Business Meetings: A Forum for Discussion or a Place to Take Action
A Discourse Analysis Study of Cross-Cultural Differences between French and American Business Professionals in the Workplace.

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Abstract

This study investigates how different linguistic and cultural backgrounds affect how people interact in a multinational workplace and how these differences can lead to miscommunication. Natural discourse was recorded during business meetings involving French and American employees at a multinational high technology company. Two cognitive models of meetings were constructed from the interview data to describe how each culture explains their own behavior and the behavior of the other culture involved. Discourse strategies of presenting and making requests were examined to shed light on the two groups' behavior during meetings. Data from the interviews suggest that the French perceive a meeting as a place to discuss ideas, but not to make decisions, whereas Americans view business meetings as a place to make decisions to take action. The presentation and request strategy results seem to support the perspectives articulated in the interviews. The author concludes that the development of cognitive models provides a crucial and often overlooked framework for not simply describing but explaining cultural norms.

Introduction

Business professionals in the global marketplace are aware of the need to learn a second language to be competitive. This is especially true if their first language is not English, the *lingua franca* of international business in most parts of the world. However, few seem to be aware of the fact that having a strong knowledge of the structure of English as a second language does not ensure successful communication. Although participants in a business activity may be speaking the same language and have similar general goals, miscommunication can occur due to[1] the cultural background of the participants. Different cultural norms can affect how different groups use language, interpret language, and affect the

means individuals employ to achieve their goals in a business environment. A problem arises when the dissimilar approaches to interacting in a business environment are misinterpreted as deficiencies in character rather than differing cultural norms.

Business meetings are one such example of an activity where this type of miscommunication may occur. In this study, a group of French and American employees who had had years of experience interacting with each other's culture worked together during regularly held meetings. The goals of the meetings were to coordinate their efforts to develop and release a new product through regular updates on activities and group problem-solving. These goals, however, were not explicitly defined at every meeting, but they were understood by both groups. The manner in which the two groups understood how to carry out these goals was different, so the way the groups used language to communicate, specifically to give presentations and make requests, was systematically misinterpreted.

The purpose of this case study is to explore and describe the norms of communication between these French and American employees from a multinational company. The study investigates both group's culturally based models of business meetings and the discourse structures of presentations given in meetings and requests for action made by participants in this specific business genre.

Literature Review

A distinction has been made by numerous authors between two sources of misunderstanding which may occur during cross-cultural communication: miscommunication at the syntactic-lexical level and at a pragmatic level (Marriot, 1995; Miller, 1995; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Thomas, 1987). Difficulties at the syntactic-lexical level, for example, using incorrect words or verb tenses, is not often a major source of misunderstanding because it can be recognized as a mistake. Studies reveal that participants usually do not view these types of errors negatively and, in fact, studies have shown that individuals try to accommodate to these types of difficulties by, for example, speaking more slowly to be more easily understood or helping the other speaker by correcting their mistakes (Marriot, 1995; Miller, 1995).

The more problematic miscommunication occurs at the pragmatic level where the expectations and assumptions are different. At this level, even though the superficial message may seem clear, the intent of the message may be misinterpreted. Jenny Thomas (1987) uses the term sociopragmatic[2] failure to refer to miscommunication caused by differing systems of belief and understanding of a given activity or event. How individuals from a specific culture perceive an activity will affect their behavior associated with the activity. For example, Miller (1995) points out that even though the two cultures (in her study the Japanese and

Americans) may have a "seemingly equivalent folk linguistic label for a particular activity, such as meetings, there may still be differences in assumptions about the purpose of what that activity entails and what behavior is appropriate to it," and this may affect "how business is accomplished through meetings" (p. 222). Scollon and Scollon aptly remark in their book *Narrative, Literacy, and Face in Interethnic Communication* that "…the greatest cause of interethnic problems lies in understanding not *what* someone is saying but *why* he is saying it" (12:1981).

