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Yunxia Zhu

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From cultural adaptation to cross-cultural discursive competence

YUNXIA ZHU
UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND BUSINESS SCHOOL, AUSTRALIA

ABSTRACT Cross-cultural competence is often studied as part of the foreigner’s one-way adaptation to the host culture while ignoring the dynamic nature of adaptation at the discourse level of interactions. To address this issue, this article proposes a conceptual model to study cross-cultural discursive competence exhibited in individual interactions in business settings. The model is based on relational empathy and genre theories and, in particular, it develops the notional concepts of ‘cultural space’ and ‘text reconstruction’ that stress a two-way cultural adaptation underpinned by building relational empathy and intercultural alliances. In addition, the study proposes that the triangulation of cultural, institutional and sociocognitive spaces is the key to understanding and interpreting text reconstruction as a dynamic process of two-way cultural adaptation. The three-space model is exemplified through an analysis of cross-cultural interactions that occurred at a business negotiation meeting.

KEY WORDS: cross-cultural discursive competence, cultural space, text reconstruction

Introduction

As the global economy is becoming increasingly interdependent and globalized, business organizations are confronted with a critical challenge of having the ability and competence of functioning effectively across cultural boundaries. The challenges are even greater when managers realize that the competence they function in their own culture may not be seen as such in a foreign or cross-cultural context. To address this issue of adapting to new cultural context, researchers (Berry, 2003; Bird et al., 1999; Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Johnson et al., 2006) have identified important theoretical dimensions to help expatriates with their overseas assignments. They point to the importance of developing an individual’s competence in the adapting to the new cultural and organizational concepts. Their research focus, however, is often placed on competence of long-
term cultural adaptation and little research has been done on exploring specific interactions such as business meetings and negotiations. An exception is found in Molinsky (2007), who fills in this research gap by examining specific interactions in business settings. In particular, he looks at the psychological tolls or negative emotions attached to individual interactions. However, he has not provided specific parameters for analysing individual interactions at the level of discourse. Additionally, all these researchers have concentrated their attention on one-way adaptation about foreigners’ adaptation to the host culture. It is therefore essential to examine discursive competence relating to cultural adaptation as a two-way interactive process, which remains the major objective of this study.

One way of remedying this research gap is to incorporate research findings from genre analysis which is of particular relevance because of its focus on analysing texts in business and professional settings. For example, Bhatia (2004) proposes discursive competence for professional members to function effectively in the area of their expertise. Effective discursive competence needs also to be explored in cross-cultural contexts. Although other researchers (such as Kong, 1998; Zhu, 2000) have done extensive research on comparing cultural differences in genre usage and competencies, very little research has been done about how different cultures actually adapt to each other in the process of reconstructing their discourse and communication. Relational empathy, according to Allan et al. (2003) stresses reciprocal understanding and collaboration across cultures. Drawing from these two sources of research, this article will propose a conceptual model of cross-cultural discursive competence (CCDC). Specifically, these two research questions are proposed:

1) What is CCDC composed of and what underpins the application of CCDC in specific cross-cultural interactions?
2) In what way CCDC can be used appropriately to reconstruct text in cross-cultural interactions?

This article is composed of four parts. First, it identifies the specific issues for research in the area of cultural adaptation at the discourse level of interactions. Second, it develops a model of CCDC for understanding text reconstruction as a two-way cultural adaptation. Third, it exemplifies the model with a specific case of a cross-cultural negotiation meeting. Finally, important findings about the model are highlighted followed by a discussion of theoretical and practical implications.

**Cultural adaptation and research issues**

The first research issue is related to the scarcity of literature in the area of cultural adaptation at the discourse level. Although extensive research has been done on cultural adaptation, research findings have mainly focused on the overall level of long-term adaptations. For example, a number of researchers (such as Berry, 2003; Black and Mendenhall, 1990) explored expatriates’ competence of...
adapting themselves on their overseas assignments. Molinsky (2007) also realizes this gap and so he makes an attempt to propose a conceptual model for studying individual interactions such as a greeting or job interview. Specifically, he borrows the concept ‘code-switching’ from sociolinguistics to refer to cultural adaptations as a switch from one’s own cultural behaviour to the foreign cultural behaviour. Molinsky (2007: 623) defines ‘code-switching’ as an alteration between two or more languages, dialects or language registers. This definition clearly specifies ‘codes’ of language as a unit of meaning. However, Molinsky’s (2007: 623) definition of ‘cross-cultural code-switching’ fails to meet with this parameter for a code. For example, Molinsky (2007: 623) defines cross-cultural code-switching as ‘the act of purposefully modifying one’s behaviour, in a specific interaction in a foreign setting, to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour’. While acknowledging Molinsky’s contribution to cultural adaptation of interactions, I have identified two further issues in this research area.

