Radboud Universiteit

MA Thesis

Culture and Interactional Trouble in Formal International Business Meetings:

The Effect of Power Distance and Hierarchy on Coping Strategy

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Date: 30-06-2021

Word count: 11,985

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MA Communication and Information Studies:

International Business Communication

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Abstract

Achieving mutual understanding is one of the goals of interlocutors in social interactions. If interlocutors fail in establishing this state of understanding, then there exists interactional trouble. People could cope with interactional trouble in different ways. One could initiate repair or one could let it pass. The usage of such strategies in informal settings in the CA literature has seen much research. However, formal settings have not been extensively investigated. An even more overlooked dimension in the literature is how different cultures cope with interactional trouble in formal settings. This study tries to add to the current literature, by investigating which role power distance (based of Hofstede, 1980) and hierarchy play in coping with interactional trouble in formal Business English Lingua Franca (BELF) meetings. In total, more than 15 hours of professional business meetings transcriptions have been analyzed. The data was provided by the VOICE corpus. The results of the present study indicate an overall preference for directly addressing troubles. Furthermore, the qualitative analyses seem to suggest that the hierarchy symbols of role and age in combination with PD did not result in more frequent direct repair initiations for low PD interlocutors compared to high PD interlocutors. Future research should expand and improve on this study by including more interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds and by achieving a symmetrical distribution across groups, in order to statistically compare behavior. This will improve the understanding of the interplay between hierarchy and culture in intercultural communication.

Keywords: Other-Initiated Repair, Letting It Pass, Interactional Trouble, Power Distance, BELF meetings, Conversation Analysis

1. Background

One of the goals of interlocutors is to achieve mutual understanding and successful communication. This state of understanding is not automatically achieved but is rather co-constructed and the joint work of conversation participants (Schegloff, 2006). However, mutual understanding might not always be achieved, due to existing trouble source(s) in (some part of) an utterance. No matter the cause of the trouble, the fact that there exists trouble in the interaction can be classified as interactional trouble. Interlocutors have systematic procedures at their disposal to cope with trouble (Kasper & Wagner, 2014). Two of such procedures are "*repairing"* (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977) and *"letting it pass"* (Firth, 1996). Most of the studies that examined the use of coping mechanisms for interactional trouble through conversation analysis (CA), focused on informal interactions between participants of the same cultural background. However, the body of CA research that involved formal cross-linguistic and cross-cultural settings is still small (Kasper & Wagner, 2014).

Zimmerman (1999) advocated for the development of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural approaches in CA, because social conduct varies with culture and social structure. Zimmerman's (1999) plea for the implementation of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural in CA research is relevant, because internationalization is causing communication to take place between people from different cultural backgrounds who all speak different languages. English has been established as the Lingua Franca of the world and, therefore, is used by an increasing number of people in different formal and informal contexts. This implies that there is an increase in contact between native speakers (NSE) and non-native speakers of English (NNSE), but also between NNSE and NNSE (Van Meurs, Hendriks & Planken, 2013). Many researchers have investigated the impact of culture. For example, according to Hofstede (1980), Roccas and Sagiv (2010), it seems that culture and personal values might be key factors that determine how an individual behaves and thinks. Therefore, different cultural backgrounds could result in different ways of coping with interactional trouble. Analyzing the impact of culture on the methods of dealing with interactional trouble in BELF meetings could potentially offer interesting insights and expand the present body of CA research.

2. Literature review

2.1.1 Interactional trouble

Building on the definition of understanding given by Schegloff (2006), Pitzl (2005) defines interactional trouble as a point in the interaction when a participant realizes that he/she cannot make sense of (a part of) an utterance. Generally, if a previous utterance is understood by the addressee, the ongoing course of action continues. However, if this utterance is not heard or understood by the addressee, the addressee could undertake various actions. The CA literature demonstrates two strategies for coping with interactional trouble.

2.1.2 Directly repairing the trouble source

Hinnenkamp (1999) suggests that fixing interactional trouble is part of the interactional trouble sequence. Directly repairing interactional trouble is an explicit attempt to deal with trouble-sources (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977; Schegloff, 2007), in order to establish and maintain mutual understanding (Dingemanse, Blythe & Dirksmeyer, 2014). This repair could be initiated to repair the trouble source(s) uttered by oneself or by someone else (Schegloff et al., 1977). Therefore, this strategy could take on two forms: self-initiated repair or other-initiated repair. Consider the following extract from Schegloff (2000):

Extract 1.

1. Frieda This is nice, did you make this?
2. Kathy No, Samu made that
3. Frieda Who?
4. Kathy Samu

On line 1, Frieda asks if Kathy made a particular item. On line 2, Kathy answers by saying that Samu made it. However, the response by Frieda on line 3 signals that she did not clearly understand or hear who made it. To "fix" the existing trouble, Frieda asks for clarification about who made it by directly asking "who?". In her turn, Kathy response by again stating the name who made the item.

This extract is an illustration of the *other-initiated repair sequence*, the central repair form in this study. Kathy produces a trouble source, which is addressed by the other participant in this interaction, Frieda. This is a key characteristic of such sequences; a trouble source is directly addressed by someone other than the speaker of the trouble source. Furthermore, it can be observed that this other-initiated repair sequence has three key moments. The first turn is the turn that contains the trouble source. The second turn contains a repair-initiation and the third

contain a solution to the addressed trouble source. Schegloff et al. (1977) describe repair-initiations which directly follow the turn after a trouble source as *next-turn repair initiators* (NTRI). This form will be further referred to as 'direct repair'.

2.1.3 "Letting it pass"

A second strategy to deal with interactional trouble has been classified by Firth (1996) as *letting it pass*. Hearers that employ this strategy at first try to interpret and guess what a speaker tries to say, without explicitly verbalizing one's inability to comprehend the utterance. Furthermore, hearers make assumptions that the trouble source will either become clear or loses its importance as the interaction progresses. However, it might happen that the trouble source becomes relevant in the interaction without further explanation. A hearer is then forced to verbalize one's troubles with the passed trouble source. Despite this clear definition, it is difficult to analyze the usage of this strategy. The gap between a hearer not noticing a trouble source and a hearer letting this trouble source pass is rather difficult to establish, because the focus of CA lies in analyzing behavior and actions which are publicly demonstrated by the interlocutors. The following extract from Schegloff's (2000) study shows the employment of this strategy:

Extract 2.

1.	Mad	Did you ever eat-uh do you ever eat- uhm, you know
2.		Fried chicken from those stands?
3.	Dad	Try not (to but),
4.	Mad	I mean I don't see how you could
5.		(1.2)
6.	( )	( )
7.	Dad	You talkin (a)bout Colonel Sanders or something like that?
8.	Mad	Yeah. Kentucky fried chicken (or something like that)
9.	Dad	Yeah we get desperate an we…..

On line 1 and 2, Mad asks a question to Dad. Later on, it becomes clear that Dad does not know which fried chicken Mad is talking about. Instead of directly initiating repair here, Dad chooses to just respond on line 3. Building on the thought that common ground had been established by the fact that Dad answered her question, Mad continues the dialogue on line 4. After the continuation, a pause can be observed on line 5 and 6. After this pause, Dad initiates repair initiation on line 7, as he is not sure about which fried chicken Mad is talking about. He does so by naming a fried chicken brand. Mad responds by providing a repair solution on line 8.

As extract 2 demonstrates, Dad first responds to Mad's question and later decides to initiate repair. His repair initiation occurs later which displaces the initiation from the next turn. This format of letting it pass can be classified as *delayed repair.* Schegloff (2000) tackles this phenomenon and argues that this could happen in certain environments: a larger unit being in progress (a list, a story etc.); the addressed other goes first or post-responses in which a hearer first respond to a trouble source and later initiates repair. These environments have in common that a hearer awaits explanation/elaboration instead of directly initiating repair. However, if it becomes obvious that the trouble source becomes essential in the interaction (a question is asked and/or a statement is made concerning the trouble source) and/or the main interaction continues, without further explanation/elaboration of the trouble source, a hearer is then forced to express his/her troubles. Schegloff (2000) continues by stating that repair initiations which are displaced from the next-turn position, need resources to locate the earlier trouble source. Repeating the whole trouble source, repeating some words which frame the trouble source and using category-specific (question) words are, among others, ways to address an earlier trouble source. Referring extract 2, Dad uses category-specific question words (naming a fried chicken brand) to locate the trouble source.

However, there is another form of letting it pass, *absence of second pair part.* Generally, a conversational sequence between interlocutors shows relatedness. An utterance of the first speaker is followed by a suiting utterance of the second speaker. Therefore, the first utterance could be seen as a first pair part and the second as a second pair part. Together, these two form an adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). However, a fitting second pair part can only be given if the hearer clearly understood the first pair part. Rather than verbalizing one's trouble with an utterance, hearers might instead refrain from producing a second pair part. The then created silence can be taken by the speaker as an indication of interactional trouble, which could result in the speaker repeating and/or elaborating on the matter (Schegloff, 1999). Consider the following extract from Firth (1996):

Extract 3.

1.	B	… so I told him not to u: :h send the:: cheese after the- (.) the blowing (.) in
2.		the ↑customs
3.		(0.4)
4.		we don't want the order after the cheese is u: :h (.) blowing.
5.	H	I see, yes

On line 1 and 2, B tells H what B had said to (presumably) one of his partners about a shipment of cheese. This is his first pair part. On line 3, B leaves a pause for H to produce his second pair part. However, B notices that H refrains from doing so and self-selects to elaborate on what he had previously said. Line 4 thus acts as an elaboration of line 1. He does this by reusing words from line 1 and explicitly explaining what he meant. On line 5, H accepts his explanation by positively reacting to his explanation and producing a fitting second pair part.