The study of how miscommunication may occur because of differing cultural norms of communication behavior has been the focus of investigation in the fields of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Tannen, 1984) and ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974) for three decades. However, insights from these two fields have rarely been applied in a business setting until recently (for example Béal, 1990 & 1992; Bilbow, 1996; Clyne, 1994; Linde 1992; Miller, 1995; Roberts, Davies, & Jupp; 1992; Scollon & Scollon 1995; Stalpers, 1992). Research in these fields of study has clearly shown that different cultures have different conversational norms (e.g. discourse patterns) and when two different cultures come into contact there may be conflict due to these different norms. These perceived deviations from one's or the other's norms, as pointed out by Miller (1995), are not usually seen as cross-cultural misunderstandings but as "deficiencies in the person's character or personality"(p. 222) or more importantly as character traits common to certain cultures. These misunderstandings may lead to or reinforce negative stereotyping of another culture.

The numerous linguistic studies which have sought to examine and explain discourse styles of different cultural groups have focused on topics such as politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson; 1978 & 1987), rhetorical strategies (Garcez, 1993; Johnstone, 1986), cohesive devices (Scollon, 1993), turn-taking (Schegloff, 1972), and prosodic cues (Gumperz; 1982a, 1982b). An essential component of these linguistic structures is schemata which can be defined as the socially constructed sets of knowledge which guide an individual's expectations and inference during interaction. Although the concept of schema is used frequently in the different linguistic approaches to intercultural discourse, there seems to be little work outside of critical discourse theory that gives a framework for constructing the organization of the schemata of a group. To investigate this aspect of schema, we can find an existing methodological framework to construct or analyze how schemata is organized by using the concept of cultural models in the field of cognitive anthropology[3] (Quinn & Holland, 1987; Lakoff, 1987).

Cultural models are "presupposed, taken for granted models of the world widely shared by members of society that play an enormous role in their understanding of the world and their behavior in it," (Quinn & Holland, 1987). Cognitive anthropologists use cultural models to try to explain how meaning

systems are organized in peoples' heads and how this is linked to action in the real-world. These models usually take the form of socially constructed sequences of prototypical events, very similar to scripts (Shank and Abelson, 1977). Quinn and Holland explain that cultural models can be inferred by what people say, but they caution that this does not mean they translate directly into or are the sole determiners of behavior. With these cultural models we can attempt to show how cultural models frame experience by supplying interpretations of that experience and the inferences about it and the goals for actions (Quinn & Holland, 1987).

The Study

A multinational, high technology company, which will be referred to in this article by the pseudonym "CHS", provided the setting of this study. CHS is a French-owned company with numerous business units located in several countries throughout the world including the United States. This study was conducted at an American facility whose primary function is research and development. The site had originally been part of an American-owned high technology company that was acquired by CHS in the late 80's. number of French managers and engineers have been transferred to the facility over the last eight years and now make up approximately ten percent of the workforce. Although both English and French are spoken at CHS, the official language of the company is English. This was a practical decision made by management since most of the French employees can speak some English while very few Americans can speak French and they view English as the *lingua franca* of international business.

The data were collected from audio-recordings of two teleconference meetings and 10 individual interviews[4] Seven participants (5 French and 2 Americans) took part in the two teleconference meetings. The five French participants were representatives from five different departments included in the development of products: engineering, manufacturing, customer service support, product line management, and marketing. One of the Americans was the liaison with a partner company working on the project with CHS, and the other American was a representative from human resources who facilitated the meetings. The seven participants in these two meetings were about the same age, had a similar amount of cross-cultural work experience, and enjoyed relatively equal status within the group.

The purpose of the teleconferences was to bring all of the members up to date on the progress in each department and to characterize any problems they were experiencing. One-hour teleconferences were held every two weeks instead of longer face-to-face meetings because some of the participants were located in France. Due to the short period of time of the teleconference, the reports were generally brief status updates. Participants often interrupted the speaker to ask clarification questions or add information to the report. Discussion concerning the

information in the report usually followed the report. This part of the meeting usually involved problem-solving. The majority of the hour was taken up by participants giving presentations.

