

Negotiating Effectively and “Politely” Across Cultures: Comparison of Linguistic Strategies among International Students in Japan

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Abstract: The goal of this study is to explore different styles of polite behaviors demonstrated in a negotiation setting among international students in Japan. In this study undertaken at an economics university in Japan, Indonesian, Japanese and German students participated in cross-cultural negotiation simulation exercises in International Management classes. Based on transcribed conversational data, linguistic strategies including silence, talk distribution, question asking and directness/indirectness were identified and analyzed in relation to the reported perceptions of the participants. The findings indicate that Japanese and Indonesian students may share certain cooperative negotiation strategies that show solidarity. Conversely, the German students used more direct linguistic strategies reportedly in order to be “logical” and “task-oriented”, which were perceived as “powerful” by observers. These contrasts imply that different linguistic negotiation strategies are likely to be used and interpreted very differently in different contexts and cultures.

Key words: politeness strategies across cultures, cross-cultural negotiation strategies, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Many of us recognize that a mismatch between cultural expectations and values can cause misunderstanding or conflict in cross-cultural situations. Different cultural values or expectations can also generate differing evaluations and interpretations of what is polite and what is impolite behavior. In this study, a negotiation setting was selected since negotiating is a key communication skill for many people at the workplace and “is arguably the most demanding and the most sophisticated of the core Business English skills” (Comfort, 2009, p. 4). In addition, Comfort explains that “the skilled negotiator must be aware of the potential difficulties arising from cultural differences which may undermine the effectiveness of their negotiating tactics, even if their language and communication skills are highly developed” (p. 4).

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the differences of politeness strategies among International students in Japan by examining the realization of linguistic strategies of silence, talk distribution, question-asking and directness/indirectness in naturally occurring language data. By analyzing them, this study attempts to show that what are considered good negotiating tactics among negotiators from one particular background may be inappropriate in another, and enhance our awareness of how cultural background can affect negotiating styles and tactics, particularly in relation to politeness strategies.

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Based on data collected in New Zealand in conjunction with the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project, Holmes and Stubbe conducted empirical research concerned with politeness at work. Settings included factories, government departments, small businesses and corporate organizations. “Although the project as a whole is oriented towards identifying effective communication and primarily aimed at a readership of workplace practitioners, Holmes and Stubbe (2003) emphasize and explore the relationship between politeness and power and how both are ‘instantiated’ in a range of discourse settings in the workplace” (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 2006). Further, research in Maori and Pakena (non-Maori, mainly European background) workplaces in New Zealand suggested that “unintended impoliteness can subtly infiltrate the core activities of workplaces, namely workplace meetings” (Holmes, Marra & Schnurr, 2008, p. 34). For example, the researchers examined differences in the ways in which Maori and Pakena New Zealanders open and close meetings, and the ways in which Maori and Pakena make critical comments about the behavior of workplace employees, relating these discourse moves to considerations of politeness and impoliteness. Their data suggested that “while Maori meeting openings tend to be direct, explicit, and elaborated, Pakena meeting openings are brief and minimal” (Holmes, Marra & Schnurr, 2008, p. 34). On the other hand, “Maori critical comments in the workplace tend to be indirect, implicit and generalized, while at least in some Pakena workplaces, criticism can be direct, contestive, and confrontational” (Holmes, Marra & Schnurr, 2008, p. 36). This study provided some indications of the cultural roots of potential areas of interethnic miscommunication and areas of potential offense and unintended impoliteness.

Power and solidarity can be considered key notions for understanding cross-cultural patterns of polite language use between interlocutors from different backgrounds. Since Brown and Gilman’s (1960) introduction of the interrelated concepts of power and solidarity, the dynamics of power and solidarity have been seen as fundamental to sociolinguistic theory. In Brown and Gilman’s system, “power governs asymmetrical relationships where one is subordinate to another; solidarity governs symmetrical relationships characterized by social equality and similarity” (Brown & Gilman, 1960). However, according to Tannen (1984, 1986), “power and solidarity are in paradoxical relation to each other. That is, although power and solidarity, closeness and distance, seem at first to be opposites, each also entails the other” (Tannen, 1984, p. 304).

