

**Researching Intercultural Communication:
Discourse Tactics in Non-egalitarian Contexts**

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Abstract

In this chapter key sociological traditions forming the theoretical backdrop of current discourse-based approaches to intercultural communication research will be discussed and John Gumperz's contribution to highlighting the interactional nature of everyday communication and language use will be outlined. Then I shall introduce the central thesis of this chapter: that discourse-based approaches to intercultural communication provide helpful frameworks for understanding how power is fluid and mediated through discourse and meaning-making, and how different social actors located in differential, hierarchical social positions, and coming from different cultural backgrounds, can negotiate through discourse for more advantageous positions for themselves. This thesis will then be delineated through

drawing on positioning theory, (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Langenhove 1999), a discourse-based social identity theory, to analyse two examples of intercultural/inter-group communication.

Interaction Analysis and Discourse-based Approaches to Intercultural Communication

What is our conception of interaction analysis and on what notion of interaction can it be based? It seems that the notion of interaction cannot be essentially defined. A broad range of phenomena or activities can be seen as interaction by different people engaged in different forms of life (Wittgenstein's notion, see Sluga and Stern 1996). At one extreme of the continuum, any human (some would also argue machine) meaning-making activity can be seen as a form of interaction. One can conceive someone finding a fruitful way of seeing "reading" as a form of interaction (the reader making meaning of/interacting with the text and indirectly interacting with the invisible/non-physically present author; or to stretch the argument a bit, the computer "reading" some input and making certain responses to the input) (similar arguments can be made for watching TV, movies or watching an exhibition). However, stretching the notion to that far end will not be too useful for the practical linguistic anthropologist interested in everyday human interaction. I shall therefore focus my analysis on the range of activities that involve some form of bi- or multi-party, face-to-face

meaning-making, which is embedded in some shared forms of life or ways of living engaged in by the interactants. And “face-to-face” is to be understood broadly, i.e., can be mediated via some form of technology, e.g., phone talk, net talk, e-mail talk, etc.

Interaction analysis thus has as its aim the uncovering of the kinds and nature of the meaning-making, interpretive processes involved and the semiotic resources drawn upon to enable the achievement of some mutual sense of inter-subjectivity (i.e., the perception on both/all parties that they achieve the sharing of certain perspectives with each other/one another). How is this sense of inter-subjectivity achieved? What is happening when this is not achieved (e.g., in cases of perceived communication barriers or breakdowns)? What is it that can bring about the overcoming of the communicative barriers or breakdowns?

Under an interactional conception of language, language should not be seen as a reified object of study by linguists and language as a bounded concept is an ideological, theoretical and social construct—born of the activities of armchair linguists and/or political, national unifying/segregating agendas. The analytical focus should be on how languages as (continuously changing) systems of semiotic resources (among other semiotic systems of resources) are recruited and utilized for, and at the same time also transformed, during interaction.

While the above brief summary will be familiar to those working in the interpretive traditions of discourse analysis, scholars working in the broader field of communication and/or intercultural communication might, however, need a brief introduction to discourse-based approaches. In the next section, key sociological traditions forming the theoretical backdrop of current discourse-based approaches to intercultural communication research will be discussed and John Gumperz's contribution to highlighting the interactional nature of everyday communication and language use will be outlined. Then I shall introduce the central thesis of this chapter: that discourse-based approaches to intercultural communication provide helpful frameworks for understanding how power is fluid and mediated through discourse and meaning-making, and how different social actors located in differential, hierarchical social positions, and coming from different cultural backgrounds, can negotiate through discourse for more advantageous positions for themselves. This thesis will then be delineated through drawing on positioning theory, (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Langenhove 1999), a discourse-based social identity theory, to analyse two examples of intercultural/inter-group communication.

Symbolic Interactionism (SI), structuration theory, and discourse-based approaches

Symbolic interactionism (SI) or that branch of sociology that focuses on human meaning-making and interpretive processes evolving around the use of symbols, or semiotic resources, has its roots in the pragmatist philosophers such as John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, and George Herbert Mead. The SI perspective puts an emphasis on human interaction and communication via the use of symbols for meaning-making, and human interpretive processes which are central to interaction and communication. SI studies the interaction order of everyday life and focuses on the social, interactional, and discursive construction of self and others. Concepts such as power, social relations, contexts, self, and identities are seen as fluid, always open to negotiation and re-negotiation, and interactively co-constructed via discourse and other semiotic resources. In sum, the SI perspective emphasizes human interaction and communication as mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions (Blumer 1986).

While Anthony Giddens seems to have developed structuration theory (Giddens 1984) quite independently of SI, structuration theory and SI are compatible with each other. The SI perspective sees people as active social agents, quite different from the solitary, rational, Cartesian individual (or

subject). People are seen as social actors--constantly actively adjusting, interpreting, and organizing and re-organizing their ways of speaking and their ways of being (e.g., ways of dressing, looking, thinking, viewing, feeling, interpreting, hearing, etc.) to adjust to others in social interactions. The self is created through such on-going social interactions, and it is a self that is fluid, and constantly negotiating with and adjusting to others. The SI concern is with how the social order (macro forces and structures) is constantly being created, reproduced, or contested and transformed.