Analysis

Interviews

Comments made repeatedly by participants during interviews by the two different cultures about the different aspects of a meeting were used to construct models of cultural knowledge. The 'common sense' knowledge revealed in the interviews was assembled into propositions which explain the sequences of prototypical events of a business meeting. The analysis was divided into three general but overlapping topics: meeting organization, objectives of meetings, and explanation for the cultural behavior in meetings.

The analysis also focuses on what is not said because what is left out is *assumed* as common knowledge to a group. This approach entails having one culture describe another culture's behavior in an event. The culture describing the foreign culture's behavior will point out behavior that is different from their own. With this method of analysis, one can reveal different aspects of their cultural models as well as point out possible areas of miscommunication. For example, the American employees describe certain French discussion in meetings as "trivial," "esoteric" or "just having fun;" the French see this discussion as a normal process in the meeting. This shows that certain discussion by the French is "not normal" for the Americans, so it is viewed negatively, whereas the French do not notice it because it is a normal occurrence for them at a meeting.

Presentations

In order to analyze the presentations, each one was divided into topics and then the topics were parsed into speech acts. The total numbers of words spoken and types of speech acts used by each participant in the presentation were calculated. Since Searle's (1976) speech act taxonomy is too broad for the focus of this study, the author developed four general acts that emerge from the data as the types of acts that represent most of the text in a presentation. Two of the speech act categories were partly based on terms used in some critical discourse analysis studies (Fairclough 1995). The four types of acts that represent most of the text in a presentation were *organization*, *summary*, *formulation*, and *result*.

The *organization* acts are marked by words and phrases that make the structure of the presentation explicit to the listeners. The acts usually mark the beginning and end of topics or important structural elements such as the main point in presentations (e.g. 'my first topic is …', 'now, concerning…', or 'the main point

is …', 'in summary,', etc.). This type of act can also give background information about the topic which is not related to the summary of the topic. For example:

> Luc: …concerning manufacturing, you may have found in your cc mail some information about the estimate transfer price"

In this example, the speaker first marks the beginning of a new topic by stating "concerning manufacturing." Then the speakers tells the group where they can find the information but has not yet given a summary of the status of the transfer price.

The terms *summary* and *formulation* are used in the same sense as Fairclough (1995, pp. 22 & 117-119) uses these terms to describe media discourse. *Summary* refers to the acts summarizing or reporting the status of something in the presentation using just the factual information but not interpreting the facts, and *formulation* refers to the interpretation, which includes evaluation and the possible consequences of the summaries given by the speaker. These two categories of acts can be shown in the following sample taken from a meeting transcript:

> Marc: …there were 18 students … from various organizations in the group… so it's a wide panel of students.

The first two utterances are *summary* because they summarize the factual information or the status of a training program and "so it's a wide panel of students" is a *formulation* act because the speaker is interpreting the information given in the two previous summaries, (i.e. there are 18 student from many different organizations and the speaker interprets this information as meaning this is a diverse or "wide" group.)

Result acts indicate what happens, or what *will* happen, in response to the current status. This act can take two forms, first as a course of action that will be taken (i.e. a request). Second, it can be an event that will happen as a result of the current status. For example:

> Michael: … we'll modify the agreement and then it will be ready to be completed

In this example, after describing the status of the agreement with their partner company (not shown in this example), the speaker discusses the course of action that will be taken '*we'll modify the agreement'*. In the second act he states a future result of the action, '*it will be ready to be completed*'

Some presentations followed a prototypical sequence: starting with organization/background, followed by summary, then by interpretation of summary and finally the result of the report. Although this was a very common pattern, this sequence of speech acts was not the only pattern. Sometimes no *organization* acts marked the beginning or end of a topic. *Formulations* were often given before *summaries*, especially for evaluations, (e.g. "We're making great progress, we have completed…"). *Results*, in the form of a course of action, were given before *summaries* or *formulation* (e.g. What we have to do is X, and here's why…)…

Requests

Request is defined in this study as when a speaker indicates that they want the hearer(s) to do something or take some action and does not include requesting information as found in information questions. Requests for action were coded and examined based on the coding manual used in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989, pp. 273-289). The CCSARP model focuses on the level of directness or clarity of the illocutionary intent of the speech act. The requests made during the meeting were identified and placed into nine categories from the most direct to most indirect strategies. In hierarchical order, from the most direct to the least direct speech act, the nine categories defined in the CCSARP are *mood derivables, explicit performatives, hedged perfomatives, locution derivable, want statements, suggestions, preparatories, and strong/weak hints* (pp. 278-280).