Although much study on power and politeness has been focused on gender (Holmes, 2005) and some study has attempted to analyze cross-cultural phenomena in the workplace (Spencer, Oatey & Xing, 2003) there is still a need to explore diversity in power and politeness across cultures and the linguistic strategies that are generated in interaction between speakers from different cultures. Despite the importance of the concept of power and politeness in these research areas, scholars have yet to develop a systematic approach to the analysis of power and politeness in negotiating setting. Negotiation is considered to be one of the most important skills in international business. As Deresky points out, “as globalism burgeons, the ability to conduct successful cross-cultural negotiations cannot be overemphasized. Failure to negotiate productively will result in lost potential alliances and lost business at worst, confusion and delays at best” (Deresky, 2006, p. 168). While this process is difficult enough when it takes place among people of similar backgrounds, it is far more complex in cross-cultural contexts because of the differences in cultural values, lifestyles, expectations and verbal and non-verbal communication systems. Thus this study aims to explore different styles of polite behaviors demonstrated among interlocutors from different cultural background in a negotiation setting in Japan. In particular this study will seek to explain how negotiators from different cultures employ certain politeness strategies differently in order to conduct effective negotiation in a cross-cultural setting.

2. Method

2.1 Goal

The goal of this study was to explore different styles of polite behaviors demonstrated in naturalistic interaction among international students in Japan. In order to investigate different styles of polite behaviors among different groups, the following questions were addressed for this study.

(1) How do interlocutors from different cultures use the particular linguistic strategies of silence, talk distribution, question-asking and directness/indirectness in relation to politeness in a negotiation setting?

(2) What can we deduce about power and solidarity strategies that are observed in the behavior of interlocutors from different cultures in negotiating setting?

2.2 Participants

In this study undertaken at a university in Japan, Indonesian students, Japanese students and German students participated in cross-cultural negotiation simulation exercises in International Management classes. Table 1 indicates the background of each participant.

Table 1 Participant Background

Nationality	Gender	Age	major	College grade	English level	Native Language
German	male	21	Management	Senior	Advanced	German
German	female	20	Finance	Junior	Advanced	German
Japanese	female	19	Education	Sophomore	Intermediate	Japanese
Japanese	male	20	Education	Sophomore	Intermediate	Japanese
Indonesian	female	21	Accounting	Junior	Advanced	Indonesian
Indonesian	male	22	Finance	Senior	Advanced	Indonesian

The participants were all university students (age range from 19 to 22). While the Indonesian and the German students were business majors, the two Japanese students were education majors. In addition, Japanese students were both second-year students while Indonesian and German students were third-year and fourth-year students. The English proficiency level of the Japanese students was intermediate (TOEIC score 600–700) while the German and Indonesian students’ levels were advanced (TOEFL scores 550–600).

2.3 Data Collection

The data was collected in negotiation simulation role-plays in international management class at an economics university. Each group of four students read the background and assembled into two negotiating teams. According to the scenario roughly based on Alphalpha cross-cultural negotiation exercise, one team is visiting the other team to discuss possibilities of arranging a contract to manufacture shoes. The buyer team wants to find a low-cost, yet reliable source of production. The seller team is from a country with inexpensive labor and is interested in gaining the manufacturing contract. The purpose of the session is to see if a contract can be negotiated between the two parties. The negotiations should result in an agreement concerning basic issues such as price per shoe, quality assurances, and delivery, and any additional items either team decides is important.

All the sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. In total, there were three 20-minute sessions. Students were given 30minutes to prepare for the negotiation. Each team consisted of two students: two Indonesian students vs. two Japanese students (Session A), two Japanese students vs. German students (Session B) and two

Indonesians vs. Germans (Session C). After each session, follow-up interviews were conducted, in which each participant was given 5 to 10 minutes to describe orally their impressions of the negotiation with the other team. All the personal interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Further, after each of the three sessions, a survey was administered to 38 Japanese university students who had observed the sessions. The observers included 16 male and 22 female Japanese students who answered 13 questions (shown in Appendix 2). They were all sophomore students majoring in education.

