence'. *Interactive style* is a term used to encompass the sum of practices and various categories of interactive strategies. Rogerson-Revell found that differences in interactive style are dependent upon what each individual considers being 'appropriate' interactive behaviour. Her study was designed to determine the 'appropriate' interactive strategies that were used depended to a certain extent on factors which have some influence on one's behavior. What is appropriate is determined not only by culture, but also a mixed of socio-cultural factors including gender, rank, and status. In this regard, Rogerson-Revell's conclusions are congruent with those of Bilbow.

This Section has provided a survey of some of the most significant research conducted on English as a *lingua franca* in international business contexts. An analysis of the principal works shows that communicative styles and strategies are to some extent culturally determined. The works also demonstrate that because of this, miscommunication or mismatches can be expected to occur regularly.

2. AREAS OF MISCOMMUNICATIONS IN CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

A large number of studies on cross-cultural interaction in business have focused on miscommunication or differences in discourse conventions. Gumperz (1982a, 1982b) discusses the possibility of negative effects resulting from differing discourse strategies, which can also be considered as communication difficulties. However, not all miscommunications are problematic, and 'trouble spots' (Ulichny 1997) are often repaired. Firth (1996) has also identified three strategies to handle any deviant linguistic behaviour that may lead to miscommunication, these are: the 'ignore or let it pass principle'; pretend to understand; or, attend and resolve it. With these strategies, some conversations can be rendered comprehensible. This can be seen in Marriott's (1997) study on norm deviation between a Japanese buyer and an Australian seller. Marriott's findings show that in cross-cultural contact situations participants are able to suspend the cultural assumptions to accommodate the communicative deviances which regularly emerge in the discourse. One example of this is the slowing of speech to accommodate a greater degree of understanding. This correlates with two of Firth's theory of three strategies to handle deviant linguistic behaviour (these two are the 'ignore or let it pass principle' and the 'pretend to understand principle'). This was evaluated positively rather than negatively. This reflects the convergence and the accommodation strategies that have been were business, despite the differences in national cultures and competence in using English. Gumperz (1982a) identifies an associated factor which contributes to miscommunication in cross-cultural interactions. Gumperz argues that

contextualization cues can cause miscommunication and misunderstanding in cross-cultural interactions. He defines contextualization cues as those:

[f]eatures of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions depending on the historically given linguistic repertoire of the participants. The code, dialect and style-switching processes,…prosodic phenomena…as well as choice among lexical and syntactic options, formulaic expressions, conversational openings, closings and sequencing can all have similar contextualising functions (Gumperz 1982, p.131).

When both interactants share contextualization cues, subsequent interactions are likely to proceed smoothly. This is because the shared meaning is discovered during the process of interaction. In such instances, the interpretive process during communication is relatively unimpeded, expectations are fulfilled, and the interaction is more manageable and, therefore, positively contributes to understanding (Gumperz, 1981a). Often, in a cross-cultural setting, what is revealed in the interaction is misunderstanding and misconception between the interactants from the different cultural groups as they do not share contextualization cues, and are not able to retrieve the contextual presupposition about meaning. From the interactional, sociolinguistic perspective, these interactants do not share a similar social construction of meaning.

Chick (1996) also highlighted a source of cross-cultural miscommunication known as *sociolinguistic transfer*. Sociolinguistic transfer refers to 'the use of the rules of speaking of one's own speech community or cultural group when interacting with members of another community or group' (p.332). This usually happens in interactions involving two interlocutors who are using a foreign or second language, and who are applying the rules of speaking their native language. Thus, the interactions are found to be inappropriate. For instance, Wolfson pointed out that the high frequency with which Americans pay compliments leads to it being perceived by members of other cultures as 'effusive, insincere and possibly motivated by ulterior considerations' (1989, p. 23). Another area in which miscommunication emerges is in the use of speech acts in an cross-cultural setting. Cohen (1996, p.384) defines a speech act as a 'functional unit in communication'. The cause of miscommunication is derived from problems in 'interpreting the true intentions of the speaker' (Cohen, 1996: 384). It is possible to categorise the various functions of speech acts, these include: representation (assertions, claims, reports), deviations (suggestions, requests, commands), expression (apologies, complaints, thanks), commissives (promises, threats) and declaratives (decrees declarations). Cohen stresses that appropriate speech acts can be determined only if one has both *sociocultural ability*, which refers to the respondents' skill at selecting speech act strategies which are appropriate, and *sociolinguistic ability,* which refers to the respondents' skill at selecting appropriate linguistic forms in order to express the particular strategies used to realize the speech act. For instance, the expression of regret in an apology can be the cause of miscommunication between interactants of different cultural backgrounds.

