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Communication Behaviors in Intra- and Inter-cultural Decision-making Meetings

With globalization, a large and rapidly growing group of bilingual individuals are exchanging information and making decisions in intercultural settings, yet there has been little systematic evaluation that compares the communication behaviors of such individuals in intra- and inter-cultural communication situations. Since these individuals have actual or potential prominence when participating in international business communication situations, ascertaining how and whether they make decisions in the same or different ways in intra- and inter-cultural meetings is of significant and practical importance.

Given the uniqueness of the language environment in Hong Kong (see, for example, Du-Babcock 1999), its prominence as an international financial center and its pattern of multiple and simultaneous language use, Hong Kong is an ideal research site for a comparison of business communication practices of Chinese bilinguals in intra-and inter-cultural decision-making meetings.

Du-Babcock's (1999) study examined the communication behavior of Hong Kong bilingual Chinese as they interacted in comparable first- and second-language strategic decision-making meetings. The study disclosed similarities in the length of speaking time among individuals in both the English and Cantonese meetings,

but differences in the number and length of turns in that group members took more and shorter turns in the Cantonese meetings and fewer and longer turns in the English meetings.

Other comparative studies (see, for example, Gudykunst et al. 1996) show that cultural individualism-collectivism (I-C) has a direct influence on behavior and that individualistic and collectivistic tendencies influence how individuals perceive themselves, which in turn, impacts on their communication behavior (e.g. communication styles). Although this research has contributed important insights into culture and behavior, Oetzel (1998) has argued that small-group contexts in many of the studies involved cross-cultural comparisons and that the studies did not focus on cross-cultural communication. These oversights are important, particularly since the world economy has become globalized and individuals are more likely to communicate in a. culturally diverse business environment with people possessing differing levels of English-language proficiency (assuming English is a world business language). Working in culturally diverse groups differs from working in culturally homogeneous groups (Watson / Kumar / Michaelson 1993; Cox 1994). As noted by Oetzel (1998: 203), "[a]lthough we know a lot about cross-cultural, interpersonal communication, we do not know much about inter-cultural, small-group communication".

The key issues and problems addressed in the current research therefore: revolve around the importance of small-group communication behaviors in decision-making meetings among individuals who come from similar cultural backgrounds (intra-cultural groups) and different cultural backgrounds (inter-cultural groups). Consequently, the current study seeks to identify the extent to which one dimension of national culture (individualism-collectivism according to Hofstede 1991 and Trompenaars 1993) influences the way people interact differently in intra- and inter-cultural groups.

Although the contrast of cultural I-C has been used to explain and organize a wide variety of behaviors in a number of different cultures, the use of cultural I-C to explain turn-taking communication behavior remains limited and inconclusive (Oetzel 1998). Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, the overall objective of the current study is to further examine Du-Babcock's (1999) findings by extending the research to a different geographical location where

individuals come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Second, the study seeks to re-examine whether culture and group homogeneity affect turn-taking and speaking time distribution. As such, my study (a) examines the effects of culture on communication behaviors; and (b) contrasts the communication behaviors of individuals from individualistic or collectivistic cultural societies to see how they might interact differently in intra- and intercultural communication settings; and (c) recommends strategies and tactics for improving intercultural interactions.

For the purposes of this study, the communication behaviors were operationalized by quantifying turn-taking and speaking time distribution. The allocation of turn-in-interaction can be either self selected or abide by the speaker's nomination of the next speaker. As for the length of speaking time by group members, this was measured by using a stop watch to measure the exact length of each conversational turn. Then, all of a speaker's times of these turns were added together to obtain total speaking time for a meeting.

