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Cultural mismatch in conversation: Spanish and Scandinavian communicative behaviour in negotiation settings.

Abstract.

An outline of cultural differences in face-to-face behaviour between Hispanic and Nordic people is presented, and various divergences in terms of communicative priorities are proposed. The assumptions made are supported by preliminary results from research on turn-taking, back-channeling and initiative/response patterns in Spanish and Swedish negotiation dialogues, the study being based on the video-recorded corpus of the "Negotiating in Spain and Scandinavia" project carried out at three Scandinavian universities. On the basis of these results, a list of predictions is proposed concerning probabilities of misinterpretations in Hispanic-Scandinavian conversation.

0. Introduction.

Any Scandinavian familiar with Hispanic culture, as well as any Hispanic person with experience of Scandinavian life style and ways of communicating, will be able to report on spectacular differences, not only in the ways in which conversations typically are carried out but also in what topics are preferred, foregrounded and reacted upon. Not only are there obvious discrepancies in the "rules-of-the game", but also these differences frequently give rise to feelings of frustration in the conversation participants as well as basically negative attitudes towards the other community and its members, attitudes which, when expressed, may be disguised as ironical or humouristic remarks, though on a deeper plane they hide prejudice that tends to be confirmed and strengthened for each time that interaction takes place. This very general picture - which, admittedly, is commonplace in descriptions of intercultural communication, whatever the nature of the cultural difference may be (sex, age, socio-economic status, regional or national culture, etc.), - raises the issue of what explanations could actually account for the lack of understanding and the misinterpretations that occur in a specific kind of intercultural encounter, and what predictions such explanations could reasonably give rise to.

It is our ultimate purpose, in this paper, to set up a list of such factors that are liable to cause communicative failure or misunderstanding bet-

ween members of the Spanish-speaking community, especially Peninsular Spaniards, on one hand, and Scandinavians, in particular Swedes, on the other. In doing this, we will start by proposing a tentative set of what will be referred to as "communicative priorities" in each culture, and after a discussion of these, especially of the way satisfaction of different face-needs is valued among Spaniards and Scandinavians, we will present data from conversational analysis of negotiation role play carried out within groups of Spaniards and Swedes, data that will support some of the hypotheses put forward at the beginning.

The notion of "cultural discrepancy" may be in need of some clarification before we proceed. When talking - somewhat loosely - of "culture", we are actually referring to something which more adequately would be called "mentality", on a plane that is "nationally" relevant, much in the sense of Daun (1989), together with the (mainly interactive) behaviour that this mentality is responsible for producing. Mentality, in its turn, is conceived of as a set of stable ways of thinking and feeling, a set which can be defined on the basis of the various types of human groupings that may constitute a basis for individual identification, ranging from the "zero" group (=the individual itself), passing through the family and further across professional and social groups of various sizes and definitions, up to broad - and much more vaguely defined - communities such as nations or even larger unities (to a certain extent, for example, it could make sense to talk of a "European" identity). Mentality is thus understood in the sense of e.g. Allwood (1986).

Empirical data have been taken from the "Negotiating in Spain and Scandinavia" corpus, a research project which is simultaneously carried out at three Scandinavian universities: the Copenhagen School of Economics, and the Universities of Odense and Stockholm (for a brief presentation, see Fant & Grindsted 1989). The corpus consists of 24 hours of video-recordings of simulated negotiations performed by participants in negotiation skills seminars in Spain, Sweden and Denmark[1], approxi-

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mately one third for each country. Since these seminars have practically the same design and progression in each of the three countries, with identical or quasi-identical role play cases, a unique degree of comparability has been achieved between the three national corpora.

In the present study, only Swedish and Spanish data will be taken into account, and Sweden will thus, for the time being, stand for Scandinavia. Among the Nordic countries there are undoubtedly culture and mentality differences that should by no means be neglected (cf. e.g. Daun et alii 1988) maybe also with regard to aspects of conversational organization. It is, however, our clear - though empirically not yet assessed - impression that in the given context, i.e. simulated negotiations between two teams normally consisting of two persons each, systematic behaviour differences between Danish and Swedish participants appear to be fairly small, especially when contrasted with the highly divergent Hispanic conversational patterns.

