# Exploiting the CIPRS Model to Analyse Request Performance Used by Second Language Speakers in an Intercultural Setting

## Faizah Idrus[a],*

[a]The International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia.
*Corresponding author.

## Abstract

It is important to understand request performance in interaction, especially when one is in a multicultural setting. This study has been dedicated to unravel the use of Cooperative Intercultural Pragmatics of Request Strategies Model (CIPRS) by second language learners in a global setting. It is found evident in this study that the second language learners do abide to a certain mental programme that has been instilled upon them and has played a very important role in their requesting performance.

**Key words:** Second language learners; Requests; Global setting; Power distance; National culture dimension; Cooperative principle; Identity; Dissonance

## INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication competence is considered imperative to second language speakers to survive in a foreign country. A few theories in intercultural communication have been made popular and among them are Spencer-Oatey & Kotthoff's (2009) who define intercultural communication as something that is concerned with communication across cultures and Gudykunst (2000) who considers that the study of intercultural communication involves observing the social behaviour of interlocutors from different cultures engaged in a social interaction. It is interesting to note here that in examining the communication behaviour of different cultures in an interaction, there must be some form of shared understanding where meaning is concerned. This shared understanding of meaning then would have resulted in a sense of belonging that each culture may experience in every encounter. Schutz (1972) defines this notion of shared understanding as a reciprocity of perspectives and Hofstede (2001) defines this as the mental programme each individual has when interacting with another individual from a different culture.

Another factor that is very much inclusive where intercultural communication is concerned would have to be the identity of the second language speakers themselves. The realm of identity and identity construction is vast and multidimensional. Idrus (2012) asserts that identity is not just identifying oneself against the characteristics one possesses; it crosses the boundaries of here and there, then and now, into the future. In other words, it is not static, time and space bound, but fluid, multi-dimensional and ever-evolving. West (1992) on the other hand describes identity as relating to desire the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliations, and the desire for security and safety. By and large, identity is one's own concept of who one is, on the one hand, and how other people see us, on the other. Each one has a persona, the self-image that they portray to others, and their commitment to and identification of their choices.

In this Nor Mokhtar's (2016) Cooperative Intercultural Pragmatics of Request Strategies (CIPRS) model has been adapted and adopted to analyse the respondents request performance. The original model has integrated three theories and they are the Hofstede's National Culture Dimensions, Grice's Cooperative Principle and Blum-Kulka's Requests Strategies. However, for the purpose of this study Blum-Kulka's Request Strategies has been replaced with a theory established by Sue and Sue (2008) which is known as the Collective Identity.

# 1. NATIONAL CULTURE DIMENSIONS

This model was created by Hofstede (2001) based on his study which is very much related to culture and values. These two elements are the key constructs of his National Culture Dimensions. Primarily, he started off with a four-dimensional model made up of *Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism and Masculinity and Femininity*. The fifth dimension, *Long Term and Short Term Orientation*, and the sixth dimension, *Indulgence Versus Restraints* have then been added as the final dimension. Nor Mokhtar (2016) acknowledged that it is these dimensions of culture – shared and individually held cultural mind-sets which drive behaviour – upon which many researchers seek to explain societal differences within a global environment. This paper will discuss the first dimension, Power Distance, which will look into the respondents requesting behaviour in a multicultural setting.

# 2. GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

The second theory integrated in this model is the Cooperative Principle. Grice founded *Cooperative Principles* and he defined them as principles which contribute what is required by the accepted purpose of the conversation. Grice's *Cooperative Principles* are classified into four types of maxims as which are listed below.

**Table 1**
**Grice's Maxims of Cooperative Principle**

| Maxim | Definition |
|---|---|
| 1. Maxim of quality | Make your contribution true; so do not convey what you believe false or unjustified |
| 2. Maxim of quantity | Be as informative as required. |
| 3. Maxim of relation | Be relevant |
| 4. Maxim of manner | Be perspicuous, so avoid obscurity and ambiguity and strive for brevity and order. |

Source: Grice, 1989, p.28.

Buchanan (2013) pointed out that according to the Gricean rules a speaker can verbalise his/her referential intentions in a social interaction and would allow a direct reference in a simple sentence. Breheny et al. (2013) reiterated that Grice is particularly concerned with inferences that enrich comprehension beyond "What is said" that is beyond the semantic interpretation of an utterance in context. An illustration that can best describe this notion is when A asked B if he enjoyed his dinner and B responded "I enjoyed the dessert". Grice's observation would be that B did not enjoy the meal except for the dessert. Hence, with that one simple statement of "I enjoyed the dessert", we can deduce that the speaker is trying to make some direct reference to the meal that he/she did not enjoy.