1. Literature review

Individualism-collectivism (I-C) is a theoretical dimension of a cultural construct that has been used to predict a variety of communication behaviors, such as low- and high-context communication styles (see, for example, Gudykunst et al. 1996) and conflict styles (Ting-Toomey 1988). To operationalize small group behavior and communication, Oetzel (1995, 1998) developed a model of effective decision-making theory (EDMT) that uses cultural I-C and self-construal to predict communication behavior in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups. Specifically, the theory proposes that differences in the number of turns, the number of initiated conflicts, and conflict styles in a small group are likely to be influenced by cultural I-C, self-construal, and cultural group composition. Although self-construal is included as one of the input variables in Oetzel's EDMT model, the current study examined only

the cultural I-C variable. The reason for this restricted focus is that both cultural I-C and self-construal are predicators of not only turn-taking and conflict behaviors (Oetzel 1998) but also communication behavior (Gudykunst et al. 1996). These studies show that cultural I-C is mediated by self-construal and that individual behavior is directly affected by cultural I-C. Given the inter-relationship between self-construal and cultural I-C and their effect on individual behavior, only cultural I-C was considered for the purposes of this study.

According to Oetzel (1998), a decision-making group can be seen as a system with inputs, processes, and outcomes where the input influences the processes and the processes influence the outcomes (see Figure 1). The input variables include the member characteristics (e.g. cultural I-C) and group characteristics (e.g. composition); while the process refers to the interaction that occurs among members, such as turn-taking and speaking time distribution. The output of the group would include such outcomes as decision quality and cohesiveness. The EDMT model has two interdependent goals. First, the theory seeks to understand the influence of cultural I-C and group composition on communication processes (i.e. the influence of input on processes). Second, the theory seeks Ao predict the relationship between communication processes and group outcomes in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups (i.e. the influence of processes on outcomes). The current study focuses on the first goal; that is, the extent to which cultural I-C impacts turn-taking and speaking time distribution.

INPUT	PROCESS	OUTPUT
Member Characteristics	Turn Taking	Cohesiveness
Cultural I-C	Speaking Time	Decision-
Group Characteristics	Distribution	Quality
Homogeneous		
Heterogeneous		

Figure 1. Systems model (adapted from Oetzel 1998).

1.1. Cultural individualism - collectivism (I-C)

The dimension of cultural I-C has been extensively used to measure and explain the similarities and differences among national cultures (see, for example, Hofstede *1991;* Trompenaars *1993;* Triandis *1995).* Individualistic cultures emphasize the goal of the individual over group goals, whereas collectivistic cultures stress group goals over individual goals. In individualistic societies (e.g. the USA), when the personal and collective goals come into conflict, the members of such individualistic cultures typically choose to pursue personal goals at the expense of collective goals. In contrast, members of collectivistic cultures (e.g. Japan) consider it socially desirable to put group goals ahead of individual goals (Triandis *1995).* In this connection, members of collectivistic cultures draw on the *we* identity, whereas members of individualistic cultures draw on the I identity (Ting-Toomey *1988;* Hofstede *1991).* Consequently, individuals from collective cultural societies are more willing than those from individualistic cultural societies to comply with the group norms and to account for these differences in small-group decision making.

1.2. Group homogeneity

Group composition refers to the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of cultural background among the group members. Scholars have argued that group homogeneity has a direct influence on individual communication behavior in that members of both individualistic and collectivistic cultures have difficulties when interacting in heterogeneous groups (Watson *et al. 1993;* Oetzel *1995, 1998).* Difficulties and misunderstandings arise because individuals tend to view the interaction from their own cultural perspectives (see also Nadler / Keeshan-Nadler / Broome *1985).* As Oetzel *(1998)* noted, there are few studies that document the influence of group composition on small group communication. For example, one study found that homogeneous groups initially had higher quality processes than heterogeneous groups did, but that over time, heterogeneous groups adjust and have processes at or above the level of homogeneous groups (Watson *et al. 1993). It* would seem, therefore,

that the differences in the cultural backgrounds of heterogeneous groups (a) lead to different communication processes than those adopted in homogeneous groups, and (b) create difficulties and misunderstandings, at least during initial meetings.

1.3. *Turn-takings and speaking time distribution*

Prior studies focusing on turn-taking signals to identify turns (e.g. Ducan / Fiske 1977) equate turns to speech acts in that a turn is measured as "an uninterrupted utterance of a single group member which is perceived to perform a specific function (or action) within the group interaction process" (Hirokawa 1980: 63). For the purposes of this study then, the measurement of turn-taking focused on the number of turns an individual took and the distribution of the turns among group members.