Although our materials represent only one particular type of interaction, namely negotiations, and, roughly speaking, only one type of discourse, namely that which characterizes this particular kind of activity, we believe our findings on conversational organization in the respective groups are generalizable to a fairly wide range of communicative behaviour. We have several reasons to assume that this is the case. Firstly, it could hardly be denied that negotiating is a rather demanding activity, which is likely to induce its participants to making extensive use of their communicative skills. Hence, interaction can be expected to be all but monotonous, and interactants to show a broad behavioural repertoire. Secondly, professional negotiations, unlike e.g. courtroom dialogues, teacher-student talk, gate-keeping interviews and many other types of interaction which have attracted the attention of pragmaticians in the last decades, have a basically symmetrical character, where the power distribution between parties is equilibrated (or at least expected to be) and each party's contributions is similar to the other's. Due to these properties, negotiation dialogues will look more like informal everyday conversation than most institutionalized forms of talk will do.

1. Culturally determined communicative priorities.

One basic idea in our approach is that culture-based differences in communicative patterns could be advantageously accounted for in terms of priorities, or socially based preferences, among conditions set on communicative interaction. This way of viewing things, of course, presuppo-

ses that a universal set of such conditions actually exists, a standpoint to which it may be objected, at least in theory, that it is not necessarily the case that the "inventory" of conditions valid in a specific culture would consist of the same tokens as the corresponding set in another comparable culture. On the other hand, it could be reasonally argued that, given an identical (or quasi-identical) activity in two different cultures, the communicative tasks associated with it will also be more or less the same, or else the activity would no longer be felt as identical. Even though there are quite a few activity types that must be thought of as highly culture-specific and devoid of clear equivalents outside the specific cultural sphere (e.g. Spanish bull-fighting or Swedish Midsummer celebration), an overwhelming number of human activities would reasonably be conceived as similar and comparable across cultural borders. This makes it fair to assume that there is a universal set of conditions on communicative interaction, and what basically separates different cultures in this regard is the ordering of these conditions in terms of their relative importance, in different settings and in the culture as a whole.

In order to establish a set of plausible hypotheses about what the relevant conditions are, and about their "ratings" in the respective cultures, various sources have been used. One has been the reading of the works on intercultural communication and national mentalities, such as Hofstede (1984), Samovar/Porter (1976), or Saville-Troike (1977). As far as descriptions of Swedish cultural patterns are concerned, we have made use of works such as Allwood (1981) not to mention the inspiring and many-faceted approach of Daun (1989). With regard to Spanish mentality, the work of Madariaga (1928), still surprisingly relevant, has been a valuable source, along with quite recent descriptions such as Miguel (1986). To a great extent, we have relied on reports from Hispanic residents in Sweden and Denmark, as well as from Scandinavian residents in Spain. Ultimately, the experience and introspections of the members of the research team, all of them Scandinavian teachers and scholars of Spanish, have served as a criterion.

Admittedly, the following proposals on culturally determined differences in communicative style as well as in several socio-psychological domains such as group membership, self-affirmation, cooperativeness vs. competitiveness, and face-work, are highly speculative. Nevertheless, they support each other mutually, and, as will be seen in sections 2.1 and 2.2, they are also in part supported by empirical data.

1.1 Principles of communicative style.

To start with, the following priorities will be taken to be basic in a contrastive study of Scandinavian and Spanish communicative interaction:

Consensus. In all cultures, a minimum degree of consensus is required for keeping the dialogue alive. However, signalling unanimity and agreement is conspicuously more important in the Scandinavian cultures than in the Hispanic ones, as well as its negative counterpart, conflict avoidance (for a detailed account on this phenomenon in Swedish culture, see Daun 1989, 102-123). Hispanic speakers will simply tolerate a much higher degree of disagreement without incurring the risk of conversational break-down.

Contrastiveness. It is a universal feature of conversational organization that contributions are expected to be contrastive, in the sense that they should contain a minimum of new information, or else the topic will be understood as exhausted (this phenomenon is due to general principles of informativity - see e.g. Beaugrande/Dressler (1981, 141-6) - and is implicit in Grice's maxim of quantity (Grice 1975). This rather vague principle is considerably sharpened in Hispanic cultures, where speakers are expected to formulate their contributions in a sufficiently divergent manner for a "dialectic" atmosphere to emerge, or else the conversation will be perceived as dull and uninteresting. Because of the above-mentioned tendencies of conflict-avoidance, the contrastiveness condition is considerably toned down among Scandinavians.

Aesthetics. For a Hispanic speaker (or writer), the aesthetic aspects of discourse, such as rhythm, symmetry and proportion, use of rhetorical devices, etc., seem to have greater importance than for Scandinavians. This observation is not only valid for individual speakers' own contributions but for conversation and discourse in general. This is not to say that Scandinavians should be less concerned with what they say and how they say it, only that they are less concerned with the specifically aesthetic and rhetorical aspects of it. Being well-formulated is simply more highly rated among users of Spanish.

