

# **TURN-TAKING AND GAMBITS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

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# 1 Introduction

The extended network of international contacts, ranging from migration patterns, rapid international transport and international business transactions to new technologies like cable TV, satellites and the Internet, has led to a concomitant increase in communication across national and ethnic borders. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that these contacts may be negatively affected by severe communication problems which cannot be reduced to a lack of knowledge of the pronunciation, grammar or the lexicon of the languages involved. As a consequence, even the utterances of people who have studied a foreign language for a long time and have acquired a nativelike fluency will never be unambiguously interpretable (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:249).

The study of intercultural communication is fertile ground for interdisciplinary analysis. Interest in the matter is lively among anthropologists, ethnomethodologists, social psychologists, and scholars from the less theoretically inclined spheres of international business and politics. This paper aims at setting a contextual framework for a linguistic approach to this field of discourse analysis. Although intercultural variables and patterns of discourse are almost inevitably reflected in both spoken and written language, I decided to focus entirely on spoken face-to-face interaction.

Michael Clyne (1994:3) lists three approaches to intercultural communication:

- (1) comparing native discourse across cultures (the Contrastive Approach)
- (2) examining the discourse of non-native speakers in a second language (the Interlanguage Approach)
- (3) examining and comparing the discourse of people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting either in a lingua franca or in one of the interlocutor's languages (the Interactive Inter-cultural Approach)

After introducing the notion of face and the basic politeness strategies, I will proceed to present the systematics of turn-taking in both intracultural and intercultural discourse. A number of examples shall illustrate potential misunderstandings related to intraturn and interturn silences, overlap and interruptions as well as nonverbal communication between

westerners<sup>1</sup> and East Asians. Moreover, I will try to highlight the importance of gambits in negotiations between nonnative speakers, as these routine formulae have a considerable impact on both turn-taking and topic shifts.

Adopting the Interactive Inter-cultural Approach mentioned by Clyne, I will then apply the abstract principles of turn-taking to empirical data collected at the *European Centre for Modern Languages* in Graz. At this institution operating within the framework of the *Council of Europe*, English is used as a *lingua franca* on a wide scale. The chapters on intercultural discourse at workshops are supposed to provide a deeper understanding of the techniques native and non-native speakers of English use in order to accomplish turn shifts. Focusing on single case studies, I will present a number of dialogues illustrating possible cultural differences as well as the role of power relations between participants. The influence of politeness relationships is particularly emphasized at formal sittings at the *European Union*. During my 6-week internship in Brussels I had the opportunity to observe the work of chairpersons, officials and politicians using their native language, and interpreters in practice. Furthermore, I interviewed several members of staff, asking them about their experience concerning multilingualism at the Committee of the Regions. After introducing the institutions I visited and worked for, I will conclude this paper by pointing out the striking contrasts between the turn-taking systems employed at the *European Centre for Modern Languages* and the *European Union*.

## **2 A definition of intercultural communication**

The term 'intercultural communication' includes the entire range of communication across boundaries of groups or discourse systems, from cultural groups to the communication which takes place between men and women. Culture, by definition, is a "shared, consensual way of life" which "provides the shared tacit knowledge that enables members to understand and communicate with each other." (Haslett 1989:20-21). In linguistics, one can explain "intercultural communication as taking place whenever participants introduce different

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'westerner' denotes both Western Europeans and Americans/North Americans. The latter expressions are used here to refer to persons inhabiting the geographical area of the continental United States.

knowledge into the interaction which is specific to their respective sociocultural group, [...]" (Knapp/Knapp-Potthoff 1987:8). Increasing this shared cultural knowledge is essential in communication, because language is intrinsically ambiguous. Since meanings are constructed jointly by speaker and listener, it is always necessary for the receiver to draw inferences about the intentions of the sender (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:6).

## **2.1 Concepts of discourse and discourse systems**

### **2.1.1 Definitions of discourse**

Starting out from a narrow definition of discourse, one could describe this discipline as the "study of grammatical and other relationships between sentences." (Scollon/Scollon 1995:95). In this paper, however, I would like to introduce a broader concept of discourse analysis based on the social environment of the language user. Within a particular discourse system, communications that are framed within another discourse system appear inefficient. Communication across discourse lines is particularly likely to suffer from such misinterpretations. The *Co-operative Principle* as set out by Grice (1967/1975) is a case in point. Determining whether a speaker is a competent communicator within his/her cultural milieu, researchers regularly apply this principle. The maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner, however, reveal an anglocentric attitude to discourse and politeness, as expectations concerning the accurate content of the various submaxims are certainly culture-bound.

The ties and connections existing within texts (e.g. pronouns) are covered by the term cohesion. Coherence, on the other hand, does not refer to language as such, but to people's experience of the world. Language users rely on this knowledge when interpreting texts and conversations. As discourse analysts are concerned with the way language is *used*, their study is considered part of pragmatics (cf. Yule 1993:104-106).

The goal of conversation analysis is to reveal the shared methods interactants use to produce and recognize their own and other people's conduct. In their ethnomethodological approach to discourse, scholars like Sacks et al.<sup>2</sup> try to explain how people take turns, and under what circumstances they overlap turns or pause between them.

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<sup>2</sup> see Chapter 3.2, pp. 11-12.

### **2.1.2 Voluntary and involuntary discourse systems**

A discourse community "is a fairly homogeneous group classified along factors such as which generation, gender, income and occupational group, ethnic and cultural group one belongs to." (Frantsits 1996:8). However, even within a certain social environment a language user is simultaneously part of multiple overlapping discourse systems. In other words, everybody inevitably belongs to involuntary discourse systems such as gender, generation or race. While these categories cannot be chosen or changed, voluntary discourse systems such as the corporate system of the company where one is employed are joined of one's own free will (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:167).

### **2.1.3 Forms of discourse - Functions of language**

A set of preferred forms of discourse of a group serve as banners of identity and membership. Although virtually any communication will have both an information and a relationship function, a shift in focus may occur depending on the culture. While international business culture focuses on the communication of information, Japanese culture places a high value on the communication of subtle aspects of feeling (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:138). The use of anti-rhetorical forms of discourse also dominates the corporate culture, i.e. the discourse system practised in multinational corporations. The idea of focused interaction is obvious in the agenda of a business meeting, where even an item called open discussion will in fact be equally predetermined (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:184).

Goal-oriented discourse systems like the western corporate culture derive from the Utilitarian ideology. According to this philosophical movement laid out during the Enlightenment, the free, equal and creative individual is supposed to function as a rational economic entity. Moreover, the Utilitarian discourse system places a high value on progress (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:102). Since the limited liability company is the legal and organizational expression of the Utilitarian ideology, it also favors efficient deductivity.<sup>3</sup> Of course employees are expected to practise the corporate discourse system during working hours, which also implies leaving the various involuntary discourse systems behind. These involuntary discourse systems may collide with the Utilitarian form of discourse, particularly in Asian countries (cf. Frantsits 1996:24). A person may thus be reluctant to shift patterns of discourse, as this will be experienced as a change in identity.

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<sup>3</sup> see Chapter 4.3.1.1, pp. 31-32.

## 2.2 The concept of face

In the field of sociolinguistics, face is defined as "the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event." (Scollon/Scollon 1995:35). The individual interactants thus establish an interpersonal identity by making assumptions about the other participants. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) pragmatic theory of positive and negative politeness, Scollon and Scollon (1995:36-41) distinguish between two types of face:

- (a) **The involvement aspect of face:** The involvement aspect refers to a person's desire to be considered a supporting and contributing member of society. By backing the other's point of view or by showing sympathy the participants underline the elements they all share.
- (b) **The independence aspect of face:** If the interactants want to emphasize their individuality and their need to remain free from imposition by others, however, they will use strategies of independence. These discourse strategies involve indirectness as well as the use of more formal registers.

Despite the antithetical nature of these two systems, it is important to note that both involvement and independence must be projected simultaneously in any conversation.

### 2.2.1 Face-threatening acts

Both faces may be challenged by so-called face-threatening acts which are at the base of most interpersonal conflicts. These face-threatening acts can either be carried out in an unmitigated way or be accompanied by redressive actions. Analyzing the receiver's point of view, for example, one can consider advice, orders and requests a danger to his or her independence. Criticism or the display of obvious dissent, by contrast, can threaten the receiver's involvement face (cf. Brown/Levinson 1987:65-67). However, the concept of politeness discussed below can be used as a means of mitigating such face-threatening connotations.

## 2.3 Three politeness systems

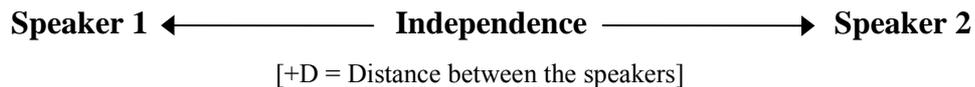
Once a face relationship has been established between the interactants, it tends to remain fairly stable. Scollon and Scollon define politeness systems as "general and persistent regularities in face relationships" (1995:42), and then move on to offer a linguistic analysis of the three major components of every politeness system.

- **The power factor (+/-P):** This first component refers to the difference between egalitarian and hierarchical relationships. The latter are usually indicated by the organization chart in business or governmental structures, and can be abbreviated to +P. If two people have equivalent ranks in their own companies or if they are friends, they will be classified as -P.
- **Distance (+/-D):** Secondly, the distance factor determines how close the participants are to each other. While the relationship between two close friends will be characterized by a lack of distance (-D), two governmental officials from different nations will in most cases be distant (+D), even though they might be of equal power within their own systems.
- **Weight of imposition (+W/-W):** In contrast to the rather stable factors power and distance, the weight of imposition varies considerably from situation to situation. A superior in a company will routinely address his subordinate by using strategies of involvement. Conversely, the lower ranking individual will prefer independence strategies. Under particular circumstances such as an imminent dismissal, however, the higher-ranking person is likely to combine an extra-deferential tone with a high level of independence strategies. In short, "when the weight of imposition increases, there will be an increased use of independence strategies. When the weight of imposition decreases, there will be an increased use of involvement strategies." (Scollon/Scollon 1995:43).

Scollon and Scollon (cf. 1995:44-46) distinguish between three main politeness systems which are based on these factors.

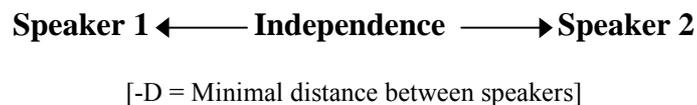
### 2.3.1 Deference politeness system (-P, +D)

Although the participants in a deference politeness system are considered to be equal, they treat each other at a distance. This symmetrical system is appropriate for the example of two professors from two different countries meeting at a conference. Their conversation would be characterized by the mutual use of independence strategies.



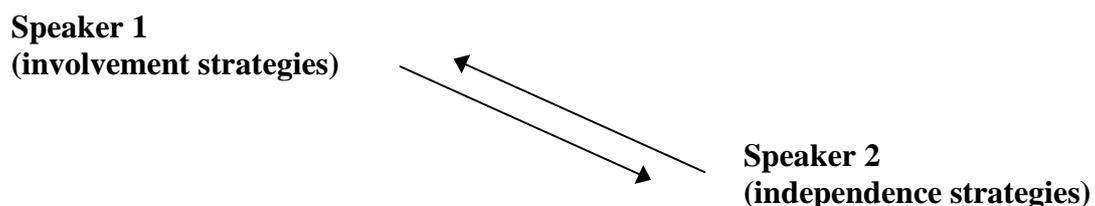
### 2.3.2 Solidary politeness system (-P, -D)

A solidary politeness system, on the other hand, is characterized by the prevailing use of involvement strategies, since the participants feel neither distance nor a power difference between them.



### 2.3.3 Hierarchical politeness system (+P, +/-D)

Here the participants recognize the difference in status that places one in a superordinate position and one in a subordinate position. The hierarchical politeness system represents asymmetrical relationships, regardless of the distance between the speakers. The higher-ranking individual uses involvement strategies, whereas the participant in the lower position uses independence strategies.



## **2.4 Miscommunication in intercultural professional communication**

Generally speaking, communications within a corporation are hierarchical, but public communications are characterized by symmetrical solidarity. Communications from parent company to subsidiary are determined by an asymmetrical hierarchical face system, and thus show predominantly strategies of involvement (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:186).

Due to the subtle differences in face values in various languages or cultures, communication across discourse boundaries is potentially more face-threatening than intracultural communication already is. Compared to western culture, especially in those of the Far East face in interaction is said to be a far more delicate issue, and the average uninitiated Westerner may without help breach the rules of etiquette in these cultures. Besides, language use in Japan, for example, is predetermined by the person's place in society. Analyzing miscommunication in general, Scollon and Scollon (1995:48) derive the following general rule: "*When two participants differ in their assessment of face strategies, it will tend to be perceived as difference in power.*" If a subordinate, for instance, chose involvement strategies as a way of addressing his superior, the latter would almost certainly accuse him/her of trying to exert power over him/her.

Janney/Arndt (cf. 1992:38-40) suggest the maintenance of positive reference groups as a way of bridging such differences. They advise interactants to stress such aspects of the situation as common professional or private interests that are shared by all participants. When interactants touch upon topics other than their obvious common interests, however, they are likely to establish negative frames of communication. In an intercultural context, discussing racial relations or religious topics may increase the danger of conflict.

## **2.5 High-context and low-context communication**

In the context of special discourse communities, the concept of face refers to the ways a cultural group organizes its social relationships. The idea of the self projected by westerners corresponds to their highly individualistic and self-motivated ideology, whereas Asians focus on a more collectivistic self (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:36).

Hall (1976) developed a scheme that focuses upon cultural differences in communication processes. A high-context message, on the one hand, is one in which "most of the

information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message." (Hall 1976:91). A message in which "the mass of information is vested in the explicit code", on the other hand, is called a low-context communication. Consequently, members of low-context and at the same time individualistic cultures tend to communicate in a direct fashion. Although no culture exists at either end of the scale, western cultures like the US, Germany and Scandinavia are considered low-context cultures. In most Far Eastern cultures, including the Chinese, Japanese and Korean, high-context messages, collectivistic goals and an indirect mode of communicating tend to prevail (cf. Gudykunst/Nishida 1994:27-30).

### **3 A framework for turn-taking**

Erving Goffman (1976:270-271) refers to a turn at talk as "an opportunity to hold the floor, not what is said while holding it." Though most researchers use the terms turn and floor interchangeably, Edelsky (1993:209) maintains that the concept of floor correlates with "the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space". A floor may therefore consist of several turns, just as it is possible to take a turn without having the floor. A person may even continue to control the floor while s/he is not talking. Although turn-taking mechanisms seem to be universal, they are subject to cultural variation.

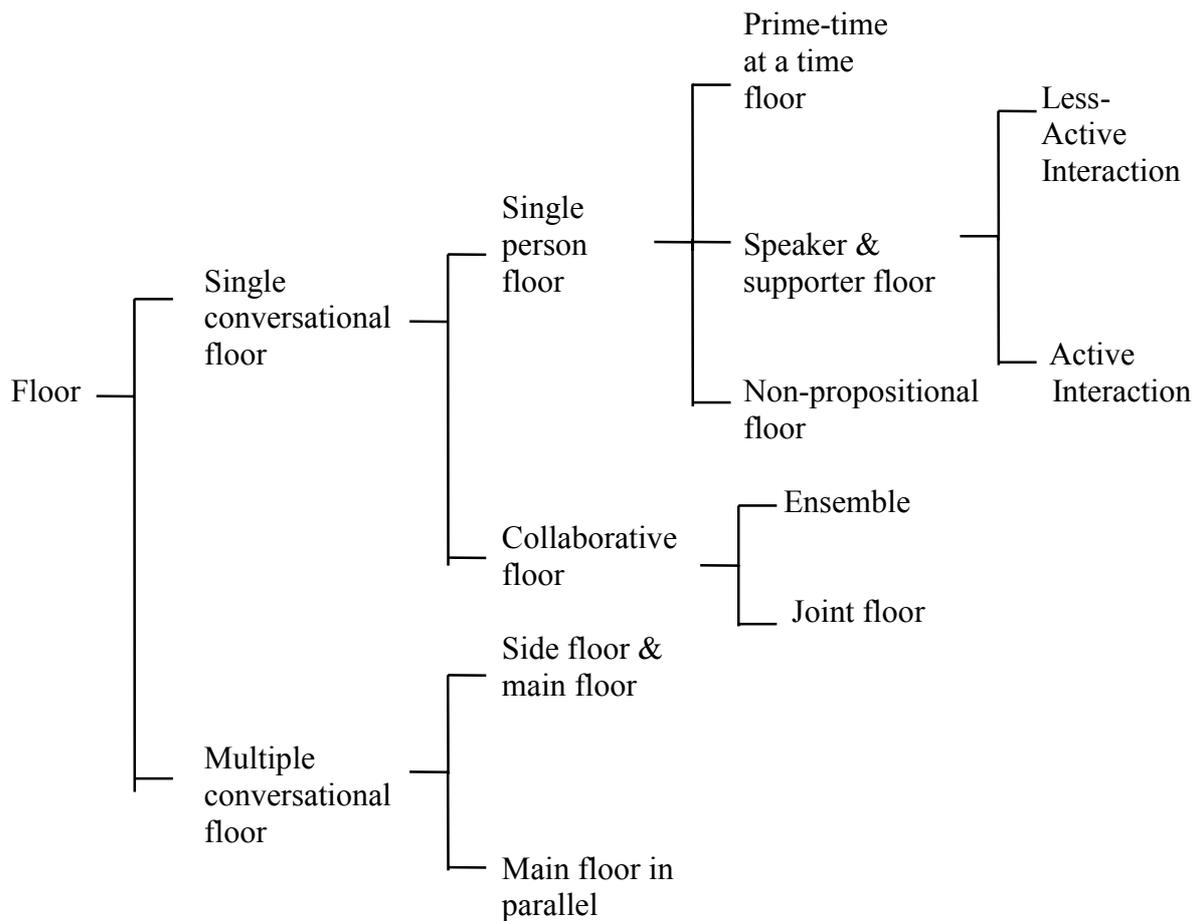
#### **3.1 Structure of floor**

Regarding the structure of floor as the expression of a cognitive network constructed by the participants in a conversation, Hayashi claims that talk is based on this cognitive network. The concept of floor may be further subcategorized into two main types. A single conversational floor reveals only one floor in the current conversation. Whenever two or more single conversational floors occur simultaneously one may refer to a multiple conversational floor (cf. Hayashi 1996:70).