The number of turns,an individual takes during a business group meeting or in family conversations (see, for example, Ng *et al. 2000)* appears to be influenced by cultural I-C across all groups. Yamada (1990) investigated the turn distribution strategies in business conversational topics between American and Japanese associates and found that American participants distribute their turns unequally, whereas the Japanese take short turns and distribute their turns evenly. Gudykunst / Nishida (1994) explain that this pattern of distribution can be linked to cultural differences. That is, members of individual-listic cultures distribute turns unevenly, whereas members of collectivistic cultures distribute turns relatively equally because individuals from collectivistic cultures stress group sharing and harmony rather than individual gains.

Although cultural I-C is likely to be a factor that affects the distribution of the turn-taking and speaking time distribution in intercultural groups, the use of language and the second-language proficiency of the interlocutors are also likely to be a relevant factor that influences the number of turns taken and speaking time in group meetings. Du-Babcock's (1999) study investigated whether the number of turns an individual takes varies among Hong Kong bilinguals when using their native language (Cantonese) or second language (English) to make decisions. Results indicated that (a) the

average number of turns in Cantonese meetings was more than those in English meetings (t = 2.04; p<.05), and that (b) L2 proficiency positively correlated with the amount of English used during meetings (r = .37, p<0.5). However, the respective speaking times were not significantly different in English and Cantonese meetings (t = .90, p>.05). The results of the original findings therefore only provide partial explanations as to how individuals from collectivistic cultures interact differently when using their first and second languages to make decisions in intea-cultural small-group meetings. In her intercultural study which examined the distribution of speaking time and turn-taking behavior in terms of cultures and group homogeneity, Du-Babcock (2003) concluded that (a) the amount of speaking time and turn-taking for individuals from collectivistic cultures was significantly less than that for individuals from individualistic cultures (F= 9.245, p<.U1; F = 4.044, p<.05 respectively), and that (b) individuals from collectivistic cultures exhibited different communication behaviors when participating in homogeneous groups as compared to a heterogeneous group decision-making meeting (F = 7.470, p<.01). Taken together, Du-Babcock's studies (1999, 2003) suggest that culture and second-language. proficiency are likely to be factors that affect the communication behaviors of bilinguals from collectivistic cultures.

Based on the findings of the two previous studies (Du-Babcock 1999, 2003), this current study further re-examines (a) whether group members from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly than group members from individualistic cultures, and (b) whether group members from collectivistic cultures are more likely than those from individualistic cultures to distribute their turns and speaking time evenly in intea-cultural groups than in inter-cultural groups. In doing so, the current study also examines whether Yamada's (1990) findings hold true in that American business people distribute their turns less evenly than their Japanese counterparts. To operationalize the turn-taking distribution, the even or uneven turn-taking distribution was measured by the standard deviations (SD) of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures in terms of individuals' turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Smaller SD indicates that turns are shared more evenly and that speaking time is more evenly distributed.

Based on the related literature review, three research questions are put forward. Research Question 1 addresses the issue of cultural I-C on turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Research Question 2 addresses group composition (homogeneity and heterogeneity) effects on the distribution of turn-taking and speaking time in group decision-making meetings. Research Question 3 first examines the impact of cultures on even or uneven distribution of turn-takings and speaking time, then examines whether individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures exhibit similar or different communication behaviors when participating in intea-cultural group meetings as compared to intercultural group meetings. The three major research questions are listed as follows:

Research Question 1: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures and those from individualistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time in small-group meetings?

Research Question 2A: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time when they participate in intea-cultural as compared to inter-cultural small-group meetings?

Research Question 2B: Do individuals from individualistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time when they participate in intea-cultural as compared to inter-cultural small-group meetings?

Research Question 3A: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures and those from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently in small-group meetings?

Research Question 3B: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently when they participate in intea-cultural as compared to inter-cultural small-group meetings?

Research Question 3C: Do individuals from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently when they participate in intea-cultural as compared to inter-cultural small-group meetings?