2.1.4 Initiation formats

When one decides to initiate repair, albeit direct or delayed, one could do so in multiple ways. According to Dingemanse and Enfield (2015), repair initiation formats could be divided into two categories: an initiation could either be open (signal a problem without specifying which part caused trouble) or restricted (signal a problem with specification to the part that caused the trouble). Furthermore, an initiation could either be a request (signal a problem and ask for repetition or elaboration) or an offer (signal a problem and offer candidate understanding). This creates three types of repair initiations:

- *Open request:* the most broad initiator that targets the trouble source as a whole, without specifying which part of the trouble source caused interactional trouble (interjections like *Huh?*, questions like *What do you mean?*).
- *Restricted request:* targets some aspect of the trouble source and might include (some) repetition of the words used in the trouble source, which shows that the hearer understood some parts (question words like *Who?*, questions like *Which car?*).
- *Restricted offer:* targets some aspect of the trouble source and might include (some) repetition of the words used in the trouble source. Furthermore, the repair initiation offers a candidate understanding by providing conformations or corrections (questions like *Do you mean Columbia?, The one next to John?*).

2.2 Coping with interactional trouble in different contexts

The presented strategies indicate that interactional trouble can be dealt with in different ways. Despite such strategies, there are other factors that could narrow down possible meaning of an utterance. Referring to Zimmermann's (1999) plea, context is an important factor which determines goal and meaning of a message or conversation. Mustajoki (2013) follows this reasoning and argues that situational context could also determine the way people speak. For this, the author adopted the term 'speech genres', as originally introduced by Bakhtin (1996). He divides these genres into six different communication situations. For this study, everyday

conversations at home, or informal conversations as a broader scope and international business meetings are the most relevant. Informal contexts differ from international business contexts, as hierarchy and rules of conduct in the latter contexts seem to be more relevant and present. For example, the chairperson (if present) is regarded as superior compared to the participants. Moreover, international business meetings seem to be more formal and such meetings mostly require people to discuss matters with people from different cultural backgrounds in a Lingua Franca (Mustajoki, 2013). These differences in formality, hierarchy, language and culture might mean that interactional trouble is solved differently when compared to informal settings.

Dingemanse, Blythe and Dirksmeyer (2014) describe that direct repair can be socially sensitive and interactionally costly, as one needs to highlight prior talk by another speaker as problematic and thus needs to disrupt the ongoing interaction. Therefore, these strategies might be more suitable in informal contexts. When one decides to these strategies in formal contexts, using a different lexical format might be useful. Dingemanse, Blythe and Dirksmeyer (2014) describe that the lexical form one uses to express one's trouble with (a part of) an utterance might characterize the social relation between interlocutors. Moreover, certain lexical formats are more suitable for managing social relations and expressing politeness. These formulaic formats contain an apologizing lexical form (an open request like: *excuse me?*, a restricted request like: *sorry, who?* or a restricted offer like: *sorry, do you mean this one?*). Apology-based lexical formats are more suitable to manage social relations, because these forms manage responsibility and include elements of politeness and saving face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The authors add that these formulaic formats are rare in informal interactions, as these formats highlight social asymmetry. Robinson (2006) and Selting (1987) similarly found that apology-based formats appear to be relatively rare in informal settings and thus might be a formal kind of repair initiation. Letting it pass strategies seem to manage responsibility less sensitively, as a hearer provides the speaker of the trouble source an opportunity to repair the trouble source, using self-initiated repair (Schegloff et al., 1977). Therefore, these strategies might be more suitable in formal contexts. In combination with the previously mentioned situational factors, the degree of explicitness and responsibility management of coping strategies might result in different coping strategies per context.

Most of the CA literature that examined ways of coping with interactional trouble collected data in informal environments between interlocutors with similar cultural backgrounds. Dingemanse et al. (2015) expanded on this domain by quantitatively analyzing how interactional trouble is solved in 12 different languages. The researchers found direct other-initiated repair to be frequent (once every 1.4 minutes on average) in any language, confirming

the universal language hypothesis: while languages differ, key systems of language may largely be similar across cultural groups.

However, participants of informal conversations are not by definition of similar cultural backgrounds, as internationalization caused more contact between people from different cultural backgrounds. An interaction becomes intercultural, as soon as there are differences in sociocultural knowledge; i.e. encounters between speakers of different cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds (Hinnenkamp, 1999). The small CA body that examined mechanisms of coping with interactional trouble in informal intercultural conversations found evidence in favor of directly repairing interactional trouble. For example, Pietikäinen (2016) investigated how interactional trouble was resolved in private English Lingua Franca (ELF) talk between intercultural couples. The findings suggest that interactional trouble is resolved by using both self and other-initiated repair strategies. Kaur (2011a) and Kaur (2011b) also support the notion that in informal intercultural settings, interactional trouble is restored by making use of direct repair strategies.

In formal intercultural business meetings, more coping strategies seem to be used to cope with interactional trouble. For example, the study of Rogerson-Revell (2010) found evidence that NSE and NNSE speakers employed letting it pass strategies to cope with interactional trouble. The author suggested that a lack of confidence or linguistic proficiency might explain why some people opted to let it pass. Another possibility is that people wanted to maintain the sense of 'normality' in the meeting. However, there also seems to be evidence in favor of direct repair to cope with interactional trouble. Tsuchiya and Handford (2014) investigated how an international business meeting from a bridge-building project in South Asia proceeded. The results show that the chair spoke the most and actively repaired utterances of other participants, to make sure everybody was aligned and comprehended the utterances, as there were differences of nationality and English proficiency among the group. Moreover, other-initiated repair strategies were also employed by other participants in the group. The same method for coping with interactional trouble was found by Franceschi (2020), Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) and Pitzl (2005). The latter study examined two ELF business meetings with speakers who spoke different mother tongues. It was found that interactional trouble was resolved by explicitly signaling one's need for negotiating meaning.

However, more empirical evidence of restoring interactional trouble lacks in the domain of CA in business meetings (Kasper & Wagner, 2014). This could be due to the fact that companies are hesitant in allowing researchers to record their meetings, as confidentiality

is a major concern of these parties (Charles, 2007). The fact that there is evidence, makes it that this domain has potential for more research.

2.3 Involvement of culture in formal miscommunication

As stated earlier, Hofstede (1980), Roccas and Sagiv (2010) among others, argue that cultural and personal values could be crucial determiners which influence an individual's behavior and thoughts. International business conversations distinguish themselves from informal conversations, because of the presence of hierarchy and formality in the former. Cultures cope with formality and hierarchy in different ways. Adopting Hofstede's (1980) work, the Power Distance (PD) dimension reflects how hierarchy is dealt with. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) describe that there could be two extremes of power distributions in the workplace. On the one hand and among many other factors, high-power-distance situations are characterized by inequality due to recognized and respected value of organizational role and older superiors compared to younger ones and subordinates who rely on superiors and formal rules. On the other hand, in low-power-distance situations superiors and subordinates are considered equivalent and opinions of subordinates are heard and respected among other factors.

One study in the domain of CA that found potential evidence in favor of the influence of culture in formal communication, is the study by Avison and Banks (2008). The researchers analyzed naturally occurring telephone conferences between offshore vendor staff in India and UK/US employees of a major pharmaceutical company. A recurring phenomenon in their analysis was the asymmetry of participation; all discussions tended to be dominated by the UK/US parties, while the Indian party provided much smaller contributions. The authors used social hierarchy as explanatory theory and linked this to Hofstede's PD dimension. India has a high PD score (77), compared to lower scores of the UK and the US (35 and 40 respectively), indicating that the Indian society respects and is more used to hierarchical relationships and conversations than the other two societies. According to the authors, this could explain why asymmetry occurred. However, the authors are aware that there is insufficient evidence to conclusively link this asymmetry to the hierarchical nature of Indian culture. As far as the knowledge of the researcher goes, this is the only CA study that included culture as a possible explanation of different behavior in formal intercultural business conversations. This assumption by the researcher and the claim provided by Avison and Banks (2008) is strengthened by the concluding remarks of Marriott (1995), which states that more detailed studies that involve different cultures and languages are necessary to develop a more detailed understanding of cross-cultural communication problems in business context.

Outside the CA domain, studies have analyzed the influence of PD in business context. For example, Khatri (2009) examined the behavioral implications in organizations related to PD. In this study, the results show that older employees and superiors in high PD societies are respected due to one's age, instead of their competences. This finding seems to be shared by the study of Selda (2000), which highlights that age increases positional power. In addition, employees in high PD context are more unwilling to participate in decision-making and leave this to their superiors, compared to employees in low PD context. Furthermore, in high PD context communication flows vertically downwards, in which the employees have an unquestioning, submissive attitude. Koc (2013) analyzed the impact of PD on subordinate-supervisor communication. The researcher compared a high PD culture (Turkey) with a low PD culture (Britain). The results show that Turkish employees tend to use more mitigated and indirect communication (passive phrases) when communicating with their superiors. The study of Botero and Van Dyne (2009), which examined the influence of PD on communication behavior of subordinates directed towards superiors, demonstrates that high PD resulted in less communication behavior of subordinates towards superiors.

The above-mentioned studies show interesting findings of how employees interact in formal interactions with their superiors. Apparently, employees from high PD cultures tend to take on a more conservative role in interactions with supervisors and communication is more indirect and one-sided. This pattern seems to coincide with the notion of Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010), that subordinates in high PD societies expect to be told what to do, that superiors do not ask subordinates for their opinions and contact is supposed to be initiated by the superior. This implies that higher roles are respected and accepted as formal hierarchy. In the same vein, Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) argue that older superiors are respected more in high PD societies than younger superiors, which could imply that age is also seen as a hierarchal accepted symbol.