The second issue, as noted earlier, is that research on cultural adaptation has mainly focused on one-way adaptations (e.g. Berry; Black and Mendehall, 1990; Molinsky, 2007). The host is often viewed as a judge or ‘evaluative audience’ (Molinsky, 2007: 624) trying to assess the appropriateness of the foreigners’ behaviour. In real-life situations, more often than not, each party is playing an active role in order to achieve a desired outcome of the interaction. How one adjusts to the host culture and what behaviour to adjust depends, to a large extent, on agreement of both the host and the foreigner about these two issues (such as whether to use a handshake or a bow in Japanese culture). During the interaction, what rules or whose rules to follow will depend on mutual negotiation between parties rather than a one-way adaptation or code-switching.

The third issue is related to units of analysis. The units of analysis in existing literature tend to be long-term interactions such as a few years’ of assignment in a foreign country. Molinsky proposes an individual interaction as a unit and defines interaction as ‘a specific, bounded unit of interpersonal communication, as brief as giving feedback to a superior . . . or as long and complex as a negotiation’ (Molinsky, 2007: 624). However, this definition does not fully capture the complexities of units of analysis. For example, he explains that an interaction can be as simple as a greeting or as complex as a negotiation. These two interactions represent two vastly different sets of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Wierzbicka, 1996) or speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986). A greeting represents a simple speech act while negotiation is a complex genre composed of persuading, offering, counter-offering, and reaching an agreement. Treating them equally as one single interaction is problematic. It is essential to understand the discursive system underlying these complexities. Only a more in-depth discursive level of analysis can help synchronize the analysis of complex speech genres, hence the imperative to develop a conceptual framework to address these issues. Specifically, two sources of literature are drawn: relational empathy and genre analysis. The former offers the underpinning for CCDC for cultural adaptation while the latter provides feasible units of analysis of individual interactions.
Relational empathy

‘Relational empathy’ derives from Broome (in Allan et al., 2003: 307), who defines this term as ‘a relational process that involves individuals and groups working together to build a collective interpretation of the situation they face and develop a consensus for performing joined action’. Traditional conceptualization usually views empathy as a psychological construct or internalization of another’s emotions. Different from this, Broome sees empathy as a more subjective experience about achieving consensus through mutual interactions. Based on the interactive nature, this article defines relational empathy as a relational state between parties that indicates strong rapport, mutual understanding and affinity. However, methodologies towards relational empathy still need to be further developed (Broome, in Allan et al., 2003). Bruneau’s interactive empathy can offer some insight for further developing methodologies. According to Bruneau (1993), interactive empathy refers to the process of creating empathy through social interactions and communication. Relational empathy in this study is mainly explored in the thrust of social interactions.

This study focuses on putting relational empathy in cross-cultural contexts and pays close attention to face. Face is defined as a positive public image of self (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998). Cross-cultural interactions between culturally distant groups such as Americans or European New Zealanders interacting with Chinese tend to stress the importance of face values and facework management (e.g. Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998). Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2000) have identified a similar need for face and facework in cross-cultural business meetings involving the Chinese. In relation to face values is Van der Wijst and Ulijn’s (1995) study of strategies for cross-cultural negotiations which were developed based on framework of politeness principles and face value (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Van der Wijst and Ulijn propose that a negotiator is likely to use a range of strategies to avoid face-threatening act, and some of the strategies relating to building consensus are selected for this study, which include:

Strategy 1 (S1): Attend to interlocutor’s interest, wants, needs, etc.
S2: Seek agreement
S3: Exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy
S4: Avoid disagreement
S5: Assert common ground
S6: Offer, promise

Strategy 1 coincides with some of the essential listening skills Bolton (2005) stresses for social interactions such as using door openers, attentive silence and minimum encouragement. The other five strategies also aim to achieve consensus with a clear stress on seeking agreement and common grounds. This paper views these six strategies as essential for building intercultural alliances. It needs to be noted, however, cultural differences may exist in specific ways of applying these. Cultural differences between Chinese and the Western cultures in communication behaviour have been well documented (e.g. Hofstede, 1991; Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998).
Genre and discursive competence