2.4 Data Analysis

Based on the transcribed conversational data, instances of silence, patterns of distribution of talk and the number of questions as well as the types of questions asked were identified and analyzed. To analyze silence, the number of silences (of more than 2 seconds), total length of silence and the average length of silence by each group in the three sessions were identified. In order to analyze talk distribution by each group, the number of turns by each group, total amount of talk by each group in seconds and in minutes were identified. Further, the average length of talk and percentage of talk by each group in each session were calculated. Third, the total number of questions asked by each group in each session were counted and the types of questions used by each group were analyzed. There were seven categories of questions. The categories that emerged from the data include general information, specific questions, confirmation questions, closed-ending questions, small-talk questions, request questions and suggestion questions. A complete list of categories with an example of each is shown in Appendix 1. Finally, to explore the use of directness and indirectness, I attempted to examine the data to find relatively clear-cut instances of contrast and decided to focus on refusals used by each group.

3. Results

3.1 Silence

The number of silences, total length of silence and the average length of silence by each group in three sessions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparison of Silence across Sessions and Negotiation Teams

	Session A		Session B		Session C	
	Japanese	German	German	Indonesian	Japanese	Indonesian
# of silence	13	7	6	4	10	12
total length/S	104.49	29.16	19.34	17.86	61.91	38.29
average length/S *SD	**8.04 (2.45)	**4.17 (1.07)	3.22 (1.14)	4.47 (1.85)	#6.19 (4.65)	#3.19 (1.13)
total N of S	20		10		22	
total/L of session	133.65		37.2		100.2	
Average/L session	6.68		3.72		4.55	

SD** $t = 4.891, p < .001, t = 1.992, p = .075$, S = silence, N = number, L = length

As Table 2 indicates, the average length of Japanese silence (8.04) in Session A was the longest of all the groups and was almost double the length of silence of the Germans in the same session A.

3.2 Talk Distribution

Table 3 presents a comparison of talk distribution by each group. The number of turns by each group, total

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seconds of talk by each group in seconds and minutes are listed for each negotiation team by session. Further, the average length of talk and percentage of talk by each group in each session are shown in the last two rows of the Table 3.

Table 3 Comparison of Talk Distribution across Sessions and Participants

	Session A		Session B		Session C	
	Japanese	German	German	Indonesian	Japanese	Indonesian
# of turns	34	76	71	39	40	41
total sec. of talk (minutes)	250.8 (4.18 mi)	795 (13.25 mis)	449 (7.49 min)	397.2 (5.12 min)	325.2 (8.13 min)	389.4 (9.49 min)
Average length/	10.46	7.37	6.32	7.87	8.13	9.49
percentage/talk	24%	76%	53%	47%	46%	54%

= number, T = turns, sec = seconds

As Table 3 indicates, in Session A, German took more than twice as many turns as the Japanese students. Additionally, the total length of talk used by German (13.25 mins) was more than three times as long as that of Japanese students (4.18 mins). In Session B and C, the amount of talk distributed were almost the same between the two groups.

3.3 Questioning Strategy

The total number of questions asked by each group in each session is presented in Table 4. Furthermore, the frequency of various types of questions used by each group is shown, (see Appendix 1 for a list of categories of questions with examples).

Table 4 Comparison of Questions Asked by Each Group

	Session A		Session B		Session C	
	Japanese	German	German	Indonesian	Japanese	Indonesian
Total # of Qs	3	17	25	5	14	15
types of Qs						
#of General Qs	1	6	6	-	2	3
# of Specific Qs	2	10	9	-	1	9
#/ConfirmationQs	-	-	1	1	6	3
# of C/E Qs	-	1	8	-	1	-
# of small talk Qs	-	-	-	4	-	-
# of request Qs	-	-	1	-	-	-
#/suggestive Qs	-	-	-	-	4	-

= number, Qs = questions, C/E = closed-ending

Table 4 shows that both in session A (Japanese and German students) and session B (German and Indonesian students), German students asked far more questions than their counterparts. For instance, in session A, the number of questions asked by German was 17 while the number of questions asked by Japanese students was only 3. Moreover, in session B, the number of questions asked by German students was five times as many as that of Indonesian students. In session C, the number of questions asked by Japanese students was almost equal (14) to the number of questions asked by Indonesian students (15). While German students showed the tendency to dominate the interaction by asking a large amount of specific questions, Japanese and Indonesian tended to show “solidarity” by balancing the number of questions. More details will be discussed in the later section.