Similarly, structuration theory provides a solution to overcome the sociological macro-micro, structure-agency theoretical divide by seeing the macro and micro, social structures and agency, as mutually constitutive and shaping. Giddens (1984) thus attempts to provide an overall theoretical framework to deal with two major sociological issues: (i) the division between the conscious subject and social structures, and (ii) agency or praxis and collective forms of social life (i.e., the agency/structure problem). Giddens (1984) sees social action and interaction as tacitly enacted social practices and discusses how they become institutions or routines and reproduce familiar forms of social life:

The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social

practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible. (Giddens 1984: 2).

With structuration theory, Giddens attempts to integrate human social action with the larger systems, structures, and institutions of which we are a part. It is the continual repetition of social action and interaction in more or less routines or repeated practices that constitute what may appear to be the larger social forms or systems. Under structuration theory, structure is not outside of and imposed on social action, but is both constituted/structured by and shaping/structuring social action.

Structuration theory thus seems to attempt to overcome the structuralist determinism that is sometimes attributed to social theorists who emphasize too much the reproduction tendency of social structures. Under structuration theory, precisely because structures and social actions are mutually constitutive and shaping/structuring, there is the possibility of transformation of larger social structures through situated social actions, which often involve discursive practices. This perspective is especially important to the central argument of this chapter: that in interactional

contexts where power relations figure predominantly, social actors can draw on discourse tactics to attempt to transform the larger social forces (more on this later).

Both SI and structuration theory thus seem to have formed the sociological backdrop of discourse-based approaches to research on intercultural communication (e.g., Scollon and Scollon 1995; Carbaugh 2005). Recent readers in intercultural communication (e.g., Gudykunst 2005; Holliday Hyde and Kullman 2004; Kiesling and Paulston 2005) also provide entries on discourse-based approaches. While Giddens (1984) does not focus on discussing language and discursive practices, many current discourse analysis frameworks have in one way or another drawn on Giddens' structuration theory in seeing social actions as predominantly mediated through language and other semiotic resources (e.g., Gee 1999). The ethnography of communication started by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz (Gumperz and Hymes 1986) also appeared in around the same period of time as SI and structuration theory. Gumperz's work on intercultural/inter-group interaction is important as not many intercultural communication studies focus on non-egalitarian situations. Below I shall discuss John Gumperz's contribution to theorizing about intercultural or inter-group communication, especially in non-egalitarian contexts.

Gumperz's contribution to an interactional conception and analysis of language

Gumperz's research has made great contribution to de-centering language as a research and analytical focus in his privileging of communicative practice, or the everyday communicative event embedded in mundane everyday activities as the central analytical focus, and in his constantly stressing the importance of situating the communicative event (the interaction) in its larger sociocultural and institutional context including the larger context of power relations. One might see him as a pioneer in critical sociolinguistics (although he might not like to attach such labels to himself and his work). His rich work in developing theories of intercultural, inter-dialectal, inter-group communication is also a major contribution which few will dispute about.

Although Gumperz seems to hold reservations about the methods and procedures of conversation analysis (CA), the methods and procedures developed in conversation analysis, though considered to be clinical by some, do seem to offer some useful empirically grounded and practical research tools to interaction analysts, especially if they are used flexibly and not subscribed to religiously. Gumperz seemingly asserted that conversation analysts have apriori, static assumptions about groups, communities or group membership. An examination of Harvey Sacks' early

lectures on conversation as well as subsequent work in CA, however, does not warrant such an assertion. Nevertheless, it is important to take Gumperz's warning about not taking "community" or "membership" as static, given categories but as something negotiated, constantly evolving in interactions. CA methods can and need to be more applied to the analysis of interactions at "borderland places", i.e., cross-cultural, cross-group, cross-community (if you want), and cross-position interaction (more on this below), and one can see such analytical projects a bit on the minority side in mainstream CA studies—projects that will take as its central analytic goal to uncover and describe how sense-making "methods" and "procedures" come into sharing by participants (e.g., cross-cultural, cross-generation, cross-gender, etc.), who might generally be seen as not sharing much in common. To borrow a metaphor from developmental psychology, one can say that we need to develop CA analytical projects that are more "developmental" or "longitudinal" than "cross-sectional".

What are the analytical categories that an interactional analyst should take as the most relevant ones at the present time, and what should be the short-term and the long-term objectives of an interactional analysis approach? It seems that a good unit of analysis is a speech event that is ordinarily recognizable as such by interaction participants. One should also take what is recognizable as communication barrier and communication breakdown as a focus for analysis. Gumperz compares this approach with the

grammarians' approach: while grammarians analyse grammatical and ungrammatical sentences and compare them to yield grammatical insights, an interactional analyst should analyse both successful communication events and instances of communication barriers and breakdowns. The long-term objective is to uncover the methods and procedures that people (e.g., coming from very different backgrounds or with very different memberships) can possibly use to co-construct common methods/procedures of sense-making, of achieving some perceived (provisional) sense of intersubjectivity. This is a theoretical project with important implications for a number of disciplines and for practical challenges facing us now in an increasingly globalized world of incommensurable discourses (with both processes of homogenization and fragmentation taking place).

Communication after 9/11 takes on different meanings—is communication or sharing some form of consensus possible only among “members”? How do “non-members” (e.g., coming from radically different positions, backgrounds, be it linguistic, racial/ethnic, religious, social, gender, sexuality, generational) become recognizable to one another as “fellow members” (of shared humanity)—i.e., recognizable to one another as sharing some common methods and procedures of meaning-making and co-inhabiting some shared forms of life (including methods and procedures for resolving conflicts of interests and cultures), no matter how provisional it is?