*Single conversational floor.* This type of floor is dominated by only one individual, whereas the other participants merely support the speaker. In contrast to such a 'single person floor', a 'collaborative floor' is characterized by all present members taking part in the ongoing conversation. If this collaboration results in a smooth exchange of turns and conversational synchrony in general, one may refer to an 'ensemble'. Conversely, disruptions like turn failure, interruptions, unexpected topic changes and suspension are more frequent in 'joint floors'.

Depending on the current speech event, 'single person floors' may take three different forms: As the role relationship of speaker and listener is clearly defined in lectures, sermons, debates, or reports at meetings, the main speaker is unlikely to be interrupted during such speech events. This floor type is therefore called a 'one prime speaker floor.' Although a 'speaker and attendant floor' is more interactive than a 'one prime speaker floor,' the secondary speakers will still refrain from intruding the primary speaker's floor space too often. Furthermore, the concepts of 'less active interaction floor' and 'active interaction floor' serve to indicate the amount of verbal and nonverbal communication occurring between primary and secondary speakers. Finally, speakers may sometimes create a 'nonpropositional floor.' Absorbed by his or her own thoughts, the speaker may momentarily utter very subjective material. Generally, the other interactants do not join such a highly self-preoccupied floor (cf. Hayashi 1996:70-72).

*Multiple conversational floor.* In the course of a conversation, two or more conversational floors may develop whenever participants, particularly members of a larger group, split into subgroups. This distribution into subgroups is of course subject to fluctuation, and persons may equally participate in two floors by establishing bridges between them. A multiple conversational floor may either consist of two parallel floors or of a combination of side floor and main floor (cf. Hayashi 1996:73-76).



**Figure 1:** Classification of floor (Hayashi 1996:71).

### 3.2 Turn-taking from the native's point of view

According to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's seminal framework for English conversation (1974/1978), turns may consist of various turn-constructive components such as sentential, clausal, phrasal and lexical units. The end of each turn construction unit, which can be projected by the participants in the conversation, constitutes a point where speakers may change. This possible completion point is called a 'transition relevance place', or TRP (cf. Sacks et al. 1978:12). In order to detect a TRP, participants look out for changes in the pitch or volume of the voice, the end of a syntactic unit, a momentary silence, or some sort of body motion. The following rules for turn allocation account for a transfer of speakership that is characterized by minimal gap and overlap:

- The use of the "current speaker selects next technique" results in a speaker change. Having reached a TRP, the current speaker chooses the next party him/herself.
- If the turn-so-far does not involve the use of a "current speaker selects next technique", any speaker may claim the next turn. This second rule usually compels the other participants to start quickly, and may thus lead to difficulties for slower participants, particularly in intercultural communication.
- The third rule applies if the next turn is neither allocated by the current speaker nor by self-selection. The current speaker may, but need not, continue until transfer is effected at one of the next TRPs (cf. Sacks et al. 1978:13).

Conversational turn-taking is both *locally managed* and *interactionally managed* by the participants. Unlike special non-conversational systems operative in ceremonies, classrooms, interviews, chaired meetings and similar settings, this model for conversation does not specify turn order and turn size in advance. Instead, any feature in such an "interactionally managed system" is multilaterally shaped by the parties, and conversation is accomplished locally on a turn-by-turn basis (cf. Sacks et al. 1978:42).

The organization of turn-taking provides "an intrinsic motivation for listening." As any given listener might be selected to speak next, s/he must cope with responding to the previous utterances. Similarly, listeners intending to self-select are expected to listen to the end of the current utterance before they may compete for the next turn at a TRP.

### **3.2.1 Adjacency pairs**

Adjacency pairs can be described as automatic sequences consisting of a first part and a second part. These parts are produced by different speakers. Having uttered the first part, the speaker immediately expects his/her conversational partner to produce a second part of the same pair. The most widely used adjacency pairs indicate thanking-response, request-acceptance, apology-minimization, and question-answer sequences. Besides, opening sequences and greetings typically contain adjacency pairs, as the following examples illustrate:

**First part**

A: How are things?

A: How ya doin'?

**Second Part**

B: The usual.

B: Can't complain. (Yule 1996:77)

Any apparent failure of the second participants to provide the second part will result in conversational dysfluency. The great majority of adjacency sequences are used as transitional points in discourse.

### 3.3 Overlap and interruptions

In Anglo-American culture, smooth transitions from one speaker to the next tend to be valued. Although participants generally conform to the rules of the turn-taking system, brief overlap may occur when two or more participants compete for the floor. When a self-selecting listener overlaps with the current speaker at a TRP, for instance, one of them may drop out, thereby acknowledging the other's right to the turn (cf. Nofsinger 1991:97-98). While overlap is considered to be supportive and does not violate the turn-taking norms, interruptions "refer to simultaneous talk that does not occur at or near a TRP." (Nofsinger 1991:102). Constituting a threat to the speaker's face, the term *interruption* often has negative connotations.<sup>4</sup>

However, what is regarded as overlapping speech is culturally determined. The model for turn-taking suggested by Sacks et al. is based on an underlying rule in American English conversation, namely that overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time. Tannen (1981), by contrast, found that natives of New York City, especially inhabitants of East European Jewish background, favor cooperative overlap in face-to-face interaction "as a way of showing enthusiasm and interest, [...]". But this strategy "[...] is interpreted by non-New Yorkers as just the opposite: evidence of lack of attention." (Tannen 1981:138). Additionally, high-involvement style is characterized by faster turn-taking, a faster rate of speech, avoidance of interturn pauses, and participatory listenership (cf. Tannen 1981:137). This high-involvement style can also be found in a number of other cultures including, for instance, Russian, Italian, Greek, Spanish, South American, Arab, and some African cultures.

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<sup>4</sup> Interruptions for the sake of clarifications, which do not necessarily contravene the principles of turn-taking, will be discussed in Chapter 4.1 (pp. 26-27) below.

Due to the varying turn-taking mechanisms between cultures and languages, interaction between native and non-native speakers is susceptible to miscommunication. Robin C. Scarcella (1990:338) presents the following example: (Bracketing indicates interruptions.)

A: Mary's invited us to lunch. Do ya wanna go?

B: Sure. [I'm not busy right now. [Why not?

A: [Good. [I'll come by in about thirty minutes.

B: Think we oughta bring [anything?  
[No, but I'll bring some wine anyway.

As an American, *B* regards interruptions as impolite, and concludes that *A* is a rude person. *A*, however, comes from Iran, a culture where interruptions signal friendliness. *A* merely transfers the rules governing conversation in his or her native language into English.

### 3.4 Silence

Discourse analysts have shown that different concepts of timing can lead to cross-cultural pragmatic failure and stereotyping. This chapter will therefore be concerned with non-phonations at TRPs as well as turn-internal forms of silence in various cultures.

Hayashi (1996:41) coined the term 'turn utterance space' in order to describe short pauses during utterances. As for the function of this space, she distinguishes between the concepts of 'intraturn space' and 'interturn space'. While the latter pauses relate to TRPs and thus occur at turn exchanges, intraturn spaces reflect pauses a speaker creates for some private reason during his or her turn. Such pauses may be due to "a variety of personal factors such as loss of words, search for a proper word, hesitation, absence of a script, empathic involvement, and temporary distraction." (Hayashi 1996:45). Long intraturn pauses on the part of the current turn holder might encourage other participants to overlap the speaker's pause. Since this kind of self-selection does not take place at a TRP, it may be conceived as an interruption. Irrelevant turn-taking during intraturn spaces might even be associated with "silent simultaneous talk", because the interruption might activate certain tacit ideas in the speaker's mind. Such feelings may include perceptions such as "I'm not finished yet," or "I'm thinking." (ibid.) Nevertheless, interactants always have the chance to contribute to the smooth progress of the conversation and to prevent irrelevant turn-taking by employing back-channel signals, short questions or comments, and nonverbal supportive behavior strategies. (cf. ibid.)

Sacks et al. (1974/1978) distinguish between three types of discontinuous talk in conversation: gaps, lapses and pauses. Nofsinger (1991:94-95) has described a gap as "the silence between the end of one turn and some listener self-selecting for the next turn." If, however, a current speaker stops at some TRP, and no speaker is willing to start or continue, the ensuing space of nontalk will be called a lapse. If the current speaker has already selected a next speaker, the delay before the selected speaker's turn beginning will be perceived as a pause. Besides, a silence arising during the course of a participant's turn is also considered a pause.

As mentioned above, the 'no gap, no overlap' structure of discourse is ingrained in Anglo-American culture. Even in intracultural encounters, persons with a slower pace at turn-taking will regularly fail to get the floor to speak. Correspondingly, the faster speaker "is doing all of the talking, constantly repeating himself or herself, [...]" (Scollon/Scollon 1995:65). Among the factors contributing to the length of interturn pauses, interpersonal face relationships play an essential role. In general, "longer pauses are associated with independence politeness strategies, while shorter pauses are associated with involvement politeness strategies." (ibid.). Politeness systems are likely to influence conversational turn-taking as well: Compared to deference face systems, non-phonations in solidarity face systems tend to be shorter. In a hierarchical face system, persons in higher positions might use different pauses than persons in lower positions. In intercultural communication between English native speakers and Asians, the latter will often face considerable problems related to turn exchange fluency. Firstly, as a second language user, an Asian will have a lower level of fluency. Secondly, the westerner will prefer involvement politeness strategies and thus shorter interturn pauses, whereas the Asian will tend to assume a deference politeness system (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:66). Therefore, East Asian non-native speakers of English will often take longer to respond to a question. Americans who tend to get impatient with this silence will either repeat the question or simply change the topic.

Cushner and Brislin (cf. 1996:123-124) provide an illustrating example of this phenomenon<sup>5</sup>: Quah, a recent Malaysian immigrant, was referred to Alex, an American counselor. Unaccustomed to the rather extended silences in Asian communication, Alex launched into long monologues during the counseling session. Quah, however, was merely waiting somewhat longer before taking his turn, partly because he considered the counselor

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<sup>5</sup> A culture assimilator is composed of a series of short episodes of intercultural conflict. These incidents, such as "The Reluctant Counselee" described above, are used in intercultural training programmes (cf. Damen 1993; Cushner and Brislin 1996).

to be an authority figure. As both interactants were becoming increasingly uncomfortable, the counseling session failed.

Americans generally consider talk a means of accomplishing mutual understanding, and a means of expressing their individuality. In contrast to Americans, Japanese value silence. As members of the Japanese culture they emphasize group harmony and believe that one's feelings cannot be conveyed through talk. In other words, these differences can be associated with the dimension of *individualism versus collectivism*.<sup>6</sup>

This negative attitude towards talk in Japan also accounts for the unfocused and fragmented nature of Japanese conversation (cf. Yamada 1992:38-40). In addition to the sociolinguistic feature of sentence incompleteness, Japanese business negotiators favor silence as a means of avoiding a problem. Americans trying to resolve conflict by talking even more may therefore experience difficulties in cross-cultural communication (cf. Yamada 1992:44).

According to Scollon and Scollon (cf. 1981:25-26), miscommunication in Athabaskan-English interactions is at least partly due to different concepts of timing between turns. English speakers, on the one hand, tolerate interturn pauses of one second at most. Athabaskan Indians, on the other hand, are used to slightly longer pauses between sentences. Just before the Athabaskan speaker is prepared to claim his/her turn, the English-speaking participant will already have continued to talk. For the Athabaskan, waiting his regular length of time means that s/he "can never get a word in edgewise." Similarly, Athabaskan intraturn pauses tend to be longer as well. The English speaker is therefore likely to interrupt his conversational partner, assuming that the non-phonation indicates a TRP. As a result, the Athabaskan is considered unable to say a whole coherent idea, and English speakers may be stereotyped as egocentric. As for discourse patterns, Athabaskan face relationships are characterized by low power differences and a high distance between member, i.e. by a deference politeness system. Most Anglo-Americans, however, prefer a solidary politeness system (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1981:179).

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<sup>6</sup> see Chapter 2.5, pp. 8-9.

## **3.5 Floor claiming and yielding - Techniques for turn allocation**

After explaining the general framework of turn-taking, I will now focus on turn signals, i.e. verbal and nonverbal tokens regulating speaker exchange. All communicative codes have elements that act as turn signals. Listeners who want to self-select may identify TRPs by analyzing the speaker's utterances for prosodic, syntactic and semantic cues. Conversely, a current speaker may implement floor allocation him/herself. Conversationalists employ a wide range of devices in order to negotiate floor shift, including extralinguistic and paralinguistic activity, gesticulative movement, gambits, and metacommunicative statements.

### **3.5.1 Non-verbal communication**

In order to ensure a smooth exchange of speaking turns, speakers may display *turn signals*, thus yielding the floor to an auditor. Since a substantial part of the social meaning of a message is conveyed via nonverbal channels, this communicative code has an impact on intercultural interactions as well (cf. Singelis 1994:274-75). Although the use of nonverbal cues is universal and innate, their meaning is culture-bound.

#### **3.5.1.1 Kinesics**

John Gosling (1981:163) describes kinesics as "all those meaningful gestures or sequences of gestures which realize interactive functions in face-to-face communicative situations."

Gaze plays a powerful role in face-to-face interaction. People engaged in conversation may look at one another to coordinate turn-taking, to signal interest and attention, and to monitor listener understanding and acceptance. Towards the end of his/her turn, the speaker may try to establish eye contact with another participant. In Western culture, gaze is therefore used as a means of selecting the next speaker who is then under considerable pressure to take the turn. If the listener avoids eye contact, however, s/he shows that s/he is not willing to speak next (cf. Gosling 1981:166). This relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic skills becomes evident in conversations between blind interactants who cannot use eye contact to anticipate turn exchange.

Body posture is another factor influencing turn shift. If an auditor suddenly changes his/her posture during a turn, s/he might want to achieve a mutuality of gaze and subsequently gain the floor. This turn signal is a striking feature of classroom discourse where pupils are expected to raise an arm whenever they wish to get a turn. Small children frequently pull the garments of adults for the same reason (cf. Gosling 1981:173). Taking a breath and leaning forward may also indicate a desire for a turn. When a speaker leans back, however, s/he may indicate that s/he has finished the turn and is now willing for others to speak. Similarly, speakers may relinquish turns by stopping gesticulations.

As far as head movements are concerned, westerners will nod their heads to show agreement, but they will shake their heads from side to side if they disagree. Since these gestures do not have the same meaning in all cultures, they can cause confusion in intercultural contexts. Head nodding may of course be used during listening as a kind of back-channel signal as well. While these head movements tend to be fairly slow, head-nods functioning as turn-claiming signals are very fast. As many other non-verbal cues, head movements should be interpreted with caution. They should be read together with the messages coming from the other communication channels (cf. Hodgson/Hodgson 1992:136).

Interestingly enough, the methods used to show involvement and attention also vary across cultures. Americans tend to lean forward and establish eye contact in order to convey these attitudes to the speaker, whereas Japanese listeners may close their eyes to signal attention (cf. Singelis 1994:285).

### 3.5.1.2 Paralanguage - Prosody

The concept of *paralanguage* has been defined as follows: "The term paralanguage includes various types of acoustical elements that accompany language, as well as the vocalizations that replace or supplement speech. Both are carried on the vocal channels but are nonverbal." (Damen 1987:166). Paralinguistic patterns such as pitch range, pitch control and rhythm control do not only inform us about the emotional state of the speaker, but they also constitute turn signals. Equally, prosodic phenomena can serve as good turn-yielding cues. Broadly defined, the term 'prosody' covers non-grammatical features such as loudness, tempo, intonation, rhythm, pausing, and accent placement.

Jo Ann Goldberg (1978) has identified *amplitude shift* as a resource for speakers to regulate

conversational interaction. In case of simultaneous speech speakers may raise the amplitude level of their utterances in order to gain or hold the floor. Smooth speaker exchange can also be facilitated by a down-step in pitch on the part of the speaker.

### 3.5.1.3 Nonverbal cues in intercultural discourse

As interactive synchrony is inextricably linked to nonverbal signs, it is essential for the language learner to keep using these signals when conversing in a foreign language. According to a study conducted in Finland (cf. Saario 1980:78), language learners should be made aware of the importance of all communicative devices. Nonverbal cues can also help the non-native speaker when s/he lacks the appropriate linguistic means of expression. Nevertheless, the university students of English taking part in the study relied exclusively on language in English discussions instead of reinforcing their messages by using paralinguistic and kinesic techniques (cf. Saario 1980:72-73).