2. Research method

2.1. Research participants

Three hundred and seventy-nine individuals (N = 379) participated in this study. One hundred and forty-seven of them came from an individualistic culture (e.g. the United States) while 232 were from collectivistic cultures (e.g. Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong, etc.). Individuals from collectivistic cultures consisted of three groups: mid-level Chinese managers, Hong Kong students, and US international students from various collective cultures (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Japan, Indonesia and Singapore, etc). Of the 232 participants from collectivistic cultures, 82 of them were mid-level managers who had enrolled on two sessions of an Organizational Behavior course from a long-distance MBA program; 88 of them were Hong Kong students studying on an English for Professional Communication Program; and 62 of them were US international students who came from collectivistic cultures and who were majoring in Business and Administration at graduate and undergraduate levels. Aside from a small number of Hong Kong students who had graduated from overseas (e.g. the United States, Canada), the majority of these 88 participants were educated in Hong Kong.

The work experience of the Chinese participants varied from students without formal organizational work experience to mid-level professional managers working in medium- to large-sized Hong Kong and Chinese private and public sector firms. The participants from the individualistic cultures included native-Americans or Europeans, ranging from undergraduates with limited work experience to MBA students with low-level managerial positions.

Although random assignments were not possible, all the non-native English speaking participants possessed adequate second-language English proficiency. For example, international students from the US had obtained at least 550 points in the TOEFL exam (minimal requirement for US admission); while the Hong Kong undergraduate participants had obtained C or above for English in their A-Level Exam (a type of Hong Kong public exam which is equivalent to SAT in the US). The C grade is equivalent to 550 to 600 points in the TOEFL exam.

For the group formation, each participant was randomly assigned to intra-cultural or inter-cultural groups. For instance, Hong Kong students were either paired with participants in the US to form inter-cultural groups or paired with their owu.peors in Hong Kong to form intra-cultural groups, while all the Chinese business professionals were placed in intra-cultural groups. In total, 54 groups were formed.

2.2. Research design

The research design of the present study was set up to examine comparable meetings in intra-cultural and intercultural communication environments where individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures participated in small-group decision-making meetings. However, there were limitations in the design which had to be taken into account: first only the differences in intercultural and intra-cultural group meetings were measured, not all the relevant communication regarding whether and how the same individuals will participate differently in intercultural and intra-cultural group meetings was captured.

Another limitation was the use of a simulated case to generate dialog. Although the use of actual dialogs from professionals in business firms is preferable, research has shown that the study of students using simulations has yielded valid data (see, for example, Ashton / Kramer 1980).

The third limitation was that the use of video-recording might have the effect of formalizing the meetings, and thereby bias the results as the interactions were not likely to be spontaneous when

participants were aware of being videotaped. However, this limitation was mitigated by the use of a professional video-recording studio in that the video-conferencing meetings were held in a state-of-art videotaping studio equipped with professional video-conferencing and taping facilities. The participants were stationed in a separate room and without visible microphones. Communication apprehension might occur at the beginning, but the fear was overcome in two to three minutes after the meeting started. Participants were so involved with the discussion that they did not notice or were not consciously aware of being videotaped. In addition, with the video-conferencing facility, the participants were able to see their counterparts projected on the screen, and this `in time' virtual meeting environment was very similar to a face--to-face interaction in a conference room. The general feedback was that the feeling of a `long distance' interaction was reduced and that the deliberations were natural and felt almost like face-to-face communication.

2.3. Procedure

The participants took part in a simulated experiential case exercise (Mainiero / Tromley 1989: 202-209) where each group had to make strategic decisions based on a 45-minute discussion. The experiential exercise in this study provided the setting for the development of realistic business decision-making dialogs. The simulation was constructed around a medical product considered by experts to be injurious to the health of consumers - even to the point of possibly causing death. These consequences had to be evaluated against the potential economic losses to the company, which would be substantial if sales of the drug were to be discontinued. The decision - not an easy one - brings to the surface the issue of dual responsibility in that participants must consider both corporate motivation to operate profitably and the overall interests of society.

The communication task represented in this study required all of the participants to engage in decision-making discussions. The participants needed to share and present information from their respective viewpoints in order to reach optimal decisions. The group members had to interactively integrate inputs and make decisions that

not only contributed to the profitability of the entire firm, but also took into consideration the well-being of society as a whole, rather than just make decisions that would improve results in their respective interests. In this connection, the focus of the discussions was on corporate strategy development in five topical areas that the company should adopt in its US domestic and foreign markets.