It is postulated that second language speakers do employ and recognise their own background knowledge, culture and identity when interacting in the global arena. Hence, this study attempts to capture the use of these elements in their interaction to come to a certain understanding as to how these are applied.

# 3. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY, CONFORMITY AND DISSONANCE

The concept of a collective identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) Sue and Sue (2008) refers to a set of individuals' sense of belonging to a group. In this study, the common traits among the respondents are a) second language speakers, b) post graduate students and c) belong to the same institution. Collective identity is the idea that through participating in social activities, individuals can gain a sense of belonging and in essence an "identity" that surpasses individuality. This idea permeates through an individual's intersection with groups of people from the same ethnicity, professing similar religion, practising analogous rituals or cultural traits, holding similar hobbies or interests or identifying themselves as belonging to a single nation. Eventhough these respondents do not belong to the same ethnicity they would come together as one through activities such as academic discussions, social activities and spiritual events. Schopflin (2001, p.1) asserts that "collective and individual identities exist and impact on one another reciprocally". Looking at some definitions and understanding of collective identity, Cerulo (1997) postulates that a collective's members are believed to internalise the qualities of "we-ness", and "being united" within the boundaries of shared attributes, where members are united with a unified singular social experience. However, the ideal notion of "we-ness", is more appropriate in a mono-cultural nation or a nation where one major ethnic identity is prevalent.

In multicultural societies, these identifications are prominent. The individual can derive great satisfaction but sometimes great risks from participating in group activities. Within a typical collective, agreement is often valued over debate, although more often than not, serious conflicts may erupt.

The shared ideology that groups possess forms the basis of their group identity (the concept of "we-ness"). The vast majority of actions, choices and ways of being are based on implicit understandings of what is right and proper in a particular context of time and place. It is when these understandings are questioned or placed under pressure that they become open to discussion and scrutiny.

Klandermans and Mayer (2006) claim that conformity is a behavioural consequence of collective identity. They go on to explain that it means that people behave in line

with the norms, rules and expectations of the group with which they identify. To illustrate, Professor Jonathan Touboul, a mathematical neuroscientist at the Collège de France in Paris developed an equation to explain the "hipster paradox." He claims there is always a delay between the time a trend begins to gain traction, and the time hipsters begin following it. This delay is caused because people are not aware of what others are deciding, in real-time. As a result, hipsters gradually realize that the trend, and the decision has been made while making the same decision separately. This leads them to gradually conforming towards what then becomes the mainstream.

In relation to cognitive dissonance, Festinger (1962) contends that it is a feeling of unpleasant arousal caused by noticing an inconsistency among one's cognitions. Dissonance is strongest when a discrepancy has been noticed between one's self-concept and one's behavior; for example, doing something that makes one ashamed. This can result in self-justification as the individual attempts to deal with the threat. Cognitive dissonance typically leads to a change in attitude, a change in behavior, a self-affirmation, or a rationalization of the behavior (Gawronski & Strack, 2004).

## 4. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

For the purpose of this study, two different sets of respondents were involved in two different methods of data collection (refer to table 2) . Both groups were selected from the pre-university students of two different universities. The data was collected via the Discourse Completion Test which require the participants to respond to the situation given and write down their own choice of requests respectively.

**Table 2**
**Distribution of Participants**

| Cohort | Data collection | | Nationality |
|---|---|---|---|
| | DCT | Interview and focus group discussion | |
| 2013/ 2014 | 59 | 1 participant interview – 1 set<br>2 participants interview – 1 set | Chinese<br><br>Both Malaysians |
| 2014/ 2015 | 47 | 2 participants interview – 1 set<br>3 participants interview – 2 sets<br>1 focus group discussion – 1 set of 5 participants | One Korean and one Indonesian<br>Two Chinese and one Chilean<br>Four Chinese, one Taiwanese and one Malaysian |
| Total | 106 | 15 | |

The analysis of this study is underpinned by an integrated model that includes Hofstede's National Cultural Model, Grice's Cooperative Principle and Sue and Sue's Collective Identity theory.
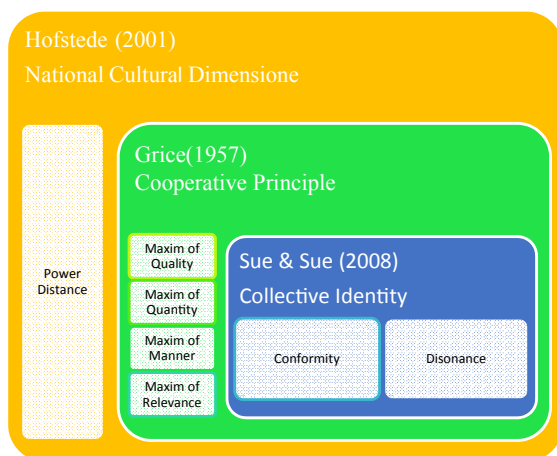