In addition to identifying and quantifying the request strategies, the analysis investigated the content of the requests for action. Requests for action were divided into two general categories: 1) actions to be taken outside the meeting or 2) actions to be taken during the meeting. The requests for action to be taken outside of the meeting were in response to the current status of the product given in the reports; for example “We need to talk about a work plan.” This example was given after a report, and it refers to the need to take action on this issue outside of the meeting. The work plan was not discussed during the meeting when the request was made.

The second type of request focused on actions to be completed during the meeting where the request is made. This type of request primarily focused on the running of the meeting itself rather than on the content of the reports, for example “Let’s regain control of the meeting” or “Would you like to give your report?”. In the first example, the facilitator is requesting that the participants quit talking and start reporting. The second example is also the facilitator asking the participant to begin his report right away during the meeting.

Findings

Interviews

What appears in the interview data are two sets of cultural models, one specifically for meetings and the second, a more general model for problem solving. The two groups have different views on the underlying purpose of a business meeting as shown by the summary of propositions listed in Table 1. The French see a meeting as a forum for discussing ideas and the Americans as a forum to make decisions and take action.

Table 1

A Meeting is a Forum for Discussion

French view a meeting as a place to:
Discuss ideas (without necessarily coming to a conclusion)
Put ideas on the table
Generate ideas on what to do
Come up with potential decisions

A Meeting is a Place to Take Action

Americans view a meeting as an place to:
Make decisions
Take action, get results
Solve problems
Implement decisions

The French seem to focus on the discussion of issues as the primary objective of their meetings. The meeting resembles a brainstorming session where participants generate and discuss ideas. Making decisions does not seem to be an objective in French meetings. The French described the purpose of meetings as a opportunity "…to get enough ideas to think about what we can do, but not [to] decide on anything," and another French participant joked that "we like to show that we have lots of ideas." Americans concur with the French observations as seen in their comments that the French "…do not try to reach conclusions or get action items," and the comment that "meetings are not where action takes place for the French."

Americans view a meeting as an opportunity to finalize tasks. The range of tasks include making group decisions, exposing and solving problems, and getting started on implementing decisions. The French described American behavior at meetings by explaining that "Americans want to reach conclusions, make decisions," and that "they (Americans) go straight for the first concrete answer and we (the French) go in a series of discussions constantly interrupting each other." Americans describe their meetings as "action and results oriented," and a place where "we (Americans) get help on issues, take action items, and make it as brief as possible to get out to work."

In addition to describing the purpose of meetings in the interviews, the two groups also described other aspects of behavior during meetings in great detail such as punctuality, preparedness, and organization. The French were described as being

regularly late to meetings while the Americans were described as being timely. The Americans complained, and all of the French participants agreed, that "they (the French) are never on time" and a Frenchman commented that "Americans have more respect for other people's time by being on time." The Americans come prepared to meetings having read any pertinent documentation before the meeting as well as having prepared their reports; whereas, the French do not regularly prepare in advance for the meeting. One American noted that "the French have a lot of ideas but they don't put them down on paper for the meeting." French meetings are longer, they start and end later than planned and they have no detailed agenda to adhere to while the American meetings tend to be shorter, usually one hour, and to follow closely an agenda. A French participant explained that "French meetings are longer and less rigorous; everyone speaks at once." American participants stated that "American meetings are more disciplined and the French (meetings) are more social," "they (the French) have no concern for time when discussing anecdotes," and "(the French) won't end a meeting without proper closure of a discussion" whereas the same participant concluded, "the Americans leave when the scheduled meeting is over, whether the discussion is over or not."

A second set of cultural models used for problem solving were found in the data. These models, as show in Table 2, indicate that the two groups have different strategies for addressing issues. The Americans tend to focus on resolving the issue or problem in the most rapid and efficient manner while the French emphasize thoroughly analyzing the issue before taking appropriate action.

