



Taina Vuorela

APPROACHES TO A BUSINESS NEGOTIATION  
CASE STUDY:  
TEAMWORK, HUMOUR AND TEACHING

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HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS OECONOMICAE HELSINGIENSIS

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## ABSTRACT

### Approaches to a Business Negotiation Case Study: Teamwork, Humour and Teaching

This dissertation is a report on a series of three studies on a business negotiation case. It addresses dimensions of business negotiations that emerged from the authentic case study at hand: it argues that teamwork and humour have significant strategic potential for negotiations, and should therefore be taught on negotiation skills courses. The questions that these three studies address are the following: Study 1: teamwork of a sales team; Study 2: humour in a competitive client negotiation; Study 3; teaching negotiating in business.

In Study 1, two meetings were under scrutiny: a company-internal strategy meeting of a sales team ('the sellers' internal meeting', SIM), which was analysed on a general level for goals and other background information; and a client negotiation (CN) with the same sellers meeting a potential customer, which was under detailed analysis for its interactional structure and the realisation of goals. The analysis revealed some interactional strategies that were used by the negotiators when trying to reach goals as a sales team in a competitive business context, when the goals are known as they had been expressed in the SIM. Although business negotiations have been shown to be constrained by factors such as the surrounding business context and seller and buyer behaviour of a particular kind, according to the results of the present study the goals the participants attempt to achieve in a negotiation affect the structure of the interaction. This would mean that the factors constraining the negotiators' behaviour are not static but are modified by the goals the negotiators set out to achieve.

In Study 2, the same data was used. The analysis revealed that there were differences in the sellers' humour in the two meetings. The meetings lasted equally long, but the SIM featured more humour than the CN. The sellers also resort to humour in the CN but they are more cautious about the subject of their joking: they may be wary of losing the image of a convincing selling company. Among the most common subjects of humour are the national characteristics of the Finns – the parent selling company is Finnish – the project itself and selling activity. The most common types of joking in the two meetings are ironic exaggerations, and joking where an incongruity is expressed. However, irony is used more cautiously in the CN than in the SIM. Joking seems power-related and power is a factor that influences who has the right to initiate and end instances of joking, and whose joking is laughed at. In Study 2, the sellers often initiate humorous communication after a problematic part of negotiation, possibly in order to humour the buyers. Difficult issues are also embarked upon via humour. Mitigating a possible offence through humour can be considered strategic use of humour. It is also in the sellers' interest to humour the buyers in competitive stages of the buying process (e.g. supplier search) in order to 'stay in the game'. Additionally, humour seems to be used for strategic purposes – pursuing goals – particularly in instances of 'seller joking' and 'buyer joking', in which the opposing party does not participate.

In Study 3, the aim was to compare Business English (BE) -oriented material used in language instruction of negotiating skills with the results obtained from studying authentic business negotiations in Studies 1 and 2. The textbooks were chosen on the basis of their easy accessibility to students and commonality of use in higher education in Finland. According to the results of the study, textbooks have evolved from the 1980s in that most of them do include some business context and some strive to refer to authentic use of language. A comparison was also made between business-oriented literature on negotiations, written by business consultants, and language instruction-oriented material. The observation was made that while consultative literature mostly ignores the concept of language, and, in general discusses communication briefly and often superficially, the business context of language-oriented material tends to be superficial in nature. Consequently, the study provides support for integrated courses on learning negotiating skills in business, where the material used would incorporate both business and language instruction material, and possibly business and language instructors working together. Although the idea is not new, as such teaching practices already exist in some establishments of tertiary business education, it could be taken into use more extensively. Such an approach to teaching the skills required in successful business negotiating would enable students to assume a more holistic view of the negotiation process, with a more in-depth understanding of the relevant concepts affecting transactional interaction, such as the power linked to different professional roles in varying contexts. The approach could be beneficial in corporate training as well.

Keywords: authentic business negotiations, language instruction material, consultative literature, Business English, interactional strategy, goal-orientation, teamwork, humour

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## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, referred to in the text by the numbers 1, 2 and 3.

1. How does a sales team reach goals in intercultural business negotiations? A case study. *English for Specific Purposes* 24 (2005), 65-92.
2. Laughing matters. A case study of humor in multicultural business negotiations. *Negotiation Journal*, Volume 21, Number 1 (2005), 105-130.
3. Teaching business negotiating: book learning vs. reality. *Språk & Marked*, 31 (2005), 23-52.

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## ERRATA

1. In the original publication 'Laughing Matters. A case study of humor in multicultural business negotiations', on page 121, the heading of Table Three reads 'Distribution of Content of Humor in Client Negotiation'. It should read 'Distribution of Content of Humor in Sellers' Internal Meeting'. On page 122, the heading of Table Four reads 'Distribution of Content of Humor in Sellers' Internal Meeting'. It should read 'Distribution of Humor in Client Negotiation'.
2. In the original publication 'Teaching business negotiating: book learning vs. reality', reference is made to Vuorela, T. 2004. 'How to reach goals in intercultural business negotiations'. In *English for Specific Purposes*, Vol. 24, pp 65-92. This publication date refers to the date of electronic publication ahead of print. The printed version was published in 2005.

## 1 OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Negotiating is a basic human activity. It is also the essence of business transactions, particularly sales. The word itself (with its Latin root ‘neg otium’) carries the meaning of work – ‘not leisure’ – and originally refers to haggling in the marketplace in the sale of goods (Bell 1995:42). Yet negotiating is clearly not reserved for just salespeople; it is something that we all do daily while managing relationships between ourselves and other individuals. Learning effective negotiating skills, i.e. skills in talking with another person or group in order to reach an agreement, would thus seem essential for success, both for corporations as well as for private individuals.

What a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately and effectively within a particular *discourse community* (i.e. individuals with shared discursive practices that may result from joint engagement in particular activities; see Saville Troike 2003) is part of her/his *communicative competence*. This can be defined as including both linguistic and sociolinguistic rules for interaction, and also cultural knowledge; hence not only the language code itself but also what can be said to whom appropriately in a given situation (see Saville-Troike 2003). Strategic professional communicative competence involves appropriate skills in professional interaction and institutional interaction (as defined by Agar 1985): for example, efficiency in work-related tasks to be carried out in particular roles specific to professional positions or contexts.

The research area of the present dissertation is communication in intercultural organisational settings, which means that people from different cultural backgrounds interact in professional contexts. Although the term ‘globalisation’ is a cliché, which denotes progress to some and regression to others, it is relevant in the present dissertation. The fact that more and more people from further and further away from each other interact on a corporate level results in the situation that expansion of the English language as a *lingua franca* in professional interaction will increase, thus furthering globalisation. This means that it is all the more important to study the use of English in intercultural professional contexts such as in the present study on business negotiations. New evidence about the strategic elements of effective negotiating behaviour may have an influence on corporate revenue through improved sales.

The terms *multicultural* and *intercultural* are used in the dissertation to describe the nature of the data under observation; however, the dissertation does not feature an in-depth analysis or reflection of the importance of culture (as an expression of shared identities; see Gudykunst and Mody 2001) in business negotiations. In addition, *lingua franca* is referred to in the dissertation as the English language used as a ‘common language’. However, English *lingua franca* as a language is not analysed in the dissertation.

In the present dissertation, and the three studies of which it consists, a *meeting* is defined as a coming together of two or more people for a specific business purpose. A *negotiation* here refers to a meeting where opposing parties, e.g. sellers and buyers, negotiate, i.e. talk to each other in order to settle a question or disagreement while trying to come to an agreement (see the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture 1998). Although even company-internal meetings often involve some negotiating between differing interests of different companies within the same company group, for example, they are not considered to be negotiations as such here (see Wagner 1995 and section 4.1 below).

The present three foci of the dissertation, namely teamwork, humour and teaching, were chosen owing to the fact that while inspecting the corpus, humour and teamwork feature clearly in the data. However, their importance in business negotiations has received relatively little attention both in consultative literature of the field and in academic research. Some studies do exist. For example, Kangasharju (1998) has studied negotiating and has reached interesting results about teamwork, similarly to Öberg (1995). However, Kangasharju's material differs from the data of the present dissertation in that it does not feature a competitive business situation. Öberg (1995) studied business negotiating, but her material does not allow a similar view on strategic negotiating behaviour, as strategy meetings of the sales team (without the clients' presence) were not recorded. Adelswärd and Öberg (1998) have studied laughter and joking in connection with business negotiating, but their main focus is on laughter rather than humour. Firth (1990) and Charles (1994) have studied business negotiating, but the themes covered are different from those of the present dissertation. While Firth studied telephone negotiating, Charles (1994) focuses on pragmatic aspects of the negotiation process. The themes of teamwork and humour clearly emerged from the data of the present dissertation and there seemed to be a gap in the research results available on their importance in business negotiating. The third focus, teaching, arose from personal professional teaching experience: the instruction material available for learning about business negotiating does not always seem to portray a realistic image of business negotiating as a strategic corporate function. Consequently, it seemed an interesting and relevant point to explore on the basis of the results obtained on teamwork and humour in business negotiating (see Vuorela 2005a, 2005b). The question is whether these themes should feature in textbooks used for instructing business negotiation skills (see Vuorela 2005c).

## **2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

When communicating in a business context, expressing oneself effectively, from the point of view of information management, and at the same time, socially acceptably with a possible future business partner, can be challenging (see e.g. Smith et al. 1996). Effectiveness and social acceptability can be seen differently in different fields of business (e.g. information technology vs. more traditional fields, such as steel manufacturing and the forestry industry). In addition, studies dealing with speaking and writing for a business purpose, i.e. business communication, use different disciplinary approaches. In European business communication research, the field can be divided into three different categories depending on the chosen focus: 1. Language acquisition and language learning, 2. the discourse taking place at business events, and 3. needs analyses of skills and language auditing (Charles 1998). The present dissertation falls mainly under categories 1 and 2.

### ***2.1 Approaches to analysing spoken discourse at the workplace***

Since the 1980s spoken discourse at the workplace has been a central focus in linguistics and particularly applied linguistics: researchers in the field have been interested in obtaining results about the regularities of spoken discourse at the workplace in order to apply this knowledge in language instruction. The present dissertation is part of such research; the rationale for the whole dissertation has been to obtain results that would have a bearing on the instruction of business negotiation skills. The phenomena under observation in the dissertation have been previously studied to a limited extent using a linguistic approach (see Kangasharju 1998, for example). This dissertation is rooted in the research tradition of applied linguistics,

which is its basic framework. Applied linguistics aims at investigating communication in a real life context, for example negotiating over a business transaction, and aims at answering the question 'So what?' about the observations made, through relating them to the practitioners in the field. This involves focusing on how studying such professional interaction can enhance understanding about such domains as, for example, intercultural communication and language pedagogy (e.g. Schegloff et al. 2002), intercultural referring to face-to-face communication between people from different national cultures (Gudykunst and Mody 2001). The present dissertation is also linked to interactional sociolinguistics through the attempt to study professional communication and the interactional conventions of a speech community, e.g. sellers (see Drew and Heritage 1992), and adheres to the views of Heritage (1984) about interaction being both context-shaped and context-renewing. One of the exciting features of sociolinguistic research is that it can produce real-life implications that offer hope for improving communication between groups, and that is why it is of interest in the present series of studies.

Pragmatics as a research approach means studying meaning in interaction (see Thomas 1995), and particularly a speaker's meaning in context. In connection with business negotiating, it is especially interesting to inspect 'what more is communicated than is said' (Yule 1996:12). The study of cross-cultural discourse (comparing discourse across cultures, see Gudykunst and Mody 2001) is an important endeavour in our times and is a part of applied linguistics that is usually termed cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) (Boxer 2002). According to the viewpoint taken in CCP, individuals from different cultures / societies / communities carry out their interaction according to their own norms, which often results in a clash, and ultimately, misperception about other groups. Again, research in cross-cultural pragmatics can at best ameliorate such consequences, as findings from discourse research can be used to solve real communication problems in a world that is continuously 'shrinking' (Boxer 2002). The study of cross-cultural workplace discourse is increasingly relevant owing to the current global market and the fact that the workplace is becoming all the more diverse. Although a systematic comparison of cross-cultural discourse is not undertaken in the dissertation, some observations made in Study 2 are a modest contribution to the field.

A discourse analytic approach to studying language can be taken in different ways, e.g. through Gricean pragmatics, ethnography of communication, variation analysis, conversation analysis, or the study of speech acts (Schiffrin 1994). Discourse analysis is also seen as an important tool for language teaching (Lazaraton 2002). According to Johnstone (2000), the most basic consideration in distinguishing between qualitatively and quantitatively oriented discourse analysis is whether the research questions are answered in mechanical (such as counting instances or calculating statistics) or non-mechanical ways (e.g. listening to phenomena or asking questions about them). Consequently, qualitative discourse analysts seek to understand how and why something happens in communication, while quantitative analysts try to determine how often an instance occurs (Johnstone 2000). Nunan (1992) proposes four criteria for distinguishing different discourse analytic approaches. They include the following: method of data generation (invented, elicited, naturalistic), mode of communication (speech or writing), unit of analysis (linguistic or non-linguistic), and type of analysis (categorial or interpretive). In this dissertation naturalistic data generation of speech was used; a linguistic analysis was carried out of the basic interactional structure of the data (with the help of discourse analytical models

proposed by Edmondson 1981 and Edmondson and House 1981) in an unpublished Licentiate thesis (Vuorela 2000). This served as a ‘backbone’ for the later analyses carried out in this dissertation, where the data was analysed by means of both a qualitative and a quantitative approach.

The ethnography of communication is a major qualitative approach to discourse analysis. According to the approach, discourse reflects cultural and social reality and it seeks to find explanations for cultural conceptions and constructions of behaviour and meaning (Lazaraton 2002). Often such studies produce a triangulation of different types of data, such as observations and field notes, interviews and audio- and videotaped interactions. The present dissertation does not make claims of ‘full-blown’ ethnography. This would have been impossible owing to the confidential nature of business negotiating. However, the meetings and negotiations of the present data were audio-recorded, field notes were collected while observing the participants’ negotiations and interviews were carried out with the participating sales team. This was deemed essential for successful analysis of the data.

According to a functionalist (related to ethnographic anthropology) view of human speech behaviour (as opposed to a more static view of cultural patterns), language is one of the integrated systems of society and culture; it reflects social categories and functions in relation to them (Saville-Troike 2003). According to an interactionalist view, language is an interactional construct and communicative competence in a language is the result of interaction processes within a sociocultural context (Saville-Troike 2003).

Language can also be seen as an instrument for consolidating and manipulating concepts and relationships regarding power and control: power can be seen to reside in the structures of language itself (deterministic view: similar to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), or to be created in the process of communicative interaction (related to social roles or to discourse processes). Historical processes of domination and subordination are also seen as the key to understanding interactional power (see Saville-Troike 2003, Koskinen 2001). The present study adheres to a view of communication where meaning and power in interaction are seen as socially negotiable, although they would also seem to be controlled by the business context and discourse processes as well. For example, before a contract is signed in a business negotiation, a buyer may have more power. In the course of the negotiation process, however, this position may change.

To sum up, the present dissertation is a series of studies involving use of discourse analysis as an analytical tool in order to clarify the interactional structure of the research material. Ethnographic-type field notes were made while observing the sales teams in meetings and negotiations, and regular interviews of the participants (particularly the specialist informant) throughout the analytical process were found helpful in the analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of transcribed audio-recorded material were carried out. The researcher’s ‘spectacles’ through which the data was inspected were provided by applied linguistics, interactional sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

## **2.2 Research on business negotiations**

Different groups of people have diverging interests in business negotiations: practising business negotiators wish to improve their negotiation skills, students of business are being trained to become effective negotiators, and researchers of

communication see business negotiating as an interesting example of verbal communication.

Viewing business negotiations as professional problem-solving encounters ties them to theories from such fields as economics, game and bargaining theory, anthropology, political science and social psychology (e.g. Lampi 1986; Firth 1995). The field of business negotiation research can be divided into different orientations: 1. studies of game theories and economics-based bargaining models represent an abstract orientation of negotiation research; 2. studies involving simulated negotiation data can be seen to belong to experimental negotiation research; 3. research which involves the description of cases of negotiations and which relies on field observations and post-negotiation interviews are ethnographically oriented; while 4. negotiation research with a discourse orientation aims at uncovering the interactional bases of negotiating (Firth 1995). Of these orientations, the present study adheres to the last two (3 and 4).

Practising business negotiators emphasise the importance of viewing business negotiating activity as an essential part of the business processes of a company, rather than a separate communication skill (of an individual), which it is often seen as in language textbooks on business negotiations. Companies see business negotiating, whether competitive or cooperative in nature (depending on the market situation in the field or the nature of the business transaction) as a strategically important element of their most basic business processes.

Professionally oriented interaction, of which business negotiations are one example, is constrained by various institutional and situational factors. Institutional discourse (e.g. Agar 1985), i.e. interaction between a representative of an institution and an outsider, has been found to differ from ordinary casual conversation, e.g. because of its turn-taking system, to the extent that meetings where the issues to be covered are constrained by an agenda are not considered 'casual conversations' (Hakulinen 1997:33). The same feature could be relevant in professional discourse as well. Owing to the fact that common patterns and regularities have been detected in negotiations between opposing parties, irrespective of issues of dispute and context, some researchers have started inspecting whether a specific 'socio-pragmatic framework for negotiations' (e.g. Firth 1990:34) or particular 'maxims of negotiating interaction' could be discovered. According to Charles (1994) one of the decisive factors influencing buyer and seller discourse is the age of the business relationship, while Yli-Jokipii (1994) emphasises the importance of the stage at which the interaction takes place in the buying process. (For a more in-depth description, see Vuorela 2005a.) Charles (1994) has also launched the concept of 'professional face' in the context of business negotiations, as according to her results, negotiators manage their interpersonal relationships differently from what would be expected in view of the politeness theory launched by Brown and Levinson (see Brown and Levinson 1987). Asymmetry, the fact that interlocutors have a different amount of information about the matters discussed, is a prerequisite for business negotiations: should there be no asymmetry regarding the knowledge the negotiators have, there would hardly be any need to negotiate. The important question is how the negotiators orient to this asymmetry (Linell & Luckmann 1991) in professional communication.

Professional interaction is becoming increasingly global. Although plurilingualism is one of the aims of European educational policies (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001), the use of English as a *lingua franca* is increasing rapidly in Europe. Consequently, investigating how Finnish business people carry out

business in multicultural environments in English is important. The present dissertation does not focus on the Finnish negotiator as a speaker of English *lingua franca*. However, owing to the pedagogical motivation of the dissertation, gaining insight into how an experienced Finnish business negotiator functions as part of an intercultural sales team was an important starting point when decisions were made about the type of data to be collected.

Poncini (2002) has explored the use of language in multicultural business meetings, e.g. different linguistic ways to create common ground between participants by Italian organisers. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining authentic business negotiation material, there is a limited amount of findings in the field as yet. In addition, comparison of different business meeting types, such as company-internal and -external meetings, is a neglected research angle, which this study tries to rectify. The relevance of such an approach also came up in interviews with participating negotiators.

Öberg (1995) has studied business negotiating in English by Swedish negotiators in intercultural negotiations and has obtained some interesting results regarding the use of teamwork in such settings (see section 2.3 below). Adelswärd and Öberg (1998), on the basis of their studies on the use of laughter and joking, have observed that they may serve different, somewhat ambivalent ends in the context of business negotiating. Humour may be used to manage relationships with the opposing side, while laughter may at times be resorted to in order to express both negative and positive experiences.

### **2.3 Teamwork as a linguistic problem**

Teams have become a popular means around which companies organise work activities. Group interaction within teams is analysed through, for example, *social network mapping* (i.e. sociometry), and group behaviour models have been introduced, showing the various factors influencing the performance of a group. They include, for example, the external conditions imposed on a group, the structure of a group, the resources of group members and the task of a group (Robbins 2001; see also Verderber 2005).

Because of the importance of team-based organisation in companies and organisation, understanding the strategic potential of team interaction is important. Cooperation is an important element even in casual conversation, although interlocutors can at times 'afford' to act very uncooperatively, e.g. while teenage offspring and middle-aged parents are conversing. Cooperation is all the more important in business negotiations. In order to be cooperative, interlocutors assume a certain amount of intersubjectivity, i.e. similarity of views and experiences. Verbal interaction, in order to succeed, is a collective effort. This joint effort is manifested through different ways, e.g. a speaker's utterances may be completed by listeners, or the speaker may be influenced by the feedback of the listeners, when completing her/his utterance (e.g. Linell 1986).

For example, Öberg (1995), as mentioned above, has studied business negotiating in English by Swedish negotiators in multicultural negotiations. Her material consists of a continuum of several negotiations within a negotiation process and she suggests that, for example, the amount of supportive teamwork across opposing teams could reveal how close to closing a deal the negotiators are. Kangasharju (1998) and Francis (1986) have also investigated how speakers align their speech in order to be supportive in administrative contexts, and what types of linguistic means they use to do this. (For a more in-depth description, see Vuorela 2000 and Vuorela 2005a.) In

the present dissertation, teamwork is defined as supportive interactional activity, i.e. a selling team member or a buying team member may engage in teamwork through supportive interactional moves, such as confirming a fact uttered by a previous speaker, for example. In this dissertation some of the results found in these earlier studies are used as starting points, but owing to somewhat different types of data and context, different foci were chosen.

## **2.4 Intercultural business communication**

Researching business communication in a multicultural environment is a complex undertaking, as it potentially involves several well-established fields. According to Bargiela-Chiappini et al. (2003), intercultural business communication (*inter* referring to cultures in contact) is a relatively young field of study when compared with disciplines such as discourse studies, business communication, and intercultural communication. As a result of globalisation, monopoly of the English language as a *lingua franca* of business communication in Europe is non-debatable, and there are at present several interesting ongoing research projects in the field in Finland (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005); and a joint research project by the Universities of Tampere and Jyväskylä: <http://www.jyu.fi/tdk/hum/englanti/EnglishVoices/researchcooperation.htm>).

Bargiela-Chiappini et al. (2003) emphasise the fact that testing existing theories and developing them (a North American preference), although important, is not alone sufficient in furthering understanding about multicultural business communication practices. What is also needed is qualitative, empirical, discourse-based studies in intra- and intercultural business environments. In the field of intercultural business communication, a notion of *business discourse* as a new multidisciplinary field of enquiry has developed, where discourse is understood as 'praxis within a broad socio-constructionist framework' which involves the complexity of such dimensions as power, human relationships and cultures (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2003:4). They further argue, in the context of business discourse research, for *partnership research*, between business practitioners, such as business negotiators, and academics. Such multidisciplinary networks have been formed in Europe with varying business-related themes and fields, e.g. explorations in internal and external corporate communication in Europe and language policies in companies (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005).

In the context of multicultural business negotiating, one relevant question is whether a negotiator's cultural background determines language use, such as the choice of persuasive strategies in business negotiating. According to some studies (e.g. Johnstone 1989), culture may predispose certain strategies over others but does not determine them. Rather, the choice would be made in the context of the interaction at hand. Although miscommunication does happen at times in multicultural communication, i.e. in situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact, interlocutors also successfully adapt to each other's cultural styles and personal idiosyncrasies. If there is failure, sometimes it appears to result from failure of goodwill rather than pure cultural differences. Poncini (2002), when discussing how to raise awareness of possible effects of culture on business communication, points out that it may be more useful to talk about cultural priorities and tendencies rather than deeply rooted differences.

## **2.5 Previous research on humour**

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century the word ‘humour’ has indicated amusement (Critchley 2002), and a dictionary definition of humour defines it, besides being a state of mind, also as the quality of causing amusement and the ability to understand and enjoy what is funny and makes people laugh (Longman 1998).

Most commonly in a joke we expect one thing and another is said, and the surprise this involves makes us laugh (see Cicero in Critchley 2002). Hence the comic world is one with ‘its causal chains broken, its social practices turned inside out, and common sense rationality left in tatters’ (Critchley 2002:1-4). Joking ‘works’ if it involves a social contract between the audience and the joke-teller.

There are three theories of humour which are commonly referred to, namely, humour due to a feeling of superiority over others; humour as a form of release; and humour as an experience of incongruity between our expectations and what actually takes place in a joke (see Critchley 2002 for more details). The linguistic aspects of humour have, however, received less attention (see Chiaro 1992).

Repetition can be experienced as humorous, and a suitable cognitive context for humour appreciation can be created by multiple presentations of jokes. Also, the nature of surrounding jokes can influence the ‘funniness of a particular joke’ (Derks and Arora 1993). Additionally, the social context in which the joke is presented should be appropriate in order to enhance humour appreciation (Staley and Derks 1995).

Apparently all cultures use humour, but humour is often context-specific and consequently certain types of humour, at least, are difficult to translate into another language. Humour is based on cultural insider knowledge and its use also reinforces the feelings of togetherness of a group, as having a common sense of humour can be experienced as sharing a secret code (Critchley 2002). Through humour we identify ourselves with a particular people who share a set of customs and characteristics: hence the relativistic nature of humour. Ethnic humour shows the prejudices that we hold and demonstrates how these prejudices continue to define (at least partly) our sense of who we are.

According to Holmes and Marra (2002:1685), different workplaces have their own culture – ‘social heritage and rules of behaviour’, and, for example, their own customs and jargon, which are continuously modified in social interaction. Becoming a member of the community of a particular workplace happens as one gains control of the discourse of that community, its humour included.

Holmes (1998), when studying humour in interactions of different government departments, identified that humour may function in unequal, hierarchical organisations in at least two ways: through ‘repressive humour’ as a means for superiors to maintain their position, and through ‘contestive humour’ as an acceptable strategy for subordinates to challenge their superiors. Although some companies recognise the power of humour in the workplace to the extent that some even use a sense of humour as a desirable trait of personality in their selective hiring process (Robbins 2001), it is seldom seen as an asset in language-oriented textbooks on negotiation skills.

It has been empirically shown that humour can have a positive effect on a person's physical and psychological well-being; e.g. laughter has been shown to decrease the levels of stress-related hormones in the blood (Berk et al. 1989). Other researchers have found humour to be an effective stress-reliever (Martin and Lefcourt 1983; Cann, Holt and Calhoun 1999), as it helps to reframe situations so that they seem less stressful (see also Abel 2002).

Humour has also been found to increase a person's feeling of hope. Snyder et al. (1991) define hope as a cognitive set of having goals and believing in action towards reaching them. According to Vilaythong et al. (2003), humour as a demonstration of positive emotions could help in dealing with specific problems or stressful events. In their study, there was an increase in hopefulness after their subjects (college students) were exposed to humour. They also identified, as an important focus for further research, examination of whether increased hope actually leads to improved ability to resolve stressful situations.

Through studying the use of humour in different types of meetings, scholars have concluded (e.g. Holmes and Marra 2002) that in different workplaces humour is used differently. These differences reflect the kinds of relationships evident between the members of these workplaces, as well as the different values and orientations of these organisations. Exploring the use of humour in the present series of studies was undertaken because the data at hand contained an ample amount of both humour and laughter. Humour seemed such an integral part of negotiation activity in the data that it could not be ignored. In addition, previous results clearly showed that it could be an important strategic element in business negotiating.

Adelswärd and Öberg (1998) have studied joking and laughter in the context of business negotiations. Their focus was mostly on laughter in business negotiations but they concluded that humour is used in order to manage interpersonal relationships between participants (see also Vuorela 2000). Although humour (as well as teamwork) is defined as an important element in an individual's *existential competence*, i.e. the ability to 'cope with' and manage life (see Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001), the importance of humour in connection with business negotiating has received little attention so far, and it is hoped that the data in the present dissertation will reveal new insights into the role of humour in business communication.

## **2.6 Teaching negotiating in a business context**

Considering the fact that good negotiating skills appear to be an important asset in reaching both corporate and individual goals, it is surprising that negotiating is seldom taught as an obligatory skill. Students can complete a degree in business in many commercial educational establishments without ever taking a course in negotiation (see Wood et al. 1997).

Previous research has shown that the language used by native speakers in authentic business meetings (Williams 1988) has little correspondence with the linguistic functions presented in textbooks. Only approximately half of the functions (e.g. disagree) mentioned in the textbooks Williams (1988) compared were actually used in the three authentic meetings that she studied. Also, the expressions used to express these functions as they were taught in textbooks could hardly be found in the authentic material at all. Consequently, she argues that authentic language should be the starting point for teaching negotiation skills, rather than educated guesses about

the relevance of different functions in meetings and the language used to express these functions. She also concludes that language should be taught as ongoing discourse, part of a strategy, rather than a list of expressions. To the best of my knowledge, no other major studies have been carried out on this subject after the pioneering work by Williams (1988).

The type of English used in the ever-more globalising world of business is an issue that is at present receiving attention. If a group of Europeans with varying language backgrounds meet in order to carry out business together, what kind of English do they use? What might a *lingua franca* of Business English be like and should it have a bearing on the kind of English that is being taught to business people in professional training, and consequently on the kind of textbooks used in connection with such training?