3.4 Directness/Indirectness Strategy

Excerpt 1 shows that there is a difference between the way Japanese and Indonesian students express their refusals. Japanese students' refusal were less explicit while Indonesian students used more direct refusal.

3.4.1 Excerpt 1 (Session C by Indonesian and Japanese students)

(Indonesian team offers \$15 per pair of shoes, which is too expensive for the Japanese team to accept).

(1) Japanese male 1: I see. I know what you want to say.....but fifteen dollars.....it's difficult for us.....it's hard for us....to...work.

(2) Indonesian female 1: So, how much do you want?

(3) Japanese male 2: Actually.....we think...five dollars.

(4) Indonesian female 1: Five dollars? Five dollars? It's impossible.

(5) Indonesian female 2: It's impossible. We can't do it.

(6) Indonesian female 1: Because we have to consider our quality, right? We serve our customers best quality, so we don't wanna sacrifice our quality for our customers....

(7) Japanese male 1: So...how about seven dollars?

(8) Indonesian female 1: No.....

For example in line 4, the Indonesian student gives an explicit refusal saying “it's impossible”. Then, another Indonesian female students steps in immediately and says “it's impossible. We can't do it”. On the other hand, in line 1, Japanese male students gives an implicit refusal saying “it's difficult for is....it's hard for us....to...work”.

Excerpt 2 shows how German students expressed their refusal differently compared to the Japanese students. It also indicates that German tended to prefer more direct and explicit refusal than Japanese students.

3.4.2 Excerpt 2 (Session A by German and Japanese students)

(1) Japanese male 1: Fifteen dollars.

(2) German male: Fifteen dollars? Oh!

(3) German female: Wow. Let's...(laughs)...OK, well. (German students speak to each other in German)

(4) German female: I think that's too much for us.

(5) German male: Yeah....too much for us.

(6) German female: Because we are not sure whether they will sell or not, so.....

Although German students' refusal is not as explicit as the Indonesians' refusal, in line 4, the German female gives a tactful refusal saying “I think it's too much for us” by using mitigation such as “I think”.

3.5 Survey Responses

On a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (disagree), the mean and standard deviation comparison of responses by the 38 observers for the first 12 items in the survey (appendix 2) is presented in Table 5. Responses for items 1 to 3 are shown under logical, those for 4 to 6 under polite, for 7 to 9 under comfortable and for 10 to 12 under successful.

Table 5 Japanese Observers' Perceptions of Negotiating Teams: Means (SDs)

Group/questions	logical	polite	comfortable	success
German	2.11 (0.68)	2.54 (1.07)	2.37 (1.11)	2.00 (0.77)
Indonesian	2.46 (1.04)	2.77* (1.03)	2.97 (1.12)	2.43 (0.81)
Japanese	3.63** (1.00)	2.14 (1.00)	2.57 (1.07)	3.46** (0.92)
Total	2.73	2.49	2.64	2.63
SD	1.12	1.06	1.12	1.03

Correlations: logic and success was 0.56**; comfortable and polite was 0.40**; **correlation is significant $p < 0.01$

A one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) tests comparing the Japanese observers’ survey responses by nationality of the negotiators: Results of 3-way comparison: $F = 26.05$, $p = .000$ (highly significant); post-hoc Scheffé tests (pairwise comparisons) showed Ger vs. Indo not significant ($p = .301$), but Ger vs. Jp and Indon vs. Jp were both significant ($p = .000$); that is, the Japanese students were perceived as significantly less straightforward and logically approaching the negotiation than the other two groups. Results of 3-way comparison: $F = 3.31$, $p = .040$ (significant); Scheffé tests indicated the only significant difference was between Indonesian and Japanese ($p = .044$); the others were non-significant (Ger vs. Indon, $p = .653$; Ger vs. Jp, $p = .$). Results of 3-way comparison not significant ($F = 2.693$, $p = .072$), but could be considered a tendency. The only pairwise difference according to Scheffé was Ger vs. Indon ($p = .079$); the other were non-significant (Ger vs. Jp, $p = .750$; Indon vs. Jp, $p = .319$). Results of 3-way comparison highly significant: $F = 28.097$, $p = .000$; Scheffé post-hoc tests showed no significant difference between Germans and Indonesians ($p = .105$), but very significant differences between Japanese and both the other 2 groups ($p = .000$ for both). Clearly, the observers perceived the Japanese negotiators perceived as less strong and successful than the other two groups.

