An Analysis of Communication Behaviors and Strategies in Intercultural Business Contexts: A Comparative Study of Individualism and Collectivism

Bertha Du-Babcock
City University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Past research has concluded that people from collectivist cultures communicate differently from individualist cultures. This distinction has been based upon the observation of Hall's theory and has not been subjected to systematic empirical investigation. In this paper, I will report a research finding examining communication behaviors of individualist cultures (Sweden, and Finland) and collectivist cultures (Hong Kong and Japan).

The data sets were the transcripts of intercultural meetings where participants discussed and made decisions about similar topics. Using this meeting data, the communication behaviors on multiple dimensions are examined. Both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data are analyzed to answer the three research questions put forward. While the quantitative aspect of the data answers research questions related to turn-taking behaviors, the qualitative data describes the discourse patterns used in relation to topic management strategies. It is hoped that the results will provide operational guidelines for intercultural business communication researchers and practitioners, and thereby contribute to the research and curricula for international business and communication studies.

Introduction

With globalization, English as a language of communication in international business contexts is assuming an increasingly vital role. A large and rapidly growing segment of non-native English speakers (see, for example, Crystal, 1997; Kachru, 1985) exchange information in intercultural business communication settings, yet little systematic comparison has been done on examining the communication behaviors of non-native English speakers in intercultural communication situations.

Prior research has established that culture and language affect communication behaviors in intercultural business settings. These research studies have concluded that people from collectivist cultures that also are thought to prefer high-context communication communicate differently from people from individualist cultures where low-context communication is allegedly preferred (see, Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). This distinction has been based upon the observation of theorists (Hall, 1976) and has not been subjected to systematic empirical investigation. Although the concept of Individualism-Collectivism (I-C) has been used to explain a wide variety of communication behaviors in a number of different cultures, the use of I-C to explain turn-taking communication behavior remains limited and inconclusive (Oetzel, 1998). Research on the effect of second-language proficiency -- in English in this case – also reveals that English-language proficiency is positively related to communication effectiveness and participation rates in second-language

communication environments (see, for example, Cao, 2011; Cheng, 2000; Du-Babcock, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2006). These studies suggest that culture and second-language proficiency are likely to be factors that affect the communication behaviors of non-native English speakers.

This research arises from the results of Du-Babcock's earlier published empirical studies on turn-taking behaviors and strategies (1999, 2003, 2005, 2006) that examined communication behaviors of Hong Kong Chinese bilinguals in intra-cultural and intercultural decision-making. In her intra-cultural study (Du-Babcock, 1999, 2006), the language proficiency-based explanation argued that first- and second-language proficiency differentials trigger the various communication behaviors of Cantonese bilinguals. Her follow-up intercultural study (2003, 2005) further examined the distribution of speaking time and turn-taking behavior of Chinese bilinguals when participating in intra-cultural and intercultural decision-making meetings. The results of these two studies suggest that culture and second-language proficiency are likely to be contributing factors that affect communication behaviors of Chinese bilinguals. On a recent follow-up study, Du-Babcock and Tanaka (2010) compared the communication behaviors and strategies used by Hong Kong Chinese and Japanese business professionals from a similar collectivist, high-context communication culture where they participated in intra-cultural and intercultural business decision-making meetings. The findings suggest that in spite of the presumed cultural similarities of Hong Kong and Japan, distinctive differences were observed in that both groups reflected their high-context communication orientations while disagreements were expressed differently by Hong Kong and Japanese business professionals in intercultural meetings. For example, in intra-cultural meetings, Japanese business professionals used similar discourse patterns in disclosing their disagreements, while Hong Kong participants tended to be more indirect in intra-cultural meetings than in intercultural meetings.

To examine the extent to which culture plays a role in intercultural meetings, the current study extends the study of communication behaviors exhibited by business professionals from individualist, low-context cultural societies. In this paper, I examine the communication behaviors of individualist cultures (Sweden and Finland) and collectivist cultures (Hong Kong and Japan). Concerning Hall's theory of context and communication, Hofstede (1991) proposed that high-context communication is preferred by collectivist cultures and low-context communication is preferred by individualist cultures. For the purpose of this study, I will take on Hofstede's claim assuming that people from individualist cultures use a low-context communication style and people from collectivist cultures use a high-context communication style.

Consequently, the purpose of this paper compares the communication behaviors (e.g., turn taking, topic management strategies) of individuals from collectivist cultures that prefer high-context communication with communicators from individualists cultures that prefer low-context communication in intercultural decision-making meetings. The paper also investigates whether English-language proficiency affects participants' communication behaviors in intercultural decision-making meetings. In addition, the paper analyzes the qualitative aspects of meeting transcripts so as to ascertain how and whether communicators from different cultures use similar or different topic management strategies. Based on the purposes, three research questions are put forward. Research Question 1 addresses the issue of cultural IC on turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Research Question 2 investigates the relationship between English-language proficiency and the communication behaviors (e.g., turn-taking) of individuals in intercultural decision-making meetings. Research Question 3 examines whether individuals who prefer high-context communication (i.e., Hong Kong Chinese and Japanese) and individuals who prefer low-context communication (i.e., Swedish and Finns) exhibited similar or

different topic management strategies (discourse patterns) in the three identified situations; namely socializing/small talk, use of back-channels, and turn-taking and floor management.

Review of Literature

To investigate the impact of culture and English-language proficiency on the communication behaviors of the business professionals between the two research groups, I will review the literature related to the two identified constructs; namely culture (i.e., individualism- collectivism) and language (i.e., English-language proficiency) to explain how culture and language affect the communication behaviors of the business professionals in intercultural business communication contexts.

Individualism-collectivism (I-C) is a theoretical dimension of a cultural construct that has been used to predict a variety of communication behaviors, such as low- and high-context communication styles (see, for example, Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996) and conflict styles (Ting-Toomey 1988). Past research has concluded that culture affects communication behaviors. Study by Gudykunst and associates (1996) showed that cultural individualism-collectivism (I-C) has a direct influence on behavior and that individualistic and collectivistic tendencies influence how individuals perceive themselves, which in turn, impacts on their communication behavior (e.g. communication styles). Although this research has contributed important insights into culture and behavior, Oetzel (1998) argued that small-group contexts in many of the studies involved cross-cultural comparisons and that the studies did not focus on cross-cultural communication. These oversights are important, particularly since the world economy has become globalized and individuals are more likely to communicate in a culturally diverse business environment with people possessing differing levels of English-language proficiency (assuming English is a world business language).

