# Building intercultural alliances: a study of moves and strategies in initial business negotiation meetings

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*Abstract*

*This paper proposes a conceptual model to study the discourse of initial negotiation meetings between members of New Zealand and Chinese corporations. It attempts to make two contributions to existing cross-cultural negotiation research, especially to rapport management. Firstly, it develops a conceptual position where negotiation meetings require mutual effort for building intercultural alliances. Secondly, the application and further division of initial moves (initiating moves-relational [IM-R] and initiating move-transactional [IM-T]), responding moves (responding move-cooperative [RM-C] and responding move-uncooperative [RM-UC]), and strategies into politeness strategies (PS) and uncooperative strategies (UC-S) offer an in-depth analysis of the nuances of positioning construction between parties. The findings indicate that a successful negotiation meeting establishes and develops intercultural alliances through appropriate use of moves and strategies. Negotiations, however, derail if inappropriate moves and strategies are used, and potential conflicts and communication breakdowns are not addressed in time.*

*Keywords:* *negotiation meeting; intercultural alliances; moves; strategies; New Zealand; China.*

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of globalization and internationalization, cross-cultural business negotiation has become increasingly frequent, hence the need to study the management of negotiation behaviour at an international level. This paper aims to develop a conceptual model to analyze the discourse of initial cross-cultural negotiation meetings using New Zealand (NZ) and Chinese negotiations as exemplar.

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Cross-cultural negotiation has long drawn researchers' attention (e.g., Adair and Brett 2005; Graham 1983; Graham and Sano 1989; Lampi 1986; Planken 2005; Van Zandt 1970). In particular, extensive research has been done on negotiating with the Chinese (e.g., Spencer-Oatey 2000; Spencer-Oatey and Xing 1998, 2004; Fang 1999; Li et al. 2001; Ulijn et al. 2005; Zhu et al. 2007) as China is becoming the largest market for international business in the world. A growing trend in such research is the use of discoursal approaches in the study of cross-cultural negotiation. A discoursal approach is defined by Widdowson (1983) as a research perspective which examines the interactive process. Researchers such as Bülow-Møller (1993), Lampi (1986), Charles (1996), Li et al. (2001), Spencer-Oatey (2000), and Planken (2005) offer insights into the nature of negotiation by analyzing the linguistic strategies used.

Also relevant to this study is research which focuses on managing rapport in negotiations in light of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Some representative studies can be found in Spencer-Oatey's (2000) work on rapport management and in an earlier study conducted by Charles (1996) on business relationship building with sales contacts. Their contribution lies in highlighting the importance of relational goals in cross-cultural negotiation. As discussed in Section 2.1, Spencer-Oatey (2000) has developed a five-domain framework for studying relational goals in negotiation: the illocutionary, content, participation, stylistic, and nonverbal domains. These five domains allow for a more comprehensive consideration of facework, which significantly extends the politeness theory of the illocutionary domain (Brown and Levinson 1987). However, while extensive research has been done in the illocutionary domain, there has only been limited research (e.g., Planken 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2000; Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2004) in the other four domains. This is one area to which this paper endeavors to make a contribution. This study also aims to extend Spencer-Oatey's rapport management to cross-cultural negotiation research.

As noted above, rapport management researchers mainly focus on the relational goal (Planken 2005), exploring the discourse relating to the social relations of interactions. Although they (Planken 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2000) recognize the coexistence of relational and transactional goals, more research is necessary to explore how common goals and mutual interests are achieved in order to fit the negotiation contexts. As Lewicki et al. (2007) note, these commonalities are essential for a win–win negotiation outcome. Existing research (e.g., Miles 2003; Zhu et al. 2007) shows that Chinese negotiators tend to focus on long-term relationships or relational goals, while Western negotiators tend to focus on transactional goals. It is therefore imperative to appropriately address potential conflicts involving different goals and help turn parties into collaborators and alliances. In order to address this issue, this paper proposes cultural alliances to extend rapport management. In addition, this paper adopts and classifies moves and strategies to extend the other domains developed by Spencer-Oatey. Specifically, the paper's aims are as follows:

1. Develop a framework of intercultural alliances (Collier 2003), which embraces both transactional and relational goals in negotiation and turns them into alliances (extending rapport management in general).
2. Incorporate negotiation moves, including initiating and responding moves (extending the participation domain), to examine the discourse of negotiation and management of conflicts.
3. Identify strategies, including positive politeness strategies and uncooperative strategies (extending the discourse content domain), to examine the micro-level discourse and its relationship with the macro-level discourse (e.g., moves and the building of intercultural alliances).

From a broader perspective, this paper also contributes to developing new approaches to enhance cross-cultural collaborations. Research on negotiation with the Chinese tends to focus on barriers and difficulties of understanding Chinese negotiation behaviors and styles (e.g., Fang 1999; Jehn and Weigelt 1999; Sheer and Chen 2003; Young 1994). However, several researchers, including Earley (2006) and Holden (2004), have realized that identifying cultural differences alone cannot address all the cross-cultural issues. This paper makes an attempt to shift the focus from cultural barriers to cultural collaborations. New Zealand and Chinese cultures were chosen since they represent the Western and Eastern cultural clusters, respectively (e.g., Hofstede 1991). New Zealand is becoming more and more involved in doing business with China, which is clearly evidenced in being the first Western country to sign the free trade agreement with China in 2008.