Question 13 was “what are your impressions of negotiation styles of each group?”(see appendix 2). Table 6 summarizes the main responses by the 38 observers to this open-ended question.

Table 6 Survey Questions-Q13 Comments

Questions	# of students	answered
Germans looked friendly.	8	
German students speak clearly and straight forwardly.	6	
Germans were logical and insisted on their opinions.	6	
German students are skillful and successful negotiators.	6	
German students are confident and strong.	6	
Japanese are modest and good listeners.	5	
Japanese students have a soft, modest and polite image.	7	
Japanese are weak negotiators.	6	
Japanese don't insist on their opinions.	5	
Indonesians are soft and had nice smiles.	8	
Indonesians insisted on their opinions.	3	
Indonesians are good listeners.	1	

As is shown in Table 6, eight students reported that German students looked friendly and six felt that German students spoke logically and straight-forwardly. Six also reported that German were logical and insisted on their opinions while five thought that Japanese were modest and good listeners. Interestingly, six students reported that German students were skillful and successful negotiators while six wrote that Japanese were weak negotiators. Six reported that the German students appeared confident and strong, while five reported that Japanese did not insist on their opinions. Finally, eight reported that Indonesian students were soft and had nice smiles, while three answered that Indonesian insisted on their opinions, and one wrote that Indonesians were good listeners.

4. Discussion

As we have seen from the results of the study, there were different politeness strategies were used by interlocutors from different cultural back grounds. Some of the linguistic strategies demonstrated and identified were silence, distribution of talk, questioning and directness/indirectness. We saw that Japanese were using silence

to show solidarity in order to build rapport with the opponent in the negotiating team while German students were using a large amount of “talk” and questions in order to demonstrate power in the negotiation session. Indonesian students were demonstrating power by giving more direct refusals while at the same time they were accommodating the amount of talk and questions with the Japanese in order to show “solidarity”.

4.1 Silence as Power or Solidarity

As Tannen (1984) and others (Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Scollon, 1985) have discussed, “there are cultural and subcultural differences in the length of pauses expected between and within speaking turns” (Tannen 1984, p. 39). In my experience as an interpreter, American speakers who expect shorter pauses between conversational turns often begin to feel an uncomfortable silence by Japanese speakers. The result is that the American speakers end up doing most of the talking, which is a sign interpreted by Japanese speakers as dominating the conversation. However, after verifying speakers’ perceptions from both sides, I found that the Americans’ intentions were to fill in what to them were uncomfortable silences in order to ensure the success of the conversation. In their view, the Japanese participants were uncooperative and often failed to do their part to maintain the conversation. Yamada (1997) also supports this view stating “the Japanese emphasis.....is to listen carefully to the ongoing conversation.....but such silences are too many too long; the conversation seems to lag without conclusion” (Yamada, 1997, p. 80).

As reported above, according to the results of this study, the silences used by Japanese students were much longer than those used by the German students. The following excerpt shows an example of interaction between German and Japanese students.

4.1.1 Excerpt 3 (Session A by Japanese and German students)

- (1) German male: How many different styles do you have?
- (2) Japanese male 1 & 2: [silence 10.65 seconds]
- (3) German male: Great.
- (4) Japanese male 1 & 2: Maybe features for men.....[silence 7.54]
- (5) German male: Great. OK.....Good. Uhm.....how about your guarantee or warranty just in case they don’t get delivered or there are mistakes on the shoes....whatever....well, I am just curious, you know.
- (6) Japanese male 1 & 2: [silence 8.5 seconds] Two dollars for each pair of shoes....
- (7) German male: Two?
- (8) Japanese male 2: If we failed, we pay back....