To operationalize small group behavior and communication, Oetzel (1998) developed a model of effective decision-making theory (EDMT) that uses cultural I-C and self-construal to predict communication behavior in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups. The findings show that communication behavior is directly affected by cultural I-C. Other cross-cultural studies examined turn-taking behavior (e.g., Ng, Loong, He, Liu & Weatherall, 2000) found that turn-taking behavior appears to be influenced by culture across all groups. Findings of these studies are consistent with Yamada's early study. Yamada (1990) investigated the turn distribution strategies in business conversational topics between American and Japanese associates. He found that (1) turn-taking behaviors differ in collectivist societies (e.g., Japan) and individualist societies (e.g., the United States) in that American participants distribute their turns unequally, whereas Japanese take short turns and distribute their turns evenly, and (2) Japanese participants are less active than American participants. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) explained that the pattern of turn-taking distribution can be linked to cultural differences in that individuals from collectivist cultures stress group sharing and harmony rather than individual gains.

In Asia, studies by Bilbow (1996) and Rogerson-Revell (1999) investigated the meeting interaction between native English-speaking expatriates and local Cantonese-speaking Chinese in large multinational corporations (MNCs). These two studies concluded that (1) Chinese are not as active as Westerners in intercultural meetings, and (2) communication breakdowns in intercultural business meetings result in perception gaps between local Chinese and expatriates. Findings of these two research studies revealed that culture can be a determining factor affecting the participation rate of Hong Kong Chinese bilinguals when taking part in MNC's top management meetings. Du-Babcock's (2003, 2005) intercultural study examined the distribution of speaking time and turn-taking behavior in terms of cultures and group

homogeneity and concluded that the amount of speaking time and turn-taking for individuals from collectivistic cultures was significantly less than that for individuals from individualistic cultures (F= 9.245, p<.U1; F = 4.044, p<.05 respectively). Findings of her intercultural study are consistent with studies by Oetzel (1998), Bilbow (1996), and Rogerson-Revell (1999) in different contexts.

Although cultural I-C is likely to be a factor that affects the distribution of the turn-taking and speaking time distribution in intercultural groups, the second-language proficiency of the interlocutors is also likely to be a relevant factor that influences the number of turns taken and speaking time in group meetings. In the next, I will review the related studies examining the relationship of the English-language proficiency and communication behaviors.

Du-Babcock's (1999, 2006) study investigated whether the number of turns individuals took varies among Hong Kong bilinguals when using their native language (Cantonese) or second language (English) to make decisions. Results indicated that (a) the average number of turns in Cantonese meetings was more than those in English meetings (t = 2.04; p<.05), and that (b) English-language proficiency positively correlated with the amount of English used during meetings (r = .37, p<0.5). Her intercultural study (Du-Babcock, 2003, 2005) also suggests that non-native English-speaking participants revealed lower participation rate than their native-English speaking counterparts in intercultural meetings and that (b) non-native English speaking participants exhibited different communication behaviors when participating in homogeneous groups as compared to a heterogeneous group decision-making meeting (F = 7.470, p<.01). Taken together, these two studies suggest that English-language proficiency can be a determining factor that affects the communication behaviors of non-native English speaking bilinguals.

To further investigate how culture and English-language proficiency affect the turn-taking behaviors of the non-native English speaking individuals, a recent study by Du-Babcock and Tanaka (2010) examined the communication behaviors of two research groups coming from similar collectivist, high-context communication cultures (i.e., Hong Kong and Japanese business professionals) in relation to their use of English as a medium of communication in their decision-making meetings. The findings indicated that in spite of the presumed cultural similarity between the two researched groups, distinctive quantitative differences were observed in turn taking behaviors in that Japanese business professionals with lower English-language proficiency took fewer turns and spoke less in comparing with those of Hong Kong business professionals in intercultural meetings. Other studies by Tanaka (Tanaka, 2006a, 2006b) also showed that Japanese participants were less active than their American and French counterparts in intercultural meetings. Tanaka's findings suggest that Japanese as compared to Americans and Western Europeans participate at a lower rate due to their lower English-language proficiency.

Based on the related literature review, three research questions are put forward.

RQ1: What the relationship is between communication behaviors and preferred communication styles in intercultural decision-making meetings?
RQ2: What is the relationship between English-language proficiency and the communication behaviors (e.g., turn-taking) of individuals in intercultural decision-making meetings?
RQ3: Do individuals who prefer high-context communication and individuals who prefer low-context communication exhibit similar or different topic management strategies (discourse pattern) in three identified situations: socializing/ small talk, use of back-channels, and turn-taking and floor management?

Research Method

The current study is based on two data sets. The first set of the data consists of the transcripts of five intercultural decision-making meetings between Hong Kong Chinese and Japanese business professionals that are categorized by Hofstede (1991) as collectivist cultural societies. In contrast, the second set of the data were the transcripts of a series of intercultural in-house meetings between individuals from Sweden and Finland which are categorized as individualist cultural societies. Details of the data collection are described below. For comparison, these two sets of the data are label as the collectivist data set and individualist data set and the two research groups refer as collectivist group and individualist group.

The Collectivist Data Set

Involved in the collectivist data set were 34 Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese business professionals who were invited to take part in intercultural decision-making meetings. Japanese participants were business professionals who signed up to participate voluntarily in response to an invitation announcement posted on a website, while Hong Kong participants accepted an invitation by one of the researchers. Only those individuals who practiced businesses and used English in the workplace were invited to participate in the study. In doing so, it can be ensured that their professional backgrounds were at a level to take part in the research. Each decision-making group was made up of five to eight members consisting of a relatively equal proportion of Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese business professionals. All the meetings were held in conference rooms that were equipped with professional video-conferencing facilities.

These participants took part in a simulated experiential case exercise (Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010) assuming the role of board of directors in a simulated business meeting. Their task was to respond to a crisis by deciding whether the company should recall a product that caused 20 to 30 deaths over the past five years. The decision-making dialogs captured strategy development in the decision-making process that evolved in the board meetings. All of the participants had adequate English-language proficiency and interactive listening skills for business related communication. Participants' work experience was comparable, and they were all mid-level managers from various organizations, including private enterprises, educational institutions, pharmaceutical company, and law firms.

Data of the five intercultural business meetings were transcribed and subjected to interaction analysis in terms of the number of turns, the distribution of speaking time, and total number of words. In intercultural decision-making meetings where English was used, the meetings were transcribed verbatim into English except at the beginning of the meeting during which participants greeted each other in Japanese and Mandarin in addition to English. Mandarin was used because the Japanese did not speak any Cantonese. In total, the corpus of the five intercultural meetings contains 43,549 words.

The Individualist Data Set

The individualist data set was a research project based on in-house communication in newly merged Finnish-Swedish corporations. The individualist data set comes from a series of video-recorded internal company meetings held in two multinational corporations. The meetings were carried out in English, with occasional Swedish or Finnish comments were injected. In total, the corpus of the individualist data set contains 53,334 words.