Furthermore, Gumperz (1982:120-129) has reported considerable differences in prosody between communities where English is spoken as a native language. As a consequence, natives from India and the United States, for instance, may have to cope with problems in interethnic communication. Prosody may also turn out to be an ambiguous feature in intercultural discourse among non-native speakers of English. If non-native speakers have accents in their pronunciation of words, it will often be difficult to identify sentence and clause boundaries.

### 3.5.2 Non-professional interpreting

In intercultural inquiry, the role of interpreters in multiethnic conversation has long been neglected. If the parties do not share a common language as a *lingua franca*, however, a professionally trained person is usually assigned the task of processing longer stretches of discourse in institutionalized settings. Alternatively, the role of the 'linguistic mediator' may be taken over by someone who happens to be bilingual but who has not been especially trained for this function. This type of discourse is inevitably affected by the constraints governing turn-taking. Additionally, the mediator might be biased towards one of the primary interlocutors, and the difficulty of transmitting certain politeness strategies might lead to potentially face-threatening situations.

Since Knapp-Potthoff/Knapp (1987) are particularly interested in non-professional interpreting as a kind of intercultural communication, they taped a couple of mediator-situations involving speakers of Korean and speakers of German. As their data indicates, it is essential for the mediator to assist in establishing common ground by rendering turn-initial expressions of politeness. However, this procedure might also disrupt conversational synchrony: Once the speaker has passed on his turn to the mediator, s/he immediately loses the opportunity to add a contribution of his/her own. While another interactant continues to talk, the original speaker might experience frustration if s/he is unable to reclaim his/her turn. Trying to prevent misunderstandings, the non-professional interpreter is thus well-advised to equalize turn-taking opportunities between the participants (cf. Knapp-Potthoff/Knapp 1987:181-201).

### 3.6 Listening behavior

Speaker-auditor interaction does not only take place at possible points of speaker exchange, but also during speaking turns. These 'auditor back-channel signals', however, do "not constitute a speaking turn or a claim of the turn." (Duncan 1973:166). On the contrary, listeners might use back-channel cues when they want to keep the communication channel open and avoid taking a turn. Speakers, on the other hand, might rely on such occasional interjections, too. If the current floor holder wants to take an extensive turn without anyone's losing face, s/he is constantly required to monitor the listeners' attention. This is commonly achieved by seeking steady eye contact (cf. Hayashi 1996:104).

Duncan (cf. 1973:166-67) has identified different forms of behavior that enable the listener to express feedback and support.

- .1 *m-hm*. This expression covers a variety of verbalized signals such as 'm-hm', 'right', 'yeah', 'yes quite', 'I see', 'surely', or 'that's true'.
- .2 *Sentence completions*. In this case the auditor would provide a brief completion of the previous sentence, but the speaker would then continue with his turn as if uninterrupted. Example:  
S: '... eventually, it will come down to more concrete issues ...';  
A: 'As she gets more comfortable.'  
S: 'and I felt that ...' (Duncan 1973:166)

.3 *Request for clarification.* Such requests usually contain a few words or phrases.

Example:

S: '... somehow they're better able to cope with it.'

A: 'You mean these anxieties, concern with it?'

S: 'Possible that other people have ...' (Duncan 1973:166)

.4 *Brief restatement.* This sort of back-channel behavior restates the immediately preceding thought formulated by the speaker. Example:

S: '... having to pick up the pieces';

A: 'the broken dishes, yeah';

S: 'but then a very ...' (Duncan 1973:167)

.5 *Head nods and shakes.* These signals may be used alone or together with the verbal back-channel patterns.

### **3.6.1 Back-channelling in cross-cultural conversation**

Though some form of listening behavior is probably common in all cultures and languages, attitudes towards back-channelling differ significantly. While American English speakers generally relegate listening to passive receiving, Japanese attach great importance to listening behavior. This is reflected in the existence of the folk-metapragmatic term *aizuchi* which literally means "mutual hammering" (Yamada 1992:131). In other words, *aizuchi* describes the interactional work done by auditors in a conversation, and back-channels are indeed used very frequently in Japanese conversations. Japanese interaction is thus expected to be the collective work of both speaker(s) and listener(s), and this principle again stresses the cultural value of interdependence, i.e. the collective in contrast to the individual dimension.

Americans are most likely to insert back-channels at possible completion points, pauses or phrase boundaries. Such tokens are therefore meant to encourage the speaker to continue his or her extended turn. Japanese listeners, on the other hand, tend to use considerably more back-channelling signals simultaneously with the speaker's utterances. If members of these two cultures transfer their timing principles for listening into a foreign language and/or refer to these principles in interethnic encounters, miscommunication might arise. Such problems might even imply stereotypes describing Americans as inattentive and selfish, and Japanese as impatient and inscrutable. What's more, Americans might misinterpret the amount of

back-channel signals displayed by Japanese speakers as repeated floor claims (cf. Miller 1991:114-118; cf. Yamada 1992:151-152).

As far as the preferred type of back-channel signal is concerned, American English speakers seem to focus on certain content-specific signals like "That's tough/wonderful/interesting.", "Exactly.", or "Yeah, I've read that." (Hayashi 1996:198). Conversely, Japanese listening behavior is based on brief utterances such as "*un/yeah, yes,*" "*soo, soo/yes, yes,*" "*aa/uh huh.*"

Robin Scarcella (cf. 1992:119-123) has noted that Mexican speakers of Spanish also tend to use both more and different back-channel cues than English speakers. The widespread use of *repetition* as a back-channel signal in fact contrasts with the English patterns. In the following example, the flow of interaction is disrupted due to the use of repetition:

Context: M and J are discussing their majors. (M is the L2 speaker and J is the L1 speaker.)

M: ... I'm a junior in psychology

J: Psychology?

M: Yes. Psychology

J: Really

M: Yeah

J: I'm unde [clared. Did you go here last year? (pause 0.8)

M: [Undeclared

J: Did you go here last year? (Scarcella 1992:122)

Compared to English conversations, *exchanged back channel cues* occur more often in Spanish interactions:

Context: S and L are talking about their majors.

S: *Qué que te gustaría estudiar?*

What what would you like to study?

L: *E Deseo estudiar ciencia política*

Uh I want to study political science.

S: *Sí?*

Yes

L: *Sí*

Yes

S: *Muy bien*

Very good

L: *Uhum Me gusta*  
Uhum I like it. (Scarcella 1992:119-120)

The third difference between Spanish and English speakers concerns the frequency of *consecutive back channel cues*, that is, "the use of several back channel cues consecutively in the same turn." (Scarcella 1992:122). Again, Spanish speakers tend to use this kind of listening behavior more often.

### 3.7 The notion of turn length

Long turns are usually connected with face saving strategies and negative politeness on behalf of both speaker and listener (cf. Brown and Levinson 1978/1987). Short turns, on the other hand, are associated with adjacency pairs. Michael Clyne (1994:109) suggests a number of factors that generally coincide with long turns:

- the speaker is interrupted only by back-channelling
- a large number of words in the utterance
- the complexity of argument and interaction sequence (involving several speech acts often including justification)
- success in turn maintenance and/or in preventing turn appropriation. [...]

The last two strategies have been described as follows:

Turn maintaining - A keeps the turn, whether B wants it or not.  
Turn appropriating - A wants to maintain the turn but B takes it. (Clyne 1994:91).

Methods such as "increase in volume, increase in speed, decrease in speed with or without elongation, rising intonation, repetition, addressing a person by name, and the use of 'excuse me'" (Clyne 1994:105-106) seem to be most effective in this respect.

Analyzing his corpus of exchanges recorded in a multicultural Australian work setting, Clyne found that long turns are not necessarily linked to a good knowledge of English. The length of turns is, to a large extent, culture-dependent. While Southeast Asians took predominantly short turns, virtually all the Europeans, Latin Americans, and South Asians in the sample took long turns. Referring to the strategies of turn maintaining and appropriating, Clyne concludes that Central Europeans and South Asians were most successful in keeping their turns. Using the techniques of tempo increase or even

simultaneous speech in order to maintain their turns, Central and Southern Europeans emphasize the content of their messages. South-east Asians, by contrast, prefer slower speech including elongation, a strategy which reflects their concern for face saving and form (cf. Clyne 1994:188).

## 4 Gambits - Routine formulae

Everyday conversation seems to abound with routine formulae, i.e. "highly conventionalized prepatterned expressions whose occurrence is tied to more or less standardized communication situations." (Coulmas 1981:2-3). In his psycholinguistic approach to routines, Eric Keller (1979/1981) focuses on routines called 'conversational strategy signals' which structure conversational procedure in general and turn-taking in particular. Some of these discourse strategies are represented in the form of semi-fixed expressions called 'gambits'. Keller defines gambits as "[...] a certain set of signals in the conversationalist's speech, used to introduce level shifts within the conversation, or to prepare listeners for the next turn in the logical argument." (1981:94).

In his research paper, which is based on a collection of about 500 gambits commonly employed in North American English speech, Keller (cf. 1981:94) identifies the four main functions of gambits:

- Acting as *semantic introducers*, gambits suggest the overall framework in which the topic is supposed to be placed. Expressions like "The way I look at it" or "I have reason to believe" serve to present a personal view, just as a piece of unpleasant realism might be introduced by phrases such as "Whether we like it or not, ..." or "To be realistic, ...".
- The second function of gambits relates to the *social context* of the conversation. The basic moves of turn-taking, i.e. turn claiming and yielding, as well as the wish to end a conversation can be signaled by gambits.
- Moreover, they may indicate a participant's *state of consciousness*. As outlined above, a person can show his/her willingness to receive information by using expressions like "Yes, I'm listening" or simply "Yes?". This attitude contrasts sharply with the face-threatening comments "I'm not really interested in that," or even "Why don't you just leave me alone".
- Finally, the *communicative control* functions of gambits range from pause fillers, i.e.

hesitations such as "you know" and "you see," to special gambits checking the continuous flow of communication. Among many others, the phrases "Are you with me" and "Is that clear?" are regularly used for this purpose.

Gambits can either fulfill only one of these functions or combine various strategies. The marked expression "I'd like to add something to that", for instance, will thus determine the semantic frame of subject-expansion and the social context of turn claiming at the same time. (cf. *ibid.*). In any situation, factors such as the appropriate degree of politeness and the size of the audience also account for the precise surface structure that gambits take.

## **4.1 Gambits as turn signals**

In the remainder of this chapter I will concentrate on the way gambits can influence the process of turn-taking. It seems that overt turn-taking signals are quite frequent in formal multiparty discussions where the signaling of social context might be a more complex procedure. In informal dyadic discourse, however, the participants are more likely to resort to nonverbal cues (cf. Keller 1981:101).

Keller (*ibid.*) suggests the following turn-taking gambits, putting their basic signaling functions into brackets:

- . 1 [I want to have a turn]: "May I interrupt you for a moment," "Can you spare a minute," "I'd like to say something," "I have something to say on that too."
- . 2 [I want to keep my turn]: "Wait a second," "Well, let's see now," "What I would say is... ."
- . 3 [I want to abandon my turn]: "That's about all I have to say on that," "That's about it."
- . 4 [I don't want to take a turn]: "I have nothing to say on that," "I'll pass on that."
- . 5 [Why don't you take a turn]: "So, what do you think of that?," "And what about you?," "What have you got to say on that?."
- . 6 [I want to leave the conversational group]: "It's been nice talking to you," "I'd better not take up any more of your time."

Considering the important aspect of face-saving strategies in both intracultural and

intercultural interactions, a speaker's social status is, in most cases, merely implied in such specific gambits. A speaker choosing a phrase like "Here's what we'll do" might, despite his/her leadership role, mainly draw the listeners' attention to the plan for action that s/he intends to mention in his/her turn (cf. Keller 1981:102).

In addition to gambits framing the particular social context of a contribution, *communication control signals* perform an important discourse function in ensuring that the communication channels are open. Keller's analysis of this category includes four types of gambits:

- .1 [Do you understand/hear me?]: "Are you following me?," "Can you hear me?," "Is that clear?," "Right?."
- .2 [I understood/heard you]: "Okay," "Sure," "And so?."
- .3 [I did not understand/hear you]: "Pardon me?," "Would you mind repeating that?," "Sorry, I didn't get that last part."
- .4 [You must have misunderstood me/not heard me right]: "That's not what I said," "What I really said is this," "What I've been telling you all along is ... ." (Keller 1981:104).

By using or avoiding such gambits conversationalists often address the delicate issue of interruptions. However, *requests for clarification* should not be treated as interruptions as they may contribute to the steady progression of the conversation. In intercultural communication, where dialogues between non-native speakers with varying degrees of language proficiency are common, some participants may not always readily admit not having understood something. In this case, the speaker may help the auditor to save face by resorting to evasive devices such as "I'm afraid there seems to have been a slight misunderstanding." or "Sorry, I probably haven't made myself clear." (Schmatzer/Hardt-Mautner 1989:93). Alternatively, the listener can use one of the following confirming devices: "*What you are saying is...*, *Do I understand you to mean...*, *Am I reading you right, when...?*, *You mean...?*, *I think you are saying...*, or *In other words...*" (Wardhaugh 1985:134). Asking probing questions and reflecting back feelings and emotion may in fact be used as a face strategy of involvement, that is, to show empathy, as well. Unlike interruptions for the sake of clarifying statements, corrections usually challenge the speaker and constitute potential face-threatening acts. Since corrections might cause the relationship between the conversationalists to deteriorate, they should be used sparingly.

In order to resist interruptions, speaker may either carry on talking louder or they may resort to a certain set of gambits. Hodgson and Hodgson (1992:172) suggest the following phrases: "I'd like to just finish the point I'm making", "I haven't quite finished yet, [...]."

According to the turn-taking rules as outlined by Sacks et al., any listener might be selected to speak next. Chairpersons in meetings might also address certain participants by name and invite contributions by using expressions such as "..., would you like to comment on this?," "..., perhaps you would like to come in here?," "What are your views on that, ...?" (Schmatzer/Hardt-Mautner 1989:88). This participant may be very interested in keeping the floor, but s/he may occasionally need a little more time to gather his/her thoughts and develop the argument. Routine expressions like "*Well, Well, where should I begin?, Well, it's like this, Let's see now, How shall I put it?, That's a good question [observation, point, etc.], I'll have to think about that.*" can buy a few seconds of planning time and prevent the other participants from claiming the turn themselves (cf. Wardhaugh 1985:142).

Having acquired the right to a turn, the speaker will continue talking until s/he voluntarily relinquishes the floor again. If the speaker wishes to take a rather extended turn, s/he can first prepare his/her conversational partners in order to prevent interruptions. Wardhaugh (1985:150) lists a number of chronological and grammatical devices: "*First of all* or *To begin with*, followed by *Then, After that, Next, Second*, and so on." Gambits like "*I just have a few comments, There are three points I want to make, or I have a couple of observations about that*" serve the same purpose. These phrases can help to create a cohesive and coherent account, but the speaker must still be careful not to monopolize the conversation.

Finally, Deborah Schiffrin classifies *discourse markers*, i.e. "**sequentially dependent** elements which bracket units of talk" (1994:31), located at the beginning of turns. While the turn-initial markers *and* and *so* can generally be found at possible completion points in the interaction, *but*, a turn-initial marker of contrast, often indicates disagreement. Like *and* and *so*, the marker *well* emphasizes a cooperative attitude (cf. Schiffrin 1994:118). Turn-initial *but* is in fact likely to contravene cooperative turn-taking, and is thus also used by speakers to challenge and interrupt others' utterances (cf. Schiffrin 1994:174).

## 4.2 Language learners and non-native speakers

Discourse analysts agree that gambits and routine formulae deserve attention in foreign language teaching. Apart from distinguishing an eloquent speaker, the acquisition of

gambits might be of advantage to any foreign language learner: A speaker who knows how to use them skillfully may gain time to think of what to say next. Although routine formulae do not convey a lot of information, they help to give the impression of greater fluency than is actually there. Furthermore, the use formulaic language signals that the speaker is a cooperative member of the conversational group (cf. Coulmas 1981:12).

Non-native speakers who face problems following a conversation are well advised to refer to culturally appropriate gambits facilitating clarification requests. The use of effective strategies can indeed mitigate the face-threat inherent in interruptions. Therefore, formulas such as "I'm very sorry to interrupt, but..." show that the participant is reluctant to violate conversational rules.

In spite of their importance in discourse, routine formulae can easily become a source of pragmatic interferences for the non-native speaker. Some of the most salient mistakes result from the lack of an equivalent expression in the foreign language and from semantic translation. The German idiomatic phrase *Guten Appetit!* used at the beginning of a meal, for instance, has no equivalent in English. Alternatively, semantic translation occurs when native speakers of English try to translate *you're welcome* into German, leading to expressions such as *\*Sie sind willkommen*. Similar mistakes involving semantic translation might be observed when French or Dutch speakers try to render *bon après-midi* and *goedemiddag*, respectively, into German. The corresponding formula *\*guten Nachmittag*, however, does not exist in the target language (cf. Coulmas 1979:254-257).

Wildner-Bassett (1984) has observed that language learners, though aware of the function of gambits and routines, tend to incorporate literal translations into the foreign language system. Her data collection contains surface structures such as "may I beg you" in English. The learner might have tried to add impact to a request by using this form instead of the common expression "may I ask you." Wildner-Bassett suggests that the learner literally transferred the German "darf ich Sie bitten" (cf. Wildner-Bassett 1984:334-335). Even fairly advanced learners of English utter so-called "near misses" like "that's a very pity" or "I would be very appreciated" (cf. Wildner-Bassett 1984:343).