Cross-cultural interactions are often related to the specific use of genres, hence a critical review on genre and discursive competence. First of all, genre is defined as ‘social action’ and typified responses to typified situations by Miller (1984). Genre can be best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). The ‘social stock of knowledge’ of genre (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974) is constructed and embedded in the discourse practice of the discourse community (Swales, 1990) or the community of social practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Second, genre researchers stress the importance of contexts in relation to text. An earlier reference can be seen in Bakhtin’s (1986) ‘deep semantics of genre’, by which he means that genre is deeply embedded in its sociocultural context. The Bakhtinian tradition exercises a great influence on further studies of genre. Other relevant works stressing the importance of social and cultural contexts can be found in Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995). In addition, genres are ‘historically and culturally specific, prepatterned and complex solutions to recurrent communicative problems’ (Guenthner and Knoblauch, 1995: 8). Recently, Van Dijk (2007) explains in more depth the dynamic nature of context in relation to cognition and text. According to Van Dijk (2007), contexts are mental models which consist of schemas of shared and culturally-based conventional categories for interpreting ongoing communicative events. Van Dijk’s definition of context offers insight for understanding cross-cultural interactions. People from different cultures have to make an effort to understand the other culture since one particular context may mean different things to different social and cultural groups. Besides, Van Dijk (2007: 36) also points out that contexts are dynamic and develop ‘ongoingly’ and ‘online’ in parallel with interactions and thoughts. Both the sociocognitive and dynamic nature of contexts are important parameters for understanding cross-cultural interactions.

Besides an emphasis on context, genre analysis also offers detailed and systematic interpretation of texts at various levels. For example, as Swales (1990) points out, genre is composed of communicative purposes and rhetorical structure of realizing these purposes. Also, according to Orlikowski and Yates (1994), genre is characterized by its purpose, form and content. Bhatia (2004) defines discursive competence as the knowledge and skills that expert professionals use in specific discourse situations of their everyday professional activities. He clearly delineates the relationship between discursive competence and disciplinary knowledge. Thus, a text is seen as reflecting the addressee’s discursive competence. Discursive competence involves textual competence, and professional and generic competencies. Bhatia (2004) proposes that discursive competence consists of textual space (textual knowledge), socio-cognitive space (genre knowledge in relation to professional practice) and social space (social and pragmatic knowledge). In particular, the sociocognitive space points to an inseparable link between genre research and professional practices of genre application.

The above types of genre knowledge are also relevant and applicable to the process of cross-cultural communication and adaptation, hence the need to introduce the model of CCDC in the next section.
A model for cross-cultural discursive competence

Drawing from the review of literature on genre study and relational empathy, this study defines CCDC as knowledge and skills of reconstructing cross-cultural interactions based on relational empathy and mutual cultural adaptation. Specifically, it proposes that cross-cultural discursive competence is composed of three spaces: cultural space, institutional space and sociocognitive space.

As shown in Figure 1, cross-cultural discursive competence is the repertoire of knowledge and skills which expert professionals employ in the course of cross-cultural interactions in business and professional settings. Cultural space extends the existing cultural dimensions (such as Hofstede, 1991), and essentially refers to the people’s potential to appropriately apply cross-cultural knowledge to build relational empathy. Specifically, cultural space can be understood from two perspectives. First, it is important to understand cultures in terms of culture-general knowledge and culture-specific (indigenous) knowledge and skills (Earley, 2002). For example, Hofstede’s (1991) and Hall’s cultural dimensions exemplify such understanding of cultures as a kind of culture-general knowledge. According to Hofstede, individualistic cultures such as the United States and New Zealand tend to emphasize self-achievement and individual goals while collectivistic cultures such as Japan and China tend to stress group values and collaborations. Hall (1976) studies cultural differences in communication styles based on to what extent the members of a culture share contexts. Indirect and implicit communication is preferred by high-context cultures such as Japan and China. In contrast, direct communication is preferred by low-context cultures such as the United States and New Zealand. Culture-specific or indigenous theories that are most relevant to this study include using culture-specific concepts such as the notion of guanxi (connections) (Fei, 1985), and mianzi (face and harmony) (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998) in the Chinese culture.

In addition to the national cultural contexts, it is also essential to give consideration to the dynamic nature of contexts (Van Dijk, 2007). For example,
national culture can interact with the organizational or interpersonal levels of context. For example, Zhu et al. (2007) found that an inadequately developed interpersonal relationship can even widen cultural divide in cross-cultural negotiations.

Second, cultural space goes beyond the study of cultural divide and, more importantly, it focuses on building relational empathy across cultures. According to Broome (quoted in Allan et al., 2003), relational empathy, with its focal point on achieving consensus and collaboration, provides an important basis for cultures to understand each other and work together. The six strategies proposed earlier can be applied in the analysis of individual interactions to identify whether relational empathy is in place or not.

Institutional space is related to professional expertise, and comprises professional knowledge required for membership of a particular discourse community. It is defined here as discipline-specific knowledge (e.g. technical knowledge among engineers), accrued experience (e.g. awareness of marketing and product knowledge for sales people) and institutional procedures (e.g. signing a MOU letter for business collaborations in forming joint ventures). More importantly it also includes institutional goals and objectives for specific interactions such as in negotiation and performance interviews. The institutional space can interact with cultural space in cross-cultural encounters. Interactants need to understand the possible difference in organizational objectives and procedures from their counterparts. For example, institutional goals and objectives should be seen as dynamic and can be adapted and modified in the process of cross-cultural interactions based on the consensus-seeking nature of relational empathy.