The initial purpose of collecting authentic video-taped meeting dialogues was to make it possible to analyze naturally occurring talk in meetings with a specific interest in how languages and cultures affect meeting practices. The meetings involved a group of managers who dealt with in-house magazine production. The meetings were informal, and the purpose of the meetings was to plan the contents of the next issue of the globally distributed internal company magazine. The other meetings were two regular management meetings which involved top management from Sweden and Finland. Meeting participants were representatives of various business units with various organizational positions.

Data Analysis

To operationalize the communication behaviors, in the *quantitative data* analysis, similarities and differences of the communication patterns were defined by (a) the number of turns taken by individuals; (b) the length of speaking time during which each group member spoke; and (c) the number of words spoken.

Turn-taking Behavior Analysis

To assess turn-taking communication behavior, the turn-taking framework developed by Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson (1974) was adopted together with the specific technique used in Du-Babcock's (1999, 2003, 2005, 2006) studies. In other words, a turn consisted of all the speech interactant's utterances up to the point where another individual took over the speaking role. The number of turns taken and the number of words spoken by each participant were codified, counted, and compared. Speaking time was calculated to measure the exact length of each conversational turn. The length of speaking time for each turn and words spoken were coded according to the designated interlocutors and served as a cross check of meeting interaction.

The quantitative measures of the turn-taking behavior, speaking time distribution, and number of words spoken by each participant are compared by computing (a) the number of turns taken by each individual, (b) the amount of meeting distribution time, and (c) number of words spoken by each participant. As the current study seeks to examine the differences in number of turns, speaking time distribution, and number of words spoken, possible variations in meeting duration and number of meeting participants may adversely affect the accuracy of the statistical test results on the variables being examined. In order to prevent these intervening factors from confusing or influencing the statistical tests and to obtain more accurate results, the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests was used to control and adjust the factors (that is, to treat them as covariates and keep them constant). To investigate how English-language proficiency affects the communication behaviors of bilingual business professionals, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was also performed.

Measurement of English-language Proficiency

The English proficiency of the business professionals was assessed by a native-English speaking consultant who was employed to judge the English proficiency levels of the Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese, Swedish, and Finnish business professionals. The speech acts to be assessed were derived from edited meeting videotapes. The native-English speaking consultant viewed and listened to five minutes of each participant's speech acts and recorded their proficiency levels using the Common European Framework (CEFR). The Common European Framework divides learners into three broad divisions which can be divided into six levels; namely: basic speakers: A1 and A2; independent speakers B1 and B2; and proficient speakers C1 and C2). Upon assigning the English proficiency of meeting

participants according to the CEFR framework, the proficiency level was further re-categorized. Individuals with A2 and B1 are categorized as 1, indicating low-level English language, B2 is categorized as intermediate-level, and C1 is advanced-level English proficiency.

With regard to the *qualitative data* analysis, the analysis of the transcripts and videos uncovered three aspects of meeting communication; namely, socializing/ small talk, use of back-channels, and turn-taking and floor management.

Results and Interpretations

In this section, I will report the results of the three research questions. The analyses of the Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 are based on the quantitative data that I examine the communication behaviors exhibited by the two research groups as measured by turn-taking, speaking time, and words spoken in their respective intercultural decision-making meetings. The Research Question 3 is a qualitative analysis that looks into how business professionals managed discussion topics from three perspectives; namely, socialization/small talk, use of backchannels, and turn-taking and floor management.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 examines the relationship between communication behaviors and preferred communication styles in intercultural decision-making meetings. To answer this research question, the number of turns, the distribution of the speaking time, and the number of words were calculated and compared between collectivist data set and individualist Data set.

As the two data sets were derived from Hong Kong - Japan simulated intercultural business meetings for the collectivist group, and from Sweden - Finland in house management meetings for the individualist group, the within-group comparisons was made. If no significant difference is found, the within-group data will be combined to form the basis for statistical analysis. Table 1 compares the within-group differences of the two research groups.

Table 1.
A Within-Group Comparison of the Identified Variables between the Two Research Groups

	Turns (number)	Speaking time (seconds)	Words (number)
Collectivist Data Set			
Hong Kong	54	729	1793
Japan	32	399	799
t- value	3.975**	4.012*	20.893*
Individualist Data Set			
Sweden	175	1729	4392
Finland	91	989	2330
t- value	5.822	8.677	16.436

Note. * Statistical significance at the 0.05 level, ** Statistical significance at the 0.01 level

An ANCOVA test was performed to examine the differences. Table 1 shows that while there are significant differences between Hong Kong and Japanese business professionals on average number of

turns, amount of speaking time, and number of words spoken in their intercultural meetings, no significant difference is found between the Swedish and Fin business professionals.

For the collectivist data set, the comparison data is only made by comparing the communication behaviors of the Hong Kong business professionals with the individualist data. The reason for eliminating the Japanese data is to prevent the combined data (with Japanese business professionals) from skewing the results, due to the comparatively lower English-language proficiency of Japanese business professionals.

As no statistical significance is found between Swedish and Finns, the data of the two within-groups are combined into the individualist Group for statistical analysis. Comparisons of communication behaviors between the individualist group and the collectivist group (i.e., Hong Kong Chinese) are made to respond to RQ1.

To examine the existence of significant differences an ANCOVA was performed in which the duration of the meetings was treated as a covariate to control its effect on the three dependent variables (i.e., the number of speaking turns, the length of speaking time, and the number of words spoken). The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.
Mean Scores of the Identified Variables between the Two Research Groups in English Business Meetings

Variables	Individualist Group	Collectivist Group	Mean difference	t-value
Turns (number)	133	54	79	10.962**
Speaking time (second)	1359	729	630	14.815
Words (number)	3361	1793	1568	22.144**

Note. ** Statistical significance at the 0.01 level

The result in Table 2 shows that the average number of speaking turns, the average amount of speaking time, and the average number of words spoken by individualist Group were more than those of the Hong Kong Group. That means the individualist Group business professionals take more turns and use more words to express their viewpoints at the meetings. Significant differences at the 0.01 level are found in the mean differences in the average number of turns and in the average number of words spoken. No significant difference is found in the mean difference in the average amount of speaking time (in seconds).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 examines whether English- language proficiency affects the turn-taking and number of words of the two groups in their business meetings. To examine the effect of English-language proficiency on the communication behaviors, proficiency was divided into three levels; namely, low, intermediate, and advanced levels, according to the CEFR language proficiency framework.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was performed, and the result is summarized in Table 3. Table 3 shows that English proficiency is positively correlated with the communication behaviors of individualist group (Swedish and Finnish) and collectivist group in different ways.