3. Present study

This study aims to investigate the assumption that differences in PD could influence how people cope with interactional trouble. This study tries to contribute to the existing body of CA research by filling the gap that exists in the intercultural business domain. As stated earlier, only a limited number of studies investigated how interlocutors cope with interactional trouble in international business context, even a smaller number that included culture as a possible explanatory factor. Furthermore, as far as the knowledge of the researcher goes, there exists no study that compared the use of two coping strategies in business conversations. This study tries to analyze the use

of two coping strategies and links these to cultural motives. This leads to the following research question:

RQ: What role does the interaction between hierarchy, defined by role in combination with age, and power distance play concerning the choice between opting for letting it pass vs direct repair in situations of interactional trouble in formal intercultural contexts?

In this study, hierarchy is formed by the interplay of role and age. It seems that cultures deal with hierarchy in different ways. Societies high on the PD dimension show great acceptance of hierarchy and subordinates seem to show submissive, indirect behavior in superior-subordinate interactions (Porter, Allen & Angle, 1980). Therefore, the reverse can be expected for societies low on the PD dimension. Relating this behavior to coping with interactional trouble in formal context, an interaction between power distance and coping strategy is expected. However, there is no expectancy about which coping strategy will be used more frequently. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1a: High PD cultures use more letting it pass strategies than low PD cultures.

H1b: Low PD cultures initiate direct repair more than high PD cultures.

Furthermore, it could be expected that repair is initiated by participants from low PD societies, despite one's role and age. Generally, hierarchy is flat and people are seen as equal in low PD societies. Explicitly and directly initiating repair to establish and maintain mutual understanding (Dingemanse, Blythe & Dirksmeyer, 2014) could therefore be accepted and seen as crucial behavior by all participants instead of the older interlocutors or the chair. The reverse can be expected for high PD societies. Therefore, an interaction is expected between role and power distance. Furthermore, an interaction is expected between age and power distance. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a: For low PD cultures, participants will initiate direct repair as frequent as chairs. Different age groups will initiate direct repair as frequently.

H2b: For high PD cultures, chairs will initiate direct repair more than participants. The oldest interlocutors will initiate direct repair the most.

Returning to the results found by Avison and Banks (2008), Khatri (2009), Selda (2000) Koc (2013) and Botero and Van Dyne (2009), it appears that subordinates are less verbally present in subordinate-superior interactions in high PD cultures. In addition, it seems that

superiors in these cultures are more direct in their communication and are supposed to initiate contact. It can be expected that the reverse is true. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: High PD participants tend to directly repair the chair less than low PD participants.

Finally, it was mentioned earlier that apology-based initiation formats are more suitable for managing social relations, as these forms manage responsibility and include elements of politeness and saving face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Managing social relations in high PD cultures might matter more, because role and age seem to be symbols of formal power in high PD cultures, whereas is low PD cultures these do not seem to have such a function. Thus, this leads to the following hypothesis:

H4: High PD interlocutors will relatively use more apology-based initiation formats than low PD interlocutors.

4. Methodology

4.1 materials

In order to answer the proposed research question, this study adopted the CA approach and combined this with quantitative analyses. This study made use of a free-to-access, non-commercial purpose existing corpus, called the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). VOICE is a large, structured collection of spoken language data which captured ELF conversations in all kinds of contexts, ranging from educational to professional. The corpus was created by Barbara Seidhofer and colleagues. In total, the corpus consists of 151 naturally-occurring, non-scripted, face-to-face interactions with 753 individuals from 49 different first language backgrounds. The interactions took place between 2001 and 2007 (VOICE, 2013).

For this study, only the 'professional business meetings' were analyzed, which included 15 hours and 50 minutes of spoken data. All meetings were accompanied by detailed transcriptions of the interactions. Furthermore, descriptions of the nature of the interaction and the participants engaging in these ELF interactions were provided (see appendix 1, page 42). Additionally, power relations and acquaintedness among the participants per meeting were provided. A meeting with fairly asymmetrical power relations means that participants had unequal social/hierarchical status, whereas fairly symmetrical power relations in a meeting described the equal social/hierarchical status of the participants. The acquaintedness level 'acquainted' means that all participants had met before at least once and predominantly acquainted means that most of the participants had met before at least once. Finally, two of the

meetings had audio-recordings and no meeting had video-recordings (VOICE, 2013). Table 1 provides an overview of the selected dataset.

Table 1. Overview of selected corpus data

MeetingID	Duration	Power relation / acquaintedness	Speakers
PBmtg3	3h28	Fairly asymmetrical / predominantly acquainted	5
PBmtg27	1h17	Fairly asymmetrical / acquainted	5
PBmtg269	2h33	Fairly symmetrical / acquainted	7
PBmtg280	0h27	Fairly symmetrical / acquainted	5
PBmtg300	3h08	Fairly asymmetrical / predominantly acquainted	7
PBmtg414	1h56	Fairly symmetrical / acquainted	4
PBmtg462	1h29	Fairly asymmetrical / acquainted	6
PBmtg463	1h32	Fairly asymmetrical / acquainted	6

As some speakers participated in multiple meetings, the total accumulated to 32 unique speakers. The VOICE researchers classified the participants by using four characteristics: sex (male or female), first language, role (chair or participant) and age (either 25-34, 35-49, or 50+). This study made use of the same classifications. In total, 17 (58.6%) participants were male and 3 (10.3%) participants had a chair role. Furthermore, 5 (17.2%) were between 35-34 years old, 21 (72.4%) participants were between 35-49 years of age and 3 (10.3%) were 50+ years old. The 32 speakers spoke 13 different first languages. The most recurring first language was German (41.4%). Next to the first languages, the participants were specified by country where possible, as some languages are spoken in multiple countries. For example, a speaker with the label Fre-fr is classified as an L1 French speaker from France. Table 2 in appendix 2, page 46, shows an overview of speakers per meeting. As can be seen in meeting PBmtg280, the researchers were unable to specify the country for three participants (Ger and Eng were only disclosed without country specification). These participants were excluded from the analyses and left 29 total unique speakers which were included in this study. Finally, in PBmtg3 there were two speakers with the classification Kor-kr. For this study, the assumption was made that these speakers originated from South-Korea, as the speakers touched upon this topic in the respective meeting. The characteristics per speaker are presented in table 3.

Cultural differences, in terms of how hierarchy might influence the way people cope with interactional trouble, are a central topic in this study. To analyze these cultural differences,

Hofstede's (1984) Power Distance Index (PDI) was adopted to measure how cultures deal with hierarchy. To determine the PDI of a speaker in this study, the first language and country specification were the only indications. However, it must be noted that these indications are by no means the most accurate form of determining the PDI of a participant. Rather, this was the most convenient as no other personal details were disclosed which represented cultural origins.

The PDI per speaker was operationalized as following: a score of 51 or more was classified as 'high PD' and a score of 49 or less was classified as 'low PD'. The high PD group included 11 speakers and the low PD group included 18 speakers. Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of PD.

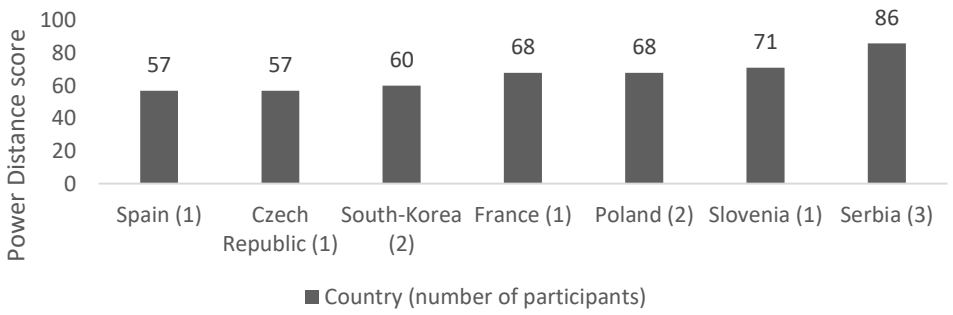

Figure 1. Distribution of represented high PD cultures

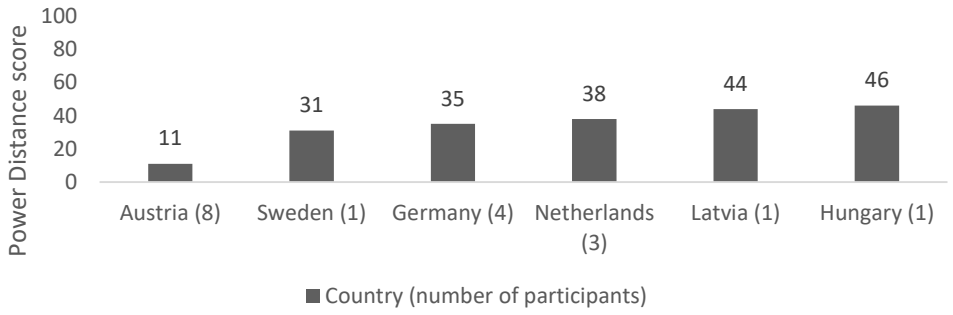

Figure 2. Distribution of represented low PD cultures

Table 3. Characteristics per unique speaker

	Gender	Language	PD	Age	Role	Participation
P1	Male	Kor-kr	High	50+	Participant	PBmtg3
P2	Male	Kor-kr	High	35-49	Participant	PBmtg3
P3	Male	Ger-at	Low	25-34	Participant	PBmtg3
P4	Male	Ger-at	Low	35-49	Chair	PBmtg3
P5	Female	Ger-at	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg3
P73	Male	Ger-de	Low	35-49	Chair	PBmtg27, PBmtg300
P74	Male	Ger-de	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg27, PBmtg300
P75	Male	Fre-fr	High	25-34	Participant	PBmtg27, PBmtg300
P76	Male	Spa-es	High	25-34	Participant	PBmtg27, PBmtg300
P78	Female	Ger-de	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg27, PBmtg300
P539	Female	Ger-at	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg269
P540	Male	Ger-at	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg269
P541	Female	Pol	High	35-49	Chair	PBmtg269
P542	Female	Cze	High	35-49	Participant	PBmtg269
P543	Female	Slv	High	35-49	Participant	PBmtg269
P544	Female	Hun	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg269
P545	Female	Lav	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg269
P170	Male	Pol	High	25-34	Participant	PBmtg280
P173	Male	Swe	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg280
P506	Male	Dut-nl	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg300
P507	Male	Ger-de	Low	25-34	Participant	PBmtg300
P534	Male	Dut-nl	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg414
P526	Female	Ger-at	Low	50+	Participant	PBmtg414, PBmtg462, PBmtg463
P535	Female	Dut-nl	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg414
P525	Female	Ger-at	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg414, PBmtg462, PBmtg463
P524	Female	Scc-rs	High	50+	Participant	PBmtg462, PBmtg463
P523	Male	Scc-rs	High	35-49	Participant	PBmtg462, PBmtg463
P527	Male	Ger-at	Low	35-49	Participant	PBmtg462, PBmtg463
P528	Male	Scc-rs	High	35-49	Participant	PBmtg462, PBmtg463