According to a survey conducted by Louhiala-Salminen (1996:44), interviewed business people felt English to be, on the one hand, a cultureless 'code system', and on the other, a version of English that can be specified by the 'contact area' (e.g. Japanese English) or the field or industry in question (e.g. engineering English). In her study on written business communication, she concluded that, in her subjects' view, there has been a shift in the use of language in business towards a practice that emphasises efficiency rather than form. In a later study, Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) state that although business people express memberships of a different kind through BELF (business English as *lingua franca*) communication, e.g. professional or company-specific identities, the choice of English as a medium of corporate communication in an international company is, according to their findings, felt to be a neutral one. This choice seems to be important in building a 'common corporate culture' in the company mergers they studied (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005). What kind of international English this BELF communication should be is an issue that deserves consideration. However, the present study has a modest goal in relation to this, considering the complexity of the issue (see research questions below; section 4). On the one hand, speakers of BELF experience it as cultureless, but on the other hand, research findings have shown that grammatical, phonetic and discoursal features of the speakers' native language and culture do transfer into BELF interaction (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005; Lehtonen & Sajavaara 1985, 1997; Sajavaara 1999).

Louhiala-Salminen concludes (1996) that written business communication should not be learnt separately from real business contexts, and recommends a case-based approach, instead of the traditional assignment-based approach, where students learn phraseology in connection with separate writing assignments (e.g. reclamation).

Besides the business context in general (e.g. seller's market or buyer's market), the business relationship itself has been found to be interdependent with the discourse of business negotiations (Charles 1996). According to Charles's results, the way that the participants act out their professional roles as buyers and sellers depends strongly on the age or length and stage of the business relationship prevailing between the parties. The older the relationship, i.e. the better acquainted the participants are, the more personalised their communication with each other, particularly concerning 'face'-related politeness behaviour (Brown & Levinson 1987), and the types of moves and topics they initiated.

According to a recent survey about the actual use of foreign languages in the working environment in Europe, although advanced-level written English is required, good

oral skills in English are valued even more highly by recruiters. These high standard skills are needed in particular in meetings and negotiations, as well as presentations. Besides English, good oral skills in at least one other foreign language were also found to be a requirement (or major benefit for a recruit) (Didiot-Cook et al. 2000).

Skills in meetings and negotiations are being taught among the business community, i.e. practising business people and students of business, with the help of two types of literature, of which one type is written by business consultants. This type of literature is written for business and decision-making purposes, and deals with, for example, negotiation tactics. The other type, the literature used in ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and more specifically BE (Business English) adult language training, involves learning about the English language used in business meetings and negotiations, e.g. relevant vocabulary and phraseology (cf. type of textbooks studied by Williams 1988). A student of business studies wishing to learn about negotiation skills often takes part in separate courses that are built according to this dichotomy: negotiations from a business perspective and negotiations from a BE perspective. The roots of such a division into business and language-oriented training are historical, and such a traditional division of labour in educational establishments may be difficult to change. However, it is questionable whether this serves anything other than administrative concerns. The third study explores how teaching negotiating skills could be improved, e.g. in the light of the results of the first two studies.

### **3 OVERALL STRUCTURE AND AIMS OF THE DISSERTATION**

This dissertation addresses dimensions of business negotiations that emerged from the authentic case study data at hand. It comprises a series of three studies (see Appendix 2). The research aim of the dissertation was to explore the strategic potential of teamwork and humour (Studies 1 and 2) for sales negotiations in the case company. As it argues that teamwork and humour have significant strategic potential for negotiators, and should therefore be taught on negotiations skills courses, its practical aim was to investigate whether this strategic potential is present in a limited sample of textbooks, in order to make recommendations about the teaching of these phenomena (Study 3). Although teaching involves much more than just textbooks, in the present study, when reference is made to teaching, the aim is to explore, on the basis of the results of Studies 1 and 2, how negotiating skills could be taught to present and future business negotiators with the help of appropriate textbooks. The three studies had the following specific aims:

1. Study 1: to identify how teamwork is used in order to reach goals, i.e. strategically, in a business negotiation with a potential client.
2. Study 2: to examine the strategic use of humour when negotiating in intercultural business meetings.
3. Study 3: to compare the approach taken to teaching negotiating skills in Business English-oriented instruction material with the results obtained from analysing authentic negotiating material. Attention was also focused on the type of Business English used and the relevance of context presented.

## 4 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Description of the data

In the first two studies of the present dissertation, Study 1 and Study 2, as well as in a previous study on business negotiating in teams (Vuorela 2000) the same authentic meetings were used as the basic research corpus, namely the Sellers' Internal Meeting (SIM) and the Client Negotiation (CN). The latter is a business negotiation between a team of business negotiators who represent a buying company (three representatives) and another team representing a selling company (four representatives). The former is a company-internal meeting of the same selling team; the Sellers' Internal Meeting preceded the Client Negotiation.

The two meetings (SIM and CN) were audio-recorded in the U.K. in 1996 (see Table 1 below). They both lasted for approximately eight hours, and together total 16 hours of tape-recorded data. They took place within 48 hours (the Sellers' Internal Meeting taking place first). The participants are native speakers of English, except for one Seller, who is a Finnish businessman with several years' experience of conducting business in English in multicultural contexts. Although one of the sellers is not a native speaker of English, the focus is not on him as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speaker in the present study. The main object of study is the sellers' speech behaviour, as access was gained into the Sellers' Internal Meeting, and not into one by the buyers. Both the meetings are instances of professional interaction (as defined by Geluykens and Pelsmaekers 1999), which clearly manifests itself in turn-taking, for example. However, only the Client Negotiation is regarded as a negotiation in the study, and not the SIM, as the latter does not feature two opposing sides trying to reach an agreement.

**Table 1** Description of data of Studies 1 and 2

	<b>Date &amp; place of recording</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Length of meeting</b>
Sellers' internal meeting (SIM)	13 January 1996, U.K.	5 representatives of selling company (excluding the researcher)	1 Finnish (Seller P); 4 British (3 English (Sellers D and A), 1 Scottish (Seller J))	8 h
Client negotiation (CN)	14 January 1996, U.K.	7 participants (3 sellers + 4 buyers (excluding the researcher))	3 sellers (Finnish, English, and Scottish) 4 buyers (3 English (Buyers S, M, G), 1 Irish (BuyerL))	8 h

The motivation for collecting authentic data from a real-life business situation with a real past was the wish to avoid possible distortions that may arise from analysing simulated research material. Business negotiations represent a type of verbal interaction to which it is difficult for a non-participant to gain access. This difficulty has had an influence on the size of the research corpus. On the one hand, the corpus is large, as all of the recorded SIM and CN material was transcribed. On the other hand, it is small, as the study focuses on one case (selling) company.

The data is a cross-section of a negotiation process. The Client Negotiation consists of three different parts: 1. opening, 2. core of the negotiation, with a technical part and a commercial part, and 3. closing (see Vuorela 2000 for a more detailed description). The affair is an industrial project, which consists of the sellers supplying an engine to

a power plant. The potential buyers would be responsible for engineering the installation of the sellers' engine, with their parent company operating the power plant after installation. The companies involved include a selling parent company (represented by the Finnish negotiator), and a selling 'network company', which belongs to the same company group as the parent company (represented by two British sellers in the Client Negotiation). The buying side is represented by an engineering company, who would install and construct the power plant (represented by two British sellers and a British consultant), and a buying parent company (represented by an Irish buyer), who would run the power plant.

As proved by several scholars (see e.g. Charles 1994, 1996; Yli-Jokipii 1994), business discourse can be fully understood only in the light of its business context. Hence the use of participant interviews for gathering information about the background of the affair in general, and the business relationship pertaining between the buyers and the sellers, was deemed essential. The researcher was present in the meetings but did not sit at the negotiation table with the participants. Participant interviews were conducted with the sellers after the meetings and regular consultative meetings were held with the specialist informant (Finnish negotiator) throughout the analytical process.

The data of the study is in some respect unique in that in the Sellers' Internal Meeting and the Client Negotiation the sellers discuss the same items of agenda but in a different business context, allowing a comparison of their speech behaviour in such 'archetypal' business meetings.

Kotler (2002:228-229) divides the buying process into the following stages: 1. Problem recognition, 2. General need description, 3. Product specification, 4. Supplier search, 5. Proposal solicitation, 6. Supplier selection, 7. Order-routine specification, 8. Performance review. The buyers have not yet committed themselves to any supplier but are in the process of selecting one (stage 6 in Kotler's classification), so there is still competition. The deal is to be closed soon with the supplier the buyers consider to be their best choice.

The buyers and sellers have a common goal regarding the Client Negotiation – the official agenda of the meeting that needs to be covered. In addition, both sides also have their hidden agendas that are not revealed openly to the opposing side. The Client Negotiation is the fifth meeting in the negotiation process between the buyers and the sellers, which, at the time of the audio-recording, had lasted for two years. The sellers have sent their offer to the buyers who now 'make their move'. Besides a common hidden agenda, the different members of both the selling and buying teams have their own hidden agendas: regarding the sellers, Sellers A and J represent a network company that has interests that are sometimes different from those of the parent company, represented by Seller P.

Both sides have clear tasks to perform. The buyers have called the meeting, drawn up its agenda, and expect answers to their questions about technical details of the sellers' product. They are in the role of 'questioner' in the Client negotiation. They also express their position concerning the commercial conditions of the potential contract – as they are stated in the sellers' offer. The sellers, in the role of 'respondent' are to provide the information requested by the buyers in the technical part of the Client Negotiation. In the commercial part, they can either approve the buyers' position or express a need for further negotiation. The sellers enter the negotiation with a clear

outcome in their minds: they are eager to close a deal; if not in this negotiation, then later.

In order to verify the reliability of the results obtained from this series of studies, more data was collected in 2003 when a similar company-internal meeting and a client negotiation were recorded. The same Finnish specialist informant who participated in the SIM and the CN took part in the two new meetings as well (SIM2 and CN2). However, the new material proved so different in its interactional structure that direct comparison could not be carried out (see sections 5 and 6 below).

In Study 1, the Client Negotiation is the main data of the study, while the Sellers' Internal Meeting is referred to in order to gain knowledge about the sellers' goals when preparing to meet the buyers the following day. Participant interviews and researcher's field notes were also referred to in analysing the data. The research material of Study 2 consists of both audio-recorded meetings, SIM and CN. Participant interviews and researcher's field notes were also used in the analysis. Here the SIM and the CN are examined as two meetings by the same sales team, which possibly represent different types of language use owing to the different nature of the situations.

The data of Study 3 consists of three parts: 1. the results obtained from analysing the SIM and the CN (Studies 1 and 2), i.e. authentic meetings; 2. specialist interviews with participants in the meetings and researcher's field notes, 3. BE language teaching literature on meetings and negotiations. The language textbooks chosen for the study are of the upper intermediate / advanced level. They were selected on the basis that they are published by major publishing companies in the field of language teaching, and are currently being used in tertiary (polytechnic) language training in Finland and are thus easily available to users. The approach to teaching negotiation skills in the English language textbooks of the study is compared with the results obtained in Studies 1 and 2.

#### **4.2 Discourse structure of the data**

The discourse structure of the data was analysed in a previous study in which teamwork was under scrutiny (see Vuorela 2000). This section is a brief summary of the methodology applied and the main results of the study, completed in 2000. The main aim of the study was to investigate the interactional potential of negotiating as a team in a competitive seller-buyer negotiation. The main accomplishment of the study was to clarify, through careful discourse analytical methodology, the structure of the data in order then to be able to look at the data in detail (which was carried out in Studies 1 and 2 of the present dissertation).

After careful inspection of the recorded material (Client Negotiation – CN, and Sellers' Internal Meeting – SIM), four text extracts were chosen for detailed linguistic analysis. Transcribed text was analysed with the help of a discourse analytic model, namely, that of Edmondson (1981) and Edmondson & House (1981). The model was in frequent use in the 1980s and the aim was to see whether it would be useful for analysing authentic negotiation material. Discourse analysis is a tool for looking at how meaning is attached to utterances in context, i.e. in language use, the relationship between language and textual context as well as the social situation in which it is used (see e.g. McCarthy 1991). The taxonomic model of language use by Edmondson (1981) and Edmondson & House (1981) was considered a suitable tool, as it emphasises the outcome of interaction, its goal-orientation. It is also a model for

analysing dyadic conversation, and hence could be applied to the present material, which – although there are seven participants – mostly consists of utterances by either buying side or selling side. ‘Structural-functional’ models, like the one by Edmondson and House, seek to describe conversation as hierarchically organised (see also Eggins & Slade 1997, Stubbs 1983, Coulthard & Montgomery 1981, Labov & Fanshell 1977, Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). As attempting to view discourse as a series of limited sets of action has proved problematic (see e.g. Piirainen-Marsh 1992), the categories proposed in the model were seen as open and were modified when necessary.

Studying speech practices in contexts such as business negotiations involved, in the present study, collecting ethnographic-type material, i.e. field work: observing, collecting field notes, asking questions, participating in discussions after and in between the meetings, and testing the validity of the researcher’s perceptions against the intuitions of specialist informants (see e.g. Saville-Troike 2003). The tradition of participant-observation is a basic for all ethnography, and this method may be augmented by other procedures of data collection and validation. Although a complete escape from subjectivity may be impossible, an awareness of the risk involved helps to minimise perceptual and analytical biases (see Saville-Troike 2003).

Extracts of the authentic material were chosen for detailed linguistic analysis on the basis of the fact that the topics that were discussed in them were taken up in both the SIM and CN; in the first, plans were made about how to pursue issues related to them in CN, where these plans were then carried out through spoken interaction: see examples 1 and 2 below, where the sellers first make a plan about denying knowledge about the size of their cooling equipment (Example 1, lines 2–9), and then put this plan into practice (Example 2). Example 3 provides a linguistic analysis of the transcribed text of Example 2.

In the integrative model of illocutionary functions and interactional structure by Edmondson (1981) and Edmondson and House (1981), the hierarchy is represented by acts, moves, exchanges, phases and encounters. The structure of conversational exchanges is seen to consist of a minimum of two moves, an initiating and a satisfying move, which produce an outcome if no rejecting move is produced. The notion of conversational strategy is built into their model of conversational behaviour as a means to achieve goals while attending to the ‘face’ (see Brown and Levinson 1987) of participating conversationalists. Four supportive moves are identified (grounder, expander, disarmer, sweetener) with the help of which speakers can react to subordinate exchange (pre-exchange and post-exchange) elements before they are produced. For an example, see Appendix D in Study 1 (Vuorela, 2005a).

The model by Edmondson and House (1981) was not altogether unproblematic to use in connection with the data. Consequently, it was modified in that the categories were seen as open, and for example, in naming the illocutionary points, an approximate illocutionary point was aimed at with the help of names of standard illocutionary verbs (e.g. propose). However, the model was successful in yielding an analytical backbone of the study, so that interactional features of the phenomena under observation could now be deciphered.

In Example 1 below the sellers make a decision in their internal meeting (SIM) about not disclosing information about the size of their cooling equipment to the buyers as yet. They fear that it may be too big to fit on the site. Also, they need more information about the buyers’ requirements regarding the cooling system before they

want to give specific information about their equipment. As a result of this tactical decision, in the Client Negotiation the sellers actively avoid responding directly to the sellers' questions (Example 2; lines 6 and 9, 10, 13, 15, 17) about the cooling equipment. See Appendix 1 for transcription conventions.

**Example 1: Sellers' Internal Meeting (SIM)**

1           Seller D   have they seen have've <name of buying company>  
 2                    got any indication of this sizing now \* I would suggest then  
 3                    tomorrow you don't even m-mention it if they ask for the  
 4                    size of the radiator  
 5           Seller J   no  
 6           Seller D   er we don't have it  
 7           Seller J   we need to check [it  
 8           Seller P   yeah]  
 9           Seller D   yeah \* because that (will) just blow our credibility  
 10          Seller P   yeah  
 11          Seller D   it's outrageous \*\*\*

**Example 2: Client Negotiation (CN)**

1           Seller J   so we've got a cooling radiator in  
 2           Buyer S   we've got to watch we've got to watch the cranes in doing that  
 3           Buyer S   I think it might be possible \*  
 4           Seller J   the cooling radiator's down in the (-) an' (---) all the heat  
 5           Buyer L   right what size is the cooling radiator for the engine  
 6           Seller J   **mm I don't know** we could tie that with double heads  
 7                    couldn't we  
 8           Buyer S   it's [here  
 9           Seller P   **yeah] we we have to discuss about the \* also about the er**  
 10          **temperatures when the engine has to be able to run**  
 11          Buyer L   yeah  
 12          Buyer M   mm-hm  
 13          Seller P   **an' what's the let's say the highest temperatures [in the**  
 14          Buyer M   right]  
 15          Seller P   **summertime**  
 16          Buyer M   yeah  
 17          Seller P   **at er which we should which the engine should give the full**  
                   **power**  
 18          Buyer L   [right  
 19          Buyer M   right] [yeah

Example of analysis of conversation Example 2 (see above)

- 1–5                   Exchange 1: initiate – reject  
                          Buyer L: REQUEST for information  
                          Seller J: NON-COMPLIANCE
- 6–8                   Seller J: post-exchange (TO A PREVIOUS TOPIC  
                          SEQUENCE)
- Exchange 1.1: initiate – satisfy (lines 9–)
- 9–19                  Seller P: INFORM / COUNTER-REQUEST

Buyer L: ACCEPT

Buyer M: ACCEPT

In Example 2, above, the sellers first deny knowledge of the size of the cooling equipment with a rejecting move (line 6) where Seller J after his rejecting move (which is produced almost as a whisper) continues discussion of a previous topic with Buyer S. Seller P helps the project leader Seller J by responding in his stead with a counter-request for information (starting on line 9). With the help of the analysis, such as given above in Example 3, it was possible to decipher how the sellers' teamwork functions as they work their way through the agenda of the CN and in the course of it try to pursue their pre-set goals. It was also possible to form an understanding of the global structure of the interaction in the negotiation through the analysis. Although this meant 'forcing' the material through a rather rigid model, which presupposes that verbal interaction is predictable in that we can expect particular moves and sequences of moves to take place in certain phases of conversation, this was deemed a useful exercise. The analysis yielded results, and possible distortions could be avoided by modifying the categories used, when necessary.

The following is a brief description of the results obtained (for more details, see Vuorela 2000). It was found that although working as a sales team is not always unproblematic, it is an asset to both individual negotiators as well as to companies. Teamwork was shown to render the task of individual negotiators less daunting, and as responsibility is shared through it, it also protects the company's interests, as team members control each other through teamwork.

Teamwork was used in initiating, satisfying and rejecting moves, although satisfying moves were less numerous as the sellers act mostly as respondents to buyers' initiations. The sellers work together locally within a move, turn or exchange. In connection with difficult topics, which involve plenty of interactional work, the sellers' teamwork has the following characteristics: 1. If one seller experiences difficulties in responding to a buyer initiation, another team member initiates a defensive new topic. 2. If one seller does not comply with a buyer initiation, another seller produces a counter-request for information with a new related topic. 3. If a seller initiation fails, another seller makes a new initiation with a new related topic. Global use of teamwork (across several unlinked topics) involves sellers taking turns in repeatedly initiating their own topic throughout the treatment of an agenda item.

The sellers had set themselves goals in the SIM regarding the agenda items. They aimed at avoiding threatening topics at this point in the negotiation process, in order not to lose the deal to competitors. Their avoidance goals are realised through teamwork, which includes providing as much information to a buyer request as they see fit, or counter-requesting with a seller topic if needed. This may also involve engaging in a session of 'sales talk' by the sellers (praising their product).

In connection with more active goals – achievement goals – the sellers work together in rejecting buyer initiating and initiate their own ideas together, sometimes supported by post-exchanges.

The sellers mainly work in pairs, except in really difficult situations, where all three join forces. Generally, the sellers who started out as a pair in connection with a topic see it through together. Besides mainly letting the team leader (Seller J) lead the

discussion, the sellers' expertise in relation to different topics is also decisive in who is to lead the discussion and teamwork.

The sellers clearly pursue goals together as a team; they also resort to teamwork in order to avoid communication breakdown: if one seller has problems in responding to the buyers, others take a turn-at-talk. Sometimes they hinder communication of unwanted topics through teamwork, and also control each other owing to their corporate responsibility. Teamwork seems effective in avoiding 'negotiation fatigue', as the participants can take turns in leading. Besides, the sellers also seem to manage their interpersonal relations through teamwork, as they sometimes work together through teamwork by repeating the same information, even when no more persuasion (towards the buyers) is really needed.

### **4.3 *Methodology of Studies 1, 2 and 3***

The methodology of the three studies is similar in that they are all qualitative in nature, although some quantitative analysis was also carried out in Study 2 (and to a more limited extent in Study 3). They all also rely on discourse analysis-based analysis of the data (described above in section 4.2) and an ethnographic-type orientation, even though in Study 3 these feature indirectly through the results obtained in Studies 1 and 2.

According to the phenomenological position, the people whose activities are under scrutiny and the worlds of which they are a part are seen as co-constituted: they do not exist independently (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:3). In accordance with such a position, background information was collected about the participants and the business relationship between the buyers and the sellers. Informal interviews were held with the sellers immediately after the Client Negotiation and at regular intervals with one seller, who acted as a specialist informant, in order to check on the researcher's interpretations of the views of the sellers. Consultations with the specialist informant from the selling team proved useful in gaining an understanding of the whole negotiation process, of which SIM and CN were a part. However, the information gained in these interviews has been treated with caution, as participants may lack objectivity in giving their interpretation of the situation. According to Davies (1999:4), when carrying out ethnographic research, reflexivity – 'turning back on oneself' – should be practised at all levels of research, from the reactions of the informants to the presence of an ethnographer, to the influence of intellectual traditions on ethnographers' theoretical orientations.

The dissertation is rooted in pragmatics, i.e. the focus is not merely on the informational content of speech behaviour but also on speaker meaning in an intercultural speech situation. Applied linguistics is also involved, in that the focus is on a real world situation, business negotiations.

#### **4.3.1 Study 1**

Working as a team is the 'backbone' of the interactional structure of the Client Negotiation: the participants resorted to teamwork throughout the CN. In fact, they carried out few interactional moves alone. Consequently, teamwork also appears to be an interactional strategy, a tool used in interaction in attempting to reach goals. Interactional strategy here refers to communication-related goal-oriented speech behaviour that may or may not be conscious. The aim of Study 1 was to find out about

the strategic potential of teamwork, i.e. how it is used in order to reach goals in a business negotiation with a potential client.

#### **4.3.1.1 Research questions of Study 1**

The main aim of exploring the strategic potential of teamwork was divided into goals and other operational research questions as follows:

1. What kind of goals can be identified in the Client Negotiation?
2. What kind of interactional strategies – conscious or unconscious – do the members of the sales team use in order to reach their goals?
3. What kind of seller teamwork can be identified in the Client Negotiation?

#### **4.3.2 Study 2**

Study 2 aims at a systematic investigation of the use of humour in intercultural business negotiations. The main aim of the study is to find out if humour is used strategically in business negotiations – i.e. does it serve the business goals of the negotiation? The methodology used is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Objectivity of analysis has been a consideration throughout the process of studying the participants' use of humour in the meetings. While identifying jocular events, the reactions of all the participants have been taken into consideration; signals of accommodation or rejection of jokes have been quantified whenever possible. Because of the fact that the meetings were audio-recorded and not videoed, signals of humour such as smiling were not recorded.

Humour is an interactional phenomenon that to some extent defies definition. Generally we experience anything said or done in order to cause amusement to be humorous behaviour. Humour is a very personal experience, however, so what one interlocutor finds humorous, another may find dull or even offensive. A jocular event, i.e. a joke, is thus sometimes difficult to define. In the present study, humour is defined as anything said or done verbally in order to cause amusement, intentionally or unintentionally. Although the functions of laughter have been shown to be ambivalent, in the present study laughter has been seen as a signal of a jocular event, unless in accordance with the situational, interactional or business context another interpretation of laughter has been found more appropriate. It is believed that the fact that the researcher was present in the meetings helped to capture the appropriate interpretation.

#### **4.3.2.1 Research questions of Study 2**

The nature of the research corpus of the dissertation allowed for an investigation of in-group (SIM) and out-group (CN) humour in a professional context. While listening to the recorded material of the two meetings, it appeared that there were differences in the sellers' use of humour in the two meetings. In researching whether and how humour may be used strategically in business negotiations, the main aim was broken down into more operational research questions:

1. Is humour in the Sellers' Internal Meeting really different from that in the Client Negotiation? If in-group humour and out-group humour are different, how is the difference manifested?
2. Who jokes in multicultural business negotiations and when?

### 4.3.3 Study 3

The main aim of Study 3 was to look at how the skills needed in meetings and negotiations are being taught in textbooks with a language-teaching orientation, the focus being on business context, and use of language in general rather than the teaching of individual language functions. An attempt was also made to investigate whether the tools of speech behaviour which were found to have strategic potential for business negotiating according to the results of Studies 1 and 2, namely teamwork and humour, feature in the sample of textbooks chosen. The successfulness of the approach taken in these textbooks in general was also to be evaluated, i.e. whether the division into language orientation and business orientation in the field of teaching the skills needed in meetings and negotiations is successful.

#### 4.3.3.1 Research questions of Study 3

In order to explore these issues, the following *research questions* were formulated:

1. How does the authentic data of the study compare with use of the English language in the models provided by textbooks used in language training of present and future sales negotiators, regarding the type of English used (British, American, regional or country-related accents, international English) and style (formal or informal) or register (as defined by Halliday 1978)?
2. Do the business contexts and situations presented in the textbooks through which business negotiators are trained reflect real-life business processes and situations (e.g. models of negotiations: competitive, cooperative) and demonstrate real interactional behaviour (e.g. use of power) through relevant participant roles (e.g. buyer and seller)?

## 5 RESULTS

The aim of the present dissertation has been to investigate professional interaction, namely business negotiating: to examine how two potentially strategic negotiating skills, namely effective use of teamwork and humour, are used in the context of competitive seller-buyer negotiations. A more practical aim involved comparing the results of these inquiries with the teaching material currently in use in teaching business negotiating.

According to the results, when considering what the components of effective and strategic professional communicative competence are (briefly discussed in section 1 above) in business negotiating, humour and teamwork should not be overlooked. They also deserve more attention in the instructional material that is used in teaching negotiating skills than they at present receive. Humour has been identified as an essential part of a plurilingual individual's existential competence. Similarly, teamwork skills are considered to be an integral part of an individual's professional competence (see Common European Reference for Languages 2001). According to the results of the study, the ability to use a team's potential in business negotiating is an asset. In addition, humour, although on the one hand spontaneous, on the other hand appears to be used systematically and strategically in managing business negotiating.

## 5.1 Study 1

Although there is a tendency to view business negotiating currently as a collaborative effort (see e.g. English et al. 1995, Wallwork 1999, Unt 1999, Lewthwaite 2000), practising business people live with the reality of everyday corporate life. Even if good, long-standing business relationships are more easily cultivated with a ‘win-win’ attitude, money has to be made in transactional interaction, i.e. profitable deals have to be closed. Conceding to the demands of the opposing side ‘where it hurts the least’ may be one solution, but sometimes not even this is possible. How then do teams plan to reach goals in their tactical planning in company-internal meetings? And how do they succeed in carrying out these plans?

According to the results of Study 1, the fact that the sellers of the study worked as a team was an important tool of strategic verbal communication, i.e. an interactional strategy. In their internal meeting they set their goals for the upcoming negotiation (CN), making sure as a team that they all agreed on them. Regarding the technical part of the CN, the sellers set avoidance goals for themselves; e.g. if the buyers introduce a topic that the sellers do not wish to discuss (because they cannot provide the requested information, for instance) they introduce their own topics instead. For the commercial part of the CN the sellers set achievement goals for themselves; for example, they decided to be aggressive about certain commercial conditions of their offer in actively pursuing them. If they do not agree about the goals, they try to reach compromises in order to be able to act in a united manner when facing the potential customer.

In the negotiation, the sellers used teamwork in several ways in order to further their cause. According to Charles (1994), sellers and buyers often act according to stereotypical seller and buyer behaviour, and the results of the present study support this. Generally, the sellers act as is ‘expected’ of them at this stage in the negotiation process: they humour the buyers, are enthusiastic about selling, but, for example, avoid interrupting the buyers. However, according to the main findings of the study, the goals that the sellers had set for themselves for the CN became the ‘building block’ of their interaction; they influenced the structure of the interaction and the way the sellers behaved as negotiators in the CN. Consequently, the results also suggest that the concept of such stereotypical seller / buyer behaviour may need redefining. It does not ‘happen’ in a vacuum but is influenced not only by the age of the business relationship (Charles 1994, 1996) but possibly also by the goals that the participants attempt to carry out.

Although the sellers and buyers are in some ways adversaries (their ‘win-win’ rhetoric notwithstanding) as they ‘fight over’ the commercial conditions of the contract, they also act as one negotiating team: they form interactional seller-buyer teams, who cooperatively make sure that all the items of the agenda are covered and that the meeting is generally managed well. According to some research findings (see Öberg 1995), the quantity of such ‘cross-team’ interactional cooperation could signal how close to closing a deal the negotiators are, i.e. the closer the deal, the more such teamwork in a negotiation. Unfortunately, as the present study is not a longitudinal one of a negotiation process, it does not provide further evidence for this interesting finding.