Excerpt 1 shows how the use of long use of long silences by the Japanese students might have confused German students and possibly made them talk more in order to fill up the “pauses”. For instance in line 3, the German male student says “great” after a long pause of 10.65 seconds produced by Japanese students. Then, in line 5, the German male student again uses fillers such as “great, OK...Good, Uhm...” after Japanese students pause for 7.54 seconds. The German students’ confusion was shown when they used the word “great” or “good”, which did not carry any apparent referential meaning in this context.

As shown in Table 2, while the average length of silences in session A (Japanese and German students) was 6.68 seconds, the average length of silences in session B (German and Indonesian students) was almost half (3.72) of that of Session A. This could be partly due to the much greater silence on the part of the Japanese students as compared to Indonesian and German students. Further, although the average length of silence between session B (4.47) and session C (3.19) did not change strikingly, the number of silence used by Indonesian students increased

from 4 to 12 when they interacted with the Japanese students compared to when they were negotiating with German students. This might be due to a strategy that Indonesian students used in order to accommodate to the Japanese and show solidarity by increasing the frequency of silences. In interview conducted with Indonesian students, one of the female Indonesian students expressed that showing “friendliness” or “solidarity” is very important in interaction in Indonesia (*the word is musyawari*) in relation to Japanese *wa* (harmony). She mentioned that she felt very comfortable negotiating with the Japanese students because she felt mutual respect for “harmony”. On the other hand, according to her in the same interview, she expressed that she felt uncomfortable with the German students because she felt that they were asking too many specific questions during the negotiation.

4.2 Talk Distribution

It is possible that the large amount of talk in the session A by the German students made Japanese observers feel that German students were strong and skillful negotiators as opposed to Japanese who appeared to be “weak” negotiators who did not insist on their opinions strongly. In many Western societies, there is a common assumption that powerful people do the talking and powerless people are silenced. Similarly, many scholars including Spencer (1980) have claimed that men dominate women by silencing them.

As it was pointed out, it is possible that the use of long silences might have confused German students and made them talk more in order to fill up the long “pauses”. In negotiations, the two sides respond to each other, therefore the domination pattern is co-constructed not just one-sided. Therefore, in this kind of inequality in talk distribution should be avoided in order to show “mutual respect”, which is crucial for effective negotiation.

4.3 Questioning Strategies

During the interview, one of the female Indonesian students reported that she felt uncomfortable and uneasy because of the large number of specific questions asked by German students. The strategy of asking a large number of questions might be another contributor that made German appear more as “powerful” and “competent” negotiators. On the other hand, the number of questions asked by Japanese and Indonesian students were almost equal. This might suggest that both Japanese and Indonesian students were attempting to show “solidarity” by balancing the amount of questions without offending the other. Further, these two groups used more confirmation questions with each other whereas German students used one with Indonesian students and none with the Japanese students. This could indicate that both Japanese and Indonesian were being “considerate” and “respectful” by repeating what was said by the other group as a question form. Excerpt 2 shows how German students kept asking specific as well as general questions to Indonesian students.

4.3.1 Excerpt 4

(1) German female: So, what about your situation in your market? Are you selling a lot of shoes? How is your business going?

(2) Indonesian female 1: Actually, our shoes are doing quite good.....good innovation. Actually, instead of using the machine we also put some details with hands. So, it's all uniqueness.

(3) German male & female: OK (they say it almost at the same time).

(4) German female: So, who are buying your shoes in Indonesia?

(5) German male: Like old guys or young guys.....middle class?