Specifically, this paper is organized as follows. Firstly, a conceptual framework is developed. This offers an underpinning guideline for the analysis of negotiation discourse. Secondly, details about the data and research methodology are outlined. Thirdly, a comparative analysis is provided for successful and unsuccessful negotiation meetings to show how appropriate moves and strategies can help promote intercultural alliances. Finally, conclusions and implications for further study in cross-cultural negotiations are discussed.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1. *Spencer-Oatey's five domains of cross-cultural negotiation*

As noted above, Spencer-Oatey (2000) proposes five domains of rapport management in negotiation. The first is the illocutionary domain (e.g., study of speech acts, such as offers and requests in negotiations) where politeness theory is centrally located. The second is the discourse domain, which includes sequence of interactional topic; the third is the participation domain concerning turn taking, such as when to respond to a conversation; the fourth is the stylistic domain regarding the register of language and choice of tone. The fifth domain relates to the use of nonverbal language. Since the illocutionary domain has been the most studied, Spencer-Oatey has highlighted the imperative for more case studies and for incorporating more theoretical perspectives. In response, Planken (2005) developed the other four domains through investigating the initiation of safe talks (relationally oriented topics) and the use of pronouns as indicator of relationships, both of which she found important for building relationships in negotiations.

The present study proposes a theoretical framework based on intercultural alliances to extend not only the four domains but also the rapport management theory. This approach incorporates both relational and transactional goals, which is imperative since the mismatch between them is often the cause of misunderstandings in negotiating with the Chinese (see Fang 1999; Sheer and Chen 2003; Ulijn et al. 2005).

### 2.2. *Intercultural alliances*

According to Collier (2003), intercultural alliances are alliances in which parties seek common goals, share responsibilities, and recognize their differences and interdependence on each other. Researchers in this area generally agree that alliances can be achieved through the negotiation of values, identities, and norms that incorporate perspectives from both cultures. To further understand cultural alliances, the following three dimensions need to be considered.

Firstly, it is essential to recognize both culture-general and culture-specific (indigenous) dimensions of cultural differences (Earley 2006). The most commonly cited general cultural differences include individualism and collectivism (Hofstede 1991) and high-context and low-context cultures (Hall 1976). The culture-specific or indigenous theories that are most relevant to this study include the concepts of *guanxi* or ‘connections’ and *mianzi* or ‘face’. *Guanxi* is a network of relationships (Fei 1985) and is essential for building relationships (Paik and Tung 1999; Zhu 2005, 2009; Zhu et al. 2006). Face, according to Ting-Toomey (1999), is an important concept for managing interpersonal relations. Spencer-Oatey (2000) further proves that public face is even more important for negotiating with Chinese people. These cultural values and dimensions have been proved to be relevant and useful for studying negotiations with the Chinese (e.g., Fang 1999; Spencer-Oatey 2000; Ulijn et al. 2005).

Secondly, intercultural alliances center on building empathy and interpersonal relations or “relational empathy,” defined by Broome (in Allen et al.

2003: 307) as "a relational process that involves individuals and groups working together to build a collective interpretation of the situation they face and to develop a consensus for performing joined action." Spencer-Oatey's (2000) pioneering work on rapport in negotiation has been noted earlier. This paper will view these relationally based frameworks as part of the intercultural alliances.

Thirdly, intercultural alliances focus on seeking common goals to achieve business objectives, also known as transactional goals (Planken 2005). To achieve these goals, negotiators need to be fully aware of their different needs and wants and, more importantly, understand their interdependence upon each other and achieve a win–win common goal (Lewicki et al. 2007). Lewicki et al. (2007) call this type of negotiation cooperative or integrative negotiation, while they refer to the opposite, i.e., focusing on one's own interest, as distributive or competitive negotiation.

### 2.3. *Stages in cross-cultural negotiations*

Negotiations are often seen as composed of a number of stages. Graham and Sano (1989) have developed a four-stage model based on their extensive study of American and Japanese negotiations, which they claim are also applicable to international negotiations all over the world (1989: 79).

1. Non-task sounding: negotiating parties get to know each other.
2. Task-related exchange of information: parties' subjective needs and preferences open to discussion.
3. Persuasion: parties attempt to influence the other side's needs and preferences.
4. Concessions and agreement (closing): parties accomplish an agreement.

The first stage is also seen as the beginning stage and the final as the closing stage. Unsuccessful negotiations can also have a closing, even without a deal. These four stages are useful for understanding negotiations in general since they reflect the development of relationship building and the business transaction. However, the four stages may not be sufficient to study how negotiators actually use language to initiate and maintain intercultural alliances, hence the need to introduce the concepts of moves and strategies.

### 2.4. *Moves*

Positioning, defined as the vantage point one takes through which one sees the world (Davis and Harre 1990: 46), underpins moves in negotiation, hence the need to discuss positioning in this section. Positioning can be seen as part of the sociocognitive process similar to frames or point of view. However, different from frames, it focuses on constructing a perspective through interactions or interactional roles involving the other party (Putnam and Jones 1982; Spencer-Oatey 2000). Through this interaction, location is created for mediating social relations and actions such as positioning credibility for one's firm and positioning a bottom-line price as attractive to the other party.

The term "move" was first introduced by Bellack et al. (1966) to study classroom discourse as a unit of interaction based on Wittgenstein's (1953) game theory. Later Goffman (1969) applied move to social interaction, an approach which is more relevant to this paper. According to Goffman (1969), a move is a course of action which involves real consequences, which offers some insight into its general meaning. This paper further defines moves as significant moments for positioning oneself in a negotiation, such as advocating one's credibility and needs. For example, commonly used moves in negotiations include making threats and appealing for sympathy. This definition of moves differs from Goffman's. It relates moves to negotiation positioning rather than focusing on when to make a move and take a turn. One conversational turn can involve more than one move since one can respond to an existing move while initiating a new move at the same time. A move can also be composed of more than one turn (e.g., using several turns to express one move of establishing one's credibility).

Moves can be used to initiate a position (an initiating move) or respond to an existing position (responding move). Initiating moves (IM) initiate a position, such as proposing a need for oneself. IM can be further divided into initiative move-relational (IM-R) and initiating move-transactional (IM-T) based on the two types of negotiation goals (relational and transactional). IM-R is used to express an intention to build rapport, while IM-T focuses on business-related issues such as getting a job done.