### 4.3 Topic shifts

Though it is virtually impossible to provide a technical definition of the term 'topic' as such, a "topic is considered as introduced when the interlocutors expound on the speech subject

and the connected speech acts either by making their own contributions or by giving the speaker to understand that they will not interfere in his flow of speech." (Bublitz 1988:61). While a 'local topic' links an immediately following utterance to the subsequent one, a 'global topic' encompasses more than one turn (cf. Bublitz 1988:35). Framing focused interactions such as panel discussions, chairpersons may sum up the global topic by using compact gambits and metalinguistic phrases: "we are TALKING about...", "to-day's panel is about...", "we came together because we wanted to TALK about...", "tonight we've met because...", "this discussion has been arranged with the intention of shedding some light on..." (Bublitz 1988:38).

Contrary to more formal and public types of discourse, in which topics are explicitly named both beforehand and during the interaction, many casual conversations cover a number of different topics. Consequently, spontaneous shifts from one topic to another are common. In everyday conversation, topics are by no means well defined, and launching a new one may thus turn out to be a rather complex action.

Before introducing a new topic, the speaker is supposed to close the preceding one. Although the actions of closing and introducing a topic will, in most cases, be performed separately, they can coincide. The use of phrases like *That's that; now then, what about...* or *dropping that, how is...* at the initial position of topic-initiating utterances reflects this dual function (cf. Bublitz 1988:63). Linguistic signals of topic introduction include particles such as *no, yes, now* and *well*. Similarly, adverbials like *actually, really, in fact* and *in actual fact* turn the attention of the addressee to a new, and possibly surprising thought. These verbal means of topic change are usually accompanied by kinesic and paralinguistic phenomena (cf. Bublitz 1988:59-60).

As a rule, topics compete with each other in everyday conversation. Yet, this competition is limited if the current topic is already close to being exhausted, and a new one is mutually agreed on. The topical action of digression, however, constitutes a special case in the sense that the previous topic is only suspended. Provided that a higher degree of urgency and a stronger interest in the new topic justify the digression, an interactant may change the previous topic one-sidedly and temporarily. In this case, remarks such as *By the way, That reminds me of, Speaking about, or Incidentally* may be used in order to mitigate the face-threat inherent in this action (cf. Bublitz 1988:67-68). The end of a digression is often marked by the use of *anyway*. Sometimes digressions result in a complete change of topic in the course of the following exchanges.

If other interactants were still planning to add something to the current topic, however, a sudden change of topic might be regarded offensive. Participants who were denied the opportunity to make further contributions to the previous topic may soon try to revive it. An effective way of achieving this aim is the insertion of phrases like *Anyway*, *Where was I?/were we?*, *To get [going] back to X*, and *As I [X] was saying* (Wardhaugh 1985:145). Likewise, gambits like *Don't change the subject!*, *Don't go off at a tangent!*, ... *but let's not digress!*, ...*let's get back to ... (you still haven't answered my question)!* underline the basic controllability of topical actions, especially in more focused interaction.

Though the participant's willingness to change the topic is usually signaled implicitly, the English language contains phrases expressing this intention explicitly. As topic shifts and deviations cannot be excluded in more formal and preplanned discourse either, the chairperson of the respective meeting is supposed to control the way in which the topic is dealt with. Gambits like *have you anything to add to...?*, *shall we turn to another subject?* are very useful in settings such as business meetings, but they tend to be avoided in everyday conversation (cf. Bublitz 1988:69-70).

Additionally, Bublitz (1988:73) found that speaker change and topic change are interdependent. At potential TRPs, the speaker may announce his readiness to yield the turn to another participant, an action that may imply an offer to move to a new topic as well. Topic changes in everyday conversation are therefore marked by the following typical profile:

- Before the topic change the number of participants who adopt the speaker role (i.e., in this case always the role of the primary speaker) and who continue the present topic is reduced.
- At the same time the number of hearer signals and short forms usually employed by the secondary speaker increases. Both modes of expression serve to indicate the decreasing willingness to talk about the current topic and the increasing willingness to change it.
- Moreover, the growing frequency of falling, final nuclear tone, (longer) pauses and other indicators suggest that the number of potential places for a speaker change and thus for a topic change is increasing.
- Further typical features of this conversation profile, [...], are decreasing tempo and loudness. The exchanges become shorter, less loud, slower and involve fewer and fewer (primary) speakers. The conversation seems to be running out or coming to a standstill.

Despite the recurring use of topic changes and digressions, speakers basically emphasize topic continuity. It is not unusual for topics to, metaphorically speaking, 'float in the air', and interactants might refer to these topics by using phrases such as *remind me to ask you about ...*, *don't forget to tell me later about ...*, *just now you mentioned that ...*. In fact, gambits help speakers to build bridges that establish coherence between various topics. The linguistic means available for this purpose include the following expressions: *that reminds me of ...*; *apropos*; *talking about ...*; *well, that's that, now then, in that connection I would like to turn to*. Moreover, a lack of coherence between successive topics can be veiled or mitigated. Here the English language contains options ranging from utterances signaling urgency (*There is one thing I meant to ask you ...; now, before I forget, there is one point I have to discuss with you...*) to even more marked expressions (*I am sorry to change the subject ...; not to change the subject but ...*) (cf. Bublitz 1988:88-91).

### **4.3.1 American and East Asian strategies to introduce and shift topics**

#### **4.3.1.1 Inductive and deductive patterns**

Since the participants in a communicative event continually try to reduce the overall ambiguity of language, they also choose rhetorical face strategies for the introduction of their topics. Usually it is the person who initiates the conversational exchange that has the right to introduce the topic. Using this framework, Scollon and Scollon (cf. 1995:74-75) give a detailed description of the inductive and deductive patterns of discourse. In the inductive approach the main point is delayed until after the supporting arguments have been presented, whereas the deductive strategy focuses on introducing the main message first. The following examples illustrate that the use of these patterns is, at least to a certain extent, culture-specific.

According to Scollon and Scollon, a Cantonese-speaking businessman is more likely to use the inductive (topic-delayed) pattern.

Because most of our production is done in China now, and uh, it's not really certain how the government will react in the run-up to 1997, and since I think a certain amount of caution in committing to TV advertisement is necessary because of the expense. So, I suggest that we delay making our decision until after Legco makes its decision. (Scollon/Scollon 1995:1).

A western businessman, on the other hand, tends to open the discussion with the introduction of the main point and to postpone further explanations until later.

I suggest that we delay making our decision until after Legco makes its decision. That's because I think a certain amount of caution in committing to TV advertisement is necessary because of the expense. In addition to that, most of our production is done in China now, and it's not really certain how the government will react in the run-up to 1997. (Scollon/Scollon 1995:2).

This aspect of facework has considerable ramifications for cross-cultural communication, because a Chinese speaker would, presumably, not expect his caller to begin immediately with the topic and may therefore pay somewhat less attention to it. Although both conversationalists may remember exactly the same details of a conversation, they will ascribe different values to the items. In an example given by Scollon and Scollon (cf. 1995:5), the American businessman Mr Richardson and Mr Wong, the representative of a Chinese company, fail to understand each other. At the end of their conversation, Mr Richardson invites Mr Wong for lunch. Mr Wong attaches some significance to this invitation, and is then disappointed because Mr Richardson never refers to it any more. For Mr Richardson, however, expressing an invitation at the end of a conversation merely shows that he has enjoyed the meeting. These assumptions form part of our background knowledge and are thus implicit.

As introducing one's topic is an involvement politeness strategy, the person whose topic is being discussed will tend to use shorter turn exchange pauses. That's the reason why, in intercultural communication, deductive discourse patterns often become monologues or dominated discourses. Having gained the right to introduce his/her topic, the speaker prefers shorter turn exchange pauses. As a consequence, s/he regains the floor at each possible point of transition (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:78-79).

#### 4.3.1.2 Topic shifts in business meetings

In a study of American and Japanese business discourse, Haru Yamada (cf. 1992:66-69) compares the strategies members of these two cultures use in order to shift topics. In American meetings, participants tend to invoke a predetermined agenda. In accordance with the agenda, American officers are expected to individually open their own topics. As these

examples show, discourse markers and filled pauses are the prevailing linguistic means for opening topics.

- 1 **all right** first deal today is Morrow>
- 2 **uhm**< . **a:nd**< the other deal, that I've started to work on is Phelps<
- 3 **so**> o:n **uh:m**< . on Garrison< holdings, that's the deal we sold out of a couple of weeks ago>
- 4 **ok**< **uhm**< . **well uhm**:< . my deal- Hinkley-, it is a complicated deal>  
(Yamada 1992:69)

In short, American officials refer to discourse markers in order to check their right to open topics at a certain point in the discussion.

In contrast to American businessmen, Japanese officers are jointly responsible for their transactions. The Japanese practice of group management and consensus decision making is reflected in topic openings as well. Due to the lack of an agenda, any participant has basically got the chance to open various topics (cf. Yamada 1992:70-71). Scollon and Scollon (cf. 1995:81), however, emphasize the fact that hierarchy in relationships still plays an essential role in Asia. Due to the impact of Confucianism, the person who is in the higher position has the right to introduce the topic. This right therefore supersedes the question of who speaks first. In this asymmetrical and hierarchical politeness system, the person in the higher social position tends to initiate his or her own topic by using the deductive rhetorical strategy. For the person in the lower position, on the other hand, it is more appropriate to follow an inductive strategy.

As far as topic shifts in ongoing conversations are concerned, the two cultures tend to use different strategies, too. American interactants focus on verbal formulae to close grouped topics, whereas Japanese officers employ silence and metacomments as a means of shifting topics. As talk is generally viewed unfavorably in this culture, silences as long as eight seconds may occur between the conclusion of one topic and the introduction of the next (cf. Yamada 1992:77-81). Americans, on the other hand, are more likely to use formulaic expressions instead:

- 1 Craig **that's all** I have>
- 2 Karen anyway, I don't know, ah **that's all** I've got>
- 3 Lynn anyway< **that's it** on the deal> and then< so I think **that's it** on the paper that we've got in the market>
- 4 Lynn yeah< uhh so that- **that's it**- it's CLOSed on our books for right now<

In intercultural communication, it may be relatively difficult for Americans to cope with the Japanese strategy of nonconfrontation and silence. Since the latter do not close off topics

verbally, Americans might perceive them as evasive. What's more, confrontational topics are preferably dropped in Japanese discourse (cf. Yamada 1992:89-91).

#### 4.3.1.3 Inside and outside encounters

The perennial uneasiness Asians and Westerners feel in their mutual conversations may, in many cases, derive from on these different strategies. Nevertheless, the deductive pattern also emerges in East Asian countries. Here ordinary conversations between friends, for instance, lack the extended period of facework (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:83). In addition to such close relationships, Scollon and Scollon mention so-called outside encounters as cases for abrupt topic introduction. These encounters, like buying a ticket for a museum, getting a seat in a restaurant or depositing money in a bank, are defined as situations where "the participants have no dealings with each other besides in this single transaction." (Scollon/Scollon 1995:80).

By contrast, inside encounters with family members and close intimates are characterized by a strong concern for face relationships. Even in the west, a situation in which one intends to borrow a large sum of money from a friend will be governed by careful propriety and thus correspond to the inductive pattern (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:81).

## 5 Socialization into a discourse system

Socialization, i.e. the process of learning culture, is accomplished primarily through the preferred forms of discourse. Young children acquire both communicative abilities and cultural norms simultaneously. Infants are still able to engage in many different types of experience. In the course of their socialization, however, they are gradually guided away from this total set of possible behaviors, and they learn the limited set of behaviors that are considered acceptable and important in their own culture (cf. Brislin 1993:95).

### 5.1 Education, enculturation, acculturation

The term 'education' is used for formally structured teaching and learning. 'Enculturation' or 'socialization' refers to informal teaching and learning. Considering these processes in the context of a corporation, the amount of formal, schooled education is a significant measure

used in setting job requirements. Once a new employee has been hired, s/he is expected to become a full member of the company's discourse system. Firstly, this is achieved by means of socialization, i.e. by observation and trying to match other people's behavior. Secondly, the company may provide formal training sessions, handbooks and policy statements (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:149-150).

'Acculturation' is a very negative term, because it "refers to the process by which a dominant culture comes to supplant the culture of people over which it has come to exercise its power." (Scollon/Scollon 1995:179). In recent years, many employees of smaller companies that have been involved in mergers and take-overs have experienced acculturation, since the parent company usually tries to enforce its own corporate culture throughout its merged system.

## **5.2 Primary and secondary socialization**

'Primary socialization' consists of the processes through which a child goes in the earliest stages of becoming a member of his/her culture. The discourse systems through which we enter through primary socialization have a weighed advantage over any we enter in later in life, as young children acquire communicative abilities within a distinct cultural context. The processes of socialization that take place when a child begins to move outside the family, goes to school and interacts with other children can be assigned to 'secondary socialization' (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:150-151).

In intercultural professional communication, there are a number of ways in which membership in a corporate discourse system can come into serious conflict with the discourse systems of one's primary socialization. The above mentioned Utilitarian discourse system<sup>7</sup> has been adopted by most international corporations as their basic ideology. While western children also receive their primary socialization into such individualistic values, a large number of Asian employees have only run across this ideology in the schools they have attended. If they have been enculturated into the Confucian ideology, for instance, they will tend to emphasize interpersonal and family relationships and the success of the group. Since they will regard the individualistic ideology as something foreign, they will only use it for instrumental purposes (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:180).

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<sup>7</sup> see Chapter 2.1.3, p. 4.

### 5.3 The acquisition of turn-taking

As Ninio and Snow (cf. 1996:146) persuasively argue, children can master turn-taking fairly early, whereas other conversational skills such as maintaining topic relevance, observing rules of timing and obligations to respond are developed later.

Developing a sort of 'proto-conversation', parents produce a lot of so-called *turnabouts* when conversing with their infants. Constructing a turn for the baby, parents do not merely ask a question, but immediately provide the required answer as well. This phenomenon accounts for the fact that the main goal of an adult in adult-child conversation is encouraging the child to take his or her turn. In adult-adult conversation, on the other hand, people usually compete for turns (cf. Coulthard 1985:176). Likewise, Ninio and Snow (cf. 1996:149) claim that many British children as young as eight or nine months are fairly good at turn-taking, because their mothers have treated them as conversational partners during face-to-face play sessions and feeding sessions from the age of three months onwards. Moreover, these children are liberally given credit for silences and turns they did not intend as communicative such as burps and coughs, for instance. By the age of 2, children are usually capable of replying to adjacency pairs. The skill in anticipating completion, entering or intruding on a conversation and timing overlap appropriately gradually increases with age.

This precocity, however, seems to be restricted to dyadic interactions with sensitive adults. The skill of sustaining long bouts of well-timed turn alternations with peers only emerges a couple of years later. By the age of three, though, children are able to follow rules of turn-taking with each other. In addition to disruptions in turn-taking, children tend to face difficulties in holding the floor in peer-interactions, as their playmates frequently challenge the other's turn. Since children speak rather slowly and dysfluently parents, by contrast, try to protect the child's turn.

Unlike American middle-class mothers and fathers, who view their children as conversational partners, adults in many other cultures do not consider children to be appropriate conversational partners. These children's socialization process is more or less restricted to just listening to their native language as it is spoken by adults. Besides, these children are more likely to initiate conversations with peers than with grown-ups (cf. Brislin 1993:142).

According to Blum-Kulka and Sheffer (1993:208), American parents attach great importance to socializing their children into American talk-regulation norms in general, and turn-taking practices in particular. Compared to American parents, Israeli parents are especially concerned with the "correct" use of language. Regarding the way bids for turns are accomplished in these two cultures, American children tend to make more explicit requests for turns, such as "Daddy, can I say something? Is it my turn?" Instead of employing explicit metatalk, Israeli children tend to prepare the ground for the ensuing talk by uttering a clearly expressed pre-exchange move: "Daddy, do you know what happened today?"

Interestingly enough, Hawaiian children participate in group activities more frequently than do children from many other cultures. Instead of insisting on their own personal goals, they are accustomed to creating narratives together with peers. As this kind of collective storytelling involves a great deal of interruptions and overlap between verbal contributions, Hawaiian children might face problems when interacting with members of other discourse systems (cf. Brislin 1993:145).

As for cultural differences in socialization, researchers also found that in Japan only 4 percent of adults felt that communication skills were among the most important things for children to learn. Conversely, parents in China and in the US stress the importance of communication skills in children's upbringing. In accordance with their culturally specific values, 27 percent of Chinese parents and 38 percent of American adults claimed to focus on the speaker's ability to express him/herself clearly. Japanese conversationalists, however, tend to emphasize the listener's responsibility and blame the listener if miscommunication arises (cf. Brislin 1993:156).

## **6 Summary of the theoretical part**

Language is culturally transmitted and a primary vehicle for cultural interaction. Both intercultural and intracultural discourse is characterized by face relationships. Firstly, the independence and the involvement face of interactants may be challenged by face-threatening acts. Secondly, the three politeness systems also derive from the notion of face. In a symmetrical politeness system, both speakers prefer strategies of independence, and all participants will use inductive rhetorical strategies, avoiding the direct introduction of their own topics. In a symmetrical solidary politeness system, face politeness strategies of

involvement are more likely to be used. As a result, each speaker will feel quite free to introduce topics on the assumption that both speakers and hearers share membership in the same social, or at least discourse, group. Finally, in an asymmetrical hierarchical system the use of either involvement or independence strategies depends on the position and power of the individuals concerned.