What kind of seller teamwork can then be identified in the CN? The sellers pursue goals together, and not just amongst the sellers, but also with the buyers, as discussed

above. The sellers ensure that all their arguments are covered with the help of teamwork, with different members of the selling team contributing to the on-going discussion at different times. They also take turns at times in repeating an argument a co-team member put forth earlier, and sometimes this seems enough to convince the buyers of their argument. The sellers also appear to manage their interpersonal relationships within their team with teamwork, as redundant information is often produced together where no persuasion is needed. In addition, they appear to humour the buyers together as a team in order to create a positive atmosphere for the negotiation.

In view of the results, it could be argued that the clearer the goal-orientation of a negotiation, the better the speakers can orient to it and act strategically when negotiating with a potential customer. This would seem to improve negotiation tactics and the quality of teamwork as a strategic interactional tool, particularly when pursuing own goals in initiating moves as a team. Consequently, this would emphasise the importance of face-to-face company-internal strategy meetings prior to meeting potential customers in client negotiations.

## **5.2 Study 2**

Generally, business negotiators are not encouraged by training consultants to use humour in multicultural negotiations with potential customers. Humour is not seen as a resource in business negotiations but rather as risky – particularly if the negotiators are engaged in negotiating multiculturally. One can reach this conclusion when looking at consultative literature with the help of which business negotiators are trained: use of humour does normally not feature in such training material. In Study 2, humour was systematically investigated in the context of authentic business meetings where the participants represented different cultural, albeit all European, backgrounds (for more information, see section 4 on data and methodology above). Some previous research has suggested that humour and laughter play an important role in the management of interpersonal relations in business negotiating (see e.g. Adelswärd and Öberg 1998). The focus of Study 2 was on investigating whether humour served the business goals of the negotiation.

In Study 2, humour was defined as anything said or done in order to cause amusement and according to the results there was more humour to be found in the company-internal meeting of the sales team (SIM). However, there was also plenty of humour in the client negotiation (CN), although the sellers seemed more wary about resorting to it there than in the SIM. On the basis of the analysis of the data, humour was found to have an impact on relationships in the SIM and CN. The participants appeared to use the breaks as well as the beginning and end of a negotiation for humour-driven management of their relations. Such segments of a negotiation are normally reserved for ‘small talk’ topics, such as weather and travel, for instance. In addition, owing to the stage of the buying process in the CN, i.e. ‘supplier search’ (Kotler 2002), the sellers seem to be humouring the buyers throughout the negotiation, as there is still competition for the supplier. In the SIM, the sellers often appear to resort to humour in order to build up a team spirit.

Although humour seems to be used in order to manage relationships, relationships also seem to have an impact on humour, as not just anybody can joke with whoever he pleases, according to the data. All interaction requires cooperation, humour particularly so, and often one member of the sales team initiates joking, while another

continues it. Ending of joking by other participants was rarely resorted to, but when it did occur it was only done by powerful negotiators, and even then it could be considered as cooperative behaviour, as it helps in attainment of the overall goal of the meeting: getting through the agenda on time. The project leaders on both the selling and buying sides in the CN were active in humorous communication, which would again emphasise the importance of the role of humour in the transaction. As this is the case, the motivation for the use of humour deserves to be discussed. On the one hand, the sellers' use of humour is spontaneous, as they do not plan their humorous communication in the SIM. On the other hand, humour does seem instrumental when it is analysed in the context in which it takes place: the sellers pursue difficult goals through humour; they also end difficult topics with the help of humour as a release of tension; they manage relations with the opposing side by indicating through humour that cooperation is still possible even if the selling and buying teams disagree; difficult issues also seem to be avoided with the help of humour. Humour may, on the one hand, be a way of controlling aggression (see Brown and Levinson 1987), and on the other, it seems a way of expressing it. Humour appears to reflect existing power relationships as, for example, the powerful negotiators' jokes seem to invite the most laughs, but humour also seems an effective tool for contesting them, especially in asymmetrical professional contexts (see Holmes 1998; Holmes and Marra 2002). Expressing frustration or concern safely is also possible with humour, as it allows for saving the speaker's 'face' (Brown and Levinson 1987).

Humour is contagious, and the participants join each other's joking unless they have a good reason for not doing so. Not all humour is successful and instances of unilateral seller or buyer joking are a case in point. If the sales team is pursuing a goal that the opposing side will not accept, they do not join in the fun.

An unexpected finding in the data was the ample use of 'ethnic' humour, i.e. humour about cultural differences. The Finnish people were particularly joked about, as the selling parent company is Finnish, but the Scottish and the Irish were joked about as well. Of the participating nationalities, only the English were 'spared'. This seemed also to be norm-governed behaviour, as the participant belonging to a certain national group seemed to have the right to initiate humour about such a group. However, working for a company also seemed to grant the employee the right to joke about that nation.

Although there were similarities in the participants' use of humour in the SIM and CN (e.g. there were few narrative jokes in either the SIM or the CN), the results showed that in-group (SIM) and out-group (CN) joking in a negotiation process is different. Regarding the type of humour used, more neutral humour was preferred in the client negotiation (such as a joking tone of voice or word choice). Irony was also used more carefully in the CN (such as an ironic tone of voice or word choice). It would seem that negotiating with a client requires monitoring the type of humour used, as the risk of offending the other party is to be avoided, particularly at certain stages of the negotiation process (as is the case in the present data). Regarding the content of humour, joking in the SIM is more personal and open, whereas in the CN, it is more careful and neutral.

An effort was made in this series of studies at verifying the reliability of the results with the help of additional material. A new company-internal strategy meeting (SIM2) and client negotiation (CN2) were recorded in 2003, with the same Finnish selling

company and Finnish seller. However, the new material was interesting in that teamwork and humour did not feature in it, as expected on the basis of the results of Studies 1 and 2. The sales manager of the selling company was not pleased with the price level to which the selling team had committed itself, so he unexpectedly joined the negotiation. He acted as leader during the whole client negotiation (CN2), and owing to the fact that the rest of the team members were dispirited by the aggressive way the sales manager attempted to change the result of the negotiation on price, there was hardly any room for strategic use of teamwork or humour. His disruptive behaviour did not bear fruit, however. He was soon made redundant from the company and the team continued later without him on the basis of what had earlier been agreed upon.

Poncini (2002:343) has pointed out that multicultural meetings have their own culture and character or 'groupness'. On the basis of the results of Studies 1 and 2, it could be suggested that negotiation processes are unique and develop their own interactional practices, according to the characteristics of the participants and the way that they respond to the changeable business realities involved. Of the plethora of interactional strategies available, some are taken into use in some negotiation processes, others elsewhere. Whether the adoption of some such strategies is proof of the successfulness of the negotiation process is a question that may deserve further research.

### **5.3 *Study 3***

According to the results of Study 3, language-oriented textbooks on meetings and negotiations have evolved since the 1980s, when Williams (1988) conducted her pioneering study on the language taught for meetings in textbooks and the language used in the meetings making up her data. Williams emphasised the use of authentic language, and other researchers (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen 1996) have called for a case-based approach in teaching Business English (BE). According to the results of the present study, textbooks with a Business English orientation which are used for teaching negotiating skills do include business context as cases. Some of them also consider factors that have been found important in negotiating (see e.g. Charles 1996), such as power. However, according to the results of the study, the situations provided in the textbooks tend to be rather superficial in nature in that little context is provided. In addition, regarding interactional power, it would seem that a more in-depth consideration of the power element in interaction is called for in different professional roles (e.g. buyer and seller) and in varying situations at different stages in the buying process (see e.g. Charles 1994, 1996).

Regarding the models of language used in negotiating, it would seem that the choices made in textbooks should be well-founded and argued for, whether British or American (US) English. European English and/or international World English should also be considered as viable models of the 'English language complex' (McArthur 2003). Business English material often describes the language used in business negotiations as formal, but this seems a simplification and does not reflect the real nature of the language used, on the basis of the present data. The age of the business relationship may be the decisive factor here, rather than the familiarity that the individual negotiators have with each other.

While the BE-oriented training material was found to provide some, although rather superficial, contexts as background when training in negotiation skills, business-

oriented (BO) consultative training material on negotiating tends generally to exclude the notion of language (see e.g. Lewthwaite 2000). This may be a result of the traditional division of courses in negotiating into language courses and business courses (e.g. in some polytechnics in Finland). While language courses traditionally concentrate on teaching phraseology, business courses focus on negotiation strategies and tactics. The results of Study 3 provide support for integrated courses on negotiation skills where teaching about language and negotiation tactics would go hand-in-hand in the context of larger business cases, as is generally the case in the BE material on the market at present. In addition, according to a plurilingualistic view on language instruction (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001), in such negotiation skills courses several major European languages could be considered, as they undoubtedly feature not only structural and cultural differences but also many similarities (particularly Indo-European languages).

To sum up, according to the main findings of Studies 1, 2 and 3, teamwork was shown to be an effective strategic tool for the sellers when attempting to reach their goals in a client negotiation. Besides taking turns and supporting each other in putting forth their arguments through teamwork, the sellers also control each other and sometimes team up with the buyers in order to make sure that the goals of the meeting are reached. At times, they use teamwork for managing interpersonal relationships, both with their team members as well as with the buyers. There is an ample amount of humour in both the SIM and CN, and humour clearly seems to work as an interactional strategic tool in the meetings. With the help of humour, both interpersonal relationships and business goals seem to be managed. Although humour is resorted to by all the participants, in the CN particularly, its use is managed carefully. The powerful negotiators initiate joking most often and their humour is also laughed at more easily. In addition, unilateral humour (either by the sellers or buyers) is interesting in that if the parties do not accommodate each other's joking behaviour, there is a good strategic reason for it. Regarding the teaching of negotiation skills, according to the results of the present work, students of business would seem to benefit from instruction where the approaches taken in Business English, and business-oriented instruction material are combined, providing a more holistic view on negotiating as a basic strategic skill and an inherent part of a company's transactional activities.

## **6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Previous research has shown (e.g. Francis 1986, Kangasharju 1998) that teamwork can be used to pursue argumentation, control participants and display solidarity. The present findings support this. However, in the data, teamwork was found to be even more than that; it acts as a 'backbone' of interaction in Client Negotiation, as the sellers carry out few interactional moves alone. In addition, the sellers were found to use teamwork differently according to the types of goals that they were attempting to reach. Besides working together, the sellers formed interactional teams with the buyers, particularly to control a co-member.

The present data support the findings of other scholars (e.g. Adelswärd and Öberg 1998) in that humour is not just reserved for casual conversation but has a place in business negotiating. In exploring the strategic use of humour, it was found that although both the SIM (Sellers' Internal Meeting) and CN (Client Negotiation) featured joking, there was more humour in the SIM, so the participants seemed to be monitoring their speech more carefully in CN. In addition, humour in the CN was

more careful in nature in that, for example, less irony was used. Besides humour having a bearing on relationships in a negotiation, e.g. the sellers seem to humour the buyers at this stage in the negotiation process, relationships were also found to have a bearing on humour, i.e. on who can joke, when and how, and also whose joking is laughed at. Not all humour in the CN was accepted by both parties, and this may be useful in diagnosing any sticking points while negotiating over a contract, for example.

Regarding the material available at present for teaching negotiating skills, it was observed that Business English textbooks have developed since the 1980s, when a pioneering study was carried out by Williams (1988). However, the present results suggest that, generally speaking, the cases presented in BE instruction material tend to be superficial in nature, as little background is given to them. The present data provide support for an integrated approach to the teaching of negotiation skills, with business and language-oriented approaches combined in order to provide a more holistic picture of business negotiating as an integral part of a company's basic business processes. The model of language provided in the BE instruction material is still U.K. or U.S. English-oriented, although some textbooks do take up concepts such as World English and International English.

From a methodological point of view, the study has limitations. The intercultural aspect of the study is limited by the fact that the national cultures involved were mainly limited to two, Finnish and British (although one buyer was Irish). The national culture did not seem to be a key factor in the data – rather the subculture of engineers appeared relevant. The participants were experienced negotiators and no major misunderstandings could be detected. However, the combination of a particular nationality (Finnish) and the selling company did have an influence on the type of humour used. The Finns were the target of much humour by both parties, although the sellers themselves were the initiators of such joking.

A classical typological model for analysing spoken interaction (Edmondson 1981 and Edmondson and House 1981) was used in analysing authentic negotiation data (see Vuorela 2000). The model is static while the material is not and it fails to capture interactivity, unlike some more frequently used approaches (e.g. conversation analysis) to the analysis of spoken interaction. However, it did allow division of the material into manageable chunks, which opened it up so that interesting insight could be gained into the data.

In this work an attempt was made at verifying the reliability of the results through additional data. Besides using participant interviews, researcher's field notes and authentic recorded data (recorded in 1996), new data (a similar set of a company-internal meeting and a client negotiation linked to it) was audio-recorded in 2003. This process proved interesting in that as a result of the fact that a manager unexpectedly joined the selling team, humour and teamwork did not function in a similar fashion when compared with the original material (CN). The manager monopolised the interaction, trying to get the buyers to agree to an unexpected rise in the price level. The other sellers were reluctant to make any modifications to the offered price at this stage, as they had already committed themselves to a lower price in a previous negotiation. This jeopardised the success of the whole negotiation process, as was later stated by the specialist informant in an interview. The fact that humour and teamwork were really not resorted to in the new data could be seen as proof of this. In CN2, the other sellers tended to sit back and let the sales manager

pursue his own agenda, to which they had not agreed. He was later made redundant from the company and the sellers did manage to close the deal with the terms originally agreed upon. Judging on the basis of these two sets of meetings, one would be tempted to say that CN2 was a problematic negotiation as it did not feature any teamwork. It could also be concluded that although resorting to teamwork and humour can be strategic negotiator behaviour, their successful use may require particular circumstances, e.g. good internal cohesion of a sales team.

While discussing the limitations of the dissertation, it needs to be pointed out that it is a descriptive case study and any tendencies revealed should be checked in further research with more extensive corpuses, possibly featuring several teams, companies and different fields. In addition, as the research material was audio-recorded, and not video-recorded, it offers a somewhat limited view of communication, as body language could not be analysed. However, it was felt that video equipment could have had a negative effect on the naturalness of the speakers' performance, whilst audio-recording equipment was considered less disturbing.

The researcher was present at the two meetings while they were taped; this was considered important. The study relies on ethnographic-type material in analysis of the transcribed material. The researcher's presence at the meeting is a two-edged sword: on the one hand, it enables an ethnographic-type approach and helps in analysing the material, as she gains insider knowledge. On the other hand, the observer's presence may influence the participants' output to some extent. In the two meetings (SIM, CN), the negotiators (especially at the beginning of the meetings and during breaks) engaged the observer in the discussion. This was particularly true regarding their use of humour; the language research project is one of the topics of joking throughout the meetings and some other observer-related topics were also joked about, e.g. gender, as the researcher was the only woman present. The dissertation makes no claims of full-blown ethnography: this would have been impossible owing to the confidential nature of business negotiating as a professional activity. However, the material collected as field notes, interviews and participant observation was an inherent part of the process of analysing the data.

The results of this dissertation give rise to further research. It would be of interest to the business community and business trainers alike to study whether the negotiators' accommodation of a similar type and subject of humour and supportive alignment of teamwork help in finding out information about how close to closing a deal a sales team is likely to be. It would also be important to explore whether more holistic and interaction-based teaching methods used, for example, in connection with practice enterprises (see e.g. Isokangas 1996) and problem-based learning (see e.g. Alanko-Turunen 2005) could enhance the learning of effective teamwork skills as an interactional tool to be used in business negotiating.

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## APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Punctuation has not been used in transcription of the corpus data. Capital letters have been used for proper nouns or names only (real or invented names of products, companies and people).

[ ]	overlapping speech
*	pause, 0–1 seconds
**	pause, 2 seconds
***	pause, 3 seconds or more
-	truncated speech
(highway)	possible transcription of unclear words
(-) (--) (---	unintelligible word / 2 words / a stretch of speech comprising 3 or more words
(LAUGHTER)	transcriber's comments on the text

## **APPENDIX 2: ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS**





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# How does a sales team reach goals in intercultural business negotiations? A case study

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## Abstract

This paper is a report of an on-going study of intercultural business negotiations. Two meetings were under scrutiny: a company-internal strategy meeting of a sales team ('the sellers' internal meeting'), which was analysed on a general level for goals and other background information; a client negotiation with the same sellers meeting a potential customer, which was under detailed analysis for its interactional structure and the realisation of goals. The analysis revealed some interactional strategies that were used by the negotiators when trying to reach goals as a sales team in a competitive business context, when the goals are known as they have been expressed in the sellers' internal meeting. Although business negotiations have been shown to be constrained by factors such as the surrounding business context and seller and buyer behaviour of a particular kind, according to the results of the present study the goals the participants attempt to achieve in a negotiation structure the interaction. This would mean that the factors constraining the negotiators' behaviour are not static but are modified by the goals the negotiators set out to achieve.

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## 1. Introduction

Although modern technology has dramatically changed the way business transactions are conducted in the global marketplace, sales people do not envisage video

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conferencing or 3D-meetings taking the place of face-to-face business negotiations (Vuorela, 2000). Corporations do not fly their executives and sales people into distant locations at great cost for nothing: face-to-face contact is seen as vital when dealing with potential customers. This paper outlines some preliminary results of an on-going study of intercultural polyadic business negotiations conducted in English. The main focus of attention is the strategic (i.e. used in order to serve a particular end, either consciously or unconsciously) use of language by a sales team in order to reach goals in a business negotiation with a potential client. The present study is motivated by practical considerations; it is hoped that revealing some of the possible regularities and underlying norms of speech behaviour in business negotiations could contribute to business language training, and thus help business people negotiate more effectively.

In the past, in discussions about what makes a sales negotiation successful, a 'stereotypical' reaction from a 'stereotypical' northern European salesperson tended to be 'a good product' (Vuorela, 2000). In other words, no matter how bad your sales technique, if you had a good product, it would sell, at least if the customer needed the product in question very badly. Today, however, potential customers have an increasing amount of choice, and no doubt prefer effective and agreeable business encounters to ineffective and/or disagreeable ones. Defining what exactly makes a business meeting effective and agreeable is no easy matter, but recognising an encounter where one does not feel like buying anything is easier: e.g. lack of both enthusiasm and service-mindedness on the part of the sellers. The rapid expansion of international business has led to a growth of interest in Business English by practising business people and researchers alike. Sales interaction, in particular, is drawing an increasing amount of attention, as sales negotiations are felt to be very challenging, especially when conducted in a foreign language.

The fact that a company sends a sales team, rather than an individual sales person, to a business negotiation speaks for itself: it is costly, and consequently could be expected to be done for a reason, a strategic one. The sellers of the study themselves explain this: it is safer to negotiate as a team as this helps to avoid fatigue and the mistakes a tired negotiator easily makes (Vuorela, 2000). Prescriptive guide books on management and organisational behaviour promote the idea of replacing traditional company hierarchies with a team organisation as, according to some consultants (e.g. McClure, 1998; Moran, Musselwhite, Zenger, & Harrison, 1996; Parker, 1990; Ray & Bronstein, 1995; Robbins, 2001), teams outperform individuals, especially if the tasks at hand require experience, judgements and multiple skills (Robbins, 2001, p. 258). At present, however, consultational guide books on the use of the English language in negotiations lack a teamwork orientation.

The present study aims at addressing the issue by first presenting relevant theoretical background on cooperation and teamwork in Section 2. The main data of the study, a Client Negotiation between a sales team and a buying team, and the background data used – a Sellers' Internal Meeting and participant interviews – are described in Section 3. Section 4 presents the research questions and the methodology with the help of which the Client Negotiation was analysed, and the way background information was gathered and used. The results of the study are described in Section 5

with the help of relevant text extracts from the Client Negotiation, and finally a summary of the results and the conclusions reached are presented in Section 6.

## 2. Research of business negotiations: basic theoretical background of the study

The present study belongs to an area of research that is growing in importance within applied linguistic research and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), namely, *Business English*. Business English is an umbrella term for different uses of the English language in varying contexts, from business-to-business transactions to company-internal situations (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Negotiation research can be divided into five different orientations: prescriptive, abstract, ethnographic, experimental, and discourse (Firth, 1995, p. 11) of which the present study adheres to the last one. *Negotiation research with a discourse orientation* emerged in the 1980s with the aim of uncovering the interactional basis of negotiating activity (e.g. Charles, 1994; Fant, 1989; Firth, 1991; Grindsted, 1989; Lampi, 1986; Öberg, 1995; Stalpers, 1993; Ulijn & Gorter, 1989).

*Negotiation* as a term extends to all areas of social life. Although a negotiation can be dyadic, in its meaning of professional language use, it often refers to a polyadic encounter – a group discussion in the workplace. Some negotiation consultants define a negotiation mechanically as ‘a process in which two or more parties exchange goods or services and attempt to agree upon the exchange rate for them’ (Robbins, 2001, p. 396), while others emphasise interaction and rather see it as the main objective instead of the exchange of goods. For example Kapoor, Hansén, and Davidson (1991, pp. 19–23) see negotiation as a process of interaction between people where the main mission is to create lasting relationships, and the main objective to nurture and manage those relationships.

According to Wagner’s (1995) definition of a negotiation, a speech event can be called a negotiation if the participants make their goals explicit by verbally referring to them, and if an external observer finds the opposing parties’ goals interrelated. However, it should be pointed out that, although negotiators no doubt need to make at least some of their goals explicit in a meeting in order for it to be considered a negotiation, the participants also often have hidden agendas with hidden goals. This manifests the asymmetry of knowledge by the opposing parties which creates a need for negotiating. Wagner (1995) also states that a negotiation may or may not involve ‘negotiating activity’, i.e. conversational activity in which speakers engage if their proposals are not accepted.

Prescriptive negotiation guide books give guidelines for information management in the course of the negotiation process. According to Kapoor et al. (1991, p. 120), information is the ‘lifeblood’ of the process and consequently, they advise negotiators to identify what information they have, what they intend to present to the other party and what information they will need from the opposing side. They also encourage negotiators to establish their priorities early on in the negotiation process: negotiators will, according to them, find it useful to classify information, in order to establish their information priorities, into (i) ‘hard’ data, e.g. facts,

figures, drawings and (ii) 'soft' information, e.g. views, opinions, feelings, attitudes, motives (Kapoor et al., 1991, p. 120).

Kapoor et al. (1990, p. 36) value the maintenance of long-term business relationships and point out that the main aim of effective negotiating is not, contrary to popular opinion, to 'destroy, trick, outmanoeuvre, or otherwise get the best of the other party' as in doing so a negotiator might gain in the short-term but lose in the long-term. On the other hand, they do acknowledge the fact that often in negotiations what appears on the surface to be the truth of a situation may turn out to be otherwise later on (Kapoor et al., 1990, p. 88).

The participants in polyadic discussions in the field of business, i.e. business professionals, have tacit knowledge about how to carry out functions in order to reach goals in such events; this has been referred to by such terms as 'language game' (Wittgenstein, 1958), 'activity type' (Levinson, 1979) and 'speech event' (Hymes, 1972). Prescriptive guide books for negotiators acknowledge this and teach aspiring business negotiators 'how to play the game' (e.g. Lewthwaite, 2000; Unt, 1999).

Due to the fact that common patterns and regularities have been detected in negotiations between opposing parties, irrespective of issues of dispute and context, some researchers have started inspecting whether a specific 'socio-pragmatic framework for negotiations' or particular 'maxims of negotiating interaction' (e.g. Firth, 1990, p. 34) could be discovered. According to Charles (1996) one of the decisive factors influencing buyer and seller discourse is the age of the business relationship, while Yli-Jokipii (1994) emphasises the importance of the stage at which the interaction takes place in the buying process.

In 'playing the negotiating game' buyers and sellers accept that the *rights and obligations* that they have in the context of the business transaction and their business relationship vary depending on which side they represent. These rights and obligations are not static but change according to the age of the business relationship and the market situation (Charles, 1994). Charles (1994, pp. 138–140), (basing her ideas on the work of such researchers as Bilton, 1981, Cicourel, 1973, Davies, 1948, Goffman, 1961, 1972, Goode, 1960, 1972, Karrass, 1974, Lakoff, 1973, 1982, Lidstone, 1977; Linton, 1936, Rosch, 1973, Rubin & Brown, 1975, and Sarbin, 1953), has identified four behavioural tactics that are typical to buyers in sales negotiations in a buyer's market: (1) a buyer is expected to restrict the interest s/he might feel towards the seller's product; (2) s/he is expected to bring out snags and reasons why s/he should not buy from the seller; (3) s/he is expected to bring out her/his own trustworthiness, and high standard requirements; (4) s/he is expected to exert a degree of control over a seller and the situation. The sellers' typical rights and obligations are identified as follows: A seller should (1) show enthusiasm towards the buyer, and the deal in general; (2) bring out positive features of her/his product; (3) demonstrate her/his trustworthiness and desirability as a trading partner; (4) accept a buyer's control of the situation, and yet be willing to share it.

*Cooperation* is a necessary element in all conversation deemed to be successful, although some activity types are clearly more cooperative than others (Levinson, 1979). When communicating with each other, interlocutors work on the basis of

*intersubjectivity*: they assume a certain similarity in their experiences and an interchangeability of views (Hakulinen, 1997, p. 13; Schutz, 1970). Performing communicative actions is often more than issuing a single utterance. As Linell (1986, p. 121) points out, dialogue is a dynamic, interactive achievement of conversationalists. It is the result of a collective effort, during which the participants jointly accomplish an action. The collective work manifests itself at several levels of discourse, e.g. in certain types of dialogue, a speaker's utterances are completed by listeners; a speaker may even encourage this by leaving a slot open in the interactional structure for another interlocuter to fill in. Alternatively, a speaker may carry out a verbal action on her/his own, but in doing so be strongly influenced by the feedback, both verbal and non-verbal of her/his interlocuters. S/he may, for example, make unplanned additions or change the illocutionary force of her/his utterances due to disapproving bodylanguage on the part of the interlocuters.

Several scholars have been studying such cooperative negotiation sequences, which they call *teamwork*. According to Francis (1986, pp. 62–67), in his data of industrial wage dispute negotiations, team members co-produce their party's case through teamwork as they signal membership to a negotiating team; they use teamwork to pursue their main goal. Francis describes four different types of cooperative interactional work through which teams are realised, namely: (1) team passing (a speaker passes a turn to a co-team member), (2) team assist (a speaker contributes to the utterance of a co-team member), (3) team takeover (a speaker takes the floor from a co-team member), (4) team movement (team members talk to one another in the presence of the opposing party, i.e. perform an action indirectly).

Öberg (1995, pp. 61–85), in investigating a negotiation continuum of three business meetings, found that teamwork in her data was a successful parameter in defining at what stage in the negotiation process negotiators found themselves: the closer the closing of a deal, the more instances of teamwork across opposing selling and buying teams could be recorded. Thus the amount of such seller-buyer teamwork, i.e. teamwork across opposing selling and buying teams with a different task to perform, could serve as an important signal to sellers as to when their main goal, a deal, is about to be reached. According to Öberg, in her data the negotiators manage through teamwork three communicative dimensions, namely those of argumentation, information management, and relational development (see also Donohue, Diez, & Stahle, 1983; Kangasharju, 1998).

Of the research reviewed above, the results from Francis and Öberg are particularly relevant to the study: it will be of interest to see whether a sales team uses similar means when attempting to reach their goals in a business negotiation. Some similarities regarding the functions of teamwork could be expected when investigating how the sellers pursue their goals as a team in the present study.

### 3. Data for the study

The present paper uses the data of a previous study in which teamwork was under scrutiny (Vuorela, 2000). Two meetings, a company-internal strategy meeting,

*Sellers' Internal Meeting*, and a negotiation with a potential customer, *Client Negotiation*, were audio-recorded in the middle of a business transaction between a British buying company and a Finnish selling company. The activity is an industrial project which consists of the sellers supplying an engine to a power plant. The potential buyers would be responsible for engineering the installation of the sellers' engine, with their parent company operating the power plant. On the sellers' side, the Finnish parent company would sell the engine to their British network company, who would then sell it to the potential customer.

The two meetings that make up the research corpus of the present study are authentic business meetings. Besides the two meetings, the research corpus was supplemented with participant interviews which took place right after the meetings. Also, the Finnish participant was interviewed throughout the analysis of the research material as a specialist informant. The researcher was present in the two meetings while they were recorded; this was considered important as the study relies on ethnographic background material in the analysis of the meetings.

The data of the study are in some respect unique; it differs from the material used in the research reviewed above in Section 2 in that the *Sellers' Internal Meeting* provides information about the goals the sellers set out to realise when facing their potential customer. This potentially yields new insight into how goals are reached when negotiating as a team in a competitive buyer–seller negotiation; the researcher does not need to speculate about the negotiators' goals when at least some of them are clearly expressed in the *Sellers' Internal Meeting*.

The meetings were audio-recorded in the UK in 1996. They both lasted for approximately 8 h, and together total 16 h of tape-recorded data. They took place within 48 h, with meeting 1, the *Sellers' Internal Meeting* preceding meeting 2, the *Client Negotiation*. Only the *Client Negotiation* features openly voiced interrelated opposing goals of the two parties involved and is hence called a negotiation (cf. Wagner, 1995).

The participants are all native speakers of British English, except for one Seller who is a Finnish businessman with several years' experience of conducting business in English. Although one of the sellers is a native speaker of a foreign language, the focus is not on him as an EFL speaker in the present study. However, the meetings are considered to represent intercultural communication. The buying company is British, while the selling company is Finnish. Also, the only Finnish representative is a powerful negotiator; the only one present who is authorised to sign the contract.