Issues in contemporary studies of interaction

A major issue in contemporary studies of interaction seems to be related to the tendency of researchers to hold a dichotomous micro-macro view of human interactions, especially in conducting interaction analysis. There seems to be a traditional dualistic view in sociolinguistics (e.g., in terms of micro-interactional sociolinguistics vs. macro-sociolinguistics) which Gumperz readily speaks against and shows in his work how unhelpful such a perspective is. This dualistic division reflects a lack of ability on the part of the analyst to overcome Cartesian dualism in theorizing human phenomena. This is also reflected in some general criticism sometimes directed towards CA: e.g., the accusation that CA is too “micro” oriented. In this regard I want to quote Harvey Sacks in his “micro” analysis of an introduction sentence in a group therapy session (Spring 1966, Lecture 04a—An introduction sequence, collected in Gail Jefferson (Ed.) 1992):

One thing we can come to see is that producing the introductions in the form of a sentence might specifically be done to make available to Jim that ‘a group’ is being presented. That is, we want to differentiate between Jim being introduced to ‘three people’ in close order, and Jim being introduced to ‘the group,’ one by one. In that regard, it seems to follow that sentence-making is to be conceived as

a kind of social institution in perfectly conventional ways. I suppose we don't ordinarily think of the use of grammar as a social institution for demonstrating organization. Courses in social organization don't have, I suppose, sections on the way you can build sentences to present a group, where you use the resources of the grammar to do that. But it might not be a bad idea. It isn't, then, that we have sentence-making on the one hand and social structures on the other, and one can study their relationship by, e.g., studying dialectics. (Sacks 1966/1992: 288)

Thus, the micro-macro analytical division is unproductive (as the discussion of structuration theory above shows) and tends to divide theoretical and research work into the work of critical social theorists and the work of micro-(socio)linguists. Whereas a more productive analytical stance would be to see, as both Gumperz and Sacks do, the macro (e.g., social structures) as being enacted, maintained, reproduced, taking shape, or being contested, being transformed...etc., through and through in the micro interactional event (e.g., sentence making in introducing someone to a group). This seems to be the most challenging and yet most interesting task for the interaction analyst; i.e., not to leave social theory to the social theorists, as argued by Gumperz himself (2003).

Another issue, which will also form the thesis of this chapter, is the relative lack of theoretical and methodological attention to analysis of intercultural-communication-situated-in-non-egalitarian-contexts. While there does not seem to be any dearth of research findings on intercultural communication, they tend to fall into the trap of linguistic and cultural essentialism; e.g., making claims like: people from the background of Language A and Culture A make and respond to compliments in these ways while people from the background of Language B and Culture B make and respond to compliments in those ways, etc.). Also, there is a need for more study on conflicts or oppositional practices in intercultural communication located in non-egalitarian contexts. Gumperz's famous studies of the job interview and the research student 'pleading' to the professor (2003) are among the few classical and pioneering studies in cross-group communication marked by hierarchical power relationships. And we must also note that Gumperz understands intercultural communication in a broad sense as inter-group (or in what I would call: inter-location or inter-position) communication; i.e., communication between people coming from different languages, cultures, dialects, social networks or classes, etc. Stretched to the extreme it can be said that all communication shares in some features (albeit to hugely varying degrees) of some inter-group or inter-position communication. This is also what Bakhtin means by saying that we need to acknowledge the "otherness" inherent in any dialogic encounter (Gardiner 2004).

In this chapter, I would like to continue in the tradition started by Gumperz in focusing on analysis of inter-group communication situated in larger sociopolitical, non-egalitarian power matrixes, and in understanding the tactics used by non-powerful participants to make the best out of a bad situation. Michel de Certeau discussed and described the everyday tactics used by non-powerful people and pointed out that tactics are ‘weapons of the poor’ (1984). Understanding the discourse tactics used by the non-powerful in inter-group communicative events will contribute to understanding the discourse strategies that Gumperz has devoted much attention to studying. In the next section, I shall draw on the analytical tools of positioning theory and storyline analysis (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Langenhove 1999) to analyse interactional examples from two case studies, each marked by a different configuration of power relations among the interactants.

Drawing on Positioning Theory and Storyline Analysis to Understand Discursive Tactics in Inter-group Communication in Non-egalitarian Contexts

In this section I shall draw on the analytical resources of positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Langenhove 1999) to analyse discursive tactics in two examples presented in this section. In typical colonial

encounters, the colonizer discursively positioned the colonized as a cultural, ethnic and linguistic 'other', establishing binary separation of the colonizer and the colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the former (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998). In both our daily conversations as well as public discourses such discursive construction of self and other and of different subject positions for self and other routinely occurs. Positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) proposes that such subject positions are linked to our discursively constructed storylines which are constantly being negotiated by different parties:

One speaker can position others by adopting a story line which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which they are 'invited' to conform, indeed are required to conform if they are to continue to converse with the first speaker in such a way as to contribute to that person's story line. Of course, they may not wish to do so for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they may not contribute because they do not understand what the story line is meant to be, or they may pursue their own story line, quite blind to the story line implicit in the first speaker's utterance, or as an attempt to resist. Or they may conform because they do not define themselves as having choice, but feel angry or oppressed or affronted or some combination of these. (Davies and Harré 1990: 7)