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974/1978) systematics of turn-taking for English conversation centres around the notion of 'transition relevance places' (TRPs), i.e. the end of a turn construction unit which may be projected by the participants. According to the 'current speaker selects next technique', the speaker designates the next party who is then expected to take the turn. If this first rule is not invoked, any listener may claim the turn. In case transfer of speakership is not effected at all, the current speaker has the right to continue his/her turn. This framework suggests that turn shifts involve hardly any gaps or overlaps. Whereas this model generally applies to Anglo-Saxon culture, other cultures might tolerate overlap or intra- and interturn silences. Intercultural misunderstandings may also arise due to varying expectations concerning back-channelling. Japanese culture, for instance, insists on back-channel signals to be used consistently, while American English speakers are more likely to insert them at TRPs.

Once s/he has reached a TRP, a current speaker will display when s/he intends to hand over the floor, and other participants may bid by recognized signals for rights to speak. Such turn signals range from kinesic and paralinguistic cues to gambits. These prepatterned routine formulae are commonly employed in order to introduce semantic frames, indicate the social context or a participant's state of consciousness, or to fulfil a communicative control function. Similarly, they help speakers to initiate digressions and topic shifts.

Regarding the theoretical patterns of turn-taking, it appears that people intuitively understand when and how to take a turn in a conversation. In intercultural communication, interactants might therefore speak a foreign language using the discourse pattern of their early language training. Trying to resolve potential problems of interpretation, professional communicators must be aware of both the inherent ambiguity of language and the significant traits of other cultures. Instead of emphasizing the other interactants' command of a language as such, they should attempt to increase the shared knowledge between the cultures. By looking for differences *and* commonalities between discourse systems, they can avoid stereotyping (cf. Scollon/Scollon 1995:251). Only if the participants in a communicative event remain aware of the fact that membership in a certain discourse

system also entails a certain communicative behavior will they manage to improve their personal and professional intercultural contacts. These skills may be acquired by attending courses and by reading training books on intercultural communication.

## **7 Empirical part**

As my main interest in this paper is in face-to-face conversations within speech events such as meetings, negotiations, and similar professional settings, I contacted a number of international organizations, asking them for a chance to observe intercultural interaction in practice. The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz was so co-operative as to let me audiotape conversations during a workshop. Soon afterwards, I got the opportunity to obtain further data in the course of an internship at the Committee of the Regions, an institution of the European Union in Brussels/Belgium.

My analysis will be based on the following hypotheses:

- ☞ Conversations between native and non-native speakers are characterized by more frequent difficulties than conversations between native speakers.
- ☞ Highly proficient non-native speakers of English still use certain verbal and non-verbal strategies for turn-claiming and turn-taking in the same way in which they are employed in their native language/culture.
- ☞ The successful use of gambits and metalinguistic expressions for turn-taking, introducing new topics, interrupting or asking for clarification depends on the speaker's knowledge of English. In formal settings, gambits are used to a larger extent, whereas the amount of back-channelling is considerably reduced.
- ☞ In addition, the chairperson's influence on the procedure of the interaction is greater at the formal sittings at the EU than at the rather informal workshops at the ECML.
- ☞ The system of simultaneous interpretation at the EU leads to delays and misunderstandings concerning turn shifts.

### **7.1 Meetings and negotiations**

Analyzing the turn-taking mechanisms employed by the participants in group discussions, Schmatzer/Hardt-Mautner (cf. 1989:52-53) emphasize the basic difference between meetings and negotiations. Meetings, which are held for the purpose of pooling information, solving problems, or deciding on action to be taken, are controlled by a chairperson. As a kind of mediator in the competition for the floor, the chair also exerts some influence on the topic.

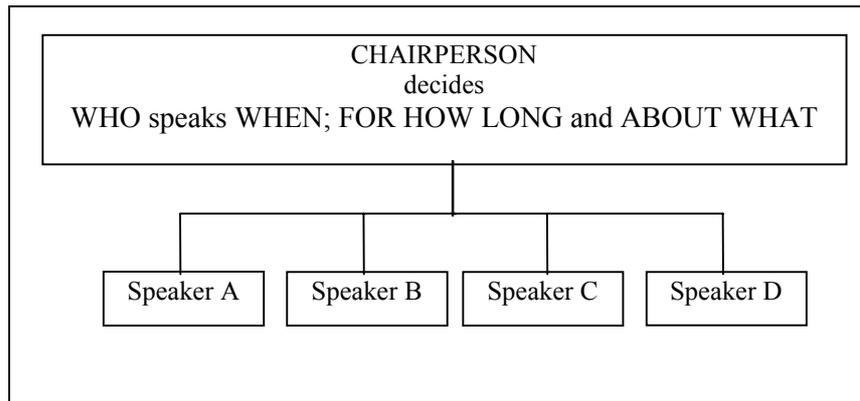


Figure 2: Turn-taking in meetings (Schmatzer/Hardt-Mautner 1989:53).

The lack of a chairperson accounts for the complex mechanism of turn-taking in negotiations. Interactants indulging in negotiations are jointly responsible for regulating turn-taking themselves.

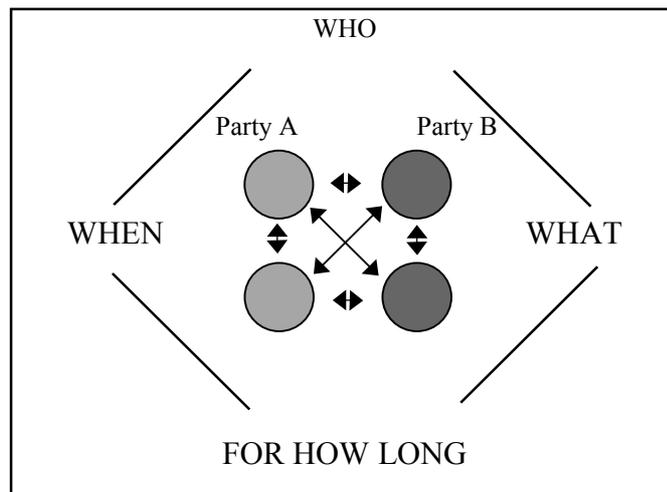


Figure 3: Turn-taking in negotiations (Schmatzer/Hardt-Mautner 1989:53).

## 7.2 The European Centre for Modern Languages

The ECML was founded in 1994 in the form of an "Enlarged Partial Agreement" which is currently supported by 24 member states (as of 1 January 1998). Operating within the framework of the Council of Europe, the Centre aims to promote the learning and teaching of modern languages in a multilingual Europe. The activities of the Centre range from the organization of workshops to the dissemination of research findings. It is important to note that, in its initial stage, the ECML has emphasized the critical needs of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. (cf. <http://www.ecml.at>).

The first part of my analysis is based on data collected at ECML-Workshop 13/1998 entitled "Technology in Vocationally Oriented Language Learning: The use of Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) in Vocationally Oriented Language Learning (VOLL)". After lecturing on topics such as the impact of hypermedia technologies or the selection criteria for VOLL materials, the animators were in charge of their respective working groups of 6-8 participants. Using multimedia tools like the Internet and CD-ROMs, the participants were expected to become familiar with and evaluate TELL/VOLL software. As a result of this workshop, the GRAZVOLL website has been launched. This homepage can be visited at <http://home.sol.no/~anlun/grazvoll/grazvoll.htm>.

### 7.2.1 Analysis of data collected at the ECML

While I was recording various practice sessions at the ECML, I noticed that the participants had a very positive attitude towards intercultural encounters. Trying to foster a face system of symmetrical solidarity, all participants were on first-name terms. The members of the groups included both native speakers of English and bilingual ESL professionals of different cultural backgrounds who had learned English as a second language within a largely non-English speaking culture. In general, the participants were proficient speakers of English. Although I will basically indicate the interactants' native country and mother tongue in this analysis, I am aware of the fact that the nature of their discussions is not merely intercultural, but above all interpersonal. Since each person is part of multiple overlapping discourse systems, it is also essential to take individual differences into account.

Apart from illustrating the difference in turn-taking strategies between meetings and negotiations, I will present a few single case studies that might indicate certain cultural

tendencies as well. Since my research has been limited to audio recordings, I cannot deal with the kinesic aspects of turn allocation in this chapter.

### 7.2.1.1 Timing in multiparty interaction

The majority of multiparty conversations observed at the workshop are characterized by cooperative overlap. In a symmetrical solidarity politeness system, turns to speak are valued and speakers compete for them. At least in the discussions which do not involve a chairperson or in which the animators refrain from playing a dominant role, all speakers are of equal status and prefer strategies of involvement. As these strategies result in a rapid set of exchanges with short interturn pauses, slower participants get less chances to contribute to the discussion. The turn-taking system rather encourages early starts. In the case of simultaneous starts, the rules provide for overlap by competing self-selectors for a next turn, when each interactant projects his/her start to be the earliest possible one at an imminent TRP. Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are therefore very common in my data.

#### ☞ INTERNET FOR STUDENTS (PART 1):

This long, sustained discussion is chaired by one of the animators who repeatedly occupies a 'speaker and attendant floor'. Gradually, the meeting is becoming emotionally charged. Unlike the other interactants, the Bulgarian participant insists on distributing handouts to pupils during Internet sessions. This rather silent participant obviously faces problems claiming a turn, and when she succeeds, her colleagues immediately interrupt her. The French chairperson, however, is aware of the face threat inherent in these interruptions, as the following comments show: "Sorry, you have to speak one at a time." This gambit refers to a longer stretch of overlapping speech. Though the first speaker had no intention to stop, other participants tried to grab the floor. At a later point in the discussion, the animator even addresses the Bulgarian participant by saying: "Don't feel threatened!"

Referring to the model suggested by Sacks et al., TRPs can often be projected in conversations, although such anticipatory completion tends to be more difficult in multiparty discourse than in dyads. The group creating the so-called virtual "Magical Mystery Tour", i.e. a program encouraging pupils to plan an excursion by referring to

various Internet sites, provides a striking example of how cooperative overlap can enhance conversational synchrony. The interactants' sense of teamwork is reflected in their turn-taking strategies during brainstorming sessions. Even where there are some interruptions, turn appropriation tends to contribute to collaborative outcomes, as can be seen in the following discussion:

☞ THE MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR - ESTABLISHING AN ADDITIONAL E-MAIL ADDRESS (PART 1):

(A = Austrian participant; SLO = Slovenian participant; N = Norwegian animator)

A: I'm thinking of a last page, but I'm not sure yet what it should be like. Now that we have collected... now that you've have collected all the material, you've worked hard and that sort of thing we...

SLO: We can OFFER them something... a cup of tea... eh... a glass of beer, something, something English.

A: Some kind of goodie

SLO: Yeah.

A: Or even... or even link them to your e-mail

SLO: ... if they have any questions.

A: Yes, some kind of feedback, if somebody somewhere in Europe uses this.

N: So I'll get about 800 000 requests now?

[laughter]

These exchanges illustrate that in contrast to interruptions, overlap does not necessarily pose a face threat. In this case, the two participants complement each other by completing the other's sentences.

Many authors have pointed out that Mediterranean cultures are characterized by a lower tolerance for gaps and lapses. In support of this view, I will present a conversation between three speakers evaluating a CD-ROM.

☞ FILLING OUT A QUESTIONNAIRE:

(I = Italian participant; R = Romanian participant; M = Maltese participant)

M: You have a silent programme...  
I: Aha  
M: And you can [have...  
I: [But [also in Italian...  
R: [very loud] [Doesn't matter if it is silent or not!

Whenever these participants do not focus on the computer, they produce a lot of simultaneous talk. The recipients initiate a turn when a completion of the current speaker's activity is neither imminent nor predictable. The Maltese and the Italian professionals do not seem to be impressed by their colleague's unmitigated exclamation either, as they keep on talking in the background, thus creating a side floor.

When speakers in my data initiate turns in 'violation' of the turn-taking rules, these deviations are, in fact, alternative ways of using the turn-taking system. That is to say, a 'violation' occurs in the service of the interaction, and is often associated with the display of affiliation or disagreement with an ongoing turn.

Similarly, requests for clarification are used on a regular basis. In the extracts cited below, the primary speaker regains the floor after explaining his previous statement.

☞ THE MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR - ESTABLISHING AN ADDITIONAL E-MAIL ADDRESS (PART 2):

(A = Austrian participant; N = Norwegian animator; F = French participant; SLO = Slovenian participant)

A: [...] or even open a "Magical Mystery Tour" e-mail account... in one of the free e-mail sites... which they could use a sort of forum.  
N: Go to 'Hotmail', get your personal e-mail address here... Yeah, that's possible, yeah.  
I: would also...  
F: That would be the reward?  
SLO: Yeah.  
A: That would be the reward.  
N: [continues his previous turn] And we should also think in terms of... eh... more solid advice for teachers, I think... I see a difficulty here, and that's... eh... people getting lost, because we provide them with external links, and they could go on and on and never return.

While most of the examples presented so far are either related to culturally accepted patterns of turn transfer or to other kinds of cooperative overlapping behaviors, the intrusion into interturn pauses is considered an interruption and therefore challenges the speaker's face. One of the points at which a speaker is vulnerable is when he pauses within a phrase. In order to prevent interruptions, speakers often use pause fillers in multiparty discourse. A miscommunication may thus be simply the result of different turn-taking behavior between cultures with long silences and ones who fill in silences with speech and thinking aloud. As quick topic shifts are common in group discussions, losing one's turn might be of serious consequence. In dyads, where it is considerably easier to take up one's own turn and topic again, silence is much more common.

Interestingly, interruptions during intraturn spaces are not always due to time pressure or a lack of patience. Sometimes they are simply the result of wrong projections of TRPs by the listeners. Instead of regarding the silence as an intraturn pause, the other participants misinterpret it as a lapse and are therefore eager to self-select. Analyzing the conversations during the ECML-Workshop, one can distinguish five main kinds of discontinuous talk:

- 1) As group activity in this workshop involves working with computers most of the time, the longest periods of silence occur when the participants concentrate on the computer program itself. For practical reasons, this specific type of silence can not be avoided in this sort of activity, and will thus not be part of my analysis.
- 2) Whenever non-native speakers hesitate in order to find the appropriate vocabulary or grammatical structure and thereby fail to produce pause fillers, they are likely to be interrupted. This happens repeatedly to the Polish participant in my collection:

☞ INTERNET FOR STUDENTS (PART 2):

(PL = Polish participant; USA = participant from Iceland who grew up in Texas/USA)

PL: I... I... I just want to... to... to... add something... Once I was in... eh... East Germany... it's now Germany of course... in East Germany, Magdeburg... and... eh... they had Americans and... eh ... Russian students of German...

USA: How long ago?

PL: No, no, no, no... but... the problem is not that. But the problem is that Russians were so... group... diplomacy, and Americans, so, individual...

As the Polish speaker fails to produce a deductive account and does not get to the point right away, the American listener tries to help him by appropriating his interlocutor's turn at an alleged TRP. The Polish speaker, however, feels disturbed and confused, and therefore interprets the auditor's interjection as an interruption.

3) However, between-turn gaps may not only be linked to language proficiency, but may be culturally determined as well. Both Norwegians in my sample have a very good knowledge of English. Nevertheless, they might transfer the turn-taking norms of their native Scandinavian culture into the target language when they produce fairly long and unfilled intraturn silences. This behavior might give rise to misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

☞ INTERNET FOR STUDENTS (PART 3):

(N = Norwegian participant; F = French animator)

N: You have companies, for example, that create websites... ah... with terrible background colors, so... [Silence (1 sec.)] and... I have a rather fast computer [Silence (0.5 sec.)]... but still I get angry, and... [Silence (1 sec.)]

F: Well, ah, I think that's because a lot of companies have stepped in on the Internet without necessarily having the competent people for doing that... that's just because it's there, and they have to occupy the ground... And I think this is counterproductive.

The Norwegian participant seems to be interrupted for two reasons. At the beginning, the other participants considered his fairly long pauses TRPs, and so they tried to claim the turn

for themselves. The Norwegian speaker usually resisted these interruptions by continuing to talk. The interruption mentioned above might have a second reason, too. As the French animator still has something to add to the subject of homepages created by companies, he is afraid of the imminent topic shift suggested by the speaker's last remark.

4) The last type of silence I have observed is connected with the structure of politeness systems as developed by Brown/Levinson (1978/1987) and Scollon/Scollon (1995). During group meetings that are characterized by the leading role of a chair, periods of nontalk arise due to the prevailing use of independence strategies. Although some participants will interrupt others if they regard them as equals, they will refrain from doing so when the chairperson has the floor. In a hierarchical politeness system, participants resorting to independence strategies obviously pay more attention to projecting TRPs as well.

☞ WRITING A QUESTIONNAIRE - EVALUATING VOLL-SOFTWARE:

(GB = chairman from Great Britain; R = Romanian participant; ZA = South African participant who has lived in Switzerland for 20 years; I = Italian participant)

The group discusses a questionnaire that was designed by the South African and the Italian participants.

GB: [quoting from the questionnaire] Treatment of errors... self-correction possibility... errors allowed?

[Silence (4 secs.) - then back-channelling by the Baltic women who were addressed]

Is it all right, is it understandable?

GB: [quoting again] Error relevance indicated...

[Silence (3 secs.)]

R: What do you mean by "errors allowed"? Eh... which don't affect communication very much, or what?

ZA: For example, if you're typing in an answer, and you forget the capital

R: yeah

ZA: But that wasn't the thing you were supposed to be practising in that exercise... it ignores that... So your answer is correct. The word you type in...