After a careful inspection of the 16 hours of research material, all of which was transcribed (Appendix A for transcription conventions), four text extracts from the *Client Negotiation* were chosen for detailed linguistic analysis due to the fact that clearly defined goals were voiced about the agenda items that were discussed in them in the *Sellers' Internal meeting*. The latter (with five participants of whom only three took part in the *Client Negotiation*) served as a source of background information about the business transaction in general, and the sellers' goals in particular, while the main data of the study is the *Client Negotiation*: a business negotiation between a team of businessmen who represent a buying company (three representatives) and another team representing a selling company (four representatives).

The meetings consist of three different parts: (1) opening, (2) core of the meeting, with a *technical part* (agenda items related to the technical specification of the project and engine) and a *commercial part* (agenda items concerning the commercial condition of the contract) and (3) closing (Vuorela, 2000 for a more detailed description). The technical part preceded the commercial one as it influences the latter. The contents of the two meetings are essentially the same; the sellers' offer, and the scope of supply it contains (i.e. what the sellers are offering to the customer in terms of a technical specification) are being clarified. Due to the differing nature of the two meetings, the issues at hand are discussed in a very dissimilar fashion. Both the technical and commercial parts of the Client Negotiation feature negotiating activity.

The Client Negotiation is the fifth meeting in the negotiation process between the buyers and the sellers, which, at the time of the audio-recording, had lasted for 2 years. The sellers have sent their offer to the buyers who now 'make their move'. Kotler (2002, pp. 228–229) divides the buying process into the following stages: (1) problem recognition, (2) general need description, (3) product specification, (4) supplier search, (5) proposal solicitation, (6) supplier selection, (7) order-routine specification, (8) performance review. The buyers have not yet committed themselves to any supplier but are in the process of selecting one (stage 6 in Kotler's classification), so there is still competition. The deal is to be closed soon with the supplier the buyers consider to be the best choice.

The buyers and the sellers have a common goal regarding the Client Negotiation – the official agenda of the meeting needs to be covered. In addition, both sides also have their hidden agendas that are not revealed openly to the opposing side. Besides a common hidden agenda, the different members of both the selling and buying teams have their own hidden agendas: regarding the sellers – whose speech behaviour is the main object of study as access was gained into the Sellers' Internal Meeting, and not into one by the buyers – Sellers A and J represent the British network company that has interests that are sometimes different from those of the Finnish parent company, represented by the only non-native speaker of English in the Client Negotiation, the Finnish SellerP.

Both sides have clear tasks to perform. The buyers have called the meeting, drawn up its agenda, and expect answers to their questions about technical details of the sellers' product. They are in the role of 'questioner' in the Client Negotiation. They also express their position concerning the commercial conditions of the potential contract as they are stated in the sellers' offer. The sellers, in the role of 'respondent' are to provide the information requested by the buyers in the technical part of the Client Negotiation. In the commercial part, they can either approve the buyers' position or express a need for further negotiation. The official project leaders are BuyerS on the buying side and SellerJ on the selling side.

Whose topics are being discussed is a possible signal of who is in control in interaction (Charles, 1994). As the buyers have designed the agenda of the Client Negotiation, and thus have decided beforehand what they want to discuss, their topics – 'buyer-interest' topics – are the foundation of the negotiation. The sellers will

also need to introduce their topics – ‘seller-interest’ topics – especially if they want to avoid a buyer-interest topic.

#### **4. Methodology and research questions**

The research approach of the study is phenomenological: a qualitative research method is adopted, coupled with an ethnographic orientation. According to the phenomenological position, the people whose activities are under scrutiny and the worlds of which they are a part are seen as co-constituted: they do not exist independently (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 3). Background information was collected about the participants and the business relationship between the buyers and the sellers, and informal interviews were held with the sellers immediately after the Client Negotiation and at regular intervals with one seller, who acted as a specialist informant, in order to check on the researcher’s interpretations against the views of the sellers.

Within the field of linguistic research, the study adheres to the sociolinguistic tradition of language study, with a discourse orientation. A structural-functional description of the transcribed negotiation text was carried out through a discourse analysis-based model, that of Edmondson (1981) and Edmondson and House (1981) (Appendix C) with a focus on features of interaction that the participants themselves make relevant. Discourse analysis is a tool for looking at how meaning is attached to utterances in context, i.e. at language use: the relationship between language and the textual context as well as the social situation in which it is used (e.g. McCarthy, 1991).

‘Structural-functional’ models, like the one by Edmondson, seek to describe conversation as hierarchically organised (Section 4 below and also Coulthard & Montgomery, 1981; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Labov & Fanshell, 1977; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Stubbs, 1983). Due to the fact that attempting to view discourse as a series of limited sets of action has proved problematic (e.g. Piirainen-Marsh, 1992), the categories proposed in the model are seen as open in the present study and have been modified when necessary.

According to Edmondson and House (1981), the global organisation of spoken interaction can be described in structural terms, like syntax. In their integrative model of illocutionary functions and interactional strategy, the hierarchy is represented by, e.g. acts, moves and exchanges, in which the units of the lowest rank are defined functionally. The structure of conversational exchanges is seen to consist of minimally two interactional moves, an initiating and a satisfying move which together produce an outcome. Should the initiating move be rejected, the rejecting move will itself need to be satisfied before an outcome can be reached.

In researching the interactional strategies used in reaching goals as a team of sellers, the study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What kind of goals can be identified in the Client Negotiation?
2. What kind of interactional strategies, conscious or unconscious, do the members of the sales team use in order to reach their goals?

### 3. What kind of teamwork can be identified in the Client Negotiation?

In Section 5 below, an attempt is made to provide answers to the research questions with the help of relevant text extracts of the data. For an example of the detailed linguistic analysis of the data, see Appendix D.

## 5. Analysis and results

Of the four items of the agenda that were chosen for the analysis, two are from the technical part of the Client Negotiation (*cooling radiator, protection system*) and two from the commercial part (*payment terms, price*). Should the customers want modifications to be made to the technical specification of the project, they would be expected to express themselves about them at this stage. Regarding the commercial items, the buyers do not accept the sellers' present price level and terms of payment as such but start bargaining about them.

In researching goal-oriented negotiating, the word *goal* is used in the study to denote aims that the sellers clearly voice in their Internal Meeting. Some other goals that were brought up by the specialist informant in participant interviews have also been considered. *Interactional strategy* here refers to communication-related goal-oriented speech behaviour that may or may not be conscious. *Teamwork* in the study refers to instances of cooperation where a speaker (or several speakers) aligns his speech with what has been said before his turn-at-talk by another speaker, either immediately before it or in the course of an earlier treatment of the same issue. This means either continuing with a previous topic or starting a new, related topic. A topic is considered established if it is taken up by both parties. The interactional structure of the agenda items was analysed on a general level. The largest unit in the analysis is one agenda item, which was analysed for topics, exchanges, turns and moves (for a detailed breakdown of the focus of analysis, see Appendix B; for a detailed analysis of the agenda items, see Vuorela, 2000).

Regarding the items analysed from the *technical part*, the sellers had set themselves '*avoidance goals*' in the Sellers' Internal Meeting: they want to avoid discussing certain features of their product at this stage in the negotiation process where the buyers are still negotiating with several suppliers, as revealing them now might result in the buyers opting for another supplier. Regarding the agenda item *cooling radiator*, the sellers do not want to discuss the size of their radiator: they know that it could be a problem for them as the buyers have a limited amount of space for the cooling equipment. Also, the buyers have not given them the relevant information on noise and temperature requirements that the sellers would need in order to design a suitable cooling system. With *protection system*, the situation is identical in that the sellers do not wish the buyers to raise questions about the engine protection system; it includes two software programs that the buyers might not want to pay for if they saw them as separate from the system. The sellers are hoping to get a maintenance agreement for the engine and having these pieces of software in the protection system would greatly facilitate maintaining the engine.

Regarding the items analysed from the *commercial part* of the Client Negotiation, the sellers had set themselves 'achievement goals' in their Internal Meeting: instead of just avoiding discussion of buyer-interest topics they will need to pursue actively their own topics in order to improve the terms of the contract. Regarding the price of their engine, the sellers' initial goal is to either maintain the present price level or increase it. They know that the buyers will try lower it instead. They are also aware of the fact that the buyers are reluctant to accept the payment terms as they are expressed in the sellers' latest offer and prepare themselves in order to defend their stand.

### 5.1. Goals as 'building blocks' of interaction

The fact that the sellers have set themselves goals of a particular kind seems to have an influence on the structure of the interaction. Regarding the technical part of the Client Negotiation, the sellers had set for themselves *avoidance goals*. When the buyers introduce a buyer-interest topic that the sellers do not wish to discuss, i.e. they are unable or unwilling to give the requested information, they introduce their own topics by counter-requesting information – see extract 1 below. For the sake of clarity, the buyers' initiations are written in italics.

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Extract 1: *Client Negotiation/Technical Part*

Agenda Item: *cooling radiator*

Topic: size of cooling radiator → temperature and noise criteria

- |    |                |  |
|----|----------------|--|
| 1  | <i>BuyerL</i>  | <i>I I think we need to check the size [of the</i>             |
| 2  | <i>BuyerM</i>  | <i>mm]</i>   |
| 3  | <i>BuyerL</i>  | <i>of this radiator it could [be</i>                           |
| 4  | <b>SellerJ</b> | <b>yeah]</b>   |
| 5  | <i>BuyerL</i>  | <i>substantial and er it could be quite an issue as well</i>   |
| 6  | <b>SellerP</b> | <b>[yeah</b>   |
| 7  | <b>SellerJ</b> | <b>yeah]</b>   |
| 8  | <b>SellerA</b> | <b>well that the- these two questions they're really that</b>  |
| 9  |                | <b>that you you've raised yourself is the size depends</b>     |
| 10 |                | <b>on [noise</b>   |
| 11 | <i>BuyerL</i>  | <i>yes]</i>  |
| 12 | <b>SellerA</b> | <b>criteria so so what is the noise criteria an' also what</b> |
| 13 |                | <b>designed temperatures does the radiator need to [be</b>     |
| 14 | <i>BuyerL</i>  | <i>yeah]</i>   |
| 15 | <b>SellerA</b> | <b>designed to operate at</b>                                  |
- 

In extract 1 above, Sellers *P* and *J* agree to provide the requested information (lines 4, 6–7), when SellerA steps in to point out that the buyers will first need to inform the sellers about the technical details that will have an influence on the size of their radiator (lines 8–10, 12–13, 15). It is not uncommon for the sellers in the data to soften disagreement by first agreeing to at least part of a buyer's

request: this strategy of tactful disagreement (cf. Goodale, 1987) is used by them throughout the discussion about cooling equipment. They accept that the matter should be studied but they will need more information from the buyers before disclosing more technical details.

Regarding the commercial part of the Client Negotiation, the sellers had set themselves *achievement goals* – they have decided to be aggressive about the commercial conditions of the contract in order to reach their goals and this has an impact on the structure of the interaction. Their goal-orientation is reflected in their speech behaviour: they act assertively here, and allow themselves to interrupt the buyers and occasionally even prevent the buyers from starting their topics at the beginning of a new topic, as is shown in extract 2 below. Although according to typical Seller behaviour (Charles, 1994), the sellers could be expected to act submissively, the achievement goals seem to override this. BuyerS, the head negotiator on the buying side, has great difficulties in getting his topic established (lines 6–7, 9, 11) as the sellers boldly hold the floor while checking aloud that the payment instalments amount to 95% as they should. BuyerS is finally successful on line 18.

---

Extract 2: *Client Negotiation / Technical Part*

Agenda Item: *payment terms*

Topic: retention of last payment

1	SellerJ	er w- 40.1 (SHUFFLES DOCUMENTS) is my next one
2	SellerA	yeah
3	SellerP	yeah * the payments
4	SellerJ	yeah *** (SHUFFLES DOCUMENTS)
5	BuyerM	mm[-hm]
6	BuyerS	(you know) ] we've got a problem with these [ 'cause our rules've
7		
8	SellerA	50 ] 60
9	BuyerS	changed again since [ (–)
10	BuyerM	yeah ha] ha
11	BuyerS	I know you've got [ a
12	SellerP	90] 95
13	SellerA	I (—) would like 100 % of the contract price (–) (JOKE)
14		
15	SellerJ	ha ha ha]
16	BuyerM	yes [ha ha right
17	SellerA	not 95 ha] ha
18	BuyerS	well ther- there are two principles here that 've been passed down from our head [office...]
19		

---

The sellers first establish the present item as the topic (lines 1–4) and then check the percentage of the instalments (lines 8, 12) and finally joke about the disadvantageous nature of the terms for the sellers (lines 13–14, 17). The fact that the sellers, on the one hand, stay within the boundaries of normative seller profile (Charles, 1994) in their speech behaviour in the technical part of the Client Negotiation, and, on the other, go beyond that when the goals of the interaction so require in the commercial part of the meeting, would indicate that the any such norms of behaviour are not rigid but can be adjusted to situational requirements, i.e. the goals they need to reach.

In describing the basis of the grammatical system of languages, Halliday (1994) has identified three functional components, which he believes to be universal features of language, namely: (1) *ideational* component: representation of what a message is about; (2) *interpersonal* component: expression of function, e.g. mood of a clause; (3) *textual* component: organisation of the message in relation to the surrounding discourse. By making a 'quantum leap' in the present study, the names of these functional categories are used here in order to describe the goals the sellers attempt to reach in the Client Negotiation: (1) *ideational* goals: conscious avoidance (e.g. do not do X) and achievement (e.g. try to do Y) goals; (2) *textual* goals: conscious or unconscious interactional means the sellers use in order to achieve their *ideational* goals, e.g. management of turn-taking and topic control via interrupting and changing the topic; (3) *interpersonal* goals: management of interpersonal relations within the sellers' team and those with the buyers: e.g. responding together, giving back-channelling cues, using humour.

### 5.2. Forming interactional teams

There are three sellers in the Client Negotiation but in their teamwork they mostly *work in pairs*; normally two sellers work together and they switch pairs every so often. On the one hand, the sellers who have started working together locally (i.e. within a move, turn, or exchange dealing with a single topic and possibly related adjacent topics) on an issue, normally see it through together, especially with unproblematic topics. Often, even globally, that is later on in the meeting, if the issue is taken up again, the same two people will work on it again together. On the other hand, depending on the purpose that teamwork is to serve, *all three sellers may work together* on an issue if it is a particularly important one, as is the case in extract 4 below. The sellers also *take turns*; for example, one seller introduces an agenda item, another does most of the talking, while the third seller summarises the result of the discussion. When discussing the cooling radiator, this type of global teamwork is demonstrated: SellerJ introduces the item on lines 1 and 3 in extract 3 below, Sellers P and A counter-request information from the buyers (see extract 5 below and extract 1 above), and SellerA closes the item, as shown in extract 3 on lines 5–19.

Extract 3: *Client Negotiation/Technical Part*Agenda Item: *cooling radiator*

Topic: temperature and noise requirements

- 1      SellerJ      **so we've got a cooling radiator in**  
 2                      (some turns have been omitted)  
 3                      **the cooling radiator's down in the (-) an' (-) all the**  
 4                      **heat**  
                             (some text has been omitted)  
 5      SellerA      **so can I just (-) on on the design of this we're looking**  
 6                      **for 70 dBA at one metre**  
 7      BuyerS      7[5  
 8      BuyerL      [74]  
 9      SellerA      that's right] 7 75 at one metre  
 10     BuyerS      outside yes  
 11     SellerA      **an' if it is er a radiator aircooler we are looking at 23**  
 12                      **degrees (-) as maximum ambient temperature with**  
 13                      **17 degrees C wet bulb on a cooling tower**  
 14                      **[(-) evaporative type system**  
 15     BuyerL      those] are maximum design (-) which will be exceeded  
 16                      for a small per cent of the time  
 17     BuyerM      mm  
 18     SellerA      **but as far as design an' operating systems that's**  
 19                      **that's what we [design (-)]**  
 20     BuyerL      this is a (-)]  
 21     SellerP      yeah \*\*\*  
 22     BuyerS      so that's the radiator  
 23     BuyerM      mm-hm

In extract 3 above, SellerA summarises the result of the negotiation cooperatively with the buyers, which is often the case. Results of the negotiation are reached together cooperatively; even if both parties have some differing interests, they are not openly voiced in the technical part of the Client Negotiation. In extract 4 below, all three sellers work together in order to be more persuasive.

Extract 4: *Client Negotiation/Commercial Part*Agenda Item: *price*

Topic: price level

- 1      BuyerS      *what about price \*\*\* we've got some take-outs that*  
 2                      *we've discussed earlier...*  
                             (part of discussion has been omitted)  
 3      SellerJ      **well yes we I mean if if you look (historically) at the**  
 4                      **project 18 months ago I think we quoted something**

## Extract 4 (continued)

5		like er * well 2.16 million * an' because of the
6		purchasing policies an' things like this we reduced
7		the price okay we took out some things like the
8		neutral air (-) [cubicle but we
9		(CLEAR THROAT)]
10	SellerJ	<b>didn't take out much more than 80 thousand [pounds</b>
11	BuyerS	<b>mm]</b>
12	SellerJ	<b>worth but we give you a 365 k reduction ** to bring it</b>
13		<b>down to this 179[5]...</b>
		(part of discussion has been omitted)]
14	SellerJ	<b>we wanna be partners with you an' if we can help * so</b>
15		<b>we did it that's what I'm saying so this 1795 is of our</b>
16		<b>good will without being asked</b>
17	SellerA	<b>can I take another (-) to that also in that period we</b>
18		<b>have lost 20%</b>
19	SellerJ	<b>yeah I'll show you this actually</b>
20	SellerP	<b>yeah</b>
21	SellerA	<b>on the currency</b>
...		(part of discussion has been omitted)
22	BuyerL	<b>sorry] sorry that the Finnish mark is getting weaker **</b>
23	SellerA	<b>no the Finnish mark is [getting stronger</b>
24	SellerP	<b>[stronger]</b>
25	SellerJ	<b>stronger]...</b>

The sellers had set themselves the goal of holding or increasing their price but when they start discussing the issue with the opposing party, it very soon becomes clear to them while the buyers describe their position that, as there have been take-outs in the technical part of the negotiation, i.e. some things have been taken out from the scope of supply, the buyers expect the price to be lowered instead (extract 4, lines 1–2). In extract 4 above, SellerJ contents himself with trying to hold the price at the present level. He starts off with a monologue about how they have already brought it down from a considerably higher level, because they see the potential deal as a partnership, so this is as far as it can possibly be stretched (lines 3–16). SellerA takes the floor immediately after his colleague has finished a turn by bringing forth additional information about how generous the sellers are with the present price level. When in doing so there is some confusion on the buyers' side about SellerA's point, all three sellers hasten to clarify the misunderstanding (lines 23–25).

Regarding *who works with whom*, the sellers with the most expertise in the topic that is being discussed pair up in the present data. The speakers' familiarity with one another due to a long history of working together appears to have a bearing on interactional partnerships. The negotiator's hierarchical position within his organisation seems also to influence how teams are formed in connection with teamwork across opposing teams (seller–buyer teamwork), as negotiators with a similar

hierarchical position within respective companies pair up more often than others in the present data. Often the head negotiators on both sides settle between themselves who is to lead the discussion; as the buyers have the upper hand here, it is the head buyer, BuyerS, who assigns an interactional role to SellerJ, the head negotiator on the selling side by suggesting, for example, ‘<first name>, would you take us through the scope’. SellerA and BuyerM are newcomers in their respective companies and often work together, e.g. debating about a detail, and often team up – forming seller-buyer teams, joking together, which frequently leads to them controlling the head seller, SellerJ, who very eagerly ‘pushes for a deal’.

### 5.2.1. Functions of teamwork

Although the interactional structure of the Client Negotiation and hence the sellers’ teamwork are structured differently in the technical and commercial parts of the Client Negotiation, at least partly due to the different types of goals the sales team had planned to achieve, the *purposes for which teamwork is used* seem constant throughout the meeting. The *sellers pursue goals together*, both pre-set goals (ideational: achievement and avoidance) and other goals (e.g. textual and interpersonal, see Section 5.2 above). Managing argumentation together requires good insight into what team members are doing, and often requires careful strategic planning beforehand; close interpersonal relations seem also to help team formation. Both factors have an effect on teamwork in extract 5 below. The sellers had planned not to discuss the size of their cooling radiator with the potential buyers as yet. It is a topic which is of interest to the buyers but not to the sellers, who rather try to introduce a

---

Extract 5: *Client Negotiation/Technical Part*

Agenda Item: *cooling radiator*

Topic: size of engine cooling radiator → temperature criteria

- |    |                |  |
|----|----------------|--|
| 1  | <b>BuyerL</b>  | <i>right what size is is the cooling radiator for the engine</i>                   |
| 2  | <b>SellerJ</b> | <b>mm I don't know...</b><br>(part of discussion has been omitted)                 |
| 3  | <b>BuyerS</b>  | <i>it's [here (POINTS TO A DOCUMENT)</i>   |
| 4  | <b>SellerP</b> | <b>yeah] we we have to discuss about the * also about</b>                          |
| 5  |                | <b>the er temperatures when the engine has to be able</b>                          |
| 6  |                | <b>run</b>   |
| 7  | <b>BuyerL</b>  | <i>yeah</i>  |
| 8  | <b>BuyerM</b>  | <i>mm-hm</i>   |
| 9  | <b>SellerP</b> | <b>an' what's the let's say the highest temperature [in</b>                        |
| 10 |                | <b>the</b>   |
| 11 | <b>BuyerM</b>  | <i>right]</i>  |
| 12 | <b>SellerP</b> | <b>summertime</b>  |
| 13 | <b>BuyerM</b>  | <i>yeah</i>  |
| 14 | <b>SellerP</b> | <b>at er which we should which the engine should give the full</b><br><b>power</b> |
-

topic which interests them. Sellers J and P have a long history of working together; together they pursue this goal of avoiding a buyer-interest topic.

In extract 5 above SellerJ denies knowledge about the size of their cooling equipment (line 2). He does this very quickly and softly and starts talking about a previous topic with another buyer. As buyers persist, SellerP takes the floor and counter-requests information, changing a buyer-interest topic into a seller-interest one (lines 4–14). A team member may also temporarily take over a turn if a co-team member has problems expressing himself; e.g. if he expresses himself long-windedly. Also, if the non-native team member searches for a correct word, a colleague may take over.

Teamwork is a useful tool in *covering the 'full front'* when pursuing an argument with every member of the sales team bringing forth a different angle of the argument. In their Internal Meeting, the sellers were concerned about the fact that if the buyers have 'done their homework', i.e. studied the scope of supply (the technical part of the sellers' offer) well, they may claim that the sellers should be paying for the maintenance software instead of the buyers. In extract 6, the sellers want to avoid questions about the software and consequently make an effort to hold the floor and bring up

#### Extract 6: *Client Negotiation/Technical Part*

### Agenda Item: *protection system*

## Topic: documentation systems

- 1 **BuyerL** an' would you put in this documentation system in the  
2 same PC  
3 **SellerA** that is a that's a [CD  
4 **SellerP** yes]  
5 **SellerA** an' it's basically it's just a CD-ROM  
6 **BuyerL** okay  
7 (some turns have been omitted)  
8 so you would include that an' an' the operator would  
9 have [access  
10 **SellerA** yeah] that [would  
11 **SellerP** yes  
12 **SellerA** be on the machine yeah  
13 **SellerP** yeah yeah  
14 (some turns have been omitted)  
15 **BuyerL** okay that's fine  
16 **SellerA** (an' already) we've seen that 'as an excellent piece of  
17 software with video (-) of how to do the repairs an'  
18 the maintenance [operations  
19 **SellerJ** mm  
20 **SellerA** an' quite an extensive  
21 **BuyerM** mm  
22 **SellerP** how to replace for example like [a valve  
23 **SellerA** cylinder] head  
24 **SellerP** a cylinder head or whatever it's it's er animated er

Extract 6 (*continued*)

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25	<i>BuyerL</i>	<i>well this would obviously help your operator on site as</i>
26		[well
27	<i>SellerP</i>	yes
28	<i>BuyerM</i>	mm yeah
29	<i>SellerJ</i>	<b>well he'll be already trained but I was thinking if your people get stuck in the middle fo the night one night they can put that in an' look it up an' see exactly what they should be doing</b>
30		(some turns have been omitted)
31		<b>an' we could stay in bed</b>
32		(LAUGHTER)
33	<i>BuyerM</i>	you would like that you hope
34	<i>SellerP</i>	<b>you can also play games with it</b>
35		(LAUGHTER)
36	<i>BuyerL</i>	I was wondering about (-)
37	<i>BuyerM</i>	yeah
38	<i>SellerP</i>	<b>but we don't supply any games</b>
39	<i>BuyerM</i>	yeah
40	<i>BuyerL</i>	okay

---

different points about how useful the buyers will find this feature of the engine protection system.

In extract 6 above when responding to the buyers' initiation on lines 1–2 and 8–9 about what the contract would include for engine protection, SellerA first plays down the monetary value of the software on line 5 but then starts to praise the content of the CD-ROM on lines 16–24, with his co-team member SellerP joining him. The buyers' response on line 25 is threatening as this is what the sellers were fearing. If the software is seen as useful to the sellers, the buyers will not be willing to pay for it. SellerJ quickly joins in on line 29 pointing out that the sellers will not always be there to do the maintenance; hence its usefulness to the buyers. The sellers finally start humouring the buyers by turning this into a joke on lines 34, 37 and 41 and the buyers have 'swallowed the bait'.

According to the information gained in participant interviews, team members normally let their project leader lead the discussion. This is the case in the present data. It is only when the other sellers are not satisfied with what their project leader is doing that they 'dethrone' him, which results in instances of *controlling team work*, exemplified in extract 7 below. In the Sellers' Internal Meeting, the sellers joke about how a good salesman should be ready to take off his shirt if need be in order to close a deal. However, closing a deal at this stage in the negotiation process is not stated as a real goal for them. SellerP represents the Finnish parent company's interests and does not want to close a deal unless it seems profitable. Some projects, even if technically possible, can become too expensive for the sellers, so until important technical details have been clarified, it is not in the parent company's interest to close

a deal which could then become very costly to run through. A network company can afford to act differently as they are the 'middlemen' and do not have to worry about manufacturing the product. In extract 7 below, the project leader, SellerJ, who represents the network company, is very eager to close the deal (lines 1–2, 9, 13, 29), almost at any cost, it seems to the other members of the team, and they join the

---

Extract 7: *Client Negotiation/Commercial Part*

Agenda Item: *price*

Topic: *swift deal*

- 1      SellerJ      *well I think we should (-) an update (-) we might do a deal \*\**
- 2      BuyerS      *er the order \* of this magnitude has to be signed by the managing director of <institutional name>*
- 3      SellerJ      *mm-hm*
- 4      BuyerS      *an' there're two other directors at <institutional name> who will need to be involved in the decision \* [so*
- 5                     *whatever*
- 6      SellerJ      *even for an intent]*
- 7      BuyerS      *whatever whatever we ne- whatever we negotiate here is subject to whatever head office say*
- 8      SellerP      *yeah*
- 9      SellerJ      *even an intent [/or)*
- 10     BuyerM      ***even] in well even in the intent 'cause an intent it effectively binds you to to***
- 11     SellerP      ***actually [yeah***
- 12     SellerA      ***an] intent an intent's [(-)***
- 13                    *(a turn has been omitted)*
- 14     BuyerM      ***I I agree] agreed so we wouldn't issue I I mean [(-) the law we wouldn't issue a letter of intent without***
- 15     SellerJ      *oh so that's it then ha ha]*
- 16     BuyerM      ***any without you know without the intention to place***
- 17     SellerA      ***[a contract***
- 18                    ***that that's why***
- 19     SellerP      *yeah*
- 20     SellerA      ***the question of how how frequently an order replaced***
- 21                    ***[(-)***
- 22     SellerP      *well*
- 23     SellerJ      *well how about an intent subject to this that an' the other*
- 24     SellerA      ***ha ha***
- 25     BuyerM      ***ha ha yeah well that (-) a letter of a letter of sort of***
- 26                    ***unintent doesn't it [you know ha ha***
- 27     SellerA      *yeah*
-

buying side in rejecting his proposals, thus controlling their project leader (lines 16–17, 24–27, 31–34).

The sellers often act as a team when this would not seem necessary from a purely informational point of view, even if they have no obvious goal in sight. Especially the two sellers who have a long history of working together, often satisfy the buyers' initiating moves together with redundant responses. Such instances of teamwork seem motivated by a strong sense of shared responsibility and may arise from the need to *manage interpersonal relations within the sales team*. On some occasions redundant information is provided by all three sellers together, the reason possibly being one of *persuasion*, e.g. when correcting a buyer's misunderstanding about the sellers' product (see extract 4 above).

The sellers' teamwork sometimes witnesses a way of *managing interpersonal relations across opposing seller-buyer teams* that is done through *joking*. The sellers sometimes humour the buyers together as a team, as in extract 8 below. Managing their relations via-à-vis the buyers can, no doubt, be considered an important overall goal of face-to-face negotiations (Kapoor et al., 1991 in Section 2).