Sociocognitive space is primarily concerned with the knowledge about the specific application of genre. As noted earlier, genre is understood as ‘typified rhetorical actions in response to recurring situations’ (Miller, 1984) or ‘typified symbolic actions in response to recognizable situation types’ (Artemeva, 2005: 392). Genre tends to have its own conventions. For example, Schryer (2000) defines genres as ‘constellations of regulated, improvisational strategies triggered by the interaction between individual socialization . . . and an organization’ (quoted in Artemeva, 2005: 392). In this thrust, texts are seen as highly structured and conventionalized in terms of content and form. These conventions are often seen as shared amongst the members of a discourse community and this cognitive understanding of genre is well established (Bhatia, 2004; Hyland, 2002; Swales, 1990). Zhu (2005), for example, identifies the shared expectations of the Chinese business community reflected in Chinese business discourse.

A further crucial notion within the sociocognitive space is the prototypical images or the fuzziness of genre (Paltridge, 1997). Prototype theory (e.g. Rosch, 1973) is of relevance as it presents a way to understand how genres are categorized. As Paltridge (1997: 53) explains, ‘prototype theory claims that concepts cannot be reduced to the sum of simple components: they depend, rather, on a prototype that is conditioned by socio-cultural factors’. The concept of prototype is useful for reconstructing text, which also offers the flexibility for a two-way cultural adaptation.
Reconstruction of text indicates that the text of intercultural interactions does not have to be confined to the conventions of the host’s culture. Rather it is a more dynamic process based on the triangulation of cultural, institutional and sociocognitive spaces (see Figure 2). A cross-cultural interaction such as a negotiation meeting is seen as a reconstructed text using rules and linguistic strategies negotiated and agreed by both parties in light of building cultural empathy and intercultural alliances. Interactants in these alliances understand their own institutional and genre conventions using prototypical images that allow fuzziness of borderline texts (Paltridge, 1997). They can also extend this framework to interpreting texts produced by people from other cultures who may apply their own culture-specific prototypical system (e.g. a personal greeting may not be prototypical in an English sales letter, although it usually is in Chinese business sales letters; Zhu, 2005). So instead of stereotyping genre conventions as fixed and unchanging, interactants see text as composed of a continuum of prototypical images of content and form, which can be reconstructed jointly towards achieving intercultural alliances and collaborations.

![Figure 2. Triangulation of text reconstruction in cross-cultural interactions](image)

However, two negative factors may hinder CCDC and they include cultural distance and institutional stereotypes. According to Johnson et al. (2006), cultural distance is negatively related to processes and outputs of international corporations, and distant differences across cultures may constitute a barrier to effective communication in international business. Institutional stereotypes, for this study, are mainly related to the discourse members’ views and attitudes about the conventions of genre and to what extent they can extend the boundary of these conventions in a cross-cultural context. For example, if managers see their own genre conventions as the only appropriate criteria of genre it would be less than likely for them to be flexible with accepting and adapting to other culture’s genre conventions, hence negatively affecting CCDC.

Based on this model, this article views CCDC as a process of appropriately applying the three spaces (cultural, institutional and sociocognitive) to reconstruct the text and build relational empathy. In this way, CCDC also addresses the various research issues in cross-cultural competence as identified earlier in this article. The reminder of the article will exemplify this model with a detailed analysis of an authentic case of cross-cultural negotiation meeting.


**Exemplifying the model**

**DATA SOURCES**
The data were composed of seven authentic business negotiation meetings between New Zealand and Chinese business corporations and were collected in Auckland between 2004 and 2006. According to Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2000) authentic cases represent an important approach for the study of rapport management. These meetings were all initial meetings with seven different groups of participants from a number of corporations with the majority from the agricultural industry. The Chinese corporations were all semi state-owned and those in New Zealand were privately owned companies, which also reflects the difference in the nature of economy in these two countries. All the meetings were recorded and transcribed with the help and permission of two business consulting firms (China-New Zealand Consulting and AsiaLink) that provide links for New Zealand and Chinese business organizations to find trade partners and collaborative opportunities. Out of the seven meetings, one was selected for analysis for this article because it was the only successful negotiation, which is seen as relevant to the study of CCDC. A successful negotiation meeting is defined as a consummated business deal in which there is to be an indication of an ongoing business relationship. Compared with the other six initial meetings, this meeting had a positive outcome of a verbal agreement and both parties indicated their intention for further communication and collaborations.

Further data were drawn from interviews with the consulting firms to solicit information about the background information concerning the negotiation meetings and the negotiators’ interactions prior to the negotiation. The interview results are incorporated in the analysis mainly as part of contextual factors for understanding the negotiation meetings.