I: No, no, no... in this case it was "error is allowed" because sometimes it's... if you... as long as you don't get the right answers you won't be allowed to continue the exercise...

In this meeting, the interlocutors seem to attribute more power to the British chairperson. Contrary to the South African participant, for instance, the animator is virtually never interrupted. Instead, the others tend to hesitate to answer whenever he directs a question to the whole group.

- 5) Additionally, silence in meetings guided by a chairperson may be more significant when the discussion is based on a predetermined agenda. If the following speakers are generally nominated by the chair, competition for turns and subsequently overlap and interruptions are reduced.

### 7.2.1.2 Back-channelling

A second area in which discourse transfer is apparent is in the use of back-channel signals. According to Duncan (1973), auditors use *m-hm* and similar forms of minimal response to display continued acceptance of the recipient role as well as attention and support. This signal is by far the most common back-channel sent by the participants of the workshop. However, the precise surface form and the articulation of the cues vary cross-culturally. The data indicate that intercultural encounters of the disturbing kind may not just result from different timing conventions, but also from the potential ambiguity connected with these signals. One noteworthy finding in this regard is that whenever the Italian participant merely responds in the backchannel, the other members of the group interpret the sound as an expression of contradiction, a query, or a claim for the floor. After the group straightened out the misunderstanding, the Italian participant often tries to adjust her back-channelling behavior to the Anglo-Saxon standards, but sometimes she automatically provides the signal that is acknowledged in her own culture.



#### WRITING A QUESTIONNAIRE/LOOKING FOR A GOOD PHRASE

(ZA = South African/Swiss participant; I = Italian participant)

ZA: What we want to get in the feedback is: There is enough animation, there is enough video, so that the student is not bored.

I: Yeah, yeah.

ZA: So how do we phrase that now?

[laughter]

ZA: What... what... basically what we want is a degree, right? How much...

I: Eh, eh, eh, eh

ZA: Too much? Or it distracts them, or is there enough, so that...

I: Yes, yes, yes... let's write the thing please, and then we come back to it later.

Although all the back-channels in this passage express some kind of agreement, the brief utterance of *eh, eh* corresponds to the signal that caused confusion in the previous discussion.

Apart from the Italian conversationalist it is the American participant who provides the most salient back-channel cues in my collection. As pointed out in chapter 3.6.1, American speakers of English employ a number of content-specific signals. My analysis seems to confirm this finding, as the phrases used by the American member of a group include exclamations such as: "Yeah, I've heard that! Yeah, create a link, yeah. Wow, that's complicated! Yes, now it starts to make sense." Additionally, he likes to complete other speakers' sentences in order to give feedback:

#### ☞ INSERTING A PICTURE INTO A HOMEPAGE

(F = French animator; USA = American participant)

F: So, you have to... again

USA: Save it...

F: What you do is, you go to "Ansicht"...

Considering the various purposes that back-channelling may serve, this presentation by the French animator reveals another interesting phenomenon. Interactants who use back-channels as a means of conveying their understanding are more likely to be addressed by the primary speaker. While the American and the Norwegian participants support the French animator, the Bulgarian participant, for instance, does not display any signals conveying her problems with the subject of the conversation. Consequently, the animator only monitors the active listeners' understanding. The silent members of the group, on the other hand, do not get the opportunity to ask questions, and are more or less excluded from the conversation.

The following example illustrates the use of repetition as a back-channel signal:

☞ INTERNET FOR STUDENTS (PART 4):

(F = French animator; PL = Polish participant; N = Norwegian participant; BG = Bulgarian participant)

- F: The principle of the Internet is that there's no centralized decision making... and... I think... one of the problems that might arise from that is that we're so eager to control... [yes, we have this in our blood.
- PL: [It is our [bias.
- N: [It's [our bias.
- BG: [Oooh.
- F: Yes, it is our bias. I think it's very important to... we do it once, to show... that's very important as a research pattern model... And then we let them go...

Finally, I would like to introduce laughter and smiles as kinesic types of back-channelling. The fact that laughter occurs very frequently in my tape-recordings does not only show that the participants are nonverbally strategically competent in conversational interaction, but also highlights the good atmosphere during the workshop. Under these circumstances, laughing is in fact a strategy of involvement and an interruption that is an encouragement for turn maintenance.

### 7.2.1.3 Turn allocation and turn length

Drawing on Schmatzer and Mautner's (1989) distinction between turn-taking in meetings and negotiations, I will treat these two categories separately in this chapter. In contrast to both debates and conversation, meetings that have a chairperson partially prespecify turns. Thus, the chairperson has rights to talk first, to talk after each other speaker, and can use each such turn to allocate next speakership. As the chair is supposed to adopt the responsibility for maintaining the flow of interaction, s/he is not likely to be interrupted. My data suggest that chairpersons in meetings take predominantly long turns because the other participants tend to use independence strategies. In particular, the leader position in a discussion is gained through mastery of both the expertise and the linguistic expression associated with the topic. During the workshop the animators recurrently explained certain

details or even gave little presentations, i.e. they occupied a 'single person floor' or, more specifically, a 'one prime speaker floor' or a 'speaker and attendant floor'.

Besides, the feedback provided by listeners in meetings deviates from the back-channel information conveyed in more heated exchanges. While auditors mostly communicate in the back-channel in order to claim a turn a few seconds later in negotiations, they merely intend to support the chairperson in meetings. That might also be the reason why chairpersons receive considerably more back-channel signals in my data than other participants, and this increases the length of chairs' turns as well. Likewise, participants' turns tend to be longer in meetings when the agenda is predetermined and the chairperson assigns turns.

In the more informal interactions I recorded, speaking turns are valued and highly sought after. The theoretical framework of turn-taking by Sacks et al. implies that turn-seeking takes place at discourse boundaries. There are, in fact, various verbal, non-verbal and paralinguistic cues available to interactants for the purpose of predicting the occurrence of the turn-switch. The participants in my study, however, do not always obey these organizational rules, although speaker transfer correlates with TRPs in most cases. Such 'collaborative floors' can therefore be considered 'ensembles'.

Instead of trying to identify turn-relevant points, recipients in 'joint floors' sometimes initiate turns when the current speaker does not intend to relinquish the floor. Prosodic patterns such as high pitch and repetition have turned out to be most common methods of turn appropriating at the workshop. Both increasing and decreasing speed and volume can contribute to turn maintenance and, under certain conditions, to turn appropriation. Increasing the speed, however, prevents someone else from interrupting and gaining the floor. In my collection, the current speaker often reacts by performing an amplitude shift him/herself. This strategy seems to be rather popular with speakers from Southern Europe whose voices often rise when they attempt to maintain the floor.

Whenever two or more self-selectors initiate a turn at a possible completion point of the current speaker's activity, the first starter usually has the right to continue. This second rule for turn allocation stated by Sacks et al.<sup>8</sup> (1974/1978) provides for overlap by competing self-selectors for the next turn, when each projects his/her start to be the earliest possible one at some TRP.

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<sup>8</sup> see Chapter 3.2, pp. 11-12.

The participants in the workshop tend to reduce their speed of talking when they approach a TRP. If the current speaker sends ambiguous turn-yielding signals, however, his/her interlocutors may make wrong predictions about the end of the first speaker's turn. This conflict may be due to misleading intonation patterns or to different cultural conventions for turn-taking, as the above excerpt from *Internet for Students*<sup>9</sup> has shown. In this example, the Norwegian participant faces problems finishing his turns because he prefers rather long, unfilled silences.

Irrespective of such misunderstandings determined by cultural factors, I have found that the techniques the participants use for claiming a turn mainly depend on their knowledge of English. Native speakers, who use the appropriate gambits more often, might have an advantage here. Strategies like raising one's pitch or repeating the initial word of one's turn seem to be the quicker and easier options for the non-native speakers taking part in my analysis. In spite of the face-threat inherent in these techniques, they turned out to be very effective in the negotiations during the workshop.

#### ☞ CREATING A WEBSITE:

(F = French animator; PL = Polish participant)

F: So, all of these things you will have to experiment with.

PL: Yes, to see on a website, and...

F: Yeah, exactly, and to

PL: [raising his voice] remember...  
[to be amazed, to be amazed...

F: ... at the results. Always, always...

[laughter]

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<sup>9</sup> see Chapter 7.2.1.1, p. 47.

In this typical incident, the Polish participant uses amplitude shift and repetition as turn-claiming devices. Since these techniques also indicate enthusiasm and involvement on the part of the participant, the animator does not feel offended at all.

Furthermore, discourse markers and so-called 'starters' are commonly used when a recipient intends to grab the floor. Starters such as *well*, *er* or *now* can be regarded as preliminaries to a following utterance. As they do not relate to preceding, but only to subsequent speech activity, they are pure turn-taking signals. The same is true for a number of gambits which, however, were only used to a very limited extent in these conversations.

#### 7.2.1.4 Gambits and topic shifts

As I already suggested in the previous chapter, the skillful insertion of gambits in speech depends on the speaker's proficiency of the language. Analyzing the meetings chaired by the British animator, one finds that he employs formulaic speech on a wide scale. Firstly, he has obviously got a larger set of gambits available than the non-native speakers in the group, and he does not need to search for ways of structuring his discourse. Secondly, as a chairman, he attempts to ascertain that the participants do not get sidetracked.

#### ☞ REPORTING ON VOLL-SOFTWARE:

(GB = British animator; ZA = South African participant who has lived in Switzerland for 20 years; LT = Lithuanian participant; I = Italian participant)

ZA: What I find a bit confusing about that Kerr evaluation sheet...

GB: Well, if it is ambiguous, let's look at the other lists and see if there is something more precise.

[...]

LT: **So, can I... ?**

GB: **Yes, please, do.** I think you had more success with your program.

LT: I don't know.

I: Eh... which one did you use?

LT: I used Kerr, also. And... and... [waiting until the others are silent] So, I take "The Wind of Change" program... So, **first of all** I have to say some words about the usage of computers in my country...

[...]

GB: Could you just describe which program it is, cause colleagues around the table don't know what you're talking about.

LT: Students of... eh...

GB: So what's the title?

LT: I said, "The Wind of Change".

GB: "Winds of Change", yes. Who's it produced by?

[...]

LT: And then, **one more thing**...

[...]

LT: **So, what else?**

GB: **May I ask you**, why did you decide to take the Kerr, and not the one which was more linked to language learning?

[...]

LT: **So... what do I have to do? Go on?**

GB: Yes...

LT: And then I want to point out the things that I found excellent...

[...]

LT: **So, these are the main points I have talked about. So, that's all I have to say.**

GB: OK, thanks. So you didn't look at the other things like: Is there an instruction manual to go with it?

[...]

GB: Yes, **but it seems to me that there're two issues here**: The **first issue** you addressed was the question of content... The **second way** of validating would be that...

In this extract, the chairman clearly acts as the leader of the meeting, allocating turns to the respective participants and introducing new aspects and topics. In accordance with the seating arrangement, the Lithuanian participant is supposed to give an account of the software program she evaluated after her Estonian colleague has finished. What is of interest here is that she actively seeks her turn by addressing the chairperson: "So, can I...?" Although the chair explicitly selects the Lithuanian participant as the next speaker, the Italian member of the group asks a question. In order to introduce the question, she uses a starter rather than a gambit as a turn-claiming signal.

Having regained the floor, the primary speaker then prepares her colleagues for a longer turn. In order to prevent interruptions, she skillfully inserts the gambit "First of all,... ". While she delivers her report, the Lithuanian participant is repeatedly interrupted by the chairperson. These instances of turn appropriation seem to break the flow of the speaker's account. In Keller's (1979/1981) terms, however, the animator's requests for clarification

could also be considered 'communication control signals'. Since he uses polite gambits such as "May I ask you... ?", these requests contribute to the overall understanding of the report, and so they should not impair the relationship between the members of the group.

After such interruptions the Lithuanian participant sometimes tries to gain some planning time without losing the turn again. In the passage above I quoted the phrase "So, what else?" to illustrate this strategy. The important role of the chairperson in selecting speakers is emphasized when the Lithuanian participant bids for the floor for the second time by saying "So... what do I have to do? Go on?" At the end of her contribution, she uses verbal formulae in order to close the topic and abandon her turn: "So, these are the main points I have talked about. So, that's all I have to say."

The chairperson's gambit "it seems to me" is interesting both as a semantic frame and an introductory remark on the turn-taking level. Preparing the rest of the group for a rather extended turn, he structures his utterance by using the following chronological device: "The first issue [...], the second way of validating [...]."

Like his British colleague, the French animator uses gambits in order to structure his discourse on a regular basis. The interactional activities that were under observation in his group, however, tended to be discussions or presentations rather than formal meetings. Consequently, the animator does not focus on allocating turns to other participants. Trying to give coherent explanations and to resist interruptions, he also employs rising intonation patterns and certain syntactic constructions such as *if*-clauses. After uttering the first part of an *if*-clause, he types something into the computer, for instance. The other participants usually do not invade the ensuing silence, because the animator still holds the floor. The incomplete sentence and the rising pitch the animator uses indicate that further comments are still to follow. The other strategies and gambits he employs include semantic introducers like "The problem is... " or "The way I see it, the Internet is a metaphor of world culture." Once he has launched a turn, he usually introduces his own topics. His deductive monologues are thus characterized by short interturn pauses which are only prolonged if there is some computing activity involved.

In addition, he tends to control topic shifts by digressing from the main problem under discussion. In the following excerpt he returns to the previous topic again just before the Norwegian participant initiates a new one.

☞ CREATING A WEBSITE:

(F = French animator; USA = American participant; PL = Polish participant; N = Norwegian participant)

F: It's clear that... on one given page... eh... you should never have... ah... but... **by the way**, something that's very efficient in that context... it tells you... when you put a picture inside your page, it tells you, so many seconds... and you can reduce the picture, and it tells you, so many less...

USA: Yeah, yeah

PL: ... just to remind you that...

F: Yeah, absolutely. It's a fundamental constraint that you have. If you don't look at it, you're lost, I mean... on a given page... ah... you should never have a lot more than... eh... 40000 kilobytes...

N: **Another thing that struck me yesterday...**

Moreover, expressions such as "You see?" and similar gambits appear quite often in the French animator's discourse. These gambits are marked for communication control, but as he uses these terms quite heavily, they might sometimes act as mere fillers for time as well.

In brief, formulaic speech seems to be of prime importance in meetings whereas dyads contain hardly any gambits. It should be noted that, in my collection, the participants used gambits for adapting the degree of politeness and for interrupting to a much lesser extent than I had expected. The South African and the British interactants, i.e. the native speakers at the workshop, are indeed the only participants who preface interruptions and other fairly severe impositions on their colleagues with expressions such as "Sorry...".

If non-native speakers use turn-initial gambits in dyads or multiparty discussions at all, they often refer to a limited set of gambits belonging to one single category. The Polish participant, for instance, utters phrases like "I have another question...", "One more question...", "I'd like to ask your advice about..." and "I just want to add something...". These gambits are characterized by their turn-claiming function. Introducing a new topic or just claiming a turn, the Italian participant repeatedly uses the adverb "actually" for both actions. Most interactants seem to be aware of the importance of topic continuity in discourse. Digressions are therefore marked by means of gambits such as "Before I forget, ...", "Going back to the idea of... ", or "Talking about...".

In summary, cooperative overlap and misprojections of TRPs are very common in the multiparty discussions recorded at the ECML. The speech of the native speakers present at the workshop is characterized by the widespread use of gambits, while most non-native speakers are reluctant to employ formulaic speech. Similarly, amplitude shift is not only used as a means of reinforcing the verbal message, but also as a means of maintaining and appropriating turns. Despite the face-threatening connotations these features have, they do not seem to adversely affect communication. In a solidary politeness system, overall goodwill, a positive attitude towards intercultural relationships and enthusiasm seem to allow people to generate 'credit', and their credit allows mistakes to be ignored or forgiven.

Eliciting information about the differences between formal meetings and rather informal conversation, I have found that turn transfer is indeed accomplished in opposing ways. In meetings, it is the chairperson who is responsible for allocating turns, while speakers may self-select in other types of conversation. These contrasting turn-taking systems also influence the interaction on the level of back-channel signals and on the level of timing conventions.

As for the characteristic features of particular cultures, my approach has been based on single case studies. The ambiguous back-channel cues sent by the Italian participant as well as the long intraturn pauses provided by the Norwegian participant led to intercultural misunderstandings. These problems, however, were soon resolved, and did not have any considerable impact on the outcome of the group work.

### **7.3 Intercultural Discourse at the European Union**

The European Union consists of three pillars, namely the European Community, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Home affairs and Justice. The work of the Community is administered by the following institutions and bodies: the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors. The Council and the Commission are assisted by the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. In the meantime, the European Investment Bank, the European Central Bank and the European System of Central Banks were established as well (Articles 7-9 Amsterdam Treaty). As I had access to meetings of both the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions during my internship in Brussels, I will focus on the prevailing discourse patterns within these institutions.

### **7.3.1 The Committee of the Regions**

Established by the Treaty on European Union, the Committee of the Regions (COR) is an advisory assembly composed of 222 regional and local authorities. Since the creation of the COR, public authorities including mayors, city and county councilors and regional presidents have to be consulted on proposed European Union (EU) legislation in areas where they are responsible for implementing these policies. According to the Maastricht Treaty, it is mandatory to consult the COR on issues concerning economic and social cohesion (including the Structural Funds), trans-European transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure networks, public health, education and culture. The consultation procedure is currently limited to the European Commission and the Council. Where the Economic and Social Committee is involved in the decision-making process, the COR shall also be informed by the Council or the Commission. If the COR considers that any specific regional interests are concerned, it may issue an opinion on the matter (Articles 198a-198c European Union Treaty).