Economy. In the same way as the "lower limit" of the Gricean quantity maxim ("don't make your contribution shorter than required") appears to be crucial to speakers of Spanish, the corresponding "upper limit" ("don't make your contribution longer than required") stands out as the dangerous point for Scandinavian interactants. This is partly due to the way of viewing self-assertive behaviour in Scandinavian cultures, where occupying much space for oneself is contrary to deep expectations on social adaptedness, whereas the same kind of behaviour does not counteract Hispanic expectations on individual competitiveness and self-affirmation. Scandinavian "economic" behaviour should also be seen as related to their high ranking of extra-personal objectives for communicative interaction, cf. below.

External Directedness. Many - though far from all - types of communicative interaction are associated with some other kind of human social or other activity, that is, one has to communicate in order to perform, alone or in collaboration with

others, a given task. Among Scandinavians (and more so among Swedes than among Danes), it is a widespread attitude that talking is the less legitimate, the less it is understood as a means of achieving a concrete, external goal. The concepts that would come closest to "small talk" have clear negative connotations. Although it is clear that in all cultures, the external directedness condition is differently valued according to the interactional setting in which it is applied, this principle has a weight in the Scandinavian mentality which leaves its importance among Hispanics far behind.

Internal Directedness. One general condition on conversational interaction is that it should have a positive hedonic tone, i.e. talking should be a pleasant activity to participate in. This principle probably has a higher priority in Hispanic cultures than in Scandinavian, where in most settings it appears to be subordinate to the external directedness principle. It is noteworthy that in a Hispanic mentality, internal directedness by no means comes into conflict with expectations on competitive and self-assertive behaviour, since conversations are seen as natural settings for self-actualization and, moreover, as frames for the establishing of personal bonds. All this contributes to making conversation stand out as a goal in itself, a view which is far from being typically Scandinavian.

1.2 Group membership and self-assertiveness.

It should be emphasized that the above-mentioned priorities among conditions on communicative activities cannot be seen in isolation from culture-specific ways of thinking and feeling in general. There are two areas that we believe to be especially relevant in clarifying the above-mentioned tendencies in the respective cultures: the ways of conceiving group membership and the ways in which self-affirmation is expected to be manifested.

As for the former, it is our firm conviction that to a Nordic mentality, being a member of groups is felt as a default, taken-for-granted state, that group membership automatically implies submitting to the group norm, irrespectively of whether the "group" is the company you work in, an association you are affiliated to, or society itself (often confounded with its formal institutions), and that group membership implies not only obligations and rights on the individual's behalf, but also that the group takes a certain responsibility for its members. Social solidarity is thus defined on the basis of group membership. The same goes for leadership: a leader is basically seen as elected by the the group, and not, as is more likely to be the case in the Hispanic mentality, as its creator or basis. Sticking to the group norm will thus be more important to a Nordic leader, at all levels, than to a Hispanic one.

To the Hispanic mentality, on the other hand, group membership is nothing that could be taken for granted, but has to be established by the individual itself. What counts more than abstract group membership in the definition of social identity is the individual's network of personal relations. Concern with establishing such interpersonal bonds is likely to occupy a much more salient position in the Hispanic mind than in the Scandinavian one. Social solidarity, rather than being based on group membership, is defined as the product of the individual's own social network. Group, or social, norm is of course a factor of weight also according to the Hispanic world view, although its power is by far as absolute as to members of the Nordic culture. The catholic religion, being a first order source of norms of behaviour, sets the example and the message contained in the institutionalization of the absolution of sins is quite clear: deviation from group norm is a serious though pardonable matter. To a Nordic mentality, this is far from being an obvious way of viewing guilt, group norm and group norm deviation (for a classical reference, see Weber 1920).

Differences in the perspective taken on group membership may partly account for the typical Scandinavian emphasis on consensus and external directedness, on one hand, and of the relative importance of interpersonal directedness in Hispanic interaction, on the other.

Also when it comes to expected ways of asserting one's self, each culture has its specific profile. To any initiated observer, it is obvious that Hispanic people have a lot more tolerance than Scandinavians to manifestations of direct self-assertiveness and competitiveness. However, this divergence should not lead us to believe that Scandinavians in general have weaker "egoes" than Hispanic people. Rather, it seems to be the case that that affirmation of Self has radically different manifestation channels in each culture. In the Hispanic culture, the normal channel is active manifestation: the individual him/herself is responsible for his/her self-assertion. To the Nordic mentality, affirmation of Self is negatively manifested as expectancy on Other's respect of Self's rights, privileges and territory. These differences may indeed be seen as one of the most important sources of intercultural misunderstanding between Hispanic and Nordic people: typical Hispanic behaviour will be felt as pushy and blunt by Scandinavians, whereas typical Nordic behaviour will be taken to be inhibited, insecure and double-bound by Hispanics.