This section has investigated areas of miscommunication in cross-cultural interactions. Three of the scholars surveyed, namely Gumperz, Chick, and Cohen provide theories as to what may bring about miscommunication. These include an inability to understand contextualisation cues, the practice of using one's own sociolinguistic framework to interpret and convey messages in another language, and the inability to select appropriate speech act to convey one's intention. Firth, on the other hand, suggests three strategies that speakers use when they encounter linguistic deviance.

3. MODELS OF BUSINESS MEETINGS AND BUSINESS DISCOURSE IN AN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

There are many types of business meetings which occur in a variety of settings. Investigations have been carried out to analyse internal corporate meetings (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1995, 1997; Bilbow, 1995, 1997), inter-organizational meetings (Collins and Scott, 1997) as well as business meetings with multicultural participation. These studies have investigated discourse and the nature of business

relationships between the participants (Poncini, 2002). Face-to-face negotiations are a common practice in inter-organizational meetings; for example, the negotiations analysed by Charles (1994) take place in the simple context of a meeting between a buyer and the seller. The importance of investigating how business interactants communicate successfully in business meetings has been identified by Firth (1990, pp. 277-278). Firth points out that an 'orderliness' is achievable in cross-cultural interactions, that is, by those who do not share either linguistic knowledge or sociocultural norms of interaction. This is achieved through participation in what Firth describes as an (international business) 'network', a community which shares 'norms, standards and interpretive procedures' (Firth, 1990; p.277). Firth contends that the discourse of negotiation has given rise to a set of meanings which transcends linguistic, cultural and national differences. Therefore, despite the fact that a network can consist of non-native speakers who use English as the language of communication in business, effective communication is achievable as long as, collectively, the participants have a shared understanding of 'standards of appropriacy, norms of spoken interaction, perceptions of where negotiation 'phases' begin and end, and knowledge of the sequential ordering of specific negotiating actions' (Firth, 1990; p.277). Even though non-native speakers of English in an international business context may lack a mastery of the 'rules' of the language, as negotiators, it is still possible for them to reach an agreement.

The importance of language use in negotiation discourse is discussed in detail by Firth (1995) who reviewed negotiation research papers on intensive conversation analysis, 'theory of negotiation', and understanding the discourse of authentic negotiation. He examined negotiation as a discourse phenomenon which is interactionally constructed in real life settings. By reviewing a collection of papers from various scholars, he categorizes the varieties of negotiation research into different disciplinary orientations (these being *prescriptive, abstract, ethnographic, experimental* and *discourse*).   The *prescriptive orientation* focuses on the practical aspects of negotiation and is targeted at business practitioners (this orientation, along with the discourse orientation – see below – reflects my own study); the *abstract orientation* involved the formulation of deductive models as in von Neumann and Morgenstern's Game Theory and Zeuthen's Bargaining Theory (cited in Firth 1995); the *ethnographic orientation* relied on primary data collections based on participant observations and interviews (e.g. Maynard, 1984); the *experimental orientation* looks at re-enactments of negotiation (e.g. Lewicki and Litterer, 1985; Fant, 1989 and Grindsted, 1989); and finally, the *discourse orientation* is used specifically in the process of discourse negotiations (1995, p. 18). He makes a significant contribution to the understanding of negotiation as a communicative event by summarizing and highlighting the research findings from a variety of business activities. In doing this, Firth is focusing on a relatively common communicative event, this being business meetings, and applies analytical and theoretical concepts in order to make people aware that effective communication can be greatly enhanced through a scholarly understanding of the discourse process. Firth has extended our knowledge of negotiation as a discourse-based communicative process. At the same time, he establishes a discourse and interactional perspective on the study of negotiation. This is of relevance to this thesis, as almost all of the authors who contributed to the edited volume have drawn on relevant concepts from Conversational Analysis (CA)[6]. In each of these studies, the authors are not only formulating and categorizing, but also extending their use to the study of negotiation-in-interaction. The collection has contributed useful insights to similar studies, and becomes a valuable source of theoretical and empirical perspectives which further enhance and advance our understanding of negotiation in interaction, particularly in a cross-cultural context. The present study combines both the prescriptive and discourse orientations as set up by Firth. . The use of prescriptive knowledge is found to be important as it provides input from other researchers' experiences which could be drawn into the actual research that is conducted. However, these prescriptive elements derived from the relevant literature have been critically evaluated prior to it being used. Studies carried out particularly focusing on the Eastern-Western contexts by scholars like Mulholland, Bilbow, Marriott and Neustupny have evaluated and demonstrated that they have gained prescriptive knowledge from conducting thorough research dealing with authentic business discourse data. This study also based its research on authentic business negotiation meetings and likewise critically examined the prescriptive