4.2 Analysis

As stated earlier, this research adopted the qualitative CA method and combined this with quantitative analyses, in order to suitably analyze the dataset and answer the proposed research question. This study made use of an existing corpus in which no personal details of the participants were disclosed. Therefore, it was not possible to ask the participants for clarifications. Therefore, the researcher was only able to objectively analyze the data (Olsina, 2002) and draw conclusions up to a certain point. To objectively analyze the dataset, the key concepts *interactional trouble, other-initiated repair, letting it pass and initiation formats* had to be operationalized. This operationalization was based on Dingemanse, Kendrick and Enfield (2016).

4.2.1 Determining interactional trouble

Returning to the definition of interactional trouble given by Pitzl (2005), it is a point in an interaction when one realizes that one cannot make sense of (a part of) an utterance. To analyze the occurrence of interactional trouble, it becomes crucial to establish that there exists interactional trouble. This can be done by examining multiple cues. The first cue can be found by examining the *next turn proof procedure* (Kasper & Wagner, 2014). A participant's understanding of a previous turn is shown in the formation of his/her next turn. If the previous turn is understood, the ongoing course of action continues. This is called an "preferred structure", in which the second pair part directly follows the first pair part and align to form an adjacency pair. However, if a turn is not heard or understood by the addressee, the addressee could do either of two things.

One might initiate direct repair to address/solve the trouble. This direct repair initiation is mostly formatted as a question (Dingemanse, Blythe & Dirksmeyer, 2014) and will form a side sequence (Kasper & Wagner, 2014), which delays the main course of action, in order to establish mutual understanding (Jefferson, 1972). These side sequences mostly occur directly after a turn that includes a trouble source. However, one might also choose to use letting it pass strategies. One of such strategies is the delayed repair initiation, in which a repair initiation to a trouble source occurs later in the interaction after being let pass at first. Furthermore, one might choose to stay silent and await further elaboration and/or explanation of the trouble source. This allows a speaker to readdress the trouble by repeating elements from the original trouble source to explain what the utterance meant.

The reason why these occurrences of side sequences and silence in combination with repetition are crucial, is because these are one of the only observable clues the researcher has

that indicate the presence of interactional trouble; interactional trouble has to be addressed and/or solved in order to be objectively analyzed as a case of interactional trouble.

4.2.2 Determining and coding other-initiated repair (direct repair)

Previously, it had been established that other-initiated repair is a three-turn sequence, directly initiated by someone other than the speaker of the trouble source and solved by speaker of the trouble source and/or other conversation participant (Dingemanse, Blythe & Dirksmeyer, 2014). This sequence has three key moments, which are labeled as following:

T-1: Turn or utterance by speaker that contains the trouble source

T0: Signaling a problem and repair initiation by hearer(s) to trouble source

T+1: Repair solution offered by speaker of trouble source and/or other conversation participant

Essential here is that T0 must be the addressee's first turn after T-1 for the sequences to be labeled as repair. This three-turn sequence, in which one T0 and T+1 are sufficient to solve the trouble, is the most basic sequence of other-initiated repair and is called a "minimal sequence" (Dingemanse, 2015). In order to count and quantify the minimal sequences, T0 was used as measurement marker.

However, a sequence of other-initiated repair can take more than the basic three turns to solve. The most common reason for this to occur is the fact that the first T+1 is treated as not sufficient enough by the repair initiator. The less common reason is that the T+1 itself could become a trouble source which then needs to be solved (Dingemanse, 2015). In either case, it might take more T0s to solve interactional trouble. These sequences are called "non-minimal sequences" (Dingemanse, 2015) and are labeled as following:

T-1: Turn or utterance by speaker that contains the trouble source

$T0_1$: Signaling a problem and repair initiation by hearer(s) to trouble source

$T+1_1$: Repair solution offered by speaker of trouble source and/or other conversation participant

$T0_2$: Signaling a problem and repair initiation by hearer(s) to $T+1_1$

$T+1_2$: Repair solution offered by speaker of trouble source and/or other conversation participant to $T0_1$

(…)

In order to count and quantify the non-minimal sequences, $T0_1$ was used as measurement marker. Apart from raw frequencies to examine the presence of other-initiated repair, there was need for a weighted and comparable variable which accounted for the difference in participation per participant, as it became clear that there existed participation asymmetry between the different participants in the different meetings. Therefore, a variable was created that examined the number of repair initiations per 100 speech turns (OIR/100).

4.2.3 Determining and coding letting-it-pass

As stated before, it is rather difficult to establish the usage of letting-it-pass strategies. However, there are ways of signaling the usage of these strategies. What becomes evident from the literature, is that two broad categories can be formed:

Delayed repair: Instead of a repair initiation occurring directly the next turn after a trouble source, i.e. direct repair, a hearer could initiate repair later than the first repair opportunity to solve (some part of) the trouble source. To code delayed repair, the following labels were used:

TS: Turn or utterance by speaker that contains the trouble source

(R_x: Possible response of hearer to utterance of speaker)

QSC: Question, statement or continuation of main dialogue by speaker and/or other participant

DRI: Delayed repair initiation by hearer(s) to trouble source

RS: Repair solution offered by speaker of trouble source and/or other conversation participant

In order to count and quantify delayed repair, DRI was used as measurement marker.

Absence of second pair part: The second pair part is replaced by silence as an indication of interactional trouble, which could allow the speaker to repeat and/or elaborate on the matter. To code the absence of the second pair part, the following labels were used:

TS: Turn or utterance by speaker that contains the trouble source

S_x: The withholding of response by hearer

ELA: Repetition of and/or elaboration on TS by speaker of trouble source

In order to count and quantify the absence of the second pair part, ELA was used as measurement marker. Similar to other-initiated repair, there was need for a weighted and comparable variable which accounted for the difference in participation per participant.

Therefore, a variable was created that examined the number of delayed repair initiations (DRI/100) and absent second pair parts (ASPP/100) per 100 speech turns.

4.2.4 Repair initiation formats

To code the type of repair initiation for T0, $T0_1$ and DRI, the following three labels were used:

- Open request
- Restricted request
- Restricted offer

Furthermore, an initiation format might include an apology-based lexical form. To code the presence of such formats, "1" was annotated to those T0, $T0_1$ and/or DRI that included these formats. If T0, $T0_1$ and/or DRI showed no presence of apology-based formats, "2" was annotated. To compare apology-based initiations per culture, the percentage of initiations that used apology-based formats was taken from the total number of initiations per speaker.

4.3 Statistical treatment

To answer the proposed hypotheses and research question, a repeated measures ANOVA was used to test the interaction between PD and coping strategy. Furthermore, a t-test was performed to analyze the difference in use of apology-based initiation formats per PD culture. Due to the fact that there existed asymmetrical distribution of participants between role and age groups per PD culture, hypotheses 2a, 2b and 3 were not statistically tested. Rather, these hypotheses were explored qualitatively by examining extracts from the corpus.

5. Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate what role power distance, in relation with hierarchy, plays concerning the choice between opting for letting it pass vs direct repair in situations of interactional trouble in formal intercultural context. In this study, hierarchy was defined by the interplay between role and age.

5.1 Overall results

The overall results are presented in table 4. In total, 165 cases of interactional trouble were found in 15 hours and 50 minutes of data. In 141 (85.5%) cases the trouble was directly addressed/fixed by means of direct repair strategies, meaning that 8.97 direct repair initiation occurred per hour on average. This resulted in a repair initiation occurring once every 6.7 minutes on average. For letting it pass, only delayed repair initiations were found. This resulted in 24 cases of delayed repair. Therefore, delayed repair occurred 1.5 times per hour on average, meaning that a delayed repair initiation occurred once every 39.6 minutes on average. No cases of absent second pair parts were found. This means that the following analyses will solely regard delayed repair as letting it pass strategy and will compare this to direct repair.