**CODING THE STRATEGIES**
As noted earlier, relational empathy is a relative subjective experience which can pose challenges for the coding processes. In order to minimize the subjectivity three experienced coders (the author plus two others) were used to identify the six strategies. Two to four coders are an appropriate number for making a reliable decision (Adair and Brett, 2005; Van der Wijst and Ulijn, 1995). It was easy to reach an agreement about some strategies but not with others. If there was a different view about the attribution of a strategy category for a particular sentence or clause, the majority’s view overrode that of the minority’s in this case. In addition, if one sentence was seen as performing the role of more than one strategy, only one strategy was attributed based on the final agreement amongst the coders.

**The cross-cultural negotiation case**
Thompson (2000) defines cross-cultural negotiation as negotiation conducted by participants from different cultures. Graham and Sano (1989) propose a four-process model for cross-cultural negotiations: 1) non-task sounding for
parties to get to know each other; 2) task-related exchange of information for parties to exchange needs and preferences; 3) persuasion in which parties attempt to influence the other side’s needs and views; and 4) concessions and agreement, which often is the summation of a series of concessions. These four processes are relevant to this study because they focus on both business transactions and interpersonal relations. In particular, the relational aspect is essential for understanding negotiations with the Chinese as it is known as a more relational-based culture than the Western cultures (e.g. Fang, 1999; Tan and Lim, 2002). Some background information about the negotiation meeting is provided.

THE SETTING
The negotiation meeting took place in Auckland, New Zealand in December 2004 between a New Zealand and a Chinese agricultural corporation. The Chinese people present at the meeting (four in total) included Wang, Managing Director of a Chinese agricultural corporation, Ms Li from Sino–New Zealand Consulting and Ms Liu, the interpreter. Also present was John, Managing Director of a New Zealand agricultural corporation. John was a European New Zealander from Macedonia originally who has exhibited the attributes of values of an individualistic culture. The claim about John’s cultural background had also been validated by the interview results with Sino–New Zealand Consulting who were familiar with him. Those who spoke and negotiated at the meeting were mainly John and Wang. All the names in this article are fictitious for the sake of confidentiality.

THE ACTIVITIES
Mr Wang came to New Zealand to promote his agricultural products including sunflower and sesame seeds. One of his major objectives in New Zealand was to meet John as a potential business partner. Before this meeting, John had sent a fax to Wang to express his basic requirements for the products. According to Sino–New Zealand Consulting, both John and Wang had consulted with them to find out more about their counterpart’s business and cultural background. The structure of the meeting roughly follows the four negotiation processes (Graham and Sano, 1989):

1. (38 mins) The two parties got to know each other. John provided information about his business and cultural background. John also mentioned the friendship with his Chinese neighbour in Auckland. Wang showed great interest in his talk.
2. (8 mins) John and Wang exchanged information about the specifications of sesame seeds. But John did not seem to be well-prepared. So Wang dropped his questions in order to avoid potential conflicts relating to face lose.
3. (16 mins) Wang asked John to offer a price. John only indicated he was prepared to pay based on competitive market price. In addition, John convinced Wang that he was keen on collaborating with Wang. Wang talks about his company’s expertise in exports.
4. (18 mins) They have reached a verbal agreement about their business deal. Then they talked about shipping and payment details followed by Wang’s lunch invite.
After the negotiation meeting, Wang and John had lunch together in a Chinese restaurant. They had an informal chat over lunch about their friendship and future collaborations. Wang also invited John to come and visit China in the future. The lunch ended on a friendly and warm note.

LANGUAGES
The negotiators spoke their own languages (John spoke English and Wang spoke Chinese) and communicated their ideas through the translation of the interpreter.

ANALYSING THE CASE IN THE CULTURAL SPACE
Cultural contexts are relevant understanding the target cultures in negotiations. New Zealand is characterized by market economy and it also belongs to individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1991). In contrast, China is an emerging country in the international market. Both market economy and traditional family values compromise each other and exist alongside each other. Confucian capitalism may help describe the context. The idea of ‘Confucian capitalism’ (such as in Yao, 2003) became well accepted in the past two decades as a concept to explain the capitalist development in East Asia. It also reflects the business context in China under both Western influence and Confucian principles relating to face and harmony. These paradoxical values are crucial for interpreting and understanding the Chinese business practices in a collectivistic and high-context culture.

As noted earlier, John and Wang have done their homework by contacting Sino–New Zealand Consulting to seek information about each other’s firm and cultural background. These interpersonal interactions prior to the negotiation meeting help reduce the cultural distance between them so that they can interact with more ease at the meeting. For example, John and Wang start their meeting with building rapport. As noted earlier, they spend a considerable amount of time (32 minutes out of the 80-minute meeting) in Process 1 in which John talks about his family, cultural background and his business. Both parties seem to understand the importance of the first process of building guanxi. Based on Zhu et al. (2007), initiating guanxi is essential for business negotiations with the Chinese. In addition, Wang and John also create a further interpersonal context to interact with each other more informally at lunch after the negotiation meeting.