Table 2

French Cartesian Model

"Problem Solving Should Be Thorough"

French approach problem solving by:
Looking at issues thoroughly
Having long discussions on interpretation
Arguing all points including the finer points
Following a series of arguments to get to an answer

American Pragmatic Model

"Problem Solving Should Be Efficient"

Americans approach problem solving by:

Going straight to the solution
Not wasting time on what they view as unnecessary discussion
Finding a problem, fixing it, then going on to the next one

The French *Cartesian*[5] model seems to indicate that one needs to build a framework or context for a problem before one can attempt to resolve or solve the problem to, as one interviewee put it, "decide if the issue is worth investigating." Once this framework is built around the issue, one can rationally discuss the issue as seen in the examples such as "…the French place a problem in an overall framework which allows them to extrapolate potential consequences," or "they need to have a long discussion about how the issue is to be interpreted." In order to build this framework, one must discuss the interpretation of the issue at hand and as many points as possible relevant to the issue. As a French employee said, for example, "we need to argue all of the points," and "we start at a high level to work their way to an answer." Some American participants remarked that "they (the French) need to look at things very thoroughly," or "analyze things to death." According to the *Cartesian* model, once all of the finest points and details are discussed, one may rationally choose the most appropriate action to resolve the issue.

Whereas the French pride themselves as being Cartesian thinkers, the Americans pride themselves as pragmatic action takers. In a *pragmatic* model, the real world action is the most important element in dealing with an issue. The *pragmatic* model focuses on implementation. The only discussion that is necessary is that which is directly relevant to the issue at hand. One does not discuss all possible consequences. One discusses only the most probable consequences. A rapid, efficient discussion leads to a rapid decision to be implemented right away, as reflected in the remark "we just do it; we don't analyze it for four months," or "Americans want to reach conclusions, and make decisions in meetings." If the solution is not effective, one begins the process again to make another decision. Much of this model was also constructed from how the Americans described the French behavior at a meeting. Common statements made by Americans were: "It's hard to understand if it's (the discussion) is worth that much," or "The French let everyone speak even if what they say is not important," or "For getting things done (the French way) is frustrating."

The different foci of emphasis in meetings and problem solving may indicate that meetings for the two groups represent different stages or play different roles in the decision-making process. One could argue that French meetings represent an early stage in the decision making process because the focus is on generating ideas through discussion and final decision making is not yet important. The following comments seem to support this notion: a French participant stated "we don't take decisions seriously," and an American remarked in regards to decisions made by the

French in the meetings, “It’s hard to tell what’s serious and what’s not.” If this is true, then the American meetings may represent the final stage in the process because decisions are made and implemented during the meetings.

This interpretation of the data would also help to explain group disparity in terms of punctuality, preparedness, and organization of meetings. At an early stage in decision making where ideas are still being discussed, punctuality is less important than at the end of the process when final decisions are being made and implemented. At earlier stages, there is less emphasis on coming prepared to meetings because the preparation for the final decisions is taking place in the meeting itself. Whereas if a final decision is to be made at the meeting, being prepared to make the decisions is much more important. Finally, in early brainstorming stages, a strict agenda may not be necessary for the general discussion whereas, if there are a set number of decisions to be made and actions to be taken, a more highly structured meeting would enhance the process.

By constructing cultural models used to frame the event of business meetings, we have already shed some light on areas where the different models conflict. The points of difference between the models become useful indicators of where misunderstanding may occur. In this study, the areas seem to be primarily the amount of time spent on the discussion of issues or the analysis of issues, and the amount of action taken in the form of decisions. Numerous comments made by the participants seemed to indicate that these areas were problematic. The Americans seemed to have more trouble understanding French behavior. Americans often mentioned the French emphasis on thorough discussion, as in the following example, “When you ask most French managers about their status, they’ll talk for two hours. Americans will summarize.” Other comments made by Americans suggest that they found most of the thorough discussion as unnecessary, as the following statements show, “the French seem to be having fun talking” discussing “esoteric topics” or “trivia”.