Table 3.
Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the English Proficiency and the Communication Behaviors between the Two Researched Groups

English-Language Proficiency	Turns (number)	Speaking time (second)	Words (number)
Individualist Group			
Low (A1+A2)	/	/	/
Intermediate (B1)	0.412*	0.357	0.379*
Advanced (B2+C1)	0.416	0. 389*	0.363*
Collectivist Group			
Low (A1+A2)	0.310*	0.307	0.346*
Intermediate (B1)	0.325*	0.314	0.329
Advanced (B2+C1)	0.417*	0.410*	0.422**

Notes. *   Statistical significance at the 0.05 level, ** Statistical significance at the 0.01 level

According to the English-language proficiency levels as assessed by an intercultural communication specialist, all of the individualist group of business professionals possess intermediate (B1) or advanced level (B2 and C1) English proficiency, and no one was at the low proficient level (A1 and A2). The results show that for the intermediate group, correlations with significant differences at the 0.05 level are found between the level of English proficiency and the number of turns and number of words spoken. In contrast, individuals with advanced English proficiency, correlations with significant level at the 0.05 level are found between the English proficiency and the amount of speaking time (in second) and the number of words spoken.

As for the collectivist group of business professionals, the results of the Pearson Correlation Coefficients reveal positive correlations with significant differences at the 0.05 level in terms of the number of turns for participants with low and advanced levels of English proficiency. In other words, for the collectivist group, the higher the individual's English proficiency, the higher the participation rates in the turn-takings. English-language is a neutral factor to those individuals whose English proficiency is intermediate. That is, individuals with advanced English-language proficiency took more turns, spoke more in terms of the distribution of speaking time and elaborated more on their opinions. Correlations with significant differences at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels are also found in the number of words for business professionals with intermediate and advanced levels of English proficiency.
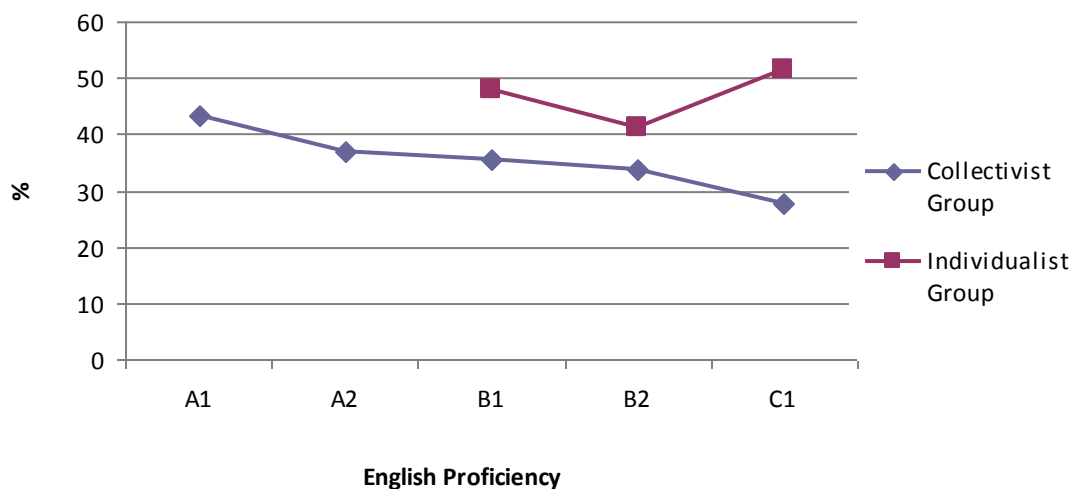
Generally speaking, the distribution of speaking time across three levels of English-language proficiency does not show significant correlation for individuals with low-and intermediate language proficiency. The reason for such an inconclusive result can be due to the use of back-channels in that the Individuals with low and intermediate levels were likely to maintain their participation rate without detailed elaboration.   To examine whether this is the case, the transcripts of meeting dialogues are examined in that the frequencies of turn-taking and the number of back-channels are calculated and compared. Turns that are used for confirming counterparts' opinions without elaborations are labeled as back-channels. For example, a **back-channel** is behavior where a participant responds or reacts to the speaker (with uh-huh, mhmm, eh?) without interrupting the speaker's turn (e.g., Du-Babcock, 2006; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Kendon, 1990). As back-channel responses are usually short, some researchers do not consider them to be complete utterances (Duncan, 1972). However, back-channel

responses (such as *(m)hm, yeah, really?*) may constitute a full turn and express agreement, disagreement, and promises. In one instance, a back-channel response can allow the speaker to retain the attention of listeners when the speaker does not want the speaking role to be taken over by the listener. In another case, the back-channel response can be a prelude to taking a turn speaking, so the listener makes sounds to show he or she is planning to speak immediately. In this case, the listener may say, "Ahhhh" in a way that implies disagreement or that a contradiction is coming when it is the listener's turn to speak. Prototypical back- channels commonly used in this study included such utterances as *yes*, *OK*, *Uh-huh*, yeah, and *you are right*.

To further examine whether English-language proficiency affects the use of back-channels, the frequency of back-channel use was counted and calculated against the number of turns taken by individuals to obtain the percentage of back-channel use among individuals with different level of English-language proficiency which are classified as low, intermediate, and advanced levels. In addition to the descriptive analyses of back-channels used by the two research groups (see Figure 1), the analyses are also made to reveal the use of back-channels by all of the participating nations (see Figure 2). Pearson Correlation Coefficients are also performed to examine the relationship between the English-language proficiency and the use of back-channels (see Table 4)

In regard to the use of back-channels, the results show that the percentages of the back-channel use by collectivist business professionals between low, intermediate, and advanced English-language proficiency are 38.8%, 35.7%, and 31.8% respectively.   The reversed back-channel patterns are observed among individualist group where individuals with advanced English proficiency (C1 level) exhibited 51.3% of the backchannel use, which is higher than those with B2 (41.3%) and B1 (47.8%) levels of English-language proficiency (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
A Comparison of the Use of Back Channels between Collectivist and Individualist Groups

In addition to the group comparisons (collectivist and individualist groups), a comparison of the use of back-channels among the participants by nations was also made. Figure 2 shows that in the collectivist group, both Japanese and Hong Kong individuals with low English-language proficiency exhibited higher percentage of back-channels than those with higher English-language proficiency. In contrast, the use of back-channel patterns is inconsistent. The results show that (a) Finns exhibited more back-channel use than Swedes, when comparing individuals with same English-language proficiency and that (b) Swedes with higher English-language proficiency tended to exhibit more back-channels.