ANALYSING THE CASE IN THE INSTITUTIONAL SPACE
This section discusses goals and objectives of the negotiation meeting based on relevant institutional knowledge. Based on a preliminary analysis of the negotiation meeting, three objectives have been identified. They include 1) achieving a business deal, 2) expanding the pie of negotiation, and 3) building intercultural alliances. According to Graham and Sano (1989), achieving a business deal is a given for any business negotiations and is embedded in cross-cultural negotiations as well. The major difference in negotiations, however, lies in whether negotiators intend to divide the pie or expand the pie to achieve a win–win outcome (Lewicki et al., 2007). Lewicki et al. also categorize the former
as distributive bargaining and the latter as integrative approach. According to Tan
and Lim (2002), collectivistic cultures tend to use the integrative approach while
individualistic cultures tend to apply the distributive approach. The differences
in objectives apparently will cause barriers to negotiation if they are not handled
appropriately. John and Wang have handled the objectives appropriately and
they both agree to promote business and build a relationship at the same time.
This shared preference can be substantiated by the considerable time they spent
on the non-task process. In addition, the relationship-related objective is also
self-evident in Wang’s question to start with:

**Excerpt 1**

Wang: I would like to know why you want to do business with me.

This statement clearly shows that Wang is not only interested in business deals
but also interested in the person he is interacting with, which suggests his inten-
tion of building trust and forming long-term relationships. John shares Wang’s
objective by providing very detailed information about his background and about
the friendship between New Zealand and China.

However, negotiating parties may not have exactly the same goals since they
have conflicting interests as in any selling and buying relationship. The focus on
integrative approach or expanding the pie can help parties to modify their goals and
coordinate them through strategic interactions (Wagner, 1990). Take Excerpt 2
as an example:

**Excerpt 2**

Wang: (With a laugh) I understand. You need me to tell you the oil percent first, and
then you offer me the price.

John: I really don’t know what percentage it should be.

Wang: (With a laugh) So you know Chinese and Chinese market very well.

Excerpt 2 occurs in Process 2 of the exchange of information. When Wang asks
John for specific requirements concerning the purity of the sesame seeds John
cannot give the details. The negotiation almost turns into distributive bargaining
when Wang says, ‘. . . you need me to tell you the oil percent first’. However, John
explains that it is not the case. Subsequently Wang accepts this by giving John
the approval of ‘. . . knowing the Chinese market very well’. By doing so, Wang
also modifies his objective or intent relating to the business deal although very
often a business deal involves providing specifications of products and prices. The
modification of his objectives saves John’s face, which in turn helps develop their
relationships. This is also an instance to show how cultural spaces complement
the institutional space.

ANALYSING THE CASE IN THE SOCIOCOGNITIVE SPACE

*Exemplifying the six strategies*

The analysis of sociocognitive space focuses on the six specific strategies for
building relational empathy and each is exemplified with excerpts taken from
the negotiation meeting. The first strategy is to attend to hearer’s interests or
needs:
Excerpt 3

John: It is very important for me and my associates in Macedonia to see, to talk, and to work with you – the representative of a very big country. For me, today is a very big day to make contacts.

As part of the response to Wang’s question (see Excerpt 1), John addresses Wang’s needs by pointing to the importance of doing business with Wang with emphatic use of verbs ‘to see, to talk and work with you’. Following this, John reinforces his point with an exaggeration of approval (S3) ‘... today is a very big day to make contacts’, which gives face and respect to Wang.

The first strategy is also expressed in other forms. For example, Wang employs attentive silence while John is giving an account of his cultural and business back-ground. In addition, John uses minimal encouragement such as ‘Perfect!’, ‘Excellent!’, when Wang gives him information about his company. These attending and listening skills are appropriately used and accepted during their interactions.

The second strategy is about seeking agreement. For example both parties try to seek agreement about the method of payment towards the end of the meeting:

Excerpt 4

John: For the smaller business that I deal with my Macedonia associates, like the company who directly export here, we always use the letter of credit.
Wang: Good, I prefer this method too.

Excerpt 4 shows how John tries to seek Wang’s agreement on using the letter of credit. Instead of asking for agreement, John tells Wang his preference, applying institutional space about the method of payment often used for exports in New Zealand. The third strategy stresses interest, approval and empathy:

Excerpt 5

Wang: Thank you very much for your clear explanation. I have understood what you said just now ... Now I will give you a brief introduction to my company.