Table 4. Overview of overall results per coping strategy

Coping strategy	Direct repair		Delayed repair		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Total	141	100	24	100	165	100
Type of sequence						
Minimal	111	80.1	24	100	135	81.8
Non-minimal	30	19.9	0	0	30	18.2
Initiation type						
Open request	48	34.0	0	0	48	29.1
Restricted request	38	27.0	6	25	44	26.7
Restricted offer	55	39.0	18	75	73	42.2
Apology-based						
Yes	19	13.5	1	4.2	20	12.1
No	122	86.5	23	95.8	145	87.9

A repeated measures analysis for initiation per 100 speech turns with coping strategy as within-factor and power distance as between-subject factor showed a significant main effect of

coping strategy (F (1, 22) = 17.15, p < .001). Irrespective of culture, direct repair (M = 0.89, SD = 0.64) was used significantly more per 100 speech turns by interlocutors compared to delayed repair initiations (M = 0.22, SD = 0.34) per 100 turns. Furthermore, no significant main effect of power distance (F (1, 22) < 1) and no significant interaction effect were found (F (1, 22) < 1). Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations per culture per coping strategy per 100 speech turns. Figure 3 presents a visual comparison. Extract 4 presents an example of a direct repair initiation sequence.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of power distance in function of coping strategies per 100 turns

	High		Low		Total	
	n	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*
Direct repair	10	0.90 (0.78)	14	0.88 (0.54)	24	0.89 (0.64)
Delayed repair	10	0.31 (0.50)	14	0.15 (0.17)	24	0.22 (0.34)

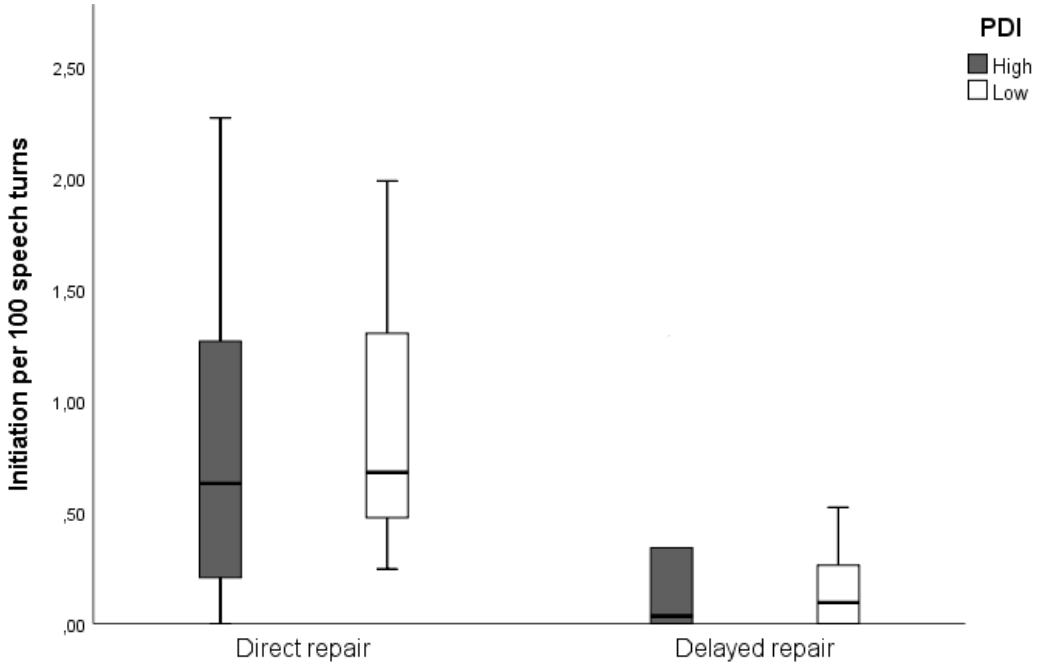

Figure 3. Comparison of coping strategy per 100 speech turns per culture.

Extract 4.

1. P535 T-1 Yeah (2) cos i n:ever heard of a ratatouille (.)
2. SS (Laughter)
3. P535 That's new for me (2)
4. P534 T0 Ratatouille is that is that that dog of er of lucky luke? or

5.	P535	T+1	<1> a <1> <2> xxx <2> <3> rat <3>
6.	P526	T+1	<1> it's <1> <2> a famous <2> <3> rat <3>
7.	P534		<2> and something <2>
8.	P525	T+1	It's a rat (.) a French: rat (.)
9.	P534		Okay (2)

(Interaction continues)

In this sequence, the interlocutors are talking about new products. One of these products has a ratatouille theme. This is uttered by P535 (a 35-49 year old low PD participant from the Netherlands) on line 1. Line 4 is P534's (a 35-49 year old low PD participant from the Netherlands) first turn, in which he directly addresses the trouble source on line 1. He does so by offering a candidate understanding of ratatouille. On line 5, 6 and 8, solutions are offered by different interlocutors. These solutions are perceived as sufficient by P534, as he positively reacts to these solutions on line 9 and the previously upheld conversation continues.

It can be observed that interactional trouble here was addressed by offering a candidate understanding without an apology-based lexical form. The following solutions by multiple interlocutors to this trouble were sufficient for the trouble to be solved. The solutions did not result in new trouble sources. This seemed to be a recurring form of addressing trouble sources throughout the corpus, regardless of whether it was a direct or delayed initiation. This sequence can be classified as a direct repair initiation sequence, because it meets the required criteria to be deemed as such: the initiation is offered by someone other than the speaker of the trouble source, the initiation is offered directly in the next turn after the trouble source and a solution is offered to the initiation. The following extract presents an example of a delayed repair initiation.

Extract 5.

1.	P524	TS	I collect s- collect special editions: if you want to know?
2.	P526	R_1	<1> (Laughter) <1> just if just in case we want to know <2> (Laughter) <2> (Laughter)
3.	P524		<1> (Laughter) <1>
4.	P524		<2> (Laughter) yes <2>
5.	P525		<2> (Laughter) <2>
6.	P524	QSC	And this er
7.	P526	DRI	Only only all the limited ones (1) you mean?
8.	P524	RS	Mhm <3> yes yes <3> something which which is not you know will sell. Hh and will you ever continue again with this er body parts.
9.	P526		<3> mhm okay mhm <3>

(Interaction continues)

In this sequence, P524 (a 50+ year old high PD participant from Serbia) says something about which items she collects on line 1. At first, it can be observed that P526 (50+ year old low PD participant from Austria) just responds to P524's utterance on line 2. After some laughter by all interlocutors, P524 continues with the conversation. However, P526 interrupts her on line 7. Her question, in which she offers a candidate understanding of which special editions it could be, signals that she is not sure which special editions P524 was talking about. On line 8, P524 confirms P526's thought and offers an elaborate explanation. On line 9, common ground is reached, as P526 positively reacts to P524's solution and the previously upheld conversation continues.

This sequence can be classified as delayed repair. Instead of directly addressing the trouble source the next turn (which would have been on line 2 in a direct repair sequence), P526 initiates repair a few turns later after (possibly) awaiting further explanation on the existing trouble source. However, this explanation was not provided. Similar to extract 4, the interactional trouble was addressed by offering a candidate understanding without an apology-based lexical form. Furthermore, the provided solution on itself was enough to fix the existing trouble.

5.2 PDI x Role

Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations of direct repair initiations per 100 speech turn per role and PD culture. An interaction was anticipated for power distance and role. For high PD cultures, chairs would initiate direct repair more frequently than participants whereas both groups would initiate direct repair as frequently in low PD cultures. However, this cannot be statistically analyzed due to the small and asymmetrical distribution of *n* for both chair groups.

Interestingly, it seemed that both high PD chair and participants initiated direct repair. The chair initiated direct repair 10 times and the participants initiated direct repair 41 times overall. Examining the direct repair initiations by the high PD chair, it seemed that overlap in turns was the main contributor of why the chair initiated repair. Consider the following extract:

Extract 6.

1.	P541		Nobody came with the idea i'm going to come with the idea on Tuesday yeah (.) tomorrow (.) <1> because we <1>
2.	P542	T-1	<1> What about web <1> pages (.)
3.	P541	T0	What?

4.	P542	T+1	What about web? (1) internet. (2) <2> is there going <2> to be at least some information on: [org4] e:rm (.)
5.	P541		<2> okay <2>
6.	P541		I don't know. (.) the web was not covered. hh (.) (could be) a good question (.) i don't know? (.) no one was thinking about.

(Interaction continues)

On line 1, P541 (a 35-49 year old high PD chair from Poland) utters something about an idea which was not presented in a meeting. At the end of line 1 and at the beginning of line 2, it can be observed that P541 and P542 (a 35-49 year old high PD participant from Czech Republic) overlap turns, as P542 interrupts P541. Due to this overlap, P541 might not have correctly understood or heard P542's question. To force P542 to redo her whole turn, P541's repair initiation has an open format which does not reveal the part that caused trouble. On line 4, it can be observed that P542 redoes her whole turn and even presents additional information. On line 6, P541 has understood the question as she now presents a suitable answer to the initial question by P542 which allowed the upheld conversation to continue.

This extract demonstrated why and how the high PD chair addressed interactional trouble in most cases. Interestingly for the high PD participants, overlap in turns did not appear to be the main contributor. Rather, unspecific talk by a speaker and personal problems with hearing or understanding seemed to contribute more to the emergence of interactional trouble. The following extract presents a direct repair sequence by a high PD participant, due to an unspecific question:

Extract 7.

1.	P1		Hm (.) and and and e:r [org36] which we started may we (.) e::r couldn't sell more (.) to them (.) while we haven't started to: receive returns which is not a good news again (2)
2.	P4		Mhm
3.	P1		E:r (.) among the department store [org37] is our major (.) client (2)
4.	P4		Erm (.) excuse me
5.	P1		Yes (2)
6.	P4	T-1	And approximately (.) how many outlets do they have? (1)
7.	P1	T0	Which one?
8.	P4	T+1	[org39] ? (2)
9.	P1		(I think) two (1)

(Interaction continues)

Before line 1, P1 (a 50+ year old high PD participant from South-Korea) utters something about turnovers of other subsidiaries and organizations. He continues on line 1. Up until line 3, P1

has already mentioned several organizations. On line 6, P4 (a 35-49 year old low PD chair from Austria) asks P1 how many outlets a particular organization has. On line 7, it can be observed that P1 initiates repair by means of a restricted request; he requests P4 to specify which organization the 'they' in line 1 referred to. P4's solution comes on line 8, which resulted in common ground and allowed the upheld conversation to continue.

Similar to the high PD groups, it seemed that both low PD chairs and participants initiated direct repair. Examining these groups, it became clear that the two chairs initiated direct repair 31 times and the participants 59 times overall. The following extract presents a direct repair initiation by a low PD chair which occurred in the same meeting as extract 7:

Extract 8.