(6) Indonesian female 1: [silence 4 seconds]

As can be seen, German students tended to ask many specific task-oriented questions. For instance, in line 1,

the German female asks three questions in one turn. In line, 4, the German female asks another specific question followed by the German male student who asks another question. In fact, the number of questions they asked in this session was five times as many as the one by the Indonesian students. In the follow up interview, Indonesian female 1 reported that she felt “uncomfortable” because of being asked so many specific questions by German students. Interestingly, none of the questions Indonesian asked were specific questions, but rather four out of five were non-business related, small talk related questions such as “so, do you like the food here?”. Interestingly, the number of questions asked by Japanese and Indonesian students in session C was almost equal. Further, these two groups used more confirmation questions with each other (Japanese students-6, and Indonesian students-3) whereas German students used once with Indonesian students and none with the Japanese students. For example, the confirmation question the Indonesian student asked was “so, you mean mass-production”.

4.4 Directness/Indirectness

Japanese culture is often considered to be a negative-face culture since people emphasize indirectness and politeness in interpersonal communication, particularly in more formal settings. Lakoff (1975) identified two benefits of indirectness: defensiveness and rapport. “Defensiveness refers to a speaker’s preference not to go on record with an idea in order to be able to disclaim, rescind, or modify it if it does not meet with a positive response” (Lakoff, 1975). On the other hand, the benefit of indirectness for rapport building comes from the pleasant experience of getting one’s way not because one demanded power but because the other person wanted the same thing. The use of indirectness can be often misunderstood in cross-cultural settings. For instance, many Americans may find that directness is logical and associated with power whereas indirectness might be the norm in communication in Japan. In Japanese interaction, saying “no” or expressing anything in a direct manner is too face-threatening to risk. Therefore, negative responses are often rephrased as positive ones such as “*soo desu kedo* (that’s right, but)” or “*soreha chotto*” (“it is a bit”), which can be quite confusing to interpret for many Americans. According to Tannen, indirectness is not in itself a strategy of subordination. Rather it can be used either by the powerful or the powerless. The interpretation of a given utterance, and the likely response to it, depends on the setting, on individuals’ status and their relationship to each other, and also on the linguistic conventions that are ritualized in the cultural context” (Tannen, 1994, p. 357).

As was seen in the result, it saying “no” explicitly was something that sounded too direct and tended to be avoided by the Japanese students. It is also possible that this kind of linguistic strategy made the observers perceive Japanese students as “polite” and “soft” but “weak negotiator” at the same time. However, indirect way of saying “no” such as “it is difficult” or “hard” was taken by the Indonesian students as meaning there was still more room to negotiate. In negotiations, this type of indirect approach can frustrate people who prefer more direct styles. For instance, while the Japanese students who employed the indirect styles in order to be respectful and polite could be perceived as “slow in coming to the point” by interlocutors who believe in saying what they think straightforwardly. On the other hand, the Japanese students who prefer indirect styles might find the direct “no” used by Indonesian students abrasive and unsubtle. According to Comfort, people who tend to prefer indirect styles in communication “are worried that the direct statement or question may put your partner ‘on the spot’ (under pressure), and could lead to loss of face if he or she is unable to respond” (Comfort, 2009, p. 25).

As was seen in excerpt 1 in result section, in line 1, a Japanese male student uses “it’s difficult for us....it’s hard for us...” instead of saying direct “no”. In the interview I had with one of the Indonesian female student, she thought she had to figure out what was difficult or hard about the figure. Therefore, she felt that she had to try

harder to convince them since it appeared that there was still much room for negotiation. On the other hand, Indonesian female 1 says “it’s impossible” in line 4. Then, Indonesian female 2 immediately follows saying “it’s impossible. We can’t do it” in line 5. According to the follow up interview, two Japanese male students felt that the negotiation was over as soon as they heard the word “impossible”.