Responding moves play two functions in negotiation: they can either be responses to initiating moves of the same positioning, or they can change the meanings of the initiating moves by repositioning the meanings. The latter often happens in a negotiation between parties with different interests and needs (Lewicki et al. 2007). Within both these functions, one can provide a cooperative response to an initiating move. "Cooperative" is based on cooperative negotiation which stresses common goals (Lewicki et al. 2007), as noted earlier, and aligns with intercultural alliances. This kind of responding move is called responding move-cooperative (RM-C). In contrast, a responding move-uncooperative (RM-UC) tends to focus solely on one's own positioning. An example is interrupting the speaker to get one's own views across. RM-UC can be damaging to intercultural alliances (e.g., imposing a transactional focus regardless of the other party's interests in relational goals).

## 2.5. *Negotiation strategies*

To further explore how moves are constructed through language it is essential to look at strategies. Two sets of strategies are relevant: cooperative strategies and uncooperative strategies. The former promote cooperation while the latter focus on one's own needs and interests. Compared to moves, strategies function at a micro discoursal level, which tends to overlap with speech acts in the illocutionary domain such as making a promise.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness strategies can provide a basis for cooperative strategies as they are useful for building rapport (Planken 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2000), which is also a component of intercultural alliances. In addition, politeness strategies are related to face, which is an essential value for Chinese culture (Ting-Toomey 1999). Van der Wijst and Ulijn (1995) showed the validity of using politeness strategies in cross-cultural negotiations. Viewing politeness strategies as cooperative can also be justified through their focus on incorporating the perspectives of both speaker and hearer. This dual perspective coincides with two-sided messages, defined as messages incorporating the other parties' perspectives, a key feature of cooperative negotiation (Lewicki et al. 2007).

In contrast, one-sided messages, which tend to ignore the other party's arguments and impose one's own argument as the only right argument (Lewicki et al. 2007), frequently occur in less cooperative negotiations. These are not covered by politeness strategies so this paper proposes two uncooperative strategies: (i) ignoring the other party (as Uncooperative Strategy 1 or UC-S1) and (ii) interrupting the other party when his or her interest is not addressed (Uncooperative Strategy 2 or UC-S2).

To examine cooperative negotiation, this paper adopts nine relevant politeness strategies from Brown and Levinson (1987): politeness strategy 1 (PS1) attend to hearer; (PS2) seek agreement; (PS3) exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy; (PS4) avoid disagreement; (PS5) assert common ground; (PS6) offer and promise; (PS7) assume or assert reciprocity; (PS8) provide reasons; and (PS9) make jokes. These are chosen as they clearly reflect interaction, listening skills, making an offer, and persuading others, which are essential for cooperative negotiation (Lewicki et al. 2007).

This paper excludes the following six strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987): (i) intensify interest, (ii) use in-group identity markers, (iii) assert concern of S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants, (iv) include both S and H, (v) be optimistic, and (vi) give gifts for the following reasons. Firstly, intensifying interest merges with PS3 (exaggerating interest) since both cover the same aspect of interaction. Secondly, strategies (ii)–(v) are all related to cooperative initiatives which have already been covered by seeking agreement and seeking common ground, which should suffice for the negotiation

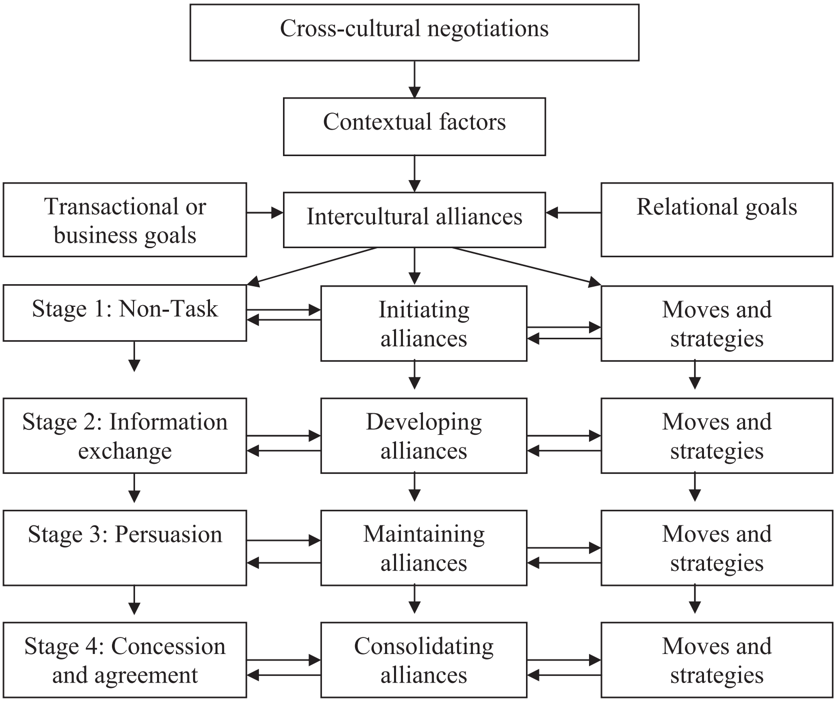


Figure 1. *Model of intercultural alliances for cross-cultural negotiations*

contexts as a whole. Finally, gift giving is not significant since it is treated as a ritualistic practice in all negotiation meetings we have observed.

## 2.6. *Proposing a theoretical framework for analyzing negotiation meetings*

Drawing on the above conceptual overview, this paper proposes a framework for understanding cross-cultural negotiations discourse (See Figure 1).