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Extract 8: *Client Negotiation/Technical Part*

Agenda Item: *protection system*

Topic: control panel

1	<i>BuyerS</i>	<i>yeah ** so and the size of that panel do w- do we get that</i>
2		<i>in lay-outs later on</i>
3	<b>SellerP</b>	<b>[yes</b>
4	<b>SellerJ</b>	<b>yes]</b>
5	<i>BuyerS</i>	<i>okay **</i>
6	<b>SellerJ</b>	<b>only if you place the order</b>
7		<b>(LAUGHTER)</b>
8	<b>SellerA</b>	<b>[(—) (JOKING)</b>
9	<i>SellerP</i>	<i>but it's more or less going to be a (—)] cabinet</i>
10	<i>BuyerM</i>	<i>all right</i>
11	<i>SellerP</i>	<i>yeah</i>
12	<b>BuyerS</b>	<b>(—) to build this huge [ha place to accommodate it</b>
13		<b>all ha</b>
14	<b>SellerJ</b>	<b>(LAUGHS)</b>
15	<b>SellerA</b>	<b>now we've got the order we'll tell you the panel's</b>
16		<b>40 metres square</b>
17		<b>(LAUGHTER) **</b>

---

The deal is not yet closed and the buyers have made it clear to the sellers, as is considered typical buyer behaviour (Charles, 1994), that so far they are in no way committed to doing business with the sellers; they are still considering competitors' offers as well. Via the joke expressed of a hypothetical problem in connection with protection systems in extract 8, the sellers humour the buyers. Sellers J and P first matter-of-factly respond to the buyers' question, when SellerJ introduces the joke

(line 6). The buyers join in the fun with SellerA while SellerP continues with a serious tone (line 9). Besides humouring the buyers with the joke, the sellers could also express through laughter (Critchley, 2002) the anxiety that they feel about the real problem that exists with the installation – the size of the cooling equipment - already safely dealt with by the time the item of protection systems is being discussed.

While aiming to achieve their ideational goals (achievement and avoidance goals), the sellers pursue textual goals, *manage their interaction* with the buyers as a team. Teamwork is used in order to *establish a topic*, or just to *hold the floor* and thus prevent the buyers from taking up their topic; this often involves *hindering communication* on an unwanted topic, as in extract 9 below, where the sellers want to close the topic of payment terms in order to reformulate a part of the contract according to their preferences. Buyers are keen to go on discussing the matter but the sellers manage to direct the discussion towards topics which are safe to them.

---

Extract 9: *Client Negotiation/Commercial Part*

Agenda Item: *payment terms*

Topic: amount of payment on delivery

1	<i>BuyerS</i>	<i>[-] are we talking about the next</i>
2	<i>SellerP</i>	<i>and it's going to [-]</i>
3	<i>BuyerS</i>	<i>40% then</i>
4	<i>BuyerL</i>	<i>as long as it's not in one of [-]</i>
5	<i>SellerA</i>	<b><i>please let] let me have a look at th- this is this is</i></b>
6		<b><i>where [we</i></b>
7	<i>SellerJ</i>	<b><i>no] we'll revamp it an' come back to you next week</i></b>
8	<i>SellerA</i>	<i>(-)</i>
9	<i>SellerP</i>	<i>yeah</i>

---

The buyers want to go on discussing the remaining percentages of payments (extract 9 above; lines 1, 3) whereas the sellers want to close the topic. They find the terms altogether unacceptable, even for the first 60% of payments, and see no sense in continuing the discussion. Sellers A and J join forces in order to avoid communication about a buyer-interest topic (lines 5–7), and are supported by SellerP (line 9).

## 6. Summary and conclusions

One of the main findings of the study is the fact that the *goals* the sellers had set for themselves *influence the structure of the interaction*: the way they behave as negotiators, e.g. whether they adhere to what Charles (1994) describes as typical seller behaviour. It suggests that such 'typical' seller/buyer behaviour may need redefining.

The buyers and the sellers have a common goal regarding the Client Negotiation: the official agenda of the meeting that needs to be covered. In addition, they also have their hidden agendas that are not revealed openly to the opposing side; they only get glimpses of the goals of the other side as they see the opposing side in action

and try to infer the meanings of each other's utterances. The asymmetry of knowledge between the opposing sides is reduced during the Client negotiation, but it is also exploited for strategic purposes.

Due to their common goal, both sides want to carry out a successful and effective meeting, i.e. cover all the items of the agenda in order to get the 'hard' and 'soft' information required for their decision-making. Although what the sellers consider a successful meeting may differ from the buyers' point of view, they work together cooperatively as seller-buyer teams, i.e. team up across opposing sides, in managing the meeting and making sure that all the agenda items are covered. According to Öberg (1995), the quantity of this type of cooperation could work as a signal of how close the parties are to closing a deal. Unfortunately, the nature of the present material does not allow us to test the reliability of this interesting finding by Öberg.

The different types of goals the sellers attempt to realise in the Client Negotiation have been classified as follows in the present study: (1) *ideational goals*: the goals that they openly voice in their Internal Meeting: avoidance goals (e.g. 'let's not talk about the size of our radiator') and achievement goals (e.g. 'let's try to raise the price'); (2) *textual goals*: goals that are related to discourse management, and used, for example, to demonstrate power in deciding who has the right to speak and whose topics are discussed; (3) *interpersonal goals*: the sellers' use of language to cater for and manage interpersonal relations. The goals are not distinct but overlap; it seems that the ideational goals in particular influence the interactional structure of verbal interaction, while the textual goals are used to further the ideational goals and interpersonal goals. The interpersonal goals sometimes seem to serve the realisation of ideational goals.

*Teamwork* is the 'backbone' of the interaction in the Client Negotiation and the sellers do most everything as a team. Hence, working as a team in order to reach their goals is an important *tool* for the sellers. The professional role of the seller sets certain limitations on the sellers' interactional behaviour as shown by Charles (1994). Their interactional role, that of 'respondent' constrains their speech behaviour even further: as the buyers have called the meeting and designed its agenda, they also control the interaction by stating their position first and then awaiting the sellers' reaction. The sellers stay within the limits of this expected seller behaviour in the technical part of the Client Negotiation, when their ideational goals mean avoidance of certain topics. In the commercial part, however, they attempt actively to achieve specific aims and their behaviour turns atypical; they 'fight for the floor' more aggressively and interrupt the buyers in order to bring up seller-interest topics.

The sellers work mostly in pairs, or as a threesome if the issue at hand is a particularly important one. They show, generally speaking, interactional loyalty in *forming interactional teams*: the speakers who have started working together on a particular topic, mostly see it through together. On the other hand, the sellers take turns when responding to the buyers' moves: one seller may start a topic, another develops it, while a third seller summarises the result of the negotiation. The sellers with similar areas of expertise often work together; also, the sellers who have a long history of working together often pair up.

The sellers *pursue goals together*, ideational, textual and interpersonal, mainly amongst themselves and partly with the buyers. Teamwork helps in covering all the sides of an argument that the sellers want to pursue. It is also an efficient tool in persuasion as the mere repeating of a similar move by co-team members is sometimes enough to convince the opposing side. The sellers *manage interpersonal relations* within their team by producing redundant information in similar moves, even when the situation does not require persuasive behaviour vis-à-vis the opposing side. They also humour the buyers together as a team, possibly in order to create a positive atmosphere through joking. The participants *manage the interaction* together regarding who talks, of what and when. The sellers and the buyers form cooperative seller-buyer teams (teamwork across opposing teams) especially in order to control a member of the selling team. As teamwork allows taking turns in participating in the interaction, it helps to avoid negotiation fatigue and thus prevents the team members from making mistakes.

The study supports Francis (1986) and Öberg (1995) who found that teamwork can be used for goal-orientation, i.e. in order to pursue argumentation, for controlling participants and displaying solidarity. According to the results of the present study, the ideational goals the sellers set out to realise in particular structure the negotiating activity, and other goals – textual and interpersonal – serve them; hence also the use of teamwork in order to reach those goals.

In weighing the results of the study, it should be borne in mind that as the research material was audio-recorded, and not video-recorded, it offers a somewhat limited view of the character of spoken discourse as body language could not be analysed. However, it was felt that video equipment could have had a negative effect on the naturalness of the speakers' performance. The study is also a descriptive case study and any tendencies revealed should be checked in further research with larger corporuses.

As speed is of the essence in international business and closing a transaction as soon as possible is the main goal of many business negotiators, company-internal strategy meetings are becoming rarer, according to interviews with the participants. Kapoor et al. (1991, pp. 19–23) state that in order for a team to be successful, team members must have besides a common understanding of the overall mission, vision and values of their organisation, a clear understanding of the specific objectives of the planned negotiation. Additionally, team members should have trained and worked together in order to be able to rely on and anticipate each other's actions and responses (Kapoor et al., 1991, p. 54). The present results support these views of Kapoor et al.

In view of the present results, the clearer the goal-orientation, the better the speakers can orient to it and act strategically when negotiating with a client. Efficiently carried out face-to-face strategy meetings prior to negotiations with potential customers, would seem to improve negotiating tactics and the quality of teamwork as a strategic interactional tool in business negotiations. The sales force of companies may need to consider very carefully whether they can afford to replace their strategy meetings with communicating in writing via e-mail before meeting a potential customer as a team. Generally, Business English textbooks emphasise the main goal of meetings; the implications of the results of the present study for teaching of negotiation skills would mean that it would be useful to break down the team's goals for the

negotiation as clearly as possible, while making sure that they are clear to all team members prior to the negotiation event itself.

Although there is on the market a proliferation of management-oriented guide books on team organisation as an alternative to traditional company hierarchy, guide books on negotiating as a team are few in number. Kapoor et al. (1991) seem somewhat idealistic in their approach to negotiations in their overemphasis of good relations and networking rather than the goal of a closed deal. The sellers in the present data seem to try to 'strike a balance' between the two: on the one hand, they clearly are interested in tricks, out-maneuvres and getting the best of the other party – at least as a short-term goal – in order to get to the next stage in the buying process, because they believe in their product and are convinced that the solution they offer to the customer is a good one. On the other hand, they do emphasise partnership and mutual satisfaction, especially in pointing out how lenient they have been in their pricing policy.

Negotiators will no doubt benefit from negotiation guide books (cf. Lewthwaite, 2000; Sweeney, 1997; Unt, 1999) if they wish to practise specific speech acts related to, e.g. bargaining, accepting, confirming, which is what guide books mainly concentrate on; yet, there would seem to be a need for guide books with a teamwork orientation, especially as team organisations in companies flourish and negotiating as a team clearly offers advantages over negotiating alone. Although negotiating alone and negotiating as a team, no doubt, are similar activities in many ways, it also appears that the latter is at least partly constrained by its own norms and regularities. Teaching about the different possible functions of teamwork (e.g. how to avoid negotiation fatigue, how to cover all sides of an argument, how to avoid buyer-interest topics and introduce seller-interest ones instead) and its techniques (e.g. one seller introduces a topic, another develops it, while a third summarises the outcome) has not found itself into consultational guide books as yet. Also, an awareness of the usefulness of long-standing seller relations while forming negotiating teams that set out to meet potential customers would seem important.

#### Appendix A. Transcription conventions

Punctuation has not been used in the transcription of the corpus data. Capital letters have been used for proper nouns or names only (real or invented names of products, companies and people).

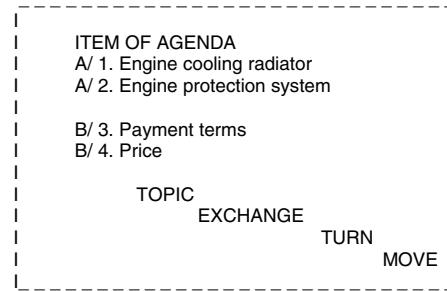
[ ]	overlapping speech
*	pause, 0–1 s
**	pause, 2 s
***	pause, 3 s or more
-	truncated speech
(highway)	possible transcription of unclear words
(-) (--) (---)	unintelligible word/two words/a stretch of speech comprising three or more words
(LAUGHTER)	transcriber's comments about the text

## Appendix B

### Breakdown of focus of analysis in Client Negotiation

MEETING:  
 Client Negotiation  
 (Sellers' Internal Meeting: background information)

PART OF CORE OF MEETING:  
 A/ Technical  
 B/ Commercial



## Appendix C

Structure of an exchange in the present study – modified from Edmondson's model (1981)

Pre-exchange (lines 1–2)  
 INITIATE (line 3) - (REJECT) -  
 Pre-responding exchange (4–5)  
 Correction exchange (6–8)  
 - SATISFY (9)  
 post-exchange (10–11)

Lines refer to example 1 below.

### Example 1

Lines

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | A: | Are you doing anything special tonight? |
| 2 | B: | No, I don't think so.                   |
| 3 | A: | Fancy going to the cinema?              |
| 4 | B: | What film do you have in mind?          |
| 5 | A: | The latest by Kaurismäki.               |

## Example 1 (continued)

- 
- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 6  | B: | Sorry?                                       |
| 7  | A: | Oh you know, <i>The Man Without A Past</i>   |
| 8  | B: | by Kaurismäki.                               |
| 9  | A: | Oh yeah. Sounds interesting.                 |
| 10 | B: | Meet you outside Andorra then, say around 7. |
| 11 | A: | Great. See you there.                        |
- 

\*A possible rejecting move to the initiating move on line 3 could be e.g. 'No, not really'.

## Appendix D

Example of linguistic analysis of the data – a multiple-head exchange analysed on the basis of Edmondson's model (1981) with modifications (S = seller; B = buyer)

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**EXCHANGE: INITIATE – SATISFY**

Grounder: INFORM (lines 1-4)

**REQUEST (lines 6-7)**

Expander: INFORM (lines 9-14)

Grounder: INFORM (lines 14-17)

**REQUEST (line 19)**

Disarmer: INFORM (line 20)

**REQUEST / THREATEN (lines 22-27)**

Pre-responding exchange: REQUEST (line 28)

INFORM (line 29)

Expander: INFORM (lines 30-31)

Pre-responding exchange: REQUEST (line 32)

INFORM (lines 33-37)

**ACCEPT (lines 39-41)**

---



---

Example 1

Lines

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 1  | BM | mm*well I mean that the point that's from our point of view         |
| 2  |    | sorry start again from our point of view there is no way that       |
| 3  |    | we could place an order on anything other than a fixed-price        |
| 4  |    | basis   |
| 5  | SJ | yeah [okay  |
| 6  | BM | we] have got to agree on a certain price (-) a certain delivery day |
| 7  |    | an' you've got to fix the price for that date                       |
| 8  | SP | yeah  |
| 9  | BM | we can't go on an' you know [you                                    |
| 10 | SJ | yeah]   |

## Example 1 (continued)

- 
- 11 BM you you've got to say for delivery [on  
 12 SJ yeah]  
 13 BM such an' such a day with the order by such and such a date \* er  
 14 our cost will be this \* now having said that we've still got a  
 difficulty  
 14 with that because uhm your costs when you take into  
 15 account uhm installation cost an' everything else still exceed our  
 16 budget for this particular er project  
 18 SJ mm  
 19 BM so we are looking to you to chop money off that cost in any case  
 20 \* uhm how much is obviously \* up to yourselves \*\*\*  
 21 BL [our  
 22 BS if your] if your best price remains \* 1795 (CLEAR THROAT)  
 23 plus half a per cent a month (- delivery)  
 24 BL mm  
 25 BS then we have to accept that an' look at it an' in the [competitor  
 26 SP mm-hm]  
 27 BS environment [we're in  
 28 SJ but what's] the absolute soonest you could place an order  
 29 BL er 29th of January \*  
 30 BM we can that's when we would be putting in the recommendation  
 31 [to <institutional name>]  
 32 SJ that would be] an intent or  
 33 BL well that would be a letter [of intent to be  
 34 BM a letter of intent]  
 35 BL to be followed up by an [(-)  
 36 BM (-)]  
 37 BL very soon  
 38 BL yeah  
 39 SP then I can base the pricing on that an' make a fixed price an'  
 40 BM (CLEAR THROAT)  
 41 SP try to do my best
- 

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# *Research Reports*

## **Laughing Matters: A Case Study of Humor in Multicultural Business Negotiations**

*Taina Vuorela*

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*This article reports the results of an ongoing study of multicultural business negotiations. Two meetings were under scrutiny: (1) the internal strategy meeting of a company's sales team (sellers' internal meeting or SIM); and (2) a negotiation between the same sellers and a potential customer (client negotiation or CN). The analysis revealed that there were interesting differences in the ways humor was used at the two meetings. The meetings lasted equally long, but SIM featured more humor than CN. Based on the analysis of these meetings, humor seems to have strategic potential for negotiations: it can be used to diffuse tension, mitigate a possible offense, introduce a difficult issue, and thus to pursue one's own goals. Among the most common subjects of humor were the national characteristics of the Finns (the parent-selling company is Finnish), the project itself, and the selling activity. The most common types of joking in the two meetings were ironic exaggerations and jokes expressing an incongruity. Irony, however, was used more cautiously in CN, where outsiders were present, than in SIM. Joking seems related to power, and power is a factor that influences who has the right to begin and end a joke, and also seems to determine whose joke is laughed at. It is also, not surprisingly, in the sellers' interest to humor the buyers in the competitive stages of the buying process (e.g., supplier search) in order to "stay in the game," which is reflected in the use of humor during the meeting.*

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**H**umor would seem to be an unimportant element in negotiating, particularly if the focus is on negotiating in a multicultural setting. This conclusion is based on a review of the consultative literature in the field, in which discussions of humor's role in negotiation is sparse. Likewise, humor does not feature in the negotiation skills textbooks that are studied by future negotiators in educational institutions. In fact, negotiators are often warned against engaging in humorous communication because of the potential risk of offending the other party in a context where the participants do not share the same cultural background. Humor would appear to be risky in business.

The present study seeks to systematically investigate humor in multicultural business negotiations. Some previous research has suggested that laughter and humor have an important role in business negotiations particularly regarding the management of interpersonal relations (e.g., Adelswärd and Öberg 1998). The main aim of the study is to investigate the case of humor further in order to discover if humor is used strategically in business negotiations, that is, does it serve the business goals of the negotiation? The working hypothesis underlying the study is that humor is such an inherent part of human interactions, negotiations included, that successful negotiators cannot afford to ignore it.

## **Defining Humor**

Humor comes in many forms — narrative jokes, nonsensical slapstick, irony, and sarcasm, to name but a few — and is generally reflected in the behavior of the participants with smiling and laughter. Humor can be defined as a state of mind, as the quality of causing amusement, and as the ability to understand and enjoy what is funny and makes people laugh (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 1998).

Most commonly, in humor we expect one thing, but another is said, and the surprise this involves makes us laugh (cf. Cicero in Critchley 2002). The three most common theories of humor involve humor as a feeling of superiority, humor as a release of nervous energy, and humor as incongruity (cf. Cicero above; for more details, see Critchley 2002).

One specific type of humor that is particularly relevant to this study is irony. Irony is the “use of words which are clearly opposite to one's meaning, usually either in order to be amusing or to show annoyance” (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 1998). Understatements and exaggerations can also be seen as ironic types of humor; such statements “under the truth” and representations of “things beyond the truth” express a desirable state of affairs in their literal meanings but in an amusing way.

## **Humor and Negotiation: Theoretical Considerations**

Humor can be a powerful tool in negotiating: it can function as “a bouquet, shield, cloak, incisive weapon” (Holmes 1998). Superiors can maintain

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their power with humor through “repressive humor;” subordinates can challenge that power through “contestive humor” (Holmes 1998). The power of humor is its flexibility as it can be used both cooperatively and competitively. This could be particularly relevant to the act of negotiating.

Through the study of humor in different types of meetings, previous research has shown that different workplaces use humor differently (Holmes and Marra 2002). The differences reflect, according to Holmes and Marra, the kinds of relationships that workers have with each other as well as the different values and orientations of these organizations. Besides enabling the expression of criticism (Kervinen 1997), humor has also been recognized as a “survival technique” (see also Cann, Holt, and Calhoun 1999; Martin and Lefcourt 1983) as it offers new viewpoints and solutions in changing situations.

Although humor and laughter appear to be linked to expressions of negative as well as positive experiences in a negotiating context (e.g., Adelswärd and Öberg 1998), it has been empirically shown that humor can have a positive effect on a person’s physical and psychological well-being. Laughter has been shown to decrease the levels of stress-related hormones in the blood (Berk et al. 1989). Humor has also been found to increase a person’s feeling of hope (Vilaythong et al. 2003; see also Abel 2002). A sense of hope, the ability to reframe difficult situations, and an efficient use of problem-solving strategies would all seem to be important in a business negotiation environment. If such abilities and feelings are brought about by the use of humor, studying the matter further in the context of negotiating is certainly a worthwhile undertaking.

### ***Humor and Power in Negotiating***

Although the freedom of expression is a basic human right, the idea of completely free speech — that anyone is free to say whatever she wants whenever she wants — is an idealization, especially if one wants to negotiate successfully. Discourse is a part of social practice and reproduces social structures (Fairclough 1989). Consequently, on the one hand, negotiation discourse reflects power relations, and, on the other hand, power struggles also occur in negotiating. Power dynamics in negotiating reflect the fact that powerful participants control and constrain what nonpowerful participants can say, as well as when and where they can say it.

Humor would seem to have links with power in negotiating contexts (e.g., Holmes 1998). Different joking relationships have been identified (Radcliffe-Brown 1949 in Knuutila 1992) as symmetrical or asymmetrical. For example, the relationship is asymmetrical when the parties involved cannot mock each other to a similar degree. These joking relationships are also linked to the types of joking and the content of the joke. This could be expected to be particularly relevant in business relationships, where the power held by opposing sides — sellers and buyers — fluctuates during the negotiation process (see e.g., Charles 1996).

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### ***The Relevance of Humor in Multicultural Negotiations***

Any effort to understand the use of humor in negotiation interactions must consider the concept of “face” (Goffman 1955), politeness theories (Brown and Levinson 1987), and the cooperative principle (Grice 1975, 1989). Verbal interaction has been shown to be governed by norms and principles; this is particularly true of professional discourse (e.g., Charles 1994; Raevaara, Ruusuvuori, and Haakana 2001). Humor can be seen to be a violation of Paul Grice’s cooperative principle: the maxims of quality, quantity, manner, and relevance. Speakers, if they follow the cooperative principle, aim to be truthful, informative, clear, and relevant, and these are often not the characteristics of humorous communication.

However, the cooperative principle has been criticized (e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1986) for describing interaction inadequately because the essential concepts mentioned in the maxims are left undefined, particularly that of relevance. Relevance would appear to be particularly important in business negotiations where the participants can be expected to be cautious about when to reveal information to the opposing side. The degree of cooperation described by Grice (1975) cannot be automatically expected of communicators. In fact, negotiators who do not give us all the information we wish they would are *not* violating the principles of communication. They are, quite simply, negotiating strategically. According to Attardo (2000: 820–822), Grice’s cooperative principle as well as Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson’s theory of relevance should be complemented with the concept of “relevant appropriateness.”

According to Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987: 232), the three most important factors that influence interactions between people and create ambiguity in these interactions are social distance between people (familiarity), power (vertical distance), and risk, that is, how threatening the interaction is. They argue that their notion of face — which comprises two desires or “face wants,” the need to be accepted and the need for respect — is universal, although there are cultural differences about what it means to be a person and the kinds of actions that can discredit a person’s worth in public situations (1987: 11–12). The need to protect face explains why so much of verbal interaction is modified with “redressive action,” through joking, for example. Humor may minimize threatening interactions; consequently it may be used as an exploitation of politeness strategies in attempting to redefine how threatening speech is (e.g., a complaint).

Humor and irony are often felt to be the final obstacles before achieving near native-speaker fluency in a foreign language (e.g., Burke 1995: 4–5, 10; Chiari 1992). Speakers want participants in a negotiation, for example, to “read between the lines” in order to recognize the function of a humorous utterance, and it is this ambiguity that enables “saving face.” However, with nonnative speakers, all participants might not recognize the

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irony. Recognition of irony is often culturally dependent, and what makes it hard to define is the fact that, like humor in general, understanding irony can be a subjective process.

Humor may, therefore, hold important strategic potential in the context of business negotiations. The essence of joking relationships is that they are felt to be nonthreatening (e.g., Goody 1978). According to John Maynard-Smith (in Brown and Levinson 1987), controlling internal aggression, while at the same time retaining the potential for aggression in external competitive relations, is a problem for social groups, for example, a sales team. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness, humor included, makes communication between potentially aggressive parties possible (see also Austin 1990).

## **Research Methods and Questions**

The present study seeks to investigate whether the members of a professional discourse community, such as business negotiators, use humor in order to manage business transactions, where financial considerations are of great importance. The issue is particularly interesting in the context of multicultural business negotiations where some of the participants are nonnative speakers of the language being used because humor tends to be experienced by language learners as very challenging. The subjects of the study originate in three different countries, namely, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and Finland. Only one of the participants, the Finnish sales manager, is a nonnative speaker of the English language.

The research material consists of two types of data: authentic audio-recorded meetings and participant interviews. Two meetings were recorded in the middle of a business transaction between a British buying company and a Finnish selling company. The company's internal meeting, *sellers' internal meeting* (SIM), had five participants. The meeting with a potential customer, *client negotiation* (CN), had seven participants, three of whom also took part in the SIM. All participants were men. Both meetings had been part of a long chain of meetings and negotiations concerning an industrial project, in which the sellers were supplying an engine to a power plant. The company's internal meeting (SIM) was a strategy meeting, where the sellers discussed the agenda of their future negotiation with potential buyers (CN). In CN, the same agenda is covered with the buyers. Both meetings were recorded within forty-eight hours, with SIM taking place before CN. The meetings were audio-recorded in the United Kingdom in 1996. They both lasted for approximately eight hours, and together totaled sixteen hours of tape-recorded data.

The essence of the two meetings is an effort to clarify the sellers' offer to the buyers. They go over the technical details of their offer, as well as the technical specifications of their product and the scope of supply. They also discuss the commercial conditions of a possible contract, for example,

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the price of the product and delivery times. The CN is the fifth meeting in the buying process between the buyers and the sellers, which, at the time of the audio-recording, had been under way for two years. These data are unique because in both SIM and the CN, the sellers discuss the same agenda items but in two different business contexts, which enables a comparison of their speech behavior in two separate “archetypal” business meetings. Although both meetings contain negotiating, that is, discussion designed to settle a question (cf. Wagner 1995), only CN is called a negotiation in the study.

In addition to the two meetings, the research corpus was supplemented with participant interviews with the sellers, which took place right after the meetings. Also, the Finnish participant was interviewed throughout the analytical phase of the research as a specialist informant. The author was present in the two meetings while they were recorded. This is helpful because the study relies on ethnographic background material in the analysis of the meetings and my presence should have facilitated the appropriate interpretation of the communication (cf. Davies 1999).

The participants are all native speakers of British or Irish English, except for one seller who is a Finnish businessman with several years' experience conducting business in English. The sellers' speech behavior is the main object of study because researchers had access to the SIM but not to an internal meeting of the buyers.

The nature of the data allows for an investigation of the phenomenon of “in-group” and “out-group” humor in the context of a business transaction, which involves several stages of the negotiation process. “In-group” refers to communication that takes place within a particular group, in this case a company group, the SIM. “Out-group” stands for communication with those members of the business community who are external to that company group, in this case, the potential buyers in the CN. Based on several listenings of the recorded material of the two meetings, the sellers' humor *seemed* to be different in SIM than in CN. As a result, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is humor in the sellers' internal meeting really different from that of the client negotiation? If in-group humor and out-group humor are different, how is the difference manifested?
2. Who jokes in multicultural business negotiations and when?

The methodology used is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Humor, humorous communications, joking, and jocular events are defined as anything said or done verbally in order to cause amusement, intentionally or unintentionally, for example, a narrative joke, a joking tone of voice, and “quips,” such as a funny word choice. Although the functions of laughter have been shown to be ambivalent in business meetings (e.g., Adelswärd and Öberg 1998), in the present study, laughter has been used

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as a signal of humorous communication, unless another interpretation of laughter has been found more appropriate because of the situational, interactional, or business context. Sometimes, the participants seem to be laughing at the awkwardness of the situation, and nobody is actually trying to intentionally be funny.

The sixteen hours of recorded data from the sellers' internal meeting and the client negotiation were analyzed for the participants' use of humor. The jocular events were identified and classified according to type and subject (content). Attention was also paid to who in the selling and buying teams began and ended joking and who continued another interlocutor's humorous communication. The results are given in Tables One-Six.

While identifying humorous communication, the reactions of all the participants have been taken into consideration; signals of accommodation or rejection of humor have been quantified whenever possible. Because the SIM and the CN were audio-recorded and not video-recorded, such visual indications of humor as smiling have not been recorded.

## **Role of Humor in Business Negotiations**

### ***Impact of Humor on Relationships***

The participants seem to use the segments of a negotiation that are normally reserved for "small talk" (topics such as weather, travel, etc.) that often occur at the beginning and end of the meeting, as well as during coffee and lunch breaks, for humor-driven management of interpersonal relationships with the opposing side. Although both the meetings were task-oriented, this task orientation is especially in the forefront during CN, where the diversity of interests is explicit. Consequently, the CN participants proceed somewhat faster than in SIM to the core of the meeting by going over the agenda without much delay. During the core of the meetings, when the participants go through the agenda, the intervals between joking incidents increase, particularly in CN but also in SIM, but the use of humor to enliven the communication by no means ends there.