The COR focuses on defending and improving the subsidiary principle. According to this principle, decisions should be taken at the level of authority that can act most effectively. This means that the EU should only adopt measures that Member States alone cannot carry out properly.

During its first four-year term of office, the COR was equally eager to address general issues affecting European integration. Examples in point are the economic and monetary union, agricultural policy, environmental protection, employment policy, the integration of equal opportunities and eastward enlargement. All these opinions are submitted to the Commission, Council and European Parliament.

Once the Treaty of Amsterdam comes into force, it will both strengthen and further develop the position of the COR as an EU advisory body. The Amsterdam Treaty will expand the Committee's existing remit to cover employment, social questions, the environment, vocational training and transport as well as implementing measures on public health and the Social Fund. Finally, it will also give the European Parliament the right to consult the Committee on matters of mutual interest (Articles 263-265 Amsterdam Treaty).

The internal bodies of the COR consist of the Plenary Assembly, the Bureau and the commissions. The seven specialized commissions are responsible for drafting the COR's opinions (cf. <http://www.cor.eu.int>; cf. Streinz 1996:103-104).

On its own initiative, the COR adopted an "Opinion on Intercultural Education" (CdR 194/96FIN), highlighting the role of intercultural education in promoting the integration in society of all citizens. Considering that there is a tendency in some Member States for low levels of achievement and high levels of exclusion for ethnic minority pupils, the COR wants to support these citizens' participation in the training systems and the labor market. To prevent marginalization, intercultural education should be provided as early as possible starting at pre-school level and continuing throughout people's lives following a lifelong learning approach. The COR strongly recommends increased support for the dissemination of best practice and experience in this field through local and regional networks. Both teachers and parents should be involved in intercultural education, ensuring that specific linguistic and cultural needs of ethnic communities are taken into account. Similarly, the COR welcomes intercultural educational action within EU-projects like SOCRATES and LEONARDO. It organized, in cooperation with the Commission, the conference on *Social Cohesion, Intercultural Education and the Role of Subnational Units* that took place in Thessaloniki on 29 and 30 September 1997. Furthermore, the COR issued a couple of documents on the promotion of linguistic diversity in Europe. On 13-14 January 1999, a Forum entitled "A Europe of Cultures in a Europe of Regions" will be held during the plenary assembly of the Committee of the Regions. The aim of this Forum is to draw the attention of the European Institutions to the added value that cultural groups, particularly minority cultures, can bring to the unity of Europe.

### **7.3.2 The European Parliament**

The European Parliament (EP) is the only democratically elected international institution. Its 626 Members exercise democratic control at European level, helping to draft, amend and adopt European laws and the annual budget. The Parliament's legislative power comprises four possible procedures: consultation, cooperation procedure, co-decision procedure and the assent procedure. The European Parliament is equally involved in the defense of human rights, and it has relations with all the world's democratically elected parliaments. In addition, European citizens can exercise their right of petition by submitting their requests and grievances on matters within the European Union's jurisdiction. The ombudsman is

responsible for investigating disputes that may arise between citizens and the administrative authorities of the institutions (Articles 137-144 European Union Treaty; Articles 189-201 Amsterdam Treaty).

The Members of the EP, who sit in political groups, belong to 20 standing committees, each of which specializes in a particular field. The EP is the only Community institution which meets and debates in public. Although the Parliament's seat is in Strasbourg, the parliamentary committees generally meet for two weeks a month in Brussels. After being appointed as rapporteurs for specific topics under discussion, Members draw up reports on legislative proposals which are then debated and voted on during plenary sessions (cf. <http://www.europarl.eu.int>; cf. Streinz 1996:93-99).

### **7.3.3 Multilingualism at the European Union**

Considering the linguistic diversity of the EU member states, one has to distinguish between the authentic, legally binding text of the Treaties, the Community's official languages and its major working languages. External communication takes place in all official languages, and citizens may address the institutions in these languages. The term working languages, however, refers to the most important languages used by the staff of an institution in everyday interpersonal communication (cf. Streinz 1996:71-73).

Stipulating that the rules governing the use of languages by the institutions of the Community shall be determined by the Council, Article 217 Treaty of Rome (now Article 290 Treaty of Amsterdam) served as a point of departure for the Community's language related regulations. Accordingly, Council Regulation No. 1/58<sup>10</sup>, which was adopted in April 1958, specified that German, French, Italian and Dutch should be used as official and working languages. Due to subsequent enlargements, eleven languages have been granted the same status: Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish. Making regulations and other documents available in all official languages of the member states is said to be a matter of accountability. In fact, organs may take decisions which immediately become law in the member states and even override national law. This full multilingual environment is unique among international organizations. At the Council of Europe, for instance, only English and French enjoy this status (cf. Coulmas 1991:4-6).

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<sup>10</sup> see Appendix.

At the EP, simultaneous interpretation of all parliamentary and committee debates is provided in the Union's eleven official languages. Similarly, all parliamentary documents are translated into and published in these eleven languages. The right of every delegate to follow debates and express himself/herself in their own mother tongue is explicitly provided for in the Parliament's Rules of Procedure. Rule 102 (2)<sup>11</sup> reads: "Speeches delivered in one of the official languages shall be simultaneously interpreted into the other official languages and into any other language the Bureau may consider necessary." (<http://www2.europarl.ep.ec/dg7-bin/seid>).

The interpreter's job is to ensure that speeches delivered in one of the official languages of the European Union are accurately rendered into other official languages. In a meeting, participants can express themselves in any one of a number of passive languages, i.e. those from which interpretation is provided and can follow the debate in one or more active languages, into which all speeches will be rendered. A set of headphones is thus available at every seat. Except for face-to-face meetings and for missions away from Brussels or Strasbourg, practically all EP meetings rely on simultaneous interpretation in specially equipped rooms, where interpreters work in teams of at least two interpreters per active language. For a meeting with simultaneous interpretation in six or more languages there must be three interpreters in each language booth.

The knowledge of one or more foreign languages is thus not a condition for the 222 Members of the Committee of the Regions, for instance. Officials working for this institution full time, however, are required to master at least one official language, excluding their mother tongue.

### 7.3.3.1 The result of the interviews

Interviewing between 20 and 25 staff members at the COR, I found out that most officials consider themselves to be fluent in both English and French, followed by German, Spanish, Italian and Dutch. Although internal communication at this institution takes place primarily in French, many people claimed to be better in English than in French. As French is used as the main working language, employees also address EU-officials they had never met before in this language. If possible, however, they try to be polite by using the assumed mother

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<sup>11</sup> see Appendix.

tongue of the other person, too. Similarly, informal meetings are held in a common *lingua franca*, but in many cases this *lingua franca* coincides with the main working language. Sometimes interactants even resort to a kind of 'polyglot dialogue'. In this case, a colleague would address them in a language they both understand, but the addressee would choose to answer in a different *lingua franca*.

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed the hypothesis that non-native speakers were at a disadvantage in intercultural encounters, especially as far as the use of politeness strategies and gambits is concerned. Three-quarters of the employees I interviewed about this matter at the COR confirmed my assumption, pointing out that it was difficult at times to express certain legal terms in a foreign language. The factors of time and stress seem to play a role as well. Asked if these problems had an impact on the use of gambits by non-native speakers, the opinions were more varied. Some colleagues, on the one hand, were convinced that there was a lot of intercultural 'know-how' in the COR. A lack of gambits would therefore not affect the level of politeness expressed in the interaction. A number of staff members, on the other hand, admitted that non-native speakers sometimes seemed short and harsh, even if they did not intend to convey this impression. Surprisingly, one official said that non-natives often use gambits as a means to gain time and as a sort of "political weapon".

Although in practice the number of languages used at the level of committee meetings of the EP and the COR is occasionally limited, the institutions remain committed to work in all eleven official languages, regardless of the cost. In many instances, officials opt to listen to the original speech in meetings rather than the translation provided by the interpreters. Alternatively, they might listen to interpretation, let us say, from Portuguese into English rather than their native Dutch because they prefer to hear what a majority of their fellow participants are hearing. If certain language pairs cannot be covered, interpreters have to relay the text, i.e. use the English or French interpretation as a basis for their version instead of rendering it directly from the original language. This system seems to be particularly problematic for some Members. Several people pointed out that they consciously tried to reduce the amount of linguistic devices such as metaphors and sayings in sittings in order to avoid intercultural misunderstandings.

Nonetheless, many EU-officials support simultaneous interpretation into all official languages, as nobody feels discriminated against in such a system. Considering the disadvantages of this policy, they do not merely emphasize the financial challenges, but also

the fact that translations often differ from the original text. Such mistakes may create misunderstandings to the extent that meetings occasionally involve long discussions about the correct translation of certain terms in a document. As a result, I observed meetings where the chairperson tried to resolve the problem by suggesting to "vote on the Spanish version of the text, and not the Danish one."

These difficulties might be exacerbated by enlargement towards the east. Apart from the resulting costs, this might also be detrimental to efficiency. That's why the number of working - and perhaps also official - languages could be reduced in the process of enlargement. The result of my inquiries about this question was particularly striking: 90% of the employees I interviewed hoped that the EU would introduce a limited number of languages in the course of eastern enlargement. According to these officials, English and French would definitely be chosen as official languages. German, Italian, Spanish and a Slavonic language might have a chance of being granted this status as well. One participant in the study suggested introducing Esperanto.

### 7.3.3.2 The rules for turn-taking at sittings

Talk at meetings involving a large number of participants is difficult to manage unless there is a pattern to which everyone is willing to subscribe in advance. According to Rule 105 of the EP's Rules of Procedure<sup>12</sup>, turns may only be assigned by the chairperson of the sitting. Members are supposed to address the chair, and are forbidden to depart from the subject. Although a speaker must not be interrupted s/he may, by leave of the chairperson, allow another participant in the sitting to put to him/her a question on a certain point in his/her speech. The following example shall illustrate how participants practise these rules:

Chairperson:    Rapporteur, wilt u dat misschien nog even toelichten?

Rapporteur:    Herr Präsident, darf ich das Wort an unseren Experten weitergeben?

Likewise, an Austrian participant refers to his expert: "Wenn Sie noch technische Details erörtern wollen, ich habe meinen Experten mitgebracht, wenn Sie ihm das Wort erteilen wollen." The chairperson, however, does not choose to do so.

At a later stage in the session, a German participant comments on a previous contribution without asking for the chair's permission and without switching on his microphone. It

seems, however, that the chairman is in control of the debate: "Ja, u probeert hier nog informeel iets te regelen."

During a discussion on "Incineration of hazardous waste" by Members of the EP's *Committee on the environment, public health and consumer protection*, the Dutch rapporteur and a Spanish Member even got into an argument over an amendment the rapporteur had introduced. Shouting angrily at each other, they interrupted each other several times. Since the two participants ignored virtually all the parameters that have a bearing on discussions at the EP, the chairperson tried in vain to stop these fact-threatening accusations, and reminded them of the rules for floor allocation: "You don't have the floor, sorry, you don't have the floor!" Such arguments are rather exceptional, though.

In addition, the stringent rules for the conduct of sittings involve restrictions on an individual's speaking time. These time limits were particularly emphasized at a conference I attended at the EP. This event was entitled "Interparliamentary conference on the protection of European Union citizens' financial interests: Pooling EU and national resources". As the participants of this conference were mainly Members of national parliaments, they were not all familiar with the EP's Rules of Procedure. Whenever a speaker did not exceed the time limit, s/he was even applauded by the chair. Nevertheless, turn-taking was more predictable at most stages of this conference than in ordinary sessions, because the national MPs were merely reading the speeches they had prepared beforehand (cf. Rule 106: Allocation of speaking time; cf. Rule 108: Personal statements<sup>13</sup>).

Communicative events such as debates carry some expectations regarding topics. In shifting from the pre-meeting preparation to the main agenda of the session the chair is likely to say something like, "Perhaps we should get down to the business of our agenda." (Scollon/Scollon 1995:25). Most chairpersons at the EU do not only keep to the global as well as the local topics specified on the agenda, but often they also refer to a predetermined list of speakers (cf. Rule 107)<sup>14</sup>. In some cases, speakers may be added to this list if they gesture their desire to contribute to the debate. Turns are predominantly claimed by kinesic signs, i.e. by raising one's hand. Sometimes, however, problems may arise due to the seating arrangements. In a working party on Ecological Union by Commission 4 of the COR, the representative of the European Commission was actually sitting on a desk next to

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<sup>12</sup> see Appendix.

<sup>13</sup> see Appendix.

<sup>14</sup> see Appendix.

the podium. Since he was not in the chairperson's field of vision, this participant experienced considerable difficulty indicating his turn claims nonverbally.

Referring to the agenda and the list of speakers prepared beforehand, it is important to note that chairpersons sometimes shift certain topics or leave them out altogether. This is certainly due to the tight schedule of meetings. At the 26<sup>th</sup> *Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions*, for instance, some speakers on the list did not have the chance to take a turn at all. Besides, the chairperson also decided when the voting procedure was supposed to start, and naturally s/he chaired the vote as well. Due to the increasing pressure, the chairperson initiated a number of quick topic shifts. One rapporteur, however, was carefully monitoring the chair's speech in order to find turn boundaries. Subsequently, he took the floor several times without being called by the chairperson. Obviously the rapporteur wanted to prevent the Members from voting on the opinion without having discussed it thoroughly before.

A potential speaker has to wait until the chair acknowledges his/her turn claim. As soon as the chair allocates a turn by calling the next speaker's name, this delegate is supposed to switch on his/her microphone. This is an essential technical aspect of turn-taking in sittings, as speakers express themselves in their native language and interpreters rely on the transmission of messages by means of microphones. If speakers forget to turn on their microphones, they will be forced to start their contribution once again. On the one hand, this system of turn-taking protects speakers from heckling and overlap by other participants, and the interactants usually occupy a 'one prime speaker floor'. The chair, on the other hand, seems to have the right to interrupt the speaker in order to indicate the above mentioned time limit (cf. Born/Schütte 1995:125).

While the discussions I observed at the ECML-Workshop were characterized by a system of symmetrical solidarity, the set-up of the formal sessions held at the institutions of the EU accounts for the prevailing use of the deference politeness system and therefore independence strategies, at least during the meeting as such. Due to both the larger number of participants and to simultaneous interpretation, power relations must be defined in advance. As far as turn-taking is concerned, the chairperson is supposed to check if delegates comply with the rules laid down in the respective Rules of Procedure, and this task adds to the chair's position of power and distance. This position is further underlined by the seating arrangements in the room, with the chairperson occupying the seat in the middle

of the podium facing the Members. Correspondingly, high-ranking representatives sit next to the chairperson on the podium.

Analyzing the chairs' turns, it is striking how frequently they employ metalinguistic expressions, i.e. expressions whose subject is language and which contain a lexicalised item referring to talk. Expressions like "Could you explain, ...", "Rapporteur, do you want to take the floor?", "Mr. [...] has the floor", "Sorry to interrupt, ...", "But before we drop the point, can we still listen to ...", or "Would you like to comment on this?" just represent a limited selection of commonly used gambits. Moreover, the participants frame their contributions by using gambits such as "Sorry if I disagree, chairman, but..." on a wide scale. These gambits signal the social context of turn-taking. After thanking the chairperson for giving him/her the floor, the speaker introduces the main structure of his argument. Speakers thus use semantic frames such as "Firstly, ..., secondly, ..." or "Let me, chairman, with your permission, go back a little in time..." very often. In addition, clarification requests such as "I'm not quite sure if I understood your question" are also common. In the case of formal sessions, gambits might also help the interpreters, giving them time to adjust to the new speaker. The end of a turn or a speech is usually marked by the almost obligatory "Thank you." Additionally, rapporteurs might finish their explanation by suggesting to the Members that they vote for or against the draft opinion or amendment.

In contrast to everyday conversation, the delegates' mode of expression frequently resembles written language, as the amount of gambits, for instance, shows. In some cases, speakers might even read out the notes they took before the session. Considering the rules outlined above, back-channel signals and turn shifts initiated by the participants are absent in these meetings. Short periods of silence are common: Firstly, the chairperson or the following speaker usually wait until the interpreter has finished his/her translation. Secondly, there might be a short delay as the following speaker still has to turn on his/her microphone. Competing for turns, participants try to switch on the microphone as quickly as possible. This characteristic of sittings at the EU actually corresponds to the systematics for turn-taking established by Sacks et al. (1974/1978). At the EP, speakers may self-select not only by verbal means, but primarily by the kinesic action of switching on the technical equipment.

Another major problem of turn-taking in official meetings is also related to the work of the interpreters. If a speaker talks so fast that the interpreters cannot keep up, s/he is interrupted and has to start all over again. At the above mentioned working party on Ecological Union,

for instance, a German participant tried to present a number of amendments to the draft opinion. The speaker was obviously inexperienced in the linguistic techniques as practised in the EU-institutions, and therefore she was repeatedly reading her text too fast. After the chairperson's objection she was allowed to proceed, but this form of miscommunication certainly impaired her performance as well as the whole meeting.

Despite all the rules adopted for the organization of such meetings, the actual course of a sitting still depends on the chairperson's style as well. One working group on agriculture (Commission 2 of the COR), for example, took place in a rather relaxed atmosphere among colleagues. This meeting was quite exceptional in the sense that the participants produced overlap and interrupted each other several times without addressing the chair. Interestingly enough, the discussion even prompted remarks in a foreign language, mainly English, although interpretation was provided for all official languages. The informal nature of this otherwise formal meeting was further underlined by the fact that back-channel cues including laughter were frequently displayed.