Figure 2.
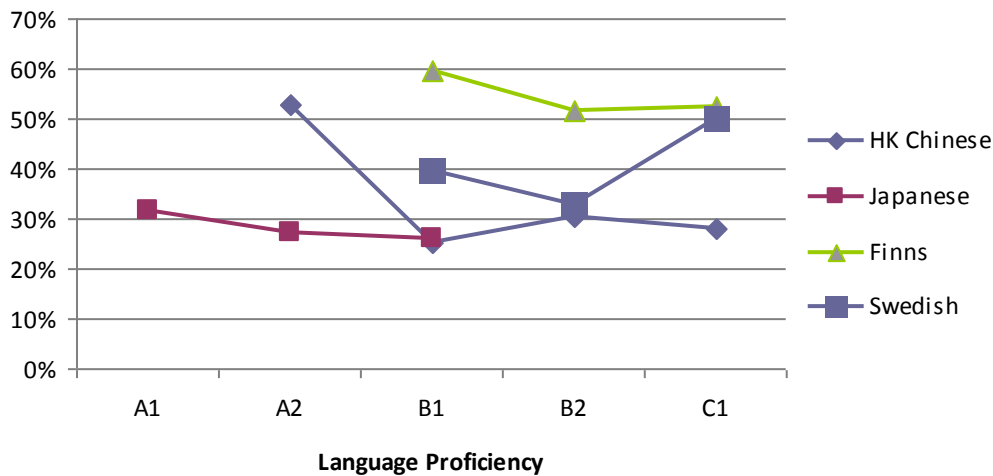*A Comparison of the Use of Backchannels among Four Nations*

Table 4 reports the relationships between the level of English-language proficiency and the use of back-channels across individualist group and collectivist group. The results of the Pearson Correlation Coefficients reveal contrasting patterns in that while the individualist group members with high English-language proficiency were inclined to use more back-channels, the back-channels were more frequently used by collectivist Japanese group members who possessed low English-language proficiency.

Table 4.
The Relationship of English-language Proficiency and Use of Back-channels

English-Language Proficiency	Back- Channels		
	Turns (number)	Speaking time (second)	Words (number)
Individualist Group			
Low (A1+A2)	/	/	/
Intermediate (B1)	0.351*	0.332	0.343*
Advanced (B2+C1)	0.403**	0.366*	0.387**
Collectivist Group			
Collectivist Group: (a) Hong Kong business professionals			
Low (A1+A2)	0.152	0.164	0.182
Intermediate (B1)	0.254	0.216	0.261
Advanced (B2+C1)	0.302*	0.279	0.285*
Collectivist Group: (b) Japanese business professionals			
Low (A1+A2)	0.276*	0.244*	0.263*
Intermediate (B1)	0.172	0.163	0.180
Advanced (B2+C1)	/	/	/

* Statistical significance at the 0.05 level
** Statistical significance at the 0.01 level

In sum, the use of back-channels partially confirms Du-Babcock's (2006) conclusion in that collectivist Japanese bilinguals who possessed lower English-language proficiency were likely to use more back-channels to show their engagement. However, the current study shows a conflicting result in the use of back- channels by the Swedish and the Hong Kong business professionals.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examines whether individuals who prefer high-context communication (i.e., Hong Kong Chinese and Japanese) and individuals who prefer low-context communication (i.e., Swedish and Finns) exhibited similar or different topic management strategies (discourse patterns) in the three identified situations; namely, socializing/ small talk, use of back-channels as well as turn-taking and floor management. The analyses of Research Question 3 are based on examining the qualitative aspect of the meeting transcripts that are in relation to the three identified discourse patterns.

Socializing/Small Talk

Socializing/small talk is like a social lubricant, and is treated in this study as an essential component of meeting behavior, although it is often regarded as peripheral and marginal due to its frequent occurrence at the opening, closing and transitional positions of conversation (Holmes, 2000). Socializing/ small talk is a relational communication genre (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 2007) that surrounds and intermingles with task-related communication and which develops positive attitudes that can result in more efficient and effective work-related communication.

Socializing/small talk takes on a different degree of importance and has different patterns in the contexts of collectivist group and individualist group. The degree and nature of small talk has to do with whether interlocutors are communicating in their first language and, when communicating in a second-

language, their level of second-language proficiency. If interlocutors have lower language proficiency, it is probable that there will be less socializing/small talk, as those involved need to concentrate on the task at hand. In addition, Asians (Hong Kong Chinese and Japanese) may avoid small talk in order to prevent from being put in a face-threatening situation due to the possibility of making grammatical errors or embarrassing statements.   Cultural factors also may affect the nature, frequency, and timing of socializing/small talk.

In a business meeting, the period during which the participants await the start of the meeting constitutes a good opportunity for socializing with each other through small talk (e.g. Boden, 1994). In this period, both groups engaged in socializing/small talk. The nature of the socializing/small talk differed, not because of cultural differences but because the individualist Group participants had a prior relationship. The collectivist group did not know each other before the simulated meetings, and therefore they used this period to introduce themselves and to begin to develop their relationships. The individualist Group used the socializing/small talk in the beginning period to renew, update, and further build and solidify their relationships. Excerpt 1 describes the deliberation of socializing/small talk of the Hong Kong-Japanese business professionals at the beginning of the meeting.

Excerpt 1: Intercultural meeting (ABC, Japanese participants, and DEFG, Hong Kong Chinese participants)

Turn	Speaker and Deliberation
14	G: I'm Cecilia, ***Douzo Yoroshiku***. [***Please to meet you***]
15	A: Hahahaha….
16	F: Hi I'm Sandy, as you see here, Sandy Yang, nice to meet you.
17	A, B: Nice to meet you, Sandy.
18	D: Hi I'm Natalie, er… nice to… meet you all.
19	N.A.(Silent)
20	A, B. Yea… nice to meet you.
21	N.A. (Silent)
22	A: Okay, I'm Iyoda, I'm working for the ai… Engineering Department, so nice to meet you too.
23	N.A. (Silent)
24	B: And er… *我是* Takano. [*I am Takano*.]
25	All: Laughing
26	B: I'm Takano, I know a little bit only Chinese ar… *你們…很漂亮*, [***You all are pretty***.]

When examining the transcripts and videoconference tapes, it is common that in the first two to five minutes, the participants seemed to be consciously grounding their harmonious relationship by inserting a little piece knowledge of the partner's language (see Excerpt 1 utterances 14, 24, and 26) while introducing themselves.

In most of the meetings, interaction styles between Hong Kong and Japanese business professionals did not differ much in greeting and self-introduction sequences. It should be noted that code switching from English to Japanese by Hong Kong Chinese participants and English to Mandarin by Japanese participants is used for achieving convergence, as found in another study of Chinese and Japanese business interaction (Poppi, 2010). Since the Japanese participants did not speak Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese was the only resource for them to use during strategic code switching.