Brown and Levinson point out that humor is a means of attending to interlocutors' "face" (Brown and Levinson 1987; see also Scollon and Scollon 1995), by involving others in the interaction and thus indicating acceptance of them or showing deference to them through indirectness. Previous research has also shown that participants in a business negotiation use humor to manage their relationship with the opposing side (e.g., Adelswärd and Öberg 1998). These observations seem to be corroborated by the current data. When the participants engage in humorous communication in the SIM and the CN, the humor seems to "put the negotiators at ease."

At the time of SIM and CN, the present business transaction was in the fourth stage of the buying process, namely, "supplier search" (Kotler 2002); the deal had not yet closed, and the sellers were still competing with other potential suppliers. Consequently, it is in the sellers' interest to

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keep the buyers happy in order to facilitate entry into the next stage of the buying process. In addition to engaging in humorous communication during the breaks, they seem to be humoring the buyers throughout the negotiation and seem to be forging relationships with the help of joking, probably for strategic reasons. For example, describing the operation of the selling company's service department, SellerJ emphasizes its efficiency through amusing imagery, that is, *joking word choice* (Extract One, lines 3 through 6), which is used often in both CN and SIM in order to amuse. (For an explanation of transcription conventions, see Appendix.)

*Extract One: Client Negotiation*

1 SellerJ So we in the U.K. we've got about just  
2 (SIPS COFFEE)  
3 round about seventy people working for  
the company **we've got**  
4 **forty-two service engineers running**  
about in little white vans [an'  
5 **things like that**  
6 BuyerM right ha

Joking is believed to have worked if the audience responds as they are expected to, by laughing. In Extract One, BuyerM finds the image of efficiency amusing (line 6), so the tactic seems to be working. Strengthening the feeling of togetherness in a buyer-seller negotiation through humor appears to be an important relational (i.e., interpersonal) goal for both the selling and buying sides. Particularly for the sellers, forging relationships in this way is important strategic work. If the buyers and sellers see the potential deal as a common goal, to be achieved together, they are more likely to try to solve all the obstacles in their way together in order to close a deal. Humor seems to play an important part in such interactional work.

Although all verbal interaction requires cooperation, this is particularly important in humor, which is often produced by the buyers and sellers together. For example, in a jocular event in the CN, the buyers start to describe the construction site of the project with a *joking word choice*: the site was designed according to Nordic standards, which to them seem "exotic." The sellers continue the quip with an *ironic exaggeration*, joking about the idiosyncrasies of the Nordic countries regarding the facilities considered necessary on an industrial site (the Swedes would like to have four toilets; the Finns would like a sauna).

Strengthening team spirit is an important overall goal of the SIM. A close-knit team could be expected to function better than a loose one, and the sellers seem to use humor in order to build up a team spirit before encountering the buyers. They use an *ironic tone of voice* when talking about their company's official selling tactics: the "win" strategy and the conferences that the company organizes in order to train its sales staff.

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They laugh about being “indoctrinated;” they see the “win” strategy that they are instructed to use as a tool for improving sales and yet they are ironic about it.

### ***Impact of Relationships on Humor***

As mentioned earlier, humorous communication is often cooperative, a “joint venture.” One person, for example, initiates a quip and another continues it. Ending or cutting off humorous speech, however, such as a joke or quip that someone else has initiated, could be seen as uncooperative interactional behavior. In a task-oriented encounter such as a business negotiation, ending a quip means controlling the other negotiators. But such powerful interactional behavior could be also be seen as cooperative, at least in some contexts, because it could contribute toward the attainment of the overall goal of the negotiation, which is getting through the agenda of the meeting on time. Such interactional power would most naturally be employed by powerful negotiators. Examining who participates in humorous communication during a negotiation from the point of view of interactional power (who seems to have the *right* to initiate and end joking in business meetings) may reveal interesting information about the norms governing the strategic use of humor.

In the CN, the buyers controlled the interaction at this stage in the buying process because the contract had not yet been signed. They had called the meeting, and BuyerS, the project leader and the most powerful negotiator on the buyers’ side, allotted turns to talk to the other participants throughout the duration of the meeting. He also *initiated* joking the most often. His joking seems power-related; he is powerful and could *afford* to joke. He also used his power by *ending* the humorous exchange if he felt that it was getting in the way of “serious” business. He was the chairman of the meeting. As chair, his humorous communication was powerful; it required the response that is most appropriate in the context of humor, which is laughter. BuyerS’s powerful role in the negotiation at this stage in the buying process was reflected in the fact that everyone present in the CN laughed at his jokes. (Some would argue that perhaps some of those present laughed because his jokes were actually funny. Based on my observations as a researcher who sat in on the negotiation, however, the quality of his quips did not earn the level of laughter they received, and the sellers seemed to be showing their respect for the head buyer in this way, even more so than with the other buyers.) It seems that strategic use of humor involves not only initiating humor but also reacting to it appropriately in appropriate circumstances.

The distribution of participation in instances of joking in the CN can be seen in Table One below, where BS stands for BuyerS and SJ for SellerJ, both of whom are project leaders. As can be seen in Table One, the project’s leaders (BS and SJ) took an active role in the initiation of humor.

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**Table One**  
**Distribution of Participation in Humorous Communication in**  
**Client Negotiation**

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	BS: Project Leader	BL	BM	BG*	SP	SJ: Project Leader	SA	Everyone	Total
Who initiates	30	7	10	7	13	28	21	4	121
Who laughs	12	2	30	8	2	28	3	36	121
Who continues joking	6	4	12	2	11	7	15	0	57
Who ends joking	5	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	7
Total participation	53	13	52	18	27	63	39	40	306

\* BG was absent during the commercial part of client negotiation.

Those who had only temporary roles in the negotiation, such as BL, who was interim project manager, or BG, who was a consultant, took more passive roles in humor initiation.

The frequencies of total participation in instances of joking in SIM indicate that the participants who knew each other best engaged most frequently in humorous interactions. Familiarity and shared knowledge seem to increase the amount of humor used in interaction. The older the professional relationship, the more humor can be expected in verbal interaction. This observation is in accordance with Mirjaliisa Charles (1994) on the relevance of old and new relationships on interaction in negotiations. Naturally, the personality features of the individual team members can also be expected to be relevant. However, in the present study such psychological considerations have not been under scrutiny. Table Two focuses on the SIM and gives the same details on participation in humor as did Table One for the CN.

As can be seen from Tables One and Two, there was more humor in SIM than in CN. The sellers seemed aware of the strategic potential of humor when negotiating with the potential client; they were eager to resort to it, but were still more careful about initiating humor than they were in SIM. Ending humorous communication is seldom resorted to in both meetings and only by powerful negotiators (SP, SJ, BS) or outsiders (BG). Even then, humor was never ended by interrupting a quip.

### ***Motivation for Humor***

It is evident that from the very beginning of both meetings, expressing humor was an important speech activity. Humorous communication, however, is time-consuming. Even if most of the joking was carried out

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**Table Two**  
**Distribution of Participation in Humorous Communication in**  
**Sellers' Internal Meeting**

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	SD	ST*	SSCR*	SP	SJ	SA	Everyone	Total
Who initiates	27	7	1	37	58	29	2	161
Who laughs	34	0	1	12	45	22	26	140
Who continues joking	7	1	1	19	15	14	1	58
Who ends joking	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total participation	68	8	3	68	119	65	29	360

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\* ST (SellerT) and SSCR (selling secretary) were only present during a part of the meeting. SD stands for SellerD, who is the manager of the sales team but did not attend CN.

through quick “quips,” if we assume that the quips lasted one minute each with accompanying laughter, pauses, etc., this would mean that out of eight hours (480 minutes), 25 percent of CN and 34 percent of SIM was spent in joking. This slows down the process of going through the agenda of the meetings, so why do the negotiators resort to humor? Humorous communication does produce laughter, which is a pleasant physical activity, but with a task-oriented business negotiation, this has limited explanatory power.

In SIM, the sellers did not actually plan how to use humor in CN in order to win the deal. Thus, their humor in both SIM and CN is, on the one hand, spontaneous. On the other hand, when the instances of humorous communication are analyzed in context, the humor does seem largely instrumental. The participants seemed to want to use humor whenever feasible in both meetings. Arguably the strategic use of humor is something we all learn early in life. Humor is one technique that children learn to manage their relationships with peers and authorities, “If I manage to make you laugh (or smile), I will win you over.” If this works at home and at school, it can also be expected to succeed in the workplace. Clearly, some of us are more adept at making jokes than others, but most of us engage in it to some degree.

So, although humorous communication can seem *spontaneous* when it is clearly not planned, participants appear to use it strategically whenever they can. They *pursue difficult goals* with the help of humor (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987) by masking a threatening goal as an unthreatening one. Humor has been shown by previous researchers to have a discourse function; negotiators have been found to *end difficult phases of negotiation with joking* (cf. Adelswärd and Öberg 1998). The results of the present study support this. Engaging in humorous communication right after a difficult agenda item is addressed can also work as a *release*

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of tension. It may also be a way of *managing interpersonal relations* between opposing negotiating parties by indicating that the parties can be cooperative even if they disagree. In these studies, the participants also seem to have *avoided difficult issues* with the help of humor. On occasion, one party would try to bring up a difficult topic but the other party would not discuss it meaningfully, preferring only to touch upon it via joking. This was particularly true in the SIM. This can again be considered strategic use of humor — direct accusations could be offensive and might jeopardize the atmosphere and the negotiation outcome.

Humor has been seen, paradoxically, as a way of controlling aggression (Brown and Levinson 1987), but also as a way of expressing it. This is particularly true of ironic or sarcastic humor. Humor not only reflects existing power relations but is also a tool for contesting them, especially in an asymmetrical professional context (Holmes 1998; Holmes and Marra 2002; see also Austin 1990). When questioned about the SIM, the specialist informant described the meeting as a “typical” company internal meeting within the company group; it contained both “business and fun.” Ironic humor seems to be used here, as well as in CN, to *express frustration or concern* about the difficulties that the negotiating parties faced. It was a “safe” way to express discontent because it permitted the speaker to express a problem while at the same time saving his face or that of the interlocutor because the joke was “off-the-record” and not an official part of the negotiation (see Brown and Levinson 1987). For example, SellerP employed an *ironic exaggeration* to describe the clear problem his team faced obtaining adequate information about the product so that they could communicate it to the buyers. He stated about the buyers that “they don’t know what they are buying, and we don’t know what we are selling so we are pretty close.”

Humor was commonly used to express frustration or concern in both SIM and CN. In Extract Two below from SIM, the sellers discussed whether they should leave the names of the software that is needed to maintain the engine in their offer. They were hesitant to emphasize the fact that the software is separate from the rest of the engine protection system because this might have meant that they would have to pay for the software instead of the buyers. SellerJ found that his argument was not succeeding, and he expressed frustration by blaming the Finnish participant, SellerP, through a joking word choice in line 9. Although SellerJ’s wording is aggressive, SellerP seems to take no offense and laughs with the others, probably because SellerJ’s tone of voice and body language were not aggressive.

*Extract Two: Sellers’ Internal Meeting*

- 1 SellerJ shall I write in brackets ⟨product name 1⟩ and
- 2 ⟨product name 2⟩
- 3 SellerA mm \* I'd I'd just leave it
- 4 SellerP no

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5 SellerA leave it  
6 SellerP leave it  
7 SellerA then it's as simple as that there's just this engine  
monitoring  
8 system  
9 SellerJ okay \* okay (LAUGHS) **bloody foreigners**  
10 (general  
laughter)

Humor has, indeed, been identified as a way of dealing with aggressive feelings (Cann, Holt, and Calhoun 1999; Holmes 1998) and the present study supports this finding, as we can see from extract two above. The fact that the humor in the two meetings is quite often *ethnic* is interesting and will be dealt with later in this article.

Besides being used instrumentally, humor may also serve as a tool for diagnosing the success of a single negotiation or even the whole buying process. Synchronizing one's speech with that of one's interlocutors is an interesting technique. It is a common feature of verbal interaction, for example when taboo words (swearing) are used and seem to work in connection with humor as well. Humor is contagious, so one instance of joking easily leads to more joking. Because laughter is a pleasant physical activity, the participants generally join in the fun unless they have a good reason not to, and the participants often adopt each other's jokes. This was particularly true in SIM, as shown in Extract Three below:

*Extract Three: Sellers' Internal Meeting*

1 SellerD **on smaller projects it's just not**  
2 **worth getting out of bed for**  
3 SellerP yeah \* it's the same thing for me in Finland if  
somebody  
4 wants me to \* uhm make a proposal of um  
(name of product)  
5 SellerD (LAUGHS) yeah  
6 SellerP **and they just want to ha the <part of**  
**product> \* then**  
a all of  
7 a sudden I have to go by bus to the  
customer  
8 SellerD (LAUGHS)

In this extract, SellerD talked about the fact that sometimes the margin of a deal is so small that the business transaction is hardly worth the effort (lines 1 and 2). SellerP continued in the same vein on lines 6 and 7. Engaging in such humorous communication may involve a risk. In CN, for example, the buyers were cautious about committing themselves to the deal as yet. Synchronizing their humor with that of the sellers might have given misleading signals in that regard. The participants, on the one hand, adopted each others quips if they were neutral and seemed "harmless."

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On the other hand, they were careful not to laugh at unilateral joking in connection with “buyer joking” and “seller joking” (see section below), where the opposing team seemed to be pursuing its own goals by mocking the other side’s viewpoints, and where they did not intend to concede. Such interactional cooperation across opposing teams could help them determine how likely they are to close a business deal (cf. Öberg 1995, Vuorela 2004). In these meetings, joking seemed to reflect the participants’ power relations. It could also be used as a tool to diagnose the success of the negotiating process because any shifts in these power relations that take place at different stages of the buying process could be expected to be reflected in the participants’ use of humor.

According to Critchley (2002; see also Holmes 1998; Holmes and Marra 2002), humor can bring forth a “change of reality” as it helps people see the world in a different light and thus enables them to *find solutions* to problems. The sellers seem to have attempted to use humor for this purpose in SIM, and some of the ideas they put forth there through humor are both creative and a bit ridiculous. For example, the noise requirements of the project might have created a challenge for the sellers so SellerA suggested that, instead of measuring the noise of their product at the actual future power plant site on the coast of Ireland, they should measure it on the English coast. In CN, however, the sellers were more cautious about initiating such joking.

### ***Unsuccessful Humor***

The most natural responses to successful humor are laughing or smiling. A speaker often feels that if listeners have not laughed at her joke, then something has gone wrong either with the joke or with her telling of it. In negotiating, however, the situation is more complicated. The humor’s effectiveness, as previously discussed, seems to be linked to power; the most powerful participant in CN, BuyerS, was the most successful in inviting others to laugh at his humorous communication. Interestingly, the new member of the buying team, BuyerM, who is less powerful than BuyerS, had more difficulty in his attempts at joint merry-making. He spent a considerable time laughing unilaterally. Like BuyerS, SellerJ, a project leader on the sellers’ side, is also a powerful negotiator. Throughout the meeting, he seemed ready to start joking if the situation allowed it and sometimes even when it did not. Apparently, his humorous communication was felt to be inappropriate or just not amusing enough because at times no one else laughed. Still, he is clearly the type of person who enjoys joking and laughing — the “clown” of the sales team.

Appropriateness is an issue in both unilateral “seller joking” and “buyer joking.” For example, there were differences in how both sides responded to unfavorable depictions of the sellers’ product. The sellers allowed themselves to joke about their product in SIM, but did not find such humor

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appropriate in CN. They did not laugh in connection with any such humor, which they might have seen as a threat to the possible future transaction. Laughter in such instances might be taken to implicate agreement with the implied criticism or acceptance of the other party's goals. In Extract Four below, the sellers and buyers disagree about payment terms and the buyers' use of humor is unilateral — the sellers do not respond to it.

*Extract Four: Client Negotiation*

- 1 SellerA an' there's a lot of people that  
2 [we don't even  
3 BuyerL (-)] (MUMBLES)  
4 SellerA do business with  
5 **BuyerL** well I can understand that if you're dealing  
in  
6 [in in in the third world  
7 SellerA [no no not]  
8 **Buyers** (LAUGHS)  
9 SellerA not \* in this] in this country's [(-)  
10 SellerJ it's Glasgow]  
11 SellerP in those countries [we get one-hundred precent  
up front  
12 **BuyerM** (LAUGHS) Glasgow's the third world yeah ha  
ha

In this extract, the buyers quite openly mocked the sellers' preferences regarding payment terms with seemingly irrelevant remarks and laughter to which the sellers did not respond. The sellers and buyers pursued goals with the help of such humor and hence used it strategically. Joking was not a joint activity there but was instead used by only one party with the opposing side as their audience. Humor failed here in that it did not become "multilateral." However, the participants managed to pursue their goals with the help of humor in such instances "unthreateningly." Whether sarcastic humor is felt to be unthreatening by the other side is another matter.

### **Humor in Multicultural Settings**

All cultures seem to use humor, but humor is often context-specific and consequently, certain types of humor, at least, are difficult to translate into another language. Humor is often based on inside knowledge of a culture, and its use also reinforces the sense of group identity. Having a common sense of humor can be experienced as sharing a "secret code" (Critchley 2002). Although recognizing humor is apparently universal in some instances (Critchley 2002), its manifestations can differ from culture to culture and among different social, generational, and professional groups, and can also vary from one historical period to another. "Getting the joke" requires a certain amount of shared background knowledge, and this helps

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explain why nonnative speakers of a language find that it is difficult to joke and understand humorous behavior in a foreign language (cf. Chiaro 1992). Through humor, we identify ourselves with a particular people who share a set of customs and characteristics, hence the relativistic nature of humor. Ethnic humor, which is oriented to differences in national culture, shows the prejudices that we hold and demonstrates how these prejudices continue to define at least partly our sense of who we are.

Culture reflects not just national identity but can also reflect various social groupings (Brett et al. 1998). According to Holmes and Marra (2002: 1685), different workplaces have their own cultures, which are continuously modified in social interaction. Becoming a member of the community of a particular workplace happens as one gains control of the discourse of that community, its humor included. Workplace communities also appear to have their own humor, which seems to override national culture and humor (Laitinen 2000). According to the specialist informant of the sales group of the present study, differences in national cultures do not normally cause any major difficulties in negotiating because sales engineers seem to form a subculture themselves, and this subculture is seen to override national cultures.

Humor is, on the one hand, a reactionary “comedy of recognition” that seeks to strengthen consensus and confirm the status quo. According to Simon Critchley (2002: 12, 41), this is particularly true of ethnic humor where often the powerful laugh at the powerless. On the other hand, critical humor, that is laughing at power, seeks to produce a change in a situation often through showing the “capture of the human being in the nets of nature” (see Holmes 1998).

### ***British Humor***

Verbal play is widespread in British culture and this type of humor nonplusses foreigners (Chiaro 1992). The British are renowned for their use of humor, and the British sense of humor has been translated into other languages, more or less successfully, from literary classics by Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare to the routines of such modern British comics as the Monty Python troupe and Mr. Bean, to name but a few. The British sense of humor is stereotypically seen to revolve around topics such as laughing at themselves and others, including foreigners, and sex (*Images of Britain* 2003), but the most common jokes in any language are the ones about happenings at the time, i.e. topical jokes (King, Ridout, and Swan 1981).

### ***Finnish Humor***

Finns have a reputation of being silent and serious-minded, except perhaps for the population in the eastern part of the country. According to a stereotypical view of Finnish humor, it is rather serious merry-making and is often linked to an ample use of alcohol (*Lonely Planet World Guide*

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**Table Three**  
**Distribution of Content of Humor in Client Negotiation**

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<b>Content of Humor</b>	<b>Total</b>
Selling/buying process	30
Participants in the meeting	22
Cultural differences	19
The project	16
Selling company group internal relations	12
General interest	10
The language/research project	9
The meeting	8
Selling company	7
Alcohol	6
The contract	5
The product	5
Business travel	5
Training of staff	2
Gender	2
Business in general	1
The sellers	1
Product maintenance	1
Power plant building	0
Payment terms	0
Weather	0
Total	161

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2003). The dry and rather “serious” sense of humor of the Finns has been successfully depicted in the films of the Finnish film director Aki Kaurismäki (e.g., *The Man without a Past*).

#### ***Ethnic Humor in Sellers’ Internal Meeting and Client Negotiation***

In both the SIM and the CN, the participants commonly joked about *cultural differences*, and such ethnic humor was the third most common subject of humor in both CN and SIM. (See Table Three above and Table Four below.) Zero frequency for some subjects at the bottom of the table shows that they did not feature at all in one of the meetings, although they featured in the other.

In CN, joking about the Finns was initiated by the Finn, SellerP, or by the British sellers (SellerA and SellerJ) who are employed by the Finnish

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**Table Four**  
**Distribution of Content of Humor in Sellers' Internal Meeting**

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Content of Humor	Total
The project	25
The product	22
Cultural differences	11
The language/research project	9
Selling/buying process	8
The contract	5
General interest	5
Payment terms	5
Selling company	5
Training of staff	5
Gender	4
Weather	4
Product maintenance	3
The sellers	3
Business in general	2
Power plant building	2
The meeting	2
Business travel	1
Participants in the meeting	0
Alcohol	0
Selling company group internal relations	0
 Total	 121

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selling company. Joking about your own national characteristics seems to be an acceptable way to produce ethnic humor. (There was also some joking about the Scottish and the Irish, again initiated by the negotiators who are either Scottish or Irish or who represent companies that operate in Scotland or Ireland.) Interestingly, however, there was no joking about the English, although three members of the buying team are English. This could be due, at least partly, to their professional role as buyers in the negotiation and to the stage of the buying process. These factors endow them with power, which can be expected to shift, however, when the contract is signed. Yet, instances of joking about the Finns outnumbered those about other nationalities. The exotic characteristics of the Finns almost seem to have been used for a marketing purpose, as if it were somehow particularly interesting to do business with people from Finland because of their cultural "idiosyncrasies." Extract Five below is an example.

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*Extract Five: Client Negotiation*

- 1 BuyerL is Finnish similar to any other] European language  
2 SellerP no it's very unsimilar . . .  
3 BuyerL did an invading tribe take it up north . . .  
4 SellerP **no act- actually what's the reason er we must have done so- something wrong\***  
5  
6 [(general laughter)  
7 SellerP because they sent us (you know) up there] . . .

In Extract Five, SellerP started to describe jokingly the cultural history of Finland (lines 4 to 7) as he responded to BuyerL's question about the history of the Finnish language. The sellers played along with the buyers while informing them about the cultural history and national characteristics of their potential future business partner. It seems likely that, in addition to situational factors, historical considerations often have a bearing on which nations are the target of humor that emphasizes cultural differences. The future operator of the power plant is an Irish company, and they will have the final word about whose engine will be bought for the plant. They were represented by one member of the buying team (BL). Interestingly, however, in CN, the Irish were joked about but not the English.

In SIM likewise, both Finns and non-Finns initiated jokes, and all the participants are employed by the Finnish selling company. Although experts warn against the use of ethnic humor in negotiations because it can imply the inferiority or superiority of one group versus another (see e.g. Critchley 2002), the Finnish negotiator did not seem insulted. On the contrary, he happily *initiated and continued* such joking. The phenomenon could be, as it is in CN, power-related. The Finn was the most powerful seller because he represents the Finnish parent company, and, because *he* joked about the Finns, he implicitly gave the others permission to cooperate and continue in the same vein. The fact that the British participants joked about the Finns openly when negotiating seems to show that being employed by the Finnish company, in a way, has created membership for them in that "national community." The participants in SIM are all, in this way, part of the same culture — they are well-acquainted with at least the professional culture of a Finnish company. "Finnishness" has thus become an "inside" characteristic linking the team.

Stereotypical British or Finnish humor could not be detected in the data. Rather, the content of humor seems to support the specialist informant's statement that sales engineers constitute a subculture, which helps sales interaction. The only negotiator who is not a native English speaker, the Finnish SellerP, did not appear to have difficulty in contributing and responding to humorous communication in SIM and CN. (See Tables One and Two.) He laughed slightly less than some participants, which could be

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related to his nationality, but it could also be a feature of powerful negotiator behavior or a reflection of his personality.

In sum, although largely similar issues were dealt with in both SIM and CN through humor, there were differences in which aspects of these issues were addressed and how. SIM and CN, although part of the same negotiation process, can be seen as representing “cross-cultural” communication, not only because of the different nationalities represented at the table but because the participants have a different amount of shared knowledge about the various factors influencing the possible future deal.

### ***In-Group and Out-Group Differences***

Although there were similarities in the use of humor in CN and SIM, for example, both meetings included very few *narrative jokes* or *word plays (puns)*. The results of the present study also showed that in-group and out-group joking in a negotiation process is different. There were some differences in the *type of humor* in the two meetings; generally more neutral humor was preferred in the CN, for example, *joking tone of voice or word choice*. This seems a safer way to use humor than irony and *ironic tone of voice or word choice* was seldom used in CN.

The distribution of types of humor in CN and SIM is shown in Tables Five and Six below.

As we can see from Tables Five and Six, *joking tone or word choice* and *ironic exaggerations* were common in both SIM and CN. *Ironical tone of voice or word choice*, however, was used more sparingly in the CN. This is understandable because it could be interpreted as offensive because it implies criticism. Irony (*ironic exaggeration*, *ironic tone of voice or word choice*, and *ironic understatement*) accounted for 34 percent of the quips uttered in the CN, while, as Table Six shows, in the SIM, irony was the most common technique used for causing amusement (*ironic exaggeration*,

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**Table Five**  
**Distribution of Type of Humor in Client Negotiation**

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Type of humor	Total
Joking tone of voice/word choice	36
Ironical exaggeration	33
Incongruity	33
Word play	9
Ironical tone of voice/word choice	7
Narrative joke	2
Ironical understatement	1
Total	121

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**Table Six**  
**Distribution of Type of Humor in Sellers' Internal Meeting**

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Type of Humor	Total
Ironic exaggeration	53
Joking tone of voice/word choice	38
Incongruity	36
Ironic tone of voice/word choice	20
Word play	7
Ironic understatement	5
Narrative joke	2
Total	161

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*ironic tone of voice or word choice, and ironic understatement*), accounting for almost 50 percent of the quips. It would seem that the type of humor used in negotiating with a client needs monitoring as it involves a risk.

The *content of humor* (see Tables Three and Four) in SIM joking was more personal and open. The *participants* themselves were a common subject as was the *selling/buying* process, the transactional activity itself. In fact, the sellers joked quite "mercilessly" about both, in ways that, to an outsider or someone from the buying team, could have appeared offensive. No one seemed offended here, however, and the "low-distance factor" (see Brown and Levinson 1987) could at least partly explain this: the sellers are part of the same team, work for the same company, and know each other quite well. In a professional context, it seems that the more familiar with each other the participants are, the more openly they can joke with each other.

In CN, the most common subjects of joking involve the *product* and the *project*, that is, the potential future business transaction, and the joking is, in general, more careful and neutral. For instance, if the buyers or sellers initiated a quip about the sellers' product, it was to deal jokingly with its minor features and not to ridicule the product itself — something that the sellers allowed themselves to do in their internal meeting. So although the same subjects featured in SIM as well, the quips there were significantly different: through them the sellers openly voiced their anxiety about the project and their product. It would seem that humor about such topics may serve different ends. In CN, the goal was cooperative (Holmes 1998) and interpersonal — the sellers humored the buyers (which is strategic behavior in the end as well). In SIM, the sellers "let off steam," diffusing tension and expressing areas of concern. In addition, they arguably used humor creatively, to find new ways of approaching problems. It also

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appears to have helped the sellers tolerate the complexity of difficult situations. This is occasionally done in CN as well but more carefully.

As mentioned above (see Table Four), the selling activity itself was the most common subject of humor in SIM. Here the sellers seem to have taken every opportunity to joke and laugh about any difficulties that they may have had in the deal. In Extract Six below, they were ironic about their pricing policy and the way that they intended to argue this to the buyers. (The sellers often used phony ironic coughs to mark off ironic statements in the SIM meeting as line 11 in Extract Six below indicates.)

*Extract Six: Sellers' Internal Meeting*

1	SellerD	because I know for (-) I'm sure he's going to be looking
2		for reductions he came out and told me so (some text has been omitted)
3	SellerD	so the price was over two million
4	SellerJ	yeah
5	SellerP	yeah
6	SellerD	it's now 1.7
7	SellerJ	1.8 say it's 1795 * the argument is our pricing policy's
8		been fair and due to negotiations with sub-suppliers etc. bulk
9		purchasing agreements and er resulting in reduced pricing and
10		the benefits of which we've passed on without being asked **
11		because we knew (COUGHS <b>IRONICALLY</b> ) that you know
12		the whole project might not have flown if you know the price (-)
13	SellerP	we always try our best
14	SellerJ	<b>so we've done some honest engineering ***</b>
15	SellerA	<b>that's another word I'm sure you don't know the meaning of</b>
16		(general laughter)

In SIM, the sellers joked about their pricing policy while they planned their strategy. In CN, the issue was dealt with almost exactly according to the plan developed by the sellers in SIM but without the use of ironic humor. In both CN and SIM, the participants clearly seemed to joke about what is important to them, that is, what is relevant (see Attardo 2003). Consequently, humor often reveals not only problems but also interests. On the one hand, it seems to have helped to distance the sellers from problematic situations and circumstances. On the other hand, humor enabled them to maintain a certain realism about their aims — for example, helping them to accept they may receive a lower price than they had originally hoped.

