Intercultural Differences in Relational Strategies at Workplace Meetings: A Case Study for Two Frameworks

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Abstract

This study develops and proposes a research approach founded on linking two novel theoretical frameworks for analysing and explaining relational strategies at intercultural workplace meetings, namely, the Multi-Level Model (MLM) and Cultural Self Perception (CSP). The approach is tested through a case study of a problematic meeting in an intercultural workplace in China. At this meeting, the Chinese and western expatriate participants both carefully adopted a range of relational strategies for problem talk. However, the interactions still evolved into a severe confrontation between the Chinese and expatriate participants. The cultural differences in relational strategies are explored on three levels, namely, turn-taking, speech act and situational context. The analysis indicates that while the relational strategies of the expatriate speakers can only be found on the speech act level, those of the Chinese speakers can be found on all of the three levels. Even on the speech act level, there are significant differences between the Chinese and expatriate speakers. It is argued that the communicative breakdown was caused by clashes of expectations of relational strategies for problem talk at meetings, and such differences can be explained by drawing on the framework of CSP. The investigation in this case study thus demonstrates that the combination of the frameworks of MLM and CSP can facilitate both systematic analysis of interactive strategies at different levels and in-depth understanding of the cultural roots for the choices of relational strategies at intercultural workplace meetings.

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Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

This study straddles the fields of intercultural communication and sociolinguistic studies of workplace discourse. The extensive work that has been done, and continues to be done currently, indicates the intellectual as well as professional need to understand increasingly multicultural workplaces around the world. One example of the development and prevalence of such globalised workplaces is in contemporary China, which was still closed to the outside world only three decades ago.

The sharp economic surge of China at the beginning of the twenty-first century has resulted in intercultural interactions between people from China and the rest of the world being deepened and broadened. Intercultural business communication in China is not confined to negotiations or business visits any more. More and more people from the other countries have chosen to work in China, some in foreign or Sino-foreign companies, and some in Chinese institutions or organizations. Interactions between the expatriate and Chinese staff in Chinese workplaces can be very different from those in foreign or Sino-foreign organizations, considering the socio-cultural and organizational contexts.

For western expatriates who may have been accustomed to relatively more ordered systems in their home countries, one distinct impression of the Chinese workplace is probably 'uncertainty', or 'chaos'. The economy of China has been experiencing two transitions since the end of 1970s, namely, from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, and from a centrally-planned economy to a capitalist market economy (or 'the socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics' in Chinese official terms). At such a transitional stage, uncertainty, ambiguity and chaos seem unavoidable in various aspects of life in the workplace, since workplace practices continue to evolve in tandem with every change in each transition. Such a chaotic state may cause confusion or frustration for the western expatriates as well as their Chinese colleagues working in Chinese organizations. Some muddle through to success, in terms of both work-related goals as well as interpersonal relationships, while others end up bitter and resentful of their colleagues from the other culture, apart from not being able to function effectively at work. It seems imperative that more systematic ways be developed to understand the dynamics of such intercultural workplace interactions better for the benefit of all concerned.

This study originates in one such multicultural workplace in China. It develops and proposes a research approach founded on linking two novel theoretical frameworks, which, it is believed, is applicable to research in intercultural workplace interactions in other cultures as well. Through testing the approach and frameworks in a case study at this workplace, the study seeks to offer a more powerful means of exploring intercultural communicative practices wherever they may exist.

1.1. Some Methodological Issues in Intercultural Communication

It would appear that there are two distinct traditions in the study of intercultural communication, and that the link between them is fairly weak if there is any. One is led by cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; 1991; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003; Triandis, 1989; 1995) and intercultural communication theorists (e.g. Gudykunst, 2004; Ting-Toomey and Oetzel, 2001), the other by cross-cultural pragmatists (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991), ethnographers of communication (e.g. Hymes, 1972; Saville-Troike, 2003) and interactional sociolinguists (e.g. Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1989). The former is mostly interested in building models or theories accounting for national character, values or conversational styles, especially in business settings, while the latter mainly in empirical analysis of discourse performances. In fact, as suggested by Poncini (2004: 34), much business research into cultural differences is based on quantitative results of surveys and not empirical investigations of actual communication behaviour, though the results of such research are used to explain communicative behaviour. Spencer-Oatey (2000) also points out that 'what is now needed is a synthesis of the different perspectives', especially between empirical studies of linguistic behaviours and theoretical modelling of cultural values and styles.

This study therefore sets out to explore the possibility of bridging the gap between the two traditions in the field of intercultural communication. However, one crucial question is:

- How can relations be established between the empirical analysis of specific interactive behaviours and the abstract cultural models that have been criticised as contributing to national stereotypes?

It is suggested in this study that the concept of *interactive expectations* or *interactive frames* (Tannen and Wallat, 1993) may be employed to bridge the gap between the specific interactive strategies and the general cultural models. It is argued that although choices of interactive strategies are individual decisions, they are actually determined by the internalized cultural expectations of interactive behaviours in a certain situation (for details, see Chapter 3). Such interactive expectations are formed in the process of an individual's socialization into a certain cultural group (or groups). Thus, an individual's interactive frames are unavoidably shaped to some extent by the cultural values or thinking patterns of the group(s). Therefore, interactive frames, which are rooted in and shaped by culture, may be used to account for the specific choices of interactive strategies in intercultural settings.

In order to test this hypothesis, two novel frameworks are proposed in this study: an analytical framework and an explanatory framework, both of which will be tested through an ethnographic case study of a problematic workplace meeting. Each of the two frameworks is based on one of the traditions discussed above:

- The analytical framework, namely, the **Multi-level Model for meeting analysis** (see Section 1.3. below and Chapter 3 for details), is rooted in the tradition of linguistic analysis of intercultural performances, such as various approaches to workplace / meeting discourse, ethnographic of communication and interactional sociolinguistics, etc.. This provides the analytical basis for examining interactive strategies and making inferences regarding the interactive frames on different levels of the discursive and the contextual dimensions.

- The explanatory framework, namely, **Cultural Self Perception** (see Section 1.3. below and Chapter 4 for details), is rooted in the tradition of cross-cultural investigation of cultural values and characteristics. This provides the basis for explanation of intercultural differences in interactive frames on different levels of the discursive and contextual dimensions.

1.2. The Case Study: a Problematic Meeting

The data for the case study was collected during an ethnographic investigation at a Chinese organization in Beijing in 2006. The organization was a training centre that ran one-year foundation programs for students who intended to go abroad to study. It is given the pseudonym *SITE* in this thesis. At *SITE*, most of the teaching staff were English native speakers while the CEO and the administrative staff were all Chinese. There was continued tension between the expatriate teaching staff and the Chinese administrative staff at *SITE*, which had evolved into a serious management crisis by the time I started the data collection.

One of the meetings that I recorded during the ethnographic investigation will be used as a case study in this thesis. The meeting, as the first session of a meeting series, was organized by the CEO as the first step to resolve the management crisis. The major goal of this meeting was to improve mutual understanding and trust through 'problem talk' (see 1.3 for a brief definition of this term). Unfortunately, despite very careful preparation on the part of the Chinese participants (especially in terms of the design of relational strategies), the meeting turned out to be a disaster: the expatriate participants were extremely offended and confronted the Chinese participants with severe criticisms and complaints, while the Chinese participants were completely confused by the unexpected outcome.

The analysis of the meeting aims to answer the following three questions:

a. **What** were the differences in relational strategies for problem talk between the Chinese and the expatriate participants?

b. **How** did these differences cause the communicative failure at the meeting?

c. **Why** did the Chinese and the expatriate participants choose such different relational strategies?

As suggested above, this case study seeks primarily to test the proposed new frameworks, which seek to link two research conventions in the field of intercultural communication. Within the case study itself, the goal of analysis is not only to find out the differences in interactive behaviours ('what'), but also to explore how these differences have caused the communicative breakdown ('how') as well as the cultural roots for these choices of relational strategies ('why').

In order to find the answers to the three questions, it is suggested that case study is the most appropriate research approach for this project. As suggested by Gray (2009: 247), the case study method is ideal when a 'how' and 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the researcher has no control. The approach of case study makes possible thorough investigation and in-depth explanation of the interactive behaviours at the meeting in question. More saliently for this study, it is also an effective tool for the testing of new hypotheses and new frameworks, which may lead to exciting new research directions.

1.3. Definitions and Key Concepts

For the purpose of convenience, the term *workplace meeting* is used in this study specially to refer to the internal or intra-organizational meeting that is conducted within an organization. All participants at a workplace meeting are from the same organization. When the modifier 'intercultural' is used in front of 'workplace meeting', the heterogeneity of the cultural background of the participants is emphasised. That is to say, the participants at the intra-organizational meeting are from at least two different cultures (here, culture refers to national culture).

A number of concepts are proposed in this study. The rest of this section will briefly introduce these key concepts.

The term *relational strategy* is proposed to replace the term 'politeness strategy' that is traditionally used in the field of politeness studies. Relational strategies not only encompass the pragmatic strategies discussed in politeness studies (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987), but also strategies that may be employed for relational purposes at the turn-taking level and the contextual levels. For details, see Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.3.) and Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.).

The *Multi-Level Model (MLM)* for meeting analysis is the analytical framework proposed for the analysis of (expectations of) interactive behaviours at workplace meetings (for details, see Chapter 3). It is suggested that in order to understand the interactive behaviours at meetings, information needs to be systematically collected and analysed both on the discursive dimension and the contextual dimension. This framework is intended to serve analysts interested in in-depth investigations of workplace meetings as well as meeting participants seeking guidance in effective communication. Participants' interactive frames may be inferred on each level of the model to account for interactive behaviours or phenomena, which may then be explained in terms of their roots in Cultural Self Perception.

Cultural Self Perception (CSP) is the explanatory framework proposed for the explanation of cultural differences in interactive behaviours (for details, see Chapter 4). It is suggested that there are two cultural views regarding the construct and the boundary of the Self, namely, *Individual-Self Perception* and *Group-Self Perception.* While the Individual-Self sees the person as the unit of social existence and actions, the Group-Self draws the boundary of self around the in-group. It is suggested that CSP, instead of the concept of 'face' that is used in traditional politeness studies, can be used to explain cultural differences in relational strategy choices. On a similar note, *relational threat* is used most of the time in this thesis instead of 'face threat', although 'face threat' is also used sometimes where previous theories are relevant.

Problem talk is treated both as a speech act and as an interactive goal in the data analysis (for details, see Chapter 7). As a speech act, it is highly threatening relationally. As an interactive goal, problem talk aims to call attention to certain problematic issues that are either within others' range of responsibility or need others' cooperation to be resolved. Problem talk needs to be differentiated from *problem solving*. Problem solving aims to reach a solution through the interaction, while the focus of problem talk is not on the discussion of solutions, but on persuading others that certain practices are problematic and need to be dealt with. Problem solving is a decision making process, while problem talk is a persuasive process.

1.4. Chapter Plan

There are nine chapters in this thesis. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature in two fields, namely, politeness studies and meeting studies. Gaps in the literature of these two fields will also be identified and discussed. Chapter 3 and 4 propose respectively the Multi-Level Model (MLM) framework for analysis and the Cultural Self Perception (CSP) model for explanation of intercultural differences in workplace interactive behaviours. Chapters 3 and 4 also discuss how the notion of interactive frames may be used to bridge the two frameworks and to account for communicative breakdown in intercultural interactions. Chapter 5 introduces the methods and process of data collection, and discusses some important issues in data collection and data analysis, for example, ethical issues and transcription and translation issues. In this chapter, the impact of the outer levels of the contextual dimension of the MLM, namely, the socio-economic, the organizational and the inter-event levels, on the meeting interactions in the case study, will also be described and discussed.

There are three analytical chapters. Chapter 6 focuses on the turn-taking strategies for problem talk used by the participants. The meeting structure as well as the relational dynamics will also be described at the beginning of this chapter. Chapter 7 expands on the notion of problem talk before introducing the method used in this study to analyse speech act strategies of long turns at meetings. Then the speech act strategies employed by the Chinese and expatriate participants will be compared. The problems with the meeting translation that may have contributed to the communicative failure will also be discussed. Chapter 8 explores how the factors at the level of the situational context have been manipulated by the Chinese participants for relational purposes. In these chapters, the Chinese and expatriate participants' expectations on all of the three levels, namely, turn-taking, speech act and situation factors will be inferred based on analysis of the meeting and interview data, and will be used to account for the communicative breakdown at the meeting. The expectations of interactive behaviours on these three levels will also be explained drawing on the framework of CSP.

Chapter 9 will summarise the findings in this study. Implications for future research and for teaching and training will also be discussed.

Chapter 2. Relational Strategies and Workplace Meetings

This chapter critically reviews the literature in two research fields, namely politeness studies and meeting studies. The theoretical frameworks and findings in previous studies will be examined, and gaps in the two fields will be discussed.

2.1. Studies of Relational Strategies

2.1.1. Review of Politeness Studies

It is generally believed that language in use serves two major functions simultaneously: one is the transmission of information, the other the management of interpersonal relationships (Brown and Yule, 1983; Goffman, 1967; Watzlawick et al., 1967). Brown and Yule (1983) refer to these two functions as 'transactional' and 'interpersonal'.

Among the various approaches to the study of linguistic strategies for interpersonal relationship management, the most influential is politeness studies, which comprises the conversation-maxim view and the face-saving view, as characterized by Fraser (1990). Both approaches have been developed with Grice's notion of the 'Cooperative Principle' (Grice, 1967, published 1975) as the fundamental theoretical basis. Both views also explicitly assert universal status for their proposed theories (Kasper, 1997).

For researchers such as Lakoff (1973; 1979) and Leech (1983) who are interested in developing conversation maxims, politeness is usually treated as one of the maxims. Lakoff (1973) suggests two rules of pragmatic competence in opposition to each other: Be Clear and Be Polite, plus three sub-maxims. Leech's (1983) framework is much more elaborate. He proposes a distinction between interpersonal and textual rhetorics, based on Halliday's three functions of language (Halliday, 1973). Politeness is one of Leech's principles within 'interpersonal rhetoric', and consists of a number of maxims regarding tact, generosity, approbation, and modesty, etc. Gu (1990) offers a modified version of Leech's (1983) Generosity and Tact Maxims to account for Chinese politeness practices, and proposes two other maxims of politeness that are specific to Chinese culture: the Self-denigration Maxim and the Address Maxim.

Compared to the conversation-maxim view, Brown and Levinson's seminal work on politeness (1978; 1987), referred to as the face-saving view by Fraser (1990), has attracted much more attention and research interest. Their framework is developed on the basis of Grice's Cooperative Principle and Goffman's (1967) notion of 'face'. They propose that every rational member of society has two special qualities: face and rationality. Brown and Levinson define 'face' as a public self-image in social interactions consisting of two related aspects:

> Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition
>
> Positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants' (Brown and

Levinson, 1987: 61)

Their notion of 'rationality' refers to a mode of means-to-ends reasoning that enables participants in an interaction to calculate the cost of actions and to select the linguistic strategies (means) that can both achieve their communicative ends and address the hearer's face wants, since, they believe, it is in every interactant's best interest to preserve the other's face, in order to protect one's own face. They explain that when performing speech acts that are intrinsically face threatening (FTAs), a speaker has a choice among five broad types of strategies, including not doing the FTA at all, doing the FTA off record, doing the FTA on record baldly, or doing the FTA on record with redressive actions attending to the hearer's positive or negative face wants.

Since its publication, Brown and Levinson's framework and studies emanating from it have attracted a great deal of interest as well as criticism. The criticisms have focused mainly on four aspects, namely, the use of the term 'politeness', the range of politeness strategies, the universality of claim, and the notion of face as the motivating force (or the socio-psychological motive). The next four sections focus on these disputable aspects.

2.1.2. Politeness, Rapport, or Relational Strategies – the Term

The term 'politeness' has been traditionally used in the field of pragmatics to refer to the study of the interpersonal aspects of language use. However, its definition has been either absent or controversial in previous studies (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Watts et al., 2005). More seriously, the use of the term 'politeness' is problematic.

Spencer-Oatey (2000a) suggests that the term 'politeness' can be confusing, as it often implies 'the use of relatively formal and deferential language'. This is problematic in that formality and deference is often the reflection and consequence of social or power distance. However, in many cases of social interactions, it is intimacy rather than distance that is desired. Thus 'polite' behaviours might not lead to desired interpersonal relationships in social interactions.

Another problem pointed out by Spencer-Oatey (2000a) is that the term tends to emphasize the harmonious aspect of social relations, while interactants might have different goals in the management of relationships. Indeed, to solely emphasize the positive aspect of interpersonal relations may result in losing sight of the diversity and dynamics of relationship management. Clearly, the interpersonal use of language extends well beyond politeness to strategies for achieving other desired interpersonal goals in social interactions.

Spencer-Oatey (2000a) proposes the term 'rapport' in place of 'politeness'. According to the Collins Cobuild English dictionary, 'rapport' refers to 'a good relationship' in which people 'are able to understand each other's ideas or feelings very well' (Sinclair, 1995). Compared to 'politeness', 'rapport' conveys more affective and communicative elements in equal interpersonal relations, without the emphasis on social prescription and coercion associated with 'politeness'. However, although Spencer-Oatey (2000a) emphasizes that 'rapport management' refers to the use of language not only to promote and maintain but also to 'threaten harmonious social relations', the term 'rapport' cannot avoid an inherent emphasis on the positive aspects of social relations.

It is for these reasons, therefore, that in this study, the term 'relational strategies' is adopted instead of 'politeness' or 'rapport' strategies, and 'relationship management' instead of 'facework' or 'rapport management'. The terms 'relational' and 'relationship' are relatively more neutral since they do not have the emphasis on 'good relationship' conveyed by 'rapport', or the normative or coercive connotation (which could be perceived as negative in today's more egalitarian world) of 'politeness'. It is, of course, recognized that factors of social distance and power are often at play in the interpersonal use of language, and that they remain very important factors, especially in workplace discourse. However, what the word 'relational' emphasizes is that there are also other relational goals that are not influenced by these factors, and which go beyond the maintenance of harmony. The use of 'management' and 'strategies' also emphasizes that human beings are not passive beings moved only by the external forces such as social distance and power: they are rational beings with emotions who not only need but also actively seek satisfying states of interpersonal relationships.

The study of relationship management involves *the exploration of choices of strategies that aim to have an effect (positive, neutral or negative) on interpersonal relations in certain (culturally expected) ways*. It is these strategies that are referred to as 'relational strategies'. It is argued in the current study that relational strategies are not universal: on the contrary, they are culture-specific; and it is important to explore cultural differences in relational strategies in order to facilitate efficient intercultural interactions.

2.1.3. Scope of Study of Relational Strategies

The second disputable aspect in politeness studies concerns the range of strategies explored. Investigations into 'politeness' strategies have focused on the use of language on the pragmatic level, in particular, on speech act realization.

Describing Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and other researchers' works, Spencer-Oatey (2000b) summarises three aspects of speech act realization that previous studies have identified as possible relational (politeness) strategies:

- the selection of speech act components
- the degree of directness / indirectness
- the type and amount of upgraders / downgraders

'Speech act components' refers to the 'range of semantic formulae or components' associated with the realization of a speech act (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b). A set of speech act components, often known as a 'speech act set', is usually composed of a head act and other additional components. One focus of previous studies have been on how each different speech act may have different formulae or components for its realization. One interesting example is Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) study of the apology speech act set, which they identify as consisting of five potential components: an IFIC (illocutionary force indicating device), the head act; an explanation or account of the cause which brought the violation; an expression of the speakers' responsibility for the offence; an offer of repair; and a promise of forbearance (cited in Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: 20). A speaker's choices of components for the speech act set and how they are combined, it is claimed, may indicate the speaker's relational orientation and the degree of politeness that is intended.

The degree of directness / indirectness of a speech act refers to the strategies for the actual realization of the head act in the speech act set. Politeness strategies in previous studies have often been related to the indirectness of speech act realization. As claimed, for instance, by Escandell-Vidal (1996), the reason for being indirect is to be polite; the best way to be polite is to be indirect; and it seems there is a correlation between the length of inferential path and the degree of politeness. Kasper (1997) also notes that both Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) and Leech (1983) assume a positive correlation between politeness and indirectness. In the study of the linguistic realization of requests, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989; also see Spencer-Oatey, 2000b) proposes three levels of (in)directness in the realization of 'request' -- direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. The direct and nonconventionally indirect strategies correspond respectively to Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) 'baldly on record without redressive action' and 'off record' strategies; while the conventionally indirect strategy fits in with their 'on record with redressive action' strategy.

Upgraders and downgraders, also known as intensifiers and downtoners, serve to increase (in the case of upgraders) or reduce (in the case of downgraders) the force of the head act of a speech act set. They are referred to as 'internal modifiers' by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). Generally speaking, there are two types of upgraders / downgraders: syntactic and lexical. Previous studies have focused on identifying the range of specific upgraders and downgraders that interactants use. For instance, Blum-Kulka et al. present an elaborate list of syntactic and lexical or phrasal internal modifiers in the realization of request (1989: Appendix). The relational impact of upgraders / downgraders is subject to the nature of the speech act.

While these previous studies of relational strategies in the 'politeness' tradition have provided useful insights, it is evident that they have mainly focused on the investigation of linguistic strategies on the pragmatic level, often with intuited or elicited data of decontextualized utterances, and ignored other levels of the discourse that may be exploited by the interactants for interpersonal goals. One exception is Spencer-Oatey (2000b), who suggested other levels of relational strategies. Drawing on the analysis of authentic interactions between British and Chinese business people, she proposes five domains of strategies that may have effect on interpersonal relationship:

- illocutionary domain
- discourse domain
- participation domain
- stylistic domain
- non-verbal domain

However, apart from illocutionary domain, which concerns the speech act strategies that are traditionally focused on in politeness studies, she gives little demonstration or empirical data analysis in terms of the investigation in the other four domains.

The current study suggests that analysis on the pragmatic level without reference to the broader context may provide a distorted interpretation of the interactants' communicative intent. Therefore, a framework that encompasses the contextual factors that may impact on or even be employed as relational strategies is needed for the description and interpretation of the relational strategies, especially in intercultural settings. The Multi-Level Model (MLM) proposed in Chapter 3 aims to address this need.

2.1.4. Universal or Culture Specific?

Another issue in politeness studies concerns cultural differences in the realization and relational functions of speech acts. In the field of politeness studies, there have been two different views of cross-cultural differences in relational strategies, namely, the universality view and the cultural relativity view.

The universality view claims that strategies for realizing speech acts, for conveying politeness and mitigating the force of utterances, are essentially the same across languages and cultures (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1978; 1987; Fraser, 1984). One major representative of this view is Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987). For instance, based on their definition of the two face wants, they (1987: 65-68) made a list of speech acts that may threaten the speaker's or hearer's positive or negative face wants across different cultures. For example, suggestions or advice are considered as acts that may threaten the addressee's negative face, since they predicate some future act on the addressee and thus shows that the speaker does not intend to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom of action. The speech act of criticism is said to threaten the addressee's positive face, as its performance shows the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the addressee's positive face.

The other view argues for cultural relativity in studying speech act strategies (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Wierzbicka, 1985). For instance, by comparing the differences between English and Polish in speech act realization, Wierzbicka (1985, 1991) argues that the differences in speech act use are rooted in deep-seated cultural norms and values, and that any claim to universality in politeness strategies cannot avoid being ethnocentric. Spencer-Oatey (2000b) notes that in Chinese, direct strategies are used more frequently than in English, and are often used in situations where a conventionally indirect form would be likely in English. However, the use of direct forms is not interpreted as rude in Chinese. She attributes this to the softening particles or affixes and tone of voice that are used along with the direct form of speech act. From the point of view of the current study, another explanation may be that this frequency of direct strategies is related to the in-group nature of relationships that Chinese interactants mostly (if not exclusively) find themselves in. In other words, the inclination to use direct speech acts might be the consequence of in-group interactions which are usually the major (if not exclusive) contexts of a person's socialization.

The current study joins the cultural relativity view and makes two suggestions regarding Brown and Levinson's claim of universality in politeness strategies. The first is that while their framework may serve well in the interpretation and explanation of the western interactants' politeness strategies, when it comes to Chinese relational strategies, there is doubt whether their framework can be used to explain Chinese interactants' choices of strategies. The second suggestion is that the relational functions or values of some speech acts (e.g. suggestions and criticisms) may not be the same cross-culturally as claimed by Brown and Levinson. These two issues will be investigated through comparative analysis of the speech act strategies employed by the Chinese and expatriate participants in the meeting data of this study (see Chapter 7).

2.1.5. Face as the Motivating Force?

Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) claim of the universality of the two face wants in relation to their definition of 'polite behaviour' have also received strong challenges and criticisms, especially from Japanese and Chinese scholars. For example, Matsumoto (1988) rejects the notion of negative face as being applicable to Japanese culture, and points out that the conception of losing face in Japanese culture is linked to having 'not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group'. Ide (1989) accepts the validity of positive and negative face, but suggests that Brown and Levinson's framework of face has to be complemented by a component of formality and discernment in Japanese culture. Sharing the Japanese scholars' concern with interactive rules in a tightly-woven hierarchical society, Gu (1990) argues for a normative function of politeness in Chinese social interactions (i.e. politeness as social constraint), in addition to the instrumental function (i.e. politeness as a means to ends) claimed by Brown and Levinson. In addition, Mao (1994) points out that Brown and Levinson's definition of face fails to recognize the communal aspect of face. He suggests that Chinese face emphasizes not the accommodation of individual 'wants' or 'desires' but the harmony of individual conduct with the views and judgement of the community. Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) later comments that in socially stratified societies such as Japan, normative politeness is dominant, while in face-and-status-based societies such as China, both normative and strategic politeness are present. She regards Brown and Levinson's conception of politeness as strategic politeness that is specific to Western individualistic societies. She argues that strategic politeness reflects the paramount concern for individual rights, i.e. what is owed to the individual, while normative or indexical politeness signals a concern for duty, i.e. what is owed to the group.

Indeed, Brown and Levinson's Model Person (1987: 58) can only be a member of an individualistic society. Negative face needs indicate a desire for autonomy and protection of personal territory, concepts that are almost alien to collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1991). Although Brown and Levinson's positive politeness has touched on in-group acceptance or involvement strategies such as treating the other as an in-group member or claiming common ground (1987: 102), their point of view is still individualistic. Their positive face needs indicate a desire for approval and appreciation of one's own needs and attributes which differentiate one from others as a distinct and unique individual. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's means-to-ends approach to politeness strategies entails the view that the interpersonal goal is always subordinate and supportive to the transactional goal. The Model Person is believed to be a fluent speaker of a natural language with two special qualities: rationality and face. The quality of rationality determines that the Model Person is able to focus on his own transactional goals in the interaction, while adopting appropriate interpersonal strategies to ensure the successful accomplishment of the transactional goals. This rational approach, however, poses great difficulty in the analysis of Chinese interactive data. It is argued in this study that the rational approach may not be able to account for all interactive strategies in all sociocultural settings. Sometimes or in some cultures, the importance of interpersonal goals may over-ride transactional goals even in the workplaces where the focus is 'normally' expected to be on completing transactional tasks.

In order to develop a more powerful framework that can be applied to the analysis of relational behaviours in both individualistic and collectivistic societies (Hofstede, 1991), Spencer-Oatey (2000b) proposes a modified model of Brown and Levinson's face notion, within her rapport management framework (see Figure 2.1. below). Instead of face, she proposes two concepts: face and sociality rights, both of which are claimed to be the motivators for rapport strategies. Face is defined as the positive social value people claim for themselves, such as sense of worth, dignity, honour, reputation and competence, etc., while sociality rights are related to personal or social expectancies, such as concerns over fairness, consideration, social inclusion/exclusion, etc.. Brown and Levinson's conceptualization of negative face are considered not as 'face' wants, but as 'rights' concerns. Face and sociality rights are each characterized by Spencer-Oatey as comprising two interrelated aspects related to individualist and collectivist perspectives. Thus face includes quality face (individualist perspective, corresponding to Brown and Levinson's positive face) and identity face (collectivist perspective). Sociality rights includes equity rights (individualist perspective, corresponding to Brown and Levinson's negative face) and association rights (collectivist perspective). By trying to encompass the collectivist perspective, she attempts to develop a framework that is universally applicable.

Figure 2.1. Components of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b).

	Face management (personal / social value)	Sociality rights management (personal / social entitlements)
Personal / independent perspective	Quality face (cf. Brown and Levinson's positive face)	Equity rights (cf. Brown and Levinson's negative face)
Social / interdependent perspective	Identity face	Association rights

However, although it seems an admirable attempt to provide a framework with wider explanatory power, quite apart from the dubious feasibility of developing a universally applicable framework, the use of the terms 'identity face' and 'association rights' to account for the collectivist perspective poses critical problems in her framework. In fact, neither 'identity' nor 'rights' are concepts of collectivist discourse.

They are probably alien to people of collectivist cultures.

'Identity' is generally understood as comprising internal traits that are stable enough to distinguish an individual from others, and the study of it has been closely related to psychological studies of self or personality featuring the western individualistic ideal (Hsu, 1985). In other words, the term 'identity' implies a focus on individuals as well as differentiation and recognition of the uniqueness of each individual. As argued by Arundale (2005; cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2007), while face is a dyadic phenomenon, identity is an individual phenomenon. Even though some psychologists have started to distinguish individual, interpersonal and group levels of identity (reviewed in Spencer-Oatey, 2007), their attention is still on how individuals identify themselves, notwithstanding that this is through their relations and roles with others. The focus of people in collectivist cultures would be more on identifying the group they belong to, rather than on who they are as distinct individuals, i.e. the unit of identification is the group, rather than the individual person (Hofstede, 1991; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Although by introducing the notion of identity face, Spencer-Oatey tries to emphasize the social aspect of 'identity', the use of the term implies an individualistic perspective.

The term 'right' may also be alien to collectivist cultures. According to Jin and Liu (2009), rights (权利, *quanli*) was first translated into Chinese in 1864, but it was used to refer to the political power (权, *quan)* and economic interests (利, *li)* of a nation or a company. Between 1900 and 1915, the use of 权利 (*quanli*) was closest to the meaning of 'rights' in western use, which is based on the conception of individual autonomy and freedom. However, after 1915, the conception of 权利 *(quanli)* was re-constructed based on Confucian ethics and reverted to the meaning of political power and economic interests, which is premised on obligation, i.e. the rights can only be enjoyed if obligations (to the others, to the group) are fulfilled. As described in Jin and Liu (2009: 136), in 1903, the relationship between rights and obligations was clearly defined as such: 盖义务者，权利之因也；权利者，义务之果也 (obligations are the cause of rights; rights are the result of obligations). Even today, the understanding of rights by the Chinese is not exactly the same as that in the west. This is not only reflected in the disputes on human rights between the Chinese and western governments, but also in the Chinese use of this term. As pointed out by Jin and Liu (2009), rights (权利, *quanli*) is still frequently confused with power (权力, *quanli*). These two terms are often used interchangeably in contemporary Chinese discourse.

While Spencer-Oatey's 'equity rights' and boundary protective claims nevertheless would still seem useful concepts from the individualistic perspective, the term 'association rights' seems particularly inapplicable to the context of collectivist cultures. Association is important for the people in collectivist cultures, but it is experienced and expressed more as a need rather than as a right. And it is not even realized through association with others as individuals, but through integration as component parts of a collective whole (see Chapter 4). From the collectivist perspective, the need for association expressed as 'rights' probably conveys an aggressive, egocentric, and self-oriented tendency which is intrinsically individualistic. Instead of identity and rights, it is integration and obligations that truly matters to members of collectivist cultures.

The point that is made up to this point is that both Brown and Levinson's face notion and Spencer-Oatey's face plus sociality rights model are constructed from the individualistic point of view. Neither of the frameworks can serve as a viable tool for sufficient understanding and explanation of relational strategies employed by interactants from collectivist cultures. The problem with the face concept lies in the fact that it has always been discussed as and conceived to be the claim of individuals, that is. the individual is seen as the unit of social interactions and face wants (see Chapter 4). This line of discussion and exploration of face is basically rooted in an individualistic ideology.

Considering these difficulties and disputes in the application of 'face', the question regarding its status as the motivator for politeness or relational strategies demands urgent attention from researchers in this field. Since Brown and Levinson (1978), face has been regarded as the fundamental basis of politeness studies. It seems that face, no matter how many facets it is believed to consist of, has been considered as the most important (if not only) motivator for linguistic politeness strategies. However, as discussed above, the actual application of this concept in the analysis of non-western interactive data has been problematic.

It is suggested here that the difficulty must have resulted from the confusion between first-order and second-order politeness concepts (Watts et al., 2005). According to Watts et al., first-order politeness refers to layman perceptions and concepts of politeness, while second-order politeness is 'a theoretical construct'. They also point out that the pursuit of universals involves second-order politeness concepts, while investigation into politeness in individual cultural frameworks involves the first-order politeness concepts. The difficulty of applying the notion of face is that it is dealt with both as a first-order and a second-order concept in actual data analysis. In situated contexts such as that of the current study, it is this notion as a first-order concept (in this study, in its Chinese context) that needs to be examined.

It is generally acknowledged that the notion of face originated from Chinese culture (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Goffman, 1967; Mao, 1994). However, the Chinese concept of 'face' is a much more complicated construct than the descriptions or definitions so far by politeness researchers. As the first scholar who brought the notion of face to western academic attention, Hu (1944) notes that 'face' has dual meanings in Chinese culture which are conveyed through two lexical forms: *mianzi* (面子) and *lian* (脸), with the former standing for prestige or reputation that can either be achieved by oneself or ascribed by others, and the latter emphasizing moral integrity both sanctioned socially and internally. 'Face' is also believed to be a crucial component in the complex social mechanism of Chinese power games (Hwang, 1987). Hwang claims that for Chinese, there are three types of interpersonal relationships: the expressive tie, the instrumental tie, and the mixed tie. The expressive tie is established on the basis of satisfaction of affective feelings, while the instrumental tie serves only as a means to achieve material goals. The mixed tie has both expressive and instrumental functions, but the expression of authentic affections in a mixed tie relationship is never as strong as that in the expressive tie. It is in the mixed ties that the importance of 'facework' becomes foregrounded. As pointed out by Bargiela-Chiappini (2003), the Chinese construct of face 'stems from a society traditionally dependent on a highly complex network of social obligations, where hierarchy, status and prestige require acknowledgement through normative, as well as strategic, "face-work"'. Hwang (1987) points out that doing facework is both an important way to show off one's power and a method of manipulating the allocation of resources to one's own benefit.

As a result of the complexity of social interactive mechanisms, the Chinese conception of face and the related interactive rules are much more complicated than that in western societies. Chinese face can be related to social status, wealth and prestige, etc.. It can be earned, or granted (Hu, 1944). It can be quantified and exchanged in power games (Hwang, 1987). In sum, it is a much more complicated notion in Chinese culture (i.e. as a first-order concept), than the face notion in western politeness studies (i.e. as a second-order concept).

Given the complexity of the face conception in Chinese culture, the current study suggests that face as a second-order concept serves better in the analysis of relational strategies of western interactants. This does not imply that people in the non-individualistic societies do not have face wants in Brown and Levinson's sense; on the contrary, these wants are likely to be universal. In fact, Brown and Levinson's positive and negative face wants can be regarded as basic psychological needs for an individual trying to function in society and to achieve a balance between 'involvement' and 'independence' (Tannen, 1984; 1986). However, they are not the only factors that influence choices of relational strategies, especially in collectivist cultures where interactive behaviours are subject to more complicated socio-cultural constraints.

As argued by Kasper (1997), the notion of face can only be correctly understood in the context of notions of self, since it is necessarily informed by culturally varying perceptions of personhood and relationships between an individual and society. Indeed, in societies where the individual is seen as the basic unit of existence and actions, more attention is necessarily paid to the satisfaction of personal psychological needs. However, in societies where the group is seen as the basic unit of existence and social actions, the needs of in-group acceptance and integration is necessarily prioritized over the individual needs of self affirmation and self-boundary preservation.

Based on this observation, this study argues that face, as a second-order concept, is not the only motivating force for relational strategies, and that there are other socio-cultural constraints and psychological motivators underpinning the choices of relational strategies. Chapter 4 of this study will propose a new concept, Cultural Self Perception, to account for the choices of relational strategies of interactants from both individualist and collectivist cultures.

2.2. Studies of Workplace Meetings

Since this study employs a case study of a workplace meeting to test the proposed frameworks, the literature of meeting studies also needs to be reviewed here. The study of meetings is generally considered as part of the field of business discourse, which is distinguished from the fields of professional or institutional discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007; Poncini, 2004). Business discourse as 'social action in business context' (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007: 3) is believed to be different from professional discourse in two main aspects: firstly, business discourse does not involve 'lay people', and secondly, there exists a superordinate business objective, be it survival, profit, or growth (Poncini, 2004: 51). As a relatively new field, business discourse is in need of more academic attention, in particular the study of business meetings.

Business meetings are categorised in various ways. There are formal and informal meetings, according to certain criteria of formality (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Boden, 1994; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003); internal and external meetings (Handford, 2010; 2007), according to whether the meeting is conducted within an organization with its own staff members, or between different organizations. Meetings can also be intracultural (Yamada, 1992) or intercultural (or 'multicultural' as referred to by Poncini, 2004) depending on the composition of the cultural backgrounds of the participants. Intercultural meetings are potentially more complicated in terms of analysis due to the presence of more than one system of cultural expectations as well as language issues, especially when translation is involved. Meetings can also be categorised according to the goals or expected outcomes, such as planning, reporting, or problem-solving meetings (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). Based on the categories described, the meeting examined in this study may be described as formal, internal, and intercultural. As will be seen in the analysis chapters (6 to 8), issues related to its perceived goal categorization can be problematic, and analysis may need to account for intercultural differences in perception and realization of such goals.

The following sections will review the field of meeting studies from three perspectives, namely, the studies of meetings as a genre, politeness behaviours at meetings, and cross-cultural and intercultural meetings.

2.2.1. Meetings as a Genre

Previous studies of business meetings have been much concerned with the analysis of meetings as a genre by building analytical models. Representative of this are the three-phase models (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 209; Boden, 1994: 87; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 65) and the six-stage model of Handford (2010; 2007). The major purpose of building these models is to account for 'the generic features' of meetings (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 205).

As a pioneer in the field of workplace meeting studies, Boden (1994) claims that meetings play a central role in the realization of the organization. She sees talk as the structuring process of organizations (or structure-in-action) and meetings as 'the essential mechanism through which organizations create and maintain the practical activity of organizing' (ibid: 81). Her analysis has focused on the interaction order of meetings, drawing on the theories of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. According to Boden (ibid: 87), all meetings are 'interactionally bounded'. That is to say, both formal and informal meetings are self-contained with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) are probably the first who acknowledge the status of workplace meetings as a genre. Their investigation of British and Italian corporate meetings is considered to be 'a ground-breaking attempt to understand real communication involving real business people' (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007: 9). In this cross-cultural study, empirical data is collected to explore the structural and pragmatic properties of corporate meetings. Based on the analysis of formal and informal meetings recorded in the British and Italian companies, they proposed a descriptive model of the generic structure of corporate meetings. The model includes three structural components, i.e. the opening, debating, and closing 'phases', which are in turn comprised of interactive 'exchanges' and connected by 'transitional moves'. As explained by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, the primary aim of generic modelling is to identify the components and boundaries in a prototypical form of interaction, and the components in the meeting model can be used to define the meetings as a distinct genre.

Handford (2010; 2007) also argues strongly for the status of business meetings as a genre. His study is based on a project involving the development of a corpus of spoken business English, CANBEC. Based on the analysis of the corpus data, he presents very interesting results regarding language use in meetings, including qualitative analysis of vague language, modality, and turn-taking, etc., and quantitative analysis of frequency, key words, and clusters, etc.. Drawing on Bhatia's multi-perspective model of discourse (Bhatia, 2004; 2008), a new model is proposed to describe the generic structure of business meetings which Handford refers to as the 'meeting matrix' (2010: 69). One important distinction of Handford's model from the previous ones is the recognition of the 'intertextual' nature of meetings (ibid: 68). As pointed out by Handford (2007: 319), the previous three-phase models pose a danger of giving the impression that meetings exist in a vacuum, as no attention is given to the intertextual nature of business meetings. His model includes two pre-meeting stages and one post-meeting stage, apart from the core three stages of business meetings. The two pre-meeting stages include a preparation stage that deals with the topics, agenda, and any other decisions made related to the meeting, and a pre-meeting stage which often involves phatic communication and serves to warm up for the meeting. The post-meeting stage concerns the effects and repercussions of the meeting. As stated by Handford (2010: 75), 'it is important to recognise that the end of the meeting in question does not entail the end of the topics, themes or issues related to that meeting'.

Handford is not the only researcher who has paid attention to the importance of intertextual context in the study of meetings. In an article on how power is enacted in

Chinese administrative meetings, Gu and Zhu (2002) identify three general frames, namely, pre-meeting frame, frame of meeting proper, and post-meeting frame. The pre-meeting frame consists of six essential moves: meeting initiation, agenda fixing, decision on participants, meeting site, meeting notification, and seating arrangement. The frame of meeting proper corresponds to the three-phase structure discussed above. The post-meeting frame includes activities ranging from further private discussions of the issues unresolved at the meeting, to entertainment, meals and interpersonal networking. They suggest that post-meeting activities are very important in the Chinese context, as some decisions that cannot be made at the meeting proper may be reached through post-meeting activities.

Pan et al. (2002: 118) have also observed that 'for Chinese, a meeting is not just a fixed time and place to meet, but comprises a series of pre-meeting and post-meeting activities'. These activities have the function of balancing different power relations among participants and organizations, and reaching agreement among the different parties concerned. They also contend that most of the time, these pre- and post-meeting activities are more important than the actual meeting itself. As a result, it would be very difficult to understand the interactive behaviours of the participants in a meeting without seeing it within the longer stream of power games and activities. They also suggest that decision making outside the meeting, both before and after, is not only a 'normal' Chinese practice, but also very characteristic of western business and organizational practice (2002: 110).

The genre analysis and the generic models proposed in the previous studies have provided a great deal of insight into the description of workplace meetings. For example, the notions of interactional boundedness (Boden, 1994), generic structuring (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997) and the intertextual context (Handford, 2007, 2010; Gu and Zhu, 2002; Pan et al., 2002) are all indispensable elements that need to be considered in the construction of frameworks for meeting analysis. The current study will also propose an analytical model for meetings, namely, the Multi-Level Model (MLM) for meeting analysis. The MLM has further expanded the scope of meeting analysis to include not only the intertextual context, but also the organizational and the broader socio-economic contexts. However, the purpose of this model is not for generic descriptions of meetings. It is used to serve the goal of the current study, that is, to explore and explain cultural differences in expectations of relational strategies at meetings (for details, see Chapter 3). As the aspects and levels specified in this model mainly serve to provide guidelines for data collection and data analysis in the analysis of meeting interactions, the MLM is regarded more as an analytical approach to meeting interaction analysis rather than as a tool for generic descriptions. Nevertheless, although this is not a focus of the present study, what the MLM can perhaps provide in complementation to genre descriptions is an enhanced model for exploring contextual explanations of variations in genre practices, or for explaining variations in specific situations from genre norms.

2.2.2. Relational Strategies at Meetings

In previous studies of workplace meetings, various aspects of interaction have been examined, e.g. turn-taking, topic management, back-channels, use of coherence and cohesive devices, evaluative language, etc. (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Boden, 1994; 2010; Handford, 2007; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Pan, 2000; Poncini, 2004; Yamada, 1992). However, not many studies have focused specifically on relational strategies at workplace meetings.

Holmes and Stubbe (2003) is a notable contribution to the study of relationship management at workplace meetings. Their meeting data is part of a large database of natural interactions recorded in New Zealand workplaces, the Language in the Workplace Project (LWP). They argue that there are two simultaneous demands in interactions for people at work: one is to get things done efficiently; the other is to construct and maintain collegial relationships. These two demands, also labeled as transactional and interpersonal goals, are frequently perfectly compatible. But sometimes there could be a degree of tension created by the conflicts between the concern for face needs and the need to get things done quickly. They argue that apart from the transactional goals, there are also social objectives or interpersonal goals that affect the interactions at meetings, goals which might be less obvious and frequently unacknowledged. These include either improving rapport and strengthening solidarity by paying attention to others' face needs, or emphasizing power / hierarchy by clearly demarcating status divisions and employment responsibilities and increasing or maintaining social distance between participants. Their analysis of meetings focuses on the meeting management strategies that manifest the interactions between power and politeness considerations at the meetings. Clearly influenced by the face-saving approach discussed earlier in Section 2.1., their analysis mainly focuses on the notions of 'face' and 'power' as motivators for relational strategies at meetings, and their relational strategies are mainly explored on the speech act level. Intercultural factors were not considered in their analytical framework. Their framework clearly would not suffice for situations such as that represented in the current study, and it is hence that more elaborate frameworks are proposed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Handford (2010) also explored the interpersonal aspect of language use at meetings, but mainly at the lexico-grammatical level, e.g. the use of pronouns, back channels, vague language, hedges, and deontic modality in relation to the social (solidarity or power-related) dimensions. Claiming to employ a discourse-as-practice perspective, Handford made some interesting arguments regarding the differentiation of the terms of 'practice' and 'strategy' (ibid: 29-33). He suggests that 'practice' is a term in relation to the discourse analysis domain, while 'strategies' relates to the pragmatic domain. While 'practice' is seen as 'the default interpretative mechanism in authentic business-meeting discourse between experienced participants', 'strategy' can be used to explain 'the atypical, creative behaviour of expert members' by exploiting 'the norms of a genre with specific goals in mind' (ibid).

Handford's argument is of particular interest to the current study. It seems to me that whether to take a practice or strategic perspective in a particular instance of meeting analysis is determined by the research method and type of data of the study. The major approach employed by Handford is corpus linguistics and his data is a corpus of business meetings. Thus, it seems natural for him to take a practice perspective to investigate the 'shared, sanctioned, recurring, constraining and enabling communicative conventions' (ibid). However, the current study is a case study of a problematic intercultural meeting. It is expected that the participants at intercultural meetings have brought long their cultural frames of conventional practices. When there are differences in their cultural frames (which is probably often the case when the participants are from groups that have very different cultural conventions), it may be assumed that the participants would switch from the 'normal' 'automatic' mode to the 'creative' model. Thus, as an endeavour to account for communicative breakdown at an intercultural meeting, the current study needs to focus on the strategies that the multicultural participants employed to achieve their interactive goals. The notion of 'practice' is an important one here, since it highlights the 'constraining and interpretative' elements of shared community uses of language, which will be addressed later in the discussion of functions of 'interactive frame' in intercultural interactions (see Chapter 3). The term 'practice', as a discourse analysis conception, refers to the observable discourse behaviours in relation to certain context, while the term 'interactive frame', as a cognitive conception, refers to the structures of expectations built on the basis of repeated experiences of cultural practices. It is also argued in Chapter 3 that the interactive frames can be inferred through the analysis of the interactive behaviours, which are believed to be consistent with the participant's understanding of conventional practices.

Based on the review above, it may be claimed that investigations in relational strategies at workplace meetings are still limited and mainly confined to the lexico-grammatical level and the speech act level. Further research needs to extend beyond these levels to those that will be considered in this study.

2.2.3. Cross-cultural vs. Intercultural Studies of Meetings

There has been some ambiguity in the use of the terms 'intercultural' and 'cross-cultural' communication. Some researchers, for example Kramsch (2001), argue that 'intercultural communication' and 'cross-cultural communication' are two interchangeable terms which both refer to 'an interdisciplinary field of research that studies how people understand each other across group boundaries'. However, many others argue that the two terms need to be differentiated. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2000a) and Scollon and Scollon (2001) suggest that 'cross-cultural' should be used to refer to comparative data, i.e., data obtained independently from different cultural groups, while 'intercultural' should be used to refer to interactional data, i.e., data collected when people from two (or more) different cultural groups interact with each other. This is without a doubt a very useful distinction, especially in terms of operational and methodological issues. Based on this differentiation of the two terms, the literature in the cross-cultural studies and the intercultural studies of meetings will be reviewed below.

Yamada's (1992; 1997) investigation of American and Japanese workplace meetings is a very interesting cross-cultural comparative study. Yamada (1992) focuses on cultural differences in topic-management strategies at business meetings, drawing on the theoretical framework of interactional sociolinguistics. She makes a very intriguing attempt to explain the differences between American and Japanese strategies by referring to the cultural expectations for interaction which are compared along two continua: the Individual-Group Dimension and the Talk-Silence Dimension. Americans are believed to prefer the modes of individuality and talk, which result in interactive expectations as 'within-group independence', while Japanese prefer the modes of group and silence, which result in expectations of 'nonconfrontation'. She argues that American and Japanese topic-management strategies at business meetings reflect these expectations. She later argues that American meeting organization is task-driven, while Japanese meeting organization is relationship-driven (Yamada, 1997). Yamada's works are valuable attempts to explore connections between cultural expectations and specific interactive behaviours, and this study draws inspiration from the notions she discusses.

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' (1997) cross-cultural study of British and Italian meetings mainly focuses on the comparative analysis of the use of pronouns and address forms, interruptive behaviours, as well as the structures of meetings. Instead of the traditional integrative theories, they argue for an aggregative approach to the understanding of culture, which 'recognises and values differences between cultures and the active roles that individuals play in *creating* culture, rather than being regulated by it' (ibid: 137, original stress). The concept of 'Self' is also brought up in their discussions, but their emphasis is on the 'relational individualities expressed in discourse' as 'the fundamental units of cultural analysis' (ibid: 142). As will be seen in Chapter 4, this study extends the notion of 'Self' in proposing the notion of Cultural Self Perception (CSP).

Pan et al. (2002) reviewed Yamada's (1992) study of Japanese and American meetings and compared them to Chinese meetings based on the study of Pan (2000) and Gu & Zhu (2002). In contrast to Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' (1997) interest in generic modelling, they warn of the 'danger of falling into structural description of meetings'. Arguing for a functional approach to analyzing workplace meetings, they point out that in many cases the 'central' business task is only the carrier of some more important interpersonal relationships. Thus a meeting can be a place for group members to air their own concerns, or to develop group cohesion and build team spirit, or to negotiate the social positions and relationships among the participants. This valuable view of the function of workplace meetings is taken into account in the current study.

Pan et al. (2002) also advocate a comparative perspective of cross-cultural differences in meeting practices. They call for attention to the differences in specific practices, and especially to the underlying assumptions about specific behaviours at meetings. They claim that although 'the procedures and structures of meetings may follow a similar pattern across different international settings', there are still differences in assumptions about how to conduct and how to behave in a meeting cross-culturally or even cross-organizationally. These assumptions about business meetings are believed to be related to cultural values and practices outside the context of the meeting (ibid: 109). Again, their valuable insights here inform the analysis in this study.

Having reviewed work in cross-cultural meeting studies, we will look at the existing studies of intercultural meetings. As discussed above, intercultural meetings refer to the meetings where the interactants are from more than one cultural group. The studies of intercultural interactions at workplace meetings are few, especially those between Chinese and Western participants. Bilbow's (1997a; 1997b) corpus-based study examine the interactions between the western expatriate and the local Chinese staff in meetings at an international corporation in Hong Kong. The unit of analysis is the speech act, and the focus is on the realization of directive speech acts such as suggesting and directing. He also made an attempt to explain the findings drawing on Hofstede's (1980) cultural value systems and Chinese Confucianism.

Another study of intercultural interactions between Chinese and Westerners at meetings is Spencer-Oatey and Xing's (2000) case study of a Chinese delegation's problematic business visit to a British company. Their data is comprised of video-recordings of the meetings and follow-up interviews with the participants.

Through analysis of the comments made by the participants on problematic issues such as hotel arrangements, seating arrangements at the meetings, and meeting procedures, etc., they focus on exploring the connection between the conception of face and communicative behaviours. They argue that social identity such as status is a important component of identity face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b). In addition, group face is also an important concept in their study, as it seems that both British and Chinese participants have taken an intergroup orientation rather than an interpersonal orientation. This seems an unsurprising observation of meetings that are both inter-organizational and intercultural. In a later work published in China, Xing (2007) reports a more in-depth examination of three Chinese business delegation visits to Britain, including the one discussed in Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2000). Drawing mainly on the rapport management framework of Spencer-Oatey (2000b), his analysis focuses on relationship management at the meetings from a variety of perspectives, such as meeting procedure and participation, relational talk, accommodating behaviour, and the interpreter role, etc.. His analysis reveals that though not typically discussed in politeness studies, the strategies on all of these aspects may have a major impact on relationship management in intercultural business meetings.

None of these intercultural studies, however, provide a sufficient degree of systemacity and comprehensiveness in examining the links between observed interactional patterns and plausible cultural explanations, and it is to address these gaps that the approach and frameworks in this study are proposed.

2.3. Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature in two fields: politeness studies and meeting studies. Gaps in these two fields were also identified and discussed.

It is argued that in the field of politeness studies, there are four disputable aspects that need to be addressed:

- The use of the terms 'politeness' and 'rapport' strategies
- The range of politeness or relational strategies
- The (non-)universality of their claims and application
- The notion of 'face' as the motivator for relational strategies

The term 'relational strategies' is proposed to replace 'politeness' and 'rapport' strategies. The limitations of the range of relational strategies used thus far in analysis will be addressed in the Multi-level analytical model proposed in Chapter 3, where interactive frames as a notion for better understanding different cultural expectations of relational strategies will also be further discussed. In Chapter 4, a new concept, 'Cultural Self Perception' will be proposed for explaining intercultural differences in relational strategies, to replace the existing 'face'-based explanatory models.

The literature in meeting studies is still limited and has been reviewed from three perspectives:

- Meetings as a genre
- Relational strategies at meetings
- Cross-cultural and intercultural meetings

It is suggested that while existing models have provided useful insights into the structure and contexts of meetings, they remain limited insufficient tools for the analysis and interpretation of the interactive phenomena in intercultural workplace meeting settings, such as that of the case study in the current project. It is suggested that a Multi-Level Model that encompasses both discourse and contextual dimensions is needed to account for the interactive behaviours at meetings (see Chapter 3).

As with the situation in politeness studies in general, the range of relational strategies studied at meetings has been confined to the lexico-grammatical level and the speech act level, and this study seeks to extend the range to other levels of the discourse as well as to the contextual dimension through the proposed Multi-Level Model.

Finally, although studies of cross-cultural and intercultural meetings have been limited both in range and insight, they have provided useful bases on which the concept of Cultural Self Perception will be constructed and proposed in Chapter 4 to account for intercultural differences in relational strategies at workplace meetings.

Chapter 3. The Multi-Level Model: the Analytical Framework

This chapter proposes a multi-level framework for investigating intercultural workplace meetings. It is suggested that in order to understand and explain the interactive behaviours, especially to account for the cultural differences at meetings, it is necessary for the framework to encompass aspects or factors on both discourse and contextual dimensions. In fact, as argued throughout this thesis, without the consideration of factors (or sometimes, strategies) in the contextual dimension, it is impossible to understand the Chinese interactants' relational strategies in the discourse dimension at the meeting in the case study. This multi-level framework can be used both for analysis of interactive behaviours and for inference of interactive frames on different levels of the discourse and contextual dimensions. It is believed that the model can function as an effective tool both for meeting researchers in their investigations and for meeting interactants who wish to make sense of their interactions in the intercultural workplaces.

3.1. A Multi-Level Model for Meeting Analysis

The key role of context in the analysis of meetings has been repeatedly emphasized by many researchers in business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Poncini, 2004; e.g. Yamada, 1992). Most of these researchers also argue for consideration of multiple levels of context in meeting analysis.