Although harmony-seeking is said to be one of the attributes of a collectivistic culture, caution is needed when asserting that the two groups share collectivist cultural values. Pre-meeting small talk is also often

observed in Western settings as well (Mirivel & Tracy, 2005). The convergence is perhaps motivated by the need to understand each other and continue with the proceedings.

In comparison with the Hong Kong-Japanese participants, the participants of the individualist [Swedish-Finnish] Group were inclined to interject small talk and use humor from time to time, especially with the initiation of new topics. The individualist Group also spent a longer time doing the socializing before the beginning of the meeting. For example, in one of the Head Office meetings, the participants spent the first 7 minutes and 48 seconds in socialization/small talk before the chairperson called the meeting to order. The language of socialization was a combination of the native languages (Finnish and Swedish) of the participants as well as English.

Back-channel Behavior

The back- channel behavior exhibited by the Swedish-Finnish Group differed from the behavior of the Hong Kong-Japanese business professionals (see Excerpt 2 for Swedish-Finnish meeting). Meeting participants were discussing a Big L(ondon) Project issue, and 104 turns (from turn 31 to turn 134) were devoted to this issue. However, when the speech acts are deconstructed, only 12 turns were related to the issue, including the first turn that was initiated by the chairperson. A, the person who was in charge of reporting on the Big L issue, spoke eight times, providing information. D used two turns to ask issue-related questions; for example, how many people could be accommodated in the new building and whether the company would provide family training. The qualitative analysis of the dialogues among participants shows that 88 % of the speech acts were back-channel behavior in which participants were either teasing about the point being humorous or being sarcastic.

Excerpt 2.		
Dialogues among Helsinki Group Meeting Participants in Discussing Big L Project		
31	E	Raising the issue for discussion
38	A	Explaining background of Big L
56	A	Providing more information on Big L;
64	A	More information on Big L and when the building would be available
66	A	List of transferees
69	A	HR matters
71	D	Raising family training issue
80	A	Details have not been planned yet
85	A	Further clarify that there are two projects in Big L project: office project and HR project; also providing the name list on these two projects
87~89	E & A	More information on who is on the list; humor[sarcastic??] beautiful steering group
112	E	The location of Big L
131	E	From turn 113 to turn 134, meeting participants continued to talk about where the exact location in a teasing tone. Only in turn 131, E(chair) commented that the location is a quite OK area;

In contrast, in a Hong Kong-Japan intercultural meeting, the meeting participants took 52 turns (from turn 51 to turn 103) to discuss the strategy options the company could take regarding their product in the US market. Of 52 turns, 7 turns were either silence or overlapping turns by all of the participants. In this connection, only 45 turns were used for categorization. The distribution of the turns was divided by

individual participants and put into two categories; topic-related discussion and backchannels. Table 5 lists the frequencies.

Table 5.
Frequency of Turns in Relation to Topical Discussion or Backchannel

	Japanese				Hong Kong Chinese			
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Topic Related	0	3	1	4	5	2	8	7
Backchannels	0	2	1	7	1	0	2	2

Of the 45 turns, 30 turns are topic related discussions and 15 are back-channels. After allocating the turns according to nationality, the Japanese business professionals only contributed 8 turns on the designated topic, whereas Hong Kong business professionals contributed 22 turns. However, when looking at the use of backchannels, Japanese business professionals exhibited twice as many uses of backchannels as Hong Kong business professionals (10 versus 5 turns). Words frequently used in backchannel turns by Japanese business professionals included: *good*, *yeah*, *yes*, *uh-huh*, and *okay*.

Turn-taking and Floor Control Mechanism (or Floor Management)

Floor control mechanisms are usually introduced for facilitating turn management where individual assumes either speaker or listener role. The passing of speaker control is enforced so as to "minimize pauses / silence and maximize the conveyed information. In the Swedish-Finnish Group meetings, floor management was free flowing among members, except for one instance when F was about 9 minutes late for the meeting. As soon as F stepped in and said *hi* to meeting attendees, E, the chairperson, immediately passed the floor to F so F could discuss the issue.

Excerpt 3.
Intercultural Meeting in English (ABCGH (Finns); DE (Swedish); F (German)

Turn	Member	Deliberations
226	E	Well, Heinz, we are, we are looking at the April results and I just said that magazine came actually above budget, which was strong … and newsprint came out five below budget, which was the result of the strike in Finland. But er, **would you like to comment on any- anything especially on on on Mag** and …
227	F	Yes
228	F	Yes
229	F	That's right.
230	F	Yes, only er em, can say that er em if you talk about er magazine that er, weakest points we have again is er compulsory where we have special problems with er er variable costs. … we are working on … to present this is er, much more important item, restructuring plan … … how to be responsible for a restructuring project … important point … in magazine.
231	E	And I have said that the protocol was doing well now XXX XXX
232	F	Yes, but but but not enough
233	C	Mm yeah
234	F	I wouldn't say that the direction is right, it's it's ok, but er, it's not enough if if you make a bench marking if you see the total in Spring in comparison to others, and we know …. management problem because there you have to be tough and you have to go really in details and have to…

In contrast, Hong Kong business professionals' floor management differs depending on whether they are speaking in their native language, Cantonese, or in English. Excerpts 4 and 5 are examples of the deliberations between Hong Kong intra-cultural meetings in Cantonese and in English.

Excerpt 4.
Intra-cultural meeting in Cantonese (ABC DEF, Hong Kong)

56	B	. . . 不如咁啦, **由阿 Natalie 個邊講先**, 而家有咩口野, 你你點睇今次？口下！ [***Natalie, how about starting from you first…***]
60	B	唔唔唔, . . . 個 drugs 係 combination 呀, 即係其實我口地口的藥係撈埋其他口的藥去食囉 . . . **咁或者 Diana 你點睇呀**？[***Uh Uh Uh…Diana, what's your opinion?***]
66	B	停一停先, Ok. 咁…**阿 Angela 你又同唔同意佢口既講法** [***Angela, do you agree with the decision on stopping ….?***]
68	B	. . .會唔會口的醫生接收口左大家錯口既訊息, 所以導致口左咁口既誤會囉。. . . **咁呀…Cecilia，咁你又點睇呀**？[***Cecilia, what do you think?***]
70	B	你同唔同意醫生去繼續去配返口的隻藥？你同意既？(looking at F and soliciting her viewpoints) (to Cecilia) [***Do you agree with leaving the decision to the doctor?***]
77	B	Ok. 咁呀，Nicole 呢？[***Is that so. So Nicole, what about you?***]

Excerpt 4 shows when the meeting was conducted in Cantonese, the floor management and turns were mostly assigned by the Chair (B). In comparison, different floor management is observed when the meeting was conducted in English in that the turns were taken by participants freely after the initial floor assignment by the chair (see Excerpt 5). In general, at the intra-cultural English meeting, the chair interjected her ideas by clarifying the discussion of the issues or summarizing the discussion. Reasons for such a different floor management can be due to the English-language proficiency of the Chair. Unlike the meeting conducted in Cantonese, the Chair spent most of her turns clarifying or summarizing the discussions in intra-cultural English meeting.