The excerpt 2 shows how the German students expressed an explicit refusal to the Japanese students. Although it is not an explicit “no” or “impossible” as the Indonesian students expressed, German students still managed to express their refusal straight forwardly, although they soften it in several ways. For example, they used fillers such as *OK*, *well* and laughing, and they hedged with “I think” and “for us” and added a reason for the refusal. This kind of tactful refusal might have made Japanese observers perceive German students as “powerful” and “skillful negotiators”.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing strategies of different linguistic politeness strategies such as silence, talk distribution, asking questions and directness/indirectness used by speakers of different cultural backgrounds, it showed that different participants may interpret the “same” interaction quite differently across cultures. Judgments about what counts as polite, friendly or impolite behaviors are a matter of dynamic negotiation between participants in particular cultural context. While both Japanese and Indonesian students were showing “solidarity” by having almost the same amount of talk and sharing a large number of “confirmation” questions, German students on the other hand were demonstrating “power” by talking significantly more than their counterparts and asking a large amount of questions in negotiation although they attempted to show solidarity by using humor and explicit linguistic strategies. As a result, the Japanese observers perceived the German students who did a large amount of talk and asked a large number of specific questions as “logical”, “strong” and “skillful” negotiators. On the other hand, the Japanese students who appeared “polite” and “good-listener” were perceived as “weak” negotiators. Indonesians were perceived as “polite” but also “insisted their opinion”.

There were valuable suggestions that were generated from this study, however, the data collected was based on simulation exercise done by university students rather than naturally occurring conversation by real professional workers at the workplace. Furthermore, we should recognize that generalizations in cultural profiles and nationalities will produce only an approximation, or stereotype of national character. In addition to individual differences, German, Japanese and Indonesian people also comprise diverse subcultures whose people conform only in varying degrees to the national character. However, it can be a good starting point to help us develop some tentative expectations and strategies with which to manage the cross-cultural negotiating strategies of the three countries. Despite the limitation of this study, there are four useful implications that can be suggested for effective cross-cultural negotiation.

First, in some cultures, people may feel uncomfortable with long and frequent silences and fill in “uncomfortable” silences in order to ensure the success of conversation while in some cultures, communicators emphasize cooperative listenership (e.g., pauses, confirmation questions) to show respect and build rapport. Secondly, some speakers take more direct linguistic strategies in order to be “logical” and “task-oriented”. They could perceive implicit approaches by communicators from different background as “not being efficient” or “slow in coming to the point”. On the other hand, interlocutors who prefer less direct linguistic approaches could interpret direct linguistic speech acts as somewhat “face-threatening” and “not respecting harmony or rapport”.

Thirdly, if one group keeps talking and another group repeatedly gives away its turns, the resulting communication can be said to be unbalanced. Although the intention may not to dominate the other party, the effect or interpretation can be domination. Lastly, when interacting with communicators from different backgrounds, we have seen that people adapt their strategies in order to overcome perceived cultural differences. Because negotiation is constructed jointly by interactants, all sides need to be aware that different backgrounds can generate differing interpretations and/or evaluations of the same linguistic expressions. In order to avoid potentially disastrous consequence in cross-cultural negotiation, accommodating to differences in style and approach of the negotiating tactics may be an emerging strategy by successful global negotiators.

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Appendix 1

Type of questions:	Examples of questions:
general information:	So, what about your situation in your market?
specific questions:	So, how many employees do you have?
confirmation questions:	So, you mean, mass production?
closed-ending question:	Do you have a contract for that?
small-talk question:	How was your trip here?
request question:	Could you produce 2,000 shoes per month?
suggestion question:	How about if we can offer you our machine?

Appendix 2

Survey

(3 = neither agree or disagree) **Gender:** Male Female

1. The German students were straightforward and approached the negotiation logically.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
2. The Indonesian students were straightforward and approached the negotiation logically.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
3. The Japanese students were straightforward and approached the negotiation logically.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
4. The German students' negotiating styles were polite, soft and friendly.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
5. The Indonesian students' negotiating styles were polite, soft and friendly.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
6. The Japanese students' negotiating styles were polite, soft and friendly.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
7. I would feel very comfortable negotiating with the German students.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree
8. I would feel very comfortable negotiating with the Indonesian students.
1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree

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9. I would feel very comfortable negotiating with the Japanese students.

1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree

10. I think the German students were strong and successful negotiators.

1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree

11. I think the Indonesian students were strong and successful negotiators.

1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree

12. I think the Japanese students were strong and successful negotiators.

1. Strongly agree 2. Somewhat agree 3. Neither 4. Somewhat disagree 5. Disagree

13. Please comment your impressions on negotiation styles of each group.

The German students:

The Indonesian students:

The Japanese students:

Thank you very much for your cooperation!