Poncini (2004) argues for the importance of investigating the extra-linguistic context apart from the discourse context in meeting analysis, for instance, the business relationship between the organizations involved in the analysis of negotiations or external (inter-organizational) meetings, or the organizational context in the analysis of internal corporate meetings, especially when different cultures are involved.

In analysing power and politeness in the workplace, Holmes and Stubbe (2003) argue that the term 'context' applies at a number of different levels of analysis, such as:

1. The immediate discourse context;
2. The social relationships between participants, in terms of roles, relative hierarchical positions, and length of colleagueship, etc.;
3. The physical setting and the background knowledge brought to the interaction by participants;
4. The institutional or wider social context, such as the dominant ideology and values.

(The list is made on the basis of Holmes and Stubbe's discussion (2003: 8-11))

They point out that contextual analysis on all of these levels are not only necessary but also crucial to the understanding of the 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1974) at the workplace.

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997: 56) propose a multi-layered interpretive framework for analysis of meeting discourse, with contextual knowledge as an important component. Their framework has three dimensions illustrated by three concentric squares:

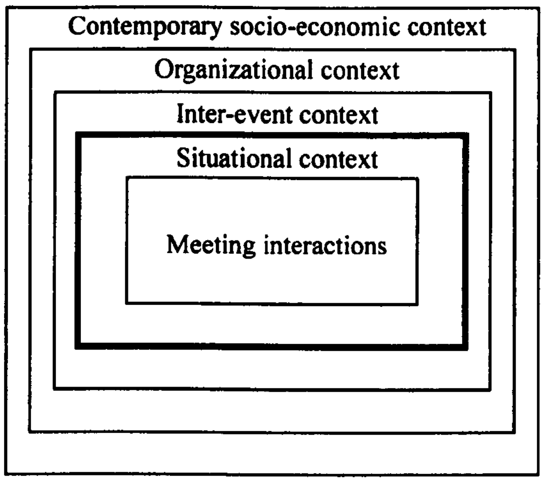
- Lying in the core is the structural dimension including the main task and sub-tasks of the meeting,
- The outer layer is the textual dimension, i.e. the instrumental theme
- The outermost layer is the social dimension, i.e. the relational theme of the meeting.

They also claim that 'contextual and situational knowledge are two components' of their interpretive framework, as individual behaviours at meetings are largely shaped by the enactment of 'background knowledge' – for example, of the wider (corporate and national) context – and situational knowledge. However, the relationship between these two components and the three dimensions in the framework is not explained. Nor is the impact of the two components on interactive behaviours explicitly indicated in their diagram.

The current study proposes a new Multi-Level Model (MLM) for systematic investigations of intercultural workplace meetings (see Figure 3.1.). The new model encompasses factors both in the discourse dimension and in the contextual dimension. It has combined two types of theoretical models in meeting studies, namely, the generic models discussed in Chapter 2 and the contextual frameworks reviewed above. As a more comprehensive model, it seeks to enable greater in-depth analysis and interpretation of interactive behaviours at intercultural workplace meetings.

As illustrated by the concentric squares in Figure 3.1, there are five levels in the model. The level of meeting interactions lies in the centre: this is referred to as the *discourse dimension* in this thesis. Surrounding the meeting interactions are four levels of contextual factors, namely, the Situational, Inter-event, Organizational and Contemporary socio-economic contexts, which are altogether referred to as the *contextual dimension.*

Figure 3.1. The Multi-Level Model (MLM) for meeting analysis



The differentiation between discourse dimension and contextual dimension is made to facilitate better description and analysis. The analysis of the discourse dimension focuses on the examination of patterns of interactive behaviours, while analysis of factors in the contextual dimension contributes to further interpretation and understanding of the interactive performances.

It must be pointed out that the boundary between the two dimensions is not clear-cut. On the one hand, linguistic performances in interactions are seen by some approaches as both text and context at the same time. As summarised by Cutting (2002: 8), apart from situational context and background knowledge context (which she refers to as 'the context outside the text'), there is also co-textual context, that is, 'the context of the text itself'. Conversation analysts also claim that utterances can create and construct context, as they can 'provide frameworks of understanding and meaning for both past and upcoming utterances' (Schiffrin, 1994: 377). On the other hand, whether as part of the text, or external to it, context plays an indispensable role in the interpretation and understanding of interactive behaviours.

The difficulty of clear separation between analysis of interactions and analysis of context can be seen in the case study in this project. In the process of data analysis, it was often difficult to identify aspects of turn-taking without considering the situational context. For example, some turn-taking patterns could not have been identified without examining the meeting agenda and participant roles that are considered as factors on the situational level of the contextual dimension (see Chapter 6 and 8 for details).

In fact, the two dimensions can be seen as integrated in the current framework for the analysis of a 'big' Discourse, as termed by Gee. Gee (1999) makes a distinction between 'discourse' with a 'little d' and 'Discourse' with a 'big D'. The term 'discourse' with a 'little d' refers to language-in-use or stretches of language such as conversations or stories, while 'Discourse' with a 'big D' refers to the way in which language is integrated with non-language 'stuff', such as ways of acting and thinking, values, beliefs, symbols, etc. that, together with language, can help identify the particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity) (Gee, 1999: 6, 13, 18). Borrowing Gee's terms, the full analytical model (MLM) proposed in this chapter can be regarded as a framework for Discourse analysis with a big 'D', while the analysis of the meeting interactions can be considered as analysis of discourse with a small 'd'. In other words, discourse with a small 'd' corresponds to the discourse dimension of the current framework, while the Discourse with a capital 'D' corresponds to the MLM framework that comprises both discourse and contextual dimensions.

For the analysis of discourse with a small 'd', *speech act* is the basic unit of analysis, while for the analysis of Discourse with a big 'D', *event* is the basic unit of analysis.

In the tradition of ethnography of communication, the concept of *event* is treated as 'the basic unit for descriptive purposes'. An event is defined as a unified set of components throughout, and terminates whenever there is a change in the major participants, their role-relationships, or the focus of attention (Saville-Troike, 2003: 23). The characteristics of workplace meetings are consistent with these criteria for defining an event. In the current model, each individual meeting is regarded as an event, which is composed of a number of phases in terms of interactive dynamics. It needs to be noted that the term 'situation', which Hymes (1972) has tried to differentiate from 'event' (although it seems the effort has caused more confusion), is employed in the contextual dimension in 'situational context' only to refer to the contextual factors within the meeting event.

Here the concept of contextual dimension needs to be elaborated a bit. In the current model, the contextual dimension includes four levels. That is to say, not only the situational factors, but also inter-event, organizational and socio-economic contexts are considered as crucial for the interpretation and understanding of interactions at the meeting. As stated by Goodwin and Duranti (1992), the notion of context involves a fundamental juxtaposition of two entities: (1) a focal event; and (2) a field of actions within which that event is embedded. They claim that the focal event (here the meeting) 'cannot be properly understood, interpreted appropriately, or described in a relevant fashion, unless one looks beyond the event itself to other phenomena (for example cultural setting, speech situation, shared background assumptions) within which the event is embedded'. Roberts & Sarangi (1999) also point out that analysts of workplace discourse, like the participants, need to draw on contextual knowledge at many levels in order to come to an adequate understanding of what is going on. Context, according to them, not only refers to 'the observable accomplishment of speakers', but also includes 'the wider context of institutional practices and ideologies which create possible scenarios that the listener uses to guess at speaker meaning'. Indeed, it is suggested that one key question that needs to be constantly asked in building a meeting model is what types of information are necessary for the analysts as well as for the interactants to make sense of what is going on at the meeting.

In the current model, the meeting is seen as an interactive event and the unit of analysis, encompassing both the discourse dimension and the situational level of the contextual dimension. This is indicated in Figure 3.1. by the bold line encircling the situational context and the meeting interactions. As pointed out by Boden (1994: 87), meetings are self-contained with beginning, middle, and end, and are temporally, spatially and interactionally bounded. Thus, the meeting is considered as a relatively self-contained unit of analysis, including both the verbal interactions at the meeting and the situational factors that are impacting on and manifested through the verbal interactions. The meeting event is the core of the framework and the centre of attention in data collection and data analysis, with the outer layers of context taken into account.

The analytical aspects of the meeting as an interactive event will be discussed in Section 3.2. below, while the function of the three outer levels of the contextual dimension in meeting analysis will be demonstrated in Chapter 5.

The Multi-Level Model (MLM) is not only proposed as a framework for meeting analysts, but also as a structure of knowledge necessary for meeting interactants, especially those at intercultural workplace meetings, to make sense of other's interactive behaviours. It provides guidance for collecting information that is crucial for planning one's own actions as well as for making inferences of other's interactive intent. It is argued in this study that whether the interactants share the same expectations on the five levels is crucial to the interactive outcome of the meeting, and that insufficient or confusing contextual information may lead to communicative failure, as a result of clashes of expectations. This will be discussed in Section 3.3. below.

3.2. Analysing Relational Strategies at Workplace Meetings

As discussed above, the examination of the meeting as an interactive event encompasses the analysis of both the discourse dimension and the situational level of the contextual dimension. In the current study, the analytical focus is on the differing relational strategies of the Chinese and expatriate participants at the meeting.

One important task of the meeting analysis is to explore the interactive goals and interactive strategies of the participants. A highly important theoretical premise of this study is that as rational agent of their actions, the participants at meetings, from whatever cultural backgrounds, are all after certain interactive goals in making each choice of interactive strategies. These choices are to a large extent shaped by culture-specific interactive frames (see Section 3.3.), which are formed during each participant's socialization process and prescribe the preferable routes towards the desired interactive goals. It is believed that the interactive dynamics at the meeting result from (in)consistencies in the participants' expectations of the interactive goals and strategies. Broadly speaking, there are two types of interactive goals: relational goals and transactional goals. In order to achieve these goals, the speakers have necessarily adopted certain interactive strategies that can serve the achievement of these goals. Correspondingly, there are two types of interactive strategies: relational strategies and rhetorical strategies serving the interpersonal and transactional goals respectively.

In this thesis, the investigation of relational strategies will be conducted both in the discourse dimension and on the situational level. The examination of the discourse dimension will focus on two aspects of the meeting interactions, i.e. speech act and turn-taking. The analysis of meeting interactions lies in the core of the framework for meeting analysis. By interactions, I mean the various aspects of discourse behaviours at the meeting, or more specifically, the linguistic and paralinguistic performances of the participants within the situational context of the meeting. By using the word 'interaction' rather than 'discourse', action as the social effect or objective in the form of linguistic behaviours is emphasized. In this study, it is also suggested that apart from the different aspects of meeting interactions, factors in the contextual dimension may also be employed as relational strategies, such as those on the situational level.

The following parts will introduce the approaches to the investigation of relational strategies at each of the three levels, namely, speech act, turn-taking and situational levels.

3.2.1. Turn-taking Strategies

Investigations at the turn-taking level contribute to the construction of meeting structure, the description of relational dynamics and the analysis of relational strategies.

Meeting structure refers to the segmentation of the turn interactions at a meeting based on the 'topical organization' (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 65). Previous studies (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 209; Boden, 1994: 87; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 65) have proposed a three-phase meeting structure, namely, the opening section, the central development / debating section, and the closing section. It is suggested that meeting structure can be the result of pre-meeting planning (if the plan is strictly carried out, as in formal meetings), or the outcome of progressive interactions at the meeting (as in informal meetings), or most frequently, the product of ongoing negotiations between the two. Therefore, the analysis of meeting structure is important both for the description of meeting interactions and for the examination of relational dynamics at the meeting.

Relational dynamics refers to the ever changing state of relational atmosphere as a result of ongoing interactions at the meeting, while *relational atmosphere* is the general impression of interpersonal attitudes that the participants have displayed through verbal or non-verbal actions at a certain moment at the meeting. Relational dynamics can be observed and analyzed through the investigation of the participants' turn-taking patterns, including features such as interruptions, back-channels, or silence and gaps.

Previous studies (e.g. Tannen, 1984; 1989) on relational functions or effects of turn-taking behaviours have focused on back-channelling, overlap or interruptions, etc.. It is suggested that apart from these devices, coordination among the participants in turn-taking may also function as relational strategies. This will be explored in Chapter 6.

3.2.2. Speech Act Strategies

As will be introduced in detail in Chapter 7, the investigation of speech act strategies at workplace meetings involves a set of concepts that are proposed in the current study, e.g. problem talk, speech act scheme, hedging act, and realization act, etc..

Problem talk is dealt with both as a speech act and as an interactive goal in the data analysis. As a speech act, it is highly threatening relationally. As an interactive goal, problem talk aims to call attention to certain problematic issues that either are within others' range of responsibility or need others' cooperation to be resolved. It goes without saying that problem talk at workplace meetings may pose serious threats to collegial relationships. It is suggested that in order to mitigate this relational threat, the speaker usually adopts a speech act scheme that is carefully designed and relationally oriented in order to successfully achieve the goal of problem talk.

Speech act scheme is a concept proposed for the analysis of the hierarchical organization of speech acts and the interactive goals of long turns at meetings. At workplace meetings, especially those relatively more formal ones, the turns are often rather long, and therefore there are often more than one act performed within one turn. It is believed that the speech acts in a long turn are organized hierarchically for the achievement of interactive goals. In order to infer the major interactive goal of a speaker turn, it is necessary to work out the hierarchical structure of speech acts within an extended turn, that is, the speech act scheme. The construction of a speech act scheme, as well as the inference of the major interactive goal of a speaker turn, is based on the topic structure of the extended turn.

As discussed above, the participants at workplace meetings often address transactional goals and relational goals at the same time. It seems also likely that at workplace meetings, the major interactive goal of the speaker turn tends to be transactional. Thus it is suggested that a speech act scheme is composed of two types of acts, namely, the realization act and the supportive act. The realization act is often used to achieve the transactional goal, and the supportive act to achieve the relational goal.

In the current study, the analysis of relational strategies for problem talk will focus on the relational considerations in two aspects: one is the design of the speech act scheme; the other is the choices of the realization act for problem talk and the supportive acts. Since problem talk is considered as a relationally threatening act, the supportive acts often serve as hedges to mitigate the relational threat of the realization act. Thus the supportive acts can be referred to as *hedging acts* when they are believed to serve such a function.

It is worth noting that some important studies have been conducted in speech act realization from the perspective of corpus analysis. For example, Handford (2010: 185) studied the 'interpersonal creativity' in problem-solving through corpus analysis of lexical items such as 'problem', 'issue', 'if', metaphors and idioms. Adolphs (2008) also explores speech act strategies such as the realization of 'suggestions' from a corpus point of view. However, she argues for an approach that extends beyond the lexico-grammatical level to include the investigation of utterance function in relation to context analysis. It is believed that corpus approach is extremely useful in the study of meeting practices on different levels of the discourse. In the long term, a corpus study will be necessary when the conditions are ready for making some generalizations of intercultural meetings in the Chinese workplace (see Chapter 9). Currently, the focus of the study is not on making generalizations of discursive patterns in meetings; instead, the focus is on verifying and developing the analytical and explanatory frameworks through a case study. On the speech act level, the focus is on developing an approach to describing the hierarchical organizations of speech acts as relational strategies for problem talk, which constitute one of the levels of analysis within the MLM framework proposed in this Chapter. Though referred to as speech act strategies, the analysis is actually not limited to the utterance level. Instead, the construction of the hierarchical organization of speech acts is based on the analysis of extended discourse structure which is one of the important features that distinguishes the analytical approach of this study from the traditional politeness studies (for details of the analytical method of speech act strategies, see Chapter 7).

3.2.3. Relational Strategies on the Situational Level

The analysis on the situational level aims to reveal how the contextual factors may be exploited by the participants for relational purposes at meetings. Contextual factors are generally regarded as 'background information' that exist externally to the interactions and have significant influence on the interactive behaviours of the participants. In the current study, contextual factors are not only seen as influences on interactive behaviours at workplace meetings, but also as a repertoire of interactive strategies that the participants may actively exploit for relational purposes.

The investigation of relational strategies at the situational level will focus on three contextual factors, namely, meeting agenda, formality and participant roles.

While the presumed function of a meeting agenda may be 'to provide an outline of the explicit goals of the meeting' (Handford, 2010: 27), this study suggests that it can be manipulated for relational purposes when there are serious difficulties in terms of relationship management in achieving the transactional goals. Therefore, the concept of 'hidden agenda' is borrowed from negotiation studies (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 31; Lampi, 1990). The *hidden agenda* is either shared by a section of the participants or known only to one individual. It is suggested that the hidden agenda is a means of 'information manipulation' (Lampi, 1990) that has a determining influence on the outcome of meeting interactions. In the case study of this project, the expected relational effect and the actual relational consequence of the manipulation of agenda will be examined to explore the relational role of hidden agendas.

Another situational factor that can be employed for relational purposes is the formality level of the meeting. It is suggested that the expected relational effect of formality lies in the 'directed and restricted' (Boden, 1994: 85) nature of turn-taking at formal meetings. That is to say, at formal meetings, speaker rights are relatively more restricted and the turn-taking more directed than at informal meetings. The speaker right and turn sequence at formal meetings are either specified in the official agenda that is usually announced in advance or allocated by the chair at the meeting. It is suggested in this study that the degree of the constraining force of meeting formality may be influenced by how much hierarchy is esteemed in a culture, and that formality can be exploited as means of relational strategy for controlling or avoiding confrontational behaviours of the participants.

Participant roles can also be manipulated as relational strategy. Drawing on Hymes' (1972) and Goffman's (1979; 1981) frameworks, this study proposes a new framework to account for participant roles at intercultural workplace meetings. The participant roles are divided into two types: the production roles and the reception roles. The production roles include the animator, the author and the principal, while the reception roles include the intended addressee, the ostensible addressee and the audience. For details, please see Chapter 8.

It is worth noting that in the current framework of MLM, the focus is on analysing relational strategies at workplace meetings, and especially on explaining cultural differences in expectations about relational strategies at problematic intercultural meetings. When discussing confrontations and seemingly disruptive behaviours in the workplace, two other analytical approaches may also be relevant, namely, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach and the impoliteness studies. The current study has taken an approach that is different from CDA and impoliteness studies for the following reasons.

The CDA approach (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993) may be relevant to the analysis of power struggles in the workplace, and power is an important aspect of workplace interactions that is enacted through language use. Power negotiation in the workplace meetings may include the ability or actions to control others' actions as well as to impose plans and evaluations at the expense of others (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 3). In the current study, power is dealt with both at the level of turn-taking and the level of situational factors such as formality. However, the discussions on these levels will focus on the exploration and explanation of the relational behaviours rather than power negotiations. This is because a CDA approach that focuses on power struggles will lead the discussion to a completely different direction than the current one. Furthermore, workplace interactions are very complicated and the CDA approach seems too simplistic by going to the extreme of focusing solely on the concept of power. As commented by Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 5), a CDA approach typically adopts the perspective of those 'out of power' and characterises the power of those in authority as 'oppressive' or 'repressive'. The current study suggests that in fact, most of the workplace interactions are conducted to seek cooperation and collaboration in order to accomplish the organizational goals rather than oppressing or repressing the others.

Compared to politeness studies, impoliteness studies is a relatively new trend studying impolite or rude language use (Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield and Locher, 2008; Culpeper, 1996; Culpeper, 2010; Culpeper et al., 2003; Mills, 2005). The discussion and exploration of impoliteness is very meaningful as it expands the scope of research to a much broader spectrum of the description of relational behaviours. However, the theoretical frameworks of impoliteness studies are not drawn on in the current study. Apart from the similar problems with politeness study in terms of the terminology, the scope of impoliteness strategies and heavy reliance on the face concept (see Chapter 2), there is another major problem for impoliteness frameworks to be applied to the current study, namely, the definition of impoliteness. Impoliteness is defined as the use of communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony (Culpeper, 1996; Culpeper et al., 2003). That is to say, the behaviours studied by impoliteness researchers are *intended* to be impolite or rude. However, the major interest in this study is to explore how well-intended and carefully designed relational strategies for problem talks have resulted in confrontation as a result of clashes of cultural expectations. The method regarding the analysis of clashes of cultural expectations as cause of communicative breakdown will be explored in the following section.

3.3. Clashes of Expectations as Cause of Breakdown

The previous two sections introduced the MLM for meeting analysis and the approach to analysis of relational strategies at workplace meetings. This section will discuss the nature and functions of 'interactive frames' in intercultural interactions. How interactive frames may be explored on the different levels of the MLM will also be discussed.

The hypothesis of this study is that the communicative failure at the meeting in question was mainly caused by clashes of cultural expectations of relational strategies for problem talk. In order to account for the communicative breakdown, a framework is necessary for making inference and comparisons regarding the culture-specific expectations. In the following parts, the significance and employment of 'interactive frames' in accounting for communicative breakdowns will be discussed, following the definition of the key concepts in this framework.

3.3.1. Frame as Structured Expectations

The term 'frame', together with some other related terms such as 'schema', 'script', etc. has been used to refer to structured expectations based on prior experiences (For detailed review of the literature, please see Tannen, 1993). A common point of emphasis of these concepts is how past experiences are organized and used as guidance for actions and interpretations in similar situations. Tannen (1993) points out that the notion of 'expectations' underlies all discussions of frames, schemas, and scripts. Following Ross (1975; cited in Tannen, 1993), she prefers the term 'structures of expectations':

> On the basis of one's experience of the world in a given culture (or combination of cultures), one organizes knowledge about the world and uses this knowledge to predict interpretations and relationships regarding new information, events, and experiences.

Frames or structures of expectations are of particular interest in the current study, as they can help uncover how interpretations and productions are predetermined by expectations which are shaped by culturally different experiences.

Tannen and Wallat (1993) make a distinction between the terms 'knowledge schemas' (in the psychological / AI sense) and 'interactive frames' (in the anthropological / sociological sense). They use 'schema' to refer to the expectations based on knowledge of the world, while 'frame' refers to expectations about the type of interaction as well as participant alignments in a particular interaction. It is the notion of interactive frames that is of particular interest to the current study. According to Tannen and Wallat (1993), the interactive frame refers to 'a sense of what activity is being engaged in', without which no verbal or nonverbal message could be interpreted. In this sense, the notion of frame seems to share similar meanings with Hymes' term 'event' (1972; 1974), and with Gumperz's term 'activity type', both regarded by their authors as the analytical unit of social interactions.

In fact, Gumperz (1982) has used the terms 'activity type', 'speech events', and 'interpretive frames' interchangeably. He suggests that situated and context-bound interpretations are crucial processes in social interactions, and that the function of the interpretive frame is not to determine meaning but simply to constrain interpretations by 'channelling inferences so as to foreground or make relevant certain aspects of background knowledge and to underplay others'(ibid: 131). In order to plan their own responses, interactants need to assess others' communicative intents, and this involves identifying the activity type or interpretive frame as well as detecting the foregrounded message by matching the perceived contextualization cues with those of the existing frames acquired from prior experiences (Gumperz, 1977; 1982).

As summarized by Yamada (1992: 7), the concept of frame describes how participants understand and evaluate 'what is going on' in an interaction, and a frame is always 'interactive' (Tannen, 1985), as well as 'interpretive' (Gumperz, 1982). In terms of the interactive nature of frames, Yamada explains that a participant's frame at a certain moment of the interaction may be a frozen image of cumulative interpretive experiences up until that point, but since interaction is dynamic and context changes with each instant, frames are constantly redefined from moment to moment. In terms of the interpretive nature of frames, Yamada claims that the interpretive frame is better seen as a method of interpretation, a systematic 'matching' of expectations with moment-by-moment conversation. Interactants use interpretive frames to categorize and evaluate what is going on during the interaction, and what the conversation might reflect about others' attitude and intentions in the conversation.

The concept of interpretive frames, or structures of expectation, is of particular significance, both for interactants in an event to facilitate smooth interactions, and for discourse researchers to analyse problematic interactive cases such as that in the present study. For an interactant, frames not only serve as guidance for one's own actions in certain situations, but also help facilitate interpretation of others' interactive behaviours, by providing enclosed structures for sense-making and by adding background information to the interactive process. For discourse researchers in intercultural interactions, the comparison of frames can help explain the causes of communicative breakdowns and misunderstandings.

In this study, the terms 'frame' and 'expectations' are used interchangeably, with some slight differences. When the term 'frame' is used, the emphasis is on the structuredness of expectations in the process of interactive interpretation in a certain situation. When the term 'expectations' is used, the emphasis is on the specific interactive behaviours (that constitute a frame) in relation to a certain interactive frame.

3.3.2. Frame and Intercultural Interactions

The concept of interactive frame, or structure of expectations, is of particular significance to the study of intercultural interactions, especially for the explanation of communicative breakdowns. Studies in the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics and ethnography of communication show that cross-cultural differences in expectations of linguistic behaviours, interactive strategies, and signalling devices can lead to communicative breakdowns. It is suggested that communicative breakdowns are often caused by the interactants' tendency to rely on their own cultural frames to make inferences and interpretations regarding others' communicative intents and attitudes.

As suggested by the interactional sociolinguists (e.g. Gumperz, 1982; Scollon and Scollon, 1995), people make inferences based on their own assumptions or expectations about the world, and linguistic productions only serve to point in the direction of what one already knows. This is due to the interactants' assumption of the sharedness of interactive frames. Since structures of expectations are formed through the accumulated past experiences of socialization in a certain culture, members of a cultural group are expected to share interpretive frames. Although there might be differences in individuals' frames due to different personal experiences, conventionalized forms of interactions are generally expected to be shared. If an interactant has been only interacting within one's own culture, it is possible for one to hold the misconception that one's own way of making sense of the interaction is the 'only' and 'correct' way (Yamada, 1992: 14).

This assumption of sharedness may lead to negative judgement of others' relational attitudes when there are differences in interactive behaviours. When inconsistency appears between the other's behaviour and one's own expectations, rather than being understood as a result of clashes of cultural expectations, the frustrations in intercultural encounters are usually interpreted in terms of racial prejudice or attributed to personality traits or relational attitudes (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). As pointed out by Gumperz (1982), since interactive frames are highly conventionalized and shared among members of a cultural group, they are often taken for granted. When interactants encounter interactive behaviours that are different from their expectations, they tend to make inferences in terms of negative interpersonal attitudes.

Furthermore, as noticed by Scollon and Scollon (1995), when inferences are made in interactions, they tend to be fixed, rather than tentative, and they are usually drawn very quickly, due to the dynamic nature of interactions. Based on this observation, Scollon and Scollon argue that successful communication is based on sharing as much as possible the assumptions about interactive behaviours. Intercultural interactants also need to be aware that it is possible that others' intentions may be incorrectly interpreted, so they should hesitate to draw any negative conclusions about the behaviours of the others.

3.3.3. Levels of Interactive Frames

It is suggested in this study that an interactant's interactive frame may be structured as a multi-level system with subsets of frames on each level. It is crucial for the analyst to identify the structured expectations on different levels for effective interpretation and in-depth understanding of the interactive behaviours at intercultural encounters.

As pointed out by Tannen (1993), theories of frames and other structures of expectations have mainly been concerned with language comprehension and have shown no way of discovering the composition of these structures. In an analysis of film narratives told by Greek and American subjects, Tannen (ibid) proposed a number of levels of frames, such as the experiment interview situation, the storytelling mode, features of films, film-viewer frame, expectations about different events in the film, and expectations about objects. Her analysis shows that expectations at all of these levels affect the perceptions and linguistic productions of the subjects. The comparison between Greek and American narratives indicates that these structures of expectations or frames are often culturally determined. She also proposes 16 kinds of linguistic evidence that can reveal the expectations or frames. Tannen's attempt to differentiate levels of frames is intriguing, but the levels she proposed are specific to her data and too complicated for application to general analysis of interactions.

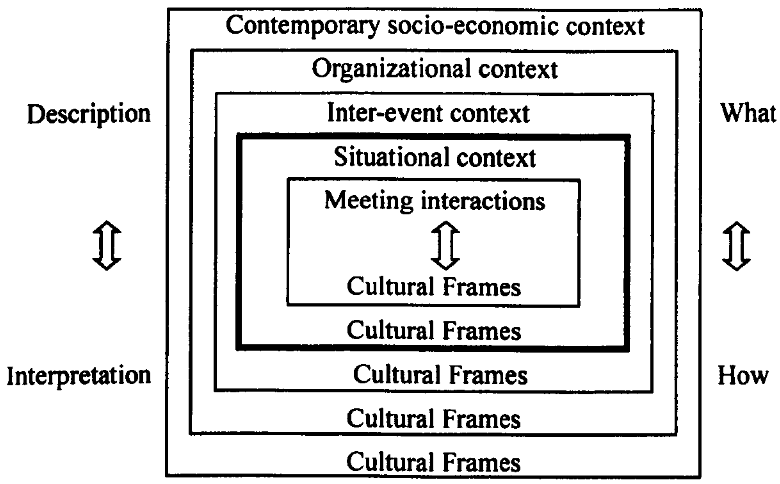
From the perspective of an ethnographic approach to communication, Hymes (1972) suggests three units of analysis: situation, event, and speech act. Similarly, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) suggest that interactants' expectations and assumptions can be analyzed on three interdependent levels:

- Cultural assumptions about the situation and appropriate behaviour and intentions within it
- Ways of structuring information or an argument in a conversation
- Ways of speaking: the use of a different set of unconscious linguistic conventions

These three levels can be summarized as situational factors, discourse structure, and linguistic conventions. They comprise a Cross-Talk Model as termed by Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) to describe structured expectations for cross-cultural comparison.

Based on these frameworks from previous studies and the MLM proposed in Section 3.1 above, this thesis proposes a multi-level interpretive system for exploring the interactants' expectations at intercultural workplace meetings (see Figure 3.2. below). It is believed that intercultural interactants bring a multi-level system of culture-specific expectations that can be studied in the discourse dimension and the contextual dimension. In each dimension, there are different levels of frames. For example, in the discourse dimension, the interactive expectations may include turn-taking expectations and speech act expectations; while in the contextual dimension, the interactants may have different expectations regarding what things should be like or how things are expected to be done on all four levels, namely, the situational, inter-event, organizational, and socio-economic contexts.

Figure 3.2. The Multi-Level Model (MLM) for frame analysis in intercultural meetings



As indicated in Figure 3.2., while investigations of the phenomena on the different levels of the two dimensions serve to answer the 'what' question by describing interactive behaviours and contextual factors, the exploration of cultural frames on each level may contribute to answering the 'how' question by accounting for the interpretive process and the causes of communicative breakdowns or misunderstandings.

3.3.4. Methods of Inferring Expectations

In the current study, a combination of methods is used to infer the cultural frames of the participants, which in turn are used to explain the causes of the communicative breakdown. Generally speaking, two approaches are adopted to investigate the cultural frames of the participants: one is through retrospective interviews, i.e. inferring the participants' expectations by analysing their comments on their own as well as others' interactive behaviours; the other is to make inferences of the participants' expectations based on their interactive performances.

The data analysis chapters (Chapter 6-8) will demonstrate how the two approaches are applied to the analysis of the causes of the communicative breakdown. Here the second approach, that is, the inference of expectations based on performances will be introduced briefly.

A major way to infer participants' expectations of others' behaviours is to examine observable patterns of their own performances, as discourse behaviours are inscribed as part of the cultural socialization and often unmarked if no clash of expectations occurs. Even if a clash of expectations does occur, the participants often tend to interpret the marked behaviours of others according to their own interpretive frames, which often leads to misunderstandings and negative evaluation of the other's relational orientation. Since the choices of interactive strategies are often made subconsciously or habitually, interactants in their retrospective interviews sometimes may not reveal sufficient information about the rationale or expectations underlying their choices. In contrast, the participants' expectations in the contextual dimension, e.g. on the situational level, are often elicited more easily through interviews (as well as through the analysis of documents data) than through direct observation of interactive behaviours.

In the current study, two methods are used for inferring frames on the basis of performances. One is related to the hypothesis discussed above, i.e. the interactants' assumption of sharedness of frames. Since the interactive frames are assumed to be shared, an interactant expects by default that the others would use the same strategies to achieve the same type of tasks. Therefore, the specific strategies adopted by an interactant may reflect his expectations about the strategies of the other participants. Based on this hypothesis, it is suggested in this study that the interactants' frames may be inferred according to the analysis of their interactive behaviours.

The other method is based on the theoretical frameworks for interaction analysis that have been developed by researchers in different fields of discourse analysis. For example, conversation analysts have a whole set of theories regarding the social constraints on turn-taking behaviours, such as adjacent pairs and preferred responses. As pointed out by Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998: 39), the sequential order of talk-in-action has both 'normative and inferential properties'. The organized turn-taking system provides a powerful normative framework both for the participants to understand and interpret one another's actions, and for the analyst to infer the participants' frame of turn-taking behaviours during the interactions.

3.4. Summary

This chapter has proposed a framework for the examination of intercultural workplace meetings: the Multi-Level Model (MLM) (see Figure 3.1. and 3.2.). It is suggested that in order to achieve sufficient understanding of the participants' interactive behaviours and strategies, the investigation of workplace meetings needs to be conducted in both of the two dimensions:

- the discourse dimension
- the contextual dimension

The discourse dimension refers to the interactive performances, while the contextual dimension encompasses factors on four levels of the context. They are

- situational context
- inter-event context
- organizational context
- contemporary socio-economic context

Within the MLM, the meeting is regarded as an interactive event and the unit of analysis, encompassing both the discourse dimension and the situational level of the contextual dimension. Section 3.2. discussed the approaches to analysis of relational strategies on three levels within the meeting event, namely, speech act, turn-taking and situational factors.

It was further suggested that analysis should extend to identifying 'interactive frames' that are culturally shaped, since sharedness or differences in expectations based on these frames may account for communicative success or failure. These interactive frames may be explored on different levels of the MLM, and may be identified on the basis of retrospective interviews and observable patterns of behaviours and strategies at each level of the MLM.

The next chapter outlines the proposed framework for explaining differences in relational strategies and interactive frames identified through MLM analysis, that is, the Cultural Self Perception (CSP) framework.

Chapter 4. Cultural Self Perception: The Explanatory Framework

This chapter proposes an explanatory framework, that is, Cultural Self Perception (CSP), for the explanation of cultural differences in expectations of interactive behaviours. The definition of the CSP concept will be introduced first. Then the characteristics of two types of cultural self perceptions, Individual-Self and Group-Self, will be described. The chapter then goes on to explore the roots and impact of CSP. Finally, a model that combines MLM and CSP will be introduced, which can be employed to account for cultural differences in expectations of relational strategies at intercultural workplace meetings.

4.1. Cultural Self Perception

Cultural Self Perception (CSP) is a concept proposed for the current study as a tool for explaining intercultural differences in interactive behaviours. This concept is employed to investigate the differences in cultural views of self construct and self boundary. There are two different cultural views of self that are considered most relevant to the current project: one is to see 'the individual' as the Self, that is, the individual as the unit of social existence with a clearly defined boundary; the other is to see 'the in-group' as the Self, that is, the in-group as the unit of social existence with the boundary drawn around the intimate group(s) within which an individual is a component part without a defined boundary (expectedly). In this study, the former will be referred to as Individual-Self Perception which is believed to be characteristic of the so-called western cultures, and the latter Group-Self Perception which is believed to be characteristic of the Chinese culture.

The concept of Cultural Self Perception is developed mainly by drawing on studies of cross-cultural psychology. The different emphasis on the individual or the group has been noted repeatedly in the examinations of cultural values. Since the publication of his seminal study on culture-level value systems, Hofstede's (1980; 1991) value dimension of individualism and collectivism has attracted immense research interest and has also been repeatedly acknowledged as the most important in later cultural value studies conducted by other cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. Chinese-Culture-Connection, 1987; Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars, 1993). A number of researchers in the field of intercultural communication have attempted to apply the value system of individualism and collectivism to the analysis of intercultural communication patterns. Most of these studies have focused on the determinative power of values on communication styles. They seek to build simplified connections between cultural values and the so-called communication styles, without providing much empirical evidence of real-life interactive behaviours. They have also neglected the influence of the cognitive function of culture, that is, how culture guides the individual's cognitive attention and channels the individual's route of action through structured expectations. To address these shortcomings, the current study, by focusing on the notion of Cultural Self Perception, places emphasis on the systematic exploration of the cognitive impact of the culturally defined self-other boundary on real-life interactive behaviours. More specifically, the study will focus on how views of self affect the specific choices of interactive strategies in intercultural interactions at workplace meetings.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) is another important work that has inspired the CSP model for the current study. They proposed the concepts of independent and interdependent self construals for the description of the two different cultural views of the self. They suggest that 'the significance and the exact functional role that the person assigns to the other when defining the self depends on the culturally shared assumptions about the separation or connectedness between the self and others' (ibid). They claim that different views of the self may have a systematic influence on human experiences, including cognition, emotion, and motivation. It seems that the notions of independent and interdependent self construals correspond to some extent to the concepts of individualism and collectivism in value studies, but with more focus on the cognitive implications of the different self constructs.

What Markus and Kitayama (1991) fail to notice, however, is that for the interdependent self, there are two different types of others, the in-group others and the out-group others. Vast differences may exist between perceptions of in-group relationships and interactive patterns, and perceptions of out-group relationships and interactive patterns. The 'others' in Markus and Kitayama's (1991) conception of interdependent self appear confined to in-group others. Another difference between CSP and Markus and Kitayama's self construals is the placement of the self boundary.

Although they have pointed out that for the interdependent self, the individual is only an incomplete 'fraction' and others are included within the boundaries of the self, their interdependent self model still regards the individual as a self unit; while in the CSP model, the in-group as the Self, that is, as the complete unit of existence, is emphasized by a clear boundary drawn around the in-group rather than the individual.

4.2. CSP: Individual-Self vs. Group-Self

The key point that is emphasized in the CSP model is whether the group or the individual is perceived as the unit of social existence and actions, that is, where the boundary of the Self is placed. This has deterministic influence on one's perceptions of self-other relations and on the interactive behaviours of individuals.

Hsu (1985) points out that in the western conceptualization of the self, the biological boundary is used to define a person, as 'an expression of the western ideal of individualism', while the Chinese concept of person (*ren* or *jen*) places the boundary of the person on the outside of the intimate relationships. Markus and Kitayama (1991) also argue that the most significant difference between independent and interdependent self construals is in the role of the others in self-definition. For the interdependent self, others are included within the boundaries of the self, and the individual is incomplete and only becomes whole when fitting into or occupying one's proper place in a social unit. The independent self, on the other hand, 'is assumed to be a complete, whole, autonomous entity, without the others' (ibid).

The two diagrams below are designed to illustrate the features of the two types of cultural self perception, namely, the Individual-Self Perception and the Group-Self Perception. For Individual-Self cultures, the individual is seen as a self-contained autonomous entity with distinct internal qualities or traits. For Group-Self cultures, a person is never a complete whole, and has to be part of a larger entity to be able to exist and function effectively.

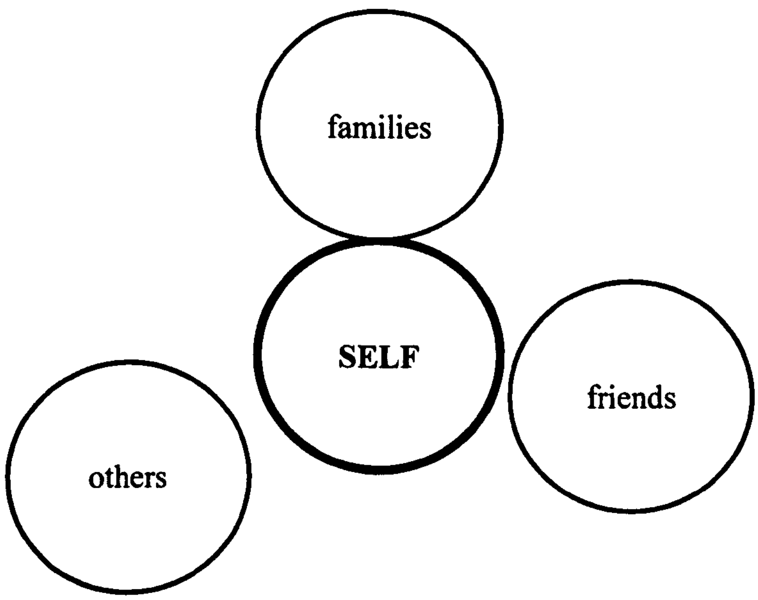


Figure 4.1: The Individual-Self Perception

As indicated in Figure 4.1, the Individual-Self Perception has two major features:

a. The individual is seen as the Self, that is, the basic unit of social existence and actions, with clearly defined boundary between the individual (the Self) and other human beings (such as families, friends, and others).

b. The Self and other individuals interact with one another as autonomous agents on an equal basis according to universal rules (ideally).

For the Individual-Self, social or affective distance might be different between the Self and different others, e.g. the distance between one and one's family members is usually supposed to be the closest, and the distance becomes larger and larger from friends, acquaintances, to strangers. However, no matter how large or small the distance is, the Self is supposed to interact with them as an autonomous agent with a clearly defined personal boundary. The individual's identity is defined by a unique configuration of internal attributes (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003). As a bounded autonomous unit of existence, the individual as the Self is exposed to both familiars and strangers. Relationships between the Individual-Self and others are fluid and need to be constantly negotiated.

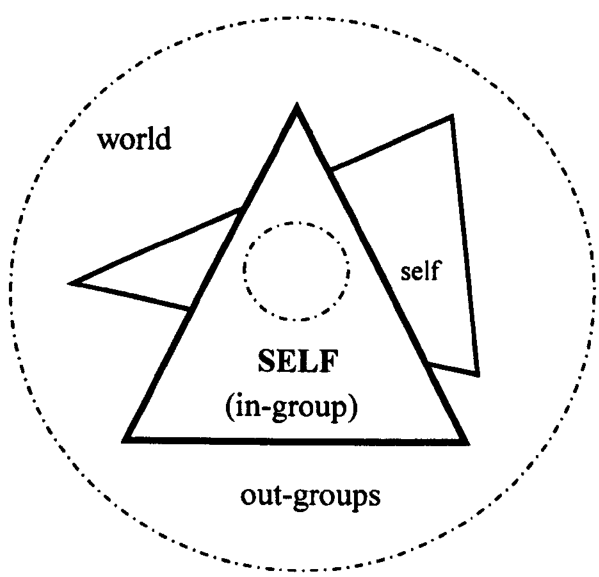


Figure 4.2.: The Group-Self Perception

The Group-Self Perception has three major features, as illustrated in Figure 4.2:

a. The in-group is seen as the real Self, with clearly defined boundary (the triangle). That is, the in-group is regarded as the basic unit of social existence and actions. The out-groups are seen as part of the physical world.

b. The individual is a component part of the Group-Self. As a component part, the individual has no clear boundary, and cannot exist or function as an autonomous unit in the social or natural environment. The fluid and permeable nature of the personal boundary is indicated by a dotted circle (the small self inside the big SELF) in Figure 4.2. In the modern world, an individual can be a component part of more than one Group-Self. In Figure 4.2. two triangles are used to illustrate this phenomenon (although the Group-Selves one belongs to are not limited to two).

c. Relationships among the in-group members are hierarchical. This hierarchical nature of in-group relationship is illustrated by the shape of the triangle in Figure 4.2. In different Group-Selves, an individual may be at different positions in the hierarchy.

For the Group-Self, the social or affective distance between a person and others is determined by group affiliation. Since the group is regarded as the bounded unit of social existence and actions, the in-group others are naturally treated differently from out-group others. For example, in Chinese, in-groups are often referred to as *zi ji ren* (the self people), while out-groups are called *wai ren* (the outside people). Within the in-group, individuals are expected to be completely open to and merged with one another. Without a clearly defined boundary, the incomplete individual cannot exist and act alone, and has to rely on the in-group others for support and protection. As a result, to claim an in-group relationship is to commit to long-term obligations.

Within the Group-Self, a person is not defined by internal attributes, but 'a totality of roles' played by the individual in the group which weave 'a unique pattern of personal identity'(Rosemont, 1991). Any change in the roles will change the identity of the person. As a result, an individual in a Group-Self Culture, such as the Chinese culture, is seen as 'connected, fluid, and conditional', in sharp contrast to the western view of the individual as a 'bounded, impermeable free agent' (Nisbett, 2003: 51).

In Group-Self cultures, kinship is usually the most stable and permanent in-group and of supreme importance (Hsu, 1985). Other in-groups, such as those based on common experience of schooling, workplace, or regional background, etc., are usually modelled on the kinship in-group. Since a kinship Group-Self is organized on the basis of consanguinity, relationships among the members are usually quite stable as well as vertical. This might explain the stable and hierarchical nature of the relationships within the other types of Group-Self.

4.3. CSP: Its Root and Impact

Figure 4.3 below illustrates a hypothetical model of the root and impact of Cultural Self Perception. It is suggested in this model that CSP is shaped by social structure, which in turn is determined by the economic form of a community. How self is viewed may have impact on a culture's view of the world, which in turn may influence the direction and major concerns of the philosophies of a culture. It is also suggested that CSP has deterministic impact on interactive behaviours, both directly and through worldview and philosophies.

This section will explore the root of Cultural Self Perception. The next two sections will discuss the possible impact of CSP on worldview / philosophies and interactive behaviours.

What needs to be stressed here is that this model is only a simplified description for the convenience of the current study, and that there must be other social, economic, and political factors in a culture's history that have contributed and are still contributing to the shaping of its CSP. Although the eventual goal of this study is to explore the explanatory connections between CSP and interactive strategies, it is still meaningful to explain the root of CSP and the route of impact of CSP on interactive behaviours. This CSP model is partly based on Nisbett's schematic model of economic-social influences on cognitive processes (Nisbett, 2003: 33).

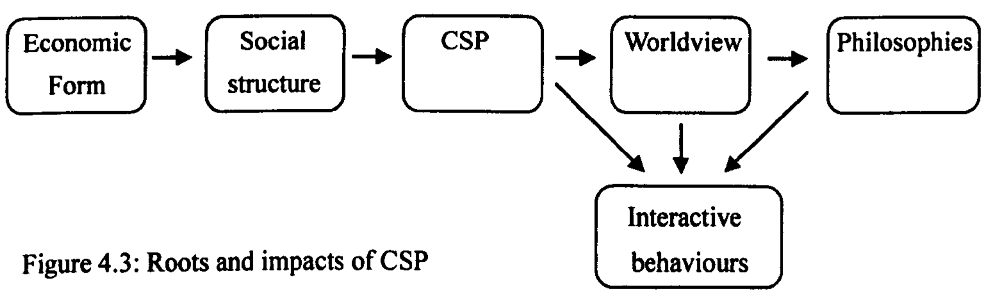


Figure 4.3: Roots and impacts of CSP

As illustrated in the figure above, the economic form of a cultural group and its consequent social structure are believed to be the root of CSP. The form of economic production can be seen as the response to the challenges (Toynbee, 1946) from the ecological or geographic environment in which a cultural group finds itself. Some scholars (such as Liu, 2002; Nisbett, 2003) claim that the differences in ecological conditions and natural resources have led to the different production modes of China and Greece (which is generally believed to be the origin of western civilization), that is, agriculture for China, and trade as the major form for Greece.

The production mode of agriculture entails immobility. In ancient China, people lived in villages made up of interrelated extended families. Social relations were based on consanguinity. Thus the social structure was stable as well as hierarchical. However, in ancient Greece, trading involves sailing and encountering different people who might have different religions and different notions about the world (Nisbett, 2003). The social structure was not as tightly-woven as in ancient China. And the social relations were based on contract rather than kinship.

It is argued that the differences in production activities and social structure might have influenced the focus of attention regarding the view of self in relation to the others (Liu, 2002; Nisbett, 2003). In ancient China, relationships within the community could be extremely complicated. People were in constant interaction with one another, and lacked personal space and time. The self was seen as embedded in a complicated network of social constraints. Furthermore, there was a lack of stimulus or challenge from the outside world due to the routinized procedures of agrarian production. There was also seldom any chance to meet strangers due to the immobile life style. As a result, the attention was constantly directed to the relationship issues within the community rather than to exploring one's own inner world or the outside world. When challenges from the natural world (such as natural disasters) or from other groups did appear (such as invasions), the group was usually the unit of action. In this way, people gradually developed a sense of collective agency and identity.

In ancient Greece, people experienced more personal mobility in sailing and trading. This might have helped to cultivate their sense of personal agency, that is, 'the sense that they were in charge of their own lives and free to act as they chose' (Nisbett, 2003: 2). During encounters with strangers from different places, attention was directed to differences in personal attributes and goals that made an individual different from one another. The self was experienced as a unique individual with personal freedom and personal identity.

It is argued that economic form and social structure not only influenced human cognitive attention at the start of the human civilizations but also continues to exert influence on CSP in the modern world. One interesting example is the emergent sense of Individual-Self in big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai in contemporary China that some observers have suggested to exist (although further empirical research is still needed to support this claim). It is believed that apart from globalization and later the internet, the economic transitions from agriculture to modern industrialisation and urbanisation have played a major role in this emergent tendency to view the individual self as a bounded unit of social existence and actions.

4.4. Impact on the Worldview

It has been suggested by some social psychologists that how self is viewed in relation to others may influence one's cognitive attention and worldview. That is to say, one's view of self and its relation to the surrounding environment might be projected to one's view of the larger social and natural world. As argued by Markus and Kitayama (1991):

> The way people initially, and thus thereafter, most naturally or effortlessly perceive and understand the world is rooted in their self-perceptions and self-understandings, understandings that are themselves constrained by the patterns of social interactions characteristic of the given culture.

The impact of CSP on worldview will be explored on two aspects: one is the approach to understanding the world, that is, atomism or holism; the other is the attitude towards the outside world, that is, control or harmony. These two aspects are believed to be most relevant to the current project on relational strategies at workplace meetings.

4.4.1. Atomism vs. Holism

It is generally believed that there is a significant difference in the approaches to understanding the world held by the Chinese and western people. The Chinese are known for their holistic view of the world, that is, their focus is on the organic or functional relations between the parts and the whole, while the western worldview is atomistic, that is, the emphasis is on the separateness and discreteness of elements that compose the world. This difference in approaches to understanding the world may be attributed to the difference in the view of self, that is, the individual or the group as a complete whole.

The difference between atomistic and holistic worldview are reflected in the ancient philosophies. In ancient Greek philosophy, the world was seen as being composed of discrete objects or atoms which act and interact according to universal rules. The object in isolation was regarded as the proper focus of attention and analysis – just as humans were seen as separate from one another and construed as distinct wholes (Nisbett, 2003: 10). The Greek philosophers believed that objects could be defined and categorized according to their internal attributes. For example, Aristotle differentiated two types of properties of objects: the central, unchanging properties that constitute the 'essence' of an object, and the 'accidental' properties that could change without affecting the object's essence (ibid). To identify the essential attributes of the isolated objects was the first and most crucial step in the process of understanding events or actions in the world.

In ancient Chinese philosophy, the world was seen as a mass of substances (rather than a collection of discrete objects) in continuous interaction with one another. As pointed out by Needham (1962: 14), the Chinese view of the universe was 'a continuous medium or matrix within which interactions of things took place, not by the clash of atoms, but by radiating influences. It was a wave world, not a particle world'. Kim (1994) also suggests that the entirety of the universe is seen from the Eastern perspective as 'a vast, multidimensional, living organism consisting of many interrelated parts and forces'. As a result, the cosmic pattern of this living organism is viewed as self-contained and self-organizing, driven by its own inner necessity rather than an external volitional power.

This holistic and dynamic view of the world is reflected in the Chinese classic, *Book of Changes* (or *I Ching*), which has been considered as the foundation of Taoism and Confucianism. As eloquently described by Young (1994: 95):

> The cosmos is seen as spontaneously self-generating and made up of perpetually transforming, complementary bipolar elements, with humans actively participating in the creative process. All parts are interrelated, interdependent, and mutually responsive. Events are construed in dynamic patterns of juxtapositions , oppositions and contrasts.

Within such a background scheme for the nature of the world, objects were seen as ephemeral forms whose boundaries are open for the dynamic interactions of the substances or elements. This conviction of 'the fundamental relatedness' (Nisbett, 2003: 23) of everything in the world led to the belief that objects could not be understood without the consideration of its context. Just as the self was seen as incomplete and embedded within a complicated social network, an object could not be separated from the other objects that were interacting with it. Just as a human being could not exist or function properly out of the group whole, an object could not be understood or analysed without the consideration of the complexities of the entire 'field', that is, the context as a whole (ibid: 21). In other words, each object or issue had to be examined from the perspective of the unique pattern of influences from its context.

It is theorized that the difference in holistic and atomistic views has a significant influence on approaches to communicative interactions. For example, when addressing a problem, will the issue be dealt with separately or in connection with other issues or people? In terms of interactive strategies, will the interpretative attention be focused on meanings conveyed solely though language or with reference to those through the channel of contextual factors? These issues will be explored in the current study.

4.4.2. Control vs. Harmony

Another impact of cultural self perception on worldview is on attitude towards the outside world. 'Attitude' here refers to the propensity to control or conform to the outside world. As individual-selves, the ancient Greeks actively sought actions upon and control of the world, while as group-selves, the ancient Chinese believed in non-action and cherished harmony both in social life and in human-Nature relations. This difference in attitude might be rooted in the different focus of cognitive attention as well as the different convictions about controllability of the world.

As suggested earlier, cultural self perceptions might have influenced the direction of cognitive attention, that is, as self-contained individuals with personal agency, the ancient Greek people had more curiosity about and paid more attention to the outside world, that is, the phenomena external to the individual self, while as incomplete component parts embedded within complicated social constraints, the ancient Chinese people paid more attention to their social environment, that is, internal issues within the group-self. This difference in cognitive attention was reflected in the directions of philosophical pursuit. The Greek philosophers were more concerned with the question of 'what is the fundamental nature of the world'; while the Chinese philosophers were more interested in 'how to live well in this world' (Feng, 2008; Li, 2004). Greek philosophies started with metaphysics, while Chinese philosophies have always focused on ethics. Truth has been an extremely important concept in western philosophies, but it has never come near the centre of interest in traditional Chinese philosophies. Instead, harmony was the key concept for the ancient Chinese. As pointed out by Nisbett (2003: 19), it was the Way (*Dao* or *Tao*) rather than the discovery of truth, that was the goal of Chinese philosophy. As suggested in the Taoist classic, *Tao Te Ching*, the Way lies in the pursuit of harmony of humans and Nature, and the equilibrium between complementary bipolar elements, represented by *yin* and *yang*.

The difference in conviction of controllability refers to the belief regarding whether the entities and events in the world could be analysed and controlled. This difference might be rooted in the atomistic and holistic worldviews, which in turn are believed in this study to be influenced by cultural self perceptions.

For the ancient Greek philosophers, the world was fundamentally static and unchanging (Nisbett, 2003: 10), just as the essence of the objects would not be changed by motions or events. This static view of the world made rule construction hence control of things possible. The static view is consistent with the atomistic belief in the isolatability of objects. Once the essential attributes were identified, the objects could be categorized. Then attempt could be made to construct the universal rules of movements or interactions on the basis of the categorization of objects.

For the ancient Chinese philosophers, the world was constantly changing and full of contradictions (ibid: 13), as a result of the interrelated and interactive nature of the component elements. Since the boundaries of objects were fluid and the substances could interact with one another across the boundaries of objects, it was simply impossible to isolate the objects. Furthermore, without the ancient Greek concept of 'essence' for isolation and definition, objects were believed to be altered by changes in the interactive relationships with other objects, just as humans were seen as submerged in social networks and defined by their roles in different situations. As a result, objects could not be categorized according to any fixed criteria, and could only be understood through consideration of the other related objects in the specific field at a specific temporal point. Thus for ancient Chinese, to understand the world through categorization and rule-construction was probably too simple-minded and naive, if not completely impossible. In fact, there was a lack of interest in universal rules in the Chinese mindset. It was conformity, that is, in harmony with the world, rather than control that was key to the ancient Chinese attitude towards the world.