1.	P1	T-1	… we asked er [first name2] (.) to set up e:r some program (.) with imp- (.) the the important er (.) key account (.) to develop some annual program (.) for ou-
2.	P4	$T0_1$	What is an annual program? (.)
3.	P1	$T+1_1$	It's a YEARLY (.) based (.) <1> (program) <1>
4.	P4	$T0_2$	<1><L1ger> ja ja {yes yes} </L1ger><1> (i mean) in regards of <2> assortment <2> in regards of placement or in regards of e:rm activities? (.)
5.	P1		<2> (unidentified chatter) <2>
6.	P4	$T0_2$	Or in regards of PRICE-off promotions or (1)
7.	P1		<to P2><L1kor> xxxxx </L1kor><to P2> (2)
8.	P2	$T+1_2$	erm mainly the: activities (.)
9.	P1	$T+1_2$	promotion activity
	(Interaction continues)		

In a discussion about the promotion activities for next year, P1 mentioned that they asked for an annual program to be made. On line 2, it can be observed that P4 asks for a specification about this 'annual program'. P4 then provides the definition of what an annual program is. However, on line 4, it can be observed that P1's initial solution is not perceived as sufficient by P4. Apparently, P4 is already familiar with the definition. Rather, he was enquiring about which theme this annual program concerns. This can be seen on line 4 and line 6. Then, on line 8 and 9, P2 and P1 provide the theme of the annual promotion program. Now that this was established, the upheld conversation continued.

This extract shows that unspecific talk resulted in interactional trouble which required more than one repair initiation in order to be solved. In addition to unspecific talk, overlap in turns and personal problems with hearing or understanding seemed to contribute to the emergence of interactional trouble. These factors also caused interactional trouble for low PD

participants. For example, see extract 4 which presented a direct repair initiation due to personal problems with hearing or understanding of the term *ratatouille*.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of power distance and role groups in function of direct repair per 100 speech turns.

	High		Low	
	n	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*
Chair	1	2.01	2	1.12 (1.23)
Participant	9	0.77 (0.71)	12	0.84 (0.45)
Total	10	0.90 (0.78)	14	0.88 (0.54)

5.4 PDI x Age

Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations of direct repair initiations per 100 speech turn per age group and PD culture. An interaction was anticipated for power distance and age. For high PD cultures, the oldest interlocutors would initiate direct repair the most whereas all groups would initiate direct repair as frequently in low PD cultures. Similar to role, this cannot be statistically analyzed due to the asymmetrical and low distribution of *n* for all groups.

The corpus seemed to show that all high PD age groups initiated direct repair. Moreover, 25-34 year olds initiated direct repair 12 times, 35-49 year olds initiated direct repair 19 times and 50+ year olds initiated repair 20 times overall. The following extract presents a direct repair initiation of a 25-34 year old high PD interlocutor:

Extract 9.

1. P73 T-1 This is what you got but what was the index (1)
2. P76 T0 Sorry?
3. P73 T+1 What was the index in luxembourg?
4. P76 Go ahead? (1)

(Interaction continues)

This discussion concerns the index of the salary. On line 1, P73 (a 35-49 year old low PD chair from Germany) directly asks what the index was. On line 2, P76 (a 25-34 year old high PD participant from Spain) initiates repair by using an open request. This open initiation format forced P73 to redo his turn, which he did on line 3. After this turn, common ground was reached as P76 understood the question. This allowed the main upheld conversation to continue.

Extract 6 presents a direct repair initiation of a 35-49 year old high PD interlocutor and

extract 7 presents such an initiation for a 50+ year old high PD interlocutor. All these extracts again present factors that seemed to cause interactional trouble throughout the corpus; overlap in turns, unspecific questions or utterances and personal problems with hearing or understanding.

All low PD age groups seemed to initiate repair as well. However, there was no 25-34 year old who initiated direct repair. The 35-49 year olds initiated direct repair 73 times and the only 50+ year old initiated direct repair 16 times overall. Extract 8 presents a direct repair initiation of a 35-49 year old low PD interlocutor. The following extract presents such an initiation for the 50+ year old low PD participant:

Extract 10.

1.			{parallel conversation between two speakers}
2.	P535	T-1	Toilet's on the: erm (.) er: (toilet) er:m {parallel conversation ends} left-hand <un> x </un> (or?)
3.	P526	T0	Par <1> don me? <1>
4.	P535	T+1	<1> on <1> left side. the toilets (.)
5.	P526		Yes yes yes
	(Interaction continues)		

On line 2, P535 (a 35-49 year old low PD participant from the Netherlands) asks where the toilets are. It can be observed that this question is asked during a parallel conversation between other interlocutors. It might have been that P526 (a 50+ year old low PD participant from Austria) did not correctly hear or understand P535's question due to this parallel conversation. To force P535 to redo her turn, P526 initiates repair using an open request. On line 4, P535 does so by reformulation her question. This leads to common ground on line 5, which allowed the upheld conversation to continue.

As both extract 8 and 10 demonstrate, overlapping turns and unspecific talk again seemed to cause interactional trouble. The corpus also showed that personal problems with hearing or understanding seemed to cause interactional trouble (as a low PD participant was unfamiliar with the term *fuss*).

Table 6. Means and standard deviations of power distance and age groups in function of direct repair per 100 speech turns.

	High		Low	
	n	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*

25-34 years	3	1.37 (0.85)	0	-
35-49 years	5	0.68 (0.79)	13	0.89 (0.57)
50+ years	2	0.72 (0.72)	1	0.79
Total	10	0.90 (0.78)	14	0.88 (0.54)

5.5 Participant directly repairing chair

To examine the number of participants that directly repaired the chair, the percentage of initiations that was directed at chairs was taken from the total number of initiations per speaker. The means and standard deviations are shown in table 7. The hypothesis that high PD participants tend to initiate direct repair towards a chair less than low PD participants could not be statistically tested, due to the low *n* size.

However, it seemed that both PD groups initiated direct repair towards chairs. High PD participants directly initiated repair towards the chair 28 times and low PD participants did so 18 times overall. Extract 7 and 9 present examples of high PD participants initiating repair towards the chair. Direct repair sequences and behavior by low PD participants seemed to be similar as the high PD participants showed in extract 7 and 9; interactional trouble seemed to be caused by overlapping turns, unspecific talk and personal problems with hearing or understanding. All initiation formats seemed to be used to address these troubles.

Table 7. Means and standard deviations of direct repair initiations directed at chairs (%) per culture group

	High		Low	
	n	*M (SD)*	*n*	*M (SD)*
Participant repairing chair	4	84.72 (23.73)	5	93.33 (14.91)

5.6 Apology-based formats

To examine the number of used apology-based formats, the percentage of initiations that included an apology-based format was taken from the total number of initiations per speaker. An independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between low and high PD cultures with regard to the percentage of used apology-based initiation formats (t (10.68) = 1.75, p = .109). Table 8 presents the means, standard deviations and range per culture group. Figure

4 presents a visual comparison.

Next to this insignificant result, apology-based initiations were relatively scarce as only 20 (12.1%) initiations included such a format. Extracts 9 and 10 present initiations that included such lexical forms.

Table 8. Means and standard deviations of apology-based initiation formats (%) per culture group

	n	Apology-based initiation formats in % *M (SD)*	Range
High PD	10	22.03 (29.80)	0 - 100
Low PD	14	4.79 (10.71)	0 – 33.3

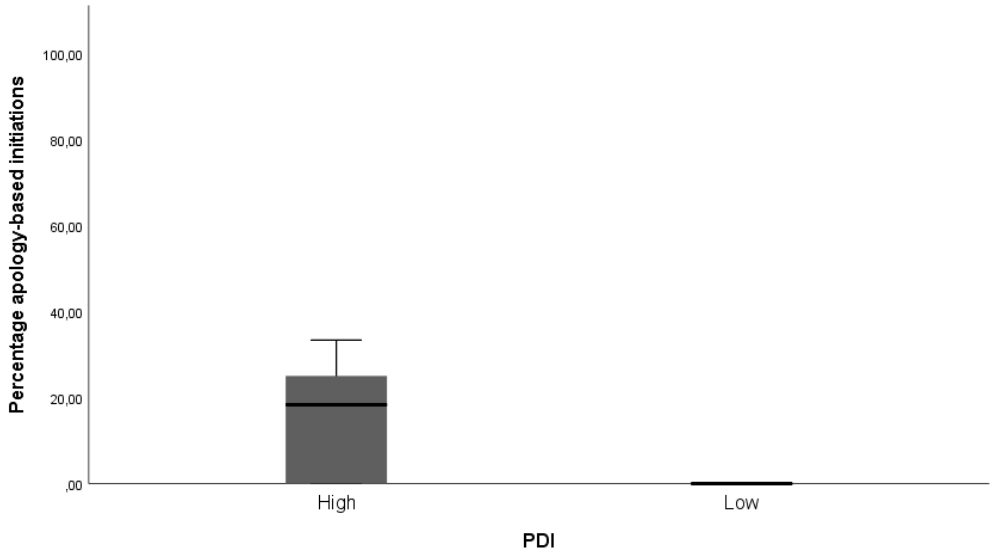

Figure 4. Comparison of apology-based initiations per 100 speech turns per culture.

Extract 9 presents an initiation format that included the most recurring apology-based format; *Sorry* as an open request. However, there were more examples found in the corpus. For example, *sorry* in combination with a question word; *excuse me?* and *pardon me?* as open requests (sometimes also in combination with a question word, forming an initiation like *Excuse me / pardon me, what?*) and an apology-based format in combination with an restricted request (e.g. *Excuse me, er gullible I've never heard that word, what does it mean?*). However, most initiation did not include an apology-based lexical format. Moreover, some repair initiations seemed to contrast the level of formality of apology-based formats. Consider the following extract:

Extract 10.