The construction of storyline is central to the establishment and articulation of collective and personal identities, which involves assigning different subject positions (or 'characters') to different people in a certain context according to a storyline projected by one's discourse. By 'giving people parts in a story', a speaker makes available 'a subject position which the other speaker in the normal course of events would take up.' (Davies and Harré 1990: 5). Below we shall quote Davies and Harré (1990) to delineate the key concepts of positioning theory for analyzing discursive tactics through analyzing the kinds of subject positions and storylines being both enabled and contested in discourse by different parties:

We shall argue that the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (Davies and Harré 1990: 3)

In projecting storylines, people routinely draw on culturally available stereotypes (or recurring storylines) as resources to position themselves and

others. In addition, different storylines are linked to different moral orders, with different sets of norms about what counts as right, legitimate and appropriate to do (Davies and Harré 1990).

It is in light of the conceptual framework and analytical tools offered by positioning theory that we shall understand “non-egalitarian contexts”. By “non-egalitarian contexts”, I do not mean a static, fixed, essentialist context out there. Instead I want to describe the larger power structures in which the interactants are located and the ways in which the different interactants draw on these structural resources to bring into shape, to reproduce (e.g., by the relatively “more powerful” party—powerful as defined by her/his location in larger sociopolitical structures) or to contest and subvert such a move to create a non-egalitarian context (e.g., by the relatively “weaker” party— weaker as defined by her/his location in larger sociopolitical structures). Thus, while interactants are differentially located in larger social structures and occupy differential positions in the larger power matrixes, the local context is being discursively constructed (reproduced or contested, negotiated and subverted and so on) in situ by the interactants (e.g., through the different storylines and subject positions being projected by different parties in conversation). For instance, while one party starts off by trying to shape the context as a non-egalitarian one (by putting him/herself in a more powerful position through a particular storyline being projected), the other party might contest and subvert the effect of such a move by using discourse

tactics (e.g., through negotiating a different storyline and thus invoking different subject positions and a different moral order).

In the following case study of Carman Lee (pseudo-name), a Hong Kong business executive and her US client on the phone, we seem to be witnessing such tensions in the negotiation of a less or more egalitarian context. Then in Case Two, we shall look at the discourse tactics of ‘Long Hair’, a grass-root, leftist, democracy fighter in Hong Kong, and how he negotiates a more egalitarian discourse context when interacting with powerful middle class politicians and party leaders in public.

Case One: a business executive in Hong Kong

Carman Lee works in a medium-size gift and premium company in Hong Kong. Her company manufactures and trades gifts and premiums, plastic products, both generic and tailor-made. They have a factory with 200 workers in China where the manufacturing takes place, and a marketing and sales office in Hong Kong where designing of products and negotiations with clients take place. Their clients come from the Middle East, Europe and their biggest clients are from the US. However, these US clients seldom come to Hong Kong and they communicate with them mainly through email. The clients she comes into face-to-face contact with are mostly from the Middle East (e.g., Dubai), and these are diasporic ethnic Indian and Pakistan

business executives who are very hardworking and very willing to travel. Some clients are from Europe (e.g., Italy), and when they come she will speak a few words such as Italian and they will be very happy to hear them; they will also learn a few phrases in Chinese, such as “Ni hau ma?” (How are you?).

English to her is easier to learn than Mandarin Chinese although she is ethnic Chinese, because to her Mandarin Chinese comes in a more formal style than Cantonese, which is her mother tongue (e.g., “go haak hou yiu-kau” in Cantonese; in Mandarin Chinese, one should say: “go haak yiu-kau hou yim-gaak”—a more formal, elaborate style needs to be used).

Her job responsibility lies mainly in sales and marketing; solving the problems of clients, e.g., helping them to do promotion; e.g., a big pharmaceutical company wants to use their company logo to design a stationery holder plus a clock; her job focuses on communication with them; e.g., explain the design, negotiate the price, and the schedule, etc.

Now with e-mail in very common use, she mostly uses e-mail to communicate with overseas clients. Thus, more written English than spoken English is used, especially when they are in the same time zone. On socializing with clients: she mainly needs to socialize with long-term clients who have become personal friends; when they come she will take them to

lunch; these clients are frequent visitors to Hong Kong and have visited HK for over 10 years; so, they are very familiar with the places in Hong Kong; and in dinners with them they will talk about things such as different education systems in different places.

The following are excerpts from the interview exchanges conducted in June 2004 between the author and Carman on intercultural communication experiences (the interview was conducted in both Cantonese and English and both parties code-switch naturally in the interview; the following is an English translation of the exchanges):

Carman: Yes, we have a Hong Kong accent. I care about it a little bit; I feel that it's not nice to hear; I'll learn by imitation; e.g., paying attention to the English on TV; sometimes when I hear some Hong Kong people speaking English on TV with a distinctive Hong Kong accent I would feel a bit uncomfortable;... Anson Chan's (the former Chief Executive in Hong Kong, an ethnic Chinese educated in the University of Hong Kong) English is okay; and Uncle Tung's (the current Chief Executive of Hong Kong) English is not bad either. But I don't have any problems communicating with my clients.