It is theorized that the difference in attitude towards the outside world determines the different approaches to problem talk. When the issues external to humans are the focus of attention and are believed to be controllable, the interactive strategies may attend to the issues rather than people. When the outside world is believed to be uncontrollable and the focus of attention is on social relations, that is, harmony, the interactive strategies may attend to the relationships rather than the issues. These will also be demonstrated in the current case study.

4.5. Explaining Relational Strategies for Problem Talks

Based on the discussions in this chapter, it is suggested that the framework of Cultural Self Perception, instead of the notion of face, may be used to explain culture-specific expectations of relational strategies at workplace meetings.

As discussed in Chapter 2, neither Brown and Levinson's face notion (Brown and Levinson, 1978; 1987) nor Spencer-Oatey's face plus sociality rights model (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) can produce plausible interpretations and explanations for the empirical observations of Chinese interactive behaviours. This is due to the fact that their conception of face has been rooted in the individual-self perception, that is, self as an autonomous bounded unit of social existence and actions. Such a view of self entails that more attention is expected to be paid to satisfying one's own personal psychological wants, free (relatively) from social constraints. However, the indigenous Chinese conception of face is much more complicated, as a result of the complexity of Chinese self construct. Since the in-group is seen as the concrete bounded unit of social existence and actions, collective identity and needs always take precedence over personal identity and wants, and personal interests must rely on the group-self for support and protection. Furthermore, since individuals are seen as incomplete component parts of the in-group whole, the wants of group acceptance and integration are prioritized over other personal wants in social interactions. With reference to such a view of self, a theory that focuses on personal face needs as motivator for relational strategies seems too simplistic for the Chinese context. As argued by Bargiela-Chiappini (2003):

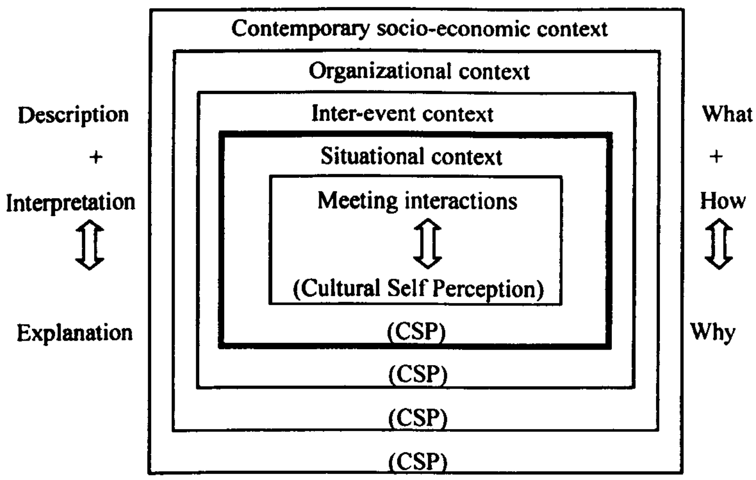
> In the so-called Western societies, strategic politeness reflects the paramount concern for individual rights, that is, what is owed to the individual, whereas in many non-Western societies, normative or indexical politeness signals a concern for duty, what is owed to the group... This rights-based social order is constructed around and for individuals. It is manifestation of an individualistic ontology, as opposed to a "communitarian ontology" that rests on a group-based society.

It is argued here that by focusing on culture-specific perceptions and definitions of self, the framework of Cultural Self Perception may overcome the limitations of the face notion in accounting for differences in cultural expectations of relational strategies.

In Chapter 3, an analytical framework, the Multi-Level Model for meeting analysis, was proposed for investigation of interactive behaviours and exploration of cultural frames at different levels of the discourse dimension and the contextual dimension. It is suggested here that CSP may also be employed to account for the cultural differences in expectations of relational behaviours at different levels of the MLM.

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, the framework of Cultural Self Perception can be applied to the explanation of the culture-specific frames at all levels of both dimensions in the MLM. The investigation of interactive behaviours and exploration of cultural frames provide description and interpretation of meeting interactive behaviours, that is, by answering the questions of 'what' and 'how', while CSP facilitates in-depth understanding of the roots for choices of strategies and expectations of the other's behaviours by answering the question of 'why'.

Figure 4.4. The Multi-Level Model for explaining intercultural behaviours at meetings



In the analysis of the case study in this thesis, there are two aspects that are worth exploring, drawing on the framework of CSP:

a. The influence of the cultural worldview on the perception of problematic issues and the conduct of problem talk;

b. How perceptions of self boundary influence differing approaches to mitigating the relational threat of problem talks.

4.6. Summary

This chapter proposed a framework to account for the culture-specific expectations of interactive behaviours and strategies at intercultural settings: Cultural Self Perception, which explores the differences in cultural views of self construct and self boundary. There are two different cultural views of self that are most relevant to the current project: the Individual-Self Perception and the Group-Self Perception. It is suggested that CSP is rooted in the social structure of a society that is in turn determined by the economic forms. It is argued that CSP has great impact on the worldview and philosophies of a cultural group, and together with the latter two CSP also has deterministic influence on the choices and expectations of interactive strategies. How CSP can be combined with the MLM proposed in Chapter 3 is also discussed by the end of the chapter.

How the MLM and CSP may be applied in meeting analysis will be explored in the case study in Chapters 6 to 8, but first some methodological issues regarding data collection as well as the outer levels of contextual information about the meeting in question will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. An Ethnographic Case Study of Workplace Meetings

In Chapter 3 and 4, two frameworks were proposed for the investigation and explanation of meeting interactions in intercultural workplaces. The three analysis chapters (Chapter 6-8) that follow will demonstrate the process and results of data analysis. This chapter will focus on methodological issues related to data collection and data transcription / translation, as well as contextual information relevant to the outer levels of the MLM framework (see Figure 3.1.).

5.1. An Ethnographic Case Study

This project is an ethnographic case study of a problematic workplace meeting. The case study is believed to be a most appropriate approach to serve the research purposes of the current study. As suggested by Gray (2004: 132), the single case study conducted at a holistic level 'should be chosen when it can play a significant role in testing a hypothesis or theory'. The goal of this study is to develop and verify a new approach to interpretation and explanation of interactive behaviours in intercultural workplace settings. The new approach, consisting of two frameworks that are proposed in Chapter 3 and 4, seeks to bridge the gap between two traditions in the field of Intercultural Communication (see Chapter 1). In fact, the current study is a dynamic and interactive process between theory development and data collection / analysis throughout the whole project.

Gray (2004: 132) also points out that another reason for the single case study approach to be chosen is 'when the case study represents a unique or extreme case'. This is because the case study is an excellent method for obtaining a thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context (Dörnyei, 2007: 155). It helps investigators to obtain rich and in-depth insights by examining how an intricate set of circumstances come together and interact in shaping the social world around us. It is also a very efficient tool for exploring uncharted territories or making sense of a particularly problematic research area. The problematic meeting under investigation is such a unique case in the sense that it is fairly rare for intercultural workplace researchers to obtain data as such in which the seemingly harmonious interactions at the beginning evolved into a fierce confrontation between the western expatriate and the Chinese participants. The study of workplace meetings in Chinese organizations, especially those involving multicultural participants, is still a rather barren field. In fact, there are few established studies or frameworks in this field to consult with in the process of this study.

As a case study, the current project is not intended to provide a *representation or generalization* of communication patterns in such institutions or circumstances or in certain cultures; rather, it is an *example or tester* used to verify the process of conducting research using the interpretative approach proposed in this thesis.

Within the case study itself, the goal of analysis is not only to find out the differences in interactive behaviours ('what'), but also to explore how these differences have caused the communicative breakdown ('how') as well as the cultural roots for these choices of relational strategies ('why'). As suggested by Gray (2004: 247), the case study method is ideal when a 'how' and 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the researcher has no control: the method makes possible thorough investigation and in-depth explanation of the interactive behaviours at the meeting.

To effectively understand the organizational and cultural contexts involved, this study also involves the approach of ethnographic research. An ethnography focuses on the study of the meaning of the behaviour, the language, and the interaction among members of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007: 69). An organization can be regarded as such a culture-sharing group or a community of practice (Scollon and Scollon, 1995; Handford, 2010). To understand the linguistic means by which participants interpret each other at institutional settings such as meetings, it is important to obtain sufficient ethnographic knowledge of the institution. As asserted by Gumperz (1999), ethnography plays an important role in the process of establishing the 'communicative ecology' of an institutional setting. The importance of ethnography in understanding meeting interactions is emphasised in this study through the MLM framework proposed in Chapter 3. It is a major argument of the current study that in order to interpret and explain the interactive behaviours at the intercultural workplace meetings, the investigation of the meeting should not be limited to the discourse level. The MLM argues strongly that it is crucial to obtain a thick description of the interactive behaviours of the participants at the meeting as well as the complex social and cultural contexts that interact with and exert influence on the interactive behaviours.

5.2. Data Collection

5.2.1. Methods and Process of Data Collection

The organization in which the problematic meeting took place is given the pseudonym *SITE* in this study. It was a training school providing one-year foundation courses for students who intended to go abroad for tertiary education.

There were three major reasons that I could obtain access to *SITE*. One reason is that Wang, the CEO of *SITE*, is a friend of mine. The second reason is that I had worked at *SITE* for one year as a teaching manager. In fact, I was the first teacher at *SITE* and my main job that year was to help Wang to lay the foundation of the academic program in terms of curriculum design and building the teaching team. As a reward for my special contribution to the establishment of the program, I was granted as much freedom as possible to do field research and collect data at *SITE*, including sitting in meetings that I was interested in, being granted access to documents related to the meetings and to the emails between Wang and the middle managers, and conducting interviews with staff members from different departments. The third reason is that at a crucial time of management crisis, Wang was hoping I could provide some insight into the causes of problems in cooperation between the western expatriates and the Chinese staff, drawing on my expertise in intercultural communication.

The process of data collection lasted for three months, from June 2006 to September 2006. It is composed of three phases. The first phase involved mainly ethnographic observation and tentative data collection (including pilot interviews and meeting recordings) from mid-June to Mid-August. The second phase was a one-week intensive process of data collection in mid-August involving recording the meeting in question and conducting retrospective interviews with the participants at this meeting. The data collected in this phase constitutes the main body of the data for the current case study. The third phase lasted from Mid-August to Mid-September. It also involved recording meetings and conducting interviews, but the focus was on the measures and resolutions taken by Wang, the CEO to resolve the management crisis at *SITE*.

5.2.1.1. Participant Observation

Gumperz (1999) suggests that a period of ethnographic observation is necessary for the researcher to familiarise herself with the 'communicative ecology' of the workplace. As a former program manager of *SITE*, I had the benefit of some general understanding of the organizational context through my work experience there. However, when starting the data collection, I realised there was a considerable gap in my understanding of the context that needed to be filled in order for a systematic workplace study to take place. As a staff member, my focus had been more on the content of work, while as a researcher, my attention needed to be directed more to the mechanisms of the 'communicative ecology' of *SITE*.

The method of participant observation was employed at the initial stage of the data collection process. As a former staff member, I was aware that there was considerable relational tension between the expatriate teaching staff and the Chinese administrative staff at *SITE*. However, at the initial stage of the ethnographic investigations, I did not have a specific research question or a clear research plan regarding how to carry out this project. I interviewed some staff members and recorded some meetings with a general objective, that is, to compare the communicative styles of the western expatriate and Chinese staff. It was not until the recording of the meeting in question that I decided how to investigate the problems in communication between the Chinese and expatriate staff at *SITE*.

Participant observation at the initial stage of data collection proved to be extremely valuable for the study. First of all, this was a stage when I gradually adjusted to a researcher's role instead of the former manager's role. This adjustment process included taking distance from the management issues, formulating and adjusting the research goals, and focusing more on the communicative behaviours and processes of the staff rather than the content of their communication. The second benefit of this initial stage is that as a researcher rather than a manager, I got to understand the workings of the other departments and the viewpoints of the staff from the other departments through observation and interviews. This helped me to obtain a more complete picture of the organization and to become less biased in the later stages of data collection and data analysis. The third benefit of this stage is that it provided a precious opportunity for practice in data collection skills. It was an indispensible step of preparation for conducting more intensive data collection during the later stages. For example, I learnt how to observe various organizational events systematically, got familiar with the recording instruments, and learnt how to place the instruments in a less intrusive manner and how to ask questions in the interviews in an appropriate way, etc. In fact, without this stage, the meeting in question may not have been recorded. The meeting in question was only one of the meetings I recorded when I still did not have a specific research question. I only decided to use it as the core data for a case study after it was recorded.

5.2.1.2. Recording of the Meeting in Question

Before the meeting in question was recorded, I had been recording meetings and interviewing staff members at *SITE*. There were no specific research questions at that stage. The only vague purpose was to investigate intercultural differences in interactive behaviours in the workplace. Before the meeting was recorded, I was not aware that later I would use it for a case study. Wang, the CEO of *SITE*, kindly agreed to record the meeting for me, while I was asked by him to show a visitor around the campus. Later that day when he handed me the recording of the meeting, he told me the meeting was a disaster and asked me to listen to the recording and help him find out what was wrong at the meeting. Even at the first listening to the meeting recording, I noticed a lot of differences in the relational strategies adopted by the Chinese and the expatriate speakers. I decided immediately to investigate further, not only to help Wang but also as a case study for my PhD project.

I noted down the aspects of interactive behaviours that may account for the breakdown while listening to the recording again the same evening, and based on these notes, I made a preliminary question list for retrospective interviews with the meeting participants.

5.2.1.3. Interviews

The retrospective interviews were conducted in order to elicit the participants' expectations of interactive behaviours as well as their explanations of the causes of the communicative breakdown at the meeting. During the week after the meeting, five interviews with the participants were conducted, namely, with Wang and three other Chinese participants, and Jack, the expatriate teaching manager. Another expatriate manager, Vincent, was not interviewed formally after the meeting, though he was the major official speaker at the meeting. The reason he was not interviewed formally was that he was extremely offended at the meeting in question and it seemed ethically inappropriate to ask him to do an interview about his unpleasant or even humiliating experience. However, in my data bank, there is an interview with Vincent conducted prior to the meeting. In addition, Vincent made a private phone call to me the same evening of the meeting, in which he complained about the interactive behaviours of the Chinese participants. Together with the formal interview with Jack, the pre-meeting interview and the phone call of Vincent should be sufficient for achieving a balanced view in the analysis of the meeting.

All the informants were told that the purpose of the research was to compare the meeting practices in Chinese and western workplaces (see Appendix 2), and all of the interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews are semi-structured. The interview questions were based on the notes taken during the preliminary analysis of the meeting. In fact, the question list served more as a guideline. It was prepared to ensure that important points would not be left out. The sequence and formulation of questions, and whether additional questions needed to be asked, all depended on the contingent circumstances during the interview, especially the responses and interests of the informants. Variation of questions was also necessary due to the fact that the informants not only had different institutional roles but also played different participant roles at the meeting. Thus various techniques were employed to encourage the informants to elaborate on the issues that interested me or that they seemed to be keen on developing more. These techniques include using clarification questions, summarizing the informant's point, using probes to increase the richness and depth of the responses (Dörnyei, 2007: 138), and taking a salient word used by the interviewee and asking the interviewee to elaborate or define it, etc. Another important lesson that I learned was never to turn off the recording machine until taking leave, because the informants may offer new information after I started to thank them as an indication of closing up the interview. During my data collection, two of the informants offered more observations or comments after the question list was finished and thanks had been expressed. These observations and comments later constituted a very interesting part of the interview. This volunteered information was of special interest to me because it was something that I was not aware of and it was what they believed to be truly relevant for the interpretation of the communicative behaviours.

In some cases the interviews themselves also served as consultation sessions for the informants to reflect on their own interactive behaviours. For example, Wang, puzzled by the unexpected outcome of the meeting, seemed rather inspired and started to take notes during the interview, though, as will be emphasized below, I avoided making any subjective or evaluative comments in order to ensure researcher neutrality and credibility. It seems that it was the interview questions themselves that had inspired Wang to reflect on the causes of the interactive problems.

5.2.2. Ethical Issues in Data Collection

5.2.2.1. My Role as an Ethnographer: Advantages and Possible Problems

There are three aspects of my identity that may have had impacts on this research project, namely, my personal friendship with Wang (the CEO), my identity as former manager at *SITE*, and my cultural background as a Chinese. All of these aspects have certain advantages for this study of intercultural workplace interactions, but they may also pose problems to the credibility of this research. I will discuss the advantages and possible problems of these aspects in this section, and the solutions to the possible problems in the next section.

First of all, my friendship with Wang was both an advantage and a disadvantage when I set out to collect the data at *SITE*. On the one hand, there was no difficulty of access to the field. Sometimes I was invited to interpret for Wang when his meetings were very important or private, and these meetings were conveniently recorded for my research with the agreement of the participants. However, my friendship with the boss could have become a barrier for the data collection. For example, in the interviews with the staff members, the informants could have had concern about confidentiality. For example, they might worry about the possibility that what they said at the interviews would be revealed to their boss, which might prevent them from expressing themselves freely.

My work experience at *SITE* also has brought benefits as well as problems to the research. As mentioned above, as a former manager, I had a rather good in-depth understanding of the organizational context, including the management mechanism and the nature of the programs. This helped to save a lot of time at the initial stage of the field work. Another advantage is that I had developed considerable rapport with the staff members when I worked as a manager. Thus I was still treated as an insider during my research, although my researcher's role was declared clearly. This means that my appearance at meetings would not be seen as intrusive and that the informants were willing to share with me their experiences and feelings about workplace issues. For example, one of the expatriate managers, Vincent, called me immediately after the meeting to let me know what happened at the meeting as well as why he felt offended by the Chinese speakers. However, my identity as a former manager may also pose some problems to the credibility of the research. For example, as a former teaching manager, my views and feelings might be biased. I may have had more sympathy towards the expatriate teaching managers when there were conflicts or confrontations between them and the Chinese administrators.

My cultural background as a Chinese may have had certain impacts on the research process and data analysis. I am confident to say that another analyst with a different cultural background would probably have adopted a rather different approach to the research process as well as to the interpretation and explanation of the same set of interactional data. My interest in developing a multi-level framework (see Chapter 3) and my persistent emphasis on contextual factors in the data analysis can be seen as an indication of the influence of my Chinese cultural background on my focus of attention. The holistic feature of the analytical framework may be seen as both a result and a reflection of my own cultural background, that is, as a researcher influenced considerably by the Chinese holistic world view and thinking patterns. Thus I see my cultural background as a valuable resource for originality and innovation of ideas for the benefit of this research project.

However, as claimed by Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris (1997: 142), working within one's own culture may pose certain dangers, such as the 'critically disabling influence' of 'cultural insensitivity' to one's own insider world. The solution they suggest is for researchers to develop the awareness of the effect that their own psychological and cultural make-up has on their process of understanding. One of the research goals of this project was to explore the impact of cultural expectations on interactive behaviours. This required a considerable degree of self-awareness on my part as a researcher, as I may have used myself as one of the 'sources of information and interpretation' (Saville-Troike, 2003: 89) during the research process. Apart from self-awareness, my solution to the danger of 'cultural insensitivity' was to maintain a certain distance from the cultures examined, including my own culture. It is argued that as a researcher in intercultural communication, one important key to accomplishing an effective and credible research project is to always maintain a distance from the cultural phenomena and to think theoretically and analytically during the research process.

5.2.2.2. Measures to Deal with the Possible Problems

In order to ensure the validity of the data and credibility of the project, a series of procedures and measures were taken during the research process.

Roberts and Sarangi (1999: 393) asked a crucial question regarding the workplace researcher's role: should the researcher's role be that of intellectual observer or involved change agent? My solution was to refrain from comments or suggestions until the three-month period of data collection was completed. Since the project focused on the interactive behaviours at workplace meetings, it was important not to interfere with the participants' choices of interactive strategies during the process of data collection. After the data collection was finished, I readily offered suggestions when required. However, as mentioned above, it is possible that the data collection process may have had some impact on the changes leading to improvement of the participants' interactive strategies during the three-month period. The interview questions may have provided some guidance or inspirations for the participants on reflecting on their own interactive behaviours.

A series of measures were also used during the interviews to ensure validity and credibility. First of all, all the interviews started with the formal procedure of signing an informed consent form. The consent form (together with a letter from my supervisor certifying the nature and purpose of the research) explained the purpose of the research and promised that the informants would remain anonymous and the content of the interview would not be revealed to a third party. This promise was particularly important considering my friendship with the CEO was known to all the informants. The informed consent form was prepared in both languages, that is, Chinese and English. The expatriate informants signed two English copies, while the Chinese informants signed one Chinese copy which they kept, and one English copy which was filed by myself. Though most of the Chinese informants could speak English fluently, Chinese was used with Chinese informants during the interviews, in order for them to express their ideas and feelings sufficiently and more readily.

During the course of the interviews, I maintained a neutral attitude towards the issues in discussion. This means that I refrained from any subjective or evaluative comments on issues or behaviours, in order not to influence the informants' free expression of opinions or feelings. This was particularly important considering my previous role in the institution (teaching manager) and the fact that I had more contact with (and thus possibly more sympathy towards) the expatriate managers. Furthermore, when analysing the interview data, the informants' comments were compared among one another to maximise the objectivity of my observations.

Remaining detached does not mean appearing indifferent towards the informants. In fact, various strategies were used during the interviews to develop rapport with the informants. For example, joking with the informants or expressing nervousness about doing interviews at the beginning of the interviews helped to create a relaxed atmosphere, while assuming a sympathetic listener's role and using back-channelling devices helped to encourage the informants to fully express themselves. Expressing personal experiences and feelings were also encouraged through indicating my sympathy and interest in what they said.

5.3. Transcription and Translation

In this section, I will briefly introduce the major principles and methods for data transcription and translation in the current study.

As claimed by Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998: 74), the practice of transcription and production of a transcript represents a distinctive stage in the process of data analysis itself. Data transcription is seen as part of an ongoing process in this research, and the principles of transcription also reflect the approaches and purposes of the project.

The transcription of the meeting proper is used for the analysis of interactive strategies, especially turn-taking and speech act strategies in chapter 6 and 7. As a result, the meeting was transcribed strictly according to a set of transcription conventions (see Appendix 1) adapted from Jefferson (2004) and Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998).

The core data bank includes one meeting (lasting two and a half hours) and six interviews (lasting four hours and forty minutes in total). The complete transcriptions of the meeting and the interviews are not attached to the thesis, due to the size of the transcription. The extracts that are directly related to the analysis are either embedded in the writing or attached in the Appendices if they are too long.

When the speech is in Chinese, an English translation of the transcript is provided. There are two versions of translation. One is the meeting translation, and the other is my translation. It is necessary to provide two versions of translation considering the problems in meeting translation which are believed to have caused a certain degree of misunderstanding at the meeting (see Chapter 7).

The Chinese transcripts are coded in the form of Chinese characters instead of the Romanised form that has often been used in previous studies involving Chinese transcripts. It is argued here that Romanised transcription of Chinese speeches can benefit neither non-Chinese readers nor Chinese readers. It is very difficult to process for Chinese readers, and it does not make any sense to people who do not know the language. Thus Chinese characters are used to facilitate understanding of the Chinese readers. For non-Chinese readers, I have made a considerable effort to ensure the accuracy of the translation, both in terms of conveying the content meaning and in terms of the meanings that are conveyed by paralinguistic devices.

5.4. The Outer Levels of Context

As argued in Chapter 3, the in-depth understanding and effective explanation of meeting interactions require sufficient investigation of the contextual dimension on four different levels. The situational level is considered as within the meeting frame, while the other three contextual levels, namely, the contemporary socio-economic context, the organizational context, and the inter-event context, are considered as the outer levels in which the meeting event is embedded. In the rest of this chapter, I will examine the information gathered for the three outer levels of the context and explore their possible impact on the interpretation of the meeting interactions.

5.4.1. The Contemporary Socio-Economic Context

It was suggested in Chapter 4 that the socio-economic form of a society may be a major shaping force of Cultural Self Perception, which in turn may have impact on worldview and choices of interactive strategies. This section further argues that the contemporary socio-economic context may influence the management and communication styles in the organizations. The relations between the CSP and the contemporary socio-economic context and other levels of meeting analysis are indicated in 4.4..

The economy of China has experienced two transitions since the end of the 1970s, namely, from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, and from communist planned economy to capitalist market economy (or 'the socialist market economy of Chinese characteristics' in Chinese official terms). These transitions have brought about a series of impact on the socio-economic structure as well as on management structures in contemporary China.

One major impact is the considerable degree of chaos on various aspects of management. At such a transitional stage, uncertainty, ambiguity and chaos seem unavoidable. It is the result of the abrupt socio-economic development, as well as the consequence of the conflicts between the emergent market economy and the communist political system.

Another important phenomenon brought about by the transitions is the economic surge at the turn of the century in China. This has led to some changes in socio-economic life that are related to the current study. One is the fact that more and more expatriates come to work in China, not only in foreign or Sino-foreign companies, but also in Chinese organizations. Another change that is related to the economic surge is that more and more Chinese students can afford to study abroad due to growth in material wealth. This makes it possible and necessary for the establishment of foundation programs (such as the one involved in this study) all over China. The national zest for material wealth has also led to the commercialization of education. Numerous training schools of various sizes have been established, and many of them are embedded within the state-run universities, including the ones that run foundation programs for students planning to study abroad. *SITE* is one of such training schools.

Yet, the management style and mechanism of Chinese organizations and institutions are still under the influence of the planned economy and the agricultural form of production. This entails at least two types of conflicts in terms of management styles. One concerns the conflicts between the management style demanded by a free market economy and the management reality under the influence of the communist political system and the traditional production form. The other type of conflict is between Chinese managers and western expatriate managers. It seems that most Chinese managers are still used to the management strategies developed during the planned economy, and as a result, the expatriate managers may experience a great deal of confusion and frustration as they have been adapted to a relatively more stable and ordered free market system in their home countries.

5.4.2. *SITE* – the Organizational Context

5.4.2.1. Features of the Organization

As more and more Chinese people become better off in the economic surge at the turn of the century, there has been a sharp increase in the number of high school or university graduates who are interested in pursuing their further degrees abroad since 2000. As a result, all types of commercial preparatory programs have been established all over China, usually within some established institutions, such as high schools or universities. These programs usually provide courses in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) as well as some introductory courses in specialized subject areas. The major purpose of these programs is to help the Chinese students who wish to study abroad become more competent and successful in an English academic context.

SITE, established in 2003 and admitting the first group of students in the autumn of 2004, is an institution where one of such programs is operated. For ethical considerations, the institution where the data was collected is referred to as *SITE*, and the specific academic program offered by *SITE* as the Program. There are four features of *SITE* that are worth noting here.

First, it is a new and developing organization, just like the market economy in this country. It is not only new in terms of time of establishment, but also in terms of type of business. Since China is still experiencing the transition from the planned economy to the market economy, there seems to be a lot of chaos and experimental explorations due to the lack of existing models or systems both at the macro and the micro levels. Another effect of this newness is that most people who are in management positions have not received systematic training in business management, which is basically developed according to the needs and situations of the western market economy.

The second feature is related to the business type of the organization. *SITE* is both a private limited company and a training centre affiliated to a state-run university in Beijing (referred to as TU). This connection with TU was made in order to use the university's name to attract students. As a private business organization, *SITE* is run purely on tuition fees. As a training centre affiliated to TU, it not only pays the university a large percentage of the tuition fees as royalties, but is also subject to the administrative management and policies of the university. To make it worse, there have always been disagreements and doubts among the policy makers of the university regarding the existence of such commercial training centres, considering the sensitivity of the prestigious status of this university in China. As a result, *SITE* faces double survival pressure, that is, both the fierce competition in the market, and the policy uncertainty and political power struggles within the university.

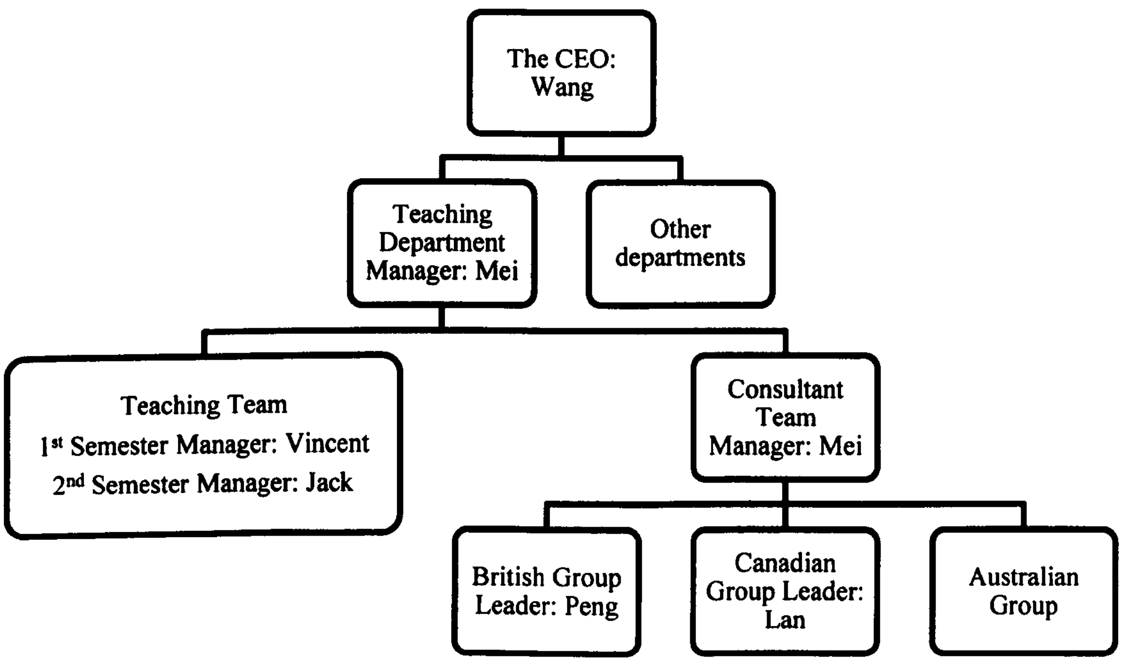
The third is *SITE*'s hybrid nature, which is closely related to its business type, that is, it is both educational and commercial. As a commercial organization that is under huge survival pressure, a major concern is profit, which is in turn determined by student numbers. As an educational institution, the quality of the academic program, that is, the quality of the students is the major concern. This hybrid nature entails an unavoidable conflict between profit and quality, which may be interpreted as a conflict between business values and educational values.

Finally, the staff composition of *SITE* is multicultural in terms of national cultures. Most of the academic staff in the Teaching Department were from the so-called western countries, e.g. the US, Canada, Australia, Britain, and Germany, etc. There was only one full-time teacher who was Chinese but with an ELT master's degree from Australia at the time of data collection. The staff that did not have teaching responsibilities are referred to as the administrative staff, and they were all Chinese.

5.4.2.2. The Management system

By the end of 2005, there were four departments in *SITE*, namely, the Teaching Department, the Administrative Department, the Recruitment Department, and the Marketing Department. The Teaching Department is the most relevant to the current study. It was comprised of two parts, the teaching team and the consultant team. The manager of the Teaching Department, Mei, was also the manager of the consultant team and the assistant to the CEO.

Figure 5.1.: the management system (the 'old' Teaching Department)



The consultant team provided various support for the students (as well as their parents), including wellbeing consultancy, learning support and university/visa applications, etc. They were all of Chinese nationality and had tertiary education backgrounds. Each consultant was responsible for about 30 students. There were three groups within the consultant team, divided according to the target countries of the students, namely, Britain, Canada, and Australia. Each group had a group leader. Group leaders were one level lower than managers in the management hierarchy.

The teaching team was mostly composed of western expatriates, under the leadership of two expatriate managers, each of whom was responsible for the management of one semester. Vincent was the manager of the first semester program, which consisted of four academic English modules that were supervised by the module conveners. Jack were the manager of the second semester program, which consisted of more than ten specialized subject modules that were all supervised by Jack.

5.4.2.3. The Management Crisis

As a new organization, the scale of *SITE* had expanded to a large extent by the second year of the program (that is, the academic year 2005-2006). The number of students had doubled, while the number of staff had almost been tripled. In the meantime, there had been an underlying tension and distrust between the Chinese and expatriate staff ever since the start of the Program. By the end of the academic year 2005-2006, the situation had been aggravated to such an extent that it evolved into a management crisis.

The management crisis manifested itself mainly in two aspects. One was non-cooperation between the teaching team and the consultant team. This developed into open confrontation between the two teams in the second semester. This issue was brought to Wang's attention when three consultants wanted to quit their positions due to 'disrespect' from Jack, the teaching manager, and the 'repression' of Mei, the manager of consultant team and the Teaching Department (quotation marks are used as these are words cited from the interviews with the participants). The other aspect of the crisis had to do with problems in teaching management in the second semester, of which Jack was the manager. *SITE* had received a lot of complaints from the students and the partner universities about the Program. It goes without saying that both aspects of the management crisis were related to Jack.

As can be seen in Interview 5.1. below, Wang stated clearly that both the conflict between the two teams and the teaching management problems were related to Jack. He expressed satisfaction with Vincent's cooperation with the consultants (line 3 and 16): the cooperation and support was rather good between the consultants and the teaching department when Vincent was the manager. He attributed the confrontation between Jack and the consultants to Jack's character: he tended to go to extremes and had very biased views of the consultants (line 1, 6, 12, and 19). This is more or less verified by Jack's reference to the Chinese staff as 'the low people' in the interview. When asked what he meant by 'low people', he explained that they were 'those consultants who are still thinking in Chinese system, who don't want students to excel, don't want students to be educated'.

Interview 5.1. Wang's explanation of the two problems (bracketed in the marks {} are my notes).

W: Jack, 其实是一个::，怎么讲，他是一个:: :: 有点走极端，容易:: 很容易激动，呃:: :: 当然他也有点嫉恶如仇，所以他对问题对事情的一些看法，更容易偏激，呃::这也是造成教学和班主任这个矛盾的一个最主要原因... 我觉得头半年支持配合还是不错的，但是当到了下半年的时候... 这已经是由某个主管在这里面就有偏差了，他是完全按照他自己的想法去做的，对于班主任来讲就是压制，那么后来这个外教这种偏激，看法上的偏激，也对班主任工作有一些偏激的看法，所以造成了他们之间没有配合，这个矛盾主要是从这儿来的，而且整个教学上失误来讲，的确也存在着很多问题，比如说我们辛辛苦苦上的课程，结果不被国外大学承认... 所以这让我们很尴尬，这是我们课程上很大的一个失误，而类似这样的失误，这样的问题，还是很多的...

(Jack, actually is a:: how to put it, he's a:: tends to go extreme, easy:: easy to be infuriated, err:::: of course he also strongly abhors 'evilness', so some of his views of issues are apt to go biased and extreme, err:: this is the major reason for the contradiction between the teaching and the consultants, in fact reflecting on the past year, I think in the first half of the year {that is, Vincent's program}, the cooperation and support was pretty good between the consultants and the teaching... but in the second half of the year {Jack's program}, the consultants were repressed by their manager {that is, Mei}, then the foreign manager {that is, Jack} had such extreme, extremely biased, some extremely biased views of the consultants' work, so these led to the non-cooperation between the two teams, this is the root for the contradiction, what is more, in terms of teaching management, there were a lot of problems, for example some of our courses cost us a lot of effort but in the end couldn't be accepted by the universities abroad... this put us in a very embarrassing situation, this is a big error in our teaching management, while errors like this, problems like this, are many...)

5.4.2.4. Roots for the Management Crisis

It is suggested that the difficulties in communication and cooperation between the Chinese and expatriate staff resulted from lack of trust, which in turn may be traced to two major reasons: namely, conflicts in professional interests and values, and lack of direct communication between the Chinese and expatriate staff.

The Conflicts in Professional Interests and Values

The Chinese and expatriate staff at *SITE* happened to belong to two different professional groups. The Chinese staff were mainly administrators, while the expatriates were all in the line of teaching. This division in professional groups entailed differences in professional interests and values.

For Wang and the other Chinese administrators, commercial profit was the highest value to pursue. It was crucial for the survival of the organization. The profit was determined by student numbers, as the whole organization was run on student tuition fees. Therefore, to increase student numbers was seen as the ultimate business goal for the development of *SITE.*

For the expatriate teaching staff, the quality of the program was vital for survival: quality, in turn, was seen to be determined at least in part by the quality of the students. It was believed that high quality of students ensured a good reputation for the program, which in turn would help to attract more good students and more partner universities.

The two problems that the expatriates addressed at the meeting in question reflect the teaching staff's concern with the student quality. The two controversial issues addressed by the expatriates were 'Group C' and 'English Only'. 'Group C' students were those whose learning abilities and motivations were lower than required by the academic program. The problem 'Group C' refers to the practice of admitting such students onto the program. 'English Only' refers to another decision to accept the students who failed the first semester program onto the second semester on the basis of acceptable English test results instead of results in the academic courses. Most 'English Only' students were originally 'Group C' students in the first semester. 'Group C' and 'English Only' were believed to be profit-driven decisions and to have brought a lot of management difficulties to the expatriate teachers.

In a pre-meeting interview, when asked what the reasons were for the split between the Chinese and expatriate staff, Vincent referred to the difficulties in communication as 'power struggles'.

Interview 5.2. Vincent's comment on communicative difficulties

> They {the Chinese administrative staff} also have a different philosophy about the product, for them this is a business, while for the teaching department this is education. The fact that the teaching department does have a huge responsibility and much more input in the product makes them feel threatened. That's the reason for the power struggles.

Jack also expressed similar views in an email to the teaching staff nine months before the meeting in question.

Document 5.1. Jack's email.

> It is obvious to the world that we are sitting on the gold mine of the era. And China has many gold-diggers desperately trying to find a quick way to make millions from the new rich Chinese students. That is the motivation of some at *SITE*. It is the motivation of the teaching staff management to provide excellent education opportunities to serious Chinese students and to provide partner universities overseas with excellent students.

In this extract, Jack had compared 'some at *SITE*' (referring to the CEO and some Chinese staff, especially those from the Recruitment and Marketing Department) to 'gold-diggers' who only cared 'desperately' to make money from the program and who were in opposition to 'the teaching staff' in terms of goals and values. It is also obvious and unfortunate that the conflicts in values had led to moral judgments. For instance, Jack and Vincent both claimed in the interviews: 'This is not culture, it is integrity!'

The Lack of Direct Communication

It seems that there had been a lack of direct communication between the Chinese and the expatriate staff before the final explosion of the management crisis. The doubts and concerns had been suppressed on both sides and accumulated into distrust towards each other.

The expatriate staff experienced a great deal of frustration due to the feeling of being isolated, both laterally and vertically. For example, Jack complained in the interview that there was a lack of top-down communication regarding what was going on in the organization in matters such as partner developments or student admission plans. In fact, the expatriate staff was never informed of the complete picture of the organizational context. For example, they were never told the nature of the organization, that is, it was actually a private business rather than a formal part of the university. If the background information regarding the organizational context had been shared with the expatriate staff, it might have been easier for them to understand the survival difficulties of the organization.

The expatriate staff also complained about the use of intermediaries instead of direct communication. When interviewed before the meeting, Vincent suggested that one problem in this organization was the use of intermediaries, and that they always got news about a problem situation through a third party. Wang in the interview explained that he had to communicate with the expatriates through an intermediary because there were linguistic and cultural barriers in his communication with the expatriate staff. Although this may have been true, it is also highly likely that he experienced a certain degree of uneasiness about how to interact with the expatriates. The Chinese boss may have little clue about how to interact with the expatriate staff, since 'an outsider is unlikely to have a place within a Chinese power structure' (Pan et al., 2002: 116).

It is suggested that it is of vital importance to maintain direct communication and to share background knowledge in multicultural organizations in order to avoid the accumulation of dissatisfaction and mistrust. As pointed out by Poncini (2004: 42-4), face-to-face interaction and the creation of shared knowledge are the two effective means to facilitate communication in the multicultural workplace. However, these seemed absent at *SITE* at least by the time of the explosion of the management crisis.

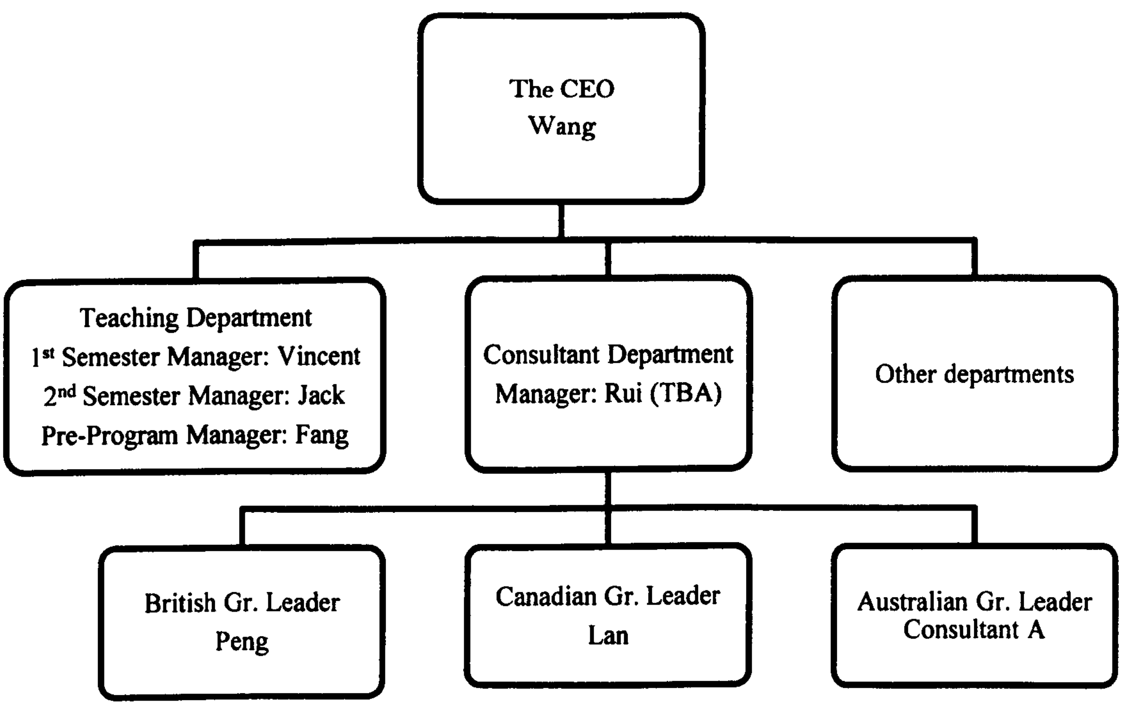
5.4.2.5. Resolutions of the Crisis

Two measures were taken by Wang to resolve the management crisis. One was the design of a new management system. The other was the organization of a meeting series to persuade the expatriate staff to accept the new system. The meeting series will be examined in Section 5.4.3. In this section, we will mainly look at the new management system.

Compared with the old system (Figure 5.1.), there were three basic changes to the new one. One was that Mei was removed from both of her positions and that the teaching managers were required to report to Wang directly. The second change was making the consultant section an official department parallel to the Teaching

Department and appointing a new manager. Another change was setting up a new teaching manager position responsible for the management of the pre-Program, that is, the lower-levelled program for 'Group C' and 'English Only' students. Removing Mei was to encourage direct communication between the expatriate managers and Wang himself; making consultants an independent department was to signal their formal status and indispensable values to the expatriate staff; and setting up the pre-Program was to relieve the expatriate managers from the burden of the lower-levelled students, therefore to reduce the degree of tension and stress.

Figure 5.2. the new management system.



The new system was seen by Wang as a major solution to the management crisis. He believed the new system provided a clearer management structure that would facilitate mutual support and cooperation between the two departments. It seems that for him, as long as the expatriate managers could accept the new system, the management crisis would be resolved.

5.4.3. The Inter-event Context

As discussed in Chapter 2, some researchers have argued for the importance of understanding the meeting proper with reference to the preceding and ensuing events (Gu & Zhu, 2002; Pan et al., 2002; Handford, 2010). The preceding events serve to prepare in various ways for the meeting in question, and the ensuing events may reflect the transactional and relational impacts of the interactions at the meeting. These events relevant to the meeting under study are referred to as the inter-event context in this study. Investigations into the inter-event context may facilitate the analysis of the meeting proper and contribute significantly to the understanding of the interactive behaviours, especially the choices of relational strategies at the meeting.

The sections that follow will examine the relations between the meeting proper and two types of inter-event activities in the case study of this project. One comprises the meeting series specified in the official agenda (see Figure 5.3. below), of which the meeting proper was the first section. The other type comprises the pre- and post-meeting events that are not specified on the agenda, but are believed to have significant relations to the meeting proper. These two types of events are referred to as *on-agenda events* and *off-agenda events*. It is believed that examination of these inter-event activities can shed light on the Chinese participants' interactive goals at the meeting proper.

5.4.3.1. The Official Agenda of the Meeting Series

Figure 5.3. The circulated official agenda (the spelling, grammar and layout are kept as original).

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Teaching Review Seminars</th></tr>
<tr><td>Topics:
Teaching Administration discussion
Course design and management
Teaching faculty management
Consultants team management
Communication and co-operation between teachers and consultants
06-07 academic year teaching administration and teaching service management</td><td rowspan="6">1. 1st Session Meeting Agenda
I. 05-06 Academic year first semester work summery
Addresser: Vincent
Free discussion followed by.
II. 05-06 teaching service work summery, that is, work summery of consultants' team
Addresser: Peng
Lan
Free discussion followed by.
2. 2nd Session Meeting Agenda
III. 05-06 Academic year second semester work summery
Addresser: Jack
Free discussion followed by.
3. 3rd Session Meeting Agenda
IV. 06-07 Academic year teaching and teaching service administration discussion
Addresser: All
Purpose: ① Draft the flow chart
② responsibility of each role
③ mechanism
Free discussion.
4. 4th Session Meeting Agenda
V. Conclusion of the meetings and finalization & publication of the new organization structure</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time:
11/08/2006 4:00pm-6:00pm, 1st Meeting
15/08/2006 6:00am-8:00am, 2nd Meeting
16/08/2006 1:00pm-3:00pm, 3rd Meeting
&
(if possible) 4:00pm-6:00pm
18/08/2006 1:00pm-3:00pm, 4th Meeting
&
(if necessary) 4:00pm-6:00pm</td></tr>
<tr><td>Venue: Section Six, 2nd Meeting Room</td></tr>
<tr><td>Attendants: Wang, Jack, Bing, Vincent, Fang, Hui, Peng, Lan, Consultant B, Consultant A, Ting, Rui, Jian, Mei
Teachers are all welcomed to this meeting.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Facility: Laptop, White board, PPT</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interpretation: by Ting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Notes-taking: by Rui</td><td>Date: Aug 10, 2006</td></tr>
</table>

The meeting in question was the first session of a meeting series that was organized by Wang, the CEO, to deal with the management crisis at *SITE*. Figure 5.3. shows the official agenda sent to all participants by Wang's secretary the day before the meeting. The original document was bilingual (that is, Chinese and English). As indicated in the agenda, this meeting series consisted of four sessions. On the left of the table is general information about the series, for instance, the topics of discussions, the time and venue, and the participants, etc. On the right are the detailed plans of the four sessions.

Among the four sessions, only for the first two were the speakers specified. In the first session, there were three speakers, that is, Vincent, Peng and Lan. For the second session, there was only one speaker, that is, Jack. All four speakers were said to be presenting on behalf of their team for the purpose of annual review (that is, 'work summery' in the original text). In other words, they were scheduled to report the work performance of their own team for annual appraisal. The third session was planned as a 'free discussion' about the new management system, including topics such as 'the flow chart' and job descriptions of the management positions. The fourth session served to conclude the discussions of the whole meeting series and to publicize the new management system formally.

According to the official agenda, it seems there were two tasks to be completed through the meeting series: one was the annual review (the first two sessions), the other was the discussion and finalization of the new management system (the last two sessions).

In the retrospective interview, Wang listed three major goals for this meeting series (for interview extract, see Appendix 4):

1. To enhance mutual understanding and trust through in-depth communication between the two departments (line 1-5; 1-25)
2. To clarify and consolidate the consultants' role (line 5-12; 25-35)

3. To publicize the new management system (line 13-17; 36-43)

The first two were the goals for the annual review sessions, while the third goal was that of the last two sessions of the meeting series. In fact, the meeting series as a resolution to the management crisis can be defined as a problem solving process, while at the meeting proper (the first session of the series), the transactional goal was only to point out the existence of the problems, that is, the problem talk. The problem talk was seen as the first step in a persuasive process of getting the participants to accept the perceived solution to the problem. That is to say, the major function of the first two review sessions was to establish common ground and to pave the way for the announcement of the new management system, which was seen by Wang as the ultimate solution to the management crisis.

5.4.3.2. The Participants

All the participants in the current study have been given pseudo-names. Two terms are used to refer to the characters at the meeting: namely, 'participants' and 'speakers'. The term 'participants' refers to all the characters present at the meeting; while 'speakers' refer to the participants who actually made verbal contributions at the meeting. That is to say, the speakers were also participants, but not all participants spoke at the meeting.

As indicated in the agenda (Figure 5.3), there were fourteen participants at the meeting, including two expatriate and twelve Chinese staff. Among the fourteen participants, only five were scheduled to speak, namely, Wang as the chair (not indicated explicitly on the agenda but taken for granted by all participants), Vincent, Jack, Peng and Lan. The abbreviations used in the transcript, the names, nationality and institutional positions of the speakers are listed in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4. Speakers at the meeting

Abbr.	Name	Nationality	Age	Gender	Position
W	Wang	Chinese	45	M	The CEO of *SITE*
V	Vincent	Canadian	33	M	The 1st semester program manager
J	Jack	American	45	M	The 2nd semester program manager
P	Peng	Chinese	29	M	Consultant group leader
L	Lan	Chinese	29	F	Consultant group leader

Figure 5.5 below shows the information about the other participants at the meeting. These participants were all Chinese, including five department managers, two secretaries, and two consultants.

Figure 5.5. the other participants who were not allocated official turns at the meeting.

Name	Position
Mei	The manager of the 'old' Teaching Department and the consultant team
Fang	The Teaching Manager of Pre-Program
Hui	The manager of the Administrative Department
Jian	The manager of the Marketing Department
Rui	The would-be manager of the new Consultant Department
Ting	Wang's secretary, also the Translator at the meetings
Bing	Secretary of the Teaching Department
A	Consultant Group Leader
B	Consultant

5.4.3.3. The Off-agenda Events

Before and after the meeting in question, there were also some off-agenda events that need to be noted. It is suggested that these off-agenda activities of the participants indicate clearly their relational goals for the meeting series.

One significant activity that was reported by all the Chinese informants in the retrospective interviews was the preparatory meetings. The participants at these preparatory meetings were all Chinese, including Wang, the consultants, and some of the managers. The informants reported that one major task of these preparatory meetings was to discuss how to avoid direct conflict at the meetings. The Chinese participants were fairly aware that the problem talks they were planning to do in the first session, that is, the meeting proper, were relationally threatening. To make it worse, all the problems were related to Jack, the expatriate manager, who was well known for being 'extreme' and 'easy to be infuriated' (see line 12, Interview 5.1.). In order to avoid direct conflict with Jack at the meetings, the Chinese participants discussed and prepared an intricate action plan of problem talk, the focus of which was a set of relational strategies on different levels (see analysis in Chapter 6-8). As reported by the informants, the plan was discussed and the speeches of the official speakers were 'prepared together' and rehearsed a number of times to ensure minimal relational threat.

Another important activity on the part of the Chinese participants was a meeting after the meeting proper had suffered from the unexpected communicative breakdown and fierce confrontation. This meeting was recorded. At this meeting, Wang and the consultants discussed the reasons for the breakdown. Two important decisions were made. One was that the problem talks planned for the second session would not be carried out. Instead, affirmation of the expatriates' work performance should be repeatedly emphasised in subsequent meetings. The second decision was to change the plan for the last two sessions. Instead of the two sessions for discussions of the new management system (see Figure 5.3.), a session would be organized to discuss the 'Group C' and 'English Only' problems, over which the expatriates had expressed a considerable degree of concern, and in fact, complained emotionally about in the first session. It is obvious that these two changes in the plan were both made for relational purpose, that is, to remedy the relational damage done by the problem talks in the first session.

Apart from the meetings with the consultants, Wang also had private talks with the expatriate managers before and after the meeting proper. The talks before the meeting were recorded, while I acted as the interpreter for them. Wang's major purpose for these talks was to explain the goals and plans of the meeting series. Wang explained to me that he had to have these talks with the expatriate managers as they were rather resistant to this meeting series. He also hoped that with his explanations, the expatriate managers would be prepared psychologically for the problem talks at the meeting, so that there could be less danger of direct conflict.

Immediately after the problematic meeting, Wang had another private talk with one of the expatriate managers, Vincent. Vincent was seriously offended by the problem talks of the Chinese speakers at the meeting. Wang had to explain to him in the private talk that instead of being meant as criticisms of his work performance, the problem talks were actually targeted at Jack's cooperative and management issues.

This was obviously another measure taken by Wang to remedy the relational damage done by the problem talks at the meeting.

As explained above, all the off-agenda activities were organized for one relational goal, that is, to maintain relational harmony. The activities before the meeting proper were organized in order to avoid direct conflicts at the meeting, and the ones after the meeting in order to remedy the relational damage and to restore the relational harmony in the organization. It is quite obvious that the relational goal of maintaining harmony was considered as the supreme goal by the Chinese participants.

5.5. Summary

This chapter first discussed some key issues in data collection, including the methods and process of data collection and the ethical issues. Three major methods were used during the process of data collection at *SITE*, namely, participant observation, meeting recording, and interviews. It was suggested that three aspects of my identity may have impacts on this research project, namely, my friendship with the CEO, my identity as a former manager at *SITE*, and my cultural background as a Chinese. It was argued that these three aspects had advantages to this intercultural workplace study, although they may also have posed problems to the credibility of this research. A series of measures addressing the possible problems was also described.

After a brief introduction to the principles and methods of data transcription and translation, this chapter then focused on the discussion of the outer levels of the meeting context according to the MLM framework. These are the contemporary socio-economic context, the organizational context and the inter-event context. Key issues at the three levels were discussed in detail, especially those that were believed to have had impact on the interactive behaviours and outcomes at the meeting in question. These discussions also provided crucial background knowledge for understanding the analysis that now follows in the next three chapters.

Chapter 6. Meeting Structure and Turn-taking Strategies

This chapter will explore the differences in turn-taking strategies between the Chinese and the expatriate participants. As suggested in Chapter 3, turn-taking analysis may contribute to the understanding of three aspects of meeting interactions, namely, meeting structure, relational dynamics, and relational strategies.

The chapter starts with an overview of the meeting structure as well as the dynamic changes in relational atmosphere across different phases of the meeting. Some extracts of meeting interactions are then examined to demonstrate the differences in turn-taking behaviours between the Chinese and expatriate participants. The last section will investigate a problem talk strategy that was carefully designed by the Chinese participants for avoidance of direct conflict at the meeting, which failed nonetheless due to clashes of cultural expectations about interactive behaviours at workplace meetings. The differences in expectations of turn-taking behaviours will be explained drawing on the framework of Cultural Self Perception.