The Hispanic way of conceiving self-affirmation may be seen as partly responsible for the emphasis on contrastiveness and aesthetics in Hispa-

nic communicative interaction. Correspondingly, the typically "economic" Nordic communicative pattern may be partly explained by the inhibition imposed on overt self-assertive and competitive ways of behaving.

1.3 Integrativeness, cooperativeness, distributiveness, and competitiveness.

The labels "integrative" and "cooperative" are frequently used together with their assumed opposites, "distributive" and "competitive", in characterizating styles of negotiating (Lampi 1986, 32; Donohue et alii 1984). Using these labels metaphorically to characterize communicative styles in general, we would suggest, firstly, that these opposite pairs are no true opposites, but may well co-exist in the same communicative style, and, secondly, that the two representatives of each opposite are far from being synonyms, i.e. neither is "integrative" equal to "cooperative", nor can "distributive" be equated with "competitive". If "cooperativeness" is taken to designate such behaviour that is directed toward the actualization of a common goal, then any representative sample of Scandinavian communicative behaviour would probably get a high score on the cooperativeness scale. If, on the other hand, "integrativeness" is the label that goes with behaviour directed towards the establishing of internal unity and solidarity, then Spanish communicative behaviour would frequently be classified as integrative. "Distributiveness", in turn, could be associated with behaviour directed towards the distribution of assets among interactants in order to satisfy as many individual needs as possible, a label quite compatible with typical Scandinavian communicative patterns. Finally, "competitiveness", understood as designating behaviour that strives towards the satisfaction of the individual's or the in-group's needs without concern for the needs of other individuals or groups, would clearly be taken to be more typical of Hispanic than of Nordic communicative behaviour. Summing up, Hispanic communicative styles could be loosely described as "integrative" and "competitive", and Nordic communicative styles as "cooperative" and "distributive".

To the above reflections another suggestion could be added. If "cooperation" is taken in the perspective of being a well-formedness principle for any type of interaction (in line with e.g. Grice 1975), the Hispanic mentality will tend to regard the act of cooperating as a means of achieving individual rather than supra-individual goals, whereas the Nordic mentality will have the inverse preference: collective goals first, individual goals second.

1.4 Face-needs and face-work.

An important constituent in the complex process of communicative interaction is the so-called face-work, the exploration of which was outlined by Goffman (1967) and (1972) and developed by several scholars concerned with politeness phenomena, such as Brown/Levinson (1978), or with emotive components of communicative interaction (e.g. Arndt/ Janney 1987). Generally, two types of face-needs are recognized as being particularly relevant to the discussion, namely the intrapersonal and the interpersonal kind. "Intrapersonal face" is defined as the inner representation of Self as an independent, autonomous person with an inviolable territory, "interpersonal face" is defined as the inner representation of Self as an accepted member of the group to which one has the idea of belonging, and "face-work" is the kind of cooperation that takes place among interactants in order to respect and maintain these self-images. This bipartite perspective taken on face-needs, however fruitful it has turned out to be in recent research, may obscure the fact that there are several other types of self-images that also call for communicative face-work (see, e.g., Crespo 1986), and that there may exist hierarchies or complex structures of face-needs that deserve being taken into account. It may also be the case that the inter/intrapersonal parameter is not the only basic one. For our present purposes, we will be concerned with three types of face-needs, which we tentatively name "autonomy face", which corresponds to the above-mentioned intrapersonal or negative face, "affiliation face", which corresponds to interpersonal or positive face, and thirdly, "esteem face", which is defined as the inner representation of Self as a person with a (non-lowest) position on a social scale and thereby entitled to get Other's esteem. Clearly enough, this type of face is closely related to the notion of pride (cf. Crespo 1986, 216), and it can be viewed as having both intra- and interpersonal properties.

The proposals we will put forward about the importance of the different types of face-needs in Nordic and Hispanic communicative style are the following:

Autonomy Face. The preservation of autonomy face will be generally felt as more important by Scandinavian than by Hispanic interactants, and, consequently, autonomy face-work will demand much more energy expenditure in Scandinavian than in Hispanic conversations. Many factors have lead us to this conclusion. The use of verbal and non-verbal means of expressing respect for Other's "territory" are much more abundant in Nordic than in Hispanic conversations. Turn-taking patterns are one such indicator (see section 2.1). Proxemics, too, clearly points in the same direction, the physical distance kept by Scandinavian spea-

kers being far superior to the one observed by Hispanic speakers. The degree to which self-affirmation is accepted in Hispanic and Scandinavian settings gives further support to this view: personal expressions of self-affirmation seem to be little threatening to the Hispanic mind.

