Face and Power in Intercultural Business Communication: The case of a Japanese company in Australia

Yasuhisa Watanabe

School of Language and Linguistics
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

20th of February, 2009
Abstract

In intra-company intercultural business communication, an accurate exchange of information between co-workers is necessary to efficiently conduct business as a company. The norms of communication to be followed as well as knowledge of work being conducted that is shared by all involved, i.e., common ground (H. H. Clark, 1996), must be fully utilised in order to communicate smoothly between workers who do not share the same first language. Communication strategies, such as repair and codeswitching, are also used as necessary to achieve transactional goals in an interaction (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). However, at the same time, there is also a need to achieve relational goals in an interaction in order to maintain the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors. This can emerge in an interaction as sensitivity to the face of the interlocutors. Furthermore, being in an intra-company setting, the position, the knowledge of the products and the motivation to interact held by each interlocutor, all of which can be seen as an emergence of power held by each interlocutors (Raven, 1965, 1993), also play a role in shaping an interaction itself through the choice of language, norm of interaction and face being achieved in interaction.

This thesis investigates the video-recorded interactions between Australian employees working for a Japanese company in Australia and their Japanese superiors. Conversation analysis in conjunction with ethnographic approach is used to analyse interactions in intra-company business settings. The Rapport Management Framework proposed by Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2005) was applied to analyse interactional achievement of face, which takes into account factors such as face needs of and power held by the individuals and attitude of interlocutors towards each other. Common
features of intercultural communication, namely repair and codeswitching, and their effects on face achievement of interlocutors are also analysed.

The analysis has found that face and power are two fundamental and inter-related notions that shape the interaction in intra-company intercultural business communication. The norms of communication are already set amongst the co-workers as common ground, which includes aspects of individual workers such as the ability to complete work and proficiency in language. Face-threats seem to be interpreted by individuals when he/she perceives others undermine his/her expectation, which are already shared as common ground. Such threats to face may arise through repairs and codeswitching in interactions, as well as through utterances made by each other.

What individuals claim as his/her face can also be recognised as the social power bases held by him/her. Power relationship between interlocutors seems to determine the degree of face-threat the interlocutor with more social power bases are allowed to project over the interlocutor with less power bases, and the degree of face sensitivity that the interlocutor with less power bases must employ. Sometimes, it appears that exercising of power bases is a strategy to uphold his/her face in interaction, thus a necessary part of an intra-company business communication. Repairs and codeswitching are used as necessary in intercultural business communication in order to smoothly achieve the transactional goals, but at the same time, they also foster the negotiation and projection of face and power, i.e., relational goals in interactions between interlocutors who share more than two languages.

The future research in face can further investigate intra-company intercultural business communication, or goal-oriented interactions between interlocutors who have long-standing relationship, to analyse the inter-relationship between situation-specific
face and pan-situational face. Ethnographic information may be necessary to understand the contexts of the interaction that are crucial in such analysis.

Business people intending to enter into an intercultural business communication are advised to observe the power relationship between interlocutors as it determines the norms of communication. It can be accomplished by being aware of the claims on face that have been made by the interlocutors, not only in the current interaction but also in the past that may constitute his/her pan-situational face, or also known as reputation or expectations.
Signed Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

A Note on Ethical Clearance

An ethical clearance to collect sensitive interactional data from human subjects (GU Ref No CLS/07/03) was obtained from Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee in October 2003.
# Table of Contents

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ................................................................................................................. 10

**CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................... 11

1.1 **INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION** .......................................................... 12
1.1.1 Differences in Expected Discourse Order and Content ............................................... 14
1.1.2 Differences in Turn Taking Patterns ................................................................................ 14
1.1.3 Misunderstandings and Repair in Interaction due to Language Difficulties ............... 15
1.1.4 Differences in Politeness and Face Concerns .................................................................. 16
1.1.5 **The Role of Power in Business Communication** ........................................................ 18

1.2 **INTRA-COMPANY INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION** .......................... 19
1.2.1 **Focus on Intra-company Intercultural Business Communication** ............................ 20
1.2.2 **Need for Ethnographic Research** .................................................................................. 21
1.3 **OUTLINE OF THE THESIS** ................................................................................................. 22

**CHAPTER 2  LITERATURE REVIEW** ......................................................................................... 24