Excerpt 5 occurs after their discussion about price. In response to Wang’s question to make an offer of price, John only gives an indication about his willingness to accept the competitive market price but stresses his intention to collaborate with Wang. In excerpt 5, Wang shows his appreciation (S3) to John by thanking him soon after John expresses his intention for collaboration. In addition, he also gives further approval (S3) indicating that he understood John, which also gives face and confirmation to John.

The fourth strategy is to avoid disagreement and both parties try to avoid potential topics that may lead to disagreement or distributive bargaining. For example, when discussing the relationship between China and Macedonia, John touched upon some political issues about Taiwan. Wang immediately says: 'Forget about it!' Wang’s comment clearly avoids any further development of this topic relating to a political stance, which may set barriers to building intercultural alliances.
The fifth strategy asserts common ground as shown in the following quote:

**Excerpt 6**

John: . . . I think most Chinese might find it is easier doing business with New Zealand. Most New Zealand people involved in trade, or the sale and purchase of services are honest, open and very frank people.

After his detailed introduction about his background, John makes a claim about the Chinese positive view towards doing business in New Zealand. He also describes New Zealand businessmen as ‘honest, open and very frank people’. These three likable qualities are a good selling point for establishing a common ground for business collaborations between him and Wang.

**Excerpt 7**

Wang: I will send you the information you want as soon as possible. I wish the very success of our cooperation. I also hope you make bigger business during our cooperation.

Excerpt 7 occurs towards the end of the meeting and Wang promises John that he will send the information John asks for soon (S6). The promise is followed by Wang seeking further common ground and collaborations (S5). Excerpt 6 also shows that one strategy can be used in close relation to another to reinforce the purpose of building intercultural alliances.

**Specific strategies used in the negotiation case**

Table 1 offers an overview of specific strategies used in each of the processes.

As indicated in Table 1, each of the processes involves using relevant relational empathy-building strategies. All the six strategies have been applied by both parties at various stages of the meeting and the wide use of strategies shows that relational empathy plays an important role in their interactions. So relational empathy, or non-task interactions, does not just occur at the non-task process as researchers (e.g. Adair and Brett, 2005; Graham and Lam, 2003; Graham and Sano, 1989) tend to believe. This finding points to the importance of continuation of relation building throughout the negotiation meeting.

Second, John and Wang use a similar number of strategies in each of the processes, which indicate their genuine effort of developing and maintaining their relationships. For example, Wang uses strategies 12 times and John uses 17 times in Process 1, and an even more similar number of strategies in Processes 3 and 4. In addition, similar types of strategies are employed by both parties, in particular in the final two processes, which may indicate they are more in tone with each other as their negotiation progresses.

Third, Table 1 indicates that the attending strategy (S1) is more frequently used than all other strategies throughout the four negotiation processes. In particular, they are more frequently used (8–11 times by each of the interactants) at the beginning and the final processes. The frequency of S1 shows how important listening skills are for developing relational empathy, although they
may not use exactly the same attending skills, a point I will come back to later in this article.

However, it needs to be pointed out that John uses strategies more frequently than Wang (9 vs 4) in Process 2 of information exchange. As noted in the meeting activities, John cannot provide the more detailed information about product specifications. He uses strategies more frequently applying S1 (attending Wang’s needs), S3 (approval) and S4 (avoiding disagreement) to protect both parties’ face. John’s strategies are reciprocated by Wang who drops his request for more detailed product specifications (S5). Excerpt 2 as discussed earlier represents part of the interactions during this process. The resolution of this potential conflict indicates that it is essential to reciprocate each other’s strategy in time in order to remove barriers towards building relational empathy and intercultural alliances.

**RECONSTRUCTION OF TEXT**

As noted earlier, cross-cultural interactions involve reconstruction of texts, which also applies to this case study. Both parties extend their prototypical images about negotiation meetings and attempt to reach an agreement about the processes, content and form of the negotiation meeting. First of all, they have agreed that they need to spend a considerable time on Process 1. John stretched his prototypical image for meetings procedures conducted in New Zealand where non-task process

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Table 1. Specific strategies used in the negotiation meeting
is supposed to be brief. Both cultural and institutional spaces are central to this agreement. Wang also adapts himself to focus on the business objective for this initial meeting as the process is not really a typical Chinese long courting process of negotiation (Graham and Lam, 2003).

The second point is related to what content is seen as appropriate for reconstructing their negotiation. As discussed earlier, sensitive topics relating to political issues and offer of price are tactfully avoided in order to assure their intercultural alliances.

Third, both parties accept and respect cultural differences in the specific use of form and communication styles. For example, the attending strategy (S1) is applied in different ways by John and Wang as noted in Excerpt 3. However, the different styles do not seem to obstruct their communication. On the contrary, the communication carries on smoothly. The acceptance of mixed communication styles can be related to the mixed use of languages at the meeting, which is beyond the topic of discussion of this article.