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Some subjects of humorous communication used in SIM are avoided altogether in CN. Within their company group, the sellers joke quite frequently about the problems related to the relationships of “network companies” to the parent company. The representatives of the British network company try to pressure the representative of the selling parent company into granting them a bigger commission, for instance, through humor. However, in CN, it is in the sellers’ interest to present a convincing, united image of their company to the potential buyers, so such “contestive” joking (Holmes 1998) was not a feature of CN (nor would those issues have been relevant to the topics discussed in that meeting).

Previous research has shown that the age of the business relationship and the stage of the buying process have a bearing on the way buyers and sellers behave when interacting with the opposing side (Charles 1994, Yli-Jokipii 1998). The SIM and the CN can be seen to represent different stages of the process of negotiation: SIM takes place before CN and is “in-group” communication, whereas CN represents “out-group” communication. This seems to be reflected in the communication and the use of humor within that communication.

## Conclusion

Although consultative business communication guide books warn negotiators against using humor in multicultural negotiating, the data from this study indicate that disregarding humor in such business meetings would leave a negotiator on the “outside” of the process. In light of these results, it seems clear that humor can be an important strategic tool for a business negotiator. It helps the negotiator to pursue goals effectively, sometimes through contestive humor or repressive humor (see Holmes 1998), as in asymmetrical humor relationships. In our example of seller-buyer negotiating, the sellers accepted the fact the buyers had the upper hand at a stage in the negotiation process where the contract was not yet signed and used humor to manage the situation.

Humor also facilitates the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. In these results, the buyers and sellers used cooperative humor to work together as a team. Furthermore, the sellers were able to humor the buyers, a necessity created by the power dynamics inherent in the buying and selling process. Humor has been described as a nonthreatening way of pursuing goals. Just how nonthreatening such manifestations of humor as ironic exaggerations actually are when they are carried out unilaterally should be investigated in further studies because laughter at another’s expense can feel quite threatening indeed.

It would be useful for business negotiators to be aware of the possibilities of using humor strategically in business negotiating, nonnative speakers included. Whether humor can actually be *learned* is an interesting question and one that this study cannot answer. However, learning about possible patterns in the use of humor in a particular culture —

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national and professional — would seem important for aspiring negotiators. The link between the use of humor and laughter with institutional power in a negotiating context, particularly in regard to the possible differences in buyers' and sellers' use of humor, would also seem to be worthy of future study. Also, the frequent use of ethnic humor was an unexpected finding that merits further closer examination. Finally, in this case study, a greater emphasis was placed on sellers than on buyers, because of the researchers' access to the sellers' internal-company meeting. Clearly, these results should be tested on a larger population of subjects.

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### Appendix: Transcription Conventions

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Punctuation has not been used in the transcription of the corpus data. Capital letters have been used for proper nouns or names only (real or invented names of products, companies, and people).

[ ]	overlapping speech
*	pause, one second or less
**	pause, two seconds
***	pause, three seconds or more
-	truncated speech
(highway)	possible transcription of unclear words
(-) (-) (-)	unintelligible word / two words / a stretch of speech comprising three or more words
(laughter)	transcriber's comments about the text

# Teaching Business Negotiating: Book Learning vs. Reality.

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## Introduction

We live in a culture of negotiations: we negotiate all the time at home, at work and in the marketplace, so negotiation can be seen as a central aspect of any decision-making process. Surprisingly, however, it is seldom taught as an obligatory skill to be learnt at universities and polytechnics, where students can complete a degree in business without ever taking a course in negotiations (see Wood et al. 1997). Although some business negotiators and consultants see the main function of business negotiations to be the maintenance of relationships (e.g. Kapoor et al. 1991), others are of the opinion that they are really always about money: buying and selling something for a convenient price (e.g. Sarasvuo et al. 1998). According to Weinberg (1985:189), price, however, is not a thing but rather a 'negotiated relationship'. Consequently, it could be argued that an investment of a relatively small amount of money in a good book on negotiation skills will pay for itself many times over. In a world where negotiating interculturally rather than uniculturally in a business context is becoming the norm rather than the exception, interesting research results have been obtained in the field of business negotiating, through studies carried out with different theoretical frameworks and types of data.

Researching negotiating in a business context links the studies with theories from such fields as economics, game and bargaining theory, anthropology, political science and social psychology (for an in-depth survey, see e.g. Lampi 1986; Firth 1995). The field of business negotiation research can be divided into different orientations: 1. studies of game theories and economics-based bargaining models represent an abstract orientation of negotiation research (see e. g. Rubin and Brown 1975); 2. studies involving simulated negotiation data can be seen to belong to experimental negotiation research; 3. research which involves the description of cases of negotiations and rely on field observations and post-negotiation interviews are ethnographically oriented (e.g. Maynard 1984, Stein 1989); while 4. negotiation research with a discourse orientation aims at uncovering the interactional bases of negotiating (Firth 1995; see e. g. Lampi 1986, Stalpers 1992, 1993, Fant 1989, Grindsted 1989, Ulijn and Gorter 1989, Firth 1991, Charles 1994, Öberg 1995). Prescriptive studies into business negotiating have a training perspective (see e.g. Fisher and Ury 1981).

How many of the results obtained in these studies actually ‘make it’ to the literature used as reference material in professional training programmes sponsored by polytechnics, universities and professional business associations is an open question, and one which deserves some attention. The present paper will discuss how well the reality of authentic business negotiations is actually reflected in the study materials used in teaching negotiating skills.

In her pioneering study on the language used by native speakers of English in meetings, Williams (1988) found that there was little correspondence between the functions taught in textbooks and the reality of authentic meetings, and no notable studies have since been carried out on the subject of meetings. The textbooks Williams had included in the study, taught, according to her, randomly chosen functions (e.g. ‘suggest’, ‘agree’, ‘disagree’) with over-explicit use of language, particularly regarding politeness forms. Speakers were more ‘blunt’ in her authentic material than what students would be allowed to be when studying with the help of these textbooks. Practising business negotiators would say, for example, ‘what a load of crap’ rather than ‘I disagree’; or they would say ‘works control’ to establish a topic rather than ‘Could we now consider works control’ (Williams 1988: 52). Over-explicitness could, according to Williams, be understandable if taught to nonnative speakers of English, but if such speakers, e.g. students, learn to expect such explicitness from native speakers in professional meetings, they could have difficulties in real-life situations. Supporting evidence for Williams’s observation has been found, as later research has shown that using over-polite forms can be seen as a sign of weakness in a business context (Yli-Jokipii 1998).

Only approximately half of the functions taught in the textbooks Williams (1988) compared were actually used in the three authentic meetings that she studied. Also, the expressions used to express these functions as they were taught in textbooks could hardly be found in her authentic material at all. Consequently, she argues that authentic language should be the starting point for teaching negotiation skills, regarding e.g. the commonality of different functions in meetings and negotiations and the language used to express these functions. She also recommends that language should be taught as ongoing discourse, part of a strategy (here understood as a particular interactional plan), rather than through lists of expressions.

The type of English used in the ever-more globalising world of business is an issue that is receiving attention presently. If a group of Europeans with varying language backgrounds meet in order to do business together, what kind of English do they use? What might a European *lingua franca* of Business English be like and should it have a bearing on the kind of English that is being taught to

business people in professional training on negotiating skills, and consequently on the kind of textbooks used in connection with such training?

According to a survey conducted by Louhiala-Salminen (1996:44), the interviewed business people felt English to be, on the one hand, a cultureless 'code system', and on the other, a version of English that can be specified by the 'contact area' (e.g. Japanese English), or the field or industry in question (e.g. engineering English). In her study on written business communication she concluded that, in her subjects' view, there has been a shift in the use of language in business towards a practice which emphasises efficiency rather than form. In a later study, Louhiala-Salminen et al. (in press) state that although business people express memberships of a different kind through BELF (Business English as *lingua franca*) communication, e.g. professional or company-specific identities, the choice of English as a medium of corporate communication in an international company, is according to their findings felt to be a neutral one. This choice seems to be important in building a 'common corporate culture' in the company mergers they studied (Louhiala-Salminen et al., in press). What kind of international English this BELF communication should be is an issue which deserves consideration, but answering the question is beyond the scope of the present study. Although the speakers of BELF experience it, at least in some ways, as cultureless, research findings have also shown that grammatical, phonetical and discoursal features of the speakers' native language and culture do transfer into BELF interaction (Louhiala-Salminen et al., in press; see also Lehtonen and Sajavaara 1985; Sajavaara 1999 on transfer of general linguistic strategies from native language).

Louhiala-Salminen in her consideration about writing skills, concludes (1996), in line with Williams's (1988) view about teaching oral skills in business meetings, that business communication should not be learnt separately from real business contexts. She recommends a case-based approach, instead of the traditional assignment-based one, where students learn phraseology in connection with separate, unlinked writing assignments.

Besides the business context in general, the business relationship has been found to be interdependent with the discourse of business negotiations (Charles 1996). According to Charles's results, the way that the participants act out their professional roles as buyers and sellers depends strongly on the age or length and stage of the business relationship prevailing between the parties. The older the relationship, i.e. the better acquainted the participants are, the more personalised their communication with each other, particularly concerning 'face'-related politeness behaviour (Brown & Levinson 1987), and the types of moves and topics they initiated.

The skills required in successfully carrying out meetings and negotiations are being taught for the business community, i.e. practising business people and students of business, with the help of literature which branches out in different orientations. Some of it is written by business consultants; this type of literature is aimed for business and decision-making purposes, and deals with e.g. negotiation tactics. Another approach to meetings and negotiations is taken in the literature used in ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and more specifically BE (Business English) adult language training. Such language-oriented teaching involves learning about the English language used in business meetings and negotiations, e.g. relevant vocabulary and phraseology (e.g. the textbooks studied by Williams 1988). At least partly due to the traditional division of disciplines into faculties, departments and subjects in educational establishments (e.g. humanities and natural sciences), a student of business studies wishing to learn negotiation skills, would normally take part in separate courses, which are built according to the following dichotomy: negotiation skills from a business perspective and negotiation skills from a BE perspective. This is certainly the case in some polytechnics in Finland.

As seen above, previous research (e.g. Williams 1988, Charles 1996, Louhiala-Salminen 1996; also Dudley-Evans and St John 1996) called for relevant business context and authentic use of language in textbooks teaching negotiation skills. In order to investigate the matter further, this study addresses the following questions: Do language and communication oriented textbooks presently in use in the field give relevant information and advice to business negotiators regarding the use of language in negotiating, and adequate insight into the strategic potential of different meeting and negotiation types? The main aim of the study is to look at how skills needed in negotiating are being taught in textbooks with a language-teaching orientation, the focus being on business context and use of language in general rather than the teaching of individual language functions. An effort will also be made to evaluate the successfulness of the approach taken in these textbooks in general: is the division into language orientation and business orientation in the field of teaching negotiation skills pedagogically grounded or is it simply dictated by administrative concerns or traditions?

More specifically, in order to discuss these issues, this study aims at answering the following *research questions*:

- How does the authentic data of the present study compare with the use of the English language in the models provided by textbooks used in language training of present and future sales negotiators, regarding type of English used (British, American, international English; regional or country-related accents) and style (formal or informal) or register (as defined by Halliday 1978)?

- Do the business contexts and situations of the textbooks through which business negotiators are trained reflect real-life business processes and situations (cf. models of negotiations: competitive, cooperative) and demonstrate real interactional behaviour (e.g. use of power) through relevant participant roles (e.g. buyer and seller)?

The next section looks at the data used in the study as well as its methodological orientation.

### **Design of the current research**

The data of the current paper consists of: 1. results from a study (see Vuorela 2000, 2004, 2005) based on authentic recordings of meetings and negotiations, 2. interviews with a specialist informant (one participant in the meetings and negotiations of the data), and 3. negotiation skills literature. This literature is of two types: BE language teaching literature on meetings and negotiations, and consultative business-oriented (BO) literature, which is widely used, besides in educational establishments, in companies. The language textbooks chosen for the study are of the upper intermediate / advanced level. They were selected on the basis that they are published by major publishing companies in the field of language teaching, and are commonly being used in Finnish university-level language training. Consequently, they are also easily available to potential users. A list of the textbooks studied is given in Appendix 1. Although the study mostly concentrates on investigating the language-oriented material, the approach to negotiating taken in some business-oriented literature on negotiation skills written by business consultants rather than language trainers, is compared with the approach of the English language textbooks. The BO literature was chosen on the basis of easy availability to users in Finland and due to the fact that the chosen books are used as reference material in BO-oriented training of negotiation strategies e.g. in Finnish polytechnics. The views expressed in the BO material used (see Appendix 1) have been synthesised in the study.

The basis of the present study is a comprehensive research project where a discourse analytic model (Edmondson 1981; Edmondson and House 1981) was used to analyse negotiating (Vuorela 2000). The authentic material, on which the study is based, is a set of meetings: a company-internal meeting by a sales team (Sellers' Internal Meeting - SIM) and another session with the same sales team meeting a potential client (Client Negotiation - CN) were recorded in 1996, equalling 16 hours of recorded material. The Sellers' Internal Meeting took place the day before the Client Negotiation. In SIM, the sellers went through the same agenda that was to be the agenda in CN, clarifying their offer, verifying that they all agreed on the details of their offer and developing negotiation tactics regarding commercial issues, for example, price. In the Client Negotiation, the sellers clarify their offer to the potential buyers, but here they also attempt to put their negotiation tactics into use regarding the commercial

conditions of the deal (see Vuorela 2000, 2004, 2005 for more details about the data).

In this paper, a meeting is defined as a coming together of two or more people for a specific business purpose. A negotiation in the context of the study refers to a meeting where opposing parties, e.g. sellers and buyers (as in CN), negotiate, i.e. talk to each other in order to settle a question or disagreement while trying to come to an agreement (see Longman 1998). Although even company-internal meetings often involve some negotiating (as does SIM) regarding e.g. differing interests of different companies within the same group of companies, SIM is not called a negotiation in the study. CN involves negotiating as a group, i.e. as a selling team and a buying team. The co-members of the selling team change from SIM to CN; although SIM is a strategy meeting of the sales team, all participants of SIM do not attend CN. The sellers are British and Finnish by nationality. The Finnish seller, who acted as specialist informant, took part in both meetings. He represents the Finnish parent company, whereas the other members of the sales team represent a 'network company' in Great Britain. The network company is part of the same company group with the Finnish parent company. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of the companies and people involved have been changed and are referred to as parent company and network company, sellerP and buyerJ, for example.

The research method is qualitative although a limited amount of quantifiable data has also been collected. The authentic material was also studied with an ethnographic orientation: the researcher was present in the meetings and background information about the business transaction in question was gained through theme-based interviews with the Finnish specialist informant. The meetings were transcribed in full prior to the analysis (see Appendix 2 for transcription conventions). The main findings of the studies on which the present paper is based are the following: 1. Teamwork is an important strategic tool for implementing the goals the selling team had set for itself in SIM regarding CN; 2. Humour is used in business negotiating for strategic reasons in connection with the present authentic data: in order to pursue goals and to manage interpersonal relationships in an asymmetrical situation where the buyers had the upper hand.

## Comparison of findings from authentic data with Business English textbooks

### Negotiation skills with a Business English orientation: models for use of English in business meetings

English as *lingua franca* may be a difficult concept from the point of view of language instruction, as it is heterogeneous by nature due to the various cultural and linguistic backgrounds of its speakers (see Knapp & Meierkord 2002). Nevertheless, the issue of international English, or the type of English used in business meetings and negotiations in general, would seem to deserve to be addressed in the textbooks of the field of language teaching. Although some of them (see Appendix 1) discuss the matter, many ignore it, and are written in either British or American English, with no open statement about why a particular model of language use was chosen for the material. Often the choice appears tied with the author's mother tongue or country of origin, and the audience the material is aimed at in a particular part of the world. If a British or American variant is preferred, the textbooks occasionally make some comparisons between American and British English, while referring to native speakers for a model of language use in video and other audio material. Westlake et al. (1994) are an interesting exception, and although listening to the video-recorded material requires some 'getting used to', as the speakers are different European nationals using English as a *lingua franca* for professional purposes, their approach would seem to reflect accurately the reality of a plurilingual (see Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001) Europe, where their target audience resides. One of the textbooks studied (O'Connor et al. 1992) openly voices 'international English' as its model of language use, and the authors comment on possible differing usage between native and non-native speakers of English throughout the volume.

McArthur (2003), while discussing the kinds of English that are emerging in the European Union and the world, states that the decisive factors influencing the current prominence of the English language and its two major strands, UK and US, are economics, politics, war and opportunity. He sees them as the two main strands of a World Standard English, which he prefers to call the 'English language complex'. It would encompass an almost limitless number of different versions of the language, including e.g. Euro-English and Nordic English. Euro-English would refer to the European Union, rather than Europe as a whole. Comparing the EU with India, he sees the danger of English becoming an elitist language as it is a 'link language' with the rest of the world (McArthur 2003:57). However, with this development, categories such as native speakers, second-language speakers and foreign-language speakers have fuzzy edges as, for example, many speakers belonging to the two latter categories can be more fluent in professional activities in Euro-English than native speakers. The fact

that many international, originally European (continental or Nordic) companies, have adopted English as their official corporate language may involve a risk of the native languages of European countries giving way to English in such fields as business and education. Due to presently on-going research projects into Euro-English, we can expect course guides and grammars and dictionaries on Euro-English in the future (see MacArthur 2003). In the meantime, before a systematic coding exists, US and UK English will no doubt predominate in BE-textbooks.

In the textbooks that were reviewed in the study, meetings are sometimes classified as *informal* or *formal*. On the basis of the present study, this may not be a very useful classification in the field of business. How familiar with each other the participants of a meeting are, undoubtedly has a bearing on the interaction between them (see e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987, Charles 1994), but whether this is on the axis of formality and informality, regarding word choice or sentence structure, for example, is an open question.

The company-internal meeting of the data (SIM) is quite informal: the sellers 'take the floor' freely and their regional accents (e.g. Scottish) are more clearly audible here than in their negotiation with the potential customers (in CN). The Client Negotiation is not formal, either. The meeting is more clearly structured, e.g. there is more procedural language (as defined by Charles 1994; see also Poncini 2002) being used regarding turn-taking, for example: the head buyer addresses the other participants with statements such as 'SellerJ, take us through the scope, would you'. A clear structure gives a more formal 'feel' to a meeting (see e.g. Ober 2001 on parliamentary procedure). Yet in CN, for example, the buyers and sellers address each other with first names, even those participants who had never met before CN, and regarding word choice, even some taboo words are used (e.g. swearing). This would seem unusual in such professional contexts as e.g. courts of law, which are often seen to be classical examples of formal use of language (see e.g. Smith et al. 1996). What appears important here is the fact that the business relationship is old and not necessarily the participants' familiarity with each other, so learners should be taught to think from the point of view of the company (while determining about degrees of familiarity) rather than their own, personal point of view (see Charles 1996).

Although most of the textbooks studied consider the native speaker to be the appropriate model of professional language use, many of them treat the effects of cultural differences on communication in business meetings and negotiations, and some also include non-verbal communication (see Appendix 3). Westlake et al. (1994) and Wallwork (1999) discuss cross-cultural differences regarding e.g. dress code, business protocol (e.g. gift giving), and body language, but the information is scattered around the textbooks in an unsystematic manner. It is

given between oral exercises as ‘light’ reading, which may improve readability of the textbook, but the information is difficult to trace without going through the whole volume page by page, as it is not listed in the table of contents. Also, possibly due to the rather incoherent manner in which it is presented, it appears rather superficial in information content (e.g. ‘Business relations are formal in most countries’, Wallwork 1999: 12) as it often lacks references. Sweeney (1997) has chosen to treat cross-cultural matters in connection with relationship building, entertaining and telephoning, and this is also evident from the table of contents of the textbook. The exercises provided could work as an introduction to the theme of cross-cultural considerations, but the theme would seem to require a more in-depth treatment with the help of supplementary material, for example. Some textbooks do not treat cross-cultural differences at all (e.g. Jones and Alexander, 2000, Student’s Book), which is surprising, considering the title of the textbook, e.g. ‘New International Business English’ (see Appendix 3 for more details). Again, the assumption is no doubt that the matter will be dealt with in connection with a separate course focusing on cross-cultural considerations, but is it wise to treat communication as if it happened in a vacuum (on ‘no wo/man’s land’)?

Particularly in the case of the literature written in American English, cross-cultural considerations are often treated from the point of view of two countries only, e.g. U.S.A. and Japan, where the former country is seen to represent the whole western hemisphere (see English and Lynn 1995).

Undoubtedly, students of business English, who will use English as non-native speakers and as a *lingua franca* in their professional lives, need instruction in relevant vocabulary, expressions, and idioms of the English language. However, rather than providing long lists of ‘useful expressions’, as many of the textbooks under scrutiny do, a more pragmatic view on communication (see e.g. Thomas 1995), with an emphasis on how meaning and understanding grows out of social encounters (see e.g. Atherton 2003), would give a sound basis for the more detailed study of different features of language use, as also concluded by Williams (1988) and Louhiala-Salminen (1996).

To sum up, an open statement about why a particular model of the ‘English language complex’ (McArthur 2003) has been chosen for a particular textbook would seem to be called for in BE instruction material. Also, besides using native speakers of English as a model in audio and video instruction material, it would seem appropriate to use professional non-native (plurilingual) speakers – reflecting the linguistic reality of Europe. Additionally, it would seem useful to consider cross-cultural matters from a multicultural rather than bicultural point of view, and particularly to treat the matters with a more in-depth approach. Finally, the axis formal-informal regarding the type of situation and/or language used does not appear to be a very relevant factor in business negotiating.

## **Negotiation skills with a Business English orientation: business meetings as part of the negotiation process**

The company internal meeting (SIM) and the client negotiation (CN) can be seen to represent different stages in the negotiation process; this explains at least partly why some differences in the communicative style of the two meetings were found (see Vuorela 2004, 2005). Use of humour, for example, is in some ways dissimilar in them: in SIM more open and personal, in CN more careful, particularly that of the sellers. However, none of the textbooks studied address humour as a tool in business negotiating. Yet, it seems to be used in the authentic meetings (SIM and CN) of the study for strategic purposes. It was used 1. to demonstrate problems in communication, and 2. to alleviate them (Vuorela, 2005); 3. it also seems an effective means for pursuing goals, particularly in the case of an asymmetrical seller-buyer relationship (when a contract has not yet been signed) (Vuorela 2004, 2005; see Extract 2 further below). In this section of the paper, extracts of the authentic meetings and examples of the BE and BO literature studied will be presented in order to clarify the points made.

The participants in the authentic meetings of the study seem to view negotiating as a game, a ‘give-and-take’ situation, and they openly voice metatalk about this. One of the BE-textbooks studied comments on this (and several of the BO literature), namely that of English and Lynn (1995: 92) and the authors provide exercises in the use of related idioms; see an example of the exercises in Example 1 below.

### **Example 1**

#### **Expressions and Idioms**

In the United States, negotiations are often seen as similar to a game. Often card game idioms are used to describe what people do when negotiating. Match the idioms with their definitions.

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. to stack the deck (of cards)      | a. to hide something valuable           |
| 2. to lay all the cards on the table | b. to say something frankly             |
| 3. to close a deal                   | c. to not show any reaction             |
| 4. to have a poker face              | d. to trick, to arrange things unfairly |
| 5. to have a card up one's sleeve    | e. to end a negotiation unfairly        |

This is an enlightening language exercise, which not only improves the students’ vocabulary and idioms, but also demonstrates how negotiators view their activity. Some other textbooks comment on this as well (e.g. Wallwork 1999) but leave it to a mere a quotation, where a link between a game and negotiating is made.

In the authentic material of the study, the negotiators use humour in putting forth proposals and counterproposals, and the opposing sides seem to tease each other

in this interactional game with exaggerated statements about their requirements and bluffing attempts that the other side claims to decipher. In SIM, the participating sellers treat almost all the items of the agenda with humour. It is only some straight-forward technical issues that are discussed without any joking.

The sellers are quite familiar with each other and the specialist informant describes SIM as a typical meeting for their sales team, combining both 'seriousness and fun'. There is plenty of laughter in connection with humour in SIM, and this laughter seems less controlled here than in Client Negotiation (CN): there is clearly more humour and laughter in SIM and often it is louder than in CN. However, the humour does not entail light-heartedness, as SIM is the forum where negotiation tactics are planned, sometimes on a general level, other times in great detail. Oddly, the BE-oriented instruction material largely ignores the strategic potential of company-internal meetings. In some of the textbooks analysed, company-internal meetings seem to focus on topics that have no relevance for the business processes of a company. The following Example 2 is from Jones et al. (2000) and it demonstrates the types of topics commonly used in the audio material of BE textbooks.

#### Example 2

*Work in pairs.* You'll hear the beginning of one of the meetings shown above. Imagine that you work for ACME Trading, the same company as the speakers: the heads of department are discussing a proposal to introduce **flexible working hours...**

Such topics are undoubtedly important for the internal operations of a company, but from the point of view of transactional business interaction, they seem unimportant. Rather, what is needed is for learners to see internal meetings as an essential component of seller-buyer negotiation processes.

When compared with SIM, the participants seem to react to the difference in the social situation in CN, as communication appears more power-related here. There is humour in CN as well, but joking is not as frequent there. Also, it often seems to be strategically used, in order to pursue goals (Vuorela 2004, 2005). In Extract 1, the buyers are putting pressure on the sellers about including a heater in their engine and do this through exaggerated imagery about fuel becoming solid due to coldness.

### Extract 1

- 1 BuyerG will you include (a) heater  
2 SellerP heater for the sludge tank eer  
3 BuyerG or are you  
4 SellerP because that  
5 BuyerS well if it's mostly water we can't have it freezing up  
6 SellerP yeah  
7 **BuyerG (it'll be) rigid from HFO certainly**  
8 **(GENERAL LAUGHTER BY BUYERS)**  
9 BuyerG (we do) need the heater

BuyerG resorts to ironic humour (exaggeration) when trying to reach his goal (line 7), to which only the buyers react through laughter. This seems to demonstrate the sellers' reluctance to committing themselves to supplying the heater as yet.

The difference in communicative style in SIM and CN is also evident due to the fact that the sellers' regional accents are toned down in the latter. Interruptions are plentiful in CN; they seem power-related and as such more 'serious' than in SIM. The potential buyers have not committed themselves to the deal as yet, and consequently, they have the upper hand. The head buyer has drawn up the agenda of the negotiation and he is clearly in control of the interaction. Power related to the participants' positions within the company hierarchy seems less important in SIM than in CN. For example, the director of the British network company chairs SIM and controls quite openly the participants' turns-at-talk, but he does this through humour, and sometimes controls the others as if he were talking to children (e.g. 'hey hey one at a time'). Yet, although SIM has a chair, who controls the interaction in this way, the participants interrupt each other quite freely, but still manage to keep the conversation flowing smoothly.

The influence of power on communication and its 'ebb and flow' in the negotiation process seems evident in SIM and CN. Yet it is ignored in many of the textbooks studied (see Appendix 3 for details). O'Connor et al. (1992:5) show an awareness of this dimension in their introduction, where they clearly describe the framework within which they operate; see Example 3, where they also comment on different approaches to negotiating and elaborate on their choices (O'Connor 1992:5).

### Example 3

The aim of this material is to:

- Develop awareness of the different stages of a negotiation
- Present the language appropriate to each stage
- Give practice in listening to and using this language in controlled situations...

These [approaches to negotiating] are determined to a large extent, by the situation; **for example, you will approach a one-off situation, such as buying or selling a house in a different way to negotiating a joint-venture agreement which will lead to a long-term relationship between two or more companies....**

The power relationships between the negotiating parties can be expected to be treated differently in short-term and long-term business deals. Unfortunately, it was impossible to obtain the audio-recorded material of this textbook from the publishers, and this may indicate that the textbook will not be available in the future either.

Verbal communication reproduces social structures, on the one hand; on the other, power can be renegotiated in discourse as well (Fairclough 1989). This seems particularly evident in CN when the participants talk about the price of the sellers' product. The buyers have the upper hand in the negotiation process in CN as there is still competition (the contract has not been signed). Yet, the sellers try to threaten the buyers – with the help of humour, for example (see Extract 2 further below).

Regarding the use of politeness features in interaction, there is an ample amount of interpersonal work through the means of involvement (which refers to verbal means of engaging other interactants and showing acceptance of them) and deference (which refers to the interactional means used to respect the other person's privacy) politeness (see Brown & Levinson 1987; Scollon and Scollon 1995) in the company-internal meeting. The participants show affiliation with each other through their speech by using similar word choices, idioms, and even sentence structures. There is such interpersonal work at play in the interaction in CNs, as well, for example, through humour, but the participants are more careful about aligning their speech with members of the opposing team. The quantity of such interactional work could demonstrate their degree of commitment to the deal (see Öberg 1995; Vuorela 2004).