A brief explanation is given here since extensive theoretical background has already been provided. As shown in Figure 1, contextual factors (e.g., cultural, group, interpersonal) play an important role for understanding cross-cultural negotiations. Building intercultural alliances focuses on both transactional and relational goals. The non-task sounding stage is related to initiating intercultural alliances. Appropriate moves and strategies should be used to identify and seek common ground. The second stage aims at developing intercultural alliances. Conflicts at this stage tend to occur since both parties have started exploring each other's wants and needs (Zhu et al. 2007). The third stage of persuasion should be seen as part of maintaining intercultural alliances as the negotiation progresses toward more essential issues such as prices. The fourth stage of concession and agreement is important for consolidating intercultural alliances. Appropriate moves and strategies relating to offers and promises can be relevant.

## 3. Research methodology

### 3.1. *Data*

Two initial negotiation meetings (one successful and one unsuccessful) are analyzed in this paper.[1] A successful negotiation meeting is defined as a meeting that has a promising outcome about a business deal. Both meetings took place in Auckland and are initial negotiations between new contacts.

These two meetings were chosen following these selection criteria: (i) the negotiations were between Chinese and New Zealanders. In this research the latter refers to people (excluding those from China) who have been NZ residents for more than ten years. The Chinese negotiators were of Chinese nationality; (ii) the meetings were conducted in NZ cultural contexts; (iii) the content of the negotiations focused on business topics involving two parties interested in exploring business opportunities; and (iv) the meetings indicated clear stages of negotiation.

With the help of Hongda Consulting,[2] the two negotiations were recorded and transcribed. They were then coded by three coders (including the author), all of whom have a discourse-analytic background, followed by extensive discussion to reach agreement about the coding of moves and strategies.

### 3.2. *Background information about the two meetings*

Both initial negotiation meetings were conducted in Auckland, New Zealand, with interpreters as the Chinese group prefers to speak Chinese and use interpreters. Only the English translation is given in the extracts for analysis in this paper since the focus of analysis is on the content of the text.

In Meeting 1 (successful), the Chinese people present (four in total) were Mr. Wang and Ms. Li from Hongda Consulting (a successful agency for setting up business links with China) and one interpreter, Ms. Liu. In December 2004, Mr. Wang, the general manager of a Chinese agricultural corporation, came to New Zealand to look for business opportunities. One of his major duties in New Zealand was to meet John—general manager of a NZ trade company, who wanted to purchase sunflower and sesame seeds from Mr. Wang's company for a company in Macedonia. Before this meeting, with the help of

Hongda Consulting, John had sent a fax to Mr. Wang to indicate his basic requirements.

Meeting 2 (unsuccessful) was also organized through Hongda Consulting. The Chinese present at the meeting included a business delegation of ten people (one businessman and nine government officers from a commerce office of T Province), one interpreter, and one representative from Hongda Consulting. Only one NZ businessman, Michael, is present, who is the CEO of a large trade firm. Similar to Meeting 1, the Chinese team leader also had fax contact prior to the meeting with the help of Hongda Consulting mainly to provide some background information about their visit. The two major objectives of the delegation were to find a business partner for the businessmen and to promote the products and trade of T Province. Compared to Meeting 1, Meeting 2 involves a large Chinese group and thus public face more evidently. It also has clear business goals.

Follow-up meetings to both meetings were organized with Hongda Consulting to confirm the objectives of each party. According to Hongda, Meeting 1 achieved its objective with an oral agreement. However, Meeting 2 derailed: the Chinese group prepared specific questions to explore business opportunities as the government officers had extensive contacts and influence in state-owned companies, but they never got the opportunity to exchange this information.

## 4. Analysis of the two negotiation meetings

### 4.1. *Overview of negotiation meetings*

Table 1 provides an overview of the moves and strategies used by the two negotiation meetings.

As shown in Table 1, Meeting 1 has completed the four negotiation stages and the duration of the meeting is 72 minutes. In contrast, Meeting 2 does not fall into the normal four-stage model as it is derailed in Stage 2 and splits into a negotiation between two parties, hence the 15-minute interlude. In addition, meeting 2 also encounters significant communication barriers. Appendix B provides specific details about the moves (including IMs and RMs) used for positioning each party's needs and stances. Although the two meetings are similar in length (66 vs. 72 minutes), more than half of the time (38/72 minutes) was spent on Stage 1 in building relationship and trust in Meeting 1, while Meeting 2 spends more time on sorting out issues and communication breakdowns in Stage 2 (30/66).

In addition, Meeting 1 shows an appropriate use of IMs and RMs, and more PS within each stage, which finally leads to a verbal agreement between the two parties (see Appendix B). In contrast, Meeting 2 has experienced interruptions using more UC-S and, as a result, it is derailed at the second stage.

Table 1. *Overall structure of the two negotiation meetings*

| | | Meeting 1 | Meeting 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stage 1 | IM | 2 | 3 |
| | RM | 4 | 4 |
| | PS | 38 | 25 |
| | UC-S | — | 4 |
| | Time | 38 minutes | 15 minutes |
| Stage 2 | PM | 3 | 3 |
| | NPM | 3 | 4 |
| | PS | 23 | 19 |
| | UC-S | 1 | 6 |
| | Time | 8 minutes | 30 minutes |
| Interlude | IM | — | 1 |
| | RM | | 2 |
| | PS | | 9 |
| | Time | | 15 minutes |
| Stage 3 | IM | 2 | — |
| | PM | 4 | |
| | PS | 38 | |
| | Time | 10 minutes | |
| Stage 4 | IM | 2 | 2 |
| | RM | 4 | 1 |
| | PS | 42 | 7 |
| | Time | 14 minutes | 6 minutes |
| Total time | | 72 minutes | 66 minutes |

## 4.2. *Comparing the strategies used in the two negotiation meetings*

4.2.1. *Comparative analysis of Stage 1.* Table 2 details all the strategies used and shows that each party focuses on PS in Meeting 1 while UC-S occurs in Meeting 2.