One may, indeed, ask why autonomy and autonomy face are so important to Nordic people. One explanation may be that the perspective taken on group membership as something prior to the individual itself, and the resultant high degree of conformism, together with strong demands on personal responsibility, create some sort of conflict which is likely to give rise to a (collectively felt) lack of conviction that Self is really an autonomous entity not governed by others. Autonomy consequently has to be reestablished by the consolidation of Self's territory, and face-work will repeatedly be done in order to confirm this. The more individual-norm governed Spaniard is much less likely to feel the same urge for his/her territory to be respected.

Affiliation Face. We expect the individual's need to see him/herself as accepted by others as more pervasive in the Hispanic than in the Nordic cultures, and the corresponding face-work to be more energy-craving in Hispanic than in Nordic conversational patterns. A typical Hispanic conversation is likely to contain more overt marks of friendliness and supportiveness, more positive "strokes" than a corresponding Scandinavian conversation, where telling or showing "we are friends" is more often felt as unnecessary or irrelevant. Differences in proxemic patterns give further support to this: the typically Hispanic physical closeness is sign of affiliation and acceptance. One explanation of this, which is in line with the above-mentioned explanation of Nordic autonomy deficit, would be that the Hispanic society does not assign the same "default" status to group membership as do the Scandinavian ones. Hispanics are simply not convinced of their automatic belonging to a community (other than the family), and thus a constant deficit in the self-image of social belonging has to be compensated for by affiliative face-work.

Esteem Face. Following Crespo (1986), we expect this face-need to be particularly characteristic of the Hispanic mentality, and maybe also a feature that distinguishes it from other related Latin mentalities. Whereas face-work related to the two earlier mentioned types largely depends on Other's activities (the interlocutors do the job of confirming the speaker's self-image), the preservation of esteem face implies a more active attitude on Self's behalf. While Self manifests his/her personality by verbal and non-verbal means (including, e.g., ways of dressing), Other's task consists in acknowledging these efforts, or, negatively speaking, in not subjecting him/her to ridicule.

There are many plausible explanations, both of the relatively high importance of esteem face or pride in Hispanic societies (some of them historical, with reference to the tremendous social trauma suffered by the

population of the Iberian peninsula as a consequence of the persecution and expulsion of the Jews and the Moors in the late 15th and the early 16th century, see e.g. Castro 1961), and of the relatively low importance of these factors in Nordic societies. The latter fact should no doubt be seen in the light of the strong egalitarian traditions prevailing in the Nordic world view: since everybody is basically equal and alike, there should be no need for signalling esteem and recognition of social status, at least not in everyday interaction. Deeply rooted expectancies of this kind may well underly the difficulties that the Nordic languages have had traditionally (and to a certain extent still have, especially if we extend the view to present-day Finnish) in achieving simple and non-cumbersome systems of honorifics and terms of address.

The importance of affiliation face and esteem face in the Hispanic culture can be seen as related to the internal directedness principle earlier suggested (section 1.1.) as being characteristic of Hispanic communicative style. It is also in line with the type of behaviour discussed in section 1.3., which combines integrativeness with competitiveness and is taken to be typical of Hispanic communicative style. Conversely, the relative neutralization of the same face-needs in Nordic settings can be seen as "collaborating" with the "external directedness" principle that characterizes Nordic communicative style, and that so often is felt by non-Scandinavians as a sign of (excessive) pragmatism.

Likewise, the relative importance of autonomy face in Nordic cultures may be taken to partly explain the conjointly cooperative and distributive behaviour which is taken to be characteristic of Nordic communicative style (section 1.3.). It can also be regarded as underlying the pervasive "economy" principle in Nordic communicative interaction, in so far as each speaker will tend to limit his/her contributions in order not to threaten the interlocutor's autonomy face. As has been frequently remarked, however (see e.g. Arndt/Janney 1987, 384), relationships based on mutual respect of autonomy rather than on mutual acceptance (and thus characerized by a high degree of "negative" rather than "positive" politeness) lead to difficulties in mutual understanding, whereby confrontations may be encouraged. One reason of the strong Nordic emphasis laid on consensus may be the striving to compensate for this effect by "imposing" apparent conformism in opinions and views, so as to counteract possible conflict and to ensure efficient cooperation. In this perspective, consensus markers in Scandinavian dialogues (such as e.g. verbal back-channeling patterns, see section 2.1.) could be seen as a device for counterbalancing the excessive focus on "negative" autonomy-face.