---

[6] Conversation Analysis is a method on analysis which aims to uncover the principles which govern naturally occurring speech.

elements important for the study. Firth highlighted the use of 'methods', rather than the use of theoretical foundations to review negotiation. This study will expand Firth's work on discourse orientation, as it has some insights linking linguistic features and non-linguistic features. The use of non-linguistic features (cultural factors) in discourse analysis has also been used effectively by Marriott and was incorporated in the present paper.

This current paper seeks to identify those linguistic and non-linguistic features which are present in the data, specifically in relation to the Malaysian-Australian business meeting context. In terms of linguistic features, various other studies have analyzed these in negotiation discourse. Linguistic features are embedded in the studies of: competence (Mulholland 1991); language deviance (Marriot 1995); and various types of speech acts such as refusal (Nelson, Batal & Bakary 2002); agreement and disagreement (Salacuse 1997, Marriot 1997); request and acknowledgement (Mulholland 1997); politeness, directness and request strategies (Neumann 1997); apologies (Holmes 1989); and directing and suggesting (Bilbow 1997). This paper also include an analysis of latent non-linguistic features of language use, it is important to recognize the influence of non-linguistic features in business negotiations. These emerge as 'themes' in the initial interviews of both Malaysian and Australian informants. They also emerge as themes in the meeting data. These themes include, for example, rapport building, ethics, informality, building recognition and credibility, and style. Other researchers have also focused on the non-linguistic features of language use, such as communication style (Graham 1983); levels of directness (Gudykunst &Ting-Toomey 1988 cited in Nelson et al 2002); attitudes (Salacuse 1998); values (Marriot 1997); and body language (Eckman, 1980, 1983; Lutz & White, 1986).

Marriott (1995) focuses on communicative problems in cross-cultural business encounters. She uses Neustupny's (1985) taxonomy of deviations as the basis for examining problems in negotiations between a Japanese buyer and an Australian seller. Marriott explores and investigates 'discord deviance', which arises from mismatches in sociocultural expectations of communicative situations. She has shown how Neustupny's taxonomy can be effectively used to account for embedded communicative and sociocultural norms, which are the preconditions for effective miscommunication. Marriott's findings suggest that discord deviance can account for a great deal of dissatisfaction experienced by Japanese and Australian businesspeople in their commercial encounters. She also suggests that different cultural groups employ different correction strategies to repair deviance. From these findings, she suggests that the concept of deviance has important implications for understanding how international negotiations succeed or fail.

Deviation is commonly the cause of breakdown in negotiation, specifically, in a cross-cultural context. Neustupny (1985) proposed five different types of deviance; propositional deviance; presentational deviance; performance deviance; correction deviance; and discord deviance. Focusing on, and extending, Neustupny's original concept of discord deviance, Marriot (1995) concentrated on the communicative behaviors of participants by analyzing them in terms of content, form and medium. The present study is modeled on Marriott's use of discord deviance. The notion of deviance is an extremely effective method for the identification of rupture in the negotiation discourse. As in this present study, the participants in Marriott's study consisted of Native Speakers (NS/Australian) and Non-Native Speakers (in Marriott's case NNS/Japanese). Marriott's approach to discourse analysis is particularly relevant to the present study. Further discourse analytic studies of cross-cultural business negotiations in the Asian contexts have been undertaken by scholars such as Mulholland (1997); Marriott (1997, 1995); Neumann (1997), Bilbow (1997) and Neustupny (1988). Some of these have previously been discussed; others will be examined in subsequent sections of the literature review.

4. CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS NEGOTIATIONS IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT

There are three prominent scholars working in the area of Asian-Western business encounters, these are

Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini (1997), Ronald Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon. Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris's (1997) edited volume first broached the subject of business negotiation in the Asian contexts. The work highlighted the then current state of cross-cultural business communication research through a number of empirical studies carried out with Asians using English as the language of interaction. Based from previous literature, many studies grouped all Asians together representing the Easterners and respectively, all Westerners as another group as they found that it was easier to communicate with groups of people with almost similar identity. Although cross-cultural business communication was not a new phenomenon, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris were among the first linguists to focus on business negotiation discourse in the Asia region due to the boom in many Asian economies. This shift in focus was due to dynamic changes in international economies since 1990. In Asia, this was a period of rapid economic growth and industrialization which lasted until the slump of 1997 (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2005, p.207). The body of research on Asian cross-cultural business negotiation flourished during this period (Yamada, 1992; Clyne, 1994; Bargiela-Chappini & Harris, 1997a; Rogerson-Revell, 1998; Li, 1999; Nickerson, 2000; Nair-Venugopal, 2000).

Even though most of the work on Asian business discourse was undertaken prior to the economic downturn, Bargiela-Chiappini has continued her interest in this field of study. The most recent work focusing on the use of English in Asian business discourse can be found in a special edition of the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* vol.16, no.1 (2006), edited by Bargiela-Chiappini. The articles in this volume encompass a range of issues including hybrid or 'glocal' forms of English; multiculturalism, multilingualism and the emergence of new cultural subjectivities; the growing recognition of varieties of Englishes (in the context of cross-cultural business discourse research these have variously been referred to as the global language, the world language, the *lingua franca* and the international language of business); the place of language in cross-cultural encounters; and the growing awareness of linguistics and its application to cross-cultural business research. The new perspective the authors have adopted is that no longer is English a homogenous language; the importance, growing use and legitimacy of 'indigenous English(es)' (Bargiela-Chiappini 2005) is increasingly being accepted internationally. These researchers are creating an awareness of this new paradigm. Marriott's work (1995, 1997) has also been influenced by the increased participation of Asian players in global business. Her research investigates the ways in which differences in cultural predispositions and expectations affect business interaction between Australians and Japanese. Her empirical data are collected from a variety of situations which include business negotiations, courtesy calls and business luncheons, using English as the language of interaction. She also makes reference to tourism service encounters where the language used is Japanese. She finds that problems which commonly take place subconsciously. In addition to this, they are not even able to account for them. The value of Marriott's research in this instance is that it draws attention to the fact that miscommunication often takes place unconsciously, without the participants even recognizing it. Intercultural competence skills, if they are brought to the encounter, will contribute to a positive outcome by firstly allowing for a recognition (or avoidance) of miscommunication, and then finding ways of resolving it.

Similarly, Mulholland (1997) proposes that Western business people make a number of 'cultural assumptions' which often lead to negative evaluations of interactive behaviour in cross-cultural business negotiations. Mulholland specifically focuses on the function of 'request', which, she argues, is a common element in most business negotiations. Her purpose was to identify how the manner of making a request can be made more effective, such that it can be clearly understood and acted upon. Mulholland investigated the nature of request-making among Australian and Asian (Vietnamese, Koreans and Japanese) business participants and found that, on the part of the Australians, requests involve a four stage process including: *pre-requesting* (indicating/hinting that a request is going to be made), *requesting* (the actual request), *post-requesting* (expansion or elaboration of the request – as well as seeking confirmation the request will be met or declined), and *re-requesting* (restatement of the original request). Mulholland found that Australians use politeness tactics in the pre-request stage, and tend to be more direct at the request stage. In the Asian cohort, Mulholland concludes that the act of request is interpreted differently because they do not use the re-request stage, and if they receive a re-request from an Australian, they are likely to perceive it as aggressiveness. In addition, for the Asians, at the post-request stage - when the Australians are seeking acknowledgement on the form of a direct yes or no

- the response may be, at least on the surface positive, but in fact could mean 'yes', 'OK', 'I understand', or it could even be a polite, indirect form of refusal. It certainly does not automatically mean that they are in agreement. Preceding the work of Bargiela-Chiappini, the researchers who originally gave attention to Asian business discourse were Scollon and Wong-Scollon. After reviewing lots of literature, Scollons' work is particularly found to be relevant to this study and that the focus is on Eastern-Western interactions. Their work is good and relevant to the context of this study and that it covers lots of theories of others. These scholars identified the existence of systematic differences in the way that Asians and Westerners communicate (1991). The difference can be seen in the way the two broad groups of people introduce topics into their conversation. According to Scollon and Wong-Scollon, Asians use an *inductive* approach (or a delayed introduction of topics) which has led to a great deal of confusion among Western negotiators. The inductive approach allows for an elaboration of face-work prior to broaching the main topic. It also allows for a greater evaluation of 'mood' and rapport-building. Westerners, on the other hand, tend to follow a *deductive* pattern of introducing topics, whereby the main topic is dealt with more immediately, that is, early in the interaction. In the deductive approach there is limited opportunity for the elaboration of face-work.