The video- and audio-taped discussions of the 54 group meetings were subjected to interaction analysis. To conduct comparative analysis of 54 group meetings, similarities and differences were defined by (a) the length of speaking time by each group member and (b) the number of turns taken by individuals.

To assess turn-taking communication behavior, the turn-taking framework developed by Sacks / Schegloff / Jefferson (1974) was used together with the specific technique used in an earlier study (Du Babcock 1999). In other words, a turn consisted of all the speech interactant's utterances up to the point another individual took over the speaking role. The number of turns taken by each participant was codified, counted, and compared. Speaking time was calculated by using a stop watch to measure the exact length of each conversational turn. The length of speaking time for each turn was also coded according to the designated interlocutors and served as a cross check of meeting interaction.

2.4. Data analysis

As this study seeks to examine the influence of a cultural dimension (individualism / collectivism) and group composition (culturally homogeneous / heterogeneous) on turns, and speaking time distribution, the considerable variations in the meeting duration (ranging from 1449 to 3540 seconds) and the number of meeting participants (ranging from 5 to 10) could have adversely affected the accuracy of the statistical test results on the variables being examined. In order to prevent these intervening factors from confusing or influencing the statistical tests and to obtain more accurate results, the researcher attempted to control and adjust the factors (that is, to treat them as covariates and keep them constant) by using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests.

Mean scores and standard deviations for all the variables were calculated and compared. ANCOVA tests were performed to investigate (a) whether there were significant differences in the communication behaviors between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and (b) whether individuals from collectivistic and individualistic cultures exhibit similar or different communication behaviors when participating in an intra-cultural and an inter-cultural group with regard to the examined variables. These tests enabled the researcher to address the research questions the study was set up to explore.

3. Results and interpretations

In this section, I describe findings for the three research questions on whether and how cultural I-C and group composition affect an individual's communication behavior when participating in an intra-cultural or intercultural group decision-making meeting. Research Question 1 asked whether individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures exhibit similar or different turn-taking and speech duration communication behaviors. To answer this research question, an ANCOVA test was performed to reveal whether there were any differences between individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures in their turn-taking behavior and amount of speaking time (see Table 1). With the meeting duration and the number of participants controlled as covariates, the results show that the I-C construct of culture is not a significant contributing factor in influencing the number of turns taken by participants in small group decision-making meetings, although individuals from collectivistic cultures (32.381) tend to take fewer turns than those from individualistic cultures (39.596).

Although the respective turn-taking did not show a significant difference, the result of the amount of speaking time indicated that individuals from collectivistic cultures spoke less than those from individualistic cultures at .05 significant level (F = 4.430). The finding reveals that the I-C cultural dimension is a determining factor that can

significantly affect the speaking time of the meeting participants. In sum; the results of Research Question 1 suggested that culture affects individuals' amount of speaking time but not their turn-taking performance in small-group decision-making meetings.

Variables	All	Collectivistic Cultures	Individualistic Cultures	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	35.988	32.381	39.596	-7.215	3.529
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	319.963	293.327	346.600	-53.274	4.430*

Table 1.   Mean scores of the identified variables between collectivistic. and individualistic cultures (* p < .05).

Research Question 2 measures the influence of group composition on the number of turns and the amount of speaking time among participants in group decision-making meetings. To answer Research Question 2, ANCOVA tests with two independent categorical variables were performed to investigate whether individuals from individualistic or collectivistic cultural societies exhibit different communication behavior when they participate in an intea-cultural group decision-making meeting as compared to when participating in an intercultural meeting. In particular, Research Question 2 was concerned with whether there are significant differences in turn-taking behavior and the distribution of speaking time (a) among the participants from collectivistic cultures and (b) among those from individualistic cultures. It was hypothesized that individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to take more turns and speak more in intea-cultural group decision-making meetings than in inter-cultural group decision-making meetings (Research Question 2A) while the reverse would be true for individuals from individualistic cultures (Research Question 2B).

The result of the ANCOVA test (see Table 2) also showed that group composition exhibits significant effect on the number of turns

(F = 4.928; p<.05) and the amount of speaking time of individuals from collectivistic cultures (F = 4.336; p<.05). In other words, collectivistic individuals took more turns in intra-cultural group meetings (42.699) than in inter-cultural group meetings (29.597). They also spoke more in intra-cultural group decision-making meetings (363.634) than in inter-cultural group decision-making meetings (288.869). In contrast, there was no significant difference in the number of turns or in the amount of speaking time among individuals from individualistic cultures who participated in either intra- or inter-cultural group decision-making meetings.

Variables	All	Intra-cultural Meetings	Inter-cultural Meetings	Mean Difference	
COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES					
Turn taking (number)	36.148	42.699	29.597	13.102	4.928*
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	326.252	363.634	288.869	74.765	4.336*
INDIVIDUALISTIC CULTURES					
Turn taking (number)	33.547	34.371	32.723	1.648	.068
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	281.1381	261.193	301.083	-39.890	.703

Table 2.   Mean scores of the identified variables for two cultures in intra-cultural and inter-cultural group meetings (* p < .05).

Findings for Research Questions 2A and 213 revealed that individuals from collectivistic cultures exhibit significantly different communication behaviors in terms of the number of turns and the amount of speaking time when participating in intra-cultural group meetings and in intercultural group meetings. In contrast, no significant difference was found among individuals from individualistic cultures when

participating in intra- or intercultural group decision-making meetings. In other words, individuals from individualistic cultures exhibited similar communication behavior regarding the number of turn-taking and length of speaking time whether communicating in intra-cultural or intercultural group decision-making meetings.

The overall results showed that group composition is a contributing factor that affects the communication behaviors of individuals from collectivistic cultures in terms of the number of turns and the amount of speaking time. However, it is only a neutral factor for individuals from individualistic cultures. The result that group composition exerts a significant influence on the turn-taking behaviors of individuals from collectivistic cultures is consistent with the previous research findings of Oetzei (1998) where Japanese members took fewer turns in inter-cultural groups than in intra-cultural groups. In contrast, group composition as a neutral factor for the turn-taking behavior of individuals from individualistic cultures, as suggested by the statistical results in this study, deviates from Oetzel's (1998) findings in that Europeans and Americans took more turns in inter-than in intra-cultural groups.

The reason for such a contrasting difference for the group composition effect among collectivists participating in intra- and inter-cultural groups is likely to be attributed to their confidence in using a second language. Individuals from collectivistic cultures who felt less confident and possibly exhibited communication apprehension, therefore took fewer turns and spoke less when communicating in an inter-cultural group where their counterparts were native-English speakers. However, the communication behaviors among participants from individualistic cultures did not follow such a pattern as observed within collectivistic cultures. With English as their first language, individuals from individualistic cultures did not exhibit significantly different communication behaviors when they participated in intra- or inter-cultural group meetings.

Research Question 3 examines whether individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures (Research Question 3A). It further examines whether individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly (Research Question 3B), and whether those from individualistic cultures distribute turns

and speaking time less evenly in intea-cultural groups than in inter-cultural groups (Research Question 3C).

To answer Research Question 3, some interpretations from the distribution of turns and speaking time difference between two cultural groups were obtained by means of standard deviation (SD) (see Table 3). The SD measures the degree of dispersion and thus can reflect the distribution of turns and speaking time among the participants in group decision-snaking meetings. A larger SD indicates a larger degree of dispersion and thus a wider distribution of turns or speaking time. It follows that some of the participants are likely to take a very large number of turns or more speaking time, while some take very few turns or little speaking time in a meeting.

Groin	*Standard Deviation*	
	No. o turns	*Amount o s#eakin~• time*
COLLECTIVISTIC	37.150	24_1.17_3
Intea-cultural	36.723	250.717
Inter-cultural	33.960	192.280
INDIVIDUALISTIC	37.293	283.339
Intea-cultural	42.095	318.642
Inter-cultural	35.827	272.510

Table 3.   Distributions (standard deviations) of turns and speaking time between
             two cultural groups.