Although the French made far fewer comments about how Americans conduct business in a meeting, the common difference often pointed out indirectly, was that the Americans only superficially cover issues or they react without thinking. Comments that pointed this observation out were statements such as, “Americans go straight to the first concrete answer,” or “they don’t analyze an issue, they just find a quick solution and don’t think about it.”

The following section examines the discourse structures of presentations and requesting strategies to identify the possible loci of miscommunication.

Presentations

Now that we have constructed different sets of cultural models to better understand how the two groups frame the event of business meetings, let us

examine the results of the presentation structure analysis indicated in the tables below:

Table 3

Mean Number of Four Types of Speech Acts per Topic by Both Groups

Group	Organization	Summary	Formulation	Result	# of Utt. Pe
French (4)	1.0	4.5	2.3	0.9	8.7
American (1)	0.8	1.6	1.8	1.4	5.6

Note: The number of individuals within each group is indicated in parentheses right of the group.

Table 4

Mean Number of Words Spoken during the Two Meetings by Both Groups

Group (French/American)	Per Individual (5/2)	Per Request (5/2)	Per Topic (4/1)
French	727	409	148
American	422	53	88

Note: The Per Individual and Per Request columns are averages from the 5 French and 2 American participants. The Per Topic columns are averages from the 4 French and 1 American participants who gave presentations. Fillers such as 'uh' were not counted.

There seem to be two remarkable differences in the results. First, the French and American presentations differ in length. Tables 3 and 4 show respectively that the French average 8.7 acts and 148 words per topic and while the American presenter[6] averaged only 5.6 acts and 88 words per topic. Second, although the structure of French and American presentations are similar in the use of *organization*, *formulation* and *result* acts, they differ greatly in the number of *summary* acts. The average number of acts per topic giving *summaries* for the French (4.5 per topic) was about three times higher than those of the Americans (1.6 per topic). These results seem to indicate that the French do a lot more speaking during a presentation (and a meeting) than the Americans. It seems as though the main difference in the amount of speaking occurs in the summary portion of the presentation by the French. As stated earlier, *summary* acts are the uninterpreted factual information given during the report. The great amount of factual information given during a presentation may reflect French participants' focus on discussion or their desire to build a context with which to better understand the issue, hence the cultural models for meetings and problem-solving. The difference seems to support the idea that the

French have a tendency to discuss issues in greater detail than the Americans. The low number of *summary* acts used by the American, compared to the French, may indicate that Americans prefer to 'cut right to the issue' without spending much time describing it through *summary*. In this fashion, the Americans avoid lengthy discussion and can come to a conclusion and make a decision more quickly, which also seems to support the American cultural models for meetings and problem solving.

Requests

Excluding the facilitator[7] the French and the American used very similar politeness strategies. Table 3 shows that the remaining American and the French were direct in their requests, using mostly *locution derivable* strategies where the illocutionary intent can be derived from the meaning of the verb, for example "We have to define why there is a price difference," or "I need to have some discussion with Alain." But they used few imperatives (*mood derivable*). Aside from the facilitator, the data generally indicated that the participants tended to avoid being indirect; they avoided using *hints*. In the remaining requests, there was a slight tendency for the French to be more direct and the Americans to be less direct but since the numbers are low, it would be premature to state that there is a clear difference. Although these are interesting findings in and of themselves, of greater interest for the purposes of this article is the total number of requests made by

Table 3

Mean Number of Different Politeness Strategies Used by Both Groups

Group	Mood	Explicit	Hedged	L.D.	Want	S.F.	Prep.	Strong Hint	Weak Hint
French (5)	0.4	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
American (1)	1.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	0.0	0.0

FrenNch total = 3.2 American total = 18.0

Note: The number of individuals within each group is indicated in parentheses right of the group. Mood = Mood derivable; Explicit = Explicit performative; Hedged = Hedged performative; L.D. = Locution derivable; Want = Want statement; S.F. = Suggestory formula; and Prep. = Preparatory.