Lin: If you have children, which accents of English do you want them to learn?

Carman: Well, I don't care much about that; as long as they can communicate, it's okay. Because, even within the same country, people have different accents and you cannot say which ones are the best or more superior. My former colleague in the bank, when she spoken English we can tell she's a Hong Kong person but she is someone who's speaking rather good English.

I think I can handle them (English-speaking foreigners) in my job domains; so I can speak English in certain domains only, e.g., some jargon related to their culture, which I'm not familiar with; sometimes we guess each other's meanings but we can communicate alright.

Lin: Have you ever come across any communication difficulties with your clients?

Carman: In particular I have an Italian client, and he's very happy when I speak Italian to him, but my Italian is limited (to several sentences) and English is not his mother tongue and

sometimes he'd say, sorry, my poor English; but we can understand each other alright; speaking is more difficult, because of loss of meaning or misunderstanding; so before each meeting his secretary will e-mail the agenda to me first and then after the meeting he or his secretary will give us the minutes, or we'll e-mail him to confirm what has been discussed, to do this, just "for sure".

I have an Engineering colleague who writes very well in English, and he's very good in using simplified English to express technical details and people can understand his writing clearly.

One incident of difficulty in communication: one time in a very noisy environment, a long-distance call from a US client, and the topic is rather complicated and I experienced some difficulties in communication with him. And I used a strategy: I said to him: it's very noisy here; please let me go somewhere and talk to you again; actually it's a strategy to get him to say the things again.

Americans do not "jauh neih" (Yale transcription of Cantonese words meaning "accommodate you"), i.e.,

accommodate you; they just speak as if you speak English as your mother tongue, and they will have sounds omitted and so on; those who speak English as a mother tongue will not articulate every sound, e.g., they will not say “I will”, but will shorten it; whereas second language speakers of English (e.g., those clients from the Middle East) will articulate every sound clearly and so it’s easier to understand their English.

Some clients are very arrogant and will not speak to you if you speak slowly; e.g., some clients on the phone will start with the sentence: Is there anyone who speaks English. I’d answer him or her: where are you from? What can I help you with anyway? I’ll answer them directly in English.

On the whole, in the industry or in HK, our colleagues might not be confident to speak English and especially when the clients speak fast and our colleagues will become diffident and hesitate to speak English even further. But I won’t be like that, e.g., I’ll ask them to spell their names, e.g., spell it please, and then I’ll say it’s strange, as it is not a common name.

We can see from Carman's remarks that she is a very confident speaker of English and she uses English in intercultural communication with other second and foreign language speakers of English, such as ethnic Indian and Pakistani clients from the Middle East or clients from Europe. With these clients she communicates comfortably in English—a language that does not belong to them as a mother tongue but a useful communication tool that has forged their business relationships and sometimes personal friendships. Such intercultural communication is characterized by egalitarian mutual respect. For instance, an Italian client would admit to her, "sorry, my poor English," but she accommodates him by using her limited Italian with him, while he will also use some Chinese phrases to show his good will. In this sense, both parties show willingness to use the other's language, if only as a symbol of respect and interest in the other's language and culture.

The storyline being co-produced in conversation between Carman and her Middle-East and European clients is thus one that projects subject positions which are more horizontally related rather than vertically related to each other; e.g., no speaker claims her/himself to be occupying a subject position higher than the other. Also, English comes in not as the superior communication tool, but just as a useful tool for intercultural communication between egalitarian, mutually respectful parties occupying near-peer subject positions. No one claims the subject position of an expertise speaker of English. Also, their creative use of multiple

communication strategies to ensure communication of important business information (e.g., e-mailing agendas in advance and written records of meetings afterwards) proves that successful communication does not depend on only one channel and second/foreign language speakers of English can use English fruitfully for intercultural communication without invoking the notion of the need for native-speaker-defined “good” English. In the storyline co-produced in their intercultural communication, it is a world and a moral order under which both conversation participants bear equal responsibilities to make oneself intelligible to each other and to try one’s best to appreciate each other’s efforts in communicating across cultural and linguistic boundaries without expecting any one party to lopsidedly make all the efforts for making oneself intelligible to the other party.

The mutuality and egalitarian atmosphere that characterize Carman’s interactions with clients from non-English countries (e.g., Middle-East, Europe) stand in sharp contrast with the kind of attitudes shown by some of her US clients. For instance, some US clients will start a phone conversation by saying: ‘Is there anyone who speaks English?’ The storyline being projected by this US client’s question presupposes a world and a moral order that has at least two inter-related ideological underpinnings: that it is entirely the responsibility of the other party to accommodate the US client linguistically, and that the burden of successful intercultural communication rests entirely with those who need to mater

English to communicate with those who already speak English as a first language.