The following compares the strategies of these two meetings in relation to moves of this stage. Negotiation Meeting 1 spends a long time on the non-task sounding stage. This stage is composed of the following moves (see also Appendix A):

– IM 1-R and RM 1-C: John and Mr. Wang greet each other.
– IM 2-R: Mr. Wang seeks information about the other party.
– IRM 2-C: John introduces himself and his business.
– RM3-C: Mr. Wang stops John from talking about Taiwan.
– RM4-C: John switches to friendship and collaboration.

Table 2. *Strategies used in Stage 1 (non-tasking)*

| | Meeting 1 | | Meeting 2 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | John | Wang | Mike | Lu | Feng | Ye |
| PS1 | 9 | 11 | 3 | — | — | — |
| PS2 | — | 2 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| PS3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | — | — |
| PS4 | 1 | — | — | | | |
| PS5 | 2 | 2 | — | | | |
| PS7 | 1 | — | 1 | | | |
| PS8 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 | | |
| PS9 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| UC-S1 | — | — | 3 | — | — | — |
| UC-S2 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Subtotal | 38PS | | 25 PS and 4 UCS | | | |

This stage starts with greetings and John's experience in Dalian, China, and his friendship with the Chinese people. By doing this, John shows that he has previous experience of establishing formal and informal relationships with Chinese, which is obviously relevant for his meeting with Mr. Wang.

Mr. Wang starts their negotiation topic after the above warming-up:

(1) Mr. Wang: Could you explain first your background, and why you want to do business with our company?

John: Thank you. I am first very surprised and pleased that I could make contact with the representative from Chinese agricultural corporation.

Mr. Wang's question clearly stresses his interest in the person and the other party's point of view (PS1), which is also essential for building relational empathy. Mr. Wang's question seems to occur at the right moment after they have both established a friendly relationship or some common ground (PS5) by sharing each other's background. John responds to Mr. Wang's question using emotive expressions "I am very surprised and pleased" (PS3, exaggerate interest and approval), which shows his positive attitudes toward his contact with Mr. Wang.

John then introduces himself and speaks about how he started business in New Zealand. His response at this point focuses on his past experience. However, it is communicative since this is what Mr. Wang is interested in (PS1). John skillfully unfolds his international background as a business representative for New Zealand and Macedonia, addressing Mr. Wang's query gradually:

(2) John: It is very important for me and my associates in Macedonia to see, to talk, and to work with Mr. Wang [speaking to the interpreter]—the representative of a very big country. . . . For me, today is a very big day to make contacts.

Here, John refers to Mr. Wang as a representative from “a very big country”, which gives face (PS3) to Mr. Wang. John then quickly moves on to emphasize the friendship between China and Macedonia (PS5 relating to common ground), which also points to an additional reason for doing business with Mr. Wang. As John clearly indicates here, this reason embraces both business deals and friendship. However, his long introduction is cut short by Mr. Wang when he makes a joke (PS9) about Taiwan:

(3) Mr. Wang: (laughs) Forget about it.

Mr. Wang maintains an attentive silence (PS1) until he responds with the above interruption. Both parties seem to understand what is needed to establish their alliances. Mr. Wang interrupts John’s joke to avoid potential conflict over a sensitive topic about Taiwan (PS4, avoiding disagreement). The joke does not seem to be funny to Mr. Wang and instead it threatens the public face because of the presence of others. John then flexibly adapts his topic to focus on the positive relationship with China (hence, PS5, seeking common ground). John seems to have handled well the cultural, political, and personal contexts at the same time, thus developing relational empathy.

In contrast, Meeting 2 does not have a smooth start. Communication breakdown occurs at the very beginning of Stage 1 (more details in Appendix B):

– IM 1-R and RM 1-C: Michael and the Chinese group greet each other.
– IM 2-R and IM3-T: Michael’s introduction and indication to start information exchange
– RM 2-C: Lu expresses gratitude.
– RM 3-UC: Michael interrupts with specific questions.
– RM 4-UC: Lu ignores this and continues the introduction to Feng, the group leader.

Both parties seem to focus on the relational aspect of the negotiation to start with using PS1 and PS2 (see Table 1). However, before the group leader Mr. Feng is introduced, Michael moves on quickly to business by interrupting Mr. Lu:

(4) Michael: This is a brief introduction, and I welcome you to Auckland, New Zealand. And I welcome questions if you have for me. I hope I can answer something.

In the above excerpt, Michael finishes relationship building by welcoming the Chinese to New Zealand (PS3), but he also initiates another move to indicate the start of business talk. There is a clear lack of relational empathy because the two parties have not reached consensus about when they should start the next stage, and how long the non-task stage should be, hence the clash between relational and transactional goals. Neither party seems to understand the needs of the other. Eventually they fail to establish an intercultural alliance, which is essential for the initial meeting. The following excerpt shows the different positions of the two parties:

(5) Lu: Although we have been here for only two days, the beautiful view of New Zealand has impressed us deeply. Here, I'd like to thank Hongda Consulting for their arrangement of this meeting and thank Mr. Chairman for coming to this meeting . . .

Michael: Well, I hope you can ask me some specific questions. It will be easier to start from that point of view.

Mr. Lu signals his intention to develop interpersonal relationship with a description of his impression of New Zealand and his gratitude toward others (PS3). However, his response does not seem to be shared by Michael, who tries to change Mr. Lu's positioning by insisting on specific questions (using UC-S2) even before Mr. Feng has been introduced. Michael's interruption not only threatens Mr. Lu's face but also causes the group to lose face as well, as Mr. Feng is the most senior person in the group.

Compared with Meeting 1, which establishes intercultural alliances successfully, Meeting 2 ends Stage 1 with conflict, failing to manage the clash between business talk and relational needs.

4.2.2. *Comparative analysis of Stage 2: task-related exchange of information.* Table 3 compares the specific moves used in the two meetings. Meeting 1 continues with PS strategies and only adopts one UC-S strategy. In contrast, Meeting 2 applies fewer PS strategies but more UC strategies.