Last but not least, each party also tries to adapt to the other in order to build relational empathy. As noted earlier, John adapts to the Chinese communication style in the first process by providing extensive background information about himself. The adaptation is based on a two-way communication. For example, Wang adapts to John’s communication style towards the end of the negotiation. Excerpt 7 shows that both John and Wang use ‘good’ or ‘good question’ as minimal encouragement.

**Excerpt 7**

Wang: What is your method of payment?
John: For the smaller business that I deal with my Macedonia associates, like the company who directly export here, we always use the letter of credit.
Wang: Good, I prefer this method too. Next question is what time do you expect to get the first shipment?
John: Good question. China and Macedonia have similar seasons. I think we shall begin on August or September.

In sum, throughout the negotiation meeting John and Wang have exhibited their CCDC in their tactful text reconstruction. They have applied appropriate cultural and institutional knowledge to build their alliances.

**Conclusion and implications for future research**

This article has developed a conceptual model for understanding CCDC exhibited in cross-cultural texts based on relational empathy and genre analysis. A major contribution lies in the fact that the model views CCDC as composed of a two-way process of cultural adaptation and text reconstruction interacting with three spaces, namely, cultural, institutional and sociocognitive. An additional contribution is the development of six strategies as units of analysis to identify relational empathy. Major findings are summed up below.
First of all, cultural space is the most important underpinning for CCDC in individual interactions. It also interacts and complements the institutional and sociocognitive spaces. As shown in the analysis of the negotiation meeting, appropriate use of cultural space can help to expand the pie of negotiation and promote a win–win outcome. So the emphasis on alliances rather than on cultural divide will help interactants to focus on building relational empathy and accept culturally different ways of strategies for building relational empathy.

Second, interactions are seen as reconstruction of text in which both parties make an effort to build relational empathy and achieve institutional objectives. During this process, it is important to seek consensus and give face to each other since face-giving is an important value for establishing relational empathy. Besides, it is also appropriate to identify potential face-threatening acts and address or avoid them in time.

Third, it has been found that the initial process of a certain speech genre, such as the non-task process of a negotiation, can be crucial for the development of relationship in the subsequent stages. It can be inferred that communicating relational empathy is essential for both parties in the first process of interactions which will pay the way for them to move on smoothly to the next processes of interactions.

Last but not least, through a detailed analysis of the exemplar negotiation case this study has come up with some preliminary observations which deserve further attention. The first observation suggests that the lack of institutional knowledge such as non-specific offer of price has been complemented by an emphasis of relational empathy and need for business collaborations. The second observation is that relationship building occurs in all the processes of the negotiation meeting rather than just in the initial non-task process as existing research suggests. The third observation is related to the mixed use of languages which allows different use or acceptance of communication styles. This observation seems to be different from Adair and Brett’s (2005) research findings which suggest that interactants of mixed high- and low-contexts prefer low-context communication. These observations pose the need to further test the conceptual model and extend the study of CCDC.

This research has further important theoretical implications for future research in these areas. Theoretical model needs to be applied to more extensive data of cross-cultural interactions. I am quite aware of the limitations of my exploratory analysis of data drawn only from Sino–New Zealand interactions. So further research needs to be conducted across a wider range of cultures. Research also needs to be done in order to further test the six strategies and also to explore other relational empathy strategies through the analysis of authentic cases of cross-cultural interaction. The findings may eventually further contribute to developing and extending the model of CCDC. An additional research area is to extend the model to detailed data analysis of different types of individual interactions such as informal organizational meetings and performance review interviews.
This study has practical implications for cross-cultural interactions. On the one hand, it is essential for business managers to pay attention to establishing relational empathy in the interaction processes; in particular, the reciprocation and adaptation of these strategies are very important as shown in the case study. On the other hand, it draws the managers’ attention to different ways of establishing relational empathy across cultures such as different use of listening and attending skills (S1) in the case. It is important to adjust these and other related strategies when interacting across cultures. Above all, this study points to the importance of using the three knowledge spaces to examine the specific use of language. The triangulation of the spaces can help global managers to overcome stereotypes and turn cultural divide into successful businesses and intercultural alliances.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
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REFERENCES


YUNXIA ZHU is Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensland and her research interests include discourse and communication, written communication, cross-cultural management and business negotiation. She has published extensively in international journals such as Text, Discourse Studies, International Journal of Cross-cultural Management, Academy of Management Perspectives, Business Communication Quarterly, Journal of Business Communication, Journal of Intercultural Communication, Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, Document Design, Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics and Global Business Languages. She also has published research monographs, and her second book Written Communication across Cultures: A Sociocognitive Study of Business Genres published by John Benjamins won the Distinguished Publication Award by Association for Business Communication in 2006. ADDRESS: University of Queensland, Business School, Brisbane, Qld 4072, Australia. [email: yzhu@business.uq.edu.au]