10.	P76	T-1	He knows already at least the traffic
11.	P73	T0	Haeh?
12.	P76	T+1	He knows already the traffic at least. (.)
13.	P73		Er yah. He would have even benefits…
	(Interaction continues)		

Here, P76 (a 25-34 year old high PD participant from Spain) utters something about an advantage somebody has over another potential new employee on line 1. On line 2, it can be observed that P73 (a 35-49 year old low PD chair from Germany) did not hear or understand P76's utterance. P73 initiates direct repair on line 2 by using the open request *Haeh?* This forces P76 to redo his turn, as it is not indicated which part caused trouble. He does so on line 3, which results in common ground on line 4. This allowed the previously upheld interaction to continue.

Even though interactional trouble emerges in a formal business meeting and using an apology-based format to address the trouble source might have been a more suitable way to do so, P73 instead uses the lexical form *Haeh?*, which might presumably be the direct opposite of an apology-based format. This format was by no means the most used non-apology-based format, but still occurred 14 times in 145 non-apology-based initiations.

6. Conclusion / Discussion

The goal of the present study was to find an answer to the assumption that cultural differences in terms of power distance might determine which coping strategy people would use in times of interactional trouble. This led to the following research question: *What role does the interaction between hierarchy, defined by role in combination with age, and power distance play concerning the choice between opting for letting it pass vs direct repair in situations of interactional trouble in formal intercultural contexts?*

Next to this research question, hypotheses were formulated which allowed for a more detail analysis for this question. These will be discussed in this section.

6.1 Overall preference of direct repair

Beforehand, it was anticipated that cultures would deal with interactional trouble in different ways. This was based on the cultural framework presented by Hofstede (1980) and the corresponding power distance dimension. More specifically, cultures high on this dimension generally show more acceptance of asymmetrical power relations, whereas cultures low on this dimension generally show more symmetrical power relations. This acceptance of power was

linked to communicative behavior. The findings of Koc (2013) and Botero and Van Dyne (2009), suggested that difference in PD could explain the interactional difference between subordinates and superiors. Subordinates from high PD cultures showed being less verbally present and more indirect in interactions with superiors. Based on these findings, it was anticipated that interlocutors of high PD cultures would employ the more indirect way of coping with interactional trouble, both initiating delayed repair and refraining from producing a second pair part. Moreover, it was anticipated that the opposite for interlocutors of low PD culture would be found, making use of direct repair strategies.

The present study has found evidence that, compared to letting it pass strategies, directly addressing trouble sources the next turn after the trouble source was uttered seemed to be the most preferred and used coping strategy. In addition to this overall preference, cultures did not differ in terms of their strategy use. Low PD cultures used as much direct repair and letting it pass strategies as the high PD cultures. This study is the first of its kind that compared the usage of both letting it pass and direct repair strategies between cultures and found evidence which showed an overall preference for directly addressing trouble sources.

Previous findings in the CA domain have found recurring evidence that indicate frequent usage of direct repair. For example, Dingemanse et al. (2015) found an overwhelming presence of other-initiated repair across cultures in informal interactions. The researchers state that a direct repair initiation occurred once every 1.4 minutes. In this study, a direct repair initiation occurred once every 6.7 minutes. This difference can be explained by the reasoning that all the analyzed meetings had certain agenda points which needed to be discussed. This presumably pre-established agenda allowed the interlocutors to look up and familiarize themselves with the to-be-discussed information. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to expect that the interlocutors are competent in their field of work and are familiar with the ongoing business of their organization and branch-specific terminology (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Furthermore, studies in the CA domain indicated that direct repair was used in different contexts. For example, Pietikäinen (2016) Kaur (2011a) and Kaur (2011b) indicated that direct repair initiations were used to cope with interactional trouble in informal contexts. Franceschi (2020) and Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) demonstrate that business professionals highlighted the importance of establishing mutual understanding through direct behavior in business meetings. The results and extracts of this study seem to coincide with this preference as direct repair initiations were frequently used to clear up the existing trouble source in formal intercultural business settings.

This preference of direct repair can be explained. First, Firth (1996) argues that people often like to 'make sense in situ' and understand each other. These might be universal requisites of human interaction that ignore cultural and contextual boundaries. This view was shared by Dingemanse et al. (2015). They argue that direct repair is a fundamental, essential and frequent feature of human conversation. Second, the innate nature of the analyzed meetings could explain why direct repair was the preferred option for coping with interactional trouble. All the meetings had a strong decision-making focus (see appendix 1 on page 42 for detailed overviews of meeting topics). Tsuchiya and Handford (2014) present a similar argumentation. In their study, the analyzed meetings also were strongly focused on decision-making. They state that mutual understanding in such meetings is important, because essential topics must be clarified and understood before a grounded final decision can made. This way, risks and consequences are minimalized.

Based on Hofstede (1980), Roccas and Sagiv (2010) and Avison and Banks (2008), it was predicted that interlocutors would show different ways of coping with interactional trouble, due to culture. Yet, the present study seems to highlight that culture does not influence the way interlocutors cope with interactional trouble. Rather, interlocutors with different cultural background showed similar coping behavior.

This similarity can be explained. Hofstede's (1980) work has had its critique. The main critique is that the data in his study is outdated. Lui, Volĉiĉ and Gallois (2015) argue that culture is subjected to change over time. At the time of Hofstede's research, the world was not as globally connected as it is nowadays. Internationalization allowed different cultures to come into contact with each other, which might have caused cultures to take over certain aspects of other cultures. The changed social environment and the merging of cultures might have caused cultures to become more similar, which might explain the similar behavior of the involved cultures in this study.

6.2 All role and age groups initiated direct repair

Tsuchiya and Handford (2014) investigated the role of the chair in interactional trouble. After a series of emails, it became obvious that the chair initiated direct repair to make sure everybody in the meeting comprehended what was uttered. In addition, Khatri (2009) and Selda (2000) showed that older age and higher organizational role were accepted symbols of asymmetrical power distribution in high power distance cultures. Therefore, the second set of hypotheses predicted the frequency of direct repair initiations for age and role groups in combination with power distance, insofar that chairs and older interlocutors would do so the most for high PD

interlocutors and no difference would be found for low PD interlocutors. These hypotheses could not be statistically tested. Therefore, the findings in this study must be interpreted with cation.

Extracts from this corpus seemed to offer an interesting pattern. In this corpus, it seemed that interlocutors initiated direct repair and sought to clear up existing trouble sources despite one's role, age and cultural background. A possible explanation could be the acquaintedness between all the interlocutors in all meetings. In all but two meetings, the interlocutors had already met one other at least once. In the remaining two, the majority had already met before. This high degree of acquaintedness might have influenced the perceived level of formality in such a way, that these business meetings were not perceived as formal at all. This claim can be supported by examining the number of direct repair initiations that included apology-based lexical formats. Dingemanse, Blythe and Dirksmeyer (2014), Robinson (2006) and Selting (1987) all coin that such formats are relatively rare in informal settings, because these formats manage responsibility and include elements of saving face. As became evident from the results, the occurrence of such formats in direct repair initiations was also rare in this study (13.5%). It might therefore be that the interlocutors experienced the meetings as more informal. The CA literature that studied informal interactions (Dingemanse et al., 2015; Pietikäinen, 2016; Kaur, 2011a; Kaur, 2011b among others) found direct repair initiations to be a frequently used strategies to cope with interactional trouble. Together with the previously mentioned universal preference of making sense in human interactions, innate nature of the business meetings and cultural change over time, this might explain why interlocutors engaged in directly repairing trouble sources. Future studies could create a corpus that incorporates an equal distribution of interlocutors across all groups. This way, statistical analyses could be conducted which would allow for greater generalizability of the mentioned results here. Furthermore, future studies could improve on this study by moving beyond the transcriptions and ask why interlocutors coped with interactional trouble the way they did. This would create a more detailed understanding of such behavior.

6.3 Participant repairing chair

The final hypothesis concerned the potential difference between low and high PD participants in repairing the chair. This hypothesis was based on the assumptions that communication is supposed to be initiated by the superior in high PD cultures and thus such participants would initiate repair less frequent, compared low PD participants as in such cultures subordinates and superiors are considered equal and thus communication might be initiated by both roles. Again

here, this could not be statistically tested. However, the corpus seemed to show that participants from both high and low PD cultures initiated direct repair towards chairs. Even though this would seem to differ from what was expected, it does seem to fit the general pattern observed in this study. The high degree of acquaintedness, the innate preference to establish mutual understanding and the possible change of culture over time might be explanations as to why participants from both high and low PD cultures initiated direct repair towards the chairs. Future studies should create a corpus which incorporates an equal distribution of interlocutors of all groups, in order to statistically test, compare and conclusively support the behavior of cultural groups.

6.4 No cases of absent second pair parts

In this study, no cases of the letting it pass strategy *absence of second pair part* were found. While this seems surprising at first, there seem to be a logical explanation. Again, the decision-making focus of the meetings and the innate preference of establishing mutual understanding might mean that refraining from producing a second pair part seems to be too fragile to be an adequate strategy in (formal) business settings.

6.5. Limitations

The first limitation of this study lies in the PDI distribution. For convenience's sake, the participants were divided into two groups. However, this is not as clear cut. Some cultures were on the outer edges of this dimension (such as Austria and Serbia), but most cultures were more positioned towards the middle of the spectrum. This means that categorizing these cultures as distinctive high and low PD cultures is not an ideal way of doing so. The researcher chose to do so, as dividing the cultures into three categories would have resulted in very small groups with very few unique speakers. Future studies could take this into account and more accurately categorize cultures according to this PD dimension or choose to use PD as a continuous variable.