The second stage of Meeting 1 is composed of the following moves (see Appendix A):

– IM 1-T and IM 1-R: John expresses a need for 1,000 tons of sunflower seeds.
– RM 1-UC: Mr. Wang asks for specifications.
– RM 2-C: John offers ambiguous explanations to Mr. Wang's request.
– RM 3-C: Mr. Wang drops his request and praises John's knowledge about the Chinese market.

Exchange of information is an important stage to develop intercultural alliances in business transactions. John starts this stage by indicating his need for 1,000 tons of sunflower seeds, followed by a request to Mr. Wang for product

Table 3. *Strategies used in Stage 2 (information exchange)*

| | Meeting 1 | | Meeting 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | John | Wang | Michael | Feng |
| PS1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| PS3 | — | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| PS4 | 4 | 2 | — | — |
| PS5 | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| PS6 | 1 | — | — | — |
| PS7 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| PS8 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| UC-S1 | — | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| UC-S2 | — | — | 2 | — |
| Subtotal | 23 PS and 1 UC-S | | 19 PS and 6 UC-S | |

specifications. Some conflict occurs when Mr. Wang tries to change John's positioning:

(6) Mr. Wang: But can you offer us first your requirements for these items, just roughly. For example, what is your requirement for the percentage of the purity?
John: The percent of the purity is. . . . In this business, the people know very well what that is.
Mr. Wang: But there should be a percentage.
John: Yes, should be.
Mr. Wang: So how many percent do you want it to be?
John: You know, you know how many.
. . .
Mr. Wang: (laughs) 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.
Mr. Wang: (laughs) So you know Chinese and Chinese market very well.

Instead of addressing John's request, Mr. Wang asks John to provide specifications in RM 1-UC using an interruption strategy (UC-S2). As shown above, exchange of information about the specification of the product takes place and both parties explore their business needs. John does not seem to be prepared for Mr. Wang's question. He either does not have the specific information or does not want to provide it (using avoiding strategies, PS4). By doing this, John protects his own face (not being able to provide required information) in front of his Chinese counterpart. Eventually, Mr. Wang drops his question by saying "So you know Chinese and Chinese market very well." In saying this, Mr. Wang switches to relationships, closing this stage cooperatively (RM 2-C), using approval (PS3) to ease the tension between the two parties.

In this stage, limited information seems to have been exchanged. The two parties have explored each other's needs, which is useful for the next stage. What is important is the way Mr. Wang and John handle conflict well by giving each other face (PS3), which is essential here for further developing intercultural alliances.

Meeting 2, in contrast, involves a series of communication breakdowns which leads to the collapse of intercultural alliances as shown by the following moves (more details in Appendix B):

- IM 1-R and IM 2-T: Mr. Fang asks general questions about NZ trade.
- RM 1-UC: Michael interrupts for specific questions.
- RM 2-UC: Mr. Feng continues with general questions about NZ exports.
- RM 3-UC and IM 3-R: Michael questions the relevance with a joke.
- RM4-UC and IM 4-T: Mr. Feng defends the relevance of his questions.
- RM 5-C and IM 5-R: Michael answers the question and stresses China–New Zealand relationship.

The moves of this stage become more complex as each party tends to use more than one move at the same time (Michael, for example, combines a question with a joke) to address the ongoing conflict between business and relational goals. Instead of developing alliances, the parties have to deal with the issue of what can be considered an appropriate question. When Mr. Feng asks a general question, Michael tries to change Mr. Feng's positioning by interrupting him (UC-S2) for more specific information. Mr. Feng ignores Michael's interruption (UC-S1) and simply continues with his positioning:

(7) Feng: I want to know the gross value and the structure of imports in New Zealand.
Michael: What's the situation of exports from China? Everything (with a laugh)!

Michael's response to Mr. Feng's question represents an RM-UC which is composed of two strategies: the first is UC-S2, interrupting the speaker and even challenging the appropriateness of the speaker's view. The second is a politeness strategy of using a joke (PS 9) to minimize the negative impact of questioning. However, jokes can be very sensitive in such situations and may involve face, in particular the public face (Spencer-Oatey 2000). Michael's humorous rhetorical question about China is not interpreted as such by Mr. Feng. Instead, it is seen as a satire about Mr. Feng's lack of knowledge, which is face threatening and also adds to the tension between the two parties. So Mr. Feng, instead of changing his positioning, challenges Michael:

(8) Mr. Feng: Let me explain why I ask this question . . . I feel the market of New Zealand is so small compared to the Chinese market. The gross value of imports and exports in China is over 800 billion US dollars, but New Zealand only has 1.8 billion US dollars. Even to our province, 1.8 billion US dollars is still a small figure.

Mr. Feng's explanation shows he actually knows the gross values of NZ imports. The message behind his questions seems to be related to his doubt about doing business through Michael's company. Compared to the first negotiation meeting, which uses hedges and avoids saying "no", Mr. Feng is very direct in challenging Michael's positioning. Apparently, this was not the original intention of his visit, and clearly shows the lack of intercultural alliances.

Michael now feels the tension and his long response focuses on repairing trust. He explains the imports as well as the specific exporting products in New Zealand. In addition, he makes the following comment:

(9) Michael: . . . 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.

By doing the above, Michael tries to identify some common ground with the Chinese group (PS5) showing his willingness to build trust with the Chinese delegates. However, the common ground does not seem to have been established since Mr. Feng goes on to ask two more general questions about NZ and China trade relations, which do not seem to expand on the common ground Michael is trying to establish.

It can be seen from the above analysis that, like Meeting 1, Meeting 2 involves more conflicts. However, unlike Meeting 1, in which conflicts are addressed positively and cooperatively, Meeting 2 adds further tension, resulting in communication breakdown. The clash between the two parties in Meeting 2 can also be explained in terms of different communication styles in high- and low-context cultures. Previous research (e.g., Paik and Tung 1999; Young 1994) indicates that the Chinese tend to follow an information sequence from general to specific, while the opposite is true of some of the low-context cultures. As neither party is prepared to accept the other's communication style in Meeting 2, Stage 2 falls apart.