The authors point out that miscommunication is caused by the inherent differences in discourse systems For instance; Asians have the tendency to unconsciously use bottom-up structures in their business discussions, whereas Westerners tend to use top-down structures. This simply means that Asians conduct their discussion *inductively* by placing the minor points of the argument first, with the more substantial content of the discussion being reserved for the last. Westerners, on the other hand, employ a *deductive* approach by introducing the most substantial topic at the beginning of a discussion and then providing support for the arguments afterwards. As has been discussed, these patterns have led to the 'stereotypes of the 'inscrutable' Asian or of the frank and rude [blunt] Westerner' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.2). However, Scollon and Wong-Scollon have identified that 'there is nothing inherently Asian or Western in either of these patterns … both patterns are used in all societies, nevertheless, there is a strong probability that such a broad discourse pattern will emerge in east-west discourse as a significant area of cultural difference and even stereotyping' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.87). Even Westerners communicate using bottom up structures in certain contexts. They then argue that '[v]irtually all professional communication is communication across some lines which divide us into different discourse groups or systems of discourse' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.3)**.** The Scollons here suggest that the existence of divergent discourse systems leads to miscommunication. Because inductive and deductive patterns constitute unconscious behaviour, the problem then centres mainly on not knowing the source of the confusion. Therefore, by not being able to locate the source of confusion, the confusion will be interpreted negatively as stereotypes, ultimately leading to a breakdown in communication and failure to achieve the set objective or purpose. These stereotypical attitudes of 'East' and 'West', according to Scollon and Wong-Scollon (2001), are derived from the unconsciously differing discourse practices in the introduction of topics.

The Asian inductive pattern reflects '[a] chained series of lesser, non-binding topics, broached, not for their own importance, but as hints or as preparation for the conclusion in the main topic at the end' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991, p.116). These topics exist as 'facework' which sometimes, especially in the case of Western people, might be viewed as trivial, unnecessary and even petty. However, this strategy has been interpreted as a kind of extended facework (Goffman, 1967, p.167; Brown and Levinson, 1987), where the topics are brought in as small talk which serves a specific function. When the topics are introduced, the purpose is to trigger a response from the other person. This means that it allows the speaker to gauge the other party's moods and attitude, prior to the introduction of the main topic of discussion. The confusion is due, in large part, to the differing strategies relating to the placement of the topic. Without any knowledge of the difference between inductive and deductive patterns, the participants involved will have to work out the discussion based on mere assumptions. This is pointed out by the Scollons who argue that;

'[t]he Asian will generally assume that the first thing introduced WILL NOT be the main point [which will be] be safely relegated to the conversational backwaters, but he or she will be paying somewhat more acute attention later on as the conversation reaches its conclusion (from his or her point

of view)' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991, p.116).

Another instance of confusion that may occur is the difficulty of knowing exactly when the conversation is coming to an end. Being unsure, the Westerner, when finally hearing the main point the Asian has made, very often interprets it to be of lesser importance than what it actually is, resulting in him or her not giving it the attention it deserves. This may result in a recycling of the topic at this point. The Asian then realises that there is a need of recapitulating some of the face work and proceeds to make a summarization of some key points, before making a conclusion. Another important aspect observed by the Scollons concerns hierarchical relationships or the recognition of an 'authoritative person' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991, p.119). This, in fact, determines who speaks first and who introduces the topic. This can be seen in Malaysian culture. For example, people who are a in lower position are expected to extend a greeting to those in a higher position, provided the individual in that higher position shows that he or she is open to the greeting. However, the person who is of a lower status 'MUST NOT *intrude* upon the higher with a greeting' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991, p.120). With regards to topic introduction, however, 'A topic can be introduced by a lower person [a person of lower status] but only by the way or incidentally' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991, p.120). However, the relevant point is to be aware that the Asian hierarchical structure leads Asians to act in deference to rank. This, in turn, is communicated through the subtle manipulation of topics (p.122).

Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon's (2001) *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach* is a valuable source for investigating how aspects of cross-cultural communication can be embraced pedagogically. Not only does it have a central focus on communication in business contexts, but it draws on over twenty years of established research. To begin with, Scollon and Wong-Scollon highlight the fact that cross-cultural communication often leads to miscommunication. However, they argue against scholars who suggest that miscommunication is simply a result of cultural differences. Rather, they draw on a discourse analysis approach to uncover the real sources of miscommunication that occur in cross-cultural contexts. They argue that 'the major sources of miscommunication in cross-cultural contexts lie in differences in patterns of discourse' (**Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.xii).** Scollon and Wong Scollon's argument is that only analysing cultural differences in any cross-cultural context, would not help in the understanding the cross-cultural communication. They believe that 'there is hardly any dimension on which you could compare cultures and with which one culture could be clearly and unambiguously distinguished from another' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.174). This view contrasts with the work of other researchers who claim that language is very much a part of culture, such as Sapir-Whorf (1940); Kramsch (1998) and Crystal (2000). Most other researchers working in this field take it as a given that language is embedded in a specific cultural framework. The current research also takes this view.

Scollon and Wong Scollon suggest that overcoming discourse barriers is a necessary first step when working towards overcoming cultural barriers. It is this assertion that has led these researchers to propose a concept called 'envelope of language'. It is, in fact, the envelope of language that differentiates one cultural group from another, and makes communication more difficult. The concept of an 'envelope of language' relates to the notion of a discourse system. By discourse system, the Scollons are referring to 'the study of the whole systems of communication' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.107) which is the broadest concept of discourse. Scollon and Wong-Scollon include four basic elements in this system of discourse which 'mutually influences one another to form an intact system of communication or discourse' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.109). The more one fits into the discourse system, the more one will feel identified with it and feel that they belong to, or are a part of, that particular social group. Conceptually, it is easier to understand Scollon and Wong-Scollon's discourse system as a 'discourse community', rather than a culture as such. Any communicator can and will simultaneously belong to several discourse communities. For instance, if a person has recently joined an international corporation in Hong Kong and is not a local person, he or she will feel out of place until learning how to 'fit into' the new situation by learning the forms of discourse that are specific to the company. This can be achieved through socialization in the new environment, or by getting the information through various kinds of training conducted by the company. Scollon and Wong-Scollon point out that there are three more reasons why miscommunication occurs. Firstly, the concept of context is explored. The authors'

argument that language is ambiguous by nature has led them to closely consider the context in which communication takes place. Communication is ambiguous because 'we can never fully control the meanings of the things we say and write' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.7). This is justified because '[t]he meanings we exchange by speaking and by writing are not given in the words and sentences alone, but are constructed partly out of what our listeners and our readers interpret them to mean' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.7). It is important that communicators have a shared knowledge of the context or situation. This knowledge is what they call the 'grammar of context' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.31). These are highlighted as necessary elements enabling communicators to interpret each other's message and include such things as physical scene, tone, medium of communication and sequence.

Second, Scollon and Wong-Scollon claim that an essential element in all communication is face. The general definition provided by Scollon and Wong-Scollon is that '[f]ace is the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.45). According to the authors (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.48), 'there is no faceless communication' because communicative activities require participants to use either 'involvement strategies' or 'independence strategies' to communicate. The paradox of face in communication is that there are two ways in which face can be played out. One is being in a state of involvement, signalling 'what participants have in common' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.46). The other is to have independence, that is, to be able to acknowledge the individuality or difference of the participants. This is a complex concept involving both power and distance. When an involvement strategy takes place, the use of power comes in to play. In view of the concept of Self, there is the possibility that people who are from a highly individualistic culture (like Westerners) have the tendency to pay more attention to their personal face needs; whereas those from a more collectivistic culture (like Asians) would be more concerned with the face of others (p.134). On the functions of language, Scollon and Wong-Scollon show that Asians place a high value on communicating 'feeling and relationship', whereas Western cultures focus on communicating information.