Excerpt 5.
Intra-cultural meeting in English (ABC DEF, Hong Kong)

176	B	[The topic was initiated by the Chair (B) and assign "E" to give her opinions.]
		… I would like er let er like er Diana, to er give your opinion er, in this issue.
177 ~ 187	E B	… I propose not to continue …, but I would allow the doctors to continue …
		Discussions continue between E and B (chairperson)
188		*[A took over the floor]*
	A	I totally agree with Celine (the Chairperson) because … I see your point Diana, … I agree with you. Yours is moderate approach …
190 ~ 192	D B A	*[D took over the floor]*
		So your choice is option A?
193		*[E took over the floor and identify the next person to take over the floor]*
	E	… So, Natalie, I would like to know if er you propose to stop er production and destroy er all the stocks, so you know at presence that still patients taking EasyFix, so what what would you do?
195	A	Yes, I know so that's why I think we need to … to see whether any supplement or any ar other drugs could be substituted, alright, or in in in replaced that EasyFix.
196		*[B / the chairperson agrees with A's viewpoint and re-states the key points and stresses corporate image]* … how to build up our build up or re-enhance our corporate
	B	image. It's it's a global, is our global asset, you know, the corporate image. And I think this approach is the most responsible behavour, to the end user, … and which is the public
197 ~ 199	A	*[A took over the floor]*
		Yes it's a long term ((nodding)) … tell the public again that our drug is reliable… So although we recall, for the um, now, but I think just for short term…
200	D	*[D took over the floor]*
		So you agree to recall all stocks but do you agree to destroy all stocks as well?
201 ~ 218	A B D	*[Turns from 201 to 218 are shared by A,B, and D to discuss the issues. The floor management is free flow.]*
		The topics of discussion are:
		❖ to alleviate public worries, so as to re-establish the public im- reputation
		❖ too soon to recall and destroy the product
		❖ not very trust those independent studies and those experts as well,
219 ~		*[E took over the floor in turn 219 and ended her turn in 234 without invitation from the Chairperson]*
220 ~ 234	E B A D	Yes, Chairman I agree [with D's viewpoints]. E thinks that recalling and destroying the product does not solve the real problem. … I don't think at this moment of time, er we need to take so strong er reaction, right now.
		From turn 220 to turn 234 the discussion was centered around whether the company should recall. E suggested that the company should hold a press conference stressing the successful cases.

In Excerpt 5, the intra-cultural meeting where English was used, the chairperson (B) initiated the topic in turn 176 and assigned the member E to express her opinions. So, the turns between 177 and 187 were

a dyad between the chairperson and Member E. The floor then was taken by Member A in turn 188, followed by D in turn 190, and E in turn 193, without the invitation of the chairperson. In turn 196, the chairperson regains the floor to summarize the viewpoints discussed from turn 177 to turn 195. Then the floor was taken by Members A, D, and E again from turn 197 to turn 234.

Conclusion

The current study examines the similarities and differences of the communication behaviors of the two research groups representing individualist, low-context cultural societies and collectivist, high-context cultural societies. The study compares the communication behaviors between these two research groups in terms of turn taking frequency, length of speaking time, total number of words, and the use of back-channels. The study also investigated communication behaviors of different speaker groups in relation to English-language proficiency.

Two data sets were derived from both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of meeting transcripts. The objective of the qualitative data, derived from text-based analysis, is to illustrate and examine how individuals from collectivist, high-context cultural societies (i.e., Hong Kong and Japan) managed meeting talk similar to or different from individuals from individualist, low-context cultural societies (i.e., Sweden and Finland). In addition, the quantitative aspect of the data (e.g., turn-taking behavior, number of words spoken) allows the turn-taking framework to be operationalized and generalized.

The results show that individualist group of business professionals took more turns and used a larger number of spoken words in intercultural business meetings where English was used as medium of communication. Although no significant difference was found in the amount of speaking time, the finding also showed that on average the individualist group of business professionals spoke more than those of collectivist group of business professionals.

The results also show that the level of English-language proficiency partially correlates with the number of turns, the amount of speaking time, and the number of words spoken for both research groups at different proficiency groups. In addition, the frequency of the use of backchannel reveals an inconsistent pattern between the collectivist and individualist groups. The findings show that the lower the English-language proficiency, the higher the use of back-channels among Japanese business professionals, whereas the reversed back-channels patterns were observed among Swedish business professionals.

The qualitative analysis of meeting transcripts shows that while collectivist group meetings exhibited small talk/socialization at the beginning of meetings, the individualist group meetings revealed that participants interjected small talk throughout the meetings, particularly at the beginning of the topic initiation. As for the use of back-channels, it is speculated that collectivist meeting participants with lower English proficiency were inclined to use more backchannels to reveal their engagement.   As for the floor management, While Hong Kong participants' floor management was controlled by the Chairperson in the Cantonese meeting, free flow floor management was observed in their intra-cultural meetings where English was used. In contrast, in the individualist group's business meetings, the floor management was shared among meeting participants, excepting when new topics were initiated by the chairperson.

Limitations

The research design of the current study was set up to measure intercultural business meetings of two research groups representing collectivist, high-context cultural societies and individualist, low-context cultural societies. While the collectivist data set was derived from intercultural meetings of five simulated business meeting discussion, the individualist data set was a series of meeting discussion by a group of business professionals who took part in the meetings where the discussion was on the upcoming magazine issues and on the company's Big London Project. The differences of the meeting structure can be the limitation of the current study.

Another limitation can the use of a business game or simulation to generate dialogues that represent the collectivist data set. It should be noted that the use of simulated meetings for data collection may have limited the scope of investigation. For example, decisions tend to be made without real responsibility needs to be taken. However, the intercultural differences in use of communication strategies were sufficiently observed in simulation data. Moreover, research has shown that the augmented reality and game-based learning has gained its popularity (Johnson, Smith, Willis, Levine, & Haywood, 2011) and has yielded valid data (see, for example, Abdel-Khalik, 1974; Ashton & Kramer, 1980) although the use of actual dialogs from bilingual managers in business firms are preferable

Implications and Future Research Direction

Findings of the current study have important pragmatic implications. The current study will represent a step to a better understanding of intercultural business communication between the two research groups of business professionals with distinct cultures and varying degree of English-language proficiency. As such, the study investigates turn-taking behaviors and topic management strategies of two research groups in their intercultural meetings. The study also examines the effects of the English-language proficiency on to the communication behaviors and use of back-channels of these business professionals. It is hoped that the current study will have a long-term impact by allowing researchers to draw upon an enlarged knowledge base and for academics and business practitioners to develop and implement programs that facilitate intercultural business communication.