In the textbooks studied, politeness issues are mostly treated out of social context; e.g. how to interrupt and deal with interruptions is an issue that is taken up merely as an exercise in phraseology. Charles (1996) addresses the issue of politeness in buyer-seller negotiations, where the concept of politeness is

different for the buyer and the seller at different stages in the negotiation process. In the authentic material (CN, in particular), interrupting seems to be linked with the professional roles of seller and buyer. In the present stage in the buying process, i.e. supplier search (Kotler 2002), the buyers have the upper hand, and this is demonstrated e.g. by the fact that the buyers interrupt the sellers quite openly, whereas the sellers do not allow themselves such interactional behaviour (at least not to the same extent). As with humour, the strategic potential of such interactional (im)politeness, could be addressed more in-depth in textbooks. For example, some forms of ‘impoliteness’ can be allowed for a buyer (e.g. interrupting) as they are wielding power through it, but may be ‘dangerous’ for a seller who has not managed to close a deal as yet. Also, considerations of what a speaker can achieve through different forms of politeness in negotiating contexts would seem important to business students aspiring to become successful negotiators.

When compared with the authentic material of the present data, some textbooks would seem to portray an idealistic view of the world of business. For example, they advise future negotiators not to try to guess what the other side thinks in a business negotiation. However, the participants in SIM spend a considerable amount of time trying to foresee what the other party wants and thinks, regarding such matters as price level, for example. Many textbooks also advise negotiators not to threaten, not to be sarcastic, not to criticise, nor blame the opposing party (e.g. Sweeney 1997). Yet, in the authentic CN, the buyers do all of these, and even the sellers to some (but lesser) degree. This would again seem to demonstrate the importance of professional roles (e.g. buyer and seller) and the power related to these roles at different stages in business negotiations – with the resulting different linguistic strategies used. Extract 2 illustrates how the sellers attempt to threaten the buyers to a pre-payment bond.

#### Extract 2

- 1 BuyerS I know ] you guys are a very reputable company but other people have  
2 sent us a pile of rubbish \* which we can't approve an' so [---)  
3 BuyerM (CLEAR THROAT)]  
4 BuyerS we want the payment \*\*  
5 BuyerL an' the [cost an' the costs of producing the drawings are not ten  
6 per cent of the contract value  
7 SellerA if you're gonna if you're gonna this this ten per cent] [that we (---)  
8 SellerJ **no but we normally ask for twenty per cent up front**] an' get it  
9 SellerA sign an order which is our standard terms of payment **an' there's a lot**  
10 **of people that [we don't even**  
11 BuyrL (MUMBLES)  
12 SellerA **do business with**  
13 BuyerL well I can understand that if you're dealing in [in in the third world  
14 SellerA [no no not]

- 15 BuyerS (LAUGHS)  
 16 SellerA no in this] [in this country's [(--)  
 17 SellerJ it's Glasgow]  
 18 BuyerS (LAUGHS)  
 19 SellerP in those countries we get a hundred per cent up front]  
 20 BuyerM Glasgow's the third world yeah ha ha

In Extract 2, SellerA first tentatively threatens the buyers by stating that they do not normally deal with buyers who do not agree to a pre-payment instalment (lines 8-12). The buyers, in turn, respond with sarcasm and sarcastic laughter (lines 18-20). The sellers cannot normally threaten the buyers at this stage in the buying process. Yet, they are doing it here, although tentatively; this would seem to demonstrate their strong position in the industry.

In the SIM and CN, negotiating as a team seems to be a strategically important tool (see Vuorela 2004). This is also supported by the views of the specialist informant. On the basis of such a limited corpus, it is difficult to make generalisations, but many companies today have been structured around a team-based organisation (see e.g. Robbins 2001), so the emphasis on team work does not seem likely to decrease, quite the contrary. Still, most textbooks ignore this altogether and treat negotiating as an activity that is mainly performed alone. Sweeney (1997:109) and O'Connor (1992:54) are exceptions as these textbooks feature some exercises where the opposing sides work in teams.

Language instruction textbooks have evolved from the past in that, for example, they attempt to give examples of authentic spoken language, rather than perfectly formed complicated sentences. Regarding detailed information about how interaction functions, different textbooks and approaches sometimes provide contradictory information. For example, whereas one consultant (BO material) advises negotiators not to fill silence (Gesteland 1999) as tolerating silence may be a strategic tool in negotiating, a BE textbook encourages negotiators to use words like 'um' in order to avoid silence (e.g. Westlake et al. 1994). A cultural difference could be at work here, as some of the textbooks studied were clearly published for a Finnish audience; the authors attempt to give useful advice to Finnish negotiators who are known for their tolerance of silence (cf. Lehtonen & Sajavaara 1985). Given the cultural differences detected in how silence is managed in different cultures, a more multicultural survey into the functions and uses of silence in interaction would seem helpful to future negotiators. The consultative literature often treats silence in great detail, particularly if the focus is on cross-cultural negotiating (e.g. Gesteland 1999).

On the basis of the study, it can be stated that BE-oriented textbooks have evolved from the late 1980s; some of them orient to negotiating as active management of interaction within the negotiation process. O'Connor et al.

(1992), for example, view business negotiations as part of a process and even comment on the effects different stages of the negotiation process have on use of language. The approach taken is case-based, but unfortunately the cases change in every second unit, and thus are treated with little business history and background information. However, many textbooks still teach English phraseology related to meetings through exercises with little or superficial background information, although there are exceptions. Rodgers (1998), for example, also practises negotiating skills through business cases and presents them with a considerable amount of background information. Here, the use of language, both written and oral communication, and negotiation tactics are practised as integrated skills. In textbooks that treat negotiating in meetings as one issue among many other business-related ones, the treatment is bound to be superficial due to lack of space.

Although there is improvement, some BE textbooks still provide rather fragmentary information on meetings and negotiations. For example, one of the textbooks studied (Wallwork 1999) contains the following types of exercises (listed and described in Example 4 below). The textbook is a general language and communication oriented business textbook. It has some interesting qualities in that all of its 14 units include 'business skills' and 'language work' related to its topics (besides meetings and negotiating, products, visiting, organisation, presentations, performance, trade, protocol, numbers, travel, planning, entertaining, communication). Business skills include subjects such as describing a company or a process; and language work, for example, pronunciation and grammar exercises. Also, the units that are of interest for the present study, namely, meetings and negotiation form only a small part of the book and, consequently, cannot treat the matters in depth. All the headings in the two units are listed while only some examples of the exercises are given in full.

#### Example 4

##### **MEETINGS** (Wallwork 1999: 16)

###### **DID YOU KNOW:** 10 anecdotal statements

E.g. It has been estimated that the cost of a meeting is twice the basic salary of each participant.

###### **LANGUAGE WORK:**

###### **Stress** (Wallwork 1999: 17)

E.g. Listen to how one particular word in each sentence is stressed more than the others. Then choose the most appropriate explanation from the three alternatives.

1. So you're saying we should do this?
  - a it's a good idea, not a bad idea
  - b not something else
  - c rather than someone else

**Hypothesizing:** Second and third conditional

- a Meetings in our company *might* be more efficient if they *had* clear agendas.
- b If we *had had* a realistic agenda, yesterday's meeting *would have been* better.
- c If she *spoke* more languages, she *could* probably get a better job.
- d I *would have spoken* more if I *had felt* more confident about what I was saying.
- e If they *didn't want to* do business with us then I don't think they *would have contacted* us.
- f We *wouldn't be* in this situation if we *had followed* the consultant's advice.

Exercise 1: Analyse the sentences above. Which ones refer to:

- the present and future?
- the present and the past?
- the past?

**Business etiquette:** What would you do in the following situations? What should you do? Do the quiz alone first, then discuss your answers with other members of the group. Be honest!

E.g. You can't understand what someone is saying because he's speaking with his hand in front of his mouth.

- a Ask him to move his hand.
- b Hope that sooner or later he'll move his hand.

**BUSINESS SKILLS**

**Being prepared.** 1. Read the text below on how to prepare for meetings with Chinese business people.

On the basis of the text, write three or four questions to ask your partner to find out how they prepare for meetings both with foreigners and co-nationals.

**Controlling a meeting.** There are certain general rules for effective meetings which also apply when participants may be of more than one nationality and the chosen language for the meeting is English. What tactics can you use to ensure that ...

- conflicts between participants are avoided?
- ...

**Getting down to business.** Which of the expressions below would be appropriate:

- a to get people's attention before starting a meeting?
- b to explain the structure and aims of the meetings?
- c at any time during the meeting?

- 1 Well, I think everyone is here now, so perhaps we'd better get started.
- 2 I think we're losing sight of the main point...

**Interrupting, recapping, confirming, moving on.** Look at some more expressions frequently used in meetings. Are there any that you haven't heard before? Can you add more?

**Interrupting:** If I could just interrupt you...  
I see your point but ...

**MEETINGS:** simulation exercise

**TABLE TALK:** discussion topics for groups

**NEGOTIATIONS** (Wallwork 1999: 114)

**DID YOU KNOW:** 10 quotations about negotiations

E.g. In a successful negotiation, everybody wins. Gerard Nierenberg, US President of the Negotiation Institute.

### LANGUAGE WORK

**Pronunciation and spelling.** The word *negotiate* contains the /ʃ/ sound.

Underline which of the following words also contain the /ʃ/ sound

action	conscious	pleasure	science
chance	discussion	scene	sugar
complexion	edge	scheme	vision

**Negotiating styles** (Wallwork 1999: 116)

Negotiation is full of jargon and idioms. Match the phrases in the first column with the definitions in the second column.

- |                          |                                 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 strike a hard bargain  | a alternative kept in reserve   |
| 2 fallback option        | b be a tough negotiator         |
| 3 haggle over a price    | c common ground                 |
| 4 hammer out the details | d deadlock                      |
| 5 happy medium           | e dispute and discuss terms     |
| 6 overlap of preferences | f elaborate the fine points     |
| 7 ploy                   | g satisfactory compromise       |
| 8 stalemate              | h something for use in exchange |
| 9 tradeable              | i tactic                        |
| 10 win-win situation     | j where everyone is satisfied   |

**Concessions.** First and second conditional.

Analyse the sentences by answering the questions below.

If you want to be tentative in order to test out your counterpart's willingness to give concessions, is it better to use *will* or *would*?...

### BUSINESS SKILLS

**Pre-negotiation socializing.** The passages describe business culture in different countries. As you read, think about which culture is most similar to your own and which is most similar to the American or British way of doing business.

**At the table.** Look at the phrases below which are extracts from a negotiation. Which were most likely to have been said by the buyer (write B), which by the seller (S), and which by either of them (E)?

- a whether you will still arrange for transport to our offices .....  
b to be quite frank we're very disappointed .....

c I'd better leave it there for the moment .....

**Presenting your case.** Your company wishes to form a joint venture with a multinational. Your group has been asked to select two from the eight multinationals listed below for possible consideration.

The negotiation game: Simulation about company perks for an employee.

**MEETINGS** Simulation: meeting to negotiate

**TABLE TALK:** topic for discussion (The great lunar lie)

The exercises presented above in Example 4 could be intellectually challenging if presented with relevant theoretical frameworks and business cases. Learning about meetings and negotiations through these exercises alone could, however, be a frustrating experience, as the approach is so fragmentary. Also, some of the content has no relation with negotiating, for example, the last topic of discussion deals with trips to the moon. From the point of view of negotiation skills, the textbook takes an interesting approach in that all the units end with a meeting simulation. However, like so many language-oriented textbooks, it is plagued by a certain non-seriousness and superficiality in its treatment of the chosen topics, and hence its use in tertiary education, for example, could be questionable.

### **Negotiation skills with a business-orientation: comparing different approaches**

When compared with the approach to teaching negotiating in business meetings that is taken in Business English-oriented (BE) textbooks, the literature written by business consultants differs in many aspects. Whereas the BE-oriented material is mainly aimed at non-native speakers of English, the target group for business-oriented (BO) material is native and non-native speakers of English. Also, in the latter material the skills required in negotiations are viewed from a corporate point of view – rather than from the point of view of an individual negotiator – and seen as strategically important for the whole company. Consequently, some of them even consider when it is wiser not to negotiate at all (e.g. Lewthwaite 2000). They tend to have a more holistic view of business negotiating and demonstrate this e.g. through different types of diagrams of the processes involved. Figure 1 below is adapted from Lewthwaite (2000) and illustrates the difference in objectives of the buyer and the seller and the role negotiating plays in establishing where these objectives possibly overlap.

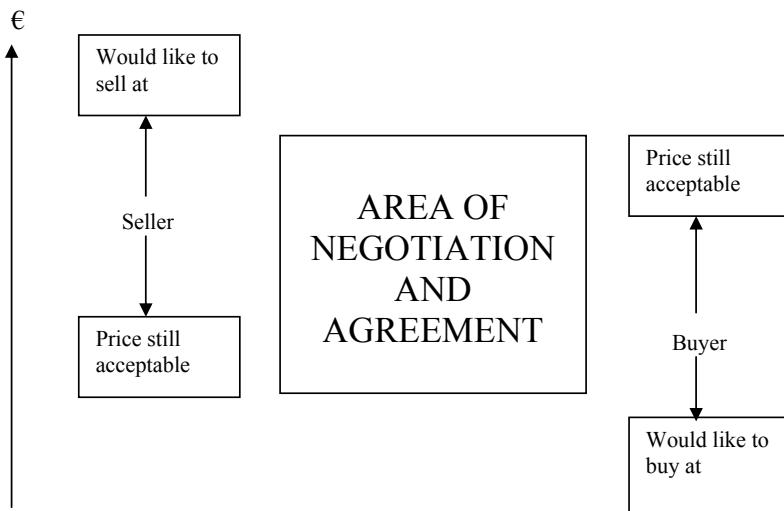


Figure 1 Overlapping objectives of opposing parties leading to satisfactory agreement

Such diagrams may be particularly useful for students of business, aspiring to become future negotiators, in discussing different abstract concepts involved in business negotiating.

Some of the literature studied clearly identify the different goals of buyers and sellers and the differing communication skills and strategies required in these professional roles regarding e.g. discoursal tactics, phrasing, interrupting (e.g. Gesteland 1999, Unt 1999, Lewthwaite, 2000). This is related to the dimension of power in communication, which is largely ignored in BE-textbooks. According to Gesteland (1999), for example, when visiting a country on business, a visitor is generally expected to observe local customs; however, for buyers, observing cultural differences is less important, whereas sellers should adapt to buyers in international business.

Many of the authors of business-oriented literature on negotiation skills ignore the issues related to a particular language (such as English) altogether. Others emphasise and discuss communication skills, but adopt a multicultural (see Didiot-Cook et al. 2000) approach. According to Unt (2001), a business transaction between two people is based on how they interact as the matters that they discuss, e.g. financial questions, are dealt with more easily if the speakers are on the 'same wavelength'. Unt (2001), similarly to many other consultants (e.g. Gesteland 1999), takes up topics such as using direct vs. indirect language, the concept of face, miscommunication, and low and high context cultures. Negotiating is looked at from the point of view of the buying process; e.g. disagreeing is seen as 'conflict management' to be treated through the means of

persuasion skills – ‘balancing the scales’, instead of listing related phraseology in a ‘vacuum’, which is still often the case in BE-textbooks. Some authors also address nonverbal business behaviour, e.g. distance and space, and also silence and conversational turntaking (e.g. Gesteland 1999). They talk about negotiating as a team (largely forgotten in BE-textbooks, see Appendix 3), topic management, and closing techniques (regarding closing a deal). All this is given as theoretical information only, and does not normally involve examples, practical exercises or assignments (nor literature references). The authors seem to assume the traditional division of labour in instruction; they increase awareness of these issues but rehearsing them is presumably deemed unnecessary for native speakers, whereas for non-native speakers it is expected to take place in a language classroom.

Let us look at the table of contents of one of the BO textbooks in order to see in which context they often discuss communication, namely that of *Negotiate to Succeed* by Lewthwaite (2000), in Example 5 below. For more details on what BO literature features as opposed to BE textbooks, see Appendix 3.

#### Example 5

#### CONTENTS

##### Successful negotiation

- Part ONE: Useful skills for the negotiator
- Chapter 1: First steps in negotiation
- Chapter 2: Approaches to negotiation
- Chapter 3: Creative bargaining
- Chapter 4: Dealing with pressure

#### **PART TWO: People issues**

- Chapter 5: Relational influence and power
- Chapter 6: Negotiating with integrity

#### **Using sarcasm**

Sarcasm can be funny in the right circumstances and very tempting to use in many more. It should be strenuously resisted in negotiating situations, however, as it is a form of disrespect. People who use sarcasm are perceived as being aggressive... Beware also the more subtle forms of sarcasm; constantly asking ‘Why?’ questions can appear to be sarcastic – ‘Why did you think that would be a good idea?’ or ‘Why would we want to pay that price?’ – and it also undermines and belittles people. If someone is questioned on every point and made to feel stupid to boot, then the chances of developing a positive, long-lived and mutually beneficial business relationship are, to say the least, slim....

- Chapter 7: Negotiating globally

- Chapter 8: Using an advocate

Chapter 9: Dealing with conflict

## **Chapter 10: Assertiveness skills**

### **Assertive communication**

The aim of assertive communication is to negotiate and agree a solution that is acceptable to all involved. This can be achieved by a simple three stage process:

- Hear and acknowledge the other person's point of view (eg, 'I understand that this deadline is important').
- State your own views, feelings and opinions (eg, 'However, I already have other important tasks to complete at the same time')
- Agree a way forward that is acceptable to both parties (eg, 'Why don't we contact the customers involved, explain the situation and find out which work must be done immediately?...)

### **PART THREE: Negotiation in practice**

Chapter 11: Tendering for contracts

Chapter 12: Staff relations

Chapter 13: Industrial tribunals

Chapter 14: Getting payment from your customers

Here communication is discussed in connection with people and assertive communication, where the treatment is rather brief and examples of communication are limited. Putting these observations into practise through communication exercises would appear beneficial to future negotiators. Communication is sometimes discussed from a cross-cultural point of view (Gesteland 1999) or from the point of view of different roles (buyer and seller, Unt 1999), but again, it is generally not related to individual situations.

Whereas some BE-oriented textbooks seem to have a somewhat idealistic view of the world of business (also some BO material), with an emphasis on win-win situations, the common denominator for the business-oriented literature on negotiation skills studied for the present paper seems to be 'never give away anything without receiving something in return'. This may, of course, end in a 'win-win' situation as well, but the approach taken is clearly more competitive in the latter material. The business-oriented textbooks present different types of negotiation processes, e.g. competitive, collaborative, and consensual (e.g. Fleming 1997) and discuss how to manage them by giving different negotiator profiles: such as negotiator as buyer or seller; factual negotiator, relational negotiator, intuitive negotiator, logical negotiator (e.g. Lewthwaite 2000), and how to combine them in different situations - without forgetting ethical issues related to them. Most of the business-oriented literature studied deals with cultural differences that influence the negotiation process more holistically than BE-textbooks (although some of both ignored the issue altogether, see Appendix 3), by discussing issues such as e.g. perception of time in monochronic and polychronic cultures, and view cultural differences also from the point of view

of purely business-related matters, e.g. cultural differences regarding corruption and bribery (e.g. Gesteland 1999).

In brief, the BE and business-oriented (BO) instruction material on negotiating skills differ the most in that 1. BO-material largely ignores the issue of the English language, (although does treat some general communication-related issues) which is the main concern in BE material; 2. some BE-material still (although some evolution has taken place since the 1980s) treats the business context as a ‘necessary evil’ (business cases tend to be superficial in nature) rather than their ‘raison d’être’, although there were exceptions, namely Rodgers (1998). Consequently, many important factors, which according to the results obtained from analysing authentic material (Vuorela 2004, Vuorela 2005) are important in business negotiating, such as humour, teamwork and power, do not receive as much attention as they seem to deserve.

## **Conclusions**

Williams (1988) states that authentic language should be the starting point for textbooks on meetings and negotiations; Louhiala-Salminen emphasises (1996) the use of real business contexts in teaching business communication. The present study supports these recommendations, and some of the textbooks studied have attempted such an approach when presenting language checklists (e.g. Sweeney 1997) and cases (Rodgers 1998). However, given the fragmentary nature of authentic spoken language use regarding sentence structures, for example, it may be somewhat problematic to put this authenticity into practice in textbooks, at least for all aspects of language. Generally speaking, language users may be intuitively aware of the nature of real language use and could be assumed to view examples provided in textbooks as a model, a generalisation, rather than an ideal form to be aimed at. Williams (1988), as also Louhiala-Salminen (1996), emphasises the importance of context: language should be presented in textbooks in ongoing discourse, where the participants communicate in order to attain a certain purpose, and possibly to realise a particular strategy. According to the present enquiry, such situational authenticity would appear to be important.

On the basis of this study, the division of teaching the skills needed in negotiating in business meetings and negotiations into a language-point of view and a business point of view (which are treated separately), may be problematic. This practice, which is often common in many educational institutions at the tertiary level in Finland, seems based on a traditional division of subjects taught in educational establishments in the field of business into humanities studies (including languages and communication) and business studies. This may be one of the prime causes to why many language and communication oriented textbooks have a fragmentary and unfocused nature in their teaching of

communication in business, with shallow and/or unexplicit theoretical foundation. Many textbooks attempt to do a little bit of everything and manage this by ‘scratching the surface’ of many topics (one being business negotiating) but providing little in-depth information about any such topics. This may be a frustrating path to teaching and learning both to instructors and students, who are increasingly eager to work in autonomous work groups, rather than traditional teacher-centred language classrooms. Integrated courses, where language instruction would take place simultaneously with learning about negotiation strategies in a business context, seem to be called for. Students could be expected to find this a more motivating way to learn about communicating successfully in business negotiations. It could involve textbooks with both business and language-oriented material. Ideally, it would also mean the cooperation of several instructors with different orientations (BE and BO), and would enable learning how to negotiate in different professional roles with the help of larger cases, with more background information about the business context and the (possibly) fictional companies involved. Such an approach presumes adopting a holistic view about negotiating as part of the business processes of a company; e.g. the power dimension of transactional interaction can be seen in almost every turn-at-talk in the authentic material (see Vuorela 2004, Vuorela 2005), and the students should be prepared for this through exercises in varying business contexts and different professional roles.

The present paper has briefly reviewed some of the results obtained from a series of studies on authentic business negotiations (Vuorela 2000, 2004, 2005). They have been related to research questions about teaching negotiating skills in the English language in tertiary education: the type of English taught, and the types of business contexts and models of negotiating used in negotiation instruction. The results have shown that although some ‘coming together’ of Business English (BE) and business-oriented (BO) material could be detected (e.g. Wallwork 1999), there is still a ‘great divide’ between them. BE-material could be more motivating for students of business if more business context (e.g. larger cases) was included; on the other hand, BO-material would seem more in touch with reality if language and communication skills were not treated as given, but rather as important elements in negotiating, which deserve to be developed. As one possible solution, a fusion of these two (BE and BO) approaches is suggested for teaching negotiating skills, with team teaching involving two instructors, whose differing fields of expertise in business and communication could lead to a holistic view of the skills required in business negotiating for the benefit of business students. Questions about core issues in negotiating in a business context, such as ‘When is it useful to negotiate and when is it not?’ are important; they would seem a natural focus in a BE-BO integrated negotiating course. At present the question is rarely raised in either type of material, particularly in language-oriented textbooks.

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## Appendix 1                   Textbooks under scrutiny

### Business English-oriented instruction material

English, L. M. & Lynn, S. 1995. *Business Across Cultures. Effective Communication Strategies*. New York: Longman.

Goodale, M. 1988. *The Language of Meetings*. Hove, UK: Thomson Learning.

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Wallwork, A. 1999. *Business Options*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Business-oriented instruction material

Fleming, P. 1997. *Negotiating the Better Deal*. London: International Thomson Business Press.

Gesteland, R. R. 1999. *Cross-cultural Business Behaviour. Marketing, Negotiating and Managing Across Cultures*. Handelshøjskolens Forlag: Copenhagen Business School Press.

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## Appendix 2

### Transcription conventions for transcribed material

Punctuation has not been used in the transcription of the corpus data. Capital letters have been used for proper nouns or names only (real or invented names of products, companies and people).

[ ]	overlapping speech
*	pause, one second or less
**	pause, two seconds
***	pause, three seconds or more
-	truncated speech
(highway)	possible transcription of unclear words
(-) (--) (---)	unintelligible word / two words / a stretch of speech comprising three or more words
(LAUGHTER)	transcriber's comments about the text

### Appendix 3

### Aspects Featured in BE and BO Material

Table 1a: Aspects featured in language-oriented textbooks (BE)

BE MATERIAL	ENGLISH&LYNN	GOODALE	JONES&ALEXANDER	O'CONNOR
MODEL OF ENGLISH	Not discussed.	Not discussed.	English used in business contexts.	Yes
CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	Yes	Yes: discussion tasks.	Not discussed.	Yes
MEETING TYPES IN NEGOTIATION PROCESS	Not discussed.	Not discussed.	Meeting vs. negotiation. No strategic aspect to meetings.	Some
MODELS OF NEGOTIATING	Yes	Discussed briefly.	Not discussed.	Yes
PARTICIPANT ROLES, TEAMS AND POWER DIMENSION	Not discussed.	Not discussed.	Yes: teamwork. Power not discussed.	Not discussed.

Table 1b: Aspects featured in language-oriented textbooks (BE)

BE MATERIAL	RODGERS	SWEENEY	WESTLAKE	WALLWORK
MODEL OF ENGLISH	Not discussed.	No open statement.	No open statement; audio material: international English.	No open statement.
CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	Yes	Yes: relationships and telephoning.	Yes, but unsystematically presented.	Yes, but unsystematically presented.
MEETING TYPES IN NEGOTIATION PROCESS	Some	Meetings as strategic tool in negotiation process.	Formal vs. informal re: vocabulary and procedure.	Not discussed.
MODELS OF NEGOTIATING	Yes	Different models discussed.	Not stated.	Not discussed.
PARTICIPANT ROLES, TEAMS AND POWER DIMENSION	Yes	Yes: teamwork; power not discussed.	Not stated.	1 exercise involves power dimension.

Table 2 Aspects featured in business-oriented literature (BO)

<b>BO MATERIAL</b>	FLEMING	GESTELAND	GRIFFIN	LEWTHWAITE	UNT
COMMUNICATION INCLUDED	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some
CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	No	Yes	Some	No	No
MEETING TYPES IN NEGOTIATION PROCESS	No	No	No	No	No
MODELS OF NEGOTIATING	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
PARTICIPANT ROLES, TEAMS AND POWER DIMENSION	Yes	No	Yes	Yes: power	Yes

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A-SARJA: VÄITÖSKIRJOJA - DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS. ISSN 1237-556X.

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- A:212. LASSE NIEMI: Essays on Audit Pricing. 2003. ISBN 951-791-751-1.
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- A:228. NINA KOISO-KANTTILA: Essays on Consumers and Digital Content. 2003. ISBN 951-791-816-X.
- A:229. PETER GABRIELSSON: Globalising Internationals: Product Strategies of ICT Companies. 2004. ISBN 951-791-825-9, ISBN 951-791-826-7 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:230. SATU NURMI: Essays on Plant Size, Employment Dynamics and Survival. 2004. ISBN 951-791-829-1, ISBN 951-791-830-5 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:231. MARJA-LIISA KURONEN: Vakuutusehtotekstin uudistamisprosessi, matkalla alamaisesta asiakkaaksi. 2004. ISBN 951-791-833-X, ISBN 951-791-834-8 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:232. MIKA KUISMA: Erialaistuminen vai samanlaistuminen? Vertaileva tutkimus paperiteollisuusyhdistöiden ympäristöjohtamisesta. 2004. ISBN 951-791-835-6, ISBN 951-791-836-4 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:233. ANTON HELANDER: Customer Care in System Business. 2004. ISBN 951-791-838-0.
- A:234. MATTI KOIVU: A Stochastic Optimization Approach to Financial Decision Making. 2004. ISBN 951-791-841-0, ISBN 951-791-842-9 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:235. RISTO VAITTINEN: Trade Policies and Integration – Evaluations with CGE -models. 2004. ISBN 951-791-843-7, ISBN 951-791-844-5 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:236. ANU VALTONEN: Rethinking Free Time: A Study on Boundaries, Disorders, and Symbolic Goods. 2004. ISBN 951-791-848-8, ISBN 951-791-849-6 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:237. PEKKA LAURI: Human Capital, Dynamic Inefficiency and Economic Growth. 2004. ISBN 951-791-854-2, ISBN 951-791-855-0 (Electronic dissertation).
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- A:244. JUKKA MÄKINEN: John Rawlsin oikeudenmukaisuuskäsitteen merkitys normatiiviselle taloustieteelle. 2004. ISBN 951-791-889-5, ISBN 951-791-890-9 (Electronic dissertation).
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- A:247. HILPPA SORJONEN: Taideorganisaation markkinaorientaatio. Markkinaorientaation edellytykset ja ilmeneminen esitystaideorganisaation ohjelmistosuunnittelussa. 2004. ISBN 951-791-898-4, ISBN 951-791-899-2 (Electronic dissertation).
- A:248. PEKKA KILLSTRÖM: Strategic Groups and Performance of the Firm - Towards a New Competitive Environment in the Finnish Telecommunications Industry. 2005. ISBN 951-791-904-2, ISBN 951-791-905-0 (Electronic dissertation).
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- A:250. TUURE TUUNANEN: Requirements Elicitation for Wide Audience End-Users. 2005. ISBN 951-791-911-5, ISBN 951-791-912-3 (Electronic dissertation).
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