2. Conversational organization.

In our contrastive study dealing with the conversational organization of the negotiation dialogues in our recordings, two aspects have been regarded as basic: (1) patterns of turn-taking and back-channeling, and (2) the initiative/ response patterns in the building up of turns and contributions. In the following sections, we will try to show how some of the above-mentioned priorities and tendencies will produce divergent results in each group with regard to these aspects of conversational organization.

2.1 Turn-taking and back-channeling.

Current theory on conversational turn-taking is essentially based on ethnomethodological work, with Sacks et alii (1974) as the fundamental source of inspiration, and research has mainly been carried out among speakers of English and in an Anglo-Saxon cultural context. Hereby, the models proposed, however sophisticated and however convincing in their descriptions and explanations, are characterized by a far from negligible degree of ethnocentrism. It is interesting, however, to see how great the applicability of the model is to Scandinavian settings and how relatively little they are applicable to Hispanic conversations, an observation which has led us to set up a tentative distinction between "floor-taker" and "floor-giver" cultures: English and Scandinavian conversation patterns would belong to the latter category and Hispanic patterns to the former. In Hispanic conversations, it is simply not evident that the current speaker "elects" the next one, as is generally claimed (and demonstrated) in current ethnomethodological research. Rather, it appears to be the case that it is open to everyone who signals interest in participation in the conversation (something which seems to be normally carried out by gaze), to present his/her contribution as soon as a convenient opportunity is offered. Although the probability for turn shifts to take place at so-called transition-relevant places (Sacks et alii 1974) is higher than in other positions, turn shifting, in Hispanic dialogues, very frequently proceeds in an "irregular" way, i.e. people interrupt one another. It may, however, be possible to preserve the classical turn-taking model by interpreting it as some sort of idealized norm for conversational organization (in a way that could be seen as similar to the way logics function with respect to argumentation), an interpretation that would allow for the description of different cultural turn-taking patterns in terms of different degrees of tolerance towards deviance from the norm. In that perspective, Hispanic speakers would be classified as being considerably more tolerant towards "irregular" turn-taking (in particular, interruptions) than Nordic speakers.

Preliminary statistical results from our Swedish and Spanish recordings overwhelmingly confirm the impression that interruptions are more frequent among Spaniards than among Swedes. For an average fortuitous sample of 10 minutes of conversation with 3 or 4 participants, the speakers of the Spanish group will commit 50.7 interruptions, as contrasted with 10.7 interruptions for the Swedish group, that is, almost 5 times as many.

There are three interpretations which seem particularly natural with regard to these results: firstly the higher Hispanic appreciation of active self-affirmation can be held responsible for encouraging interruptions in Spanish dialogues; secondly, the importance assigned by Nordic speakers to the satisfaction of autonomy-self needs is a factor that strongly discourages interruptions, which are seen as signs of rule-offending and aggression; thirdly, the higher value attributed by Scandinavians to economy and external directedness will contribute to condemning interruptions as undisciplined and inefficient behaviour.

When it comes to patterns of conversational **back-channeling,** there are two divergences between the Hispanic and Nordic cultures that are particularly conspicuous: the abundant Hispanic vs. parsimonious Nordic use of full gaze, on one hand, and the frequent Nordic vs. very seldom occurring Hispanic use of verbal back-channeling (or "vocal" back-channeling, see Berg Sørensen 1988, 84-108 and Allwood 1988 for two opposite views on Scandinavian "mm-ing"), on the other. Preliminary statistics from our data overwhelmingly support the latter observation (for the moment being, no statistics have been made on gaze patterns): for an average 10 minutes' long dialogue sequence, the Swedish group will produce 60.3 verbal back-channelings and the Spanish group only 4.1.

It seems to be the case that verbal back-channeling in Nordic conversations does the same basic job as is carried out by gaze in Hispanic conversations, namely confirming hearer's attention to speaker. This is seen by the fact that apparent Spanish equivalents of Swedish or Danish verbal back-channelers do not assume the same fundamental function in dialogue, but are rather understood as devices for taking the floor, in the non-supportive case (thereby functioning as initiatives, cf. below, section 2.2.) or as signs of consent or agreement, in the supportive case (thereby functioning as true reponses, cf. section 2.2.). Likewise, the gaze pattern typical of Hispanic conversation will, when transferred to a Scandinavian setting, tend to be interpreted as something other than attention back-channeling, such as, for instance, the signalling of closeness or even as a means of claiming the floor.