6.1. Meeting Structure and Relational Dynamics

6.1.1. The Meeting Structure

Figure 6.1. below shows the meeting structure of the meeting in question. Meeting structure refers to the segmentation of the turn interactions at a meeting based on the 'topical organization' (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 65). Meeting structures are

frequently the product of on-going negotiations between pre-meeting planning and progressive turn interactions at the meeting.

Figure 6.1. Meeting structure

Phases	Turns
1. Opening remarks	1. Wang
2. Presentation	2. Vincent
3. Issue One (Inter-departmental Cooperation) – The Emergence of Tension	3. Wang's transitional turn
	4. Vincent's other-repair turn
	5. Peng's suggestions
	6. Vincent's reply
4. Issue Two (Teaching Management) – The Confrontational Debate	7. Wang's encouragement
	8. Lan's suggestions
	9. Vincent's reply
	10. Wang's supportive comments
	11. Vincent's challenge
	12. Wang's explanation
	13. Vincent's rebuttal
	14. Wang's self-repair
5. Conclusion – The Seeming Reconciliation	15. Vincent's Complaints
	16. Wang's reply and conclusive remarks
	17. Vincent's self-repair
	18. Wang's conclusive remarks

Note: the opening remarks by Wang were not recorded. This is indicated by the shading in the opening phase boxes.

The meeting structure in Figure 6.1. has been identified on the basis of *official turns*. By 'official turns', I mean the turns that have been granted by the chair or by the agenda, or those that are taken in order to advance the development of the central topics of the meeting. Interruptions or back-channels during the official turns are regarded as *unofficial turns* in the analysis. It is necessary to differentiate the official turns from the unofficial ones, as it helps to distinguish the topical focus of the meeting and makes it possible to describe the structure of an extended and structurally-complicated interactional event. Both official and unofficial turns are importance resources for the examination of relational dynamics.

According to the definitions above, 18 turns are identified as official turns in the meeting, which can be further segmented into five phases, according to the topical commonality or topical connection among the turns. These are the opening and concluding phases, the presentation phase, and two discussion phases that each are developed around one topical issue. Previous studies (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 209; Boden, 1994: 87; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 65) have proposed a three-phase meeting structure, namely, the opening section, the central development / debating section, and the closing section. It seems the presentation phase and the two discussion phases can be grouped together into the central development / debating section for the current purpose.

6.1.2. The Relational Dynamics

The identification of the five-phase structure facilitates description of the relational dynamics at the meeting. As proposed in Chapter 3, *relational dynamics* refers to the ever changing state of *relational atmosphere* as a result of on-going interactions at the meeting, where 'relational atmosphere' refers to the general impression of interpersonal attitudes that the participants have displayed through verbal and non-verbal actions at a certain moment at the meeting. When determining the division of phases, I have also considered the relational atmosphere that each turn has contributed to as well as substantiated.

The relational dynamics went through dramatic changes across the five phases, from harmony to tension, then to fierce confrontation, and finally to seeming reconciliation.

During the first two phases, the relational atmosphere seemed positive, or even harmonious. The first turn, Wang's opening remarks, was rather functional as a meeting management move. Then Vincent in his presentation used a significant number of positive relational strategies (see Chapter 7), and the audience laughed a few times during the presentation and applauded warmly at the end.

However, the last three phases saw dramatic changes in relational dynamics. Tension started to emerge at the beginning of Phase Three and evolved into confrontation between Vincent and Wang towards the end of Phase Four. During these two phases, Peng and Lan's suggestions were received by Vincent as direct criticisms of his work performance (as indicated in his response turns as well as in his private phone call to me after the meeting), while Wang's supportive comments on Peng and Lan's suggestions became the last straw for Vincent. He not only interrupted Wang with forceful self-defence, but also challenged Wang's qualifications for managing the organization. Surprised by this unexpected situation, Wang took a self-repair turn through which he tried to tactfully clarify the target of criticism which had been deliberately obscured since the beginning of the meeting, that is, the problems raised concerned not Vincent, but Jack. This was followed by Vincent's emotional release through a number of complaints about the management of the organization and about some staff members (Turn 15), which may be regarded as the first turn of Phase Five in the analysis, as the topics in this turn are more relevant to that of Wang's conclusive turns in the last phase. Wang's reply to Vincent (Turn 16) focused on suggesting possible solutions for the issues that Vincent had complained about, which seems to indicate that Wang had abandoned the original transactional goal of problem talk in order to avoid further conflict. With Vincent's self-repair turn, it seems a certain degree of reconciliation was achieved by the end of the meeting.

In the rest of this chapter, Section 6.2. will explore the differences in turn-taking behaviours between the Chinese and expatriate participants. The relational considerations and the relational consequences of these behaviours will also be investigated. Section 6.3. will examine a turn-taking strategy of the Chinese participants which was almost undetectable to me if not for the Chinese participants' reminding in the retrospective interviews. The framework of Cultural Self Perception will be applied to the explanation of the cultural differences in expectations about turn-taking strategies in both sections.

6.2. Intercultural Differences in Turn-taking Behaviours

When listening to the recording of the meeting, a general impression one may have is that there is a sharp difference between the expatriate and the Chinese participants in their approaches to turn-taking at the meeting. The expatriate participants appeared to be very proactive, and when criticised, they became rather aggressive, while the Chinese participants seemed rather passive, and when criticised, they became even more restrained or withdrawn. The following comparative analysis verifies and offers explanations for this impression of cultural differences.

Three aspects of the turn-taking behaviours of the Chinese and the expatriate participants will be examined: the number of turns, interruptive behaviours and turn-taking choices in the face of criticisms and confrontation. The analysis of turn numbers aims to account for the proactive vs. passive impression, while the examination of specific interactive behaviours, such interruptions, in the face of criticisms and confrontation seeks insights into cultural differences in dealing with relational / transactional goals at workplace meetings. The intercultural differences in turn-taking strategies will then be summarised and explained drawing on the framework of Cultural Self Perception.

6.2.1. Number of Turns

Based on the analysis of the number and pattern of both official and unofficial turn types, it is argued that the expatriate participants appeared to be much more proactive than the Chinese participants at the meeting.

6.2.1.1. Official Turns

The meeting in question is a formal meeting. This is partly reflected in the pre-circulated agenda, which has specified the topics, the speakers, and even the sequence of speaking (see Figure 5.3. or Figure 8.1.). As a result, the participants at this meeting generally knew who were entitled to official turns. This is demonstrated in the acknowledgement of 'speaker rights' at the meeting. The official speakers remained the same as those specified in the pre-circulated agenda, that is, Wang (not indicated in the agenda but tacitly known as the chair), Vincent, Peng, and Lan. No other participant attempted to obtain an official turn. The participants' acknowledgement of the official status of the four speakers is also reflected in Jack's turn-taking patterns at the meeting. Although he interrupted a lot during Vincent's turns (to provide support to Vincent), Jack never attempted to obtain an officially independent turn. That is, all his turns are dependent on Vincent's official turns. It is also interesting to note that Vincent was the only speaker that he interrupted. In the post-meeting interview, he clearly indicated his awareness that this was 'Vincent's meeting', while his own meeting, that is, review of his program, was the second session of the meeting series scheduled one week later (see Figure 5.3.).

As indicated in Figure 6.1., there were 18 official turns at the meeting: Wang and Vincent each had eight turns, while Peng and Lan each had only one turn. As the chair, many of Wang's turns were obligatory as meeting management moves. The one turn Peng and Lan each took was pre-allocated in the agenda.

In contrast, Vincent's turns were almost all self-selected. Among the eight turns taken by Vincent, only one was pre-allocated (that is, the presentation). This is noteworthy considering the fact that this was a formal meeting. Boden (1994: 85) points out that 'a primary feature of formal meetings is the directed and restricted nature of turn-taking'. In the Chinese workplace context, it may be said that turn-taking as 'directed' means that it proceeds with the participants expected to take turns according to the pre-circulated agenda or when selected by the chair; and turn-taking as 'restricted' means that both the speakers and their turn-sequence and topics are expected to be consistent with those indicated in the pre-circulated agenda. Vincent's seven self-selected turns were neither specified in the pre-circulated agenda nor allocated at the meeting by the chair. Furthermore, a closer examination reveals a pattern in which Vincent and the Chinese speakers took turns alternately, that is, Chinese speaker – Vincent – Chinese speaker ...– Vincent – Chinese speaker (see Figure 6.1.). This suggests that Vincent had become the 'central interactant' at the meeting as a result of his active participation. Based on these facts, it seems plausible to say that Vincent was the most active speaker at the meeting.

6.2.1.2. Unofficial Turns

The unofficial turns at the meeting are all taken by the unofficial speakers, that is, the participants who had not been allocated speaker rights in the agenda or by the chair. As with the official turns, the expatriate unofficial speaker, Jack, appeared to be much more active than the Chinese unofficial speakers.

There are altogether 18 unofficial turns identified. 15 of these belong to Jack, while only three belong to the Chinese participants. Almost all of Jack's unofficial turns (except one that was invited by Vincent) were self-selected supportive interruptions during Vincent's official turns, while only one of the Chinese unofficial turns was a self-selected supportive interruption. It was taken by a consultant to provide information that Wang couldn't remember. The other two unofficial turns of the Chinese participants belong to Hui, manager of the Administrative Department. These two turns were taken by Hui to suggest deferring the discussion of a tricky issue until later in private, when he was directly criticised by Wang towards the end of the meeting (for detailed analysis, see 6.2.3.3.).

The analysis of turn numbers above indicates that the expatriate participants seem to be much more proactive and participative than the Chinese participants at the meeting. We will now turn to the analysis of interruptive behaviours.

6.2.2. Interruptive Behaviours of the Expatriate Participants

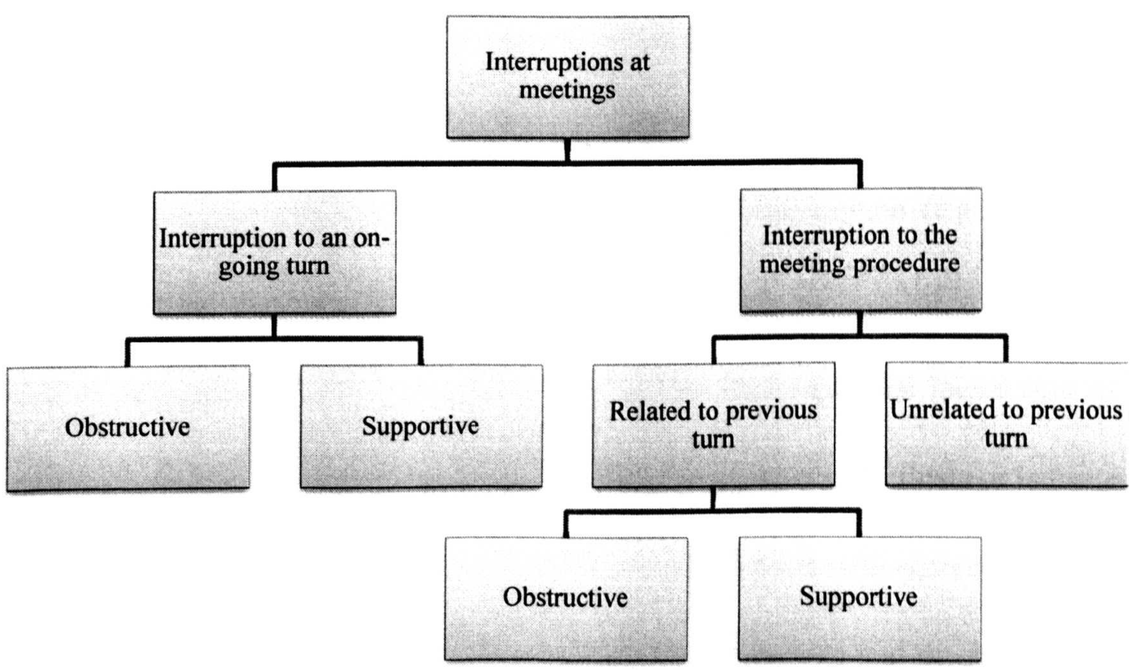
It is suggested that the relational dynamics at this meeting, especially the emergence of tension and explosion of conflicts are mainly manifested in the phenomenon of interruption on the part of the expatriate participants.

6.2.2.1. Interruptions at Meetings

Most previous studies of interruptions have been related to casual conversations or institutional interactions. It is suggested in this study that interruptive phenomena are more complicated in workplace meetings than in those two situations. A framework is proposed below for the analysis of the relationship between interruptions and relational dynamics at workplace meetings.

First of all, interruption has been seen as an attempt to grasp the floor when it is tacitly agreed by all participants that it still belongs to another speaker. This is the prototype of interruption studied before in the analysis of casual conversations and institutional interactions. However, it is suggested that in meeting interactions, there is another type of interruption, that is, interruption to the meeting procedure. It is suggested that this second type of interruption is specific to the study of interactions at workplace meetings, especially formal meetings. By interruption to the meeting procedure, I mean taking the floor when it seems not being occupied by a speaker, while knowing at the same that it is already allocated to a certain speaker according to the agenda or by the chair. This is particular to formal meetings where the turn-taking is expected to be 'restricted and directed' (Boden, 1994: 85). Thus, interruptions at meetings can be categorised into two types, namely, *interruption to an on-going turn* and *interruption to the meeting procedure*.

Figure 6.2. Types of interruptions at meetings.



Another method of categorising interruptions is according to their relational effect. Interruption is generally viewed as an instrument used to compete for floor domination: thus it is usually regarded as having negative impact on the relational dynamics as a result of its obstructive and aggressive nature. However, in the current study, it is suggested that interruptions may lead to two possible relational consequences: one is to threaten the relationship with the interrupted speaker by expressing disagreement, the other is to enhance the relationship with the interrupted speaker by providing support or expressing agreement. The former is referred to as *obstructive interruptions*, and the latter *supportive interruptions*.

As indicated in Figure 6.2., an interruption to an on-going turn may either be supportive or obstructive, depending on whether agreement or disagreement is expressed. The case with interruption to the meeting procedure is more complicated. The interruptive turn may either be related to the previous turn or not. Only when it is related to the previous turn, can it be defined as obstructive or supportive to the previous speaker turn. When it is not related to the previous turn, closer examination is necessary to investigate the relational effect of the interruption (e.g. Vincent's self-repair turn, see analysis in Section 6.2.3.3.).

It is also argued in this study that during highly confrontational interactions at workplace meetings, obstructive and supportive interruptions may facilitate or indicate participant alignment at the meeting. That is to say, interrupting with agreement serves to establish a sort of speaker alignment between the interrupting and the interrupted, while interrupting with disagreement may serve to demarcate the boundary between the disagreeing sides.

As will be demonstrated below, both supportive and obstructive interruptions are observable in the turn-taking behaviours of the expatriate speakers. Vincent used two obstructive interruptions to express disagreement with the Chinese participants, while Jack used 14 supportive interruptions to align himself with Vincent. In contrast, none of the Chinese participants took an obstructive interruption at the meeting, and there was only one case of supportive interruption.

It will also be argued below that interruption as a marked turn-taking phenomenon, whether disruptive or supportive, can serve as an indicator of relational dynamics in the analysis of workplace meetings, especially where there is interactive tension and confrontation.

6.2.2.2. Obstructive Interruptions

There are two obstructive interruptions (Turn 4 and 11) identified at the meeting, and they both belong to Vincent. Both Vincent's interruptive turns were taken either to express disagreement to the previous turn or to self-defend in the face of criticisms (which, in fact, is also to express disagreement).

Vincent's Turn 4 is an interruption to the meeting procedure, and his Turn 11 is an interruption to an on-going turn. The two obstructive interruptions are also the indicators of crucial changes in the relational dynamics at the meeting. Vincent's other-repair turn (Turn 4) is the first signal of dissonance at the meeting. His interruptive challenge (Turn 11) not only has converted Wang's meeting conclusion attempt into a debate, but also signals the advent of the confrontational climax of the meeting. The two obstructive interruptions will be examined below.

Vincent's Other-repair

The first signal of discord at the meeting appears when Vincent takes the other-initiated other-repair turn (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Schegloff et al., 1977) after Wang's transitional turn (Turn 3). An other-initiated other-repair turn can be relationally threatening, as it can 'draw attention to and topicalize an error' in the prior turn, and it can be received as an explicit correction of or in effect, a direct disagreement with the previous speaker (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998: 59-69). Thus for Vincent to take such a turn is risky in terms of interpersonal relationship, especially at a formal institutional meeting and when the speaker that is corrected is his superior, the CEO of the organization.

To make it more relationally risky, Vincent's other-repair turn can also be viewed as an interruption to the procedure, that is, interruption to the expected turn sequence or the formal meeting procedure. Vincent's turn was neither selected by the previous speaker, that is, Wang, who was also the chair, nor pre-allocated on the agenda. In fact, as the chair, Wang had officially terminated Vincent's domination of the floor in the transitional turn, and had allocated the ensuing turns to the other participants. This can be seen through the analysis of the ending part of Wang's transitional turn (see analysis of Extract 6.1. below).

Extract 6.1. is the abbreviated transcript of the first marked moment in relational dynamics at the meeting. It includes Wang's transitional turn, Vincent's other-repair turn, and the beginning utterances of Peng's suggestion turn (Turn 3, 4, and 5, in

Figure 6.1.). The abbreviated parts are indicated by the ellipses (…). My translation of Wang's speech is bracketed, and the meeting translation (T) is also included.

The analysis will first focus on the reasons why Vincent decided to take this relationally threatening turn, and then discuss the changes in the relational atmosphere at this critical moment, as a result of the interactive strategies employed by Wang and Peng following Vincent's other-repair turn.

Extract 6.1. Vincent's Other-repair turn.

1	W	…我觉得他讲了讲了很多非常好的方面和情况，呃当然也谈到了一些 (.) 呃::: 意见呵建议呵等等的呵，比如包括 (.) 呃::: 我们存在的一些问题… 你比如说，对班主任这块就是定位…因为国外没有，但是在中国有… 所以这一块呢实际上他们也有一种困惑，就是我们怎么样，呃，看这个 consultant 这个位置… 所以我想呢可能接下来咱们，是不是我们大家呢，从各自不同的角度来讲，我们来谈一谈，呵，一个对教学上呢，你们你们怎么看，另外觉得(.)配合上，应该有哪些问题，呵，或者说比如我们觉得应该怎么来配配合… (…I feel he has commented on many good aspects, err of course also mentioned some (.) err::: differing opinions and suggestions, etc heh, for example including (.) err::: some of our problems… for example, the definition of the positions of consultants… because there is no consultant abroad, but there is in China… so in fact on this aspect they have some confusions, that is how should we, err, view the position of consultants… so I think maybe next we, maybe we could, from everyone's own perspective, we could talk, heh, one is on teaching, what you you think, the other is how you feel about (.) cooperation, what problems there might be, heh, or in other words, for example, how we feel we should cooperate...)
	T	…and we do have problems, err but it give us some good advices, especially on the consultants, I quite understand that from his perspective in western countries they do not have consultants, so they do not understand what's the role of consultant, and what's the responsibility and how they cooperate with the teaching department, so from the western's eye, er they are kind of confused, but china have consultants, I mean T.U. also have consultants… err so, I would like to have everybody here to talk about your own opinions err about Vincent's talk, and what do you think of it, and:: er how we can cooperate with teaching department, err and how we do support to them, the this err free discussions er for everybody here
	(4.0)	
2	V	er, {clears throat, in relatively lower tone} °just regarding the consultants, I was always trying to highlight err the good things, °hnh, using various examples, that I,

		I also like to say that we already have, I thought the last meeting we had this week	29
		was very productive, and the communication flow was very good, we making very	30
		good decisions:: together, and I tried in my talk actually to use examples, I	31
		highlighted the value regarding whether be the report forms or student applications	32
		to the universities visa applications that are (.)incredibly valuable, and <u>major</u> <u>major</u>	33
		contributions to the program, yeah	34
	(6.0)		35
3	P	{clears throat} I talk I I want to:: er talk talk about one:: big shortcoming err for::	36
		consultants' (1.0) work last year... in in fact the communication between con	37
		consultants and:: teaching department <u>is</u> a problem, and we both realized that...	38

It is suggested that there are two possible motivations for Vincent to take this relationally threatening move. The first is concern for accuracy of communication. That is to say, the other-initiated other-repair turn is taken by Vincent to clarify a supposed misunderstanding by Wang. Wang, in his transitional turn, quoted Vincent as referring to the cooperation between teachers and consultants as a major problem (Line 2, 11, and 17). However, in fact, the cooperation was positively evaluated by Vincent during the presentation as a great success in the first semester program (see Chapter 7). Wang's 'distortion' of his speech obviously was a major reason that Vincent felt compelled to take this relationally risky move to clarify the misunderstanding.

Another motivation for Vincent's interruptive other-repair turn is related to his desire to maintain good rapport with the Chinese consultants. It is true that there had been serious problems in cooperation between the expatriate managers and the Chinese consultants. In fact, the necessity for keeping the position of consultants in this organization had been a disputable issue between the Chinese and the expatriate staff. Jack, the manager of the second semester program, was known for having problems in cooperating with the consultants. However, as a manager who was keen to maintain relational harmony, Vincent had been very careful to maintain good relationships with all co-workers, including the consultants. The fact that Vincent set out to take this relationally-risky turn also indicates the significance of this relational issue to him.

The analysis above shows that though relationally threatening, Vincent's other-repair turn is actually motivated by an attempt to protect the relationship with the consultants. We will now examine the relational effect of this move. Considering the relational threat of an other-repair turn, the interactive decision of the corrected speaker may have a significant impact on the development of relational dynamics at the meeting.

When an other-initiated other-repair turn is taken, the speaker who is corrected has three choices regarding how to respond to the disagreement / correction. One is to agree with the repair and correct himself accordingly. Another is to disagree with the repair and insist on his own point. The third is to remain silent. The first choice is relationally preferable. The second option may disturb the relational atmosphere, as a debate may develop around the trouble source. The relational consequence of the third option is uncertain. Sometimes no response could be even more relationally risky, as it may be received as an indication of silent resistance. The sense of uncertainty may create more pressure and confusion on the interactant who takes the other-repair turn.

Wang chose the third strategy, that is, no response, and he had reasons for this choice. As will be discussed in Section 6.3. below, the cooperation between teaching and consultants was one of the two problems that had been planned to be addressed by Peng and Lan. For Wang and the other Chinese participants, it was a fact that the cooperation had been a problem, as reported in the interviews. It was also a fact that the expatriate managers had difficulty in accepting the existence of the consultants (for details, see discussion of organizational context in Chapter 5). This was one of the major problems that they aimed to solve in this meeting series. So for Wang, to focus on the consultant issue as a problem was just a strategy to prepare for the transition of floor and topics. It is then understandable why it was impossible for him to agree to Vincent that the cooperation between the teaching and the consultants was successful. He did not take the second option either, that is, to disagree with Vincent, because apart from the possible relational disturbance, it may also focalize the disagreement, and the discussion may have had to digress from the planned procedure, that is, the coordinated turn-taking strategy carefully designed for the problem talks at the meeting (see 6.3. below).

However, what was probably never expected or realized by Wang and the other Chinese participants is that the beginning of Peng's suggestion turn, in effect, sounded like a reply to Vincent's other-repair. In fact, it sounded like a direct disagreement to Vincent's other-repair, that is, the second choice of response to the other-repair turn that Wang had avoided.

Extract 6.1. shows the first few lines of Peng's opening remarks. The topical utterance of the opening remarks is an emphatic statement (enforced by 'in fact' and the phonetically stressed 'is'):

> erm (1.0) in in fact the communication between con consultants and:: teaching department <u>is</u> a problem and we both realized that (Line 39)

'In fact' is usually used to 'introduce or draw attention to a comment that modifies, contradicts, or contrasts with a previous statement' (Sinclair, 1995). Peng's emphatic statement thus probably seemed like a direct contradiction to Vincent's comment that the communication and cooperation was very successful between the two departments (Line 30). Furthermore, since Vincent's other-repair turn was taken to correct Wang's statement, Peng's opening remarks could also be interpreted by Vincent and Jack as an open support to Wang, although such obvious speaker alignment had been avoided by the Chinese speakers. That is to say, Peng's statement probably not only seemed a direct and forceful disagreement to Vincent, but also an echo to Wang's emphasis on the cooperation as a serious problem. 'We both' refers to the two departments. The use of 'in fact' and 'we both realized that' seems to imply that Vincent was not telling the truth. This is even more relationally threatening. It goes without saying that this seeming direct disagreement has serious relational consequences.

The interactive choices made by the Chinese participants thus may have given Vincent the impression that they directly disagreed with, or even contradicted him on the issue of inter-departmental cooperation. This was perhaps what led to the change in Vincent's relational attitude towards the Chinese participants. In the turn following Peng's, Vincent started to criticise the consultants directly, which is in sharp contrast to the strenuous effort he had made to enhance the rapport with the consultants through intensified expressions of affirmations in the presentation turn (for details, see Chapter 7) and the other-repair turn (Extract 6.1. above).

What Vincent was never aware of was that Peng's speech had been prepared before the meeting and he was only reciting the script. That is, it is true that his emphatic statement was an echo and support to Wang's point, but it was not meant as a disagreement to Vincent's statement. Vincent's other-repair was not expected when Peng and the other Chinese participants were preparing the speech. As will be discussed in Section 6.3., both Wang's transitional turn and Peng and Lan's suggestion turns were prepared and rehearsed in the preparatory meetings by the Chinese participants. The three Chinese speakers' topics had been seamlessly synthesized. Both the content and wording of their speeches had been censored by the group to ensure high communicative efficiency and low relational threat. This is referred to as a coordinated turn-taking strategy in Section 6.3..

In sum, as an interruption to the meeting procedure, Vincent's other-repair turn is relationally threatening. However, this relationally threatening move was taken to correct Wang's supposed misunderstanding which he was afraid may cause damage to the interpersonal relationship. Thus, it is also a relational move. Unfortunately, Vincent's relational effort was met by a seeming direct confrontation from Peng who had never been prepared for Vincent's unexpected interruption.

Vincent's Challenge

If his interruptive other-repair turn can still be viewed as an effort, though a relationally risky move, to maintain the positive direction of the relational dynamics, Vincent's challenge turn (Turn 11) is without a doubt a move made with much less relational considerations. By this time, he has voiced explicit criticisms of the consultants in his reply turn to Peng (Turn 6), and expressed direct disagreement to, in fact, argued forcefully against Lan's suggestions (Turn 9). All of these relationally threatening actions are in sharp contrast to the relational strategies carefully and artfully employed in his presentation turn. If these relationship-threatening actions are viewed as manifestations of increased tension, then Vincent's challenge turn can be seen as a clear announcement of the explosion of direct conflict.

The relationship-threatening nature of the challenge turn is indicated by two main facts. One, it is an interruption to an uncompleted turn, that is, Wang's (attempted) conclusive turn (Turn 10); two, the speech act performed in this turn is challenge, a highly relationship-threatening act, and it is performed in a forceful way.

Extract 6.2. is an abbreviated transcript of the marked moment when Vincent takes the interruptive challenge turn. It includes Wang's conclusive comments on Peng and Lan's suggestions, Vincent's challenge turn, and Wang's explanation turn (Turn 10, 11, and 12). My translation of Wang's speech is bracketed, and the meeting translation (T) is also included.

Extract 6.2. Vincent's challenge turn.

1	W	{clearing throat}呃我想::说两句呵，这个::，(1.5) 我觉得刚才提咱们从 Peng 那儿都问题提的都很好，主要提的是这个例会方面的呵(P: mm)，比如说… 呃::那么第二点，我刚呃:: Lan 这个::谈到的::这儿点里边我觉得，呃首先谈到第一点呵，就是关于教师这一块，就是说呢，她提了一个很好的建议… 其实我们这个内部上的这种监管呢，还应该很重要的一点来自我们教学主管的，{clearing throat}… 其实这个工作::我觉得可能还需要::加强，呃因为我听到过有学生跟我讲，就是说当我们的老师，比如说 Jack Vincent 他们到教室去偶尔去听听他的课的时候，那个课程讲得特别好，他们学生也特别满意，但是当(.)他们不去监课的时候，有些课程就是(.)很随意的上了，他们觉得这个其实(.)在这方面我从学生这个角度来看呢，我觉得这一块应该是非常重要的，你先翻一下 {clearing throat} ({clearing throat}er, I would like to say a few words heh, this::, (1.5) I feel just now we, the suggestions raised by Peng are very good, the major point is about the regular meetings heh (P: mm), for example… er, the second point heh, I just er, among the several points made by Lan I feel, er to begin with, the first point discussed heh, is about teachers, that is to say, she made a very good suggestion… in fact, our this internal supervision ne, should also be an important part of the job of our teaching managers, {clearing throat}… in fact this job:: I feel maybe still need to be:: enforced, er because I heard from some students that, that is to say our teachers, for example when Jack and Vincent went to their classrooms to observe their classes occasionally, the classes went very well, the students were also very satisfied, but when (.) they didn't go to supervise their classes, some classes would be (.) taught in a casual way, they feel this in fact (.) on this aspect I see it from the students' perspective ne, I feel this part should be very important, maybe you translate this part for now {clearing throat})
	T	er that I heard from Peng and Lan the suggestions an and the problems, they talked very (.) well, er the the Peng gives some problems, on the communications and gives suggestions, such as the regular meetings, er that's very good a advice, and from Lan, er she gives some points er I want to talk about, from the first one… erm, I think they periodically going to the class to watch their their job, and do some random assessment, err it's very necessary, er I heard from, it is said that when when the manager go to the class to ob observe the teachers', er, class, that class err going on very good and do an excellent job, but er without the observations, probably this teacher is doing just normal and sometimes even worse, erm so I I think that's err very important to do the observations or management on the other teacher's (.) work.
2	V	who:: who is:: °hnh can you give me an example? (J: °hhhh) (T: 呃，他说当您听到) who watched the observation, which teacher, and then which teacher did a bad job after the observation?

First we will look at the interruptive nature of Vincent's turn. Wang's Turn 10 (turn 1 in Extract 6.2.) was an attempt to conclude the meeting, according to the Chinese participants' turn-taking plan (see Section 6.3. below). Up till now, Peng and Lan had performed their role of suggestion makers, as appointed and rehearsed at the preparatory meetings. In this attempted conclusive turn, Wang intended to put an end to the meeting with supportive comments on Peng and Lan's suggestions. He first commented on Peng's suggestions briefly, then started to comment on Lan's suggestions one by one. The use of the listing linking adjunct '首先 (to begin with)' (Line 3 and 15), indicates that this was only the first of several points he was going to make in this turn. This plan to address all of Lan's points is also faithfully conveyed by the meeting translation with the phrase 'from the first one' (line 29). However, till the end of this turn, he only got to comment on the first suggestion made by Lan. So it can be inferred that what is Turn 10 now was not intended to be a complete turn. It was only intended to be the first segment of the conclusive turn, had it been not interrupted and digressed by Vincent's challenge turn. The fact that this is not a complete turn can also be seen in the last utterance of Turn 10, addressing the meeting translator: '你先翻一下' (Line 11), meaning 'maybe you translate this part for now' (Line 25). It seems plausible to suggest that Vincent was aware that Wang's turn was not finished, both from the use of the phrase 'from the first one' in the meeting translation and from the fact that all speakers at this meeting share the pattern that each speaker's turn is divided into several segments in order to pause for the sake of translation.

Whether or not Vincent was aware that Wang's turn was not completed, or that

Wang was intending to conclude the meeting by this turn (which a Chinese participant would have easily discerned), it seems at this point Vincent did not care, so much as when he took the other-repair turn. In fact, Vincent not only interrupted, but interrupted with a relationally threatening act, challenge.

In this interruptive turn, Vincent challenged Wang to provide evidence for his statement that teachers did not perform satisfyingly when they were not watched. The speech act of challenge is highly risky relationally, especially when it is performed to a superior. When performing an act of challenge, one is expressing doubt of the truth value of the other's idea. In this sense, a challenge is not only an expression of disagreement to the other's ideas, but also a questioning of the other's credibility. What is more, Vincent's challenge was produced bluntly and in a very forceful way, without any forms of mitigation. He shot four questions in a row, ignoring the translator's attempt to translate. Meanwhile, Jack laughed supportively (line 37). In fact, it was only by this move of Vincent's that Wang was alerted to the degree of tension. And it was from this moment on, he started to adjust his original communicative plan.

Interactively, it seems not surprising that Vincent would be so infuriated by Wang's supportive comments on Lan's suggestions. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, Lan's suggestions were received by Vincent as direct criticisms due to different expectations of discourse structure and to the problems in meeting translation. In his reply turn to Lan (Turn 9), he argued forcefully against Lan's claim that more teacher supervision was needed. When Wang openly expressed support to Lan in Turn 10, he probably felt Wang was arguing with him against the points he made in the reply turn to Lan. Wang's supportive comments were probably seen by Vincent as an open declaration of speaker alignment with Lan in the criticisms of him. As a subordinate, it was probably disheartening to see his boss stand on the side of another subordinate in criticising him at such a formal meeting. In the private phone call to me after the meeting, Vincent exclaimed: 'Even Mr. Wang! Even he has supported such criticisms of me'. And to make it worse, for Vincent, the criticisms of him were obviously not based on fact. Wang later was forced to admit that the problems were with Jack's program, not Vincent's. This concern for truth was probably the major reason that Vincent had the courage to take the interruptive challenge turn. Truth as the highest value in the western philosophical tradition (see Section 4.4.2. of Chapter 4) certainly overrides the considerations of personal relationship or hierarchical power.

It is suggested that Vincent's impression that Wang was arguing against him in Turn 10 was again created by coincidence. As will be discussed in Section 6.3., as a relational strategy, the three Chinese official speakers' topics are synthesised and their turns are well-coordinated. Wang's supportive comments had been prepared in the preparatory meetings, without any expectation of Vincent's defensive arguments against Lan. This again shows the Chinese participants' expectations of the 'directed and restricted' turn-taking behaviours at formal meetings (Boden, 1994: 85).

6.2.2.3. Supportive Interruptions

Analysis of Vincent's interruptive behaviours indicates that interruptions with expression of disagreement, that is, obstructive interruptions, may result in the aggravation of tension at the workplace meeting. In the following analysis, it is demonstrated that interruption with agreement, that is, supportive interruption, may also serve to intensify the tension at a meeting. Supportive interruption, together with overlaps and back-channels, may be used as an expression of solidarity as well as a display of participant alignment. When there is a dispute or confrontation at a meeting, such display of participant alignment will certainly aggravate the relational atmosphere.

Among the fifteen unofficial turns of Jack, fourteen are supportive interruptions, and one is invited by Vincent for confirmation of certain information. That is to say, all of Jack's unofficial turns took place during Vincent's official turns, and all of them were taken to provide support to Vincent. In this section, two extracts will be used to demonstrate the relational effect of Jack's supportive interruptions.

The first extract is part of Vincent's reply turn to Peng (Extract 6.3.). If his other-repair turn (Turn 4) was the first sign of relational dissonance at the meeting, Vincent's reply to Peng (Turn 6) then sent out clear signals of tension, which obviously had been received by all of the English speaking participants, including most of the Chinese consultants. Jack's interruptions further contributed to the increase in tension. The extract starts with Vincent giving an example of how his Chinese teachers had avoided speaking English in order to help him learn Chinese.

Extract 6.3. Jack's interruption to Vincent's reply to Peng.

1	V	… and none of our Chinese teachers spoke to us in English, that was great=
2	J	= my daughter is here in (the university name), same thing, (V: nobody speakers to her) nobody speaks English to her in her courses=
3	V	=but we have consultants no matter how many times we tell them... and:: we ask can you please speak in English with the students all the time, and just refuse to do it… if we're speaking Chinese to the students, that's not acceptable=
4	J	= there was an argument made that:: teaching in Chinese is going to help the C student C C group students=
5	V	=yeah=
6	J	=you can see they fail=
7	V	=yeah we were tol=
8	J	=26 fail 6 passed=
9	V	=we were told [that
10	J	[teaching in Chinese did not help them
11	V	yeah
12	J	[they proved it]
13	V	[they proved it]
14	J	[{laughs}]
15	V	[{laughs}]

In this turn, Vincent started to criticize the consultants explicitly. When he criticized the consultants for not speaking English to the students, he used his own experience of Chinese learning to illustrate how important it is for the staff in a language school to speak the target language. The force of the criticisms, as well as the tension, was intensified by Jack's interruptive turns.

In this extract, we can clearly sense the relational tension at the meeting interactions. The turns are closely latched, and there are almost not time gaps between the turns. It seems that Jack and Vincent were both on the floor, or at least alternating at a very fast speed. Jack first interrupted (turn 2) to give another example of his daughter's experience to support Vincent's argument. Then he interrupted again (turn 4) to argue against another argument made by some consultant previously, that is, teaching in Chinese can help the low-level students. Vincent did not seem to mind the interruptions at all. In fact, he kept expressing agreement to Jack's statements either by trying to complete his utterance ('nobody speaks to her', line 2), or by using the response token 'yeah'. In turn 7 and 9, Vincent tried twice to continue his speech, but was interrupted by Jack both times. After the response token in turn 11, Vincent decided to quit the unfinished utterance that he had tried to produce in turn 7 and 9, and produced an utterance to support Jack ('they proved it', turn 13), which not only overlapped with Jack but also was exactly the same as Jack's utterance. Realizing this simultaneity, they started to laugh together (turn 14 and 15). The fast tempo, the overlaps and the simultaneous speeches, all indicate the degree of solidarity and consensus between Jack and Vincent. This formation and expression of alliance obviously increased the tension, especially during the course of Vincent's direct criticisms of the consultants.

Another example is Jack's interruptions to Vincent's rebuttal turn (Extract 6.4. below). As discussed earlier, Vincent interrupted Wang's attempt to conclude the meeting when Wang made some supportive comments on Peng and Lan's suggestions. Vincent's interruptive challenge, not only performed bluntly with no mitigation but also forcefully with a number of questions shot successively, had alerted Wang to the degree of tension at the meeting. As a cooperative move, Wang tried to answer Vincent's challenging questions by providing the information Vincent demanded, that is, the names of the teachers whom students had complained about. What he did not realize was that this was taken by Vincent as an argumentative move to defend Lan's statement that teacher management needed to be improved, which Vincent had argued against in his reply turn to Lan with lots of examples. At this moment, Vincent became very upset, believing even Wang, his boss, was aligned with the consultants and openly criticizing his work. If his challenge turn announced the start of the conflict, his rebuttal to Wang's comment manifests the full-scale explosion of conflict at the meeting.

Extract 6.4. Jack's interruption to Vincent's rebuttal turn.

1	V	=hm, hm, er yeah, well, err, (1.0) like I er:: I'm saying, you know we we monitor the teachers… (.) er :: you know, with all the the teachers we've had with problems we we fir °hhhh fired them, we were the only the only department (J: the only department) that fire people… er there is tons of quality control, we have I sent scores with Jack from all of our teachers to (University K), they were very °hh happy, with how things were scored, in fact we had, for the undergrads no complaints, err so=
2	J	= (Visitor E) was happy with (Teacher G) too, he taught for (Partner University C), (Visitor E) was here from (Partner University C), it's (Visitor E)'s job [to fire
3	V	[(Visitor E)'s job to fire him, [we fired him.
4	J	[yeah, (Visitor E) was well aware of (Teacher G)'s shortcomings, (Visitor E) took action
5	V	yes, (Visitor E) hired him, so it was a really touching situation, but I dealt with it, errm
6	J	there was very much dealt with
7	V	yeah
8	J	(Teacher G) was giving lot of extra information on the courses to make the courses better, we know, we were well aware of the problem
9	V	and you see, we work with (University J), we work closely with (University J), we use some of their own methods for quality control too … they've tons of experiences, they are the most recognized program in the UK, so if they tell me these teachers are good, I believe them, if I have someone say, the students don't like him they can't give you a reason, and then the students give the best feedback one of the best feedbacks, I question that person's ability to judge academic context properly=

10	J	=( ) quality control is <u>quality</u> control=
11	V	=yeah, °hnh exactly {}
12	W	(to the translator) 先给我翻译一下，太长了°hh
		(maybe translate a bit for me, it's too long°hh)

In this turn, Vincent started to launch indirect criticisms of his superior:

we were the only the only department (J: the only department) that fire people (line 3)

Since Wang was in charge of the Chinese personnel issues, this indirect criticism can be considered as being targeted at Wang. This is a highly relationally risky act, especially considering the hierarchical relation between himself and Wang. During the performance of this criticism, Jack provided support by echoing Vincent's phrase 'the only department' (line 3).

When Vincent started to use the examples of the partner universities to support his argument that there was enough quality control in his program, Jack joined in and provided more information (turn 2). From turn 2 to turn 8, it seems that Jack and Vincent were both on the floor again, or at least alternating at a very fast speed. They overlapped, and completed each other's utterances, and expressed agreement and support to each other by using minimal response tokens such as 'yeah' or by repeating each other's utterances.

Towards the end of this turn, Vincent started to challenge Wang's academic qualification and management competence almost directly (line 23 – 28). By 'almost', I mean he did not mention Wang's name, instead he used 'someone', but the reference is very obvious, considering he was quoting Wang's statements. At this moment, Jack cut in again and made another intensified comment 'quality control is <u>quality</u> control' (line 27). By emphasizing the second 'quality', he expressed a further challenge and doubt of Wang's competence in managing an academic institution. This comment was supported by an intensified agreement from Vincent, 'yeah, °hnh exactly' (line 28).

The examination of the two examples above has demonstrated the relational effect of supportive interruptions. It is suggested that they may aggravate the relational tension by openly displaying speaker alignment in confrontational interactions at meetings.

6.2.3. Interactive Behaviours of the Chinese Participants

In contrast to the expatriates' active turn-taking patterns, the Chinese participants appear rather restrained and passive throughout the meeting. If the tension at the meeting has manifested itself in obstructive interruptions and speaker alignment on the part of the expatriate speakers, for the Chinese participants it is more reflected in refraining from turn-taking, indicated by long gaps before the scheduled turns, non-response when criticised or refuted, and abandoning the original transactional goals when the relational atmosphere appeared endangered, etc.. There was no obstructive interruption on the part of the Chinese participants. And there was no conspicuous speaker alignment through supportive interruptions among the Chinese speakers. Or, it may be better to say that the Chinese participants have tried their best to avoid any revelation of speaker alignment at the meeting.

6.2.3.1. The Restraint of the Official Speakers

As the official speakers, Peng and Lan's turn-taking behaviours at the meeting seemed fairly reserved and restrained, especially in comparison to the expatriate official speaker, Vincent. This is reflected both in the absence of response to Vincent's argumentative reply turns, and in their hesitation or reluctance to take their own pre-allocated turns.

Peng and Lan's hesitation and reluctance is clearly reflected in the long gaps before taking their pre-allocated turns. Silence can be an important indicator of the tension. Before both of Peng's and Lan's official turns (Turn 5 and 8 in Figure 6.1), there are long gaps.

According to the plan made and rehearsed by the Chinese participants in the preparatory meetings (see Section 6.3), Peng was supposed to take his turn after Wang's transitional turn. However, as indicated in Extract 6.1 above, there was a 4-second gap after Wang's transitional turn; and after Vincent's other-repair turn, there was another 6-second gap before Peng finally took his pre-allocated turn. This may indicate that Peng was nervous and hesitant about undertaking his mission, that is, to address the issue of inter-departmental cooperation as a problem. What made Peng hesitate was the fact that Vincent not only repeatedly described the cooperation as a great success in his presentation turn, but also expressed disagreement in his other-repair turn with Wang's reference to the cooperation as a problem. He probably had realized that it would appear a direct disagreement to Vincent if he continued to carry out the original plan. However, as the designated speaker, he had no other choice but to accomplish the task entrusted to him by the group.

Compared to the gap before Peng's turn, the gap before Lan's official turn was even longer. After Vincent's reply turn to Peng, there was a 24-second gap (see Extract 6.5. below). This also indicates Lan's hesitation to continue the plan. According to the Chinese participants' plan, she was supposed to give suggestions on teaching management. This topic was even more relationally threatening than Peng's. In addition, in his reply to Peng, Vincent, probably disappointed and offended by Peng's definition of the cooperation as a 'big' problem (see Extract 6.1. above), had already changed his attitude and started to criticise the consultants directly. The fact that Jack supported Vincent with a number of supportive interruptions had further increased the force of the criticisms. As a fluent speaker of English, Lan was probably aware of the degree of tension. Thus she became rather hesitant about taking her pre-allocated turn.

Extract 6.5.

		(24.0)	1
1	W	继续°hh，看还有什么问题？别人呢	2
		(continue°hh, are there any other problems? How about others?)	3
		(4.0)	4
2	L	呃::下面我想说一说一些就是...	5
		(err::, now what I want to talk about is...)	6

As indicated in Extract 6.5., noticing this long silence and probably unaware of the degree of tension due to his limited command of English, Wang took a marked turn to encourage Lan to take her official turn (although without mentioning Lan by name). He urged 'others' to continue with 'other problems' (line 3). All the Chinese participants knew that the 'others' had been planned to be Lan, and the 'other problems' to be the issue of 'teaching management' that Lan had been appointed to address. Lan later reported that Wang eyed her at this moment to encourage her to continue. However, even with Wang's encouragement, it still took Lan four seconds to start her turn. This indicates clearly Lan's reluctance to carry out the original plan, and her concern about aggravating the tension.

This concern with relational atmosphere is also reflected in Peng and Lan's choice of non-response to Vincent's reply turns. In his reply to their suggestions, Vincent had either criticised the consultants directly (reply to Peng), or expressed the counter-argument forcefully by using a lot of examples (reply to Lan). It seems that both Peng and Lan had chosen not to reply in order not to aggravate the tension.

Lan, in the post-meeting interview, explained why she did not respond to Vincent at the meeting. During the interview, she first claimed that she had sufficient evidence, such as complaints from the students about certain teachers, to prove that there were problems with teaching management. When asked why she did not give some examples or explanations after Vincent's counter-arguments, she explained that it would sound like she was 'arguing with him' (see Interview 6.1.).

Interview 6.1.

因为就我来讲，如果说再给他一些例子，不见得对他是，不见得就是说能够说，那完全就是说什么呢，那就是说呃::，我觉得我我跟他就是争了，争论得就更加更加更加强了，那反而会让他觉得会更加地接受不了... 当时他已经那么激动了，那实际上有点火上浇油了那意思，{笑} 让他觉得他是不是更加不可接受，但是实际上是有这样的问题

(because as for me, to provide more examples, is not necessarily, not necessarily can, that would be completely what, that would be like err::, I think It would seem I'm arguing with him, the argument would be more aggravated, that would make it even more unacceptable to him... at that moment he was already so infuriated, then to say more would seem 'to pour oil on the flames' {laughs}, that would be even more unacceptable for him, but in fact there are such problems)

Lan's comments indicate that although she had confidence in the truth value of her statement, she decided not to take a turn to defend herself. The major reason for this decision is the relational consideration. That is, she was worried further examples or explanations would seem argumentative to Vincent and would probably aggravate the tension that was already rather intense.

Peng and Lan's hesitation and reluctance in taking their allocated turns indicate that they were under huge pressure when making the choice between accomplishing the transactional goal (that is, the problem talks) or maintaining the relational harmony. And their choice of non-response after being criticised directly or refuted forcefully indicates that when the relational atmosphere became tense, they would rather abandon defending themselves even though they had complete confidence in the truth value of their statements. It seems unquestionable for them that the relational concern should always override the transactional goal and personal pride.

6.2.3.2. Wang in the Face of Confrontation

Wang's role at the meeting underwent a transition in the middle of the meeting, due to Vincent's challenging interruptions. At the first half of the meeting, Wang tried to stick to his role as the meeting chair, avoiding expression of his own positions on the topical issues. In the later half, he was dragged into a confrontational debate with Vincent. The strategies Wang used to deal with this unexpected situation is especially interesting for the study of Chinese meeting behaviour and relational strategies.

As can be seen in the meeting structure in Figure 6.1., starting from Turn 10, the interactions at the meeting were mainly between Wang and Vincent. In contrast to Vincent's aggressive interactive behaviours, Wang's turn-taking behaviours seem rather cooperative, or even accommodating. This is reflected in two strategies he adopted: one is the self-repair turn after Vincent's rebuttal, and the other is the withdrawal of problem talk in his reply to Vincent's emotional complaints. It is argued that these strategies were determined by a supreme concern with the relational goals.

As demonstrated in the analysis of Extract 6.4. above, in his rebuttal turn (Turn 13), Vincent not only forcefully refuted Wang's claim, but also challenged Wang's qualification to manage the institution. At this point, Wang appeared to have become fully aware of the degree of confrontation. In order to reduce the relational tension, he chose the strategy of self-repair. Extract 6.6. is the abbreviated transcript of Wang's self-repair turn.

Extract 6.6. Wang's self-repair turn.

W	呃::其实刚才我想说明呢，其实不可能这意思听得有点儿我觉得可能有点儿拧了,呃刚才谈的意思来讲,并不是说我们在整个教学过程当中呢没有监管,呵... 就是说呢，比如说从我们教学主管来讲的话呢，呃::我呢看到了我们在监管上那边儿取得的这些这些成绩... 呃我只是想说可能呃::呃刚才那个 Lan 谈的那个事情就是说，希望能够就是比如说，那个::从我们的教学主管上来讲，呃::可以减少一部分减少一部分教学的这种工作量，他的工作他的精力呢，比如在这方面转一点儿的话呢,可能会使我们的监管呢,更有效,效果会更好... 呃在我们的整个课程当中，我想 the first semester program 呢应该已经做到这一点了... 我觉得这个他们应该我觉得到目前为止我们做的还是不错的... 呃::但是可可能我想更多的来讲是在我们的专业课教学上，就是第二学期课程, 因为毕竟我们刚刚，第一次，就是(.)做第二学期课程, 呃::::不像它不是说运行了已经有完整的一次了以后了，它是只是第一次在运行,所以可能还存在着一些(.)呃这样的问题... 因为这块儿呢整个课程这块儿来讲呢，实际上我们专业课它是第一年刚开始，那么整个课程设置来讲其实都是更多来讲都是 Jack 一个人在做的，呃::他非常辛苦，呃::而且没有更多的在这方面的这些像 Jack 像 Vincent 手下有几个 convener 呵，实际上那会儿 Jack 手下 Jack 手下是没有的，在这种情况下来讲的话可能难免会出现这样的情况，但是

	我想呢我们，在今年的教学当中，可能这个方面我想应该，应该会得到一个比较大的改观 (Err:: actually what I wanted to say, actually not, possibly the meaning was a bit I feel possibly misunderstood, err as to the meaning I just expressed, it was not to say that there was no supervision in the whole teaching process, heh… that is to say, for example from our teaching managers, err:: I have seen these these achievements made on supervision… err I only wanted to say probably err:: err what Lan just mentioned, that is, hopefully that is for example, that:: from our teaching managers, err:: part of the teaching workload of the managers can be reduced, so that his work his energy ne, for example can be transferred to this aspect, probably our supervision ne, could become more efficient, the effect could be even better… err in our whole program, I think the first semester program ne should have achieved this… err:: but possibly I think more concerns are with our second semester program, because after all we only, the first time, that is (.) to do the second semester program, err:: not like that after it has been run for one complete time, it was only was the first time to be run, so possibly there were still some (.) err such problems… because this part ne in terms of the whole program this part, in fact it was the first year to run the specialized subject courses, then as to the whole curriculum in fact it was designed by Jack alone, err:: he worked really hard, err:: furthermore, there were no course conveners such as in Vincent's program heh, in fact there was no conveners to help Jack, in such circumstances possibly it was unavoidable to have such problems, but I think we, in the teaching this year, possible on this aspect I think it can, can be improved greatly

In the self-repair turn, Wang tried to clarify two points: one was that he acknowledged the expatriate managers' achievements in teaching management, the other was that it was actually Jack's program that needed to be improved.

When addressing the first point, he tried to emphasize that the point he intended to make was not that there was no teacher management (line 2, 20), and that what he truly meant to suggest was the managers' teaching workload be reduced in order for them to have more time so that they could manage the program 'even better' (line 5 – 7, 24 – 37). In this part, it was evident that Wang tried to clarify the type of the speech act performed by Lan and himself, that is, it was actually a well-meant suggestion rather than a criticism.

The second point he made could easily appear to be a criticism. In order to placate Vincent who felt criticized unjustly, he had to clarify the fact that the target of criticism was actually Jack rather than Vincent. When making this point, Wang was careful not to seem critical of Jack. He spoke slowly and paused frequently to weigh his words. He also used the speech acts of explanation and affirmation as hedges to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk. He tried to explain repeatedly that the reason for the existence of the problems in Jack's program was that the program was only run for the first time (line 10-12, 29-31) and that there were no conveners to help Jack (line 14-16, 34-36). He also emphasized that Jack worked really hard and designed the curriculum all by himself (line 14 and 34). It is evident that in order to avoid confrontation with Jack, Wang had used these affirmative speech acts as hedges to mitigate the possible relational threat of the problem talk.

We will now look at another strategy that Wang used to reduce the relational tension towards the end of the meeting: the withdrawal of the planned problem talks. After Wang's self-repair, Vincent launched a series of emotional complaints about the management difficulties he had experienced in his work. These, to Wang, may have sounded like indirect criticisms of himself and some other Chinese staff. However, instead of treating Vincent's speech as criticism or complaint, Wang dealt with it as problem talk (see Extract 6.7.).

Extract 6.7. Wang's reply and conclusive remarks (Turn 16).

W	呃::{clearing throat}我觉得这样呵，呃::刚才 Ja, Vincent::提出的这些问题我觉得其 实应该引起我们重视，我想我们今天开这个会，其中有一个目的来讲，就是为了把

这些问题摆出来，看看我们怎么来解决... 他是出于一种责任，出于一种对别人的这种负责任的态度，他他他在做，但是这个说明是我们问我们工作当中存在着这样一些问题，那首先这里边儿我有我有很大的问题，但是我们有些部门，也有也有这样的问题，所以我想呢这个问题提出来以后，去研究一下，比如这里边儿涉及到，Hui 这边儿，教师的签证问题，教师的合同问题... 呃::我跟 Hui 已经商量过... 我们会专门有人来把这事情给做好... 那么还有这里边儿也谈到了我们的网站... 这样的一个问题，管理的问题，所以我觉得从 Jian 这块儿你也应该要，看一下，应该应该这些东西你要经常给他们要反反馈的，如果说没有及时更新，为什么，呵，里边儿还有还有哪还有哪些问题，我想其实这个也是，呃至少制约着就是(1.0)这个彼此之间的这种沟通，因为我们他们比如花费了这个时间了，做出来以后，没有用，他会觉得这个很很受打击的，别人换换个位思考大家都其实是一样的呵，所以我觉得这块儿，的确存在着很多问题... (1.5) 好吧，我觉得他刚才 VinceVincent 提出的这些问题都是很客观的些问题，看我们应该到底应该应应该怎么做，我们大家去想一想，争取在这次(.)会上，我们能够得到一些结论，我们应该怎么做

(err::{clearing throat} I feel this heh°, err just now Ja, Vincent raised these problems I feel they really deserve our attention, I think today we hold this meeting, one of the purposes, it to lay out these problems, see how we can solve them... he's been dealing with them out of sense of responsibility, out of such an attitude that he's responsible for others, he he he's doing them, but this indicates that we there are such problems in our work, then first I have I have big problems, but some of our departments, are also also responsible, so I think after these problems are raised, go and do some research, for example it has been mentioned, Hui's part, the issues of teachers' visas, teachers' contracts... err:: I have discussed with Hui... next semester we will have a special person to deal with such issues... then another issue that was mentioned is our website... such a problem, management problem, so I feel Jian you also should, have a look, should should such issues you should give them feedbacks frequently, if there is no update, why, heh°, what other problems there might be there, I think in fact this is also, err restricting (1.0) the communication between one another, because we they for example have spent the time, after it's done, it became useless, he would feel really frustrated, everybody would feel the same if we step into shoes of others, so I feel this part, there are indeed some problems... (1.5) ok, I feel he just the problems that Vince Vincent has raised are all very objective observations, see how we should what we should do, everybody we go and think, try to at this (.) meeting series, we can get some conclusions, what we should do)

As shown in Extract 6.7. above, in his reply turn to Vincent's complaints, Wang had completely given up the original transactional goal of this meeting, that is, to persuade the expatriate managers that there were problems in Jack's practices in inter-departmental cooperation and teaching management. Instead, Wang focused completely on the topics addressed by Vincent in his complaint turn.