## **7.4 Comparison between the two discourse systems**

The main difference between intercultural communication at the ECML and the EU certainly concerns the setting of the discussions. Naturally, the workshops I recorded turned out to be more informal than the sittings at the EP and the COR. The latter institutions' system of turn-taking is laid down in their Rules of Procedure, whereas the scope of workshops at the ECML tends to be less limited. Moreover, discussions take place in small groups using either French or English as their working languages.

According to Rule 102 of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure, formal sessions as well as legal documents are supposed to be interpreted and translated in all official languages of the EU. Turn-taking is thus characterized by the interpreters functioning as a medium of communication between the official talking in his/her mother tongue and the listeners. Apart from the time limits imposed on individual contributions, the order of the speakers is predetermined by the agenda and the list of speakers kept by the chairperson. In contrast to discussions at the ECML, multiple conversational floors, active interaction floors, overlap, interruptions and back-channelling are virtually absent at the public meetings held at the EU. The ECML, on the other hand, generally fosters a face system of symmetrical

solidarity. As a result, both the physical space and the power distance between participants are very small.

Only if interaction is chaired by one of the co-ordinators does the structure of turn-taking resemble the system employed at the EP and the COR. Instead of self-selecting for the next turn, participants wait for the initiative of the chairperson who is responsible for allocating the right to speak. The data I collected seems to confirm two hypotheses I stated at the beginning of this empirical part: In formal meetings, participants are more reluctant to send back-channel signals, whereas gambits and metalinguistic expressions are used on a wider scale. At the ECML, native speakers of English also tend to insert more gambits. As reflected by the seating arrangement, the role of chairpersons is nevertheless much more important at the EU.

As for the prevailing techniques of turn allocation, kinesic aspects are paramount within both discourse systems. Due to the distance involved, however, the impact of eye contact is negligible at the EU, but not at the ECML. Members of the EP, for instance, deploy very different gestures such as raising their arms in order to claim the floor or competing for a turn by switching on their microphones as quickly as possible. The latter technique may also lead to disruptions in turn-taking. At the workshops organized by the ECML, by contrast, individual and cultural differences account for interturn silences. If intraturn pauses occur in this setting, they are more likely to be interrupted. As my last hypothesis suggested, delays at EP and COR sittings are in fact often caused by the system of simultaneous interpretation rather than by cultural differences.

In short, the systematics of turn-taking at these two organizations show marked contrasts. In both cases, however, it is essential for participants to be familiar with the respective face relationships and the explicit or implicit rules for turn and topic shifts in order to prevent intercultural miscommunication.

## 8 English conclusion

Children acquire tacit knowledge of principles of social order and systems of belief through exposure to and participation in language-mediated interactions during socialization. As a result, intercultural breakdown tends to occur at the discourse and pragmatic levels, rather than being caused by phonological, lexical and morphosyntactic questions.

The universal concept of politeness is used for avoiding and mitigating conflicts arising in intercultural oral discourse. Scollon and Scollon (1995) examined three politeness systems, namely the solidary, the deference and the hierarchical politeness system which all draw on the factors of power, distance and weight of imposition. Just as interpersonal face relationships, however, these strategies are subject to cultural variations. On the level of interpersonal communication, Japanese, for instance, tend to be extremely obliging about face. In the West, the deductive rhetorical pattern and egalitarian relationships play a more important role. Apart from focusing on high-context communication, members of Far Eastern cultures seem to be more disposed to working in collective environments than Westerners. In addition to such intercultural questions of politeness, there are types of discourse in which the interactional structure itself seems to create problems. Mediator discourse, i.e. establishing understanding with the help of a non-professional interpreter, serves as a good example for this kind of difficulty.

While Hayashi (1996) is mainly concerned with structuring single and multiple conversational floors, Sacks et al. (1974/1978) defined the rules for turn allocation. Points where speakers may change in conversation are called *transition relevance places* (TRPs). At each of these TRPs, participants may choose not to take a turn or to take a turn with delay. Conversation can thus be continuous or discontinuous. Scollon and Scollon (1981:25) found the different timing of turn-internal and between-turn non-phonations in Athabaskan-English interactions to be an important source for cross-cultural stereotyping. As TRPs can usually be projected in conversation, the rules suggested by Sacks et al. also provide a basis for the discrimination between inadvertent overlap at these boundaries of turn-constructional units and violative interruption. It is important to note that different cultures might have divergent expectations regarding overlap and silence.

Non-verbal signals such as paralinguistics and prosody, and kinesics, which includes facial expressions, eye contact and gestures, are frequently subject to intercultural misunderstandings, because they work in an unconscious way. Transitions from one turn to

the next are nevertheless accomplished by displaying such non-verbal cues. Furthermore, cultures tend to have varying attitudes towards back-channelling, i.e. a recipient's minimal response.

To assess the cross-cultural communicative competence of native and non-native speakers of English, I undertook some research at a workshop organized by the *European Centre for Modern Languages* (ECML) in Graz. After recording a number of discussions, negotiations and meetings, I focused on the use of 'communication strategy signals' called gambits in my analysis. Although gambits function as essential turn-taking signals in formal meetings, they are used considerably less often by non-native speakers and in informal discussions.

Additionally, gambits and metatalk are employed on a regular basis by EU-officials chairing meetings at the *European Parliament* (EP) and the *Committee of the Regions* (COR). These chairpersons also use routine formulae in order to initiate changes in topics as predetermined by the agenda.

However, since meetings at the EU are not conducted in a *lingua franca*, but rely on simultaneous interpretation, the interactional techniques differ from the ones used at the ECML. Members of the EP, for instance, are only allowed to take a turn if their name is noted on the list of speakers, or if they claim a turn by raising their arm. Still, it is the chairperson who has the right to allocate turns. While silences within and between turns are commonly interrupted during ECML-Workshops, disruptions at the EU are due to the use of independence strategies. In this case, silences are often connected to problems with the technical equipment or with the interpreters.

Although my analysis of multiparty talk yielded some interesting results, I am very conscious of how tentative these findings regarding cultural patterns are. In conclusion, however, there is a close bond between language and culture. That's why communication difficulties may be overcome by referring professionals to cross-cultural training courses or simply by promoting positive attitudes towards intercultural encounters.

## 9 Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Angesichts der Vernetzung der Weltwirtschaft in diesem Jahrhundert sowie der ständig zunehmenden Bedeutung von Computer- und Telekommunikationstechnologien wird auch das Bedürfnis nach Verständigung über staatliche und kulturelle Grenzen hinweg immer größer. Die daraus resultierenden Sprachbarrieren können auf verschiedene Weise überwunden werden: Neben dem Erlernen einer gemeinsamen *lingua franca* besteht für viele Wirtschaftsexperten und Politiker die Möglichkeit, ausgebildete Dolmetscher heranzuziehen. Da Kinder während ihrer Sozialisation aber auch kulturelle Werte und Normen verinnerlichen, lassen sich interkulturelle Mißverständnisse nicht allein auf mangelnde grammatikalische oder semantische Kenntnisse in der jeweiligen Fremdsprache zurückführen.

Jeder Mensch ist vielmehr ein Mitglied von kulturspezifischen, sich zum Teil überlagernden Diskurssystemen. Während man in eine gewisse Generation oder Rasse hineingeboren wird, ist die Gruppenzugehörigkeit zum anti-rhetorisch ausgerichteten System des Utilitarismus meist freiwillig gewählt. Das letzere System wird unter anderem in multinationalen Konzernen praktiziert.

Im Verlauf eines jeden Gesprächs, sei es auf inter- oder auf intrakultureller Ebene, müssen die Gesichtsbedürfnisse der Kommunikationsteilnehmer befriedigt werden. Dieses Konzept bezieht sich auf die Achtung, die einem Individuum entgegengebracht wird. Ein Gutteil von dem, was wir üblicherweise Höflichkeit oder Etikette bei sozialen Zusammenkünften nennen, besteht darin, unser Gesicht oder das des anderen zu wahren. In ihrer Analyse von Höflichkeit führten Brown und Levinson (1978/1987) daher die Sprechhandlungskategorie der 'face-threatening acts' ein. Die in diesem Modell postulierten Strategien zur Vermeidung von Gesichtsverlust stehen in einem engen Zusammenhang mit den drei von Scollon/Scollon (1995) ausgearbeiteten Höflichkeitssystemen. Im sogenannten 'deference politeness system' haben die Sprecher zwar den gleichen Status, doch die Distanz zwischen ihnen ist relativ groß. Das 'solidary politeness system' kommt in Beziehungen zwischen Freunden oder guten Kollegen zum Tragen, da hier sowohl die Distanz als auch der Machtfaktor auf ein Minimum reduziert sind. In einem 'hierarchical politeness system' sind jedoch die Machtunterschiede zwischen den Beteiligten das entscheidende Merkmal.

Im Unterschied zu einigen anderen Forschern, die sich in erster Linie der Definition und Struktur des psychologischen Konzepts des 'floor' in der Diskursanalyse widmeten,

entwickelten Sacks et al. (1974/1978) ein einflußreiches Modell des Sprecherwechsels ('turn-taking'). Diese Theorie geht davon aus, daß Gesprächsteilnehmer die Fähigkeit haben, 'transition relevance places' vorherzusehen. An solchen Punkten, die durch das Ende einer syntaktischen Einheit, einer Veränderung in der Tonhöhe des Sprechers oder einer gewissen Gestik gekennzeichnet sind, kann ein Sprecherwechsel stattfinden. Der nächste Gesprächspartner kann vom bisherigen Sprecher im Zuge der 'current speaker selects next technique' bestimmt werden. Ist dies nicht der Fall, so kann sich entweder der schnellste Teilnehmer zu Wort melden, oder der momentane Sprecher hat das Recht fortzufahren.

Obwohl diese Mechanismen des Sprecherwechsels universellen Charakter haben, variiert die praktische Ausführung in den verschiedenen Kulturen manchmal erheblich. Während Überschneidungen zwischen den einzelnen Sprechern und Beiträgen in der anglo-amerikanischen Kultur möglichst vermieden werden, sind Überschneidungen im sogenannten 'high-involvement style', der unter anderem von jüdischen Einwandern in New York City praktiziert wird, ein positiv bewertetes Merkmal. Andererseits können auch Pausen während eines 'turns' oder nach einem solchen die Ursache interkultureller Stereotypenbildung sein. Die durchschnittlich eingehaltenen Pausen sind in vielen Kulturen länger als in der angelsächsischen, was so manchen Amerikaner dazu veranlassen könnte, den Gesprächspartner bewußt oder unbewußt zu unterbrechen. Derartige Unterbrechungen beeinflussen aber nicht nur die jeweilige Höflichkeitsstruktur, sondern können sogar eine folgenschwere Gesichtsbedrohung darstellen.

Betrachtet man die vorherrschenden Signale des Sprecherwechsels näher, so fällt auf, daß vor allem der Augenkontakt und die Körperhaltung eine besondere Rolle spielen. Darüber hinaus beeinflussen paralinguistische Elemente den Sprecherwechsel. Wenn Kommunikationsteilnehmer nicht unbedingt an einem 'turn' interessiert sind, aber ihr Verständnis des Gesagten dokumentieren wollen, greifen sie meist auf Hörsignale, sogenannte 'back-channel signals', zurück. Diese Signale reichen von kurzen Lauten bis zu prägnanten Rückfragen oder der Vervollständigung von Satzteilen. Vor allem Japaner legen großen Wert auf die von ihnen als 'aizuchi' bezeichneten Hörsignale, welche in ihrer Kultur öfter als von Amerikanern oder Westeuropäern vermittelt werden.

Zusätzlich zu den bereits genannten Signalen des Sprecherwechsels üben sprachliche Routineformeln einen bedeutenden Einfluß auf Gesprächsmuster in formellen Sitzungen und Konferenzen aus. Keller (1979/1981) definiert Signale, welche Veränderungen im Fokus des Kommunikationsgeschehens auslösen und somit als Signale für einen

interpretativen Rahmen einzustufen sind, als 'gambits'. Mit anderen Worten, 'gambits' kennzeichnen verschiedene Bewußtseinsebenen, d.h. sie können sich auf die semantische Ebene, den sozialen Kontext und auf die psychologische Ebene des Sprechers beziehen, was 'gambits' zum einen im Bereich der kommunikativen Kontrollfunktion ansiedelt, zum anderen aber auch auf die soziale Komponente der Höflichkeit verweist.

In formellen Situationen ist es auch üblich, Themenwechsel mit Hilfe von 'gambits' einzuleiten. Außerdem kann durch entsprechende 'gambits' die Kohärenz des Gesprächsinhalts gewährleistet werden, falls ein Sprecher vom eigentlichen Thema abschweifen möchte, ohne eine Gesichtsbedrohung zu verursachen.

Um die oben zusammengefaßten Theorien zu verifizieren, gab mir das *Europäische Fremdsprachenzentrum* des Europarats in Graz die Möglichkeit, mündliche Kommunikation während eines Workshops mit dem Titel "Technology in Vocationally Oriented Language Learning" aufzuzeichnen.

Zunächst ist zu bemerken, daß diese Workshops durchwegs von einem 'solidary politeness system' geprägt sind, und Gruppendiskussionen zudem in einer *lingua franca*, d.h. auf Englisch oder Französisch, geführt werden. Nachdem meine Audioaufnahmen keine generellen Rückschlüsse auf kulturelle Muster zuließen, konzentrierte ich mich auf Einzelfallstudien und Merkmale der Interaktion zwischen Muttersprachlern und Nicht-Muttersprachlern.

Ein Großteil der informellen Diskussionen zeigte kooperative Überschneidungen ('cooperative overlap'). Diese Überschneidungen resultierten sicherlich aus den verwendeten 'involvement strategies'. Besonders auffallend waren Überschneidungen bei Gesprächen zwischen Teilnehmern aus Süd- und Südosteuropa. Im Gegensatz dazu stellen Unterbrechungen wiederum das Risiko einer Gesichtsbedrohung dar. In dem von mir analysierten Workshop kamen vor allem der norwegische und der polnische Teilnehmer mit dem schnellen Tempo des Sprecherwechsels kaum zurecht. Im ersten Fall war die Unterbrechung der Pausen vermutlich kulturell bedingt. Der polnische Teilnehmer hingegen kämpfte mit einem Problem, das auch andere nicht-native Sprecher in diesem Workshop zu benachteiligen schien: Er benötigte mehr Zeit, um seine Gedanken zu formulieren, war gleichzeitig aber nicht in der Lage, Unterbrechungen durch das Einfügen von entsprechenden 'gambits' zu verhindern. Auch in bezug auf Hörsignale traten interkulturelle Mißverständnisse auf. Die Hörsignale einer italienischen Teilnehmerin wurden in der Tat als 'turn claims' interpretiert. Im allgemeinen variierten die Teilnehmer

die Lautstärke ihrer Äußerungen oder wiederholten die Schlüsselwörter ihrer Botschaft mehrmals, um zu Wort zu kommen. 'Gambits' wurden in erster Linie von Muttersprachlern und von den Gesprächsleitern in formellen Situationen bevorzugt.

Im Laufe meines Studienaufenthaltes beim *Ausschuß der Regionen* (AdR) der *Europäischen Union* in Brüssel besuchte ich eine Reihe von Sitzungen sowohl im AdR als auch im *Europäischen Parlament* (EP). So hatte ich die Gelegenheit, ein zweites Diskurssystem kennenzulernen. In der mehrmals novellierten Richtlinie No.1 des Rates aus dem Jahre 1958 wurde festgeschrieben, daß die Europäische Gemeinschaft elf Amts- und Arbeitssprachen verwenden sollte. In der Folge beschloß auch das EP in seiner Geschäftsordnung, alle Dokumente in sämtliche Amtssprachen zu übersetzen. Die offiziellen Sitzungen sind daher von der Präsenz einer Anzahl von Dolmetschern geprägt. Das System des Sprecherwechsels bei den Sitzungen der EU ist auf diese Gegebenheiten abgestimmt. Aufgrund der Dominanz des Vorsitzenden hat dieser das alleinige Recht, Abgeordneten das Wort zu erteilen. Diese wiederum signalisieren ihre Bereitschaft dazu durch nonverbale Handzeichen, es sei denn, ihr Name befindet sich bereits auf einer Rednerliste. Trotz des bestehenden Zeitlimits sollte der Sprecher seinen Beitrag in gemäßigtem Tempo vortragen. Diese Bedingungen behindern vielfach den reibungslosen Ablauf des Sprecherwechsels in Sitzungen. Weiters leiten die Vorsitzenden Abstimmungen, und initiieren den Übergang zu neuen Punkten auf der Tagesordnung. Zu diesem Zweck bedienen sie sich verschiedener Standardformeln, doch auch Abgeordnete verwenden regelmäßig 'gambits'.

Zusammenfassend ist zu sagen, daß in internationalen und zugleich interkulturellen Institutionen wie dem *Europäischen Fremdsprachenzentrum* und der *Europäischen Union* Differenzen und Mißverständnisse in bezug auf Höflichkeitskonventionen, den Mechanismus des Sprecherwechsels und des Strukturierens von Beiträgen mittels 'gambits' nicht ausbleiben. Dennoch zeigt der Verlauf der diversen Sitzungen und Workshops, daß bei einer positiven Grundeinstellung stets konstruktive Ergebnisse in einem mehrsprachigen Umfeld erzielt werden können.

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