How are these differences in systems of back-channeling to be interpreted? It seems reasonable to believe that placing the back-channeling function on a verbal rather than on a non-verbal plane implies a rise in the level of consciousness and a higher degree of formalization. In this sense, Nordic cultures appear to assign a greater significance to the confirming of attention in dialogue than does the Hispanic culture. Apart from doing the work of expressing apparent consensus (while functioning as a compensatory affiliative face preservation device, cf. above, section 1.4.), the relatively emphatic Nordic back-channeling patterns heighten the degree to which dialogue is regulated and thereby collaborate with the restrictive norms for turn-taking and avoidance of overlapping speech typical of Nordic conversation. This is in line with the idea, suggested above (section 1.3.), of the characteristic Nordic combination of distributive and cooperative behaviour.

2.2 The distribution of initiatives and responses in dialogue.

Among the various systems proposed for the coding and analysis of dialogue in meaningful units, the one elaborated by Linell/Gustavsson (1987) has turned out to be particularly fruitful for our purposes. This system is to a great extent based on language game theory (cf. e.g. Severinson Eklundh 1983) and bears strong resemblance with the coding system for negotiation interaction analysis proposed by Donohue et alii (1984). In the framework of Linell/Gustavsson (1987), individual turns are analyzed in terms of initiative and response components, the normal case being that a turn contains both kinds of elements. Apart from this type of turn, there are also turns that have only initiative properties (turns that do not link up with any preceding turn), and those that have only response properties (turns that do not bring the dialogue further). Attention back-channelers of the type discussed above (section 2.1.) for several reasons are not treated as turns, nor are they seen as bearers of true initiative and response properties (Linell/Gustavsson 1987, 62-66). As for the response components, these are analyzed in terms of the features "local" (plus/minus), meaning the speaker's turn links up with an immediately preceding turn, and "focal" (plus/minus), understood as the property of being connected with the central - or focal - part of a preceding turn. Furthermore, responses can be self-linked, i.e. addressed to speaker's own preceding turn, or (which is taken to be the "normal" case) other-linked.

In our analysis, an additional unit of conversation will be used along with the turn, namely the "contribution", chiefly identical with the "move",

as proposed in such different frameworks as the conversational analysis of Goldberg (1983) and the dialogue game theory of Carlson (1983, 57-65; 67-69). An individual turn may consist of one or more contributions, each contribution being seen as a potential full-fledged turn with initiative and/or response properties (or a combination of both). In negotiation dialogues, speakers very often produce turns which consist of more than one contribution, a fact which is probably due to the need felt by the negotiator to strengthen his/her proposals with arguments. These cases have been registered as instances of self-linking, thereby basing this phenomenon on the unit of contribution and not on the turn, as in the framework of Linell/Gustavsson (1987). In accordance with their system, we distinguish, however, between cases of "weak" and "strong" self-linking, the latter being used in the case of a self-linking speaker blatantly neglecting to respond to the interlocutor's preceding turn.

In our data, we have chosen to study contrastively the following parameters in the Spanish and Swedish groups: (1) the proportion of self-linked responses ; (2) the proportion of other-linked local and focal responses (i.e. responses that in some sense can be seen as "optimal"); (3) the proportion of "deficient" responses, i.e. non-local and/or non-focal, or non-responses; (4) the proportion of so-called abortive initiatives, i.e. initiatives that are not linked up with by any kind of response. According to our hypotheses on communication and face-need priorities, it would be natural to hypothesize the following:

— As a combined result of Spanish demands on competitiveness, well-formulatedness and preservation of esteem face, and of Swedish demands on economy and preservation of autonomy face, Spaniards are likely to produce more self-linked responses than Swedes.

— As a result of Swedish demands on economy cooperativeness together with Spanish demands on conversational contrastiveness and internal directedness and Spanish tolerance for non-preservation of autonomy face, Swedes are likely to produce more conjointly focal and local responses and less non-focal responses, non-local responses and non-responses, than Spaniards.

— As a result of the Spanish higher demands on competitiveness and lower demands on cooperativeness, a greater number of abortive initiatives is likely to be produced among Spaniards.

Our results largely confirm these hypotheses. For every 10 minutes' sequence of dialogue, the Spaniards in our negotiation role play will produce 93.1 self-linked responses and the Swedes only 60.2. This means that the proportion of self-linking is more than 50 % higher in the Spanish group, in a setting where Scandinavians are pushed towards a consi-

derably higher degree of self-linking than in most other situations. Furthermore, a very feeble proportion of the Swedish self-linkings are "strong" ones (1.3 per 10 minutes) whereas "strong" self-linking is much more frequent among the Spaniards (9.2 per 10 minutes, or 10 % of the occurrences). The "optimal" responses show the inverse picture: 26.7 such responses per 10 minutes are found among Spaniards, as compared to 38.7 for the Swedes, that is, 50 % more focal-and-local responses for the Swedish group. As for the category "incomplete or missing" responses, the numbers are 22.7 for the Spaniards and 10.7 for the Swedes per 10 minutes' sequence - more than twice as many in the Spanish group. Also the number of abortive initiatives in the Spanish group is about twice as big as in the Swedish: 20.2 as an average per 10 minutes, as contrasted with 10.7. It should be remarked, moreover, that more than two thirds of the Spanish abortive initiatives are fruitless (and often repeated) attempts of taking the floor, whereas about one half of the Swedish abortive initiatives are produced because an interlocutor has claimed the floor and the speaker deliberately inhibits his/her own initiative to conform to the interlocutor's strongly manifested wish to speak - a partly cooperative, partly submissive pattern that is very seldom found among Spanish interactants.