In order to placate Vincent, Wang used a series of speech acts when dealing with Vincent's emotional complaints, namely: converting Vincent's speech act of complaint to problem talk, discussion of solutions to the problems, affirmation of the expatriate manager's attitude, and self-criticism / criticism.

Wang started the turn by defining Vincent's speech act as problem talk instead of complaint (line 1 and 17). This helped to focus on the constructive aspect rather than the emotional aspect of Vincent's complaints. Then he addressed each of the problems Vincent mentioned and urged the managers of the departments complained about to find solutions. This suggests a very positive attitude to Vincent's complaints.

Furthermore, both at the beginning and the end of the turn, he expressed affirmation of the value of Vincent's act, such as 'Vincent raised these problems I feel they really deserve our attention' (line 2, 18), and 'I feel he just the problems that Vince Vincent has raised are all very objective observations' (line 15, 34). He also praised Vincent's great 'sense of responsibility' (line 3, 20) and expressed his sympathy for the expatriates' feeling of frustration, saying, for example, 'after it's done, it became useless, he would feel really frustrated, everybody would feel the same if we step into shoes of others' (line 12, 31). In making such comments, Wang indicated that he regarded Vincent's comments as being made for constructive purposes rather than as an emotional attack. This seemed to aim at reducing the relational tension after Vincent's emotional release.

Before discussing the solutions to the problems raised by Vincent, Wang also used the strategy of criticism and self-criticism to placate Vincent. As can be seen in line 5 and 22, he first admitted his own responsibility for the problems, 'then first I have I have big problems'. The he named two department managers, Hui and Jian, as being responsible for the problems. It is suggested that the speech acts of self-criticism and criticism (of the Chinese managers) serve as relational strategies for the purpose of reducing the relational tension. It is worth noting here that the two Chinese managers' reaction to the criticisms was in sharp contrast to the expatriate managers. This will be discussed in the next section.

The analysis above indicates that at this point, Wang had completely abandoned the original goal of problem talk and decided to focus on resolving the relational tension at the meeting. In the retrospective interviews, Wang's relational strategies, especially how he dealt with Vincent's emotional complaints, were highly praised for being very tactful and appropriate by the other Chinese participants. And Wang's strategy of the withdrawal of problem talk indicates again that the relational goal was considered as the supreme goal by the Chinese participants.

6.2.3.3. Hui in the Face of Criticism

As demonstrated in the analysis above, in the face of criticism and confrontation, Peng and Lan chose the strategy of non-response, while Wang chose the strategy of self-repair and withdrawal of problem talk. They are in sharp contrast to the expatriate participants, who either chose to refute forcefully or to align with the person criticised with supportive interruptions. In this section, we will look at another strategy the Chinese participants employed when they were criticised at the meeting.

As mentioned above, in Wang's reply to Vincent's complaints, he criticised two Chinese managers, that is, Hui and Jian. None of these managers took a turn to respond to these criticisms. They chose the strategy of non-response, just like how the consultants dealt with the expatriates' criticisms. However, towards the end of the meeting, one of the two managers, Hui, was forced to take two unofficial turns when he was directly and repeatedly criticised by Wang.

Extract 6.8 shows the transcript of the last turn interactions of the meeting. The first turn in Extract 6.8 comprises the ending utterances of Wang's reply to Vincent's complaint (Turn 16). The second turn in the extract is Vincent's self-repair turn (Turn 17). It is suggested that Vincent's self-repair turn was an interruption to the meeting procedure, since the chair had formally terminated the meeting in Turn 16 and the floor was supposed to have been officially closed. This interruption of Vincent's was neither obstructive nor supportive, as it was not directly related to the previous turn, that is, Wang's reply in Turn 16. It was taken to remedy the relational damage caused by his own rebuttal turn (Turn 13) and complaint turn (Turn 15).

Extract 6.8. Hui's strategy for dealing with criticism.

1	W	…呃感谢::Vincent sorry°h 感谢 Vincent，然后也谢谢大家。
		(…err thanks to:: Vincent sorry°h thanks to Vincent, and then thanks to everyone
		as well)
2	V	yeah, I just like to say °hh, Hui, I don't think it it's your fault the visa problem at
		all, Hui, in all honesty is one of the hardest working people I've <u>ev</u>er met
		anywhere in the world, one of the:: best colleagues I've ever had, and again Hui is

		always doing things that are his job an and not his job and, it was°hh not your fault but {all laugh including Hui} cos we both care so we end up doing something, an and but y you are such a wonderful man°hh, {all laugh loudly} and I don't want you to think I was:: {Hui's laughter} criticizing you and all there, and I was just trying to explain why (.) I'm so busy cos I I do a lot {laughter in the audience} that's not teaching or any part of my job, but I do love working here, I love my job, but I wish I didn't have°hh to do these things, so I could (1.0) be better here and also be better for:: (1.0) my my girlfriend°hh cos I I'm often not home, err but, yeah °thank you Mr. Wang, for for giving me an opportunity to have a voice and to °listen to everything you people have to say I I much appreciate it, mn°
3	W	°thank you very much°，但是 Hui 别光笑，我觉着这个问题吧，你的确很忙呵，也很认真负责，大家都有目共睹的，但是这个事情确实没有做好，就签证这个，（some laughter in the audience）这个我们不能回避的呵 (°thank you very much°，but Hui don't just laugh, I feel this problem, you are indeed very busy, and also serious and conscientious, this has been witnessed by everybody, but this issue was indeed not dealt with well, especially the visa issue, (some laughter in the audience), this is a problem we cannot avoid heh°
4	H	回头我跟你探讨一下这个具体的 (I will discuss a bit the details with you later)
5	W	对，探讨一下，看我们到底怎么解决，不是光探讨原因，探讨怎么解决°hh (right, discuss a bit, see how we can solve the problems, not only discuss the reasons, but also the solutions °hh)
6	H	有原因就可以解决°hh (once the reasons are found out, the problems will be solved °hh)
7	W	Ok. {meeting translation} ok°h, thank you 谢谢各位 { loud applauses }

As shown in the extract above, in his interruptive turn, Vincent tried to clarify that he did not intend to criticise Hui. He emphasized that he had high regard for Hui as 'one of the hardest working people' in the world (line 5), and defined his own act of complaining about the visa problem as an explanation of why he was so busy (line 11). At the end of the turn, he expressed his appreciation to Wang for giving him this opportunity to communicate with the others at the meeting (line 15). It seems obvious that Vincent's interruptive turn was taken to achieve reconciliation with the Chinese participants.

The rest of the turns in Extract 6.8. (turn 3-7) may be regarded as the last official turn at the meeting, that is, Wang's conclusive remarks (Turn 18). It is worth noting that this is Wang's third attempt to conclude the meeting. He attempted to conclude the meeting in Turn 10 and 16, but was interrupted by Vincent both times. It was in this last official turn that Hui took two unofficial turns. These two turns are categorised as unofficial because they were taken in order not to speak at the meeting. That is to say, these two turns did not contribute to the development of the central topics.

After thanking Vincent in a soft tone, Wang pointed out to Hui that he still should be responsible for the visa problem (line 18, 22). This was a rather direct criticism of Hui, although mitigated by agreement with Vincent's affirmations of his conscientiousness. The way Wang performed the criticism is in sharp contrast to how he dealt with the problem talk about Jack's program. In order to avoid giving the impression that he was blaming Jack, he had tried to attribute the existence of problems to external circumstances.

Being criticised by Wang in this way, Hui's response was in sharp contrast to that of Vincent. First of all, he might not have considered Wang's criticism of himself was fair. If he did, he probably would have accepted the criticism at this point. However, although he did not appear to accept the criticism, he did not choose to defend himself immediately like Vincent. Instead, he suggested discussing the matter in private after the meeting (line 25).

There might be a few reasons he did not want to discuss the matter at the meeting. One, Wang had announced the conclusion of the meeting. As a Chinese subordinate, he wanted to show respect for the authority of this announcement and did not want to lengthen the meeting by discussing his own issues. Two, he might have wanted to defend himself, and this was better done in private than at such a formal meeting. For Chinese participants, self-defence against a criticism could seem argumentative, while arguing against the boss can be fairly face-threatening (to both sides) at a Chinese meeting. Three, the discussion might involve criticisms of some other Chinese participants, and he probably did not want to threaten their face in public. For whichever reasons, it seems clear that Hui's decision to avoid discussion at the meeting was made for relational purposes.

In contrast to the expatriate managers' indignant reactions to criticisms, Hui chose to defer the discussion until after the meeting. And this decision would certainly win trust from the boss as well as respect from the other Chinese participants, as it conforms to the Chinese expectation of '识大体 顾大局' (*shidati*, *gudaju*), which means that an individual should always take the overall situation into account when making personal decisions. The 'overall situation' refers to the common interest of the group. A good in-group member is not the one who would stand up to express himself, but the one who is able to sacrifice his own interest in order to protect the common interest of the group.

6.2.4. Intercultural Differences in Turn-taking Behaviours

As demonstrated in the analysis of meeting interactions above, there are huge differences in turn-taking behaviours between the Chinese and expatriate participants at the meeting. Generally speaking, the expatriate participants seemed rather proactive and even aggressive, while the Chinese participants seemed fairly restrained and even withdrawn in terms of turn participation. This is reflected mainly in three aspects of turn-taking behaviours, namely, the number of turns, the interruptive behaviours, and the reaction to criticisms and confrontation.

First of all, the expatriate participants appear much more active than the Chinese participants in terms of number of turns. Both in terms of official and unofficial speakers, the expatriate participants' turns overwhelmingly exceeded those of the Chinese participants. Moreover, nearly all the expatriates' turns were self-selected, while none of the consultants' turns was self-elected. In fact, both of the consultants' turns were pre-allocated on the agenda, and they seemed pretty hesitant about taking them at the meeting when tension started to emerge.

There is also stark contrast in the interruptive behaviours between the Chinese and expatriate participants. While there was only one case of supportive interruption on the part of the Chinese participants, the expatriate participants employed the instrument of interruption frequently at the meeting. The obstructive interruptions are used to express disagreement, while the supportive interruptions to express agreement. Both types of interruptions contributed to the building of the relational tension at the meeting. An interruption that is neither obstructive nor supportive is also discovered, which is used to obtain reconciliation towards the end of the meeting.

The third difference in turn-taking behaviours lies in the strategy employed in dealing with criticism and confrontation. When feeling criticised unfairly, the expatriate participants not only refuted with forceful arguments and counter criticisms, but also openly displayed speaker alignment through supportive interruptions. In contrast to the expatriates' aggressive strategies, the Chinese participants chose to avoid direct confrontation and tried to reduce tension in the face of criticisms and confrontation with a series of strategies, including non-response, self-repair, withdrawal of the transactional plan, and deference of the discussion until after the meeting.

6.2.5. CSP and Turn-taking Strategies

It is argued that the differences in turn-taking strategies between the Chinese and expatriate participants are mainly determined by two fundamental differences between the individual-selves and the group-selves: one is the difference in priority given to the interactive goals, and the other is the difference in perception of the unit of social actions.

The differences in the strategies for dealing with criticisms and confrontation indicate that the expatriate participants assign primacy to the achievement of the transactional goals, while the Chinese participants always prioritize the relational goals over the transactional goals. For the expatriate participants, the relational goal is secondary and supportive to the transactional goals, while for the Chinese participants, the transactional goals can be abandoned, at least temporarily, in order to maintain a harmonious relationship. For the Chinese group-selves, a disrupted relational state within the group Self probably makes any transactional plan impossible, considering the cultural view that the group rather than the individual is perceived to be an autonomous agent.

That the individual or the group is seen as the agent, that is, the unit of social actions, also determines the differences in turn-taking styles. The expatriate participants appear much more proactive and self-initiated than the Chinese participants at the meeting, both in terms of the number of turns and in interruptive behaviours. It seems the expatriates enjoy more freedom to express their opinions and feel less constrained in turn-taking actions. Even when they form speaker alignment, they express it as separate self-contained individual agents, e.g. through spontaneous supportive interruptions. However, the Chinese participants seem to be extremely constrained, probably by a number of considerations, e.g. the relational concern, the action plan sanctioned by the group, and the role one is assigned to play, etc. The next section will examine in detail the Chinese participants' action plan for the meeting, which is considered as a turn-taking strategy for problem talk.

6.3. Coordinated Turn-taking as Problem Talk Strategy

In the post-meeting interviews, the Chinese participants mentioned how carefully they had prepared and rehearsed the whole procedure of the meeting. This drew my attention to the coordination of the Chinese official speakers' turns. Close examination of the topic structure of the Chinese speakers' turns indicate that their topics are seamlessly synthesized. It seems that the Chinese speakers had a well-prepared action scheme for problem talk which involves complicated cross-speaker cross-turn coordination. It is argued below that this cross-turn coordination is a relational strategy that was designed to avoid direct conflict at the meeting.

In this section, we will first look at the original meeting plan of the Chinese participants, which is fairly different from the pre-circulated agenda presented in Chapter 5 (this plan is also discussed as the Chinese participants' secret agenda in Chapter 8). It is also different from the actual meeting structure examined at the beginning of this chapter, due to the fact that this plan was disrupted by the expatriate participants' active turn-taking participation. We will then investigate the rationale underlying the design of this plan, as well as the interactive goals that were aimed at.

6.3.1. Coordinated Turn-taking as an Action Scheme

As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the problem talks (for definition, see Chapter 1 or 7) on the part of the Chinese participants were mainly carried out by Peng and Lan. Peng addressed the problem in inter-departmental cooperation, and Lan in teaching management. In this chapter, we also looked at how Wang's supportive comments on Peng and Lan's suggestions have resulted in Vincent's indignant interruptive challenges. In this section, we will have a close examination of Wang's transitional turn (Turn 3). It is then argued that the Chinese official speakers' topics are seamlessly coordinated, and that the four coordinated turns are actually a carefully planned problem talk scheme.

Wang's transitional turn (Turn 3) follows Vincent's presentation. It consists of three parts, including comments on Vincent's presentation, problems raised by Vincent, and topics for further discussion. It is suggested that the major function of this turn is to transfer the floor from Vincent to the consultants and to pave the way for Peng and Lan's problem talks. The interactive goal of this turn is reflected in the relative proportion of different topics in the topic structure.

Since this turn is not long, and has only one segment, the number of Chinese characters representing what was said will be used instead of time length to determine the relative proportion of different topics. The total number of Chinese characters of the turn is 1239. As shown in Figure 6.4. below, Wang spent the most of time on talking about the problems raised by Vincent, that is, 634 characters in comparison to 403 and 202. Among the three problems, the inter-departmental cooperation occupies three quarters of the time. This indicates that the issue of inter-departmental cooperation is the focal point in this turn's topic structure.

Figure 6.3. Topic structure of Wang's transitional turn.

<table>
<tr><th>First-level Topics</th><th>Second-level Topics</th><th colspan="2">No. of Characters</th></tr>
<tr><td>General comments on Vincent's presentation</td><td></td><td colspan="2">403</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Three problems raised by Vincent</td><td>Inter-departmental cooperation</td><td rowspan="3">634</td><td>471</td></tr>
<tr><td>Group C management</td><td rowspan="2">163</td></tr>
<tr><td>Website development</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Two topics for further discussions</td><td>Teaching management</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">202</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inter-departmental cooperation</td></tr>
</table>

It is worth noting here that inter-departmental cooperation was not treated as a problem in Vincent's presentation. In fact, it was described as a great success and part of the achievement in the first semester program (see Chapter 7). However, in the discussion of the problems, Wang spent much more time (471 vs. 163) on the cooperation issue than the other two problems, that is, 'Group C' and 'website development' which were the actual problems raised by Vincent in his presentation. It is believed that by defining the cooperative issue as a major problem, Wang was paving the way for Peng's suggestion turn, in which Peng was scheduled to give suggestions on how to improve inter-departmental cooperation.

Following the discussion of problems, Wang suggested two topics for further discussion at the meeting (see Figure 6.4.), namely, interdepartmental cooperation and teaching management. These two topics are exactly what Peng and Lan were appointed to talk about in their suggestion turns. The topical focus of Peng's suggestions is on interdepartmental cooperation, and Lan's is on teaching management.

The analysis above indicates that Wang's turn not only served to facilitate the transition of floor, but also the transition of the topical focus of the meeting, that is, from the discussion of Vincent's presentation and Vincent's program to the discussion of certain problems that had concerned the Chinese participants. That is to say, changing the items in Vincent's list of problems is actually a purposeful strategy to divert the ensuing discussions towards the direction that was more consistent with the prepared problem talk plan of the Chinese participants. This attempt to change focus of discussion was also noticed by Jack. He commented in the interview that the purpose of Wang's transitional turn was to 'let Vincent talk, but what Wang really wanted to hear was what the consultants were going to say back to Vincent', and 'it's like drawing a wall, this is teaching, here is consultants, ok, you guys are back, **WE** are out'.

Based on the discussions above, we may infer the Chinese participants turn-taking plan, or in more precise terms, turn coordination plan. It is suggested that four official turns of the Chinese speakers constitute a problem talk action scheme. These four turns are Wang's transitional turn, Peng and Lan's suggestion turns, and Wang's supportive conclusive turn.

Figure 6.4. The Chinese participants' coordinated turn-taking plan.

Phases	Turns
1. Opening Phase	1. Wang's opening remarks
	2. Vincent's Presentation
2. Suggestions	3. Wang's Transitional Turn
	4. Peng's Suggestions on Inter-departmental Cooperation
	5. Lan's Suggestions on Teaching Management
3. Conclusion	6. Wang's Supportive Comments

Figure 6.4. shows the inferred Chinese participants' plan of the meeting. It is not a written document, and it is unknown to the expatriate participants. It is reconstructed on the basis of close examination of topic coordination as above, as well as drawing on multiple sources, including the document of the pre-circulated agenda, the information provided by the participants in the post-meeting interviews, and the audio

recording of the actual interactions at the meeting.

As indicated in Figure 6.4., the original plan of the meeting structure consists of three phases, including

Phase One: opening remarks by Wang, and Vincent's presentation on the annual report of the first semester program;

Phase Two: suggestions to the Teaching Department by Peng and Lan, with introduction by Wang;

Phase Three: conclusion by Wang with supportive comments on Peng and Lan's suggestions.

It is suggested that according to the Chinese participants' plan, real communication starts from Wang's transitional turn. That is to say, Vincent's presentation was only perfunctory, and the Chinese participants had a fixed action plan that was prepared without much consideration of relevance to Vincent's presentation. Since the Chinese speakers' speeches had been coordinated and rehearsed in the preparatory meetings, no matter what Vincent was going to say in his presentation, the Chinese speakers would carry out their prepared problem talk scheme.

6.3.2. Coordinated Turn-taking as a Relational Strategy

As will be demonstrated in Chapter 7, Vincent's problem talk was completed within one single turn, while for the Chinese speakers, the task of problem talk would not be accomplished until the end of the meeting. It is a carefully-planned collaborative job accomplished by multiple speakers. It is argued that the rationale of such a complex design of action scheme is relational, that is, to avoid direct conflict at the meeting. Cross-speaker cross-turn coordination in problem talk may serve to achieve this relational goal through three aspects of functions, namely, 'water testing', group pressure, and shared responsibility.

Coordinated turn-taking is first of all a 'water testing' process. By 'water testing', I mean the communicative purposes are revealed step by step throughout the four coordinated turns, and the topics are arranged according to the degree of relational threat. The benefit of such a design is the speakers may withdraw when the relational atmosphere becomes tense. After Wang's request for comments on the two issues in his transitional turn, that is, inter-departmental cooperation and teaching management, Peng and Lan each addressed one of them. Peng's suggestions on cooperation were arranged to precede that of Lan's on teaching management, as the Chinese participants were probably aware that giving suggestions on teaching management was much more relationally threatening than giving suggestions on cooperation. Cooperation concerns both departments, while teaching management is solely the responsibility of the teaching managers. To give suggestions on teaching management may be considered as an invasion of management boundary. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 7, Peng's four suggestions are also ordered according to the degree of face threat to the teaching managers, that is, the suggestions for both departments follow those for the consultants, while the suggestions to the consultants are merely perfunctory considering the fact that Peng's speech was prepared by all consultants in the preparatory meetings. Thus, if lined up together, it seems obvious that the eight suggestions made by Peng and Lan were actually ordered according to the degree of face threat to the teaching managers, that is, from suggestions for consultants only, to those for both departments, to those for the teaching managers only.

There may be two reasons for such an ordering of suggestions. One is the desire to avoid direct confrontation at the meeting. Suggestions entail lack of satisfaction with the other's work performance, so they could be received as criticisms. Such a sequential order may make it easier for the teaching managers to accept the suggestions without losing too much of their face. By giving suggestions to themselves first, the consultants displayed the generosity of taking the responsibility for the cooperation problems and the willingness to make an effort to resolve the problems (this is similar to the function of the speech act of self-criticism discussed in Chapter 7). The other consideration in this sequential ordering may have been that it could help the speakers preserve their floor before the hearers got exasperated and interrupted their communicative plan. Arranging the two topical issues in this order, that is, Peng's cooperation issue preceding Lan's teaching management issue, makes it possible for both sets of suggestions to be articulated at the meeting. That is to say, this arrangement is motivated by a concern of the Chinese participants that if the suggestions on teaching management were given first, the teaching managers might start to challenge and confront them (and they did!), and as a result, the suggestions on cooperation would not have a chance to be articulated at all.

The second relational function of the coordinated turn-taking lies in the expected persuasive power of a group action. It seems that in Chinese culture, the persuasive power is expected to be stronger when the problem talk task is performed collaboratively by a group rather than by one individual. This may be expected as a result of group pressure. That is to say, when the impression is created that the rest of the group have reached a consensus on an issue, it is more likely that the individual would conform to the group. For the Chinese group-selves, conformity to the group is desired and internalized as a general tendency in social actions. Since an individual is not seen as a self-contained autonomous agent, it cannot exist if excluded or separated from the in-group.

Another relational effect of the coordinated strategy is that both the responsibility and the risk of the relationally threatening task are shared among the speakers. When speaking as part of the group, the authorship belongs to the group, so does the responsibility. An individual may not be held responsible then for what has been said, especially when the content and procedure have been sanctioned by the group. This means when performing a highly relationally risky act, the speaker would not have to suffer from too much anxiety about the possibility of disrupting the harmony, as causing trouble to the in-group harmony would usually be considered as immature and unacceptable within the group.

The Chinese turn coordination appears to have been a meticulously designed interactive strategy for a set of interactive goals. The transactional goal was to call attention to the problems with Jack's program. The relational goal was to avoid direct conflicts at the meeting. However, neither the transactional goal nor the relational goal of the Chinese participants was achieved at the meeting. In terms of the transactional goal, the intended addressee of the problem talk, that is, Jack, never realized the fact that the suggestions or criticisms were actually targeted at him rather than Vincent. In terms of the relational goals, despite the strenuous effort made in the design of the scheme for conflict avoidance, the interactions evolved nonetheless into a severe confrontation at the meeting.

6.4. Clashes of Expectations on the Turn-taking Level

It is argued throughout this thesis that the communicative breakdown is caused by differences in cultural expectations of interactive strategies at meetings, which are in turn believed to be rooted in differences in cultural self perceptions. In this meeting, while the expatriates saw themselves as autonomous individuals who could achieve goals of their own, the Chinese see themselves as component parts of the group-self. This section explores explanations for the differences in turn-taking expectations between the Chinese and expatriate participants at the meeting, drawing on the framework of Cultural Self Perception. We will also explore the reasons why the meticulously prepared coordinated turn-taking action scheme has resulted in a fierce confrontation, which was exactly what the Chinese participants aimed to avoid at the meeting.

The inferences regarding the expectations are drawn mainly on the basis of the interactants' own interactive behaviours and their comments on one another's performances in the interviews.

6.4.1. Turn-taking: Acting as an Individual or a Group

At the turn-taking or participation level, one significant difference was in the frame of a complete action scheme for problem talk. For the expatriate participants, the process of a problem talk could be completed within one speaker turn. For example, the speech act scheme of Vincent's presentation can be regarded as the complete action plan for his problem talk (see Chapter 7). But for the Chinese speakers, one speaker's speech act scheme appeared to be only a composite part of the complete problem talk scheme, and the process of a problem talk may not be completed until the end of the meeting.

Vincent's action scheme for problem talk appeared to have been personally decided, while the Chinese speakers' action scheme was a group plan, which involved cross-speaker, cross-turn planning and collaboration (see Section 6.3. above).

One consequence of the coordinated turn-taking scheme was that the speakers had little space for personal choices of interactive strategies. Each speaker's role had been pre-determined in the scheme. And each role had a pre-allocated script sanctioned by the group in the preparatory meetings. For example, Lan's suggestions (or in fact, criticisms) were not her own opinions. They were the opinions of the group. And her action of addressing them was not an independent personal act. It was a composite part of the coordinated group action.

However, as autonomous speakers who have complete control over the organization of one's speech, the expatriate participants may have treated the Chinese speakers' turns as self-initiated self-contained speeches with independent interactive goals. As a result, they may have focussed more on the relations between the Chinese speakers' turns and Vincent's turns rather than on the links among the speeches of the Chinese speakers themselves. Since the Chinese participants' turns were seen as independent personal actions, it is not surprising then that Vincent treated the Chinese participants' speeches as responses to him, either as direct disagreement to or as counter-argument against the points he made in the preceding turns.

As suggested by Scollon & Scollon (1995: 133), each cultural group is likely 'to make false assumptions about members of the other group' based on their own cultural expectations. Asians, who are often group-selves, will possibly overestimate a westerner's concern about the group's response to an issue; while a westerner who is often an individual-self, is likely to assume a greater degree of independence on the part of an Asian with whom he or she is negotiating (ibid). This seemed to be exactly what happened at the meeting. While the Chinese employed a coordinated turn-taking strategy to avoid possible relational damage, the expatriates interpreted the Chinese speaker's communicative intents individually, that is, to see them as the expression of personal views rather than group views.

In this section we have looked at how the group action of the Chinese participants was viewed and reacted to as individual actions by the expatriates. In the next section, we will investigate the Chinese group-selves' expectations of the interactive behaviours at meetings.

6.4.2. Expectations of Group-selves: Hierarchy and Harmony

During the process of data analysis, there was one question that I kept asking myself: why did the Chinese participants never expect that when criticised unfairly, Vincent would take confrontational actions to defend himself? The fact that they took it for granted that their strategy would work shows that its design was based on some deeply-rooted expectations regarding how to behave at workplace meetings, and that they may have assumed subconsciously that these expectations were shared among all participants, Chinese or western.

Based on the observed differences in turn-taking behaviours (Section 6.2.3.), it seems plausible to make the following inferences about the Chinese expectations: one, the participants were expected to conform to the 'restricted and directed' (Boden, 1994: 85) turn-taking rules at the meeting, that is, only to take turns when allocated in the agenda or selected by the chair; two, when there appeared a danger of conflict, the participants were expected to withdraw from the interaction in order to maintain the harmony. Drawing on the framework of CSP (see Section 4.2. of Chapter 4), it is suggested that these expectations are rooted in two supreme concerns in Chinese workplace interactions, one is the *esteem for hierarchy*, the other is the *relational harmony*.

Let's first look at how the esteem for hierarchy affects the meeting interactions. At Chinese formal meetings, especially when there is considerable hierarchical difference among the participants, speaker right is usually pre-allocated and turn sequence highly restricted. For the participants to conform to such restrictions is a display of the expected esteem for hierarchy. As suggested by Gu and Zhu's research, in the Chinese workplace, a meeting is a formal and official procedure to ratify existing power relationships and hierarchical positions (Gu and Zhu, 2002; Pan et al., 2002).

It is suggested that this expectation of esteem for hierarchy underpins the design of the coordinated turn-taking strategy. In fact, the four well-coordinated turns of the three Chinese speakers constitute a complete discussion procedure that perfectly meets the Chinese expectations of meeting conduct. As explained by Pan et al. (2002), at Chinese workplace meetings, there is a close correlation between rank hierarchy and speaking patterns, especially topic opening and closing procedures. It is always the person who is highest in rank starts the meeting, usually by introducing the main topic to be discussed. During the discussion, he or she would stay out of the discussion and take up the role of an observer. After a period of discussion, this person would take the floor again and make it clear what his or her view of the topic is. And this would be taken as the signal to close the topic for all participants. When there is a conflict, as long as the person highest in rank gives his opinion, the conflict is supposed to be resolved. Participants are not expected to defend and develop their positions through argument any further at the meeting. As claimed by Pan et al., it would be quite surprising to find anyone who would take a dissenting view now that the person of the highest rank has expressed his or her position (ibid: 123).

Pan et al.'s observation explains well the rationale underlying the design of this four-turn action scheme, as well as the Chinese participants' expectations of the expatriates' response to their actions. According to the Chinese plan, Wang introduced two topics for discussion in the transitional turn, and after some discussions of the two topics (that is, Peng and Lan's suggestions), Wang made clear his opinion, that is, he supported Peng and Lan's suggestions. A Chinese participant would have been aware that this was the final decision and no further discussion was expected any more.

What the Chinese speakers did not realize was that these expectations and tacit agreements regarding how to behave at meetings are not shared cross-culturally. Vincent not only interrupted Wang's conclusive turn indignantly to express self-defence, but also made pretty direct criticisms of Wang and the other Chinese staff. In contrast to the Chinese participants, the expatriates seemed to be less constrained by hierarchical or relational concerns. It seems that they had different expectations of how to behave in meeting interactions. For the expatriate individual-selves, a meeting is probably seen as an occasion for self-initiated interactants to exchange ideas and to accomplish tasks together, and respect for hierarchy and the maintenance of relationships are probably considered secondary to the task of achieving the transactional goals.

Apart from the high esteem for hierarchy, Chinese group-selves also expect restrained interactive behaviours for the maintenance of harmony. As demonstrated in the analysis of the Chinese participants' turn-taking behaviours above, the Chinese participants seemed to be extremely wary of actions that may cause direct conflict at the meeting. In the face of criticisms, the Chinese participants inclined to choose a non-response strategy. When the interactions became confrontational due to the expatriates' aggressive refutations and criticisms, they either chose to give up the original transactional plan or to defer self-defence till after the meeting. Their conscious restraint from relationally threatening actions is obviously in sharp contrast to the expatriates' impetuous and aggressive turn-taking styles.

One important reason that the Chinese participants refrained from confrontational behaviours might be that for the group-selves, the ability to maintain in-group harmony is valued much more than that of personal expression. In fact, when directly confronted or criticised, the ability to remain calm and to refrain from actions that may aggravate a tense situation is regarded as indication of personal maturity which is certainly valued much higher than the ability to express clearly one's own positions and beliefs.

The following extract of interview may help us to understand better the Chinese participants' expectations of a skilful interactant's reaction to criticisms at meetings. When asked how she would have responded to the criticisms if she were Vincent, Fang, a Chinese teaching manager who was also present at the meeting, made some very interesting comments:

Interview 6.2.

我觉得中国人可能更容易沟通一些，我觉得我至少不会，因为我当时我不会，呃从 Vincent 角度上来讲，我觉得他会觉得这是指责，但是对于我来说的话，我觉得这是我们沟通上的空缺，我觉得我会跟他解释我做了些什么，做了些什么，我会这样去接受，因为中国人都有一

个面子问题嘛，就是说我肯定会说，你提的这个建议是好的，我会继续努力，但是我在这方面呢我有的地方做得不够足，我做了一些事情是这样这样的，但你提的建议呢我会接受... 如果是我的话,我可能会这样去解决... 心里头有可能会不高兴，对，对，但是我不会觉得把它弄得很冲突，因为你那样去弄下去的话,双方都有可能受到伤害。

(I guess the Chinese might be a little easier to communicate with, I think at least I wouldn't, because I wouldn't immediately, err from Vincent's perspective, I guess he might feel this is criticism, but if it were me, I would feel this is a gap in our communication, I guess I would explain to them I have done this, I have done that, I would take it in this way, because Chinese all have a face concern, that is to say I definitely would say, your suggestion is good, I will continue to make effort, but on this aspect I didn't do well enough on some aspects, I did do some stuff like this and this, but I'm willing to accept your suggestions... if it were me, probably I would deal with it in this way... probably I would feel upset in my heart, yeah, yeah, but I wouldn't want to make it so confrontational, because if you do it that way, it is possible that both sides would get hurt.)

In this extract of the interview, Fang explicitly expressed her expectations of appropriate responses to criticisms at meetings. In fact, the way Hui dealt with Wang's criticism was also a good example of Chinese expectations of appropriate behaviours on such occasions. Wang's criticism of Hui was much more direct than that of the expatriates. But Hui neither got irritated nor tried to defend himself at the meeting, although his response later indicated that he probably did not accept the criticism. He first remained silent, then when pressed by Wang for response, he suggested a private talk with Wang after the meeting. In this way, he has avoided any possible damage of one another's face, knowing that both Wang and the other participants would appreciate his self-sacrifice for the maintenance of harmony.

6.5. Summary

This chapter started with an overview of the meeting structure and relational dynamics at the meeting in question. This should be able to provide a general picture of the interactions at the meeting, such as the phases, the topic(s) of each phase, as well as the dynamic changes of relational atmosphere across the phases. In this section, a number of key concepts were also defined, such as official turns and unofficial turns, relational dynamics and relational atmosphere.

The second section focused on the comparison of turn-taking behaviours of the expatriate and Chinese participants on three aspects, namely, the number of turns, the interruptive behaviours, and the reaction to criticisms and confrontation. The analysis indicated that the expatriate participants appear rather proactive and even aggressive, while the Chinese participants seemed fairly restrained and even withdrawn. It was argued that these differences in turn-taking behaviours and strategies can be explained by drawing on the framework of Cultural Self Perception (CSP).

The third section introduced a relational strategy for problem talk discovered on the turn-taking level, that is, the coordinated turn-taking strategy on the part of the Chinese participants. It was argued that such a turn-taking strategy was expected to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk through three aspects of the functions of the cross-speaker cross-turn scheme, namely, 'water testing', group pressure, and shared responsibility.

The fourth section explored the cultural roots for the clashes of expectations on the turn-taking level, which was believed to had contributed to the communicative breakdown at the meeting. It was argued that the differences in turn-taking expectations could be explained by drawing on the framework of CSP. Generally speaking, the choice of turn-taking strategies is determined by the definition of the unit of actions, that is, whether the individual or the group is seen as the autonomous agent of social actions. It was also argued that the coordinated turn-taking strategy was rooted in two supreme concerns of the Group-Selves in workplace interactions, one is the *esteem for hierarchy*, and the other is the *relational harmony*.

Next chapter will explore the differences in relational strategies on the speech act level, which will also be accounted for by drawing on the framework of Cultural Self Perception.

Chapter 7. Speech Act Strategies for Problem Talk

This chapter explores the differences in speech act strategies for problem talk between the Chinese and English speakers at the meeting. It is suggested that problem talk is a relationally-threatening speech act, and that in order to mitigate the relational threat of this act, the speaker usually adopts a 'speech act scheme' that is carefully designed and relationally oriented.

Speech act scheme refers to the pattern of hierarchical arrangement of speech acts that is designed for the realization of certain communicative goals. In exploring speech act strategies for problem talk, the study here focuses on relational considerations in the design of the speech act schemes, as well as relational considerations in the choices of hedging acts and the *realization acts* of problem talk.

This chapter also attempts to explain the rationales for the Chinese and expatriate participants' choices of speech act strategies at the meeting, drawing on the framework of Cultural Self Perception introduced in Chapter 4. It further seeks to explore the causes of the communicative breakdown at the meeting on the level of speech acts, especially from the perspective of speech act expectations and the possible influence of meeting translation.

7.1. Method of Analysis

Before the examination of the speech act strategies of the Chinese and expatriate speakers at the meeting, the method used to construct the 'speech act scheme' of a long turn will be introduced, preceded by a brief discussion of the face-threatening nature of 'problem talk'.

7.1.1. Defining Problem Talk

Problem talk is dealt with both as a speech act and as an interactive goal in this study. As an interactive goal, problem talk aims to call attention to certain problematic issues that are either within others' range of responsibility or need others' cooperation to be resolved. Problem talk is different from problem solving. Problem solving aims to reach a solution or decision through the interaction, while the focus of problem talk is not on the discussion of solutions, but on persuading the others that certain practices are problematic and need to be dealt with. Problem solving is a decision making process, while problem talk is a persuasive process. Problem talk can be more difficult than problem solving due to the fact that there may not be any consensus on whether the problem exists or not.

As a speech act, problem talk can be relationally threatening, as it may include some element of criticism and suggestion. On the one hand, problem talk may be received as criticism, since to point out problems in others' work domain is in effect to express disapproval of or disagreement with others' decisions or practices. On the other hand, problem talk may include some elements of suggestion, since when pointing out that a practice or decision is problematic, the speaker is often at the same time expressing a position on what is supposed to be done. According to Brown and Levinson's discussion of face threatening acts, criticism may threaten the hearer's positive face, while suggestion (advice) may threaten the hearer's negative face (1987: 65-67). As a result, problem talk may threaten both the positive face and the negative face of the addressees.

However, problem talk is different from criticism or suggestion. Criticism and suggestion can be said to focus more on the human agent of the 'problematic' practice, while problem talk can be performed in such a way that the problematic issues are dealt with objectively with the human agent intentionally 'forgotten' – as the western expatriates have done at the meeting. Criticism may be received as a personal attack, while problem talk could be perceived as an argument over divergent views. As an argument against a problematic practice, problem talk consists of a very important process of persuading others that something is wrong, while suggestion does not necessarily go through such a process.

As will be discussed in this chapter, the western expatriates dealt with the problem talk as argument, while Chinese speakers chose suggestion as the realization form for the problem talk. Unfortunately, the Chinese speakers' problem talk was received as direct criticism, as a result of the clash of speech act expectations and problems in meeting translation.

7.1.2. From Topic Structure to Speech Act Scheme

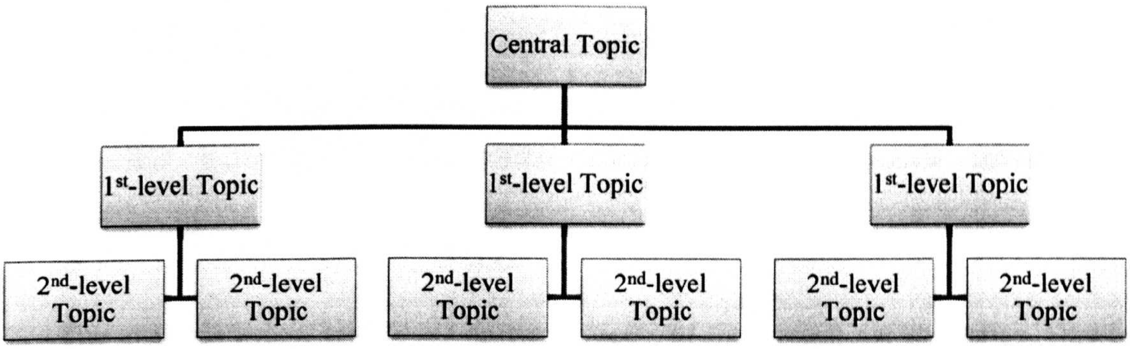
One challenge in the analysis of the current meeting data, which features extended turns, is how to work out the major speech acts and the interactive goals of each turn. Since a long turn consists of a number of speech acts, it is necessary to develop an effective way to describe the structure of the speech acts. The concept of 'speech act scheme' is proposed here for the analysis of long turns at meetings. *Speech act scheme* refers to the hierarchical organization of speech acts within a speaker turn. It is designed for the achievement of the interactive goal of the speaker, which can be seen to consist of two aspects, the relational goal and the transactional goal. It is suggested that a speech act scheme is composed of two parts, namely, a realization act that is used mainly to achieve the transactional goal, and a set of supportive acts. It is argued that there are relational considerations both in the performance of the realization act and in the supportive acts. These relational considerations are studied as relational strategies on the speech act level in the current study.

It is suggested that the speech act scheme can be constructed through the examination of the discourse structure of an extended turn. 'Discourse structure' here refers to the hierarchical organization of topics within a speaker turn. The notion of topic is a useful one in the analysis of speech acts of extended spoken discourse. Analysis of topic structure enables segmentation of an extended turn into a number of units. Each unit develops around one topic utterance (similar to the topic statement of a paragraph in written discourse), and the topic utterance can be considered as the linguistic realization of the central speech act of the unit. Just as a written piece of discourse develops around one thesis, each extended turn also has one central topic, which corresponds to a central speech act, that is, the *realization act* of the major interactive goal. The other topics or speech acts are supportive acts that are hierarchically organized to support the central one. 'Topic utterance' is a textual notion, while speech act is a discourse-as-social-action notion. The former serves to organize an extended speech, while the latter is loaded with the speaker's interactive intent. Such structural analysis of topics and speech acts can facilitate the inference of the hierarchical order of interactive goals of a speaker turn. As stated by Brown and Yule (1983: 94, original emphasis), 'our interpretation of *what* a speaker is talking about is inevitably based on *how* he structures what he is saying'.

In the analysis of the current study, *segment* is treated as the basic topic unit of a turn. A 'segment' can be compared to a 'paratone' (Brown and Yule, 1983: 100). Paratones are the structural units of spoken discourse which take the form of 'speech paragraphs'. In the meeting under investigation, since most of the official turns at the meeting in question were extended in length, the speakers intentionally paused in order for the convenience of translation. In most cases, these segments finished with the speaker's natural pauses or other paralinguistic indications of pausing for translation. Since the speaker had control over where to pause for translation, each segment was usually well-developed and self-contained with a clearly-stated topic – although there were distinct differences in the pattern of topic development within a segment between the Chinese and the expatriate speakers.

When a turn has a number of segments, it is suggested that they are grouped according to similarity of topic. As a result, the topic structure of a turn may consist of a central topic and two other levels of topics: these are referred to as *first-level* and *second-level* topics respectively. A first-level topic is the common topic shared by a group of segments, while a second-level topic is usually the topic of a component segment (see Figure 7.1.).

Figure 7.1. Topic Structure of a Turn



On the basis of the topic structure above, a speech act scheme can be inferred for each extended turn (see Figure 7.2.). A central speech act can be identified for the turn: this, however, may not always be inferred through the central topic of the turn. For example, the central topic of Vincent's presentation is ‘annual review’, but the central speech act is problem talk; Peng and Lan’s central topics are ‘interdepartmental cooperation’ and ‘teaching management’, but the central speech act for both is suggestion. A central speech act is defined by the major interactive goal of the speaker and has to be inferred through detailed analysis.

Corresponding to first-level and second-level topics, there are also first-level and second-level speech acts, which are each realized by their topic utterances. The data analysis in this study indicates that one of the first-level speech acts may be developed into the central speech act of the turn, with the others as the supportive acts. The central speech act corresponds to the primary interactive goal of the turn, which is often transactional at workplace meetings. This will be demonstrated in the analysis of the Chinese and the expatriates' speech act schemes below.

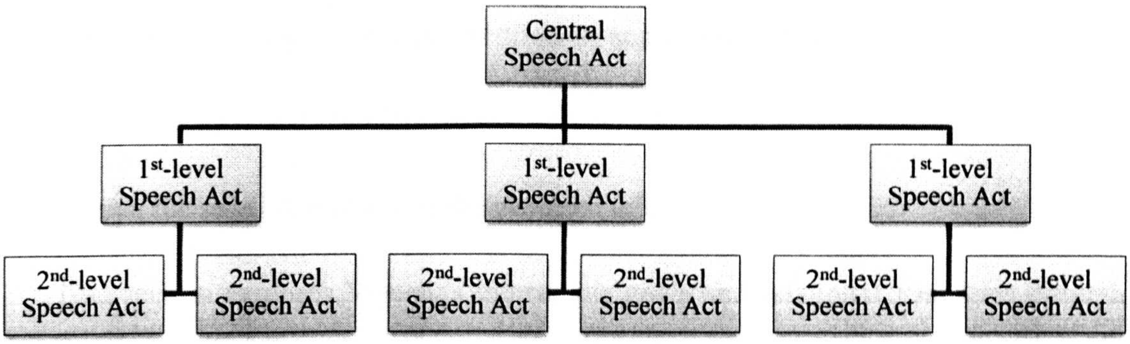


Figure 7.2. Speech Act Scheme of a Turn

The analysis below will focus on two aspects of the speech act strategies. One is how a set of speech acts were organized and why in such a way in each particular speech act scheme. In other words, how the acts are sequentially and hierarchically structured in a scheme, and what are the interactive goals of such a structural pattern. The other aspect concerns the rationales underpinning the choices of speech act for the achievement of the interactive goals, especially the relational considerations for each choice of hedging act and the realization act for problem talk.

7.2. Vincent's Speech Act Strategies for Problem Talk

As shown in the pre-circulated agenda (Figure 5.3., also see discussion in Chapter 6), apart from the chair (that is, Wang, the CEO), there were three official speakers at the meeting in question, namely, Vincent (the expatriate manager of the first semester program), and Peng and Lan (two Chinese consultant team leaders). Team leaders were one level lower than managers in the management hierarchy (for detailed information about the participants, please see Chapter 5). It is argued in this chapter that the major interactive goal of the speeches of both Vincent and the two consultants was problem talk, that is, to call attention to some problematic issues. However, the expatriate manager and the Chinese consultants adopted drastically different strategies to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk.

This section explores Vincent's interactive goals and relational strategies through the analysis of the discourse structure and the speech act scheme of his presentation. The topic structure of the presentation will be examined first; then a speech act scheme will be constructed on the basis of the topic analysis. The analysis of topic structure and speech act scheme will help us to draw conclusions regarding the interactive goals of the speaker.

On the basis of the discussion of speech act scheme and interactive goals, I will explore the relational strategies in terms of the design of the speech act scheme and the choices of the realization acts and hedging acts. Such examinations will not only help us understand the speaker's own relational orientation, but also help us make inferences about the speaker's expectations about others' relational behaviours.

7.2.1. Topics, Speech Acts, and Goals

Vincent's presentation lasted 28 minutes 14 seconds, excluding the time of translation (51 minutes in total including the translation time). In order to work out the speech act scheme of this long turn, it is crucial to examine the organization of topics at different levels. Such an understanding of the hierarchical relationships between the topics (and hence, between the speech acts) will then facilitate the investigation of the speaker's interactive goals and relational strategies.

7.2.1.1. The Topic Structure

The presentation consists of 13 segments, which are separated by the Chinese translation. Each segment can be treated as a topic unit, or a paratone (Brown and Yule, 1983: 100). As an extended speech delivered by a professional at a formal meeting, Vincent's presentation displays some distinct features of professional written language in terms of topic development. For example, the beginning of a segment is usually marked by a topic utterance, and the rest of the segment concentrates on the development of the stated topic. Vincent's segments also demonstrate the linguistic and paralinguistic cues of topic shift in spoken discourse described by Brown and Yule (1983: 101). For example, the beginning of a segment is typically marked by an introductory expression which is phonologically prominent, and the end by a summarising phrase, which often repeats the introductory expression, followed by a lengthy pause at the end, or alternatively, very low pitch on lexical items and loss of amplitude plus a lengthy pause (the marker of the end of a paratone is similar to turn completion/transference signals). These topic shift indicators show that segments can be treated as basic topic units in the analysis of the topic structure of the presentation.

In order to work out the topic structure of the presentation, the thirteen segments are grouped into four topical parts, according to commonality or logical connection among the segment topics. The topics of the four parts are regarded as the first-level topics of the presentation, and each is made up of a number of second-level topics. The table below displays the first- and second-level topics identified through analysis. The time duration indicated for each topic does not include translation time.

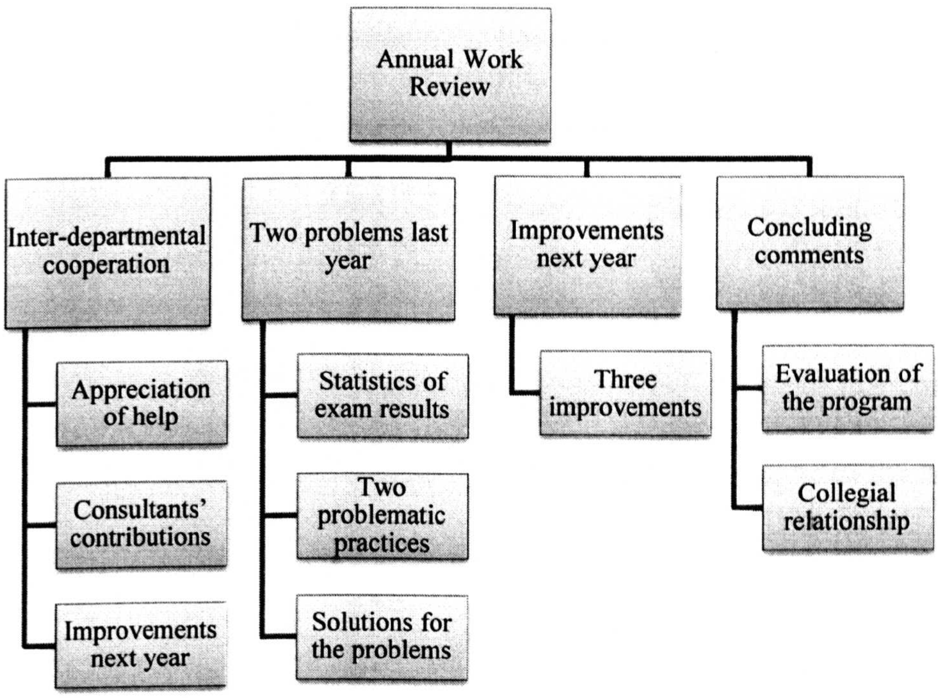
Figure 7.3. The Topics and Speech Acts of Vincent's Presentation

1st-level Topics	Time	Seg.	2nd-level Topics	Speech Acts
1. Inter-departmental cooperation	5'42"	1	Appreciation of help	Thanking
		1-3	Consultants' contributions	Affirmations
		4-5	Improvements next year	Offer
2. Two problems last year	12'19"	6	Statistics of exam results	Report+affirmation
		7-8	Two problematic practices	arguments
		9	Solutions for the problems	Report
3. Improvements next year	3'41"	10-12	Three improvements in the program	Report
4. Concluding comments	6'32"	13	Evaluation of the program	Affirmation
			Collegial relationship	Expressives
Summary	**28'14"**	**Annual Work Review**		**Report**

As indicated in Figure 7.3., the presentation is comprised of four first-level topics, namely, inter-departmental cooperation, two problems last year, improvements next year, and concluding comments. The presentation also displays distinct beginning, middle and closing phases. The first and fourth parts are the opening and closing phases, and the second and third parts constitute the middle phase. Vincent started the presentation by expressing appreciation of help from his boss and other managers, and he also 'highlighted' (Vincent's own comment) the consultants' contributions to the success of the program. The concluding comments include affirmative comments on the program management and expression of personal feelings about the collegial relationship. The middle phase includes an extended discussion of two problematic practices and reports of three improvements made for the program in the next year.

Figure 7.4. below provides an alternative graphical view of the topic structure of Vincent's presentation.

Figure 7.4. Vincent's Topic Structure



7.2.1.2. Problem Talk as the Major Interactive Goal

According to the pre-circulated agenda (see Figure 5.3), Vincent was scheduled to make this presentation for the purpose of annual review. Thus it seems natural to assume that the central topic of the presentation was the review of his performance in program management, and that the central speech act would be 'report'. That is to say, the major interactive goal of the presentation should have been to provide enough information for evaluating his work performance. However, various pieces of evidence indicate that the major interactive goal of the presentation was problem talk, that is, to draw attention to some problematic practices in the previous year.

The importance of problem talk is manifested in the proportion of time allocated to the problem topics, contrasts in paralinguistic features between segments and the patterns of interruption by Jack.

It is suggested that time allocation is an important indicator of a speaker's communicative intent. The time allocation of Vincent's presentation suggests that paramount importance is attached to the problem talk. The second topical part is the longest among the four parts of the presentation. It lasts 12 minutes 19 seconds, while among the other three parts, the longest is only 6 minutes 32 seconds (the concluding part). The difference in length indicates the difference in the degree of the speaker's attention and interest in the topical issues. That is to say, instead of affirming the consultants' contribution or evaluating his own performance, the speaker's primary concern was to point out the problems that had deeply concerned him.

It is worth noting here that apart from the problem talk in the second topical part of the presentation, there is another problem talk embedded within the evaluation topic in the concluding part, which the speaker claimed to be supportive evidence for his affirmative comment on the program management. The discussion of this problem takes more than half of the time of the program evaluation. Although this problem is not examined in the current study, it indicates clearly that problem talk is the major goal of Vincent's presentation.

There is also ample paralinguistic evidence that reveals the degree of emphasis that the speaker has put on different topics. This can be demonstrated through the comparison between the first two topical parts. When addressing the topic of inter-departmental cooperation, the speaker's tone is calm, and the speed is slow and well-controlled with a number of pauses, hesitations (such as 'err') and stretched sounds. These paralinguistic features indicate that the articulation is measured and that the speaker is very careful with the use of language. In contrast, when addressing the problem topics, the speaker's voice is much louder and faster, with a lot of phonetic stresses and distinct variations of intonations. This reflects the speaker's emotional involvement in this topic. The emphatic use of language is probably also expected to help call the others' attention to the importance of the problem topics.

Vincent's preoccupation with the problem topics is also reflected in how reluctant he was to pause for translation in the second topical part. One example is the ending of segment 7. In this segment, Vincent argued against two problematic practices. At the end of Segment 7, he spoke so passionately that it seems he forgot to pause for translation. And it seems he was reluctant to pause even after being reminded by Jack.

Extract 7.1.

V: ...err when our partner universities complained about that that I think in my mind a very serious thing, but getting back to the review, {Jack reminded Vincent to pause for translation} ok, yeah yeah, I didn't give my examples yet but I {loud laughter in the audience}

This is in sharp contrast to the shorter and well-controlled segments in the first topical part. The reluctance to pause for translation indicates that this is the topic that truly concerned him.

The paramount importance attached to problem talk is also indicated by Jack's active participation in Vincent's problem talk part, especially in comparison with his relative silence during the other three parts. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, Jack interrupted frequently during Vincent's problem talk to provide support. The interactions between Vincent and Jack in this part not only indicate their shared consensus regarding the problem topic, but also show the gravity of the topic to both of them.