2.1 **PERSPECTIVES ON INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION** ...................... 26
2.1.1 **Repair** .......................................................................................................................... 28
2.1.1.1 How Repairs are Carried Out ....................................................................................... 29
2.1.1.2 Repairs in NS-NNS Interaction .................................................................................... 32
2.1.2 **Codeswitching** .............................................................................................................. 34
2.1.2.1 Linguistic Functions of Codeswitching ........................................................................ 36
2.1.2.2 Social Functions of Codeswitching .............................................................................. 39
2.1.2.3 Discourse Functions of Codeswitching ........................................................................ 43
2.1.3 **Power** ............................................................................................................................ 50
2.1.3.1 Types of Power in Social Relationships ..................................................................... 53
2.1.3.2 Influencing Power in an Interaction .............................................................................. 59
2.1.3.3 Social Power in Japanese Interactions ......................................................................... 62
2.1.3.3.1 Japanese Folk Notions of Social Power ................................................................. 63
2.1.3.3.2 Power Projected in Japanese Interactions .............................................................. 66
2.1.4 **Face** .................................................................................................................................. 68
2.1.4.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Face ................................................................................. 70
2.1.4.1.1 Goffman .................................................................................................................... 70
2.1.4.1.2 Brown and Levinson ............................................................................................... 72
2.1.4.1.3 Arundale .................................................................................................................... 74
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS ........................................................................... 141

4.1 FACE THREAT AND FACE ENHANCEMENT .................................................. 143

4.1.1 Face and Interactional Goals .................................................................. 143

4.1.2 Face and Relational Goals .................................................................... 154

4.2 FACE ACHIEVEMENT WITH INTERLOCUTORS WITH DIFFERENT POWER BASES ................................................................. 163
4.3 REPAIR: ACHIEVING INTERACTIONAL GOALS ........................................ 184
  4.3.1 Repair of Understanding Issues .................................................. 185
  4.3.2 Repair of Acceptability Issues .................................................. 205
4.4 CODESWITCHING: MANAGING RELATIONAL GOALS ...................... 213
  4.1.1 Reinforcing Understandings .................................................... 213
  4.4.2 Managing Floor ........................................................................ 223
  4.4.3 An Integrated Analysis of Codeswitching ................................... 229
  4.4.3.1 Persuasion Strategy with Intra-sentential Codeswitching .......... 237
  4.4.3.2 Managing Face, Kao and Power Relationship in Interaction Through Codeswitching .......................................................... 242

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION .................................................................. 248

5.1 SUMMARY ................................................................................... 248
5.2 FACE AND POWER IN INTRA-COMPANY INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION .......................................................... 249
  5.2.1 Face in Intra-company Intercultural Business Communication .... 249
  5.2.2 Influence of Power on Interactional Achievement of Face ......... 252
  5.2.3 Face and Power in Repair and Codeswitching ......................... 254
5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE RESEARCH ............................ 256
  5.3.1 Inter-relationship between Face and Power .............................. 257
  5.3.2 Chronological and Social Development of Face ....................... 258
  5.3.3 Implication for Business People ................................................. 260
5.4 CONCLUSION .............................................................................. 261
APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS ..................................... 262
APPENDIX 2: INSTRUCTION SHEET FOR STIMULATED RECALL INTERVIEWS .... 264
APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS ASKED IN SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS .......... 265

REFERENCES ................................................................................. 267
Index of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Model of power/interaction from the perspective of the influencing agent.................................................................60
Figure 2: Plan of the office .................................................................118
Figure 3: Plan of the meeting room in meeting 1 .................................................118
Figure 4: Plan of the meeting room in meeting 2 .................................................119
Figure 5: Plan of the meeting room during stimulated recall interviews and semi-structured interviews ........................................120
Figure 6: Company structure of Company S.................................................124
Figure 7: Workers involved in ordering and development of products and their chains of command ...........................................128
Figure 8: Flowchart for development of a product ...........................................131
Figure 9: Yamamba style make-up ..............................................................217
Figure 10: Looking at the bottles from the side..............................................243

Table 1: The relationship between sources of trouble and formats of other-initiated repair (Svennevig, 2008, p. 338) .........................29
Table 2: Subcategories in the six bases of social power and examples in business settings ..........................................................57
Table 3: Factors contributing to the interaction between American and Japanese workers on the production floor (Sunaoshi, 2005, p. 190) ..............106
Table 4: Summary of key Studies on Intercultural Business Communication ....109
Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written without the support of a number of people. I would like to acknowledge indebtedness and gratitude to them all.
First of all, I am extremely grateful to my principle supervisor, Dr. Michael Haugh, for his continuing support, mentoring and encouragement in the latter half of my candidature. Without his insight into the subject and support in analysing the interaction data, this thesis would have become something different from the form it is presented now.
I am also indebted to Dr. Kit·Ken Loke, my external supervisor, for her support in the first half of my candidature. Her help at the early stage of my candidature was invaluable in developing my research and writing skills at the early stage of my candidature.
Gratitude also goes to Dr. Glenn Stockwell, my external supervisor and a personal friend, for his continuing encouragement and providing me with comments from the perspective of someone not familiar with the field of pragmatics and face research.
I would also like to thank Dr. Susana Eisenchlas, my associate supervisor, for reading my final draft and giving me critical comments.
Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank the president and the employees of Company S who kindly granted me access to their workplace to video-record their interactions, and key members who, despite their busy work schedule, took time to respond to my interviews to provide me with an insight into their work and interactions.