In addition, the asymmetrical distribution of speakers in role and age groups makes it difficult to generalize the results of the present study to a bigger population. For example, the high PD chair group included only one speaker. Therefore, the results of the present study must not be treated as hard facts, but rather as interesting findings which might offer new insights and starting points for future studies. More studies will be needed in order to find generalizable patterns and clear-cut conclusions.

Third, most of the meetings analyzed in this study did not include audio. This is a missed

opportunity, as some aspects of verbal communication (intonation) might present additional information as to how repair initiations are formed (e.g. see Dingemanse, 2015; Kasper & Wagner, 2014; Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015; Dingemanse, Blythe & Dirksmeyer, 2014). Moreover, the VOICE corpus did not include video recordings of the meetings. This is also a missed opportunity, as non-verbal communication elements might represent thoughts and could play a crucial role in initiating repair (see Rossano, Brown, & Levinson, 2009; Seo & Koshik, 2010; Mortensen, 2012, 2016). Future studies could implement these factors to gain a more complete view of how people behave verbally and non-verbally in situations of interactional trouble.

Furthermore, this study only examined one cultural dimension. It might be that another cultural dimension could be a better predictor of different behavior. For example, the uncertainty avoidance dimension by Hofstede (1980) focusses on how cultures deal with ambiguous or unknown situations. Cultures low on this dimension are comfortable with ambiguous situation and thus might not feel a direct need to clear up such situations. Future studies could prove this relation.

Finally, the coding procedure in this study was performed by one coder in total. This might have harmed the reliability of the results. Future studies could learn from this, by at least making use of two separate coders and compare the results. This way, the coding procedure would be tested by multiple people which would result in a more reliable coding scheme. This could increase the level of validity of the results.

6.6. Implications

This study contributed to the existing body of CA research that analyzed ways of coping with interactional trouble. In more detail, this study has found evidence of the preference of direct repair in formal contexts and the relatively scarcity of letting it pass strategies. Furthermore, it has shown that culture does not seem to be not as impactful as certain studies suggested it to be and that people from different cultures showed similar behavior. Practically, this study has shown that initiating direct repair could be regarded as fundamental and essential behavior in business meetings. One should not refrain from initiating direct repair, as this seems to be a natural way of behaving in situations of interactional trouble. Apparently, establishing mutual understanding by initiating direct repair is behavior that is accepted cross-culturally and seems to be frequent in contexts with a high decision-making focus.

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Appendix 1 – Meeting descriptions

PBmtg 3

Power relations: fairly asymmetrical

Acquaintedness: predominantly acquainted

Meeting takes place at [org1]. P3, P4 and P5 are employees of this organization. P1 and P2 are employees of a company that distributes, markets, and sells the products of [org1]. P1 and P2 have never met P4 and P3, but they have met P5 on a few occasions. P5 participates as someone acquainted with all participants and because she knows the past history of the two companies and their work. P4 has just taken over responsibility for the Korean market. The meeting therefore serves to establish personal contact and working relations between P1, P2 and predominantly P4. P4 also chairs the meeting. P3 has just joined [org1]. He mainly assists P4. In addition to establishing personal contact, the meeting also serves to give P4, P3 and P5 an overview of promotion activities done in Korea and to inform P1 and P2 about product news (VOICE, 2013).

PBmtg 27

Power relations: fairly asymmetrical

Acquaintedness: acquainted

An internal staff meeting of [org15] P73, P74, P75, P76, and P78 are all employees of [org15] and P73 is the senior employee and the head of the team. Therefore he chairs the meeting. The main topics of the meeting are internal organizational matters relating to staff changes, vacation times and business contacts (VOICE, 2013).

PBmtg 269

Power relations: fairly symmetrical

Acquaintedness: acquainted

This business meeting takes place at [org1] which all participants work for. The meeting is organized by the Austrian headquarters, with P539 and P540 being the German-speaking hosts. The purpose of the meeting is to brief the people in charge on a new campaign and inform them about how to publicly represent a new environmentally friendly product/project. P541, one of the executive staff members, presents new strategies and informs the others about latest

developments and the course of action to be taken. P541 also chairs the meeting in a way, though, as becomes evident during the interaction, the others do interrupt her at some points. P541 seems to be one of the company's major PR managers, mediating between company internal and external people. The other participants come from daughter companies/branch offices of the company in different countries and do not seem to converse with each other on a regular basis, although some do appear to be at least acquainted with each other. They are mainly listening, commenting and discussing how to introduce and realize the campaign in their respective countries. P540 appears to be superior to the others in the company's hierarchy (VOICE, 2013).

PBmtg 280

Power relations: fairly symmetrical

Acquaintedness: acquainted

This business meeting takes place at a company involved in software development. P169, who is the project manager, discusses the project status with the team members. All speakers are colleagues, except S7, the researcher, who actually gets a few questions about the purpose her recording is to serve (VOICE, 2013). There existed interactional trouble between S7 and other participants. These have been ignored, as these do not fit in this study's aim.

PBmtg 300

Power relations: fairly asymmetrical

Acquaintedness: predominantly acquainted

This business meeting is held on the occasion of a sales visit. P506 is a sales representative of the airline [org2] and he has come to visit the forwarding agency [org5], where the meeting is held. [Org5] is a daughter company of org1. P73, P507, P78, P74, P76 and P75 are all employees of the forwarding agency and thus colleagues and very well acquainted. P73 is the head of the team and functions as chairperson throughout the meeting. This meeting switches between different rounds of business talk, in which different participants are present. Only P73 and P506 are present throughout the whole meeting. The first part includes P73, P506 and P507. Then P78 joins. Compared to P73 and P506, P78 is not very active in the conversation and there are rather long portions where only P73 and P506 interact even though P78 is also present. A while later P74 joins the group, also at first as a silent participant, but then the meeting turns to

his area of responsibility and he joins in. A while later the same happens again as P76 and P75 join the group and first remain silent in the background (VOICE, 2013).

PBmtg 414

Power relations: fairly symmetrical

Acquaintedness: acquainted

This business meeting takes place at [org1]. P526 and P525 are employees of [org1]. P534 and P535 are employees of a distribution company which distributes, markets and sells the products of [org1] abroad. P534 and P535 are visiting [org1] and the meeting happens at the occasion of this visit. P534 and P535 have brought some presentation materials with sales statistics of [org1]'s products, which P535 explains and discusses with P526 and P525. P534 adds some comments with regard to the current circumstances of selling the product in shops and supermarkets. There is a very friendly and humorous atmosphere and the content of the meeting often leads to jokes and laughter and humorous remarks (VOICE, 2013).

PBmtg 462

Power relations: fairly asymmetrical

Acquaintedness: acquainted

This business meeting takes place at [org5]. P525, P526 and P527 are employees of [org5]. P524 is the head of [org25], a company which distributes the products of [org5] abroad. P524 and her employees P523 and P528 are visiting [org5] and the meeting happens on the occasion of this visit. All participants have met before and so are acquainted with each other. P528 is a participant but hardly says anything (VOICE, 2013).

PBmtg 463

Power relations: fairly asymmetrical

Acquaintedness: acquainted

This business meeting takes place at [org1]. P525 and P526 are employees of [org1]. P524 is the head of [org33], a company which distributes the products of [org1] abroad. P524 and her employees P523 and P528 are visiting [org1] and this meeting is part of their visit to Austria. The meeting as such starts when P523 and P528 come back into the room. The speakers talk about the past and future orders [org33] has placed and will place at [org1]. P523 talks on the mobile phone with an employee of P524's company at several points during the meeting to

clarify what they are ordering. P523 and P524 mention several supermarket chains and retail shops in their countries which are anonymized as [org] items. After discussing the orders and figures, P525 introduces the product news for the next year. Ten minutes before the meeting ends, P527, a high representative of [org1], joins the meeting. All participants have met before and so are acquainted with each other (VOICE, 2013).

Appendix 2 – Overview of speakers per meeting

Meeting ID	PBmtg3		PBmtg27		PBmtg269		PBmtg280		PBmtg300		PBmtg414		PBmtg462		PBmtg463		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Speakers	5	100	5	100	7	100	5	100	7	100	4	100	6	100	6	100	45	100
Gender																		
Male	4	80	4	80	1	14.3	5	100	6	85.7	1	25	3	50	3	50	27	59.9
Female	1	20	1	20	6	85.7	0	0	1	14.3	3	75	3	50	3	50	18	40
Role																		
Chair	1	20	1	20	1	14.3	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.6
Participant	4	80	4	80	6	85.7	5	100	6	85.7	4	100	6	100	6	100	42	93.3
Age																		
25-34	1	20	2	40	0	0	4	80	3	42.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	22.2
35-49	3	60	3	60	7	100	1	20	4	57.1	3	75	4	66.6	4	66.6	29	64.4
50+	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	25	2	33.3	2	33.3	6	13.3
Language																		
Kor-kr	2	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.4
Ger-at	3	60	0	0	2	28.6	0	0	0	0	2	50	3	50	3	50	13	28.8
Ger-de	0	0	3	60	0	0	0	0	4	57.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	15.5
Fre-fr	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.4
Spa-es	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.4
Pol	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.4
Cze	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.2
Slv	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.2
Hun	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.2
Lav	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.2
Swe	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.2
Dut-nl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	2	50	0	0	0	0	3	6.6
Scc-rs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	50	3	50	3	6.6
Unidentified	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.6

Appendix 3 – Declaration on plagiarism and fraud`

Declaration on plagiarism and fraud

The undersigned
[first name, surname and student number],

Jeffrey Teeuw – s1047110

Master's student at the Radboud University Faculty of Arts,

declares that the assessed thesis is entirely original and was written exclusively by himself/herself. The undersigned indicated explicitly and in detail where all the information and ideas derived from other sources can be found. The research data presented in this thesis was collected by the undersigned himself/herself using the methods described in this thesis.

Place and date:

Arnhem, 30-06-2021

Signature: