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The Negotiation Process: A Comparative Study of Mid-Level Marketing Executives in the U.S.A. and Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

Negotiation has emerged as one of the most critical factors in the process of conducting international business (Fayerweather & Kapoor, 1976). Perlmutter (1983) estimated that over 50% of an international manager's time is spent negotiating. In addition, the process of negotiation has been identified as one of the single most important international business skills (Bryan & Buck, 1989; Fayerweather & Kapoor, 1976; Kapoor, 1974).

With the push toward increasing economic integration, the importance of understanding the cultural domain of process in marketing negotiations becomes even more vital (Kale & Barnes, 1992). The ever increasing opportunities to market products and services globally cannot be optimally capitalized upon unless the cultural domain of the buyer-seller dyad is better understood.

The influence of culture on the negotiation process has been recognized by many researchers (Graham, 1985a, 1985b; Graham & Sano, 1986, 1989; Kapoor, 1974). Harris and Moran (1987, pp. 55-56) indicated that "there are many differences in the negotiation process from culture to culture and they involve language, cultural conditioning, negotiation styles, approaches to problem solving, implicit assumptions, gestures and facial expressions, and the role of ceremony and formality."

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That is, there are cultural variations in negotiation process and behavior among different cultures/countries and it is culture that influences the negotiation process, and thereby affects the negotiation outcome. Thus, a key factor in improving cultural interaction in negotiation is understanding how specific cultural differences are likely to affect the negotiation process (Beliaev et al., 1985).

The significance of insight and true understanding of face-to-face marketing negotiation in different cultures/countries is critical for optimally capitalizing on the increasing opportunities for marketing products and services globally. Thailand's growing economy and the conditions that offer international business opportunities are driving forces requiring the comprehension and recognition of marketing negotiation processes in Thailand. In addition, a comparative study of face-to-face marketing negotiation in Thailand and the U.S.A. has thus far received no scholarly investigation in the international marketing literature.

PURPOSE

This study was a conceptual replication and extension of the comparative studies of marketing negotiation carried out by Professor John L. Graham and his colleagues: Adler, Brahm and Graham (1992); and Graham, Evenko and Rajan (1992). This research sought to extend the aforementioned studies in that it represented the first empirical comparative study of face-to-face marketing negotiation at a specific management level. Further, it explored negotiation by subjects in a specific function (wholesale distribution), and in a specific industry (audio-video equipment industry).

The research empirically compared and contrasted negotiation processes between American and Thai subjects via two-person, buyer-seller negotiation simulations and content analysis of the videotape recordings of both verbal and nonverbal behaviors (conversational form and content) during the negotiation simulations.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Conversational Form and Content

Linguistic theory holds that consideration of only verbal content yields inadequate understanding of interpersonal interactions. Sociolinguistics emphasizes the importance of the form of conversation. It focuses on the nonverbal and structural aspects of language that provide the necessary ancillary information for accurate

interpretation of the content of conversations. The content of conversation is what is said, whereas the form is how it is said. Several researchers have developed schemes for categorizing the "what" aspects of negotiation (e.g., Pennington, 1968; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975; Bonoma & Felder, 1977; Angelmar & Stern, 1978; Donohue, 1981; Putnam & Jones, 1982) and have used these schemes to analyze the verbal content of negotiating interactions.

Individuals also provide stylistic signals for interpretation of verbal communications through the use of contextualization cues such as a rise in tone of voice to indicate or underline an important point while interacting (Gumperz, 1979). Gumperz (1979) also suggested that: (1) contextualization cues vary across cultures; (2) they are behaviors learned in the course of the individual's socialization; and (3) the differences in these cues are often the cause of misunderstandings which can have serious consequences in cross-cultural interactions (e.g., termination of negotiation).

Poyatos (1988) and Gumperz (1979) suggested that elements of conversational form which vary across cultures are legion. For example, Brazilian negotiators appear to have a more aggressive style of conversation than Japanese or American negotiators (Graham, 1985b). In simulated negotiations, Brazilians used the word "no" more frequently, the former providing a negative/ presumptuous tone vis-a-vis the Japanese and American behaviors. The Brazilian nonverbal behaviors also differ from the Japanese and American - no silent periods, and far more interruption, and facial gazing occurs.

Conversational Form: Structural Aspect

"No" - There are substantial differences between the frequency of the use of the word "no" by Brazilian negotiators as opposed to Americans and Japanese (Graham, 1985b). Also, disagreement is a crucial signal in the content analysis schema (Bales, 1950). Japanese negotiators, for example, seldom use the word "no" during negotiations (Nakane, 1970 ; Ueda, 1974; Van Zandt, 1970). That is, as an explicit negative response, the word "no" is rarely used between Japanese individuals of relatively equal social standing. Van Zandt (1970) explained how Japanese executives will not say "no" to foreign negotiators. Even when the Japanese mean no, they will use a more ambigous term (Ueda, 1974). Content analysis results (Graham, 1985a) suggested that U.S. negotiators used this word nearly twice as often as their Japanese counterparts.

Nonverbal Behaviors and Conversational Overlaps

Nonverbal behavior refers to what negotiators do rather than what they say. Nonverbal behavior is complex and multifaceted - it delivers multiple messages, many of which are responded to subconsciously (Adler & Graham, 1989). It includes tone of voice, facial expressions and gazing, body distance, touching, gestures, silences, and symbols. Nonverbal behavior varies considerably across cultures (e.g., Graham, 1985b).

According to communication theory, when two individuals are effectively sharing ideas their communication behaviors - both verbal and nonverbal - will be rhythmically coordinated (Gumperz, 1979; Erickson, 1976). Three key variables of conversational coordination are as follows.

Silent Periods - gaps in conversation of ten seconds or more in duration (Graham, et al. 1992). To an American, lengthy periods of silence in a conversation mean something is wrong. In contrast, periods of silence are part of Japanese conversational style. Graham (1985a) reported almost twice as many silent periods in Japanese interaction than in American. Ueda (1974) and Van Zandt (1970) explained how the Japanese can unintentionally gain a negotiating advantage as a result of remaining silent. Graham and Herberger (1983) stated that U.S. executives are uncomfortable with these silent periods and many admitted to their attempts at filling the gap with conversation or yet another persuasive appeal.

Conversational Overlaps - periods when both parties are talking simultaneously, or when the conversational contribution of one speaker overlaps that of the other (Graham, et al. 1992). Conversational overlaps are the opposite of silent periods - they occur when more than one person speaks at the same time. Graham (1985b) discussed the concept of "interactional synchrony" - the unconscious coordination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors of two or more participants in a conversation. One possible measure of this construct is the number of conversational overlaps or interruptions during a conversation. Interruptions are one of the most important structural aspects of conversation.

Facial Gazing - the percentage of time negotiators gaze at the face of their counterparts (Graham, et al. 1992). Several researchers consider facial gazing in negotiation. For example, Lewis and Fry (1977) found significant relationships between facial gazing and outcome of negotiation. Argyle and Cook (1976) also suggested differences in facial gazing behavior across cultures.

Discrepancies in Conversational Form

Discrepancies in conversational form, although more likely to exist in cross-cultural interactions, may also adversely affect intracultural interactions (Graham, et al. 1992). Poyatos (1988) suggested that such differences in conversational form can cause lack of communication and miscommunication.

Based on the theoretical perspective provided, research hypotheses are suggested as follows:

H1: There are significant differences in conversational content as to the frequency of promises, between American and Thai marketing managers.

H2: There are significant differences in conversational content as to the frequency of questions, between American and Thai marketing managers.

H3: There are significant differences in conversational content as to the frequency of self-disclosure, between American and Thai marketing managers.

H4: There are significant differences in conversational form as to the frequency of the word "no", between American and Thai marketing managers.

H5: There are significant differences in conversational form as to the frequency of conversational overlap, between American and Thai marketing managers.

H6: There are significant differences in conversational form as to the frequency of facial gazing, between American and Thai marketing managers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Negotiation Simulation

The negotiation simulation, developed by Kelley (1966) and used by many researchers (i.e., Graham, 1983, 1984, 1985a; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975) provided for the generation of data to be analyzed in this study. The simulation involved negotiating for the prices of three products. Each negotiator received an instruction sheet, including a price list with associated profits for each price level. The participants read the instructions (i.e. either a buyer or seller position sheet and appropriate payoff matrix) and planned their negotiation strategies. The participants were seated across from one another at a table, given final verbal instructions, and the simulation was begun. When an agreement was reached, each participant was asked to complete the post-negotiation questionnaire. See Graham (1983, 1985b), for the details of negotiation procedures, payoff matrices, negotiation simulation instructions, and post-negotiation questionnaire. Also see Clopton (1984), Krauss (1966), and Pruitt (1981) for the advantages of employing negotiation simulation.

In this study, the roles of negotiators were played by middle-level marketing managers and the stakes of the situation were generally the same for the negotiators as were those that pertained in the audio-video equipment industry. That is, the current study represented an investigation of real-world comparative marketing negotiation based on an adequately controlled negotiation simulation as a tool for investigation, analysis, and comparison,

Sample

The participants/subjects in the negotiation simulations were 24 American and 24 Thai middle-level marketing managers (hereafter MLMMs) of U.S. firms in the audio-video equipment industry that attended the Summer International Consumer Electronics Show (CES), Chicago, June 23-25, 1994, and MLMMs of Thai firms in the audio-video equipment industry that participated in the Bangkok International Hi-Fi Festival (BIF), Bangkok, July 10-14, 1994. The study group was limited to managers of firms that participated in the exhibition, in order to create

homogeneity. In order to avoid biases due to outside control or influence, branches and subsidiaries of these firms as well as retailers were excluded.

Since there were differences in the negotiation behavior of students and businesspeople (Fouraker & Siegel, 1963), the subjects were limited to experienced MLMMs. All had at least two years of experience in marketing/sales negotiation in their respective countries as well as being regularly and directly involved in marketing/sales negotiations.

Data Collection

All of the 24 American MLMMs (12 American dyads) and 24 Thai MLMMs (12 Thai dyads) were videotaped on a voluntary basis.

Analytical Methods

Analytical methods in the current study included: (1) content analysis; and (2) methods for analyzing conversational form and coordination.

Methodology of Content Analysis

Content analysis requires three major decisions which serve as the coding rules: choice of the categories, choice of the unit analysis, and choice of the system enumeration (Angelmar & Stern, 1978; Holsti, 1968). Coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics (Holsti, 1968). See Angelmar and Stern (1978) for details of the categories of content analysis.

The unit of analysis is the "specific segment of content that is characterized by placing it in a given category" (Holsti, 1968, p. 647). Unitizing may be performed on a **syntactic** basis, e.g. words, sentences, or paragraphs; or on a **semantic** basis, e.g. assertion (Osgood, Saporta, & Nunally, 1956) or intended speech sequence (Bonoma & Rosenberg, 1975; Rosenberg & Bonoma, 1974).

In this study, semantic rather than syntactic units were chosen. This choice was dictated by the fact that Bonoma and Rosenberg (1975) and Rosenberg and

Bonoma (1974), upon whose scheme the present one was built, also used semantic units. It reflects a greater concern for validity than for reliability (Markoff, Shapiro & Weitman, 1975). Frequency was used as the system of enumeration. It was assumed that each unit was given equal weight with every other unit and, thus, implied nominal scales.

Coding Procedures

Two coders (including the researcher) were employed in classifying segments of the conversation into twelve negotiation categories. All 24 interactions (12 American and 12 Thai interactions) were coded. The researcher coded 16 interactions (8 American and 8 Thai interactions) and a research assistant coded 8 interactions (4 American and 4 Thai interactions) to provide a reliability check.

The coders first read the definitions of the categories. Subsequently, both discussed these categories with reference to some sample material. After a satisfactory degree of coding convergence had been reached, the actual data were treated in two phases. First, each scorer independently divided the material into units of analysis. The resulting units were compared and disagreements recorded and resolved. The second phase of the content analysis consisted of the independent categorization by the coders of the units that had been generated.

Methods for Analyzing Conversational Form and Coordination

The analysis of conversational form and coordination was conducted in accordance with the method employed by Graham et al. (1992). The critical aspects included:

Conversational Form: Structural Aspect

"No". The videotapes were searched for this word, and the number of occurences of the word "no" were counted and tallied.

Conversational Coordination: Nonverbal Behaviors

Silent Periods. The videotapes were searched for gaps in conversations of ten seconds or more, and these gaps were noted on the transcripts, tallied, and calculated for the duration.

Conversational Overlaps. The videotapes were searched for overlaps, and such interruptions in the flow of conversation were counted. The number of overlaps (interruptions) by each participant was totaled and divided by the time of negotiation to arrive at average incident values which were compared across interactions.

Facial Gazing. The videotapes were reviewed using a stopwatch to record the time each participant spent gazing at the counterpart's face. The proportion of time during which this behavior was engaged in was used in the comparison of interactions.

Hypotheses Tests

Hypotheses tests for the comparison of the variables between the two groups were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U Test. That is, statistical differences regarding conversational content and conversational form were compared using the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U Test.

RESULTS

The results for the hypotheses tests are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Results for Hypotheses 1 through 3 (n = 24)
(Mann-Whitney U Test)

Hypothesis	p-Value
H1	0.0028*
H2	0.0454**
H3	0.6321

*Significant at p-value < 0.01
**Significant at p-value < 0.05

As indicated in Table 1, there are significant differences in conversational content as to the frequency of promises and questions between the American and Thai marketing managers. However, there are no significant differences in conversational content as to the frequency of self-disclosure, between the American and Thai marketing managers.

Table 2

Results for Hypotheses 4 through 7 (n = 24)

(Mann-Whitney U Test)

Hypothesis	P-Value
H4	0.0092*
H5	0.0044*
H6	0.0001*

*Significant at p-value < 0.01

As indicated in Table 2, there are significant differences in conversational form as to the frequency of the word "no", conversational overlap, and facial gazing, between the American and Thai marketing managers.

Findings on Conversational Content and Form (Percentage)

Findings from the analyses of an exploratory comparison of negotiation behaviors using observational measures of conversational content and form (which were analyzed by using percentage) are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Findings and Analysis of Conversation Content (Percentage): Comparison of Negotiation Behaviors

For both the American and Thai negotiators, as indicated in Table 3, the majority of verbal behaviors were problem-solving/information exchange oriented - questions and self-disclosures. However, Thai marketing managers used a higher percentage of problem-solving behaviors than their American counterparts: 88% (or 33% + 55%) versus 58% (or 28% + 30%), respectively. Another difference becomes apparent when the various instrumental behaviors are added together, that is, threats, promises, commitments, rewards and punishments. Twenty-eight percent of the American marketing managers' statements fell into these categories, compared to only nine percent for Thai marketing managers. Thus the American marketing managers used instrumental negotiation strategies three times more than Thai marketing managers.

Table 3

Content Analysis Findings (What is said) (Percentage)

	Culture			
	American (n = 12 dyads)		Thai (n = 12 dyads)	
Negotiation Behaviors	**Total Occurrence for Each Category**	**Percent**	**Total Occurrence for Each Category**	**Percent**
Promise	54	16	8	5
Threat	2	1	5	3
Recommendation	20	6	1	1
Warning	15	4	0	0
Reward	36	10	2	1
Punishment	2	1	0	0
Positive Normative Appeal	10	3	3	2
Negative Normative Appeal	0	0	1	1
Commitment	0	0	0	0
Self-Disclosure	102	30	95	55
Question	95	28	57	33
Command	0	0	0	0

Note: Columns may add up to ± 100 because of rounding errors. Total units counted for Americans were 336; for Thais 172.

Table 4

Findings Regarding Conversational Form (How things are said) (Percentage)

Negotiation Behaviors	Culture: American (n = 12 dyads)	Culture: Thai (N = 12 dyads)
Structural Aspect		
The Word "No'	16.89	4.11
Nonverbal Behaviors		
Silent Periods	0.000	0.027
Conversational Overlaps	29.26	13.87
Facial Gazing	11.23	1.87

Note: The Word "No". The average number of times the word "no" was used by each negotiator per 30 minutes of negotiation.

Silent Periods. The average number of conversational gaps initiated by each negotiator, 10 seconds or greater, per half hour.

Conversational Overlaps. The average number of interruptions .by each negotiator per half hour.

Facial Gazing. The average number of minutes each negotiator looked at counterpart's face, per 10-minute period.

Findings and Analysis of Conversational Form (Percentage): Comparison of Negotiation Behaviors

Silent Periods From the data observed, there were no silent periods for the American group. For the Thai group, silent periods observed (from 5 Thai dyads; 7 dyads had no silent periods) were 4 minutes 4 seconds. Therefore, the average silent period = 48.8 seconds or 0.813 minute. Thus, the average silent periods per half hour = 0.813/30 = 0.0271 (or 2.71%) as compared with 0% for the American group.

The analysis of the structural aspects and nonverbal behavior yielded additional differences in conversational form between the American and Thai groups. American marketing managers used the word "no" more frequently (approximately, four times) than Thai marketing managers. There were more silent periods in Thai negotiations than in the American negotiations as previously discussed. In addition, American marketing managers interrupted one another with two times the frequency of Thai marketing managers. Facial gazing was found to be very different between the two groups. American marketing managers look at the counterpart's face six times longer than Thai marketing managers (see Table 4).

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the conversational content, Thai marketing managers also placed more emphasis on problem-solving behaviors (questions and self-disclosures) and de-emphasized instrumental influence strategies (threats, promises, commitments, rewards and punishments). In comparative terms, Thai marketing managers used more problem-solving strategies and less instrumental strategies than the American marketing managers.

The analysis of the conversational form also suggests that there were differences between the two groups for every element of the conversational form considered in the study. For Thai marketing managers, the word "no", conversational overlaps, and facial gazing occured much less than for the Americans,

and silent periods were allowed. That is, the American negotiators disagreed with counterparts, as measured by the use of the word "no", with strikingly greater frequency than Thai marketing managers. American negotiators also interrupted each other very frequently, spent more time gazing at counterparts' faces and allowed no silent periods. In summary, the American negotiation process was found to be different from the Thai in every aspect of conversational form.

The differences in the usage of the word "no", silent periods, conversational overlaps, and facial gazing were consistent with previous studies such as Graham (1985b) regarding other cultures (Brazil and Japan). Differences are in not only what the negotiators said during the negotiation simulations, but also how things were said varied substantially across cultures.

Management Implications

This study is one of the first empirical studies in this specific setting/context. Until further research is reported, executives should balance the findings with their own experience when managing and interacting in both intra- and intercultural negotiations.

One of the critical dimensions for the success of negotiation is the discrepancies in conversational form that are normally perceived as common or ordinary issues in the American culture but not for Thais. The Thai counterpart may not reciprocate the problem-solving strategy initiated by the American negotiator when such discrepancies exist. This may lead to diminishing interpersonal attraction, benefit (both economic-profit and psychological rewards) and relationship. That is, discrepancies in conversational form which are generally not consciously perceived by negotiators may result in potential problems in cross-cultural negotiation. This implies that high-level executives might consider choosing and training marketing managers who are similar in background and personality to their Thai counterparts and vice versa.

The findings of this study strongly encourage placing emphasis upon the teaching of adaptation in negotiation training programs. Negotiators who

view their job as one of creating satisfaction and solving problems for their counterparts are likely to negotiate more profitable marketing agreements and arrangements as well as induce long-term cooperation and relationships.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings and limitations of this study provide several avenues for future research. Since the present study used a relatively small sample size, this may have influenced the findings of this investigation. To rectify these deficiencies, future research needs to maximize the generalizability of the findings by employing a larger sample of middle-level marketing/sales managers from the industry. In addition, in future research, a culturally neutral third-party observer might be used to evaluate the qualities of negotiators' processes/behaviors during the negotiations to provide a stronger test of the hypotheses.

This study should be viewed as only the first step in the comparative study of marketing negotiations in a specific industry and management level. Similar studies using alternative subjects (other levels of marketing management or even sales representatives), settings, and methods will be crucial for mitigating the measurement and external validity limitations inherent in this single study.

Future research should, of course, consider intercultural negotiation and use negotiation simulations combining survey and observational methods as well as both communication content and form. Graham (1985a) and Adler and Graham (1989) reported that negotiators' behaviors differ as between intra- and intercultural interactions.

Finally, future research needs to be conducted on different issues and influences (i.e., trust, team negotiation, short-term versus long-term relationships, one-shot versus serial or repeated negotiation, the effects of third parties and longitudinal empirical studies), situations/settings (other industries/products such as service industries, distribution channels such as retailers, and countries, as well as other levels of marketing management) where the two cultures as well as other different cultural groups negotiate.

Conclusions

The findings indicated that there were differences betweeen the two groups regarding how things were said. That is, clear contrasts between the American and Thai marketing managers were found in aspects of conversational form. The findings of this study imply that the American marketing managers would likely have difficulty negotiating with Thai marketing managers. One of the important areas of future research, therefore, should be the investigation of American/Thai negotiating interactions. Future research needs to be focused on identifying what if any adjustments/adaptations should be made and by whom.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will broaden the knowledge base and promote the constructive development of research activities into international marketing negotiation. It is also hoped that the findings provide important implications for training marketing executives in this industry in managing intercultural situations more efficiently and effectively in the future.

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