Third is the idea of meta-communication. Borrowing on the anthropologist Gregory Bateson's work (1972), Scollon and Wong-Scollon show that '[e]very communication must simultaneously communicate two messages, the basic message and the meta-message' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.77). They explain that '[t]he meta-message is a second message, encoded and superimposed upon the basic [message]' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2001, p.77). This is reflected in the work of Gumperz when he claims that, with each message, there is also a second, meta-message, that is carried along and tells the listener how to interpret the basic message. This basic message, by itself, will not reflect any meaning. Gumperz (1977, 1982, and 1992) uses the term 'contextualization cues'. The recognition of a metamessage is highly relevant to understanding the discourse of cross-cultural communication. It allows us to admit that although language is fundamentally ambiguous, it is possible that people have the 'innate capacity to draw inferences from ambiguous information' (p.73). The authors provide a new framework in the concept of a 'discourse system' based on the four elements of discourse: ideology, socialization, forms of discourse and face systems. They present a new perspective on discourse analysis in the study of cross-cultural professional communication in Asia. The aim of this review has been to show how Scollon and Wong-Scollon have gone beyond the boundaries of culture, to show that there is a link between the discourse patterns and the strategies that people use to communicate.

5. CONCLUSION

This literature review has surveyed some of the most important published work in the field of cross-cultural business communications. The first section examined the historical development of English as a global language. Here, we can see how the English language has expanded and formed numerous varieties. The second section looked at the concept of World Englishes and reviewed some of the scholarly debates surrounding the acceptance and legitimacy of non-standard varieties of English. Section three set out, in more detail, the positions of several key researchers who are involved in these

debates. Section four discusses research that has been undertaken on the localization of Australian and Malaysian English. Part of this discussion sets out work that has been done in mutual intelligibility and accommodation strategies. This is important given the cross-cultural nature of business relations in general, but particularly in the context of Australian-Malaysian business encounters. Section five explores further research in cultural and cross-cultural issues. In particular, the aim has been to investigate the interdependency between language and culture. This section introduced some of the key scholars who bridge the disciplinary divide between applied linguistics and cultural studies (and then apply it to the study of business discourse). Section six looks more specifically at studies which have been conducted on business negotiations, especially those of a cross-cultural kind using English the medium of communication. The final section sets forth the theoretical frameworks that are being utilised in this present study. The following chapter details the methodology used to collect and analyse the data for this study.

REFERENCES

Bargiela-Chiappini, F., & Harris, S. J. (1997). The Languages of business: Introduction and overview. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & S. J. Harris (Eds.), *The Languages of Business: An International Perspective* (pp. 1-20).Edinburgh University Press.

Bargiela-Chiappini, F. (2005) Asian business discourse(s) Part 1. Journal of Asia Pacific Communication.

Bargiela-Chiappini, F. & Gotti, M. (2005) *Cultural and Pragmatic issues (Part 11), 15(2)*, pp. 207-228.

Bargiela-Chiappini, F. (2006) Interculturality, "culture-in-use", and intercultural business discourse, LAUD.

Bichler, M. G., & Kersten, E. A. (2002). *Towards a structured design of electronicnegotiation*.

Bilbow, G. T. (1997). Spoken discourse in the multicultural workplace in Hong Kong: Applying a model of discourse as 'Impression management'. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & S. J. Harris (Eds.), *The Languages of business: An internationalperspective* (pp. 21-48). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University.

Boden, D. (1995). Agendas and arrangements: Everyday negotiations in meetings. In A.Firth (Ed.), *The discourse of negotiation: Studies of language in the workplace*(pp. 83-100). Oxford: Elversier Science Ltd.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language Usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Cohen, A.D. (1996). Speech acts. In SL McKay & NH Hornberger (Eds); S*ociolinguistics and Language Teaching.* Pp.383-420. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Clyne, M. (1994). *Intercultural communication at work: Cultural values in discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 329-49.

Crystal, D. (2002). *The English language: a guided tour of the language*. London: Penguin.

Eckman, P. (1980) 'Three classes of nonverbal behavior' in von Raffler-Engel, W. (Ed.) *Aspects of nonverbal behavior,* Lisse, Swets and Zeitlinger.

Eckman, P. (1983). Emotion in the human face. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fant, L. (1989). Cultural mismatch in conversation: Spanish & Scandinavian communicative behavior in negotiat ion settings. *Hermes, 2, pp.247-265.*

Firth, A. (1990). 'Lingua Franca' negotiations: Towards an interactional approach. *World Englishes, 9*(3), pp.269-280.