In this utterance we see the reincarnation of the storyline in imperialist literature, e.g., Robinson Crusoe, the legacy of imperialist and colonial mentalities (see analysis by de Certeau 1984). This brings us to the witnessing of another practice of Carman, which can be seen as subversive. Instead of answering this client in a subservient way, she asked in her own variety of English: ‘Where are you from? What can I help you with anyway?’ By responding to a question not with an answer but with a question, she turned the tables and showed her agency and confidence in answering back to the voice posing as a colonial master. In her defiant act, she answered with a voice that belongs to a self-respecting, empowered agent who does not subscribe to the master-primitive imperialist storyline and resists the first party’s attempt to define the context as a hierarchical one. She is projecting a totally different storyline in her reply. In this storyline the subject positions are reversed: she is someone who demands to know the background of the caller; i.e., she is the one who has the right to demand information from the caller in the first place. In the storyline that she counter-projects with her reply, she is an equal partner in this business and professional relationship with her US clients, not a linguistic or cultural inferior. For instance, she will handle them quite confidently; e.g., by asking them to spell their names when the pronunciation is not clear. In

doing this, she indicates to the other party that the burden of intercultural communication rests with both parties, and not only on her side and she successfully used her discourse tactics to negotiate a more egalitarian intercultural communication context through projecting a different storyline with more egalitarian subject positions linked to a moral order under which both parties share equal responsibilities for making the communication work rather than expecting one party to lopsidedly accommodate the linguistic demands of the other party. In the next section we shall use positioning theory and storyline analysis to analyse discourse tactics used by people of the marginalized.

Case Two: 'Long Hair': a defiant, outspoken, grassroots, democracy fighter in Hong Kong

'Long Hair' is the nickname of Leung Kwok-hung, a leftist, outspoken, grassroots, political activist in Hong Kong for many years. He was elected a Legislative Councillor in Hong Kong on 12 September 2004. His winning of the election was mainly due to the support of young voters, mainly disenfranchised youths in Hong Kong who are discontent with the education system, high unemployment rates and the increasingly stratified society along social class lines. Many university student associations also invited him to give talks right after his successful election. My discourse data consists of his public televised debates with powerful right-wing business

leaders who are also powerful party (e.g., Liberal Party) leaders in Hong Kong before and after the election. Due to limited space here, I shall quote only one excerpt from one such debate in a public forum shortly after the election (20 September 2004, City Forum, televised live by Radio Television Hong Kong; the event was recorded by the researcher for analysis). I shall briefly describe the context of the excerpt and then present the excerpt of the exchanges between James Tien (a powerful business leader and also the Chairman of the Liberal Party in Hong Kong) and Leung Kwok-hung (Long Hair).

When James Tien Pei-Chun, Chairman of the Liberal Party then, is debating with Andrew Cheng of the Democratic Party, Leung Kwok-hung (Long Hair) interrupts and speaks to James Tien in an assertive tone (The original Cantonese utterances are transcribed in Chinese characters, with English glosses tabulated next to them in the table below):

	Cantonese utterances	English translation
1.	梁 :田少，我唔會再要你對我道歉，你唔使驚。	Leung: Young Master Tien, I will not request you to apologize to me again, you don't have to be afraid.
2.	田：你對我咁友善，我點會驚。	Tien: You are so friendly to me, I will not be afraid.

3.	<p>梁：不過我段報紙、有段新聞比大家睇，就係田北俊公司被爆欠薪（說時拿出剪報給現場觀眾看）。你為打工仔著想，你竟然間搞成咁！我初時以為你係清潔先生，你有咩野講？欠左人百幾萬！個個人都好老下架喇，做左咁耐幫你。</p>	<p>Leung: But see the news report, a news report for all of us to see, is the reporting of the incident of wages owed by James Tien's company (Leung pulls out a newspaper cutting and shows to the audience). You are considerate towards the workers, you did something like this! I at first believe you are Mr Clean, you have anything to say? Owing people a million dollars or so! That person is quite old, and have served you for so long.</p>
4.	<p>田：依個係我一個合資公司=</p>	<p>Tien: This is one of my joint ventures...=</p>
5.	<p>=梁：你係咪口蜜腹劍？</p>	<p>=Leung: Are you poison in the honey? (literal translation: honey-mouth and sword-stomach)</p>
6.	<p>田：依個係合資公司，響國內既情形，宜家仲響度打緊官司 =</p>	<p>Tien: This is a joint venture, it's a case in mainland, now it is engaging in a lawsuit=</p>

7.	=梁：即係你唔知？ =	=Leung: That means you don't know? =
8.	=田：我唔係好詳細了解，但係我會負責既。	=Tien : I don't quite understand the details, but I will be responsible.
9.	梁：你到宜家都唔知呀？你有無關心過個個人呀？	Leung: You still don't know now? Have you ever cared about that person?
10.	田一臉為難，想開口時梁又搶著說：宜家好簡單，我就唔會再擺 d 野過黎比你睇架喇！我有首詩送比你，你有無、你識唔識水滸傳，水滸傳度有首詩。	Tien looks embarrassed, Leung again interrupts before Tien can speak: Now it is simple, I won't take any more thing out and give it you to see! I have a poem as a present for you; have you, do you know Water Margin, there is a poem in Water Margin.
11.	田笑說：你好似武松吖！	Tien jokes: You are just like Wu Song.
12.	梁不理他，續說：叫苦熱歌，苦熱歌。赤日炎炎似火燒，野田禾稻半枯焦，農夫心內如湯煮，皇孫公仔把扇搖。	Leung ignores him, and continues: It's called Bitter-Hot Song, Bitter Song. Hot red Sun is burning like fire, crops are half-withered. Farmers' hearts are like boiling