Against the background of the findings and limitations of the current study, I suggest that additional research be conducted on bilinguals' communication behaviors in different language and cross-cultural environments. The future study can structure meetings in a cross-cultural manner where participants come from different cultural contexts in a continuum ranging from individualist, low-context (e.g., Sweden) to collectivist, high-context (e.g., Japan). In doing so, the comparison can be made to ascertain how and whether culture and language affect the communication behaviors and where the cross-over point will be.

In addition, future study would ideally contrast bilinguals' second-language accommodation in an intra-cultural environment where their native language is dominant medium of communication as opposed to an intercultural environment where English is a dominant language. Other studies could also be conducted to find ways of encouraging collectivist, high-context cultural societies individuals (e.g., Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese) to take a more active role in intercultural and cross-cultural communication encounters when interacting with native-English speaking counterparts from individualist, low-context cultural societies.

References

Abdel-Khalik, A. R. (1974). On the efficiency of subject surrogation in accounting research. *The Accounting Review*, 49, 743-750.

Ashton, R.H. & Kramer, S.S. (1980). Students as surrogates in behavioral accounting research: Some evidence. *Journal of Accounting Research, 18,* 1–15.

Bilbow, G. (1996). Managing impressions in the multicultural workplace. *Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation*, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

Boden, D. (1994). The Business of talk: Organizations in action. Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press.

Cao, Y. (2011). Investigating situational willingness to communicate within second language classrooms from an ecological perspective. *System, 39,* 468-479.

Cheng, X. T. (2000). Asian students' reticence revisited. *System 28*, 435-446.

Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Du-Babcock, B. (2005). An analysis of communication behaviors between intra-and inter-cultural decision-making meetings. *Journal of Asian-Pacific Communication (edited by F. Bargiela-Chiappini & M.o Gotti), 147-168*.

Du-Babcock, B. & Babcock, R. (2007). Genre patterns in language-based communication zones *. Journal of Business Communication,* 44*,* 340-373*.*

Du-Babcock, B. & Tanaka, H. (2010). Turn-taking behavior and topic management strategies of Chinese and Japanese business professionals: A comparison of intercultural group communication. *Proceedings of the 75th Annual Convention of the Association for Business Communication.* Chicago, Illinois.

Du-Babcock, B. (1999). Topic management and turn taking in professional communication: First- versus second-language strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly, 12*(4), 544-574.

Du-Babcock, B. (2003). A comparative analysis of individual communication processes in small group behavior between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. *Proceedings of the 68th Association for Business Communication Convention.* Alberqueke, NM.

Du-Babcock, B. (2006). An analysis of topic management strategies and turn-taking behavior in Hong Kong bilingual environment: The impact of culture and language use*. Journal of Business Communication, 43, 21-42*.

Duncan, S. (1972) Some signals and rules for taking speaking turns in conversations*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 23,* 283–92*.*

Goodwin, C., & Goodwin, M. H. (1992). Context, activity and participation. In Auer & di Luzio (Eds.), *The Contextualization of Language,* 77-99, Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Gudykunst, W. B., Matsumoto, Y., Ting-Toomey, S., Nishida, T., Kim, K., & Heyman, S. (1996.) The influence of cultural individualism-collectivism, self construals, and individual values on communication styles across cultures. *Human Communication Research, 22*, 510-543.

Gudykunst, W., & Nishida, T. (1994). Bridging *Japanese / North American differences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Guffey, M. E., and Du-Babcock, B. (2010). *Essential of Business Communication* (2nd ed.). Singapore: Cengage Learning Asia

Hall, E.T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*, New York: Doubleday

Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind.* Berkshire, UK: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holmes, J. (2000). Politeness, power and provocation how humor functions in the workplace. *Discourse Studies*, 2, 159-185.

House, R.J., Hanges, P.W., Javidan, M., P. Dorfman, and V. Gupta (Eds.) (2004), *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Johnson, L., Smith, R., Willis, H., Levine, A., & Haywood, K. (2011). *The 2011 Horizon Report.* Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium. Retrieved from http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/HR2011.pdf

Kachru, B.B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk and H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kendon, A. (1990). *Patterns of behavior in focused encounters*. UK, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mirivel; J. C. & Tracy, K. (2005). Premeeting talk: An organizationally crucial form of talk. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 38, 1 – 3.

Ng, S., Loong, C., He, A., Liu, J., & Weatherall, A. (2000). Communication correlates of individualism and collectivism: Talk directed at one or more addresses in family conversations. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 19(1), 26-45.

Oetzel, J. (1998). Explaining Individual Communication Processes in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Groups through Individualism-collectivism and Self-construal. *Human Communication Research, 25*(2), 202-224.

Poppi, F. (2010). Mediating between local and global practices: the use of English as the lingua franca for internal company communications. Paper presented at the 10th International Conference, European Society for the Study of English. Turin, Italy.

Rogerson-Revell, P. (1999). Meeting talk: a stylistic approach to teaching meeting skills. In M. Hewings & C. Nickerson (Eds.), Business English: Research into practice (pp. 55–72). London: Longman.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematic for the organizational of turn-taking for conversation. *Language, 50*(4), 696-735.

Tanaka, H. (2006a). Emerging English speaking business discourse in Japan. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 16*(1), 25-50. doi: 10.1075/japc.16.1.03tan

Tanaka, H. (2006b). Corporate language policy change: the trajectory of management discourse in Japan, the oppressed or the oppressor? In R. Dolón, M. Labarta & J. Todolí (Eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp.279-288). Spain: Universitat de Valencia.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Intercultural Conflicts: A Face-Negotiation Theory. In Kim, Y. Y., and Gudykunst, W. B. (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication*. (pp. 213–235). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Trompenaars, F., and Hampden-Turner, C. (1998). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business* (2nd ed.). McGraw Hill, New York.

Yamada, H. (1990). Topic management and turn distribution in business meetings: American versus Japanese strategies. *Text, 10*, 271-295. doi: 10.1515/text.1.1990.10.3.271

Special Acknowledgements

BERTHA DU-BABCOCK is an Associate Professor teaching (intercultural) business communication and Communication Strategies in Business Projects at City University of Hong Kong. She received the Distinguished Member Sward in 2010, the Kitty O Locker Outstanding Researcher Award in 2008 and the Meada Gibbs Outstanding Teaching Award in 2004. She also received Outstanding Article Awards in the Journal of Business Communication (2007) and Business Communication Quarterly (2001). Contact her at enbertha@cityu.edu.hk.