individuals of the two groups. The French made just over three requests per person during the two meetings, while the American made 18. These numbers are even more remarkable when the number of requests per individual is compared to the total number of words spoken by each individual; the French averaged 727 words each during the two meetings while the Americans averaged 422. The French

averaged almost fifty percent more words spoken per individual yet the American made over five times as many requests as the average French participant. Given that the function of the requests was to take some type of action in the case study, this may indicate that Americans are more action taking oriented in meetings than the French. If the Americans are concerned with making decisions and implementing them, one would expect to find numerous requests for something to be done during a meeting. Whereas if the French are more inclined to discuss issues without making decisions, one would assume that fewer requests for someone to do something would be made, and the findings seem to reflect this.

Conclusion

This study sought to describe the cultural norms in communication and identify specific linguistic structures of the discourse strategies as well as cognitive framing of the business meeting. The focus on constructing the cultural schemata of both groups in addition to analyzing their discourse strategies gives a more complete picture of the business meeting interaction. The cultural models helped put the discourse strategies into context and explain their use. The strategies employed during meetings by the French participants were to give longer, detail-oriented presentations and make few requests for action. Whereas the American favored strategies of giving succinct presentations and making many requests for action during meetings. These findings are interesting because they help point out specific loci miscommunication. However, the strategies remain limited to simple description until they are placed in the context of the cultural models employed by the culture to understand the purpose of and appropriate behavior in a meeting. The cultural models help explain why the groups utilize these specific strategies. The French view the business meeting as a forum to discuss ideas but not necessarily make decisions, and, in their view, the appropriate way to solve problems is to approach the issue through lengthy, thorough analysis. The Americans, on the other hand, view a meeting as a place to make decisions and solve, not only discuss, problems. They view the most important aspect of problem solving as the solution rather than the analysis of the issue.

The two sets of cultural models developed in this study are by no means the only models employed during the meeting. A variety of models are applied to frame or guide the behavior of an individual through the different situations encountered during meetings. Some models focus on the specific activity itself, like a business meeting or an interview, while other more general models may be used during certain aspects of a meeting, like problem solving or decision making. The general model of problem solving is not limited to meetings, it is employed in any activity which involves problem solving, like, for example, negotiating.

Returning to the topic which was first addressed in the introduction, business

professionals need to be aware of how their cultural norms differ from those of the cultural group with whom they are working to communicate successfully. The cognitive models discussed in this study could be utilized by intercultural trainers as a theoretical framework for culture, or more specifically culturally influenced behavior. The individual models themselves could serve as useful tools for practical application in training providing both culture-general models of how cultural knowledge is organized and accessed, and cultural-specific models to explain and describe cultural behavior of specific cultural groups. Finally, these models provide a coherent explanation of behavior which can be applied to both specific activities and more general situations and could replace the common "checklists" of behavior often employed in culture-specific training.

In conclusion, although this is a preliminary study of developing the use of cultural models to examine cultural norms, the results suggest that these models provide an important dimension for studying intercultural communication. Their theoretical framework and potential application are of importance to both researchers and practitioners alike. The focus on developing coherent models of cultural schemata takes the crucial step from simply describing cultural behavior to explaining it.

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Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, culture refers to national culture, i.e. French, American. The author is well aware of (and has tried to control for) variables such as age, sex, socio-economic status, and position in the company which may subdivide the "cultural background".
2. The term sociopragmatic was originally coined by Leech (1983).
3. See D'Andrade (1995) for discussion about the development of the field of cognitive anthropology which includes the epistemology of cultural models.
4, Five individuals (three French and two Americans) were interviewed from the two teleconferences studied in this article. The remaining five interviewees were participants at other recorded meetings not included in this study.
5. The names of the two problem solving models are taken from how the interviewees characterized their *own culture's* problem solving styles.
6. In two other sets of recorded meetings at CHS (not included in this study), the number requests made by the American and French participants were similar to participants in the present study.

7. The facilitator was excluded from this part of the study because her role was different from the other participants and this seemed to affect the directness of her request strategies. The facilitator tended to use more indirect strategies such as hints. For further examination of the facilitator's requests, please see Christian (1996).

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