Of course, these and similar observations call for a more detailed study on how the initiative/response pattern is implemented in each group. Still, we believe that the preliminary findings from our investigation on initiative/ response patterns, turn-taking and back-channeling have already supplied good support for many of the hypotheses suggested in section 1.

3. Some conclusions: predicting Hispanic-Scandinavian misunderstandings in communication.

One practical result of our study on conversational structure is that it enables us to consolidate some assumptions on what would be likely to happen in Hispanic-Scandinavian intercultural communication. It should be emphasized that the points we will bring up are to be understood as nothing more than generalized predictions about probabilities. Of course, the factors referred to as sources of misinterpretations may very well be counteracted by other factors, the most important one being man's empathic capacity and ability to adjust to new situations. Still, we believe that even if misunderstanding-generating factors are efficiently counteracted in the concrete intercultural situation, so as to avoid communicative break-

down or failure, this does not necessarily lead to a change in the participants' cognitive image of each other. Preconceived ideas about the other may still prevail, in spite of the fact that a subject has actually acquired new experience from interaction with someone representing another culture. In fact, prejudice may even become reinforced by the interpretations automatically applied to the observed behaviour.

We consider the following assumptions to be relevant to the over-all organization of dialogue in Hispanic-Scandinavian interaction:

(1) A Hispanic speaker will interpret a Scandinavian interlocutor's verbal back-channeling (especially "supportive" variants), not as a means of confirming attention, but as a true response of agreement or consent.

(2) A Hispanic speaker will interpret a Scandinavian interlocutor's verbal back-channeling (especially the "non-supportive" variants which do not take place at transition-relevant places) as abortive initiatives that have not been put forward with the sufficient amount of energy as to be taken seriously.

(3) A Hispanic speaker will interpret the absence of interruptions on the Scandinavian interlocutor's behalf as an indirect signal to go on talking.

(4) A Hispanic speaker will interpret the absence of initiatives taken by the Scandinavian interlocutor as a sign of lacking interest.

(5) A Scandinavian speaker will interpret interruptions done by the Hispanic interlocutor as signs of aggression (autonomy-face threatening) or as a simple lack of conversational know-how.

(6) A Scandinavian speaker will interpret the prolonged turns and self-linking of the Hispanic interlocutor as lack of cooperativeness and/or sense of economy, possibly as a sign of egocentricity.

(7) A Scandinavian speaker will also interpret the absence of verbal (supportive) back-channeling on the Hispanic interlocutor's behalf as lack of cooperativeness, possibly as a threat to affiliation face and even as hostility.

The above-mentioned predictions on intercultural communicative interaction can be seen as directly supported by the statistics so far drawn on our data. To these predictions, we would like to add the following three still unconfirmed assumptions concerning the interpretation of patterns of gaze:

(8) A Hispanic speaker will interpret the averted gaze of the Scandinavian interlocutor, not as the sign of temporarily renouncing the floor as may be meant, but as a sign of lacking attention, or worse, lacking interest (a threat to both affiliation and esteem face).

(9) A Hispanic speaker will interpret the full gaze directed to him/her by the Scandinavian interlocutor, not as the (discreet) sign of claiming the floor that it may be intended to be, but as a simple sign of attention or interest and thereby as an indirect sign to go on talking.

(10) A Scandinavian speaker will interpret the full gaze directed to him/her by the Hispanic interlocutor, not as the sign of attention or interest it is likely to be intended to be,but as a signal of claiming the floor or as a sign of closeness or (exaggerated) interpersonal involvement.

It may be argued that these predictions give a very pessimistic view of the chances of success attributable to Scandinavian-Hispanic intercultural communication. Although we would like to insist on the possibilities of compensating for communicative hindrances due to divergent cultural background by means of empathy, in order to restore (at least cognitive) understanding, we are still convinced that the emotive part of understanding will be seriously affected by factors such as the above-mentioned. It is an important future task of language-training to integrate such aspects in its scope and its curricula.

4. Literature

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