The analysis above indicates that instead of providing a report for evaluation, the speaker's major interactive goal was to point out the dangers and consequences of two problematic practices. It is worth noting that the decision for the two practices were made by Wang, the boss, and supported and implemented by the Chinese staff. In fact, these practices may not even have been seen as problems by the Chinese participants. This was why Vincent made such an effort to try to persuade the Chinese participants that these practices had created a lot of difficulties for running the program. It is evident that the problem talk could easily have been received as criticism by the Chinese participants. In order to carry out the problem talk successfully, a carefully designed action scheme seems to be necessary.

7.2.2. Speech Act Strategies for Problem Talk

The analysis below will explore in detail the relational strategies employed by Vincent on the speech act level. In order to mitigate the relational threat of problem talk, a speech act scheme has to be carefully designed with relational considerations. The strategies that are used to address these relational considerations are referred to as the relational strategies for problem talk. In this part of the case study, the examination of relational strategies on the speech act level will include the analysis of three aspects, namely, the relational considerations in the general design of the speech act scheme, the type of hedging acts that are used to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk, and the choices of realization form of the problem talk.

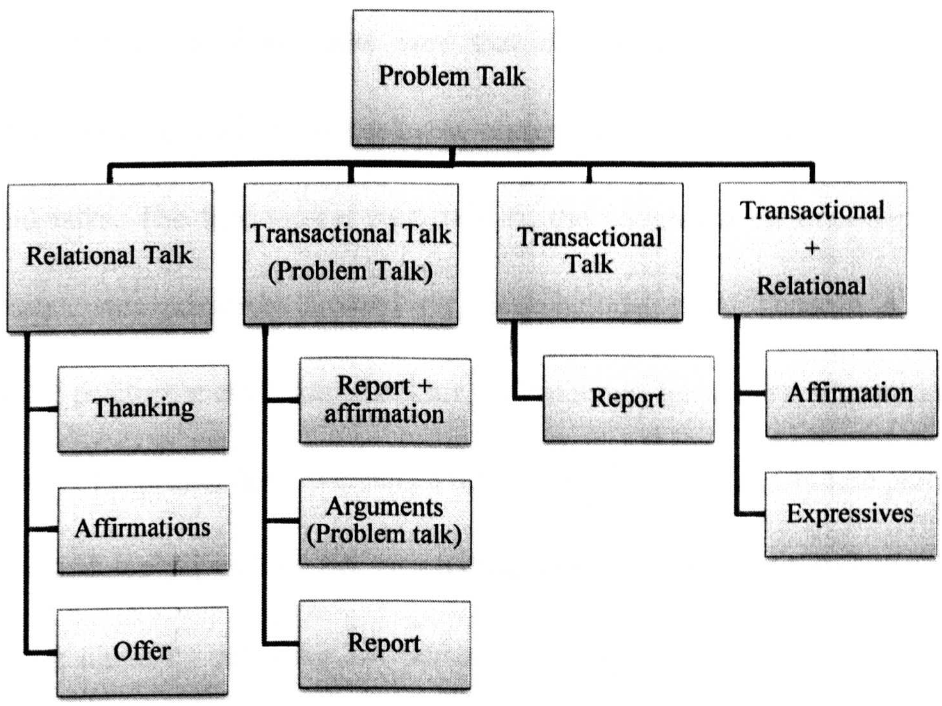
7.2.2.1. The Speech Act Scheme for Problem Talk

Vincent's speech act scheme appears to have been an action plan with an emphasis on the tactful realization of the problem talk. As discussed above, although Vincent was requested to make the presentation for the purpose of annual review, the primary interactive goal of his presentation was not to report, but to discuss two problematic practices, which had been decided by Wang and supported by the other Chinese staff. It goes without saying that Vincent's problem talk may have posed a huge threat to his relationship with his Chinese colleagues. The analysis of the speech act scheme below will focus on the strategies employed by Vincent to mitigate the relational threat.

The speech act scheme is illustrated in Figure 7.5, and has been constructed on the basis of the topic structure identified in Figure 7.3. Since the primary goal was to call attention to the problematic practices, the central speech act of Vincent's presentation is believed to be problem talk rather than report for evaluation.

As discussed above, the presentation consists of four topical parts. Part One addresses the topic of inter-departmental cooperation, and the primary interactive goal is relational. Part Two focuses on the discussion of two problems in the previous year, and it goes without saying that the primary goal is transactional. Part Three reports on improvements made in the program for the coming year, and the interactive goal is also transactional. The concluding part winds up the presentation with a balance between transactional and relational goals.

Figure 7.5. Vincent's Speech Act Scheme



Supporting the central speech act are four groups of speech acts, corresponding to the four topical parts. Since the focus of the study is on relational strategies, the relational or transactional function of each speech act group is indicated in the leading box of each group: each of these is a first-level speech act. Although a speech act may be performed with simultaneous considerations of both transactional and relational goals, it is believed that one of the aspects is usually dealt with as the major goal. For example, the interactive goal of the second part was primarily transactional, so its first-level speech act is transactional talk. The topical focus of this part is on the two problems in the previous year, and the supporting second-level speech acts are mainly arguments and reports.

Close examination of Vincent's speech act scheme indicates that he paid much attention to balancing the transactional and relational goals. Although the major interactive goal of the presentation was problem talk, which is transactional, a series of strategies were used to make sure that the problem talk was mitigated by relationally positive acts. For example, the presentation both started and finished with relational talks. The first topical part, that is, the comments on inter-departmental cooperation, was primarily focused on the relational goal. Through a series of relationally positive speech acts (thanking, affirmations, and offer), Vincent appeared to endeavour to consolidate and enhance the relationship with the Chinese participants. In the second topical part of the concluding comments, he addressed the topic of relationship again by revealing his personal feelings and expressing very positive attitudes towards the relationship. In this way, he ensured that the transactional talk, especially the problem talk, was hedged and cushioned by relational talks.

This hedging and cushioning strategy is also reflected in the second-level speech acts. If we observe the speech act boxes of the first and the last part in Figure 7.5 closely, we will notice that there is a certain symmetrical pattern in speech act arrangement, that is, expression (thanking) + affirmation vs. affirmation + expression. That is to say, the presentation both started and finished with the speech act of expression, which was either followed or preceded by the act of affirmation. Both expression and affirmation are relationally positive acts. It is suggested that these acts had significant relational functions in Vincent's speech act scheme, that is, they were used to mitigate the possible relational damage of the problem talk.

It is worth noting that although the program affirmation in the concluding segment is seen as performed mainly for a transactional goal, that is, to provide a report for annual evaluation, it may also be regarded as a relational hedging to the problem talk. The reason that this self affirmation may be treated as a relational hedging includes two aspects: one is that the act of affirmation could help to enhance the upbeat spirit after the discussion of the problems; the other aspect relates to the fact that since the consultants had been referred to as an important part of the program throughout the presentation, the affirmation of the program could also be seen as an affirmation of the consultants' contributions.

In sum, problem talk was the primary goal and central speech act of Vincent's presentation. In order to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk, the speech act scheme of the presentation was carefully designed in such a way that the transactional talk was hedged and softened by relational talk, that is, speech acts that were performed with the primary goal of relationship enhancement.

7.2.2.2. The Hedging Acts

The term 'hedging' is borrowed from studies of lexical hedges (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1972; Lee-Wong, 2005; Markkanen and Schroder, 1997). In these studies, hedging refers to lexical items that are used to modify a speaker's commitment to a proposition or to mitigate the face threat of a speech act. In the current study, the term hedging is applied also to the speech act level instead of only the lexical level. It is used to refer to the mitigating or modifying function of certain speech acts in a speech act scheme. Such hedging acts play a supportive role and are used to mitigate or modify the force of the realization acts that are used to achieve the speaker's major interactive goal.

In Vincent's presentation, the hedging acts to problem talk are mainly found on two levels of the speech act scheme (see Figure 7.5.). One is on the first level of the speech act scheme, that is, the relational talk at the beginning and the concluding parts of the presentation. The other is on the second level of the scheme, that is, in the affirmative act immediately before the realization act of the problem talk within the second topical part.

We will first examine the relational talk on the first level of the speech act scheme. Vincent's presentation started and concluded with relational talk. In these relational talk segments, he addressed the topic of inter-departmental relationship, that is, the relations between the teaching and the consultants. The second-level speech acts he used for these relational talk segments include thanking, affirmation, offer, and expression of personal feelings.

The cooperation between the expatriate teachers and the Chinese consultants had been a major problem in the previous year. The expatriates had expressed objections to the existence of the consultants in the program in various ways. As admitted by

Vincent (see line 2-6 of Extract 7.2. below), the concept of consultant was a new idea to the western teachers. This was one of the major problems that Wang and the consultants planned to address at this meeting. Probably aware of this fact, Vincent addressed this topic both at the beginning and at the end of the presentation, but in a very positive tone. In fact, by adopting a positive approach to discussing this problem of the Chinese participants' concern, he turned his speech into relational talk that served to mitigate the possible relational threat of discussing the problems of his own concern (in the second topical part).

Take the first segment of Vincent's presentation as an example (Extract 7.2.). Vincent started the presentation with the act of thanking. Although the beginning of the presentation was missed out on the recording, it can be retrieved from the meeting translation. According to the translation, Vincent, as the manager of the first semester program, started the presentation by expressing gratitude to Wang (the CEO), the other mid-level managers, as well as the consultants, for their assistance and support during the first semester.

In Extract 7.2., the first utterance is incomplete because the first half of it was missed out in the recording. The point that was made in the first utterance, that is, the consultants' contributions were 'extremely beneficial' to the progress of the program, was repeatedly emphasized in this segment (see the two utterances italicized in line 7 and 19). It is suggested that the major speech act of this extract is affirmation, which is performed by the incomplete topic utterance at the beginning, as well as the utterances in line 7 and 19.

Extract 7.2. The first segment of Vincent's presentation.

V:	*...and of course err oh who were (.) err extremely beneficial to the:: progress made throughout the first semester*, and the consultants, the whole idea (.) of a consultant for a Westerner, err especially from a Westerner who's been brought up in a Western academic context t'say, it's a very new idea, er in the west we we don't have consultants, er and I think:: (.) it was a relationship that:: took a little time to to build and >to define itself, I think we're still trying to define< exactly how this should work but:: *very important things we've done through the consultants:: er throughout the semester*, some very er good ideas were suggested and proposed to the teaching department, >on behalf of the consultants I think one of the more important < (.) were the:: teacher report forms we gave in the first semester err which was really through a consulting err meeting, other invaluable contributions on behalf of the consultants were the:: applications er to universities, I myself (.) had the opportunity to work more closely (.) with Lan cos she's responsible for Canada, and I can definitely say that without Lan most of the students won't be going to Canada, she helped with the applications, err she dealt with the parents, err and she helped to the visa, she did almost all the visa work except for the study plan, and I'm fully aware that all the consultants in the respective programs, (Consultant A) (Consultant B) with Australia, err Peter of course, oh Emily °hh yeah with Australia too, but Peter (.) and (Consultant C) (.) er with the UK, and *without this help (.) err most students won't be going abroad, so that's (.) err invaluable to the success of the program*, we are here to teach, >but we are here to teach for a purpose, and the purpose has to be fulfilled, without the consultants the purpose won't be °fulfilled°<

As indicated in Chapter 6, when Wang included the cooperation issue (that is, the expatriates' objection to the existence of consultants) as one of the problems discussed in Vincent's presentation, Vincent corrected him in an other-repair turn. He emphasized that he had expressed affirmations of the consultants by highlighting the consultants' work as 'major major contributions' to the success of the program. Now we will look at how the affirmation of the consultants was performed in a emphatic way.

First of all, the affirmation was highlighted by repetition. As indicated above, the speech act of affirmation was repeated three times in the first segment (line 1, 7, and 19). In fact, the affirmation of the consultants' contribution continued across three segments (Segment 1-3) and was performed drawing on different perspectives.

Secondly, extensive examples were used to support the affirmative comments. For example in the extract above, Vincent not only listed the specific contributions of the consultants, such as the report forms (line 9) and the details of the application to universities (line 11-16), but also made sure he mentioned all the names of the consultants (line 16-18).

Another strategy for highlighting the affirmation was the use of intensifying devices, such as intensifiers (Carter and McCarthy, 2006), double negation, repetition, and phonetic stress. In the extract above, we can find the following examples:

Intensifiers: extremely (line 1), very (line 6 and 7), definitely (line 13), and fully (line 16), etc..

Double negations: without Lan most of the students won't be going to Canada (line 13); with<u>out</u> this <u>help</u> (.) err most students won't be going abroad (line 18); without the consultants the purpose won't be °fulfilled°< (line 21).

Repetition: we are here to <u>teach</u>, >but we are here to teach for a purpose (line 20).

Phonetic stresses: <u>important</u> (line 9), <u>all</u> (line 15), with<u>out</u> this <u>help</u> (line 18), etc..

The analysis above demonstrates how the act of affirmation was performed in the relational talk in the first topical part. It is also suggested that the relational talk at the beginning of the presentation served to build up a relationally favourable environment for the ensuing problem talk.

Now we will look at the relational talk at the end of the presentation (Extract 7.3.).

Extract 7.3. The relational talk in the concluding part.

V:	...my final words are that, on a <u>per</u>sonal level, err my biggest concern is always the
	students, and I know I got upset (.) people err in different:: contexts of communication,
	and:: I apologize, er to those of you I <u>have</u> upset over the past year some when it comes
	to (.) err important decisions I don't care about myself, I (.) don't really care about the
	person I'm talking to, I care about the students, and what's best (.) er for the students, for
	the students all the time, and:: anyway so, I have said before, I do apologize for it, I'm
	incredibly proud of the work everybody's put in, err to the first semester, erm and I don't
	see myself in a: in a management role, err I'm here at (name of the university), ah I do
	feel all the time like a guest, but I feel very welcomed, as a guest, I feel valued, and
	please know that in <u>my</u> mind you're all very valued also, and I see ourselves as a team,
	we were together as a team, we fell as a team, we succeeded as a team, and I hope the
	future brings us <u>more</u> success than the success we've enjoyed this year, °thanks°

The relational talk in Extract 7.3. comprised the second topical part of the concluding segment. The first part was an affirmative comment on the program (see Figure 7.3). This relational talk consisted of a series of comments on the work relationships with the others. The speech acts used for this topic included apology for possible offences and expression of personal feelings about the interpersonal relationships. According to Searle's classification of speech acts (Searle, 1979: 15), these speech acts are referred to as the expressives for the convenience of discussion.

In this relational talk, Vincent used half of the time to apologize for previous offences to the others. Although the IFID (illocutionary force indicating device) (Searle, 1969; Searle, 1979), 'apologize', was explicitly uttered twice (line 3 and 6), and the second one was even intensified by the emphatic auxiliary verb 'do' to indicate the degree of sincerity (line 6), it is suggested that this act of apology was carried out more as a relational gesture rather than as an indication of sincere regret.

Vincent's apology was performed with a forceful account of the reason for the offences, and the account appears more like a justification rather than a regretful explanation. He claimed that the reason for the presumed offences was that his 'biggest concern is always the students' (line 1). This reason is repeated more expressively and emphatically in forms of parallelism and repetition:

> I don't care about myself, I (.) don't really care about the person I'm talking to, I care about the students (line 4)
>
> I care about the students, and what's best (.) er for the students, for the students all the time (line 5)

These forceful declarations indicate the speaker's strong belief in the appropriacy of his might-be-offensive behaviors. That is to say, the act of apology was used more as a relational gesture rather than as an expression of true regret. There may have been two messages sent in the performance of this apology. One, the speaker was admitting responsibility for previous offences and was willing to attend to the feelings of those who had been hurt; two, the speaker did not think he had done anything wrong. The former would indicate the speaker's desire to maintain the interpersonal relationships, while the latter would show the speaker's strong belief in his values and principles. The former attends to the others' face needs, while the latter concerns the speaker's own face needs. By sending the two messages together, it seems the speaker was trying to show consideration for the others' face needs without damaging his own sense of values. As suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), apology is an act that may threaten the speaker's own positive face. By regretting doing an act previously, the speaker's self-image can be damaged to some degree. By performing the act of apology with forceful justifications, Vincent showed his willingness to make a compromise between his own face needs and those of the others.

Apology is usually regarded as a negative politeness strategy, since it is used to express regret or reluctance of previous impingement on the others (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, it is suggested that Vincent's apology has been used as a positive politeness strategy, since the emphasis of this act is on attending to the others' feelings rather than expressing regret. This act may regarded as 'a token apology'.

Following the act of apology, Vincent went on to express a series of personal feelings (e.g. feeling proud and valued, and his hopes) about the interpersonal relationships. In this part, the team integrity was repeatedly emphasized. Various intensifying devices were used to stress the force of each expression: these included intensifiers such as 'incredibly' (line 7) and 'very' (line 9 and 20), and parallelism ('we were together as a team, we fell as a team, we succeeded as a team' in line 11). This emotional expression of personal feelings is a positive politeness strategy, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). As explained by Brown and Levinson, positive politeness is used as a kind of social accelerator by stressing common membership in a group. In positive politeness, shared wants and common goals are emphasized, interest and approval of each other are expressed, and reciprocity of obligations is established. It is evident that by emphasizing team integrity and expressing positive feelings about the relationship, Vincent was trying to enhance interpersonal relationships with those at the meeting by attending to the others' positive face needs.

As discussed earlier, the major goal of the expressives in this relational talk was to enhance the relationships with the Chinese participants. Since problem talk was the primary task of the presentation, this relational talk also functioned to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk and help to wind up the presentation with an upbeat spirit.

We have examined the hedging acts in the two relational talks at the beginning and the end of the presentation. Now we will look at the last example of hedging acts for problem talk on the second level of the speech act scheme. Extract 7.4. is the abbreviated transcript of Segment 6, the first segment of the problem talk part. As indicated earlier, the major problem talk is carried out in the second topical part. The sequential organization of speech acts in this part fits in well with the traditional structure of western argumentative rhetoric. This will be discussed in the next section on the realization acts of the problem talk. The actual discussion of the problems is carried out in Segment 7.

Before the start of the discussion, two acts were performed. One was the presentation of a statistical report on the exam results. The other was an affirmative comment on the issue to be discussed (see Extract 7.4.).

Extract 7.4. Affirmation as hedging in Segment 6.

V:	yeah, erm, one other thing that I'd like to talk about... {handing out the statistical report	1
	on the exam results and explaining the meaning of the figures on the printout} ...erm at	2
	the end you see the final scores, pass and: (.) fails, now there are certain things that	3
	worked out well for us, ah: one thing that worked out very well was following Group C	4

	closely, err we took students like (four student names) and others… we moved them out	5
	of C into B, and in B they did well, and they did well in the subject courses getting six,	6
	there are students in C that are good, that are motivated that have a lot of ability and	7
	potential, some of those students did very well, they went on to pass, the whole program	8
	they got six on their EILTS included	10

To have low-level students (Group C) in the program was always regarded as a major problem by the expatriates. It was also the major problem that Vincent addressed in the second topical part. However, before discussing the problem, he made an affirmative comment on the issue: 'there are certain things that worked out well for us (line 3). This act of affirmation is believed to have the function of mitigating the negative impact and the relational threat of the following problem talk.

The examination of hedging acts above demonstrates that Vincent's problem talk was well buffered by relational talk. The presentation both started and finished with relational talk that served to mitigate the relational damage of the problem talk. In other words, on the first topic level, the relationally risky transactional talks were hedged by the relational talks. On the second topic level, the realization acts of problem talk were also hedged by relationally positive acts, such as affirmation immediately before the realization acts.

7.2.2.3. The Realization Acts

As indicated above, the relational strategies on the speech act level are mainly explored in terms of two aspects of the speech act scheme. One aspect concerns the functions of the supportive acts, that is, the speech acts as relational hedging for problem talk. The other is the choice of realization form for the problem talk. Analysis indicates that the act of argument was used as the realization form of the problem talks in Vincent's presentation, and that the major relational strategy was impersonalization.

Argument as a speech act consists of a set of claims (statements, propositions, etc.). Some of these claims (the premises) serve to advance reasons for the acceptance of a particular claim within the set (the conclusion) (Cummings, 2007: 164). In the current study, we will refer to the leading claim (the conclusion) as 'the claim' of the argument and the supportive claims (the premises) as the 'reasons'.

Impersonalization refers to the avoidance of explicit reference to the human agent in the performance of a speech act. The human agent could either be the speaker or the hearer, or a third party. Impersonalization has been seen as a negative politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson (1987). Luukka and Markkanen (1997) suggest that impersonalization is a sub-type of the strategy of hedging. Impersonalization, as a relational strategy, is generally believed to be motivated by the desire to protect one's own face and/or to save the hearers' face. It is also used to make one's message more acceptable to the hearers (Luukka and Markkanen, 1997), especially when the message may threaten the hearers' face.

In the second topical part of the presentation, Vincent addressed two problems, which were actually two on-going disputes in the previous year between the Chinese and expatriate staff regarding the standard of student admission. The expatriates insisted that only students who met the requirements could be admitted to the program, while Wang and the other Chinese staff allowed students below the standard into the program. The expatriate staff believed that the decision to admit low-level students had caused serious problems in student management and had a negative impact on the quality of the program. That is to say, Wang and the other Chinese staff were believed to be responsible for the problems discussed by Vincent. In a presentation addressed to these Chinese colleagues, talking about these issues as problems could have been easily received as criticism. The strategy of impersonalization, that is, avoidance of reference to the agents of the problematic practices, may serve to reduce the degree of relational threat. Impersonalizing the problem talk may also help to focus the discussion on the issues, rather than on the persons who were supposed to be responsible for the problems.

We will now examine how the problem talks were realized linguistically. There were two controversial issues addressed in the second topical part, namely, Group C and English Only. 'Group C' students were those whose learning abilities and motivations were lower than required by the academic program. Here the problem of Group C refers to the practice of admitting such students onto the program. 'English Only' refers to another decision to accept the students who failed the first semester program onto the second semester on the basis of their English test results only. Most 'English Only' students were originally 'Group C' students in the first semester.

It seems Vincent's major goal here was to try to persuade Wang and the others to pay attention to the negative consequences of the two practices. He argued against these two problematic practices one after the other in Segment 7 and 8 (for abbreviated transcript, please see Extract 7.5.).

Extract 7.5. The problem talk in Segment 7 and 8.

V:	err, so↓, {louder} there are two things I want to draw your attention to, the one thing is	1
	having a group C we started to realize it's dangerous, cos on the whole, most of the	2
	students are weak, 42 were still in group C, only 6 passed, 36 failed, for me group C was	3
	a massive problem, err I was:: trying to help Fang who was under huge pressure and	4
	being completely disrespected at times by our students, I spent a lot of time when I	5
	should've been with my teachers, with our students, in the students' dormitory, talking to	6
	students in bed, trying to get them out of bed, get'em dressed, er walking'em to class,	7
	put'em in the class, er this is unacceptable, I would think in a university context	8
	especially a place that called itself er (name of the university), the other thing I'd like to	9
	draw your attention to is English Only, what does English Only mean? English Only, we	10
	have 26 students, these students did not pass the Program... they failed the first semester,	11
	but we allowed them on the basis of the W Test, or the Oxford Placement Test, moving	12
	into the second semester, 19 of these 26 students failed, and then we ended up on the	13
	phone trying to find people like (Partner university D) that would take them... but this is	14
	I think unacceptable, we run a program that required academic training, our partner	15
	universities want (.) academic training, and we need to give it to them... er yeah, so the	16
	examples I'd like to give that English is not enough, er I will give you:: er three, one was	17
	the examinations board, Peng was there, as a coordinator for that program, errr we can all	18
	tell you everybody who was there, that er first of all, (Partner University C) high made	19
	the admission requirements higher than before cos they were disappointed from er the	20
	first year... but↓ (.) the key:: element information is students who met (.) this standard	21
	with their results in our academic courses, in the courses we give here, even if their	22
	IELTS score was not good enough, they could go to (Partner University C) and do a	23
	preparatory course first, and they did go, the students who have high enough IELTS, but	24
	who failed the courses, or who did poorly in the course who did not meet the	25
	requirements, even if they passed the courses but they didn't do (.) well on the courses,	26
	(visitor C) refused them immediately, and that's serious thing...	27

We will first look at how the argument against 'Group C' was performed. The discussion of the Group C issue started with a topic utterance, 'the one thing is having a group C we started to realize it's dangerous' (line 1). The main clause of this utterance is 'having a Group C is dangerous', which is also the claim of the argument. The claim is supported by two reasons. One is the fact that most of the Group C students failed the courses (line 2-3); the other is that the Group C students had caused a lot of problems for the management (line 3-8). The two reasons are either supported by statistical facts or examples from personal experiences. Figure 7.6 depicts the argument scheme of the Group C problem..

Figure 7.6. The argument scheme of the 'Group C' issue.

Claim	Having a Group C is dangerous (line 2)
Reasons	Most of the students are weak (line 2)
	For me group C was a massive problem (line 3)

The discussion of the second issue, that is, English Only, started with an introductory statement, 'the other thing I'd like to draw your attention to is English Only' (line 9). This is believed to be a very indirect claim that English Only is a problem. The claim is supported by two reasons. One is the fact that most English Only students failed the second semester program (line 11-13). The other reason is that the importance of academic ability overrides that of English ability for the partner universities (line 15-16). This statement is then supported by three examples. Only one of the three examples is displayed in Extract 7.5, due to limitations of space. The argument scheme of the English Only problem is presented in Figure 7.7..

Figure 7.7. The argument scheme of the 'English Only' issue.

Claim	English Only is a problem (line 9)
Reasons	Most English Only students failed the second semester (line 13)
	English is not enough for studying abroad (line 15)

The analysis above has demonstrated how the speech act of argument was performed as the realization act of the problem talk. Now we will look at the impersonalization strategy that was used to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talks.

First of all, the subjects of the claims of the two arguments are both nonhuman (see Figure 7.6. and 7.7.). Both of the two claims are evaluative statements. And both of the subjects of the statements are the problematic practices. One is 'having a Group C', the other is 'English Only'. Although these practices were actually decisions made by Wang and implemented by the other Chinese staff, they were either referred to as a state of being ('having a Group C') or given an abstract label ('English Only'). That is to say, the human agent of the problematic practices was deliberately missed out in the discussions, and the two problematic issues were dealt with as abstract, objective entities.

In contrast to referring to the issues as objective entities, Vincent kept using the inclusive pronoun 'we' to align himself with the audience. For example, he asserted: 'we run a program that required academic training, our partner universities want (.) academic training, and we need to give it to them' (line 15). He used 'we' and 'our' to emphasize that he and the hearers were on the same side against the problems. The use of 'we' seemed to be conveying a well-intended meaning: 'I'm not blaming anybody. The most important is that we work together to solve the problems.'

Apart from impersonalizing the problematic issues, the force of the arguments also appears to have been mitigated in other ways. For example, the two claims were both mitigated by hedges, such as 'the one thing is' (line 1), 'we started to realize' (line 2), and 'the other thing I'd like to draw your attention to' (line 9). Furthermore, instead of 'problem', the two issues were addressed as two 'things' (line 1 and 9). The word 'problem' carries the indication of a very negative attitude, while 'thing' is more general, neutral and vague. This indicates the effort of the speaker to avoid being too direct or too negative.

The two problems were not only referred to as 'things', they were treated as 'things' as well. They were dealt with as objective entities that were external to both the speaker and the hearers. Throughout the problem talk, nothing was mentioned about the people who were responsible for these decisions.

By impersonalizing the issues, the problems were treated as objective entities, rather than the results of subjective decisions. By using the inclusive pronoun 'we', Vincent emphasized group integrity in the face of problematic issues. The problems were treated as objective entities that everybody, no matter which department they were from, could work together to deal with. Though impersonalizing the problem talk, the situation became 'we' against 'it', rather than 'I' against 'you'.

We may illustrate the relational effect of impersonalization by comparing the problem talk above to Vincent's later comments on similar issues. In contrast to the careful relationship management he exercised by using impersonalization in the presentation, the problem talks in Vincent's reply turn to Peng's suggestions indicate a sharp difference in his relational attitude. At that point, the relational tension had started to emerge at the meeting. Vincent's other-repair turn was not responded to by Wang, and Peng's opening remarks seemed to express direct disagreement with

Vincent's repeated affirmation of the inter-departmental cooperation. In his reply to Peng's suggestions, Vincent started to criticize the consultants directly:

> but we have consultants no matter how many times we tell them, and this (.) to me I find it unacceptable... and just refuse to do it, and to me that's unacceptable

> we had consultants (.) telling our students that all they needed to do was IELTS, I was saying no that's not true

These two extracts are obviously direct criticisms of the consultants. The human agents are stated clearly: the consultants. The criticised practices are also clearly stated as actions of the criticised agents: 'just refuse to do it' and 'telling our students that all they needed to do was IELTS'. This is obviously in sharp contrast to the impersonalized problem talk in his presentation.

In sum, the realization act of Vincent's problem talk was argument, and the relational threat of the realization act was mitigated by the strategy of impersonalization. A major function of impersonalization is to focus the point of view on the issues, rather than on the people who are responsible for them. The problems are dealt with as objective entities, rather than the consequences of human actions. As a result, the problem talk appears more as discussion of issues rather than criticism of people.

7.2.3. Individual-Self vs. Speech Act Strategies

The analysis above indicates that although requested and appearing to report for the purpose of annual review, the major transactional goal of Vincent's presentation was problem talk, which to some extent reflects the underlying negotiation of power in this organization (see analysis of organizational context in Chapter 5). In the course of the problem talk, Vincent demonstrated a strong desire to maintain or enhance the interpersonal relationship with the Chinese participants, especially the consultants. Vincent's problem talk was completed within one turn. As a result, his relational strategies are found mainly on the speech act level.

Vincent's relational strategies have been examined in terms of two aspects, that is, the general design of the speech act scheme and the specific choices of the speech acts. In terms of the general design, it is discovered that the problem talk was embedded in the presentation for annual review, hedged and cushioned by relational talks at the beginning and the end of the presentation. The analysis of the choices of the speech acts focused on two types of acts, that is, the realization act and the hedging act for the problem talk. It is discovered that Vincent's problem talk was realized by the act of argument which was mitigated by the strategy of impersonalization. Impersonalization was used to distance the problematic issues from his hearers so that the discussion could be focused on the issues, and so that the hearers would not feel criticised. The hedging acts were relationally positive acts such as affirmatives and expressives that were used to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk. For example, the use of affirmation, thanking, apology, etc. in the relational talk at the beginning and the end of the presentation served to consolidate and enhance the interpersonal relationships with the co-workers by addressing the relationship issue directly and positively. In fact, the speech act of affirmation (e.g. affirmations of consultants' contribution, of the positive aspects of the discussed issue, and of the program management, etc.) was used throughout the presentation to ensure an upbeat spirit.

Generally speaking, the hedging acts correspond to Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) concept of positive politeness strategy, while the impersonalized realization acts to their negative politeness strategy. In fact, it is discovered in this study that Vincent's relational strategies seemed to be consistent with and explainable by Brown and Levinson's face / politeness framework (1978; 1987).

However, as will be demonstrated later, there are a lot of difficulties and inconsistencies when their framework is applied to the explanation of the Chinese speaker's relational strategies. In order to compare and explain the Chinese and western speakers' strategies within the same framework, I have proposed the concept of Cultural Self Perception. As discussed in Chapter 3, in the so-called western cultures, the individual is seen as the Self, that is, the unit of social existence and social actions, while in Chinese culture, the boundary of self is drawn around the in-group. It is also argued that cultural self perception has great impact on the choices of relational strategies.

Close observation of Vincent's speech act scheme for problem talk (see Figure 7.3., 7.4. and 7.5.) reveals that there are two principles governing the design of Vincent's speech act strategies, namely, 'Be positive' and 'Be objective'. In other words, positiveness and objectivity seem to be regarded highly and this is reflected through the tactful design of the speech act strategies. It is suggested that these two principles are rooted in the western self perception, that is, the perception of the individual as the Self. The relationship between the two principles and Individual Self Perception will be discussed later. We will first look at how the two principles are reflected in the design of the speech act strategies.

The principle 'Be positive' is not only manifested in the speech acts of the relational talks but also in the acts of the transactional talks. We have discussed in detail the positive approach in Vincent's relational talks in the section on hedging acts. Apart from these relational talks, a positive attitude was also displayed and emphasized in the transactional talks, e.g. the report of the improvements immediately following the problem talk (see Figure 7.3., 7.4. and 7.5.). This helped to change the focus from the problems to the progresses, that is, the positive aspect of the development of the program. Then when commenting on the overall program in the concluding part, Vincent used a positive act of affirmation, 'is the Program good? I would say: yes, it's already:: (.) excellent'. At the end of the presentation, he expressed hopes regarding the future development with full confidence, 'I hope the future brings us <u>more</u> success than the success we've enjoyed this year' (Extract 7.3., line 12). These acts of report, affirmation and expression of hope have all conveyed a very positive and enthusiastic attitude.

It seems that to 'be positive' is a highly valued principle in making such a speech. In the interview, when comparing Vincent's presentation with the Chinese speaker's suggestions, Jack thought highly of Vincent's presentation because it displayed a positive spirit. Jack also criticized the Chinese speakers for being too negative. He complained that Peng and Lan said 'very little' about the positive things (see Interview 7.1.). In fact, the lack of positive attitude was also complained about by Vincent in the private phone call to me after the meeting. He expressed his disappointment that 'people only launched criticisms without any affirmation of the work that's done'. Then he asked rhetorically, 'why can't people be the same positive as I was?'

Interview 7.1.

> Oh I thought err (1.0) that:: (.) er Vincent's presentation (.) was err positive, err and focused on (.) a lot of (.) <u>good</u> things that were done, err including (.) <u>dea</u>ling with the bad things that happened so, err I think that was quite positive, , and I think that <u>some</u> of the suggestions made, were:: err by the consultants were positive and hopeful for some improvements in the system, which is ok, err but I thought there was also err err a very er negative spirit to the whole thing, and and and <u>from</u> (.) the consultants, there was very little said about the positive things that happened in the teaching

The principle 'Be objective' is mainly reflected on the realization form of the problem talks. In the section on realization acts of the problem talk, we have discussed the function of impersonalized statements. By using impersonalized statements as the realization form, the discussion was focused on the issue rather than the related persons. This is believed to be a relational strategy, since it helps to distance the problematic issues from both the speaker and the hearers. It ensures that nobody's face is threatened, as the issues are treated as objective entities that exist externally and independently. This strategy also reflects the western speaker's tendency to separate the issue from the persons, especially in the discussion of problematic issues. Thus it is believed that this strategy is a reflection of the principle 'Be objective'.

7.3. Peng and Lan's Speech Act Strategies for Problem Talk

Peng and Lan were the team leaders of the consultants. There were three consultant teams, responsible for the students who studied on the Britain, Australia, and Canada programs respectively. Peng was the leader of the Britain team, and Lan the Canada team. Peng and Lan were elected as the spokespersons mainly for two reasons. One was that they were believed to be sedate and prudent speakers, and therefore less likely to say things that would provoke the expatriate managers. Another reason was that they had made a good impression on the expatriate managers. They were the consultants who had never been complained about by the expatriates. In fact, their work performance had won considerable acknowledgement and affirmation from the expatriate staff (e.g. see Extract 7.2. for the affirmations of Lan and Peng by Vincent). It is evident that the choice of problem talk speakers was made mainly out of relational considerations.

In the following sections, we will examine Peng and Lan's relational strategies on the speech act level. We will first look at their topic structure and speech act scheme respectively. Then we will discuss their speech act strategies in detail. Comparisons will be made between the speech act strategies of Peng / Lan and Vincent. Finally in the discussion of the principles that govern the design of speech act strategies, we will try to explain the differences by drawing on the framework of Cultural Self

Perception.

7.3.1. Peng's Topic Structure and Speech Act Scheme

Peng's turn lasted 6 minutes 17 seconds, excluding the translation time, which is much shorter than Vincent's presentation turn (28 minutes 14 seconds). Peng's speech was delivered in English. Various pieces of evidence indicate that Peng was very nervous about making this speech. The speech was delivered at a rather slow speed, and the speech was full of false starts as well as other hesitation devices such as pauses, lengthened sounds, 'erms' and 'errs'. Apart from the pauses within the segments, Peng also paused much more frequently than Vincent, which resulted in much shorter segments.

Peng's turn consisted of ten segments, with the first one rather long and the rest shorter and shorter. These paralinguistic features may be attributed to the fact that, as a non-native speaker, Peng needed time to think and construct utterances in English. However, considering the level of fluency of his speeches at other meetings that I have recorded, as well as the fact that this was a scripted speech and it had been rehearsed several times at the preparatory meetings, a better explanation would be that Peng was rather nervous about doing this problem talk, and that he was extremely careful with the wording. The slow speed, the hesitation devices, and the shorter and shorter segments would give him more time to weigh up the choices of relational strategies.

As illustrated in Figure 7.8., the issue Peng addressed was the cooperation between the consultants and the teaching department. The ten segments can be grouped into three parts, namely, the opening remarks, the suggestions, and the conclusion. The major speech act of the opening remarks was self-criticism. The second part consisted of four suggestions. And the concluding part focused on affirmation of the progress in the cooperation. The suggestion part is the main body of Peng's speech, that is, the actual problem talk.

Figure 7.8. Peng's topic structure

1st-level Topics	Seg.	2nd-level Topics	Speech Acts	Time
1. Opening remarks	1	We did not cooperate with the Teaching Department very well.	Self-criticism	3'18"
2. Suggestions	1	The consultants should take the initiative.	Suggestion	
	2	Weekly meetings for consultants.	Suggestion	24"
	3	Biweekly meetings for both departments.	Suggestion	46"
	4-7	Information sharing.	Suggestion	1'09"
3. Conclusion	8-10	The communication is much better now.	Affirmation	40"
Summary		**Inter-departmental cooperation**	**Suggestion**	**6'17"**

In the opening remarks, the cooperation issue was defined as 'one:: (.) big shortcoming err for:: consultants' (1.0) work last year' (see below, Extract 7.6., line 1). Inter-departmental cooperation was an issue that concerned two parties, that is, the teaching department and the consultants. In order not to appear to be criticising the teaching department, Peng blamed the consultants themselves for the problems in cooperation, 'we didn't er cooperate with the teaching department very well' (Extract 7.6., line 3). Thus it is suggested that the speech act of self-criticism was used here as a hedging act to mitigate the relational threat of the ensuing problem talks.

In the second part, Peng gave four suggestions on how to improve the cooperation. It is worth noting that there were also relational considerations in the ordering of the suggestions. The suggestions were ordered according to the degree of relational threat so that it could be reduced to a certain degree. The first two suggestions were given to the consultants, and the last two to both departments. The suggestions to both departments involved actions required on the part of the teaching department. As a result, they were more face-threatening than the suggestions to the consultants themselves. It is suggested here that the function of the two suggestions to the consultants themselves was mainly relational, considering the fact that these suggestions were prepared by all consultants in the preparatory meetings. That is to say, these two suggestions had little transactional function, as they were not only known but also prepared by the consultants themselves (considering this contextual factor, it becomes clear that even the suggestions to both departments were actually only for the teaching managers.). To give two suggestions to the consultants themselves first may help to mitigate the relational threat of the latter two that were addressed to both departments. It seems to indicate that Peng, as a representative of the consultants, was suggesting that the consultants should first make efforts on their own part to resolve the cooperation problem. In sum, the two suggestions to the consultants themselves may be considered as relational hedging to the two suggestions to both departments.

In the concluding part, Peng mainly expressed affirmation of the cooperation since the start of the new academic year, 'a::nd I notice that... we communicate we communicated much better than before'. It is suggested that the major function of the affirmation in the concluding part was relational, that is, it was used as hedging to the preceding problem talks. In contrast to Vincent's strategy of using positive expressives as hedging throughout the presentation, Peng's positive expressive, i.e affirmation, only appears very briefly at the end of the speech. However, this does not mean Peng did not hedge the problem talk before and during the problem talk. As argued above, the act of self-criticism and the two suggestions for consultants all served as hedging to mitigate the problem talk, that is, the two suggestions to the departments (which were purportedly addressed to both departments).

Figure 7.9. Peng's speech act scheme.

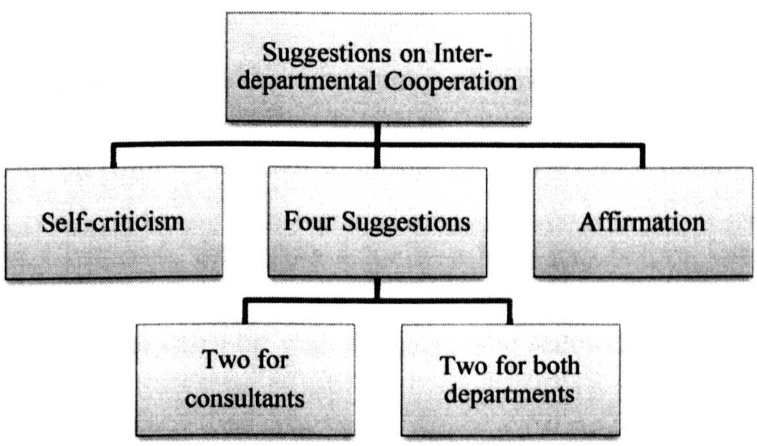


Figure 7.9. illustrates the speech act scheme of Peng's suggestion turn. The main communicative purpose was to give suggestions to the teaching managers on the issue of inter-departmental cooperation. It is suggested that suggestion was chosen as the realization form of problem talk by the Chinese participants at this meeting. The problem talk was hedged by the act of self-criticism at the beginning, the two suggestions to themselves, and the affirmation at the end of the turn. The four suggestions appear to have been ordered with careful consideration of relational effect,

that is, the suggestions to both departments were preceded by those to the consultants themselves. And the interactive function of the two suggestions to the consultants themselves was more relational than transactional, considering the fact that these suggestions were the results of extensive discussions by all consultants in the preparatory meetings.

7.3.2. Lan's Topic Structure and Speech Act Scheme

The task allocated to Lan was to address the problems in teaching management, which was obviously even more relationally risky than Peng's. Lan's speech was delivered in Chinese, though both Peng and herself had been requested to speak in English by Wang. Having sensed the emergence of tension in Vincent's reply to Peng, Lan decided to speak Chinese in order to ensure precision and accuracy of expression. As discussed in Chapter 6, there was actually a long gap before Lan's turn which indicates her hesitation to carry on with the plan. She seemed aware that the problem she was assigned to address was even more relationally threatening and might meet stronger resistance from the expatriate managers.

As indicated in Figure 7.10., Lan's turn consisted of five segments, and lasted about 5 minutes 14 seconds (excluding the translation time), similar to Peng's turn, and much shorter than Vincent's. The first segment was the opening remarks, and the next four segments were the four suggestions to the teaching department. There was no concluding part. As with Peng's speech, the suggestion part was the actual problem talk, and the opening remarks can be said to have served as hedging to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk. The hedging act used here was a statement.

Figure 7.10. Lan's topic structure

1st-level Topics	Seg.	2nd-level Topics	Speech Acts	Time
1. Opening remarks	1	The two departments have the closest cooperative relationship.	Statement	1'22"
2. Suggestions	2	Reduction of the managers' teaching workload.	Suggestion	1'11"
	3	Regular teacher meetings with conveners.	Suggestion	43"
	4	Student handbook.	Suggestion	1'08"
	5	Introduction of new teachers to the consultants.	Suggestion	50"
Summary		**Teaching management.**	**Suggestion**	**5'14"**

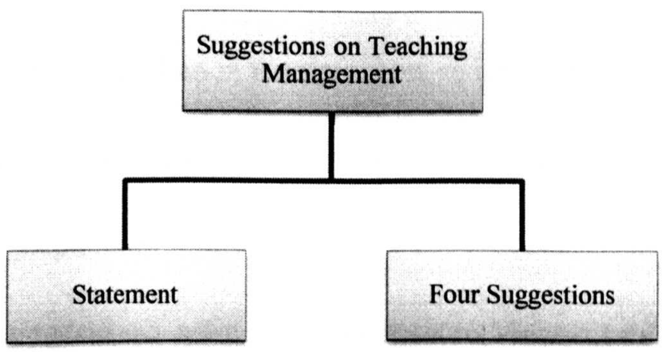
In the opening part, Lan emphasized that the Consultant Department was united most closely with the Teaching Department. The major speech act of this part is suggested to be statement. Similar to the function of Peng's self-criticism in his opening remarks, it is believed that Lan's statement also served as relational hedging to the ensuing problem talks.

In the second part, Lan also made four suggestions. As will be discussed later, although suggestion was chosen as the realization form and Lan used various kinds of softeners, her problem talk was still received by Vincent as direct criticism of his work performance. This appears to have been why Lan's suggestions touched off a fierce confrontation at the meeting between the expatriates and Chinese participants. It is suggested that there were two main reasons that Lan's relational strategies failed. One was the clash of cultural expectations about speech act strategies. The other concerned the problems in meeting translation. This will be discussed in Section 7.4.

Lan's speech act scheme is rather simple (Figure 7.11.). The major communicative purpose was to give suggestions to the teaching managers on teaching management.

The problem talk, that is, the four suggestions were preceded by a hedging act of statement, through which Lan emphasized that the two departments had the closest cooperative relationship in the organization. It is suggested that the hedging act of statement aimed to send a relational message that the consultants regarded the teaching staff as part of the in-group, that is, the Self, and that as interdependent components of one Self, for the consultants to give suggestions was an expression of in-group obligation and care.

Figure 7.11. Lan's speech act scheme



7.3.3. Speech Act Strategies for Problem Talk

This section will look in detail at Peng and Lan' s relational strategies for problem talk. I will first discuss the similarity and connection between their speech act schemes and the relational considerations in the design of their speech act schemes. Then I will examine their choices of hedging acts and the realization act of the problem talk. Comparisons will be made between the Chinese consultants' and Vincent's relational strategies.

7.3.3.1. Speech Act Schemes

Close examination of Peng and Lan's topic structures and speech act schemes reveals two similarities. First of all, they both started with opening remarks, and the topic speech act of the opening remarks served as hedging to the main body of problem talk. Secondly, they both used suggestions as the speech act to realize the problem talk. In fact, even the number of suggestions was the same, that is, they each made four suggestions. It seems that they used one formula for problem talk, that is, hedging act + four suggestions. This could not be a coincidence considering the fact that, as reported by Peng and Lan in the retrospective interviews, the content and form of their speeches were actually the result of extensive discussions of the Chinese participants in the preparatory meetings.

It needs to be emphasized again that in contrast to Vincent's problem talk scheme that was achieved within one single turn, Peng and Lan's speech act schemes were only part of the complete problem talk scheme of the Chinese participants. As discussed in Chapter 6, the Chinese participants' problem talk scheme involved cross-turn cross-speaker coordination. And as will be discussed in Chapter 8, the Chinese problem talk scheme also involved the manipulation of various contextual factors.

7.3.3.2. Hedging Acts

Both Peng and Lan used opening remarks to introduce the topical issue. Each of their opening remarks had a topic utterance. The speech act of Peng's topic utterance was self-criticism, while Lan's was statement. It is suggested that the topical speech act of the opening remarks served to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk (that is, the suggestions). That is to say, Peng's self-criticism and Lan's statement were both relational hedging acts. Let us first look at Peng's hedging act of self-criticism.

Extract 7.6. Peng's opening remarks.

P	{clears throat} I talk I I want to:: er talk talk about one:: big shortcoming err for:: consultants' (1.0) work last year, er in start we do not, err communicate with teaching department very well, a:nd we we didn't er cooperate with te teaching department very well, erm (1.0) in in fact the communication between con consultants and:: teaching department is a problem, and we both realized that, erm because there are not only language barrier, but also erm cultural differences, er just like Vincent said, err consultant or 班主任 is a:: a new concept to to them, so, it takes time to erm set a:: a system, but I think if we err communicate well er very well, ermm we can solve these problems, and:: in in fact for us con (.) consultants, we (.) err would very much like to:: err cooperate with te teaching department... er the problem is, this is mm how to, how to do that (V: mm), and:: mmn, as far as I'm I'm concerned, we can do better this year, err on the following four aspects...

Peng started his opening remarks with a topical utterance introducing the issue he was talking about, that is, 'one:: big shortcoming err for:: consultants' (1.0) work last year' (line 1). This 'big shortcoming' was the issue of inter-departmental cooperation. In contrast to Vincent's highlighted celebration of the successful cooperation between the two departments, Peng defined the cooperation as a big problem. It goes without saying that cooperation always involves two parties. To define the cooperation as a problem not only posed a direct contradiction to the affirmative comments Vincent made in his presentation and other-repair turn, but also sounded as a criticism of the teaching managers. In full awareness of the face threat of problematizing the issue, Peng decided to pin the blame for the problem on the consultants themselves. This self-blame is further emphasized by the repeated utterance: 'we didn't cooperate with the teaching department very well' (line 3). The use of 'we' referring to the consultants as the only agent of the problematic issue seems to indicate that the fault was solely on the consultants' side.

In the rest of the opening remarks, Peng attributed the reasons for the problem to impersonal factors such as 'language barrier' and 'cultural differences' (line 6). Vincent's admission of the westerners' unfamiliarity with the concept of consultants was also quoted as supportive evidence. These were further moves to unload the responsibility for the cooperation problem from the teaching managers. Finally he expressed the strong will of the consultants to cooperate with the teaching department: 'in in fact for us con (.) consultants, we (.) err would very much like to:: err cooperate with te teaching department' (line 9). This sequential arrangement of speech acts, headed by the act of self-criticism, would no doubt have been relationally-oriented in the ears of the Chinese participants, although not necessarily so for the expatriate participants.

It is evident that the speech act of self-criticism was used here as a relational strategy to mitigate the face threat of the upcoming problem talk. Through the act of self-criticism, the speaker expressed the well-meant intention to take full responsibility for the problem. It was probably expected that this act of claiming the responsibility could help relieve the face burden of the teaching managers. Moreover, it was probably also expected that after the self-blame, the consultants could gain some moral ground for discussing the problems in cooperation.

However, the relational hedging of self-criticism did not work on the expatriates as expected, and there are two reasons for this. One major reason is that for the western expatriates, self-criticism is not conventionally used as a relational strategy. To use self-criticism as a hedging act is against the 'be positive' principle of the western speakers. In fact, whether the act of self-criticism is ever used in the western discourse is still doubtful and needs more empirical investigation in the future. The cultural roots for the act of self-criticism will be discussed later in this chapter.

The other reason is that by self-criticism, the cooperation was defined as a problem, which constituted a direct contradiction of or disagreement with Vincent's definition of the cooperation as a great success in his previous turns. Furthermore, Peng's use of emphatic devices may have exacerbated this impression. In line 4, Peng claimed that the cooperation was problematic, 'erm (1.0) in in fact the communication between con consultants and:: teaching department <u>is</u> a problem'. The statement seems rather forceful due to the use of the emphatic phrase 'in fact' and the phonetically stressed 'is'. According to the COBUILD dictionary (Sinclair, 1995), 'in fact' is often used to draw attention to a comment that modifies, contradicts, or contrasts with a previous statement. It might be possible that the phrase 'in fact' had created the impression on Vincent that Peng was emphasizing that his previous comment on the cooperation issue was not true. That is to say, the use of 'in fact' could have given the impression that Peng was expressing a direct disagreement with

Vincent. In addition, the use of emphatic devices may also have given the impression that this statement was the topic speech act of this segment. The phrase 'in fact' may have been seen to function as a discourse marker that served to introduce the topical utterance. In that case, 'in fact' could have a similar function to 'but' whose status as discourse marker will be discussed in the section on translation problems.

Now we will look at Lan's opening remarks. Extract 7.7. is the abbreviated transcript of Lan's first segment. The English translation in the brackets is my translation of Lan's speech, and the meeting translation is also included as reference.

At the beginning of the opening remarks, Lan introduced the topic utterance: 'we are the department that is united most closely with the Teaching Department' (line 6). The speech act performed by this utterance is statement.

Extract 7.7. Lan's opening remarks.

L	呃::下面我想说一说一些就是，班主任作为，呃::对班主任来说呢，我们是跟教学部，呃结合最为紧密的一个部门，那么班主任呢实实际上是呃学生家长和教师之间的这样一个桥梁... 我们共同的目标，那么教学部和班主任共同的目标呢，就是要实现一个呃成功地把我们的学生培养成为可用之才，然后输送到呃各个呃国外院校去... 呃那么我们现在呢也希望就是说从教学部这一块呢提出来给教学部参考的几个呃建议，希望能够对教学部今后能够有所帮助... (err:: now I would like to talk talk about that is, the consultants as, err:: for the consultants, we are the department that is united most closely with the Teaching Department, then the consultants ne in in fact are err such a bridge between the parents and the teachers... our common goal, then the common goal of the teaching and the consultants, is to achieve a err, successfully train our students to become useful materials, then send them to err universities abroad... err then we now also hope that is to say to make several err suggestions from the perspective of the Teaching Department, hope they can be of some help in the future to the work of the Teaching Department...)
T	thank you, err that, I want to say some a few words that, err I I think er consultants is the clos closest er colleagues with the teaching department (V: mm), and we are a bridge between the teaching department to the students' parents... because we have the same purpose same goals, that is want to to to er train the successful students to go a abroad

	successfully… here are some er suggestions from <u>my</u> point of view, want to given to er mm teaching department, that hope it will be useful for <u>you</u>…

By making this statement, Lan tried to emphasise the closeness of the cooperative relationship of the two departments, that is, they are 'united most closely' among all departments in the organization. Through this statement, Lan tried to establish a strong tie between the two departments. Since they were 'united most closely', the two departments could be regarded as one whole entity. In order to emphasise this united nature of the relationship, Lan also pointed out that the two departments shared the same goal (line 3, 10 and 18). And as component parts of the whole, there was supposed to be an interdependent relationship between the two departments. As a result, both departments had the obligation to help each other and think from the perspective of the other. This emphasis on the unity of the two departments gave Lan the moral ground for giving suggestions on the teaching managers' job duty. Thus the speech act of statement would naturally lead to the act of giving suggestions 'from the perspective of the Teaching Department' (line 13).

It is evident that the act of statement was used as a hedging for the upcoming problem talk on teaching management. It was probably expected that the emphasis on the integrity of the two departments would make the teaching managers aware of the good intention behind the ensuing face-threatening suggestions. However, although Vincent agreed to the statement (see Vincent's back channel 'mm' during the translation in line 16), the relational effect of Lan's hedging strategy was still questionable, considering the aggravated relational tension following Lan's suggestion turn. The emphasis of the united relationship did not seem to make it easier for the expatriate managers to accept the suggestions either, which is clearly reflected in the fierce counter-arguments of Vincent to Lan's suggestions.

Both Peng and Lan were probably fairly aware of the relational risk in carrying out this problem talk task. As team leaders (lower than managers in rank) of a different department, to give suggestions on how to improve the teaching managers' work would not have seemed appropriate either, both in terms of range of job duty and in terms of hierarchical status. But as the spokespersons appointed by the boss and the group, they had to do it. In order to reduce the possible relational tension caused by the problem talk, they both chose to use hedging acts to mitigate the face threat of the problem talk. Peng's self-criticism was intended to relieve the face burden from the teaching managers by claiming the responsibility for the problem, while Lan's statement emphasised the good intention and moral ground for the act of suggestion giving.

Although Peng and Lan chose different speech acts as the hedging, it is suggested that there is commonality between the two hedging acts. The act of self-criticism and the statement about the unity of the two departments both emphasise obligation among members of the in-group. Peng's self-criticism emphasises the obligation to sacrifice one's little self for the collective interest of the big Self, while Lan's statement of unity emphasises the obligation to always put oneself in the others' shoes or even to walk for them. Both acts provided the speakers moral ground for the relationally risky act of problem talk. By self-criticising, the consultants had made gestures for taking responsibility, and it would be more appropriate for the teaching managers to admit their own responsibility for the problems in cooperation as well (so did Vincent in the following turn, reluctantly). By emphasising the united nature of the two departments, the consultants had claimed a moral ground for suggestion giving as interdependent components of the whole. Hedged by these two acts, the ensuing act of giving suggestions was turned into an expression of mutual obligation and care among the in-group members.