	<p>(說時真的拿出扇子搖)</p> <p>噏！你，依把扇就送比你， 第日你搖下搖下，睇下香港 咁多人失業，三十萬人失 業，你、你都話你自己有功 既！七年以黎，董建華禍港 央民，斗零救窮人，二千億 港市，你係咪搖住扇響度 睇？你響行政會議...</p>	<p>soup, the royals are fanning. (Leung takes out a real fan and fans himself with it.) See! You, this fan is for you; on the other day you fan and fan, seeing how many people in Hong Kong lose jobs, 300,000 people are unemployed, you, you still say you have your contribution! Seven years from now, Tung Chee-wah caused disasters to the country and its people, 50¢ to save the poor, \$200 billion for the Hong Kong market, are you fanning and watching? In the Executive Council, you...</p>
13.	<p>田笑著反問：今日係咪好過舊年 呀已經？係咪你把扇多少撥 倒 d 比窮人呢宜家？</p>	<p>Tien smiles and asks back: "Isn't today much better than last year? Is that your fan fanning stuff for the poor?"</p>
14.	<p>梁：你係咪搖左扇？你話你係聽 依個居民既心聲，你落區，</p>	<p>Leung: Have you fanned the fan? You said you are listening to the</p>

	<p>你知唔知翠華餐廳一杯齋啡加一個菠蘿油係幾錢？你淨係識紅酒既價格，你主張紅酒減稅！</p>	<p>people's voice at heart, you visited the community, do you know how much a black coffee and a pineapple-bun-with-butter cost at Tsui Wah Restaurant? You only know the price of red wine, you proposed red wine tax-reduction.</p>
15.	<p>田：以前我係唔識，依排我都知道係有 ABC 餐。</p>	<p>Tien: I didn't know in the past, but now I know there are set-meals A, B and C.</p>
16.	<p>梁：幾多錢呀？</p>	<p>Leung: How much then?</p>
17.	<p>田：十五蚊倒啫。</p>	<p>Tien: Like around 15 bucks.</p>
18.	<p>梁：十五蚊？！</p>	<p>Leung: 15 bucks?!</p>
19.	<p>田：ABC 餐啫！</p>	<p>Tien: Set-meals A, B C!</p>
20.	<p>梁：我話比你聽，係二十蚊，齋啡加菠蘿油，翠華係全港最多人食既餐廳。</p>	<p>Leung: Let me tell you, it's 20 bucks, a black coffee with a pineapple-bin-with-butter. Tsui Wah is the most popular restaurant in Hong Kong.</p>
21.	<p>田：咁你食得貴我好多喇長毛！</p>	<p>Tien: So you dined more expensively</p>

		than I did, Long Hair!
22.	梁：嗱！紅酒減稅，你地就講到好優惠喇自由黨，當係政績咁講。你有無諗過 D 人，連食過十五蚊既餐都無，你講得啱喇！	Leung: See! Red wine tax-reduction, you guys claiming a good offer (by) the Liberal Party, saying it like a contribution. Have you ever thought of the people, not even having eaten a 15-buck-meal; you have said so right!

In this exchange, we can see that Long Hair is very skillful in using quick, witty, discursive tactics to position his interlocutor, his debating opponent, James Tien, as a rich family's son not knowing much about the living conditions and suffering of grassroot people. James Tien, being well-known in Hong Kong society as coming from a rich family, is often addressed to as 'Tien-siu' in public media (literally: Young Master Tien). In the Chinese language, 'personal name + siu' is an address term reserved for young masters, usually used by servants to address their young masters ('siu' being a word to attach to the name of the young master; 'siu' means 'young master'). In public media in Hong Kong, sons of wealthy families are often referred to as X-siu (X is the name of the person). Long hair (Leung), by using this membership category term (Jayyusi 1984; Hester and Eglin 1997) right from the beginning of the exchange, is positioning Tien as someone

coming from the rich upper classes, and as someone who does not share the lifeworld of the majority of people in Hong Kong.

Then Leung pulled out a newspaper clip to show that one of Tien's employees was treated unfairly (with wages unpaid to him). By showing concrete evidence and by cornering Tien about his ignorance of the plight of his own employee, and then juxtaposing/equating Tien's ignorance with his lack of concern (Turn 9), Leung is launching a powerful accusation against Tien in Turns 3-9. Being caught unexpectedly by Leung on this incident, Tien (apparently without any assistant beside him to brief him on this incident) acts in a role that Leung seems to have both expected and positioned him to act in the storyline projected in Leung's discourse: That Tien-siu (Young Master Tien) is uncaring and unkind even to his own employee (or servants who have served him—his company—for so long; see Turns 3 and 9).

Having cornered Tien with this concrete incident showing Tien's lack of concern and care for his own employees, Leung immediately recited a Chinese ancient poem ('as a present' to Tien) which talks about the plight of poor people under a cruel government in the Sung Dynasty. The poem was taken from the famous Chinese classical novel, *Water Margins*, which depicted the story of a group of disenfranchised people who were forced to rebel against an oppressive, uncaring, corrupt government which let the rich

and the powerful bully poor, powerless, ordinary people in the Sung Dynasty of China. It must be pointed out here that while Leung is from the grassroots, he is widely-read in the Chinese classics and can recite Chinese classical poetry and essays at ease. Compared with Leung, Tien is shown to be not only an uncaring rich son (due to family wealth), but also someone who is unfamiliar with Chinese classics. Leung's fluent recitation of this ancient Chinese poem in one of the most famous Chinese classical novels, has again, given Leung an upper hand. By reciting this poem from Water Margins, Leung is also evoking the collective memory of the storyline of Water Margins: how decent, honest people were forced to become anti-government rebels to fight for justice.