Firth, A. (1995a). Talking for a change: Commodity negotiating by telephone. In A.Firth (Ed.), *The discourse of negotiations: Studies in the workplace* (pp. 183-222). Oxford: Elversier Science Ltd.

Firth, A. (1995b). Telenegotiation and sense-making in the "Virtual marketplace". In A.Firth (Ed.), *The discourse in business negotiation* (pp. 127-150). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Firth, A. (1996). The discursive accomplishment of normality. On 'lingua franca' English and converstaion analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics, 26*, pp.237-259.

Garcez, P.M. (1993). Pointmaking styles in cross-cultural business negotiation: A microethnographic study, English for Specific Purposes, 12(2), pp.103-120.

Ghauri, P.N. and Jain, S. (1996). "Indian ocean rim trade bloc: Prospects and problems." *International Executive, 38(5),* pp.583-597.

Gumperz, J. (1977). Sociocultural knowledge in conversational inference. In M-Saville-Troike (Ed). *28ᵗʰ Annual Round Table Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics* (pp.191-211). Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.

Gumperz, J. (1982a). *Discourse Strategies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J. (Ed) (1982b). *Language and social identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J. (1999). On interactional sociolinguistics method. In S.Sarangi & C.H.Tajfel (Ed). *Social identity & integrating relations.* Pp. 15-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kramsch, C. (1998). The privilege of the intercultural speaker. In M. Byram & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approachesthrough drama and ethnography* (pp. 16-31). Cambridge: CUP.

Marriott, H. E. (1995a). 'Deviations' in an inter-cultural business negotiation. In A. Firth (Ed.), *The discourse of negotiation: Studies of language in the workplace* (pp.247-270). Oxford: Elversier Science Ltd.

Marriott, H. E. (1995b). The management of discourse in international seller-Buyer Negotiation. In K. Echlich & J. Wagner (Eds.), *The discourse of business negotiation* (pp. 103-126): Walter de Gruyter.

Marriott, H. E. (1997). Australian-Japanese business interaction: Some features of language and cultural contact. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & S. J. Harris (Eds.), *The language of business: An international perspective* (pp. 49-71): Edinburgh University Press.

Mulholland, J. (1997). The Asian connection: Business request and acknowledgement. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & S. J. Harris (Eds.), *The Languages of Business* (pp. 94-116). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Neumann, I. (1997). Request in German Norwegian business discourse: Difference in directness. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & S. J. Harris (Eds.), *The Language of Business: An International Perspective* (pp. 72-93): Edinburgh University Press.

Poncini, G. (2002). "Investigating discourse at business meetings with multicultural participation." *IRAL, 40*, pp.345-373.

Poncini, G. (2004). Discursive strategies in multicultural business meetings. In Ferris, T.L.J. *Profesional Communication.* June 2007, vol.5o, (2*),* pp.177-179.

Rogerson-Revell, P. (1998). *Interactive style and intercultural competence at work: From research to practice.* Paper presented at the Proceedings of conference at Leeds, Metropolitan.

Rogerson-Revell, P. (2003). *Developing a cultural syllabus for business language e-learning materials. ReCALL.* 15,2, pp.155-169.

Salacuse, J. (1998). 'Ten ways that culture affects negotiating style. Some survey results." *Negotiation Journal.* 14. Pp.221-39.

Scollon, R. (2001). Action and text: Toward an integrated understanding of the place of text in social (inter)action. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods in critical discourse analysis*. London sage.

Scollon, R., & Wong Scollon, S. (1991). Topic confusion in English-Asian discourse. *World Englishes, 10*(2), pp.113-125.

Scollon, R., & Wong Scollon, S. (1995). *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: the case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 11*(2), pp.133-158.

Seidlhofer, B. (2003). *Controversies in applied linguistics*. Oxford Oxford University Press.

Seidlhofer, B. (2004). Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24*, pp.209-239.

Seidlhofer, B., & Jenkins, J. (2003). English as a lingua franca and the politics of property. In C. Mair (Ed.), *The politics of English as a World Language*. Amsterdam/New York: New Horizons in Pstcolonial cultural studies, ASNEL, Papers 7 Rodopi.

Wolfson, N. (1989). *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL.* Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Yamada, H. (1997). Organisation in American and Japanese Meetings: Task versus

relationship. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & S. J. Harris (Eds.), *The Languages of Business* (pp. 117-135). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Editor: Jenny Ding