7.3.3.3. Realization of Problem Talk

Both Peng and Lan chose the speech act of suggestion as the realization form of problem talk. It is suggested that there were relational considerations in this speech act choice. As discussed before, problem talk shares some similarities with the acts of criticism and suggestion. In fact, problem talk can be easily received as criticism, which is rather face threatening and may give rise to direct conflict or confrontation. Both the Chinese and the expatriate speakers at this meeting tried to avoid giving the impression of criticising the others when conducting their problem talk. Vincent's strategy was to impersonalize the issue, that is, to distance himself and the hearers from the problematic issue by using the act of impersonalized statement, while Peng and Lan's strategy was to use suggestion as the realization form. Suggestion is considered rather positive relationally. In fact, the act of suggestion is often used as an in-group relational strategy in Chinese culture.

We will now explore the intended and actual relational effects of suggestion as the realization of problem talk, through the examination of Lan's first suggestion (Extract 7.8.).

Extract 7.8. Lan's first suggestion.

L	呃::那么,第一点呢我们想到的是，呃我们发我们观察到呢，呃我们对任何老师的聘用是非常严格的，比如说我们要呃教学部的老师要看到这个呃::任课老师的简历，进行面试，并且进行试讲等等，所以这样呢能够保证我们的教学质量是一个很高的水平，但是当这个任课老师进入到我们的呃::项目里头来以后呢，呃那么，相对来说对他们的监督和管理这方面相对来讲说呢稍微少了一些，那么，呃::作为教学主管来讲，呃::更多的应该精力呢我们觉得是否是应该更多地放在也就是说教学的管理上面，那么，我们的两位教学主管在这一年的工作中是非常的忙的，我们经常可以看到他们来的很早走的很晚，**呃::所以我们建议,是否能够减少教学主管的这个呃上课的这个次数**，而教学主管能够更多的进入到课堂里头去，呃倾听呃任课老师的这个课程，也监督他们是不是达到了教学目的完成了教学任务，是否能够保证一个很好的教学水平 (Err::, then, the first point *ne* that comes to our mind is that, err we notice we observed that::, err we are very strict with the process of teacher recruitment, for example we would err the Teaching Department managers would look at the err:: CVs of the teaching applicants, carry on the interviews and teaching trials etc, so this process *ne* can ensure a very high standard of our teaching quality, but after the teacher comes into our err:: program *ne*, err then, relatively the supervision and management of them this aspect relatively *ne* was a little bit less, then, err:: as the managers, err more should energy *ne* we feel whether should more devoted to the management of teaching, then, our two managers were extremely busy last year, we would often see them come very early and leave very late, **err:: so we suggest, whether it is possible to reduce the err teaching err hours of the managers**, so that they can have more time to go into the classrooms, err monitor err the teachers' the courses, also supervise them whether they have achieved the teaching goals, completed the teaching tasks, whether they can ensure a good teaching standard)

Lan's first suggestion to the teaching managers was to reduce the teaching managers' teaching hours. Following the topic utterance that performed the suggestion (line 8 and 21), she explained that the purpose of reducing teaching hours was to give the teaching managers more time for monitoring the teachers (line 9-11 and line

22-25). The act of suggestion was probably chosen as the form of problem talk because it was believed to be relationally constructive and thus more acceptable to the expatriates. But it was exactly this suggestion that touched off the fierce confrontation between Vincent and the Chinese speakers at the meeting.

In order to understand why this carefully designed relational strategy did not work as expected, we need to answer a series of questions. For example, what was the problem Lan tried to address through this suggestion? Why did Lan choose suggestion as the realization form of problem talk? And finally, why did this relational strategy fail to achieve the intended relational effect?

The following interview with Lan may give a clue to the answer for the first question.

Interview 7.2. Lan's comments on her first suggestion.

{laughing while speaking}就是布置给我的这个(.)任务hh°，就是由我来把这四条(.)说出来，这是我的(.)这个任务 hh°... 呃我们当时提这个，实际上主要就是关注的实际上就是说第一条，就是我提的第一条，当时为什么会提这一条呢？实际上就是说，我们从学生和家长那里得到了一些反馈，就是说这个老师怎么怎么样，那个老师怎么怎么样，因为我们平常跟学生沟通比较多一些么，（举出学生抱怨 Jack 负责的课程中一个老师的例子）... 呃就是说，这种事情，就是说如果说只是一次两次，我觉得那可能是不是学生有这样的问题，那么如果是说有很多很多次，(.)呃那么，有(.)多个学生就同一个老师说了这样的问题，那我觉得那具有一定的共性。

{laughing while speaking} this was a (.) task appointed to me, that is it was me who was to speak out the four suggestions, this is mine (.) task hh°... err we raised this suggestion at the time, in fact the focus was in fact it was on the first suggestion, that is the first suggestion I made, why at that time we raised such a suggestion? In fact that is to say, we had got some feedbacks from the students and parents, that is to say this teacher what what, that teacher what what, because we usually had more communication with the students, {giving an example of how a student complained about a teacher in Jack's program} ... err that is to say, such things, that is to say if there were only once or twice, I would feel that maybe whether the student had such problems, then if that is there were many many times, (.) err then, there were (.) many students complaining about such problems with the same teacher, then I would feel that there was certain commonality in those complaints.

When commenting on their collaborative preparation of the problem talk, Lan could not help laughing, probably at the contrast between the degree of effort made to avoid confrontation and the fierceness of conflict that was actually caused by their sophisticated relational scheme. She reported that all of the suggestions were raised and discussed by the consultants with Wang at the preparatory meetings, and that she was only the spokesperson who was elected to carry out the task of articulating them at the meeting. She also mentioned that her first suggestion was considered of supreme importance, as the consultants had received a lot of complaints from the students about certain teachers in Jack's program. (It is worth noting here that she did not mention the teachers were from Jack's program. I worked out this by comparing the names of teachers and courses with the record. In fact, during the interviews, neither Peng nor Lan seemed to notice anything unusual about addressing the problems in Jack's program at Vincent's meeting.)

Based on the information Lan provided in the interview, we can draw the conclusion that the problem that was intended to be addressed was that some students and parents had complained about certain teachers in Jack's program. And evidently as a result of these complaints, Wang and the consultants were worried about the teaching quality and decided to address this issue at this meeting. However, instead of pointing out the problem, the Chinese participants decided to make a suggestion.

Figure 7.12. illustrates the reasoning pattern of the Chinese participants. Between the actual problem and the solution (the suggestion), there are two more inferring

steps. In Lan's speech (Extract 7.8.), the two inferring steps are indicated (line 17-19), while the problem, that is, the fact that there were complaints about some teachers were deliberately left out.

Figure 7.12.

Problem	There are complaints about certain teachers
	So ↓
Inference 1.	There is a lack of teacher supervision
	So ↓
Inference 2.	More time is needed for the managers to monitor the teachers
	So ↓
Solution	Reduce the teaching hours of the managers

Now we will discuss the question of why suggestion was chosen as the form of problem talk. It seems that for the Chinese participants, a suggestion was relationally safer and more constructive than a discussion of the problem itself. By avoiding mentioning the problem, the Chinese speakers expected the expatriate managers to detect their effort to protect their face. And the act of providing solutions (suggestion) was expected to further convey their considerateness as in-group members. However, leaving out the facts made the statement that there was a lack of teacher supervision seem to have come from nowhere. This was what Vincent questioned both at the meeting and after, that is, what was the evidence for this accusation?

When asked at the interview why she did not mention the complaints at the meeting, Lan said that it would sound like a criticism. It seems that for the Chinese speakers, to point out the problem was equal to criticising the managers for not doing their job well. It is worth noting here that Lan's comments may reflect the contrast in worldview between the western and Chinese participants. Vincent's strategy of impersonalised statement reflects the western speaker's tendency to separate the issue from the agent. This is rooted in the western atomistic view of the world, which is in contrast to the Chinese holistic worldview. The holistic view is the tendency to focus on the connectedness of things (e.g. an issue and its human agent) rather than to deal with issues as separate and bounded entities. This may explain to some extent why the Chinese speakers did not choose the impersonalization strategy. They believed that the problems could not be addressed without sounding like criticising the managers, because they saw the issues and the agent as an inseparable whole.

Thus impersonalised statement was probably never a choice for the Chinese participants, due to their holistic worldview. Criticisms were probably seen as relationally too dangerous, as they could lead to open confrontation at the meeting. The act of suggestion was probably believed to be a safe choice for the realization of the problem talk. One benefit of using suggestion would be that the discussion of the actual problem could be sidestepped. Instead of the problem, the focus would be on the solution. As a result, instead of sounding like criticising, the speakers may be seen as being constructive and thoughtful.

The strategy of suggestion is consistent with the hedging act in Lan's opening remarks. By stressing the unity between the expatriates and the consultants, Lan probably intended to assert that the expatriates and the consultants were actually in-group members. And suggestion is often used as an in-group bonding strategy in

Chinese discourse. Among in-group members, giving suggestions is an indication that 'I care for you, so I would like to do the thinking for you'. To give suggestions is to stretch out one's arms saying 'hey we belong to the same Self'. And to accept suggestions is to reciprocate and reaffirm this in-group bonding.

There may be three major reasons that this suggestion strategy did not achieve the relational goal as expected. The first is the difference in cultural expectations about speech act strategies, especially regarding the relational function of suggestion. As individuals who perceive oneself as an autonomous personal self, there was no way for the western expatriates to understand the tacit 'in-group bonding' message transmitted in this speech act.

Another reason can be attributed to the fact that the problems addressed were not from Vincent's program, but Jack's. Since this was Vincent's session and Peng and Lan's turns followed Vincent's presentation, it was interactively expected by the expatriates that Vincent rather than Jack was the intended addressee. Thus it was understandable that the expatriates would expect the problem talks were targeted at Vincent rather than Jack. This was also one of the major complaints Vincent made to me after the meeting: the criticisms were not based on fact. However, it did not seem a problem for the Chinese participants to address Jack's problems at Vincent's meeting. It seems that they expected the expatriate managers to work out the intended addressee by themselves, and probably also to appreciate the Chinese speakers' effort to save their face. They actually commented that a Chinese interactant would be able to work out easily who the problem talk was targeted at. In fact, when there is incongruence between the facts and the talk, a Chinese would immediately start to search for the hidden meaning.

A third reason lies in the problems in the meeting translation. This will be discussed in Section 7.4.2. below.

7.3.4. Group-Self vs. Speech Act Strategies

The analysis above demonstrates that although the real transactional goal was to draw attention to some problems, the Chinese speakers camouflaged their intention by giving suggestions. And in order to mitigate the possible relational threat of the suggestions (since they may still sound like criticisms), Peng and Lan chose to hedge them with the acts of self-criticism and statement of group unity respectively. Self-criticism was used to hedge the problem talk on the cooperative issue that involved the responsibility of both sides, while statement of group unity was used to hedge the problem talk on teaching management of which the responsibility was solely on the expatriates' side.

Evidently neither Brown and Levinson's politeness framework (1978; 1987) nor Spencer-Oatey's rapport management framework (2000) is able to provide a plausible explanation for these relational strategies of the Chinese participants. It is suggested that these relational strategies on the speech act level are rooted in the Chinese self perception, or Group-Self Perception as discussed in Chapter 4. To see the in-group as the Self means the in-group is regarded as the unit of social existence and social actions. As a component of the in-group Self, each individual is constrained by the moral commitment to the in-group. This may be referred to as the sense of mutual obligations. It is argued in this section that the Chinese speakers' choices of realization acts and hedging acts are underpinned by this moral commitment.

In order to compare with the explanation of the expatriate speaker's strategies, two other principles are proposed here, which are believed to be rooted in the sense of mutual obligations upheld by the Group-Selves. The two principles are 'Be bound' and 'Be considerate'.

The principle 'Be bound' refers to the Chinese participants' inclination to emphasise in-group unity in interactions. Peng and Lan's hedging acts both reflect this tendency. Although self-criticism and statement of group unity are different speech acts, they are actually chosen for the same purpose, that is, to emphasise the in-group relationship between the speakers and the hearers. And this emphasis on in-group unity lays the relational foundation for the ensuing problem talk (in the form of suggestion).

The principle 'Be considerate' is a result of the mutually interdependent nature of the in-group relationships. In other words, this principle is based on the supreme value of mutual obligation in Chinese culture. As an in-group member, one is required to pay attention to other members' needs, wishes and feelings constantly. It may be not too extreme to say that an individual's attention is expected to be paid more, if not solely, to the others' needs than to his own, knowing that his own needs will be looked after by the others.

The link between the principle 'Be bound' and the statement of group unity seems evident. It may be necessary to explain briefly the relation between the principle 'Be bound' and the act of self-criticism. Self-criticism is an act that is not rarely seen in Chinese workplace meetings. It is both used as a relational gesture and as an invitation to others to cooperate in problem solving. In performing self-criticism, personal face (the small self) is sacrificed for the collective interest of the group (the big Self). Thus self-criticism is an in-group strategy that is consistent with the principle 'Be bound'. It shows the cooperative attitude of the speaker and re-affirms the in-group unity to the hearers.

Peng's strategy of self-criticism is in sharp contrast to Vincent's strategy of affirmation which was also used as a hedging act for problem talk. Self-criticism and affirmation correspond to different interactive principles, the former to the Chinese principle of 'Be bound', the latter to the western principle of 'Be positive'. For Vincent, Peng's self-criticism was probably too negative, while for Peng, Vincent's affirmation was probably too unfamiliar a strategy to react to since it put too much emphasis on personal achievement instead of in-group unity. As admitted by Peng, he realized after the meeting that Vincent's affirmations should have been reciprocated. He said that he should have said something affirmative as well, but he did not know why he did not, and that perhaps because it was not a conventional practice. Lan explained this in more detail. She admitted that she was very pleased by Vincent's affirmation of her work. But affirmation seems not a practice that she was used to.

Interview 7.3. Lan's comment on the use of affirmation.

当然他提出来的话，我当然会觉得那么至少我这一年的工作应该是就是说得到了一个认可，当然会觉得是会非常的舒服，呃::但是呢就是说，就是说如果是我来做::总结发言的话，就是说像以前啊我们也做过这种像类似于述职报告的时候，是不会说要::想到会有这样一个::有一个这样的一个过程，就是说有一个这样的程序吧，就是说应该每一个人或者说跟你工作相合作呀相关的这样一些人都应该给他一些这样的一些正面的一些语言啊，或者说给他一些这样的表达这样的一个感谢... 但是现在我开始感觉到，就是说可能如果以后，因为我觉得这是很好的一种这是一个很好的习惯，应该来讲，就是说中国人可能在这方面吧不是特别的呃::就是说中国人不太善于正面的去赞扬你啊

(Of course when he mentioned that, I of course would feel then at least my work this year that is to say have got a recognition, of course I would feel would feel very pleased, err:: but that is to say, that is to say if it were me making such a presentation for annual review, that is to say like before we also made presentation similar to this, we wouldn't think of there would be such a:: such a process, that is to say there would be such a procedure, that is to say you should give everybody or, those people who are relevant to your job who cooperate with you, should give them some positive language like this, or give them some expression of thanking like this... but now I start to realize, that is to say maybe in the future, because I feel this is a very good this is a very good habit, should be, that is to say Chinese people maybe on this aspect are not very err:: that is to say Chinese are not good at paying positive compliments to you)

Both Peng and Lan admitted that affirmation is relationally constructive, but they could not explain why they did not think of using it as a relational strategy. Lan also commented later that it felt 'not quite natural' to make affirmative comments to people's face.

To use affirmation as a relational strategy reflects the face wants of western self. As self-contained individuals with clear boundaries, western speakers see 'personal worth' or 'personal actualization' as the most important values and motivations at the workplace. As suggested by Markus and Kitayama (1991), for independent selves, a positive view of self is linked more to fulfilling the tasks associated with being unique, expressing one's inner attributes, and asserting oneself. They are expected to take credit for their successes, explain away their failures, and in various ways try to aggrandize themselves. Thus the use of affirmation is relationally constructive as it meets the expectation of asserting the personal worth of the individual-selves.

In contrast, the Chinese speakers see 'obligations' and 'group inclusion' as the key values. As observed by Nisbett (2003), the goal for the self in relation to society is not so much to establish superiority or uniqueness, but to achieve harmony within a network of supportive social relationships and to play one's part in achieving the collective goals of the group. Personal self is not important compared to the group-self, neither are personal feelings comparable to the responsibilities and obligations to the group. Attention is never paid to 'personal worth' or 'personal actualization' as the motivations of the individuals since they are individual-self concepts. When personal boundary is eliminated, there is no sense to talk about personal value any more. The most important personal qualities are those related to interpersonal relationships and interdependence (Wang and Cui, 2005). A member of the group should and has to do well to meet the expectations of the group, if one wants to be included and to depend on the group for achieving personal interests. Therefore, affirmation is placed not on positive comments on individual attributes or achievements, but on contributions to the in-group harmony. Evidently the strategy of self-criticism is rooted in the supreme value of in-group unity of the Chinese culture, which unfortunately did not strike a chord with the western managers.

As reported in the retrospective interviews, it seems that the Chinese participants had to make a choice between criticism and suggestion in terms of the realization of the problem talk. That is to say, it seems that the impersonal strategy used by the expatriate was never a choice. This may reflect the Chinese holistic view, that is, their tendency to focus on people and the lack of ability to separate the issues from people.

Now we will have a look at the connection between the strategy of suggestion and the principle of 'Be considerate'. Suggestion is also an in-group strategy that is based on the values of in-group unity and obligations among the in-group members. If the argumentative power of Vincent's impersonalized statement is in its emphasis on objectivity and truth-seeking, the argumentative power of the Chinese speakers' suggestion lies in the emphasis on the in-group nature of the relationship. Being a member of a united whole entails commitment to mutual obligations. Indeed, one important feature of the Chinese group-self is the importance of the sense of obligations. Because their small selves exist interdependently, everyone is supposed to be aware of their responsibilities and obligations towards the in-group others. The sense of obligation entails thinking for each other and giving advice when something is believed to be wrong in the other's practice. Giving suggestion is not just for the good of the others, but also for the sake of the collective interest and goal. As observed by Young (1994: 110), for Chinese, hard work and mutual aid signify a commitment to human relatedness and social belongingness, while utterances of praise or gratitude work to create distance, subtly subverting the mutual support and consideration taken for granted among in-groups. Thus the in-group strategy of suggestion is guided by the principle of consideration, which is rooted in the highly valued sense of in-group obligation.

In sum, the Chinese speakers' relational strategies are governed by two principles, that is, 'Be bound' and 'Be considerate'. These two principles reflect the highly valued pursuit of in-group unity and sense of obligations which are rooted in the Chinese self perception. In a culture that sees the maintenance of in-group harmony as the supreme goal, whatever act that is performed for the common goal of the group-self, be it self-criticism or suggestion, is acceptable and expected to be appreciated.

7.4. Causes of Communicative Breakdown

On the speech act level, the causes of the communicative failure at the meeting may be explored in terms of two aspects: the clashes of expectations about relational strategies and the problems in meeting translation.

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese and expatriate participants both had carefully planned their relational strategies for problem talk at the meeting. Evidently both of them had a clear relational goal to achieve at the meeting, that is, in spite of the relational threat of the problem talks, they wanted to maintain or even enhance the interpersonal relationship through the interactions. However, the interactions evolved into a fierce confrontation at the meeting. In fact, both Vincent and Jack quit their positions at *SITE* by the end of the academic year.

About the Chinese speakers' speech act behaviours at the meeting, Vincent had two main complaints: first, the Chinese speakers were too negative in evaluating his work performance; in fact, there were only criticisms and no affirmation at all; second, the criticisms were not based on facts. We have discussed why Vincent had the impression that the criticisms were not based on facts, both in Chapter 6 and in this chapter. That is, the problematic issues that the Chinese speakers discussed were actually not from Vincent's program, but from Jack's; and there were relational considerations for the Chinese to do this. In the discussions of interactive principles above, we have also explored what strategies of the Chinese speakers gave Vincent the impression of being too negative and why Vincent was so upset about this.

In this section, we will try to account for the communicative breakdown mainly by exploring the western and Chinese participants' expectations about speech act strategies. In addition, we will also investigate the influence of the translation problems on the transmission of the Chinese speakers' relational intentions.

7.4.1. Clashes of Expectations about Speech Act Strategies

It is argued in this study that the communicative breakdown is mainly caused by clashes of cultural expectations about relational strategies for problem talk. And it is discovered that the western expatriates' relational strategies were mainly found on the speech act level, and the Chinese speakers' strategies were found not only on the speech act level, but also on turn-taking and contextual levels. This chapter focuses on the examination of the differences in the expectations about speech act strategies, as well as how these differences led to the communicative breakdown at the meeting.

As discussed in Chapter 3, communicative breakdowns are often caused by the interactants' tendency to rely on their own cultural frames to make inferences and interpretations regarding the other's communicative intent and relational attitude. Since structures of expectations are formed through the accumulated past experiences of socialization in a certain culture, members of a cultural group are expected to share interpretive frames. Although each individual may have different frames formed through different personal experiences, the conventionalized forms of interactions are generally expected to be shared. When inconsistency appears between the other's behaviour and one's expectations in intercultural interactions, rather than being understood as clashes of cultural expectations, the frustrating encounters are usually interpreted in light of racial prejudices or attributed to personality traits or relational attitudes (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Due to this habitual interpretation with reference to one's own frames, the relational effort made in the choice and performance of the speech acts is often not able to strike a resonance with the interlocutors who hold a different structure of expectations. And incongruence in the other's choices of strategies might be interpreted according to one's own frame, often in terms of relational orientation. When the culture-specific relational strategies are interpreted according to the interpretive frame of another culture, the interactive intentions may well be distorted, which in turn may lead to communicative failures or even relational damages.

Since interactive frames are expected to be shared, a participant expects by default that other participants would use the same type of strategies in achieving the same type of tasks. That is to say, the specific strategies adopted by a participant may reflect his expectations about the strategies of the other participants. In this study, the expectations about speech act strategies are mainly inferred through the analysis of the speakers' speech act schemes, and their choices of hedging acts and realization act of problem talk. The participants' retrospective comments in the interviews have also been used to help infer their expectations about other participants' relational strategies at the meeting.

What were the Chinese and expatriates' expectations about relational strategies on the speech act level then? The analysis in this chapter indicates that the western expatriates' relational strategies were governed by two basic principles, that is, 'Be positive' and 'Be objective', while the Chinese participants' strategies were based on two completely different principles, that is, 'Be bound' and 'Be considerate'. These different sets of principles are believed to be rooted in the cultural self perceptions.

Different principles lead to different expectations of the design of the speech act scheme, especially the expectations of the choices of hedging acts and realization acts. Based on the principle of 'Be positive', the expatriates expected the hedging acts for problem talk to be affirmation; and based on the principle of 'Be objective', they expected the realization act of the problem talk to be impersonalized statement. In contrast, the Chinese expected the hedging acts for problem talk to convey the emphasis on group unity (that is, the principle of 'Be bound'), even by using the act of self-criticism that may seem highly negative to the expatriates, and the realization act of the problem talk to be the highly personalized act of suggestion.

Since the relational tension was built up by and manifested in Vincent's fierce counter-arguments and emotional complaints (see Chapter 6), we may explore the reasons for the communicative breakdown by focusing on how the Chinese speakers' interactive behaviours may have contradicted Vincent's expectations.

If we compare the Chinese and expatriates' hedging acts, we may notice that the Chinese hedging acts were either flouting the western interactive principles, or failed to enact the expatriates' frame of relational strategies. For example, Peng's act of self-criticism was totally against the principle of 'Be positive', while Lan's statement of group unity failed apparently to grant the expected moral ground for problem talk to the expatriates. As a result, neither self-criticism nor statement of group unity struck a chord with the expatriate participants. Furthermore, when the act of affirmation was used by the Chinese speakers, it might not have sounded like affirmation to the expatriates, e.g. the affirmation of the expatriate managers' devoted work attitude by stating that they came very early and left very late. The affirmation was made according to the Chinese frame of relational strategies. No wonder Vincent complained that the Chinese speakers launched direct criticisms without any affirmation.

In terms of the realization act of problem talk, the Chinese choice of suggestion is obviously in sharp contrast to the expatriates' expectation of impersonalized argument as the appropriate form of problem talk. An important payoff of the expatriate's realization form is that the problematic issues can be kept at a safe distance from both the speaker and the hearers. In contrast, the act of suggestion is people-centred. When making suggestions, the agent of the problematic issues cannot be avoided. As a result, it is much easier for a suggestion to be received as a criticism, especially if exacerbated by problematic translations (see below).

The act of argument also reflects the western pursuit of truth as the highest value, while the Chinese speakers' choice of realization act does not address the expatriates' concern for the truth value of their statements. The Chinese participants' interactive concern is always focused on relationships. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese speakers' suggestions were meant for Jack. They considered this intentional confusion of addressee as a relational strategy for avoidance of direct confrontation. However, lacking such an expectation in his interpretive frame, Vincent could not detect the relational intention underpinning such a strategy. In fact, he was not only seriously offended but also infuriated by the false accusations.

Apart from the differences in interpretive frames, there were also other factors that contributed to the communicative breakdown at the meeting, such as problems in meeting translation and the Chinese participants' manipulation of contextual factors (see chapter 8). In the next section, we will discuss how the relational effort made by the Chinese speakers was offset by the problems in language use in translation. In Chapter 8, we will further explore the clashes of expectations on the situational level.

7.4.2. Problems in Meeting Translation

We will use Lan's first suggestion as an example to exemplify how the meeting translation caused problems to the effective working of the Chinese speakers' relational strategies.

Lan's speech was delivered in Chinese, though both Peng and herself had been requested to speak in English by Wang. Having sensed the emergence of tension in Vincent's reply to Peng, Lan decided to speak Chinese in order to ensure precision and accuracy of expression. As discussed in Chapter 6, there was actually a long gap before Lan's turn which indicates her hesitation to carry on with the plan. She was quite aware that the problem she was assigned to address was even more relationally threatening than Peng's and might meet stronger resistance from the expatriate managers. However, what Lan was not aware was that meanings could be lost or distorted in translation, especially those that were expressed through subtle relational devices.

As expected by the other Chinese participants, and as we have seen, Lan made great effort to reduce the possible offence of her speech. She was very careful in her choice of relational strategies, both in terms of the design of speech act scheme and in the use of softeners and personal pronouns. In fact, her speech sounded very tactful and understated to a Chinese ear. However, her speech became a turning point in the relational dynamics at the meeting. As discussed in Chapter 6, her speech touched off the open confrontation at the meeting. In contrast with his previous reply patterns of agreeing and thanking, Vincent not only rejected Lan's suggestion directly, but also argued against her points forcefully. After that, Vincent became more and more offended and emotional. Apart from questioning the truth value of Lan's statement, one thing that Vincent complained most about was that Lan has launched severe criticisms at him without any affirmation of what has been done. That is to say, although Lan had intentionally chosen suggestion as the form of problem talk, and although her tone sounded very mild to the Chinese participants with the use of softeners and affirmations, her speech was still received by the expatriates as direct criticism.

In order to explore how a mild suggestion was turned into an harsh criticism, I will compare the meeting translation to my translation of Lan's first suggestion. In my translation, I have tried my best to transmit the original meaning of the speech, including both the transactional and the relational aspect. I have paid special attention to the translation of discourse markers and the softeners, the latter including the modality, the lexical hedges, rephrasing, and hesitation fillers, etc. It is worth noting that my version of translation is not intended to be used as a model for meeting translation. The purpose of this translation is just to compare the differences in terms of relational strategies between the meeting translation and Lan's original speech. However, to transmit the relational orientation of the speaker during on-spot translation is not a question of concern in the current study.

Extract 7.9. Two versions of translation of Lan's first suggestion.

L	Err::, **then**, the first point *ne* that comes to our mind is that, err we notice we observed that::, err we are very strict with the process of teacher recruitment, for example we would err the Teaching Department managers would look at the err:: CVs of the teaching applicants, carry on the interviews and teaching trials etc, so this process *ne* can ensure a very high standard of our teaching quality, but after the teacher comes into our err:: program *ne*, err **then**, relatively the supervision and management of them this aspect relatively *ne* was a little bit less, **then**, err:: as the managers, err more should energy *ne* we feel whether should more devoted to the management of teaching, **then**, our two managers were extremely busy last year, we would often see them come very early and leave very late, err:: ***so we suggest whether it is possible to reduce the err teaching err hours of the managers***, so that they can have more time to go into the classrooms, err monitor err the teachers' the courses, also supervise them whether they have achieved the teaching goals completed the teaching tasks, whether they can ensure a good teaching standard
T	number one, er I know when we hi hire teachers to our Program, we have ver very strict rules, we look at the teachers' CVs, and give them interviews and find very qualified teachers to come to us, ***but the thing is, when they come to the Program to teach, er I think actually we lack of the watching***, or kind of assurance to them, when they when during the works here, err as a manager, or as a co manager of the teaching department, I think much more work should be put on the management, I know all errr two of you er er all come very early and leave very late, erm and I think probably it it must be better if er you kind of come er come to class to watch the teachers' classes, rather than er to take many courses to teach, er lessen your teach workload and do much more manage work err will will be much better for the management, and achieve the tasks of as a manager.

The following analysis suggests that two major differences between Lan's original speech and the meeting translation may account for the expatriates' misunderstanding of Lan's communicative intention. One is the differences in discourse structure and the use of discourse markers to signal the structure. The second difference is in the use of softeners, which is crucial for creating the intended relational effect of mildness and tentativeness in Lan's act of suggestion giving.

7.4.2.1. The Obscured Focus

Close examination of the two versions of translation in Extract 7.9. above (Chinese readers can compare the meeting translation to the Chinese original in Extract 7.8.) reveals that the meeting translation has more or less faithfully followed the literal meaning of the Chinese original at the utterance level. However, the original speech was intended as a suggestion, while the meeting translation might be received as a criticism. It is suggested that this is a result of the culturally different expectations about discourse structure as well as the misuse of discourse markers in the meeting translation.

Let us first look at the discourse structure of Lan's original speech. Having indicated in the opening remarks that there were four suggestions to make, Lan started the first suggestion with an unfinished utterance: 'Err::, then, the first point that comes to our mind is that' (line 1). However, instead of finishing this utterance, she jumped to describe an observation about teacher recruitment procedure. In fact, the real 'point' only appeared towards the end of the segment, introduced by the summary discourse marker 'so', 'err:: so we suggest whether it is possible to reduce the err teaching err hours of the managers' (line 10). With the suggestion making its appearance at the end of the segment, the topic development process was finally completed.

Figure 7.13. Discourse structure of Lan's first suggestion.

Topic Development		Speech Act
Preparatory process	The teacher recruitment procedure ↓ then There is a lack of teacher supervision	Affirmation Statement

	↓ then More energy required from the managers for teacher supervision ↓ then The managers' full devotion of time last year ↓ So	 Suggestion Statement / affirmation
Topic	**Reduction of the teaching hours of the managers**	**Suggestion**

As indicated in Figure 7.13., before the delivery of the topic utterance, there was a whole preparatory process. Each step of the preparatory process was introduced by the discourse marker 'then' (那么) (line 1, 6, 7, and 9). Lan first made a highly affirmative comment on the teacher recruitment procedure, then she stated gingerly that the supervision of teachers was 'relatively' 'a little bit less' (line 7). She then suggested tentatively that more energy was required from the managers. Finally she stated that the managers had been very busy the year before. This last statement was both an argumentative step and a relational gesture. As an argumentative step, it provided logical support to the final suggestion of reducing the managers' teaching hours by indicating that the managers had no more time to spare. As a relational gesture, it can be regarded as an affirmation of the managers' full devotion to work. It could also serve to mitigate the face threat of the problem talk by attributing the problem to an external factor, that is, the problem existed not because the managers did not work hard enough, it was because they had no more time to spare for supervision. The expression 'often see them come very early and leave very late' is a cliché in Chinese that is often used to praise someone's 'wholehearted' dedication to the collective cause. In Chinese workplace, it seems the import of attitude overrides that of everything else. A person's performance is primarily evaluated according to the degree of devotion to the work (that is, the collective interest), which is in turn believed to be reflected in the time spent at work, rather than concrete achievements. It is worth noting here that although the literal meaning has been translated at the meeting, that is, 'I know all errr two of you er er all come very early and leave very late' (line 20), this relational strategy of affirmation evidently did not strike a chord with the expatriate participants due to the cultural difference in expectations about positive evaluations at the workplace.

The discourse structure of Lan's first suggestion reminds us of the 'because...so' construct discussed in Young (1994). Young observes that in contrast to the 'topic statement + discussion' pattern of western discourse (e.g. Vincent's 'claim + facts / examples' pattern), there is usually a lack of thesis statement at the beginning of Chinese discourse. The definitive summary statements of main arguments are usually delayed until the end, and that "because" and "so" are used, respectively, to initiate the discussion and mark the transition to the definitive summary statements (ibid: 29). Although Lan did not use 'because' to initiate the discussion, she did use 'so' to signal the transition to the main point she intended to make, and she did have an extensive discussion stage before finally delivering the summary point.

According to Young (1994), this discourse pattern may indicate a cultural emphasis on cooperation, prudence and clear-headed caution in interactions. By delineating the background information and revealing the reasoning process, the Chinese speaker not only invites cooperative interpretive effort from the interlocutors, but also helps the interlocutors build up the psychological and mental expectations for the intended key statement. The speaker probably also expects to avoid confrontation by providing the justifications before the delivery of the proposal. It may also provide space both for the speaker and the hearer to retreat if tension is sensed during the preparatory process. It seems that this discourse pattern itself can be viewed as a relational strategy. It indicates an emphasis on the interpersonal (rather than transactional) aspect of the communication.

If the statement about unity in the opening remarks was used to justify the act of giving suggestions, the set of speech acts of the preparatory process was used to justify the suggested proposition itself.

Now let us look at the discourse structure of the meeting translation. As suggested earlier, the misuse of discourse markers in the meeting translation and the difference in cultural expectations about discourse patterns was one likely cause of the expatriates' misunderstanding of the intended speech act of Lan's first suggestion. In the meeting translation, the statement on the lack of teacher supervision is topicalized due to the misuse of discourse markers. As highlighted in Extract 7.9., the following utterance is quite likely to sound like a topic utterance to an English speaker: '<u>but</u> the thing is, when they come to the Program to teach, er I think actually we lack of the watching' (line 17). As a result, the key speech act of this segment may appear to be criticism to the expatriates, rather than the intended act of suggestion in the Chinese original. The topical status of this statement is signalled and enforced by the discourse markers 'but' and 'the thing is'.

It is observed that 'but', as a discourse marker, can be used to signal the transition to the topic utterance in English discourse. In Vincent's presentation, 'but' was frequently used as a discourse marker. For example, at the beginning of the presentation, after an admission that the cooperative relations between the consultants and teachers took some time to develop, Vincent turned to the topical utterance, 'but:: very important things we've done through the consultants:: er throughout the semester' (Extract 7.2., line 6). A number of examples were then used to support this statement. Another example is in the concluding segment. After admitting that there were still problems in the program, Vincent turned to the topical utterance, '<u>but</u>, err, is the Program good? I would say: yes, it's already: (.) excellent'. Then he went on to provide supportive evidence for this statement. These examples indicate that the phonetically stressed or elongated 'but' can be used to signal the transition from the hedging act to the topical act of the discourse.

The discourse marker 'the thing is' is used to focus attention on what follows and usually signals that there is a problem (Carter and McCarthy, 2006). The combination of the discourse markers 'but' and 'the thing is' in the meeting translation probably signalled to the expatriates the topical status as well as the problematic nature of the teacher supervision issue. The problematic nature of this issue was further emphasized by the adverb 'actually', which can often be used emphatically to imply a contrast between a desirable and an undesirable situation (Carter and McCarthy, 2006). The use of the discourse markers 'but', 'the thing is', and the adverb 'actually' can be said to have created the following impression: 'the following comment is about an undesirable problematic issue, and it is the real business I'm going to talking about. It deserves much more attention than the preceding affirmative comment on the recruitment procedure, which is only a hedging for relational purposes'.

Figure 7.14. Discourse structure of the meeting translation.

Topic Development		Speech Act
Hedging	The teacher recruitment procedure ↓ But the thing is	Affirmation
Topic	**There is a lack of teacher supervision**	**Criticism**
Arguments	More energy required from the managers for teacher supervision	Statement
	The managers' devotion of time last year	Statement
Solution	Reduction of the teaching hours of the managers	Suggestion

Figure 7.14. shows the discourse structure of the meeting translation. Since teacher supervision is topicalized and problematized, the statement on the lack of teacher supervision may not only have been received as a criticism, but also as the leading speech act of this segment. The intended topical act of suggestion may then be seen as a supportive move, providing a solution for the problem. Comparing Figure 7.13. and 7.14., it is evident that the discourse structures of the original speech and the meeting translation are completely different, and that the topical focus has been completely obscured or misplaced in the meeting translation due to the misuse of discourse markers. To make it worse, the discourse pattern of the meeting translation is consistent with the English speakers' expectations about discourse patterns, that is, topical utterance at the beginning (maybe with brief hedging), which reinforced the

expatriates' impression that the intended speech act was criticism.

7.4.2.2. The Softeners Lost in Translation

Having examined why the intended act of suggestion was turned into the act of criticism, we will look at how the act was performed in terms of the tone of the speech. Lan's Chinese speech sounded rather hesitant, reserved, and tentative, while the meeting translation of her speech sounded fairly forceful and assertive. In fact, the Chinese participants all reported that Lan's tone was 'very mild' and 'well-toned'. Lan used a lot of hesitation devices and softeners to indicate her awareness of the relational threat of the intended act as well as her reluctance to perform this face-threatening act, while the translator's speech seemed very aggressive and forceful. It is suggested that the tone, as a result of the use of softeners and some other paralinguistic devices, can also be used as a relational strategy. If a speaker's tone cannot be conveyed appropriately through the translation, the relational effort made by the speaker may unfortunately miss the interlocutors' attention.

In order to exemplify the difference in the tone of speech, we will compare two pairs of utterances from my translation of Lan's speech and the meeting translation. The first pair is the understated statement of the supervision problem in Lan's speech (Extract 7.10.).

Extract 7.10.

L	but after the teacher comes into our err:: program *ne*, err then, relatively the supervision and management of them this aspect relatively *ne* was a little bit less	1 2
T	<u>but</u> the thing is, when they come to the Program to teach, er I think actually we lack of the watching, or kind of assurance to them	3 4

As discussed above, the use of the discourse markers 'but' and 'the thing is', and the adverb 'actually' has topicalized the speech act and turned it into a topicalized criticism in the meeting translation. In contrast, the Chinese original actually sounded very mild and tentative. Apart from the use of the hesitation filler 'err' and the discourse marker 'then' which also has a softening function, Lan also used '*ne*', a Chinese softening particle for which there is no English counterpart. The adverbs 'relatively' and 'a little bit' are also used to mitigate the force of the statement by comparing the supervision to the recruitment procedure which was claimed to be very successful. As a result of the use of these downtoning devices, the Chinese original sounded much milder than the meeting translation.

Extract 7.11.

L	then, err:: as the managers, err more should energy *ne* we feel whether should more devoted to the management of teaching	1 2
T	err as a manager, or as a co manager of the teaching department, I think much more work should be put on the management	3 4

Another example is the suggestion that the managers should devote more energy to supervision of teachers (Extract 7.11.). The meeting translation also appeared more assertive and forceful than the Chinese original. Although the hedge 'I think' was used to mitigate the force of the speech act, the intensified comparative 'much more' made the suggestion seem rather accusatory, as it seemed to be suggesting that the manager's current work was much less than what was desirable. In fact, the Chinese original intended to suggest that the managers needed to devote more energy to teacher supervision rather than teaching by themselves. This can be inferred when the topic utterance is articulated toward the end of this segment. And this inference task may not be difficult for a Chinese audience who would expect the topic utterance by the end of the discourse. Apart from this confusion of comparison, the softeners also played an important role to mitigate the relational threat of this suggestion, including 'err', '*ne*', 'we feel', and 'whether'.

7.5. Summary

This chapter started with the introduction of an elaboration of the notion of 'problem talk' and the method used to infer the speech act scheme of a long turn at meetings. Then the speech act strategies for problem talk of the expatriate and Chinese official speakers were compared in terms of three aspects, namely, the design of the speech act scheme, the choices of hedging acts and the realisation act for problem talk.

Analysis indicated that the expatriate speaker's speech act scheme was carefully designed in such a way that the problem talk was hedged and softened by relational talk. The problem talk was realised through the act of statement, and the major relational strategy used for the realisation was impersonalization. The problem talk was also mitigated by relationally positive acts, such as affirmation and expressives that were either immediately preceding the problem talk, or embedded in the relational talk at the beginning and end of the presentation turn. Drawing on the framework of CSP, it was argued that the expatriate's speech act strategies can be explained by two principles held by the Individual-Selves, namely, 'Be positive' and 'Be objective'. These two principles are consistent with the two face wants of Brown and Levinson's framework (1987). This indicates that Brown and Levinson's framework can be applied to the analysis of the Individual-Selves' relational strategies on the speech act level.

Following the examination and discussion of the expatriate's speech act strategies, the two Chinese official speakers' strategies were also investigated. Analysis indicated that the two speakers shared a very similar design of speech act scheme as well as the same realisation forms of the problem talk. Their problem talks were realised through the act of suggestion, and hedged either by self-criticism or emphasis on in-group unity. It was pointed out that the Chinese speakers' speech act strategies could be explained by drawing on CSP, but not by Brown and Levinson's framework (1987). Drawing on CSP, it was argued that the Chinese speech act strategies can be explained by two principles: Be bound and Be considerate, which are rooted in the sense of mutual obligations in a Group-Self culture.

It was suggested that on the speech act level, there were two sets of causes for the communicative failure at the meeting. One comprised the clashes of expectations about relational strategies, and the other comprised the problems in meeting translation.

The next chapter will explore the relational strategies of the Chinese participants on the level of the situational context, which will also be accounted for by drawing on the framework of CSP.

Chapter 8. Contextual Factors as Relational Strategies

In the preceding two chapters, we have examined the differences between the Chinese and the expatriate speakers in relational strategies on the discourse dimension. The analyses show that the expatriates' problem talk is completed within one turn, while the Chinese participants' problem talk is a cross-turn, cross-speaker, coordinated action scheme. The expatriates' relational strategies for problem talk are mainly found on the speech act level, while the Chinese relational strategies are not only found on the speech act level, but also on the turn-taking level.

In this chapter, it is argued that the Chinese problem talk not only involves relational strategies in the discourse dimension, but also in the contextual dimension. The analysis in this chapter will demonstrate that various contextual factors are purposefully manipulated by the Chinese participants to serve the transactional goal (that is, the problem talk) and the relational goal (that is, the avoidance of conflict at the meeting).

In Chapter 3, a Multi-Level Model (see Figure 4.1.) was proposed for meeting analysis. It is suggested that in order to understand the interactions at a meeting (both for the analysts and for the interactants), four levels of contextual factors need to be considered, namely, the intra-event situational context, the inter-event context, the organizational context, and the contemporary socio-economic context. The factors at the inter-event, organizational and socio-economic levels that may have had an impact on the interactive behaviours at this meeting have been discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter will focus on the examination of situational factors at the intra-event contextual level. The analysis will focus on three aspects of the situational factors that have been manipulated by the Chinese participants as relational strategies – namely, agenda, formality and participant roles. It is suggested that the clashes of cultural expectations at the situational level may also account for the communicative breakdown at the meeting.

8.1. Agenda

The agenda seems one of the most indispensable factors both in the conduct of meetings for the participants and in the analysis of meetings for the researchers. However, as questioned rhetorically by Pan et al. (2002: 109), we might all make an agenda, but what is its purpose?

Handford (2010: 27) suggests that 'the function of an agenda is to provide an outline of the explicit goals of the meeting'. On the other hand, Boden (1994: 156) claims that 'to define an organizational agenda is to define not so much a specific conversational procedure in talk as to describe a talk-based activity through which organizational members pursue local issues, maintain and advance departmental positions, and occasionally even follow a slated agenda'. While the function of agenda suggested by Handford has focused on the prototypical function of an agenda from the view of meeting as 'practice' (Handford, 2010), Boden's contention draws our attention to the role of the agenda in the struggles towards the achievement of interactive goals that could be different for the meeting participants from different departments.

The analysis below will investigate how the situational factor of the meeting agenda has been employed as a relational strategy for problem talk by the Chinese participants.

8.1.1. Open Agenda vs. Hidden Agenda

Lampi (1990; cited in Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 31) suggests that there are two types of agendas in negotiation discourse, namely, open agenda and hidden agenda. The open agenda is 'less interesting and readily available' (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 31) to all participants, while the hidden agenda is either shared by part of the participants or known only to one individual. It is suggested that hidden agenda is a means of 'information manipulation' (Lampi, 1990) that has a determining influence on the outcome of meeting interactions.

When examining the inter-event contextual information in Chapter 5, we have noted that the Chinese participants held a number of preparatory meetings before the meeting in question. In those meetings, the Chinese participants contrived a meeting plan that was different from what was shown in the official agenda (see Figure 5.3.). In Chapter 7, we also noted the difference between the announced topics of Peng and Lan in the official agenda and the actual topics they addressed at the meeting. Instead of reporting on their work performances as stated in the agenda, they each made a set of suggestions to the expatriate teaching managers. In Chapter 6, we discovered that the Chinese official speakers were actually carrying out a coordinated turn-taking plan in which the topics of the Chinese speakers were synthesised seamlessly, the goal of which was to achieve the task of problem talk while avoiding direct conflict at the meeting. These strategies at the speech act and turn-taking level were all part of the problem talk scheme of the Chinese participants, which the expatriate participants were oblivious to. In this section, we will have a close examination of the hidden agenda of the Chinese participants.

As explained in Chapter 5, the meeting in question is the first session of a meeting series. Figure 8.1 shows the plan of this meeting, extracted from the pre-circulated agenda (for the complete version of the meeting series agenda, please see Figure 5.3.).

Figure 8.1. the pre-circulated agenda (the spelling, grammar and layout are kept as original.)

1. 1st Session Meeting Agenda I. 05-06 Academic year first semester work summery Addresser: Vincent Free discussion followed by. II. 05-06 teaching service work summery, that is, work summery of consultants' team Addresser: Peng Lan Free discussion followed by.

According to the pre-circulated agenda, the meeting would develop around two sets of presentations, one by Vincent on the management of the first semester program, the other by Peng and Lan on the consultants' work performance. Each set of presentations would be followed by free discussion.

However, as shown in the Chinese participants' coordinated turn-taking plan in

Figure 6.4, Peng and Lan were actually allocated the task of giving suggestions to the expatriate managers, and their speech had been prepared by the group and rehearsed repeatedly in the preparatory meetings. This indicates that the information about Peng and Lan's topics on the pre-circulated agenda (Figure 8.1.) was deliberately made misleading. In fact, the coordinated action scheme for problem talk, in which Wang, the chair, was also an active participant, was totally unknown to the expatriate teaching managers.

The interview with Fang also reveals that the expatriate managers were not told the real meeting purpose, that is, the problem talk. Fang was the Chinese teaching manager of the Pre-Program, and she shared the same office with Vincent and Jack. She mentioned that Wang came to their office two weeks before the meeting to inform the expatriate managers of the meeting series plan:

Interview 8.1. Fang's comment on agenda setting.

> 呃在前期的时候没有明确地告诉大家我们这个开会的最实际的意义，最根本的要想解决的问题是什么，只是说我们就想做一个回顾，作一下总结，然后大家讨论一下... 呃，之前王老师来了，然后跟 Jack 和 Vincent 说了，但是我觉得好像解释得不是特别清楚，就是说作一下总结...
>
> (err before the meeting people were not told clearly the most practical goals, the fundamental problems needed to be resolved, only told us we needed to do a review, make a summary, then everyone discuss together... err, Wang came to the office, then told Jack and Vincent, but I feel it seems the explanation was not very clear, only said make a summary...)

According to Fang, the expatriates were not told that the major goal of the meeting was to discuss some 'fundamental' problems. Instead, they were only informed that the purpose of the meeting series was to 'do a review' or 'make a summary'. Based on Fang's report, it seems plausible to conclude that the real purpose of the meeting was not shared with the expatriate managers. It was a hidden agenda that was only shared by the Chinese participants.

The major difference between the hidden agenda and the open agenda is in the transactional goal of the meeting. While the open agenda indicated that the major purpose of the meeting was annual review, the major goal of the hidden agenda was actually problem talk. The difference in goals determines the difference in meeting types. According to the open agenda, the meeting proper was an annual review meeting, while in the hidden agenda, the meeting was a problem talk meeting. Difference in understanding of meeting types necessarily leads to different expectations in terms of meeting frames. That is to say, the Chinese and expatriate participants have come to the meeting with completely different expectations in terms of interactive goals and interactive behaviours at the meeting.

8.1.2. Differences in Meeting Frames

As argued throughout this study, the communicative breakdown at the meeting was caused by clashes of expectations at different levels of the interactive frames. This section will explore how the differences in meeting frames have contributed to the communicative failure at the meeting.

According to Holmes and Stubbe (2003), the goal or purpose is the major defining factor of a meeting. The other situational features within the meeting frame are primarily determined by the goals of the meeting. As suggested by Holmes and Stubbe, there is 'an interesting correspondence at a very general level between the functions or purposes of a meeting, the nature of the relationship between the participants and the predominant structural pattern which characterizes it' (2003: 70). This is consistent with the view of this study that each type of meetings corresponds to an interactive frame of meeting conduct and meeting participation that the participants from the same cultural background are expected to share. And the interactive frame, that is, 'a sense of what activity is being engaged in' (Tannen and Wallat, 1993) is of vital importance for successful communication, as without it no verbal or nonverbal message could be interpreted.

Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 64) suggest that meetings can be classified into three distinct types according to their primary or business goals:

1. planning or prospective / forward-oriented meeting
2. reporting or retrospective / backward-oriented meeting
3. task-oriented or problem-solving / present-oriented meeting

It goes without saying that annual review meetings belong to the second type, while problem talk meetings the third.

As indicated in the section above, the expatriate managers believed the meeting in question is an annual review meeting, based on the pre-circulated agenda (Figure 8.1.) and the verbal notice from Wang (Interview 8.1.). We will now explore the possible components of an interactive frame of annual review meetings that the expatriate managers might have expected in the meeting.

Based on the literature in annual review meetings, or 'performance appraisal meetings' as termed in the literature (Clein et al., 1987; Cohen, 1987; Holbrook Jr, 2002; Levy and Williams, 2004; Bouskila-Yam and Kluger, 2011), we may infer the following key features of such meetings in the western workplaces:

1. Purpose: to evaluate the staff member's job performance.
2. The dyadic feature: evaluator vs. evaluatee (employer vs. employee).

The purpose of the appraisal meeting is to evaluate the subordinate's work performance, based on 'performance goals and measures' (Cohen, 1987). Apart from evaluation, the appraisal meetings may serve other functions, for example, 'developing staff members, communicating expectations, and coaching them in areas of performance deficiency'(Cohen, 1987). It seems that there are usually two participants at a performance appraisal meeting, with the interactive roles of evaluator and evaluatee. The institutional relationship between the evaluator and the evaluatee is usually the employer and the employee, that is, the superior and the subordinate. Handford also reports that in his business meeting corpus, the majority of review meetings are between managers and subordinates (2010: 13).

Based on the information above, we may infer that the expatriate managers may have had the following expectations regarding the annual review meeting:

1. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate their job performance.
2. Their interactive role was the evaluatee, while the role of the others at the meeting was the evaluator.

In contrast to the expatriates' frame of annual review meeting, the Chinese participants' expectations were based on the frame of problem talk meeting. Figure 8.2. shows the major differences between meeting frames of the Chinese and expatriate participants.

Figure 8.2. Differences in meeting frames.

Situational Factors		Expatriates	Chinese
Type of meeting		Annual review	Problem talk
Goal of meeting		To review and evaluate Vincent's performance	To point out problems in Jack's program
Participant roles	Wang	Chair , evaluator	Chair , supporter of P & L
	Vincent	Presenter and evaluatee	Presenter
	Peng & Lan	Evaluators	Presenter of problems
	Jack	Unaddressed	Intended Addressee

Within an annual review meeting frame, the expatriates saw all of the other participants, including Wang and the other Chinese administrative staff, as the evaluators of their job performance, while for the Chinese participants, the annual review meeting was only a convenient form for them to conduct the problem talks. Within the frame of problem talk meeting, Peng and Lan played the role of problem presenters with support from Wang, the chair and boss, with Jack as the intended addressee and Vincent in the role of the presenter only (the expected participant roles will be discussed in detail in Section 8.3).

The differences in expectations of meeting frames may explain why the expatriate managers felt upset and offended at the meeting. First of all, within the frame of annual review meetings, the others were seen by the expatriates as the evaluators of their job performance, but apart from Wang, the other participants at the meeting were either of the same rank as them or lower in terms of institutional hierarchy. In fact, the two Chinese official speakers who gave suggestions to them, Peng and Lan, were lower than them in rank. It probably felt rather inappropriate to the expatriate managers that they were evaluated by staff who held lower positions. Secondly, most of the other participants were from other departments, and thus they were probably believed to lack professional expertise to evaluate their work effectively. This was actually pointed out by Vincent in his rebuttal turn (see Extract 7.4.). Finally, the frame of evaluative meetings may have also contributed to how Peng and Lan's suggestions were perceived by the expatriate managers. This needs to be elaborated a little more below.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the view of turn-taking as self-initiated autonomous actions may account for why the expatriates failed to see the coordinated nature of the Chinese speakers' turns. It is suggested here that another factor that has contributed to this is the differences in expectations of meeting frames. As suggested by Gumperz (1982), situated and context-bound interpretations are crucial processes in social interactions, and the function of the activity type is not to determine meaning but simply to constrain interpretations by 'channelling inferences so as to foreground or make relevant certain aspects of background knowledge and to underplay others'(ibid: 131). Within the frame of evaluative meeting, Peng and Lan's suggestion turns following Vincent's presentation were probably received as feedbacks to Vincent's report, or in fact, as criticisms of Vincent's work performance, even though they had indicated through various cues that their suggestions were not targeted at Vincent.

This may explain why Vincent was more and more offended, and self-selected repeatedly to defend himself and to launch direct criticisms of the Chinese participants. Thus we can see that the expatriates' lack of awareness of the hidden agenda has led to their misinterpretation of the Chinese speakers' communicative purposes, although it was carefully planned as a relational strategy.

8.1.3. The Hidden Agenda as a Relational Strategy

It is suggested that the motivation for the hidden agenda strategy was mainly interpersonal. That is to say, the effort of manipulating the meeting agenda was actually made in order to maintain collegial relationships and to avoid direct conflict at the meeting. Before exploring how the hidden agenda was expected to facilitate the interpersonal goal, we will first try to explain why the intended communicative goal was concealed.