After travelling on the time line from the present (Tien's apparent unfair and unkind treatment of his employee) to the ancient (reciting the poem from Water Margins to evoke the storyline of an unfair and unjust ruling elite), Leung again takes Tien back to the present by interrogating him about his knowledge of the living conditions of the grassroot people in Hong Kong (Turns 14-20): asking Tien how much it costs to have a common meal in Hong Kong). Again, Tien's knowledge is shown to be inadequate, and Tien is further positioned as a typical member of the rich not knowing the plight of the poor.

Leung's discursive tactics are systematic, almost like well-planned, and he has cleverly drawn on popular cultural and discursive resources: news reports, ancient Chinese classical stories, Chinese poem depicting the plight of poor people, and everyday streetwise knowledge (of the living conditions) of grassroot people.

When reciting the poem, Leung fans a traditional Chinese paper fan, which serves as a hook to anchor the audience's imagination (those watching this debate in front of the television) in Leung's storytelling—his projecting of a storyline not too dissimilar to that of *Water Margins*.

Tien is thus put on the defensive, but given his lack of Chinese cultural and discursive resources (Tien was Western and English-educated, not familiar with Chinese classics), his rebuttal seems so ineffective in front of Leung's consecutive attacks, the last of which being the accusation of Tien as only knowing and caring about the reduction of red wine tax (Turn 22). Again, the middle class symbol of red wine (in Hong Kong, red wine consumption is associated with a middle and upper class life style) is invoked by Leung to position Tien as a bona fide middle class person, neither cognizant of, nor caring about, the life conditions of the grassroot people in Hong Kong.

Long Hair has always been well-known for his eloquent, outspoken, defiant discourse style and this is precisely why some young people and many working class people like him. They like his upfront, straightforward, no-nonsense discourse style and his consistent voicing out of the economic difficulties of the grass-roots and his direct attacks on the non-democratic political structure of Hong Kong. When a well-known rich guy, James Tien, who was also Chair of the Liberal Party representing business interests, was in the debating show, Long Hair deployed his discursive tactics skillfully to position Tien in a negative light: as someone who does not know about, and cannot, and will not care about grassroot people in Hong Kong.

Has Leung been unfair to Tien in cornering him with his superior Chinese cultural and Hong Kong streetwise knowledge and linguistic resources? Has he been not interacting in a rational way? Recent critiques of Habermas's ideal communicative situation, where interactants interact in a constraint-free, egalitarian context, have pointed out how unrealistic it is when the interactions are between people located in different power relationships (e.g., Crossley and Roberts 2004). Gardiner (2004) has even pointed out that subscribing to such rationality norms will bring more damage to the already marginalized in such a context. In the above analysis, I attempt to show how Leung (relatively powerless in terms of wealth and in the existing governing structure of Hong Kong) skillfully deploys his other kinds of cultural and linguistic capital (e.g., his familiarity of Chinese

classical stories and street knowledge of Hong Kong) to position an otherwise much more powerful person (Tien) in a negative light. Tien is shown to be of a lesser stature given the moral order projected by Leung's storyline. Such a (re)presentation of the world (and the moral order and accompanying rights and obligations sets linked to it) gives Long Hair the moral high ground.

Coda

Having looked at the two examples above, it seems to us that intercultural or inter-group communication is more likely to be (at least provisionally) successful if both parties are willing to make the effort to overcome communication barriers, to mutually respect each other's language and culture (e.g., Carman and her European and Middle-East clients), and to mutually share the burden of intercultural communication. In their conversation both parties co-produce a storyline which offers relatively more egalitarian subject positions for both parties. However, in non-egalitarian contexts (which are in fact not static and are open to negotiation and re-negotiation through discourse), intercultural communication does not always resemble the well-intentioned, civil, good-mannered interactive styles of interactants in other intercultural communication contexts, and 'weaker' parties might draw on discourse strategies or tactics; e.g., returning

an arrogant question with a question, turning the tables, and counter-projecting a different storyline with a more empowered subject position for self (as in Carman's example when interacting with an arrogant U.S. client) to subvert the power relations and to negotiate for, and reconstitute the context into a more egalitarian context for interaction. Such discourse tactics often do not subscribe to rationality, appropriateness or politeness norms as these discourse tactics (or strategies, in Gumperz's terms) are 'weapons of the poor' (de Certeau 1984). The use of positioning theory and storyline analysis seems to be a promising direction to help intercultural communication researchers understand how different social and cultural groups located in different positions in the larger social structures, nevertheless, attempt to project a different social and moral order under which they can mitigate their structural disadvantage and create a discursive context where more egalitarian subject positions are discursively made possible, if only momentarily, thus, attempting to change the context and larger social forms, norms and structures through in situ social actions and discourse tactics (see earlier discussion of structuration theory). This paper represents a preliminary attempt to analyse two examples of such inter-group communication in non-egalitarian contexts and it is hoped that further research in this area will help us understand the different discursive resources (and constraints) leading to both the challenge and the degree of (im)possibility of achieving intersubjectivity in inter-group/intercultural communication in adversarial situations.

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