To answer Research Question 3A, an ANCOVA test was performed and the results (see Table 3) showed that individuals from collectivistic cultures, with a slightly smaller SD (SD = 37.150) and a resultant narrower distribution, distribute their turns more evenly in a group decision meeting than those from individualistic cultures (SD = 37.293). Likewise, a smaller SD or a narrower distribution of speaking time for collectivistic individuals (SD = 241.173), as compared to a larger SD for individualistic participants (SD = 283.339), shows that these collectivistic individuals tend to distribute their speaking time more evenly than participants from individualistic cultures.

These results indicated overall that individuals from collectivistic cultures, who stress group sharing rather than individual gains, shared turns and distributed speaking time slightly more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in group meetings. These findings

are consistent with the studies by Yamada (1990) and Gudykunst / Nishida (1994) in that while members of individualistic cultures distribute turns unevenly, those from collectivistic cultures distribute turns relatively equally.

When taking group composition into account, the results show that members of collectivistic cultures distribute their turns (SD = 33.960 vs. SD = 36.723) and speaking time (SD = 192.280 vs. SD = 250.717) more evenly in inter-cultural groups than in intea-cultural groups (see Table 3). The same pattern was also found among participants from individualistic cultures; that is, individuals from individualistic cultures also tend to share their turns (SD = 35.827 vs. SD = 42.095) and speaking time (SD = 272.510 vs. 318.642) more evenly when participating in inter-cultural groups as compared to in intea-cultural groups.

The findings show that individuals, whether from collectivistic or individualistic cultures, tend to share turns more evenly when facing their counterparts from a different culture in an intercultural group meeting. These findings appear contradictory to previous research which has revealed that individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize group sharing and distribute turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings. Such a discrepancy among individuals from collective cultures may be triggered by the `unconventional performance' of the meeting participants from collectivistic cultures being investigated in this study.

The findings also reveal that those from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly in intercultural than in intea-cultural group meetings. The smaller standard deviations or narrower distributions derived can be attributed to the practice of accommodation by members of individualistic cultures when they communicate with their counterparts coming from collectivistic cultures who communicate in their second language and possess varying English proficiency.

4. Discussion and conclusions

In general, the amount of speaking time was the only difference between collectivistic and individualistic cultural individuals. This can be seen from the fact that, overall, collectivistic cultural individuals took fewer turns and spoke less than those from individualistic cultures when participating in small group decision-making meetings. Yet, both individualistic and collectivistic individuals took more turns when participating in intra-cultural group meetings compared to intercultural group meetings. This suggests that, given an equivalent length of meeting time, most group members took more and shorter turns in the intra-cultural meetings and fewer and longer turns in intercultural group meetings irrespective of their cultural background. In other words, the discussions in intra-cultural meetings were more interactive and the length per turn was about 15 percent shorter in intra-cultural meetings than in intercultural meetings. As for the turn-taking distribution, the surprising result was that individuals from both cultures distributed more evenly, namely narrower standard deviations in intercultural group meetings than in intra-cultural group meetings. The reason for this unexpected result lies in the possible accommodation of native-English speakers to the second-language speakers and the accommodation of high-proficiency second-language speakers to the intermediate-proficiency second language speakers in intercultural group meetings.

The findings of this study have important and pragmatic implications for intra- and intercultural communication because the results generally illustrate the usefulness of cultural I-C and group composition to explain whether individuals exhibit similar or different communication behaviors (i.e. turn-taking and speaking time duration) in small-group decision-making meetings. The findings also add value to a very extensive literature on cross-cultural communication in examining whether and how individuals communicate differently or similarly in intra- and cross-cultural situations.

The results also confirm the previous findings that cultural I-C and group composition have an important effect on communication behaviors in small-group decision-making meetings. This is because

these findings suggest that in order to enhance communication efficiency in an intercultural communication situation, it is important for individuals with higher language proficiency to accommodate to their counterparts possessing lower language proficiency. It is suggested that additional research in the area should focus on examining how to improve the interaction among people with diverse backgrounds and varying second-language proficiency when they communicate professionally in a cross-cultural environment.

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