4.2.3. *Comparative analysis of strategies of the rest of moves.* A summary of moves and strategies used for the rest of the negotiation for both meetings is presented in Table 4 (more details can be found in Appendices A and B).

Table 4. *Strategies used for Stages 3 and 4*

| | Meeting 1 | | | | Meeting 2 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | John | Wang | | | Michael | Feng | Ye |
| Stage 3 | PS1 | 4 | 4 | Interlude | PS1 | 3 | — | 1 |
| | PS2 | 1 | 1 | | PS3 | — | — | 2 |
| | PS3 | 2 | 1 | | PS6 | 1 | — | — |
| | PS5 | — | 3 | | PS7 | — | — | 2 |
| | PS6 | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| | PS7 | 1 | 5 | | | | | |
| | PS8 | 10 | 4 | | | | | |
| | Subtotal: 38 PS | | | | Subtotal: 9 PS | | | |
| Stage 4 Deal and closing | PS1 | 10 | 8 | Stage 4 Closing | PS1 | 3 | — | 2 |
| | PS2 | 2 | 3 | | PS3 | 1 | 1 | — |
| | PS3 | 1 | 3 | | | | | |
| | PS5 | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| | PS6 | 2 | — | | | | | |
| | PS7 | 3 | — | | | | | |
| | PS8 | — | 8 | | | | | |
| | Subtotal: 42 PS | | | | Subtotal: 7 PS | | | |

Meeting 1 progresses into the persuasion stage, although it also deals with a sensitive issue about price. Both parties seem to manage this stage well. The final stage is then reached with an oral agreement addressing their business needs (e.g., product specifications and quote of price). Meeting 2, however, is derailed into an interlude during which Mr. Ye makes some business queries of Michael, and the rest of the Chinese chat in small groups. A comparison of the two meetings is discussed below.

Meeting 1 actually starts with a difficult question in Mr. Wang's IM-T:

(10) Mr. Wang: Following your style of business negotiation, I'd like to ask one more question: Can you offer me the lowest price you can accept?

This is an essential question for both parties since it deals with the bottom-line price. Additionally, it is not a safe topic (Planken 2005) and is potentially face threatening if John offers a price too low or fails to offer a price. Too low an offer may throw both parties into a state of distributive bargaining. Failure to offer a price will not satisfy Mr. Wang's question. John seems to be fully aware of the challenge as he carefully addresses Mr. Wang's question:

(11) John: Honestly, but don't be surprised, I really expected this question. If you are here for a few days, I will organize to find what that

> limit is. But I am not sure, because this is my first time involved with these seeds. If you discuss wheat seeds, I know. But for this one, I don't know. But I really believe that we should do something, we really have an opportunity to do this business, because I trust in the opportunities for China to have this quantity, . . .

This indicates John is prepared for the question. He tries to convince Mr. Wang by indicating that he would know the bottom-line price of wheat seeds but not of sunflower seeds. This knowledge about the prices of other similar products gives face to both himself and to Mr. Wang (PS3). Even more persuasive is his stress on collaboration when he says "I really believe that we should do something, we really have an opportunity to do this business, . . .", which assumes or asserts reciprocal rights for doing business together (PS7).

John also helps to maintain his alliances with Mr. Wang who, in turn, decides to drop his question and moves on to introducing his company in more detail, which is also an indication of good will for cooperation. John continues being cooperative through the use of a series of attending (PS1) and approval strategies (PS3) to show appreciation about Mr. Wang's information. Each party addresses their business needs for "more information and more detailed requirements" followed by John's reassuring response to provide the information later after further consultation with his business partner in Macedonia. Eventually John successfully persuades Mr. Wang, which is also the climax for maintaining intercultural alliances. However, the whole process of making this acceptable is very challenging, and it would not have been possible without shared understanding and trust (relational empathy) from the negotiating parties and without the detailed information John provided about his connection with his Macedonian colleagues (transactional information).

Having managed the most challenging part of negotiating a price, the final stage becomes much easier for both parties. Stage 4 is predominantly transactional, and both parties use a series of politeness strategies (such as PS1, PS2, PS3), agreeing on method of payment and some shipping issues. The parties switch back to a relational focus at the closing when Mr. Wang invites John to lunch, and both parties wish the best for their future collaborations (PS5).

In contrast, the deadlock in Stage 2, descends into chaos in Meeting 2. There was silence and anxiety in the room. Some members even began to murmur about Michael and Mr. Feng's dialogue in Chinese. During this break of about fifteen minutes, Mr. Ye, the general manager of a synthetic chemical company and also the businessman in the group, approached Michael. Mr. Ye showed Michael a brochure about his toothpaste product and expressed a need to find a trading partner to sell the toothpaste in New Zealand. Michael helped Mr. Ye by ringing one of his NZ colleagues, Jonathan, and gave Mr. Ye information about future communications with Jonathan. So, although Michael seems to be prepared for the meeting in some way, the rest of the Chinese group appears to have lost interest. This interlude clearly indicates how a negotiation can derail if it is not managed appropriately.

In the end, Meeting 2 draws to a close with both parties exchanging gifts but with no real outcome achieved. Ironically, the gift the Chinese group presented to Michael was an introduction package about the business opportunities the group had been prepared to promote. As noted earlier, they seemed to have changed their original objective to a non-substantial negotiation. This interpretation was also confirmed by Hongda Consulting.