The major purpose of disguising the real action plan was probably to disarm the expatriate participants. If the meeting was labelled as 'problem talk', the contradicting views between the Chinese and expatriate participants would probably be foregrounded. As a result, it might meet more resistance from the expatriate participants. In fact, various types of evidence indicate that the expatriate managers had been rather resistant to this meeting series. As discussed in Chapter 5, there had been fundamental differences in professional interest and values between the Chinese administrative and the expatriate teaching staff. Jack even referred to the Chinese administrators as 'gold-diggers' and 'low people' who were believed to have serious moral deficiencies (see Interview 5.2. and Document 5.1.). In Chapter 6 and the section above, it was also mentioned that the expatriates considered it a waste of time to talk about academic issues with the Chinese staff (including Wang, see analysis of Extract 6.4.), as they were believed to lack the necessary professional expertise 'to judge academic context properly' (line 25, Extract 6.4.). The consultant informants also reported in the interviews that communication with the teaching staff had been completely blocked, and that the expatriate managers, especially Jack, had refused to share any information with them. Considering the expatriates' attitude towards the Chinese staff, it seems understandable that the Chinese participants, especially Wang, would worry that putting the real action plan, that is, the problem talk, on the agenda, might provoke hostility in the expatriate managers, and as a result, might disrupt the problem talk plan that had been prepared strenuously over the past two weeks.

The interpersonal function of the hidden agenda lies in the choice of the meeting type of annual review. It is suggested that two features of the annual review meetings may facilitate the interpersonal goal: one is the evaluator vs. evaluatee roles particular to appraisal meetings, the other the Chinese cultural expectations about the functions of annual review meetings.

The meeting type of annual review makes it possible that a temporary power relationship is established between the Chinese consultants and the expatriate managers. Within the frame of annual review meeting, the presenter plays the interactive role of the evaluatee, while the others the evaluators. The evaluators have a certain degree of power over the evaluatee and the legitimate right to comment on the evaluatee's work performance. Although the Chinese consultants, such as Peng and Lan, were lower than the expatriate managers in terms of institutional hierarchy, the meeting type of annual review may grant them the legitimate right and power to speak up for once, considering the difficulty felt by the consultants to communicate on an equal basis with the teaching managers previously. This is probably the reason why Wang and the other Chinese participants decided to use the meeting type of annual review. By making use of the procedural advantage of the annual review meetings, the Chinese participants hoped that not only their speech acts of suggestions could be perceived as acceptable and unmarked in form, but also their voices could be heard and taken seriously by the expatriate teaching managers, who, as the evaluated, were supposed to be less powerful and thus more cooperative at such meetings.

Another important reason that annual review was chosen as the meeting type is related to the cultural expectations of the functions of such meetings. The annual review meeting is a common practice in state-owned organizations or government institutions, in which the staff from the same department sit together and each gives a report of one's own performance in the past year. According to my observation at *SITE* and other Chinese workplaces, the annual review event often not only refers to the meeting proper where staff report for assessment, but also includes a series of entertaining activities, such as team building games, banquets and karaoke, etc. The venue is often a hotel at a popular resort. In the retrospective interview, Fang also mentioned that at such meetings, people usually just each read out a report on their work performance, and it is almost done only for a perfunctory purpose. It seems to me that the major function of annual review meetings in the Chinese workplace has more to do with consolidation of in-group unity rather than job evaluation.

For a culture that sees relationship as the primary concern, it seems understandable that the focus at annual review meetings is on in-group cohesion rather than performance evaluation. For the Chinese staff, annual review meetings provide an opportunity to enforce the collective identity. As group-selves, it is of vital importance to have the sense of belonging. The confirmation of group identity can be achieved through group censoring and group acceptance at such settings. This may also explain why annual review was chosen as the meeting type for the problem talks at the meeting in question. The expatriates were probably expected to refrain from confrontational behaviours in the face of differing opinions. As commented by Fang, even if there is a criticism or a differing opinion raised at such an occasion, a Chinese evaluatee would not react so strongly as Vincent did at the meeting. The evaluatee is supposed to readily accept the criticism, as a gesture of willingness to immerse into the group. The conventional gambit for such occasions, as suggested by Fang, are 'oh, I'll investigate in this' (see Fang's comments in Interview 6.2). In group-self cultures, such a self-restrained attitude in the face of criticisms is believed to reflect the emotional maturity of an individual who is able to sacrifice his own face for the maintenance of harmony within the group. As suggested by Markus and Kitayama

(1991), 'if a predominant basis of self-esteem is how well one fits in and preserves relationships and interpersonal harmony, then failing to distinguish oneself with a highly successful performance may not be particularly devastating'. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Chinese participants chose the meeting type of annual review for the problem talk: the expatriates were probably expected to refrain from confrontational behaviours in the face of criticism -- if they were aware, as the Chinese participants were, of the primary emphasis on group unity of such meetings.

8.2. Functions of Formality

Meetings, according to Boden (1994: 83), can be divided into two general types: formal and informal. Boden observes that large formal meetings are often information oriented, while smaller informal meetings are task or decision focused. Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997: 207) report that in their data, the level of formality of meetings is influenced more by 'the perceived relevance of the subject matter to individual, or departmental, interests' than by 'respect for hierarchical status'. Boden's and Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' observations are also valid to some extent for the data of the current study (this will be elaborated below). However, the major finding in the analysis of formality below is that in the Chinese workplace, formality may be purposefully employed as a relational strategy for problem talk. That is to say, formality can be used as a means to avoid direct conflict and to maintain harmony at meetings. This is achieved through the emphasis on the 'directed and restricted' (Boden, 1994: 85) nature of turn-taking at formal meetings, which in turn is rooted in the esteem for hierarchy in the Chinese mentality.

8.2.1. Formality of the Meeting

The degree of formality of a meeting can be assessed on a number of aspects and has great impact on the styles and dynamics of interactions at the meeting. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) provide us a useful framework for analysing the formality of meetings.

Figure 8.3. Dimensions for comparing meetings (adapted from Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 60).

Formal meetings	Informal meetings
Large in size	Small in size
Formal setting	Unplanned location
Starting time specified	Occurs by chance
Finishing time specified	Finishes 'naturally'
Participants specified	Open to anyone
Formal procedures	Informal style
Explicit structured agenda	'Rolling' agenda

According to this model, the meeting in question can be placed at the formal end of the continuum of meeting formality. It was relatively large in size with fourteen participants. It had a formal written agenda, specifying the venue, starting and finishing times, participants and their roles, and procedures and topics, etc. (see Figure 5.3.).

The formality of this meeting is also reflected in the convening of the preparatory meetings, in which the Chinese participants allocated the turns and topics to the delegated speakers and rehearsed the speeches and procedure repeatedly to ensure minimum relational risk at the meeting proper. Furthermore, both Peng and Lan, the two Chinese official speakers, emphasised in the retrospective interviews that this meeting was 'very formal'. Their comments will be examined below.

8.2.2. Expected Relational Effect of Formality

Based on the analysis of the information provided by the Chinese informants, as well as the turn-taking analysis in Chapter 6, it is suggested that the degree of formality has been employed purposefully by the Chinese participants as a problem talk strategy. It was both expected to facilitate the transactional aspect of communication, that is, the problem talk, and to serve the relational goal of avoiding direct conflict at the meeting.

When asked why a more formal form was appropriate for this meeting, Peng commented that it may help to attach more significance to the topical issues. Lan also commented that such a formal procedure can keep the discussions focused on the problematic issues and achieve more communicative efficiency at the meeting. These comments on the transactional function of the formality of meetings correspond to Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' observation mentioned above (1997: 207) that formality is influenced more by the perceived relevance of the topical issues to the departmental interests. The problematic issues addressed by Peng and Lan were of great concern to the Chinese consultants. The major transactional goal of convening this meeting was to draw the expatriates' attention to the existence of these problems. It is thus understandable that the Chinese participants tried to convey the import of the topical issues through the formality of the event.

However, what is of more interest here is the expected relational function of the meeting formality. One distinct feature of formal meetings is the restriction of speaker rights. Both Wang and Peng admitted that during the preparatory meetings, Wang had specified clearly who were not allowed to speak at the meeting. They claimed that the purpose of restricting the speaker rights was in order not to 'provoke' the expatriates with reckless comments, considering the fact that some Chinese consultants were well known for being 'too blunt and outspoken' (Wang's interview).

Another important feature of formal meetings is the 'directed and restricted' (Boden, 1994: 85) turn-taking pattern. Formality can be used to control the turn-taking behaviours of the participants, and thus to control the relational dynamics at the meeting. As discussed in Chapter 6, by choosing the more formal form, the Chinese participants probably expected the expatriates to only take the pre-allocated turn on the official agenda and to refrain from self-initiated turn-taking. If the expatriates had conformed to such tacit turn-taking rules prescribed by the level of meeting formality, the Chinese official speakers could have been able to accomplish their coordinated problem talk scheme (see Chapter 6), and the meeting could have been finished 'in harmony' as planned.

Why did the Chinese participants believe that the expatriates would be constrained by the norms of formality? The reason was probably that they did not realize there were cultural differences in the degree of esteem for hierarchy. Pan (2000) argues that the central organizing dimension of Chinese workplace meetings is official power and status. Generally speaking, it is expected that the subordinates demonstrate considerable restraint and prudence when the superior is present at the workplace meetings. Gu & Zhu's (2002) research also suggests that in the Chinese context, a meeting is a formal and official procedure to ratify existing power relationships and hierarchical positions. At the meeting in question, Wang, the CEO of *SITE* was not only present, but also playing the role of the chair. All of the participants were therefore expected to only take a turn when allocated by the chair, as an indication of respect for hierarchy. That is to say, to conform to the formal meeting procedure, such as refraining from self-initiated turn-taking, is culturally expected in the Chinese workplace meetings. However, it seemed obvious that esteem for hierarchy did not have such a significant impact on the individual-self expatriates as expected.

8.2.3. The Unexpected Relational Consequence

As suggested above, the Chinese participants expected the formality of the meeting, that is, the restricted speaker rights and turn-taking pattern, to serve the relational goal of avoiding direct conflicts at the meeting. However, it seems that the formal form not only did not help prevent the direct confrontation, but also contributed to the aggravation of the relational tension.

First of all, the expatriate participants did not refrain from self-initiated turn-taking. They not only self-selected but also interrupted to challenge and rebut the Chinese official speakers, including Wang, the chair and the CEO of *SITE*. It seems that the formality that is underpinned by the esteem for hierarchy did not have the expected effect on the expatriate participants who are from individual-self cultures. In contrast, the Chinese participants seemed extremely restrained and even nervous at the meeting. As pointed out earlier, apart from the delegated official speakers, none of the Chinese participants contributed to the discussion of the topical issues. They even refrained from back-channelling in contrast to the expatriate participants. Peng commented on the relational consequence of the formality level at the meeting.

Interview 8.2. Peng's comment on the consequence of formality

上一次的这个 seminar，我觉得气氛(.)不够:::呃(.)，不够自由吧应该说，因为像这种，应该就是 free discu discussion，但是呢实际上呃发言的就没有几个，大家都有点呃拘谨，或者说是::不够::呃互动性不够强，那么一个人在说完话以后，下一个人说的只是自己想说的东西，而不是说针对上一个人发言来，不是一种实际上就不是一种讨论了，而只是一种呃::就是做 presentation 的感觉了... 这个我觉得跟王老师的是有关系，因为之前我们开会的时候，他就他就是说指定了指定了我和 Lan 发言，那么其他人他就不<u>敢</u>发言了... 他担心...一个是分散这个主题，再一个呢他担心就是如果说的不合适的话，会这个::就是::呃::可能这个词不太好，就是'激怒'这个呃外教... 我们的发言是准备好了的... 当然说这些我们准备好的话我觉得是比较(.)稳妥的一个办法吧

(at last seminar, I felt the atmosphere (.) was not:: er(.) not free enough I should say, because like this, should be free discussion, but in fact there were not many who spoke, everybody was a bit prudish, or not enough err:: interactive, then after one finishing speaking, the next person only said what he wanted to say, but not considering what the previous speaker had said, not a in fact it's not a discussion any more, but a sort of err:: felt like a presentation... this I think is to do with Wang, because at the preparatory meetings, he had appointed appointed Lan and me as the speakers, then the others <u>dare</u> not speak at more... he was concerned... one concern was the focus would be blurred, another concern is that he was worried that if something inappropriate was said, it will:: that is::err::maybe this word is not appropriate, that is to 'provoke' the expatriate teachers... our speeches were prepared... of course to say the scripts that we have prepared, I felt it's a much safer way)

Peng commented that the atmosphere at the meeting was not good because it was not 'interactive' enough. One example he gave was that the Chinese speakers only spoke their prepared scripts in order to be relationally 'safe', while neglecting necessary responses to the previous turns of the expatriates. Another example he gave was that none of the other Chinese participants spoke up apart from the official speakers. Peng explained that this was due to the fact that Wang had forbidden some participants who were known as reckless and blunt from speaking, and that his purpose was relational, that is, not to 'provoke' the expatriate participants. Wang also admitted in the interview that the fact he forbade some Chinese participants from speaking had made all of the Chinese participants nervous.

Another consequence of formality, which was probably never expected by the Chinese participants, was that the Chinese speakers' problem talks became more face-threatening to the expatriates. That is to say, compared to those at relatively informal meetings or in private talks, problem talks at a formal meeting may pose more face-threat to the addressees. The expatriates probably felt they had been criticised 'formally' in front of a group of colleagues. In fact, Jack later defined this meeting as a 'criticism session' in the interview and equated it with the public criticism assemblies during the period of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China.

Therefore, not only did meeting formality fail to serve the function of avoiding conflict as expected by the Chinese participants, it even aggravated the relational tension at the meeting.

8.3. Participant Roles

The situational factor of participant roles is also manipulated by the Chinese participants for relational purposes. In order to examine their design of participant roles, a framework is proposed drawing on Hymes' and Goffman's works.

Hymes (1972) points out that 'the common dyadic model of speaker-hearer specifies sometimes too many, sometimes too few, sometimes the wrong participants'. He proposed four types of participants, namely, speaker (or sender), addressor, hearer (or receiver, or audience), and addressee. One important point made by Hymes is that the speaker may not be the addressor, and that the hearer may not be the addressee.

Goffman (1979; 1981) has also challenged the primitive notions of hearer and speaker and proposed a model to describe the complexity of participant roles. He suggested that the notions of hearer and speaker be broken up into more differentiated parts, including the participation framework and the production format (Goffman, 1981). The participation framework describes the complexity of roles on the part of the hearers. A hearer might be a ratified participant or a bystander, and a ratified participant can be addressed or unaddressed. The production format includes three possible roles, namely, the animator, the author, and the principal. The animator is compared to a 'talking machine' (ibid: 144) and is the participant who physically utters the words. The author is responsible for the selection of the sentiments and the composition of the actual words. And the principal is the person whose position or beliefs are expressed. Levinson (1988) later proposed the terms 'reception roles' instead of 'participation framework' and 'production roles' instead of 'production format' in order to avoid confusion. Levinson's terms are adopted in the current study.

Based on Goffman's (1979; 1981) model, a framework is proposed below to describe the participant roles at the meeting in question. Clashes of expectations about participant roles between the Chinese and expatriate participants will also be explored and explained.

8.3.1. The Expected Participant Roles

Figure 8.4. below shows the framework for analysis of the expected participant roles during the Chinese speakers' problem talk at the meeting. Since the meeting in question was a spatially and temporally enclosed event, there is no unratified participant in the current framework. The participant roles are divided into two types: the production roles and the reception roles. The production roles include the animator, the author and the principal, while the reception roles include the intended addressee, the ostensible addressee and the audience.

Figure 8.4. The expected participant roles.

Production roles		**Reception roles**	
Animator	Peng and Lan	Intended addressee	Jack
Author	Wang, Peng, Lan, and others[1]	Ostensible addressee	Vincent
Principal	Wang, Peng, Lan, and others[1]	Audience	Jack and others[2]
Others[1] are the participants who had attended the preparatory meetings. others[2] are the participants who had not been granted the speaker right in the official agenda.			

One important difference between the current framework and Goffman's model above is that in addition to the intended addressee (the addressed in Goffman's model) and the audience (similar in some sense but still different from the unaddressed in Goffman's model), there is an additional role termed as the '*ostensible addressee*'.

While the intended addressee is the hearer to whom the message is intended and whose role is relatively more passive, to play the role of the ostensible addressee requires some active cooperation from the hearer. The ostensible addressee must have the awareness that the message is not intended for himself, but at the same time must play the role of the intended addressee ostensibly as a cooperative move towards the speaker. This will be elaborated in Section 8.3.3.

The term 'audience' is used instead of the 'unaddressed' in Goffman's model above. There are two reasons why the term 'audience' is preferred here. First of all, one important feature of the 'audience' is that they are usually not expected to participate in the interactions. The term 'audience' is used by Goffman (1981) to refer to the listenership during a stage event where the hearers are expected to appreciate the remarks made rather than to reply in a direct way (ibid: 138). Formal meetings may share some features of a stage event. That is to say, the formality of the meeting projects the listenership as the audience rather than the interactants at the meeting. This is why Jack is also included in the category of audience in the table above. The term 'audience' also corresponds to the notion of unofficial speakers discussed in Chapter 6. Another reason that the term 'audience' is used instead of the 'unaddressed' is that in fact, Jack WAS addressed. He was the intended addressee. However, he was expected to play a double role, that is, the intended addressee and the audience at the same time. This will also be discussed in Section 8.3.3.

Before discussing the Chinese participants' expectations of the expatriates' participant roles, we will look at Peng and Lan's roles at the meeting as animators.

8.3.2. Peng and Lan: the Instrumentalised Speakers

Goffman (1981: 144) suggests that 'animator' is merely an analytical role rather than a social one 'in the full sense so much as functional nodes in a communication system'. However, it is suggested in this study that the animator can be a social role in meeting interactions, as part of a relationally oriented scheme of participant roles for problem talks.

As indicated in Figure 8.4, Peng and Lan's roles during the problem talks at the meeting were those of animators. The animator is the speaker who is allocated the task of physically uttering scripts prepared by others. It is suggested that this is a rather passive role. Instead of being committed to and responsible for what is said as an autonomous individual, the speaker is instrumentalised as a 'talking machine' (Goffman, 1981: 144).

As reported by Peng (see Interview 8.2. above), Peng and Lan were appointed by Wang as the delegated speakers and their speeches were prepared together with the group. Lan also reported the details of the preparation procedure for their scripts.

Interview 8.3. Lan's report on preparation of the scripts.

呃我们先开会，我们把这些大家都提出来，有哪些哪些哪些，然后我们再归纳一下，可以分成两个类型，一个就是两个部门之间的，这种我们觉得应该怎么样再去配合的一些建议，那么另外一个呢就是属于我们对<u>他们</u>的，他们那个部门的，从我们这个角度来看，因为我们从学生和家长那里有一些反馈，那么我们从这个角度来看，对他们提出一些建议，所以就主要就是分成两个这样的一个两个方向吧，所以然后呢正好是两个人发言嘛，就是做了一下分工

(err we had a few preparatory meetings, we everybody raised all the points, there are these and these points, then we summarised them, they would be divided into to two types, one is the suggestions on the two departments, some suggestions on how we felt we should cooperate with each other, then the other type is our suggestions to <u>them</u>, their department, from our perspective, because we have received some feedbacks from the students and the parents, then from our perspective, provide some advice to them, so there were mainly these two directions, so then it happened to be that there were two delegated speakers, so each of us was responsible for one direction)

According to Lan, the suggestions raised by Peng and herself were prepared by all of the participants at the preparatory meetings (others[1] in Figure 8.4.). As delegated speakers, Peng and Lan's task was only to verbalise the scripts prepared by the group. According to the Chinese informants, the procedure and the Chinese official speakers' speeches were also rehearsed a few times at the preparatory meetings to ensure minimum relational risk. Based on these facts, we may suggest that the authorship of Peng and Lan's speeches belonged to all of the participants at the preparatory meetings. And these participants may be considered as playing the role of the principal at the same time, since the scripts reflect their positions and beliefs on the topical matters.

Apart from the reports in the retrospective interviews, there is also paralinguistic evidence for the instrumentalised status of Peng and Lan's participant role. As discussed in Chapter 6, before Peng and Lan's turns, there were long gaps which indicate their hesitation and reluctance to carry out the original problem talk plan, having sensed the relational tension reflected in the expatriates' previous turns. However, as the animators, Peng and Lan were not entitled to the right to make autonomous decisions to deal with the contingencies, that is, to quit their turns or to adjust the content of their speeches in accordance to the expatriates'. They had to take their allocated turns and speak the sanctioned scripts. Their choice of actions was already pre-determined by the group in the preparatory meetings.

Apart from the paralinguistic cues, there is also linguistic evidence for Peng and Lan's animator's role, that is, the use of pronouns. In Peng and Lan's speeches, 'we' is used instead of 'I' as the first person pronoun. For example, 'we' is used in Lan's speech to refer to the consultants, while at the same time, the third person plural pronoun 'they' is used to refer to the teaching expatriates:

> we often would see that they came very early and left very late (Lan's speech)

In fact, the first person single pronoun 'I' is seldom used in Peng and Lan's speeches. It is suggested that the use of 'we' rather than 'I' as the subject is expected to diminish the responsibility of the speakers as an individual for the speech and to signify their representative role of the consultant group. It is an indication that the ideas were shared by the group, rather than from the speakers themselves.

It is suggested that the purpose of arranging the animator's role is relational, that is, to avoid direct conflict at the meeting by controlling the relational risk. As reported by Peng in Interview 8.2. above, the reason that Lan and himself were appointed to speak the prepared scripts and that the others were forbidden to speak up by Wang was that Wang was worried that reckless comments might infuriate the expatriates and thus disrupt the problem talk plan. Peng himself also believed that to say the prepared scripts was 'a much safer way'.

As the animators, Peng and Lan took up the responsibility of physically uttering the prepared and sanctioned scripts which stand for the group's beliefs and positions.

They were not speaking as autonomous individuals, but as the mouthpieces of the group. Therefore, their role was impersonalised, or in fact, instrumentalised. And for instrumentalised speakers, what matters most is not self-expression, but the sense of obligation for the in-group.

8.3.3. The Addressee: Intended vs. Ostensible

Having examined the production roles during the Chinese participants' problem talks, we will look at the complicated reception roles expected of the expatriate participants.

As explained in Chapter 5, the problems the Chinese participants addressed were actually with Jack's program rather than Vincent's. The Chinese participants had deliberately chosen to address Jack's problems in Vincent's session in order to avoid direct conflict with Jack, as he was known to be very aggressive and 'inflammable' (Wang's interview). That is to say, Jack, rather than Vincent, was the intended addressee of the problem talks for the Chinese participants.

In some private exchanges after the meeting, when asked why they were not worried about 'provoking' Vincent, the Chinese informants commented that Vincent had displayed very good relationship management skills in the past interactions. They also said that they had confidence in Vincent's willingness and skills in maintaining harmony among co-workers (Vincent's desire and capability to maintain rapport with his colleagues is also reflected in his tactful use of relational strategies in the presentation – see Chapter 7). It seems that as a colleague considered skilful at relationship management, Vincent was expected to have the ability to actively infer and cooperate with the Chinese participants' role plan during the meeting interactions.

How were the expatriates expected to realize who was the intended addressee? There were two types of cues in the speeches of the Chinese speakers. One was the incongruence between the stated and the fact. For example, the Chinese participants claimed that there was a lack of teacher supervision in the program. However, everybody was aware that teacher supervision was conducted quite well in Vincent's program (and, though not indicated explicitly, it was a fact that all the examples given by the Chinese speakers were from Jack's program). When there seemed to be obvious inconsistencies between the claimed and the fact, the expatriates, especially Vincent, were expected to think actively (rather than 'react' actively) and find out why there were such obvious inconsistencies between the fact and their speeches, that is, what was the intended message that was sent through such obvious incongruence in information.

Another type of cues is the use of pronouns by Peng and Lan. As discussed in the section above, plural pronouns were used instead of single ones, and third person plural pronouns were used to refer to the expatriates instead of 'you'. Though the suggestions were addressed to the expatriates present at the meeting, the third person pronoun 'they' or 'the teaching managers' were used to refer to them. The second person pronoun 'you' was probably avoided as it might be interpreted as referring to Vincent alone, considering the fact that Vincent was the evaluatee at this annual review meeting. In fact, 'you' was never used in Peng and Lan's speeches (though, 'you' was used in the meeting translation of Lan's speech, which may be one reason the expatriates did not take the cue). While the plural forms of pronouns indicate that the participants on both ends of the production and reception were seen as groups rather than individuals, the third person plural instead of the second person pronoun was an attempt to send the message clearly that Vincent was not the intended addressee.

It is suggested that there were two layers of expectations in terms of the participant roles of the expatriates. First of all, both expatriate participants were expected to realize that Jack was the intended addressee. However, they were not expected to act according to this awareness of roles. They were expected to continue to play the roles prescribed in the official agenda, that is, Vincent as the ostensible addressee and Jack as the audience. This arrangement of roles served to protect Jack's face and enhance Vincent's face.

As an unofficial speaker, that is, the audience, Jack was expected to remain silent throughout the meeting with sufficient awareness (with the help of all kinds of cues as listed above) that the problem talks were targeted at him. He was probably expected to reflect on the management of his program and to take actions after the meeting to resolve the problems without having to make them public to the others. At the same time, he was probably expected to appreciate the effort made by the Chinese participants to protect his face by addressing the problems in such an indirect way.

As an ostensible addressee, Vincent was probably expected to understand that the fact that the Chinese speakers chose to address the problems in such an indirect way reflected their trust and confidence in him. This may have reflected their belief in the shared rapport with him and in his maturity and capability in dealing with relational issues. This may also indicate that he was treated as an in-group member who was willing to share the obligations for the group. He was probably also expected to accept the criticisms perfunctorily as illustrated by Fang (see Interview 6.2.), with the knowledge that at least two parties would feel indebted to him: the Chinese participants would appreciate his self-sacrifice for the in-group harmony, and Jack would be grateful that he had sacrificed his own face in order to protect his. Indeed, self-sacrifice is the keyword in the maintenance of in-group harmony for group-selves.

8.3.4. Clashes of Expectations about Participant Roles

It is obvious that neither of the expatriate participants was aware of the scheme of participant roles carefully designed by the Chinese participants. They were not aware that Peng and Lan were not the authors or principals of their speeches, and that the suggestions they made were actually the group's position rather than their own. They were also not aware that the suggestions (or in fact, criticisms) were actually not targeted at Vincent, but at Jack.

Instead, Vincent felt wronged and criticized unjustly. He not only self-selected to respond to the suggestions with indignant self-defensive arguments, but also interrupted, challenged and criticised the Chinese speakers, including Wang. On the other hand, Jack was totally oblivious of the double role of the intended addressee and the audience that he was expected to play. Instead, he defended Vincent indignantly both at the meeting through supportive interruptions and in the retrospective interview.

It is suggested that the clashes of expectations regarding the participant roles are also rooted in the differences in Cultural Self Perceptions. First of all, how self is perceived determines whether the participants are expected to interact as independent individuals or to communicate as groups. For the Chinese participants, the communication at the meeting took place between the group of the expatriate managers and the group of the Chinese consultants. The use of plural pronouns is one of the cues for such views. The groups were interacting with each other and each group was supposed to act as one entity. Since the group is the unit of actions, monologue was expected due to the expected lack of autonomy and flexibility. That is to say, each speaker was expected to move as a chess piece according to the pre-determined in-group plan. However, for the expatriate participants, each of the participants was supposed to express his own ideas and to take responsibility for his own speeches. As a result of individual autonomy, dialogue was expected rather than monologue at meetings. This belief is reflected in their active turn-taking patterns, especially in Vincent's self-selecting to argue indignantly against each of the claims by each Chinese speaker without any attention either to the coordinated nature of the Chinese participants' turns and topics or the fact that he was not the intended addressee.

Whether the individual or the group is viewed as the Self also determines whether the participant is seen as a role-player or as an autonomous person at workplace meetings. It seems that in contrast to the individual-selves, the group-selves pay much more attention to the roles they play than to the expression of their own beliefs and positions. In a group-self culture, each person is seen as a component part of the in-group whole, and obligations are always emphasized rather than rights. In consequence, self-expression and promotion are not favoured or disapproved of. The primary goal of interactions is to contribute to enhancing in-group unity, cohesion, and interdependence. One is always aware that he speaks as a member of a certain group, rather than as an autonomous individual. As a group member, the need for self-control takes precedence over the need to control the outside world or to satisfy personal needs, in order to maintain in-group harmony. As self is defined by its role, the interactive behaviour of a person must be subject to the constraints of the role(s), as argued by Cheng (1990; cited in Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998: 7). It is the role, not the self, that determines the behaviour.

8.4. Manipulation of Contextual Factors as Relational Strategies

This chapter suggested that apart from linguistic forms and devices, there are other levels of strategies that may be employed for the achievement of relational goals, such as the manipulation of situational factors. In fact, the Chinese participants involved in this study have relied heavily on such contextual factors for the communication of the intended meanings. An interactant who is not familiar with the Chinese communicative patterns can easily miss the intended message due to their prioritized attention to the verbalized meanings.

The analysis in this chapter has focused on three situational factors, namely, meeting agenda, formality and participant roles, that have been manipulated by the Chinese participants for the achievement of the interactive goals, namely, the problem talks as the transactional goal and the avoidance of conflicts as the relational goal.

By covering the real communicative purpose (that is, the problem talks) with an open agenda (that is, the annual review), it was expected that the sensitive problematic issues would not be spotlighted and thus the expatriates would be disarmed. In addition, two particular features of annual review meetings were expected to serve the relational goals. One is that annual review meetings dictate an interactive relationship between the evaluator and the evalutee. Such a temporary relationship between the consultants and the teaching managers provided the legitimate right for the consultants to perform the problem talk that otherwise would be difficult given their different status in the institutional hierarchy. The other feature concerns the specific functions of annual review in Chinese workplace. The primary function of the annual review events is to consolidate the in-group cohesion rather than to evaluate staff performance. With such an understanding of the meeting purpose, a Chinese evaluatee would cooperate by all means at such an occasion and refrain from confrontational behaviours even if there are differing opinions or criticisms. These were probably the expected behaviours of the expatriates who, unfortunately, did not share such culturally specific interactive frames.

The situational factor of formality is also employed for achieving the goal of conflict avoidance. Formal meetings have two distinct features, namely, restricted speaker rights and directed turn-taking pattern. In group-self cultures, the participants are expected to conform to these norms at workplace meetings as a result of the esteem for hierarchy. Apart from consolidation of in-group cohesion, Chinese workplace meetings have another important function, that is, ratification of existing power relationships and hierarchical positions. Conforming to the restricted and directed norms of the formal meetings indicates the participants' understanding of such cultural expectations as well as their willingness to be accepted by and integrated with the in-group. Such background knowledge related to the frames of formal meetings are obviously also not shared by the expatriate participants.

Manipulation of participant roles constitute another aspect of the relational strategies on the situational level. The complexity of roles in this meeting not only lay at the production end where the speakers were instrumentalised in order for the control of relational risk, but also at the reception end where the expatriates were expected to play double roles in order to save each other's face. Vincent was expected to play the role of the ostensible addressee while completely aware that the intended addressee was Jack. Jack was expected to play the role of audience while knowing that he himself was the intended addressee. Jack was probably also expected to be grateful to the Chinese participants for designing such a role game and to Vincent for his self-sacrifice in order to protect his face, while Vincent was probably expected to take pride in the in-groups' trust of his relational maturity and in his self-sacrifice for the in-group harmony. These expectations, again, were not shared by the individual-self expatriates.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This study aims to test the hypothesis that intercultural differences in relational strategies can be explained by exploring the cultural differences in how 'self' is perceived and defined. Two frameworks were proposed for the testing of the hypothesis. One was the analytical framework: the Multi-Level Model (MLM) for analysing (expectations of) interactive behaviours at workplace meetings. The other was the explanatory framework: Cultural Self Perception (CSP), for exploring the roots of cultural differences in expectations of interactive behaviours. It is argued that these two frameworks can work together to answer the 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions in intercultural workplace studies, and that the analytical and explanatory power of these two frameworks has been demonstrated in the case study of a problematic workplace meeting in this project.

This chapter will first summarise the findings of the case study, then discuss the significance and application of the two frameworks for intercultural workplace studies. The implications for teaching and training will also be discussed. Some remarks on the strengths and limitations of this project, as well as on future directions of research will be made before this thesis concludes.

9.1. Findings in the Case Study

The meeting analysed in the case study suffered from a severe confrontation and communicative breakdown between the Chinese and western expatriate participants.

Both parties intended to address some problems of great concern, and both employed a range of relational strategies to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk. The research design is predicated on the hypothesis that the communicative failure was caused by differences in cultural expectations about relational strategies, which are rooted in the culture-specific perception and definition of the self. The analytical and explanatory framework proposed in Chapter 3 and 4 were employed to find out and explain the differences in expectations of relational strategies.

Data analysis indicates that while the western expatriates' problem talk was completed within one speaker turn, the Chinese participants' problem talk was an intricate cross-turn, cross-speaker coordinated action scheme. The expatriates' relational strategies for problem talk were mainly found on the speech act level, while those of the Chinese participants were not only found in the discourse dimension (e.g. speech act and turn-taking), but also in the contextual dimension, such as manipulation of situational factors. It is argued that the communicative breakdown at the meeting was caused by these differences in expectations of relational strategies for problem talk, since the participants probably interpreted the other's behaviours according to their own interactive frames.

In each of the analytical chapters (Chapter 6, 7 and 8), the impact of Cultural Self Perception on the choices of relational strategies was discussed in detail. It was argued that the differences between Individual-Self and Group-Self Perceptions may account for the differences in the choices of relational strategies between the western expatriate and the Chinese participants.

First of all, the difference in cultural self perception has resulted in the difference in turn-taking strategies (for details, see Chapter 6). While the expatriates saw turn-taking as individual actions, the Chinese participants designed a complicated turn-coordination plan in which the topics and the sequence of their turns were pre-determined and rehearsed. It was argued that the difference in turn-taking behaviours indicates the difference in the view of the unit of social actions between the group-self and the individual-self. While the individual-self sees the person as the autonomous agent of social actions, the group-self sees the group as the unit of social actions within which the individual is only an incomplete component.

Cultural self perception is also believed to have significant impact on the choices of speech act strategies (for details, see Chapter 7). As individual-selves, the expatriates saw the problem issues as objective entities that can be separated from the persons as a result of the atomic worldview. As a result, an objective approach was adopted for the performance of the speech act of problem talk, that is, through impersonalization as a strategy for mitigating the threat to the hearer's negative face. In addition to the objective approach, a positive approach was also employed by the expatriates to mitigate the face threat of the problem talk, that is, through the use of affirmatives and expressives. The positive approach is also rooted in the individual-self perception. Since the individual is seen as the bounded unit of social existence and actions, it is expected that the unique qualities of each individual as well as their personal desires and capacities need to be constantly defined and verified. The use of affirmatives and expressives addresses exactly such needs of individual-selves.

By contrast, the Chinese participants saw no boundary between the issues and the persons as a result of the holistic worldview. For them, it is impossible to talk about problems without addressing the responsibility of the person. That is to say, the speech act of statement has never been available for them as a choice for the realization of problem talk. As a result, the speech act of suggestion, which is believed to be less relationally threatening than criticism, was chosen as the realization form. In order to mitigate the relational threat of the problem talk, the Chinese speakers chose the act of self-criticism and emphasis of in-group unity as the hedging acts. It is suggested that the Chinese speakers' choices of hedging act and realization act are both rooted in the supreme importance of 'mutual obligations' for group-selves. While suggestion conveys in-group care and thoughtfulness, self-criticism indicates the cultural value of self-sacrifice for in-group interest, which is the maintenance of in-group harmony here.

It was further argued in Chapter 8 that the Chinese participants' heavy reliance on contextual factors as means of communication also reflects group-self perception. By contrast, the expatriates appeared to have completely misread the significance of contextual cues owing to their individual-self orientation. The Chinese reliance on contextual cues is not only a result of the degree of shared contextual knowledge due to the tight-woven unity and frequent in-group interactions, but also due to the desire for harmony that is of supreme import for the group-selves. By manipulating the contextual factors, much of the relationally threatening message can be communicated indirectly. As a result, direct conflict may be avoided, which is considered as an extremely dangerous threat to the unity and stability of a Group-Self.

9.2. Implications for Intercultural Workplace Studies

The case study demonstrates that used in tandem, the two frameworks can provide a powerful diagnostic and explanatory tool for identifying potential problems in relational strategy use in intercultural workplace meetings, and interpreting their roots in the respective cultures, specifically in the way self is perceived within different cultures.

It is thus suggested that the two frameworks as well as the findings in the case study have filled in some of the gaps in the fields of meeting studies and politeness studies (or studies of 'relational strategies'). The Multi-Level Model (MLM) for meeting analysis proposed in Chapter 3 encompasses both discourse and contextual dimensions in the analysis of meeting interactions. It allows the exploration of relational strategies to extend from the analysis of linguistic performance to contextual factors that may be manipulated for relational purposes. In other words, this multi-level framework has made it possible to go beyond the traditional limits of politeness studies within the range of pragmatic strategies by encompassing turn-taking in the discourse dimension and manipulation of situational factors in the contextual dimension. Apart from the situational level, the analysis of the information on the other three levels of the contextual dimension have also been proved to be extremely helpful in the understanding and interpretation of the participants' relational strategies at the meeting. The MLM also provides a convenient guideline for the meeting researchers in terms of data collection. That is to say, the MLM has specified the types of information that is necessary or even crucial for in-depth understanding and thorough interpretation of meeting interactions.

The current study also challenged the views of 'face' (Brown and Levinson, 1978; 1987) or 'face and sociality rights' (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b) as the motivating force for choices of relational strategies. As suggested in Chapter 7 and Section 9.1. above, Brown and Levinson's framework proves to be effective in the explanation of the western expatriates' relational strategies. However, the Chinese participants' relational strategies neither fit in with Brown and Levinson's nor with Spencer-Oatey's framework. As argued in Chapter 2, this is because their frameworks are constructed from an individual-self's perspective, which means that they see each of the intercultural interactants as a bounded autonomous unit of social existence and actions. In order to account for the Chinese participants' relational strategies, a new explanatory framework has been proposed in this study: Cultural Self Perception. The three analytical chapters have demonstrated the explanatory power of this framework.

It is suggested that the current study has the following important implications for future studies in relational strategies at intercultural workplace meetings:

- Studies of relational strategies should not be confined to the pragmatic level.

Understanding and interpretation of social reality cannot afford to neglect the analysis of contextual and cultural factors. Therefore, the range of relational strategies need to be expanded to include both discourse and contextual dimensions.

- It is possible to account for intercultural communicative breakdown through making inference of cultural expectations. The inferences can be made on the basis of the analysis of the interactants' behaviours as well as corroborated by retrospective interviews with the interactants.
- While no framework can be applied universally to the explanation of the relational behaviours of interactants from different cultural backgrounds, Cultural Self Perception may work as a far more powerful explanatory framework than the existing ones, since it encompasses both the Individual-Self's view and the Group-Self's view.

9.3. Implications for Teaching and Training

9.3.1. Implications for Intercultural Communication Training

Existing intercultural training programs have tended to focus on differences in cultural values without exploring how these values are relevant in intercultural communicative practices, or only on how to behave 'appropriately' in another culture without explaining why certain ways are 'appropriate' and why some others would cause misunderstandings, frustrations or even negative judgments. The current study has demonstrated how interactive behaviours can be interpreted and explained drawing on interactive expectations which are rooted in how the self is perceived in a specific culture. An important implication of this is that it is possible to extend the focus of intercultural training from 'what and how' to 'why'.

Furthermore, the trainees also need to be reminded that the most harmful tendency in intercultural interactions is to jump too easily to negative judgements of the other's moral quality or interpersonal attitude, when the other's behaviour is inconsistent with one's expectations. As suggested by Scollon and Scollon (1995), our inferences of the other's meaning are drawn very quickly in interactions, and tend to be fixed rather than tentative. In order to avoid misunderstandings in intercultural interactions, the trainees need to be trained to expect differences in expectations on different levels of the interactions. Scollon and Scollon (1995) also suggest that increasing shared knowledge is an effective way to reduce ambiguity and achieve successful communication. By increasing shared knowledge, they mean 'knowing as much as possible about the people with whom one is communicating'. It is suggested here that shared knowledge also includes the information as well as the other's expectations on various levels of the discourse and contextual dimensions.

Thus the frameworks proposed in this study can also be used as a guideline for intercultural training, especially workplace training. While the MLM has listed the levels of contextual knowledge that an interactant needs to make sense of interactions at a communicative event, the CSP has provided possible ways to account for clashes of expectations on each level of the discourse and contextual dimensions.

It is suggested that the model in Figure 4.4. can be conveniently applied to actual workplace training of intercultural communication. The Multi-Level Model for explaining intercultural behaviours at meetings in Figure 4.4. has combined the two frameworks proposed in the current study. It provides a clear structure for conducting meaningful discussions in the training sessions both on the psychological plane and on the various levels of discourse and contextual dimensions. For example, on the psychological plane, reflective and introspective discussions may be carried out in terms of how self is perceived in different cultures and its impact on worldviews and interactive behaviours. Differences or similarities in cultural practices of workplace meetings may also be explored on different levels of the MLM, while CSP may be applied to the explanation of discoveries of phenomena on all levels of the MLM. This approach has been applied to the actual design of a syllabus of postgraduate module called Intercultural Communication on a MSc program on Communication and International Entrepreneurship. The module has been extremely successful and has received very positive feedback from the students.

9.3.2. Implications for Language Teaching

Language learners may either function as intercultural interactants themselves, or as interpreters who have the important responsibility of facilitating mutual intercultural understanding. For example, at the meeting in question, one Chinese participant chose to speak English (probably as a relational token towards the English speaking expatriates), while another participant played the role of meeting translator though she never received formal training in translation. As discussed in Chapter 7, both of the two participants' use of English has created misunderstandings in terms of relational attitude and relational purpose.

It is suggested that such problems in language use in intercultural settings are the consequence of the philosophies and methods of current language teaching. Even until now, language teaching has focused primarily on accuracy and fluency with the transactional goal as the primary goal for interactions. The relational function of language has been neglected to a large extent. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to say that the relational functions and relational effects of different aspects of language use have been neglected in language teaching. One striking example is the meeting translation of one of the Chinese participants' suggestions (for details, see Chapter 7). Comparing the meeting translation and the Chinese original speech, the literal meaning of each utterance is more or less accurate. However, since the difference between Chinese and English in discourse structuring has been neglected (e.g. the difference in positioning the topical utterance in the discourse), the intended speech act of suggestion in the Chinese original was turned into a criticism in the English translation. Furthermore, due to the loss of the softeners in the translation that had been abundant in the Chinese original, the criticism sounded even more unrelenting and aggressive.

It is suggested that language education needs to pay more attention to the relational functions of language use in various contexts. As argued by O'Keeffe et al. (O'Keeffe et al., 2007: 181), 'how speakers in the real time of online speech orient, monitor, manage, modify and soften their message so as to relate to the hearer' should not be neglected in language teaching. Either as a future intercultural interactant or a translator, the language learner needs to develop a certain degree of awareness of the linguistic and paralinguistic repertoire that is available for negotiation of interpersonal relations.

It is suggested that in language teaching, attention needs to be paid to the description and discussion of relational strategies as well as of the cultural differences in relational strategies on the following levels:

- The lexico-grammatical level. Abundant research, especially those from the perspective of corpus linguistics, has provided significant insight into the description of lexico-grammatical items as relational language as well as the application of the discoveries to language teaching (e.g. Carter and McCarthy, 1995; 2006; O'Keeffe et al., 2007; Handford, 2010).
- Speech act level. Significant studies on this level that may provide directions for language teaching include politeness studies (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987), rapport studies (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), and the corpus approach to context-sensitive descriptions of pragmatic functions (Adolphs, 2008).
- Hierarchical organizations of speech acts as relational strategies in the current study (see Chapter 7). This approach argues for a broader view of speech act as

relational strategies extending from utterance level to the discourse structure. The discoveries in Chapter 7 in terms of realisation act and relational act may provide insight into the teaching of relational strategies. Special attention also needs to be paid to the cultural differences in discourse structure, which may lead to different interpretations of what act is performed and therefore what is the major interactive goal.

- Turn-taking level. The current study suggests that turn-taking may provide abundant discursive resources for interactants' choices of relational strategies. Apart from supportive interruptions and overlaps, a coordinated turn-taking scheme has also been discovered as relational strategy for problem talk. It is suggested that language teaching should not neglect the discussion of possible culture-specific relational strategies on the turn-taking level.
- Contextual levels. The analytical framework proposed in this study, the MLM, also provides guidance for language teaching in terms of possible areas or resources that may be exploited for relational purposes, for example, the relational strategies on the inter-event level discussed in Chapter 5 and those on the situational level in Chapter 8.

It is suggested that language learners need to be alerted to all of the levels discussed above in order to understand and employ relational strategies efficiently across different cultures.

9.4. Limitations

It is conceded that the data in this case study may be seen as too limited: only one meeting is investigated, though facilitated with ethnographic data. However, the major purpose of this study was not to derive broad generalizations of the patterns of interactive behaviours of Chinese and expatriate participants in intercultural meetings. This study sought primarily to test the hypothesis that intercultural behaviours can be explained with reference to how self is perceived culturally. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings in the case study is not a major concern of this study. It can, and perhaps needs to be addressed through replication in future research.

On a similar note, the representativeness of the data may be called into question. The meeting may be considered as too 'abnormal' as it suffered from communicative breakdown while the majority of intercultural meetings may have been conducted successfully. For example, Poncini (2004) has argued strongly against the tendency to focus on communicative failure rather than success in the study of intercultural interactions. However, it is argued here that communicative breakdowns do provide a fruitful field for studies of intercultural interactions, as they indicate clashes of cultural expectations. That is to say, where there is a communicative failure, the differences in interactive expectations are foregrounded. For a study that is interested in exploring the relations between self perceptions and interactive expectations, the study of communicative breakdown makes it possible to obtain intensive and insightful findings regarding culture-specific interactive expectations in a certain context.

In terms of the application of CSP, there are three possible limitations. The first concern is its reliability and generalizability. As can be seen in the three analytical chapters (6, 7 and 8), the explanatory system is still not established and the explanations are still tentative. The precise relationship between CSP and relational behaviours needs to be explored. The current project is but an initial exploratory application of the CSP to explain intercultural interactive behaviours at workplace meetings. Though it has proved an effective tool in the explanation of differences in interactive behaviours in the case study, further work is still necessary to verify and further develop the explanatory system of the framework.

In applying the CSP, caution also needs to be exercised over the possible over-generalisation of cultural differences. Researchers in the field of intercultural communication have constantly warned against the risk of creating national stereotypes by focusing on cultural differences. When speaking of cultural perceptions of the self, will other factors that may influence interactive behaviours be neglected, e.g. the idiosyncratic differences of the individuals or the variety of sub-cultures within a national culture? These warnings have been borne in mind during the whole process of the study. For example, in the discussion of organizational context in Chapter 5, the possible influence of professional culture was considered, such as the impact on communication of the differences in professional values and philosophies between the expatriate teaching staff and the Chinese administrative staff. In order to address the issue of individual variation and idiosyncrasy, special attention has also been paid to commonality in the participants' comments on the choices of strategies in the retrospective interviews. Having said this, it needs to be pointed out that it would be impossible to make any generalisations if too much attention is paid to the idiosyncratic differences. What can be described in intercultural studies is what is prescribed by the culture and what is held as ideal and advocated through education and socialization in a society. Only such a view of cultural generalization can make it possible to conduct intercultural comparisons.

Finally, there might be doubt regarding the validity of CSP in such a rapidly changing world, especially in China. As suggested in Chapter 4, there has been an emergent sense of Individual-Self in big cities in contemporary China as a result of industrialisation and globalisation. Though it is believed the Group-Self Perception is still dominant in China, it is necessary to pay attention to the extent of the shift in self perception in future research.

9.5. Directions for Future Research

As suggested above, more work can be done and needs to be done along the lines discussed in this study.

One type of work that is closely related to the case study is comparison between the meeting in question and the other two meetings in the same meeting series. The latter was not examined in this study due to time and space constraints. In the next two meetings, the Chinese participants did adjust their relational strategies considerably according to their understanding of the causes of the communicative breakdown. It seems the interactions at these two meetings were much smoother. It would be interesting to examine the changes made by the Chinese participants and explore the rationale underpinning these changes.

In the long run, a corpus of Chinese workplace meetings needs to be built. In the current study, the corpus approach was not used, as the focus was not on generic description (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997) or study of meeting practices (Handford, 2010). The current project was an ethnographic case study that was used to verify and develop the proposed analytical and explanatory frameworks. Having been tested successfully in this study, the frameworks need to be verified furthermore through more case studies as well as corpus analysis. The future corpus may include both intercultural meetings and intra-cultural meetings. Considering the variety of cultural backgrounds of expatriates in the Chinese workplace now, it is expected that investigations from an intercultural perspective will be even more valuable. Intra-cultural meetings, that is, with all participants from the Chinese background, are also interesting for exploring Chinese meeting practices and relational strategies. The examination of intra-cultural meeting practices is one of the most important means of inferring the culture-specific interactive frames of workplace meetings.

Further work is also needed to develop the explanatory framework of Cultural Self Perception. Such development can be based on a number of resources. One is the existing literature that is related to self-view, including the works of the cross-cultural psychologists and intercultural researchers. Another type of resource comprises the empirical meeting studies introduced above. In fact, the application of CSP is not limited to the explanation of meeting interactions. It can be and should be tested in more types of intercultural interactions, such as casual conversations or service encounters. Quantitative methods may also be used to test and develop the framework of CSP, and to complement the findings in the current study. For example, a questionnaire may be conducted in the expatriate community to better ascertain their views of working in a new culture, or in their intercultural workplaces to obtain the views of both Chinese and expatriates' views. The questionnaire needs to be designed on the basis of the assumptions made in CSP with a focus on workplace experiences, so that the findings in this study and in the other future empirical studies can be verified.

However, it is nonetheless hoped that this thesis represents a valuable first step in an area of research with important long-term consequences for our understanding of intercultural communicative practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Transcription Conventions

(0.5)	The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates a pause in the talk of less than five-tenths of a second.
::	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
° °	Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
,	A comma indicates a 'continuing' intonation.
.	A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the end of a sentence.
=	The 'equal' sign indicates 'latching' between utterances.
[ ]	Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
under	Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis.
?CAPITALS	Words in capitals mark a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
°hhh	A degree sign plus 'hh' indicate quiet giggles with an out-breath, or laughs while enunciating a word or phrase. The more h's the longer the out-breath.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate th presence of an unclear fragment on the tape.
{laughs}	A description enclosed in a curly bracket indicates a non-verbal activity, or the transcriber's comments on contextual or other features.
(teacher A)	Title plus a capital letter in a bracket indicate an actual name mentioned by the speaker.
↑↓	Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. (They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift?)
> <	'More than' and 'less than' signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk.
< >	'Less than' and 'more than' signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably slower than the surrounding talk.
°hnh	A characteristic interjection by Vincent indicating the suppressed feeling of embarrassment, helplessness or displeasure.

Note: Adapted from Gail Jefferson (1994) and Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998).

Appendix 2. The Informed Consent Form

Project: A Discourse Approach to the Analysis of Intercultural Workplace Meetings
Practitioner-researcher: Ms. Du, Ping
Supervisor: Prof. Ronald Carter
Institution: School of English Studies, the University of Nottingham, UK
Contact Number: (0086) 136 xxx xxx xx
Email: aexpd@nottingham.ac.uk

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. The major purpose of the current research is to develop an analytical framework for comparative studies of the meeting practices in the Chinese and Western workplaces. Before we start, I would like to emphasize that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary;
- You are entitled to ask questions before, during and after the interview;
- You are free to refuse to answer any question;
- You are free to withdraw at any time.

The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and her supervisor. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research report (the PhD thesis), but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign this form to show that you have read and fully understood the consents.

__________________________ (Signature)

__________________________ (Printed)

__________________________ (Date)

Appendix 3. The core data bank used for the case study

Meeting recording	The first session of the Annual Review Seminars
Interviews	1. Retrospective interview with Wang 2. Retrospective interview with Jack 3. Retrospective interview with Fang 4. Retrospective interview with Peng 5. Retrospective interview with Lan 6. Pre-meeting interview with Vincent

Appendix 4. Interview extract: the goals of the meeting series stated by Wang

W: 主要是目的::{outbreath}有::几个吧，一个是(.)加强教学部和学务班主任这个两个部门之间的(.)互相之间的沟通，加强他们之间的了解，而这种了解不是流于表面的了解，而是深层的这种了解，加强之间他们之间那种互信，那么在这种基础上来讲，使他们能够促进这两个部门之间, 能够更加主动地支持，配合，相互尊重，(.)理解，正确理解对方的这种信息，(1.0)这是主要是一个这样的原因，第二个原因呢是想，这是基于我们过去的那种(.)两年来的一个经验吧，零四级的学生，那时候当时的班主任的工作来讲是非常主动非常认真非常负责的，呃::但是当时我们的教学体系并没有真正地形成，而到了零五年当我们的教学体系形成了以后，初步形成了以后，班主任这支队伍反倒是在里面，起的作用很小了，而且之间的配合没有了，而且两个两个部门之间呢，产生了这种，猜忌不信任，我想有::主要原因老外他们并不了解(.)中国人为什么要设班主任，设班主任的这个岗位的目标是什么，岗位职责是什么，所以他们不理解以至于他们也不知道怎么去使用，不知道怎么去配合，可能造成了被动，那么我想通过这个会呢，达到这样一个目的，另外我想通过这个目的呢，通过这个会议呢，通过双方之间这种深层次的沟通，让我们，在已经成型的这种教学这种教学管理体系的这种基础之上呢，我们继而推出一种新的更适合中国国情的更适合我们这个项目的新的管理上的一个架构，从教学，从教务，从学务，大家之间，彼此之间，能够互相的了解，能够互相的支持，互相的配合，而这种支持和配合不是盲目的，而是在一种更清晰的体系架构下的这种支持和配合。

(The major goals::{outbreath} there are:: several, one is (.) to enhance the communication between teaching and teaching service student service these two departments (.)between each other, and to enhance the understanding between them, and such an understanding is not a superficial understanding, but an understanding at a deeper level, to strengthen the mutual trust between between them, then on the basis of this, to help them improve between the two departments, can take the initiative more actively to support and cooperate, mutually respect, (.) understand, correctly understand the information of the other side, (1.0) this is major is such a reason, the second reason ne is want to, this is based on our past that (.) two years' experience, the students of 2004, at that time the consultants' performances at that time were very active very conscientious very responsible, err:: but at that time our teaching system was not really formed, however in 2005, when our teaching system was formed, preliminarily formed, the team of consultants instead played a very minor role in it, furthermore, there was no more cooperation between them, moreover, between the two the two departments, there grew such a, suspicion lack of trust, I think they are the major reasons the foreigners they don't understand (.) why the Chinese want to set the position of consultant, what are the goals of setting the position of consultant, what are the duties of the position, so they don't understand so that they don't know how to use, don't know how to cooperate, probably this has caused the passive situation, then I want to through this meeting series, achieve such a goal, in addition I want to through this goal ne, through this meeting series ne, through such an in-depth communication between the two departments, let us, on the basis of such a teaching such a teaching management system that has taken shape, we subsequently introduce a new management system that is more suitable to the Chinese context more suitable to our program, from the angle of teaching, of teaching service, of student service, among everybody, among one another, can mutually understand, can mutually support, mutually cooperate, while such a support and cooperation is not blind, but such a support and cooperation within a clearer system structure)

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