The above comparison sharply contrasts the outcomes of the two meetings. In Meeting 1, the negotiation could have gone wrong at several points if there had not been sufficient business knowledge or relational empathy and trust. It has to be noted that compared to the contextual factors of Meeting 1, Meeting 2 poses more challenges of dealing with public face of a larger group. Yet parties in Meeting 2 seem to exert much less effort to build intercultural alliances; instead, they insist on their own positioning and on using uncooperative strategies. Meeting 2 thus is an example about how parties can abandon an exploration of building intercultural alliances when confronted with communication barriers and breakdown.

## 5. Summary and conclusion

This paper has developed a theoretical framework based on intercultural alliances which extends Spencer-Oatey's (2000) rapport management. The further division of moves into IM-R versus IR-T and RM-C versus RM-UC, and strategies into PS and UC-S, offers insight for understanding how alliances are built in complex cross-cultural negotiations involving different types of positioning and conflict. The findings drawn from a comparative study of two initial business meetings between Chinese and NZ firms have confirmed the validity of this framework.

The study shows that appropriate moves and strategies were used in Meeting 1, while Meeting 2 failed to use them appropriately. For example, Meeting 1 is characterized by use of attending skills, giving face to each other, and seeking consensus, which establishes common ground between the two parties in the first stage. Whereas Meeting 2 did not complete the first stage successfully, confronted with threat to public face, which apparently led to communication breakdown. Both meetings suggest the importance of using politeness strategies and the potential danger of using uncooperative strategies. The failure of Meeting 2 also highlights the challenges of dealing with contextual factors: when negotiating with larger groups the public face is even more paramount. In addition, both meetings also demonstrate that jokes are not an easy strategy to use since they involve public face and can cause misinterpretations across cultures. The findings also highlight that the relationship between intercultural alliances, moves, strategies, and effective negotiations walks a tightrope between transactional and relational needs of both parties, while ineffective negotiators tend to impose their own positioning and disregard the others' needs and wants.

On the basis of the above findings, the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it is essential to develop intercultural alliances. An emphasis on this aspect will help negotiators to focus on building relational empathy and, more importantly, on working on how to incorporate both relational and transactional goals. Secondly, communicating empathy (PS3) and asserting common ground (PS5) are important strategies for both parties in the first stage to facilitate a smooth move to the second stage. Further, it is important to give face and stress common ground, especially at critical moments such as dealing with jokes or sensitive questions about the bottom-line price. Last but not least, it is essential to promptly address differential positioning before the situation snowballs into conflict, as shown in Meeting 2. Managing conflict seems to be essential for Stage 2, and the different approaches (e.g., focusing on alliances or on own positioning) to managing conflict can lead to different outcomes.

This study has implications for future research on cross-cultural negotiations. More research is needed to explore intercultural alliances building in various conflict-related situations. More strategies also need to be explored at the discourse level since this research is based on a limited comparison of two negotiation meetings. Furthermore, more negotiation databases across cultures should be established to test some of the findings of this study and to further substantiate and investigate the relationship between micro-level discourse and macro issues of promoting intercultural alliances.

**Appendix A. Overall structure of Negotiation Meeting 1**

| | John | Mr. Wang |
|---|---|---|
| Stage 1 | IM 1-R: Greeting (also chats about his experience in Dalian) | RM 1-C: Greeting (shows interest and agreement) |
| | | IM 2-R: Asks why John is doing business with him |
| | RM 2-C: Responds with background information | |
| | | RM 3-C: Interrupts to stop the sensitive topic of Taiwan |
| | RM 4-C: Changes topic to friendship | |
| Stage 2 | IM 1-T and IM 2-R: Explains product needs (10,000 tons of sunflower seeds) and asks for specifications | |
| | | RM 1-UC: Asks John for his specifications about product |
| | RM 2-C: Provides some ambiguous explanations | RM 3-C: Drops his question about specifications and praises John |
| Stage 3 | | IM 1-T: Asks John to make an offer of price |
| | RM 1-C: Gives indirect response to indicate competitive market price | |
| | | RM 2-C: Drops his question to introduce company information and credentials |
| | RM 3-C: Shows interest and agreement | |
| | | IM 2-T: Asks John to give more information later |
| | RM 4-C: Agrees and stresses collaboration | |
| Stage 4 | | IM-T1: Asks about method of payment, shipping, etc. |
| | RM 1-C: Responds to the queries with his preference backed up with reasons | |
| | | RM 2-C: Promises to send a quote and sample report |
| | IM 2: Request for chemical analysis | |
| | | RM 3-C and IM 3-R: Agrees and expresses his wish for collaborations followed by a lunch invitation |
| | RM 4-C: Thanks and accepts the invitation | |

**Appendix B. Overall structure of Negotiation Meeting 2**

| | Michael | Mr. Lu | Mr. Feng | Mr. Ye |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stage 1 | IM 1-R: Greeting → | RM 1-C: Greeting → | Greeting → | Greeting |
| | IM 2-R and IM3-T: Introduces company and invites questions | RM 3-C: Expresses thanks | | |
| | RM 3-UC: Interrupts for specific questions | RM 4-UC: Ignores and begins introducing Feng, the group leader | | |
| Stage 2 | | | IM 1-R and IM 2-T: Asks general question about NZ trade | |
| | RM 1-UC: Interrupts for specific questions | | RM 2-UC: Continues with general question about NZ exports | |
| | RM 3-UC and IM 3-R: Questions the relevance with a joke | | RM 4-UC and IM 4-T: Defends relevance of question | |
| | RM 5-C and IM 5-R: Answers the question and stresses China–NZ relationship | | | |
| Interlude | | | | IM 1-R: Asks about selling his toothpaste |
| | RM 1-C: Responds and rings his colleague Jonathan | | | RM 2-C: Thanks Michael |
| Closing | | | IM 1-R and IM 1-T: Presents gifts (company information) and thanks Michael | |
| | RM 1-C: Exchanges gifts | | | |

## Notes

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2. All personal and company names in the paper are fictitious for the sake of confidentiality.

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