**Figure 1**
**Cooperative Intercultural Pragmatics of Request Strategies Model (CIPRS)**

The analysis and discussion of the data in this section will be based on power distance, a term introduced by Hofstede (2001) who believed that power exists in all cultures. Power distance is the first dimension identified by Hofstede in his longitudinal study that he conducted with the IBM company. Power plays a very important role in a society and thus the need to be able to address it properly heightens the demand for the speaker to understand and put a lot of effort into ensuring that the hearer's negative face is placated. This would measure how politeness is achieved and at the same time achieving the objective of the interaction for instance request. The sequence of this discussion is indicated in the figure above (Figure 1) and as can be seen the model is created in order that it depicts processes that are related to one another. It was discovered in the data that when observing power in an intercultural communication, the participants have observed that the model was implemented but not necessarily would comply to the order depicted by the model.

## DISCUSSION

How power distance is reflected in this study can be seen in the following extract which required the participant to react to a situation and to make a request to the roommate to clean up the living room or dining room that they share.

**Table 3**
**The Choice of Request Strategies Used by the Participants From the DCT**

| SITUATION (SIT) | EXCERPTS |
|---|---|
| SIT 1 Dining/living room | Hi dude! I will invite some friends tonight and have a dinner in our room. So I just wondering whether you can clear up what you have left yesterday. Hi Alan. The party you had last night was really excited and we all had a good time. However, the dining room is extreme messy today. My friends will come to our flat and have dinner. I hope I can make a good impression for them. Thus could you please clear up the messy dining room with me? |
| SIT 2 Strangers | I'm so sorry! I am quite late for my class and I'm afraid I need to go. Sorry I don't feel like talking today. |
| SIT 3 Lecture notes | Do you perhaps mind if I would like to borrow your notes for couple of days? I will give it back to you as soon as possible. June! Would you lend me your notes. I missed the class because I was sick. If you don't mind I want to study myself with your notes. |
| SIT 4 Lift home | Hey you are here too! Is it convenient for you to give me a lift home? You know me we live in the same street and it is very late now. Please! Are you guys leaving now can I join you if you enough room in the car? |
| SIT 5 Job advertisement | Hi, this is Sue! I am quite interested about the job that you have advertised in the newspaper in the newspaper. I just want to know more details about it. Would you like to tell me more details about that. I am interested on the job you have advertised recently, but I still need some more information. Could you please send me futher information on that? |
| SIT 6 No parking | Hello, madam! I am sure you might not notice that this area is 'no parking' area. So would you like to move you car to the parking area? Madam it is a 'no parking' area, please do not park here. |
| SIT 7 Paper extension | Dear Mrs. Nathaniel, I am really sorry to bother you. But I did not finish the task as your demand. Could you please give me an extension to finish it, because I really want to complete it in high quantity. Thank you. Dear Mrs. Nathaniel, may I postpone the time of submitting paper later cos I haven't finished it. The paper is really not very easy for me so I think I need more time to perfect it. |
| SIT 8 Paper presentation | Annie, could you present your work a week earlier? Because it will match my class as well and students will have a better understanding Annie, would you mind present your work a week earlier? I think your work would go well with my part this week. If you're not ready, it's ok. However, I'd like you to work along with me. |
| SIT 9 Tennis ball | Hey boys! Could you please give the ball back to me? Forgive my poor skills on tennis, I'll be thankful if you can give the ball back to me. I won't hit it over the fence again. |
| SIT 10 Drinks | Would you please get the drinks? I am tired. Andrew, can you bring some drinks for two of us, please? I had a long day and I feel tired. |
| SIT 11 Parking meter | Ma'am. Could you do me a favour. I have this important job interview now and have no time to get more cash for parking (show the £5 note at the same time) I will return it to you. Hi, I am sorry madam, I have no change to pay for parking, but I have a £5 note. Do you have change for this? Thank you. |
| SIT 12 No smoking | Grandfather, could you mind put out the cigarette! I'll be glad if you do that. Grandpa, it's a non-smoking coach. See the poster there and it's really a small room with many people. Cigarette is bad for you and other as well. |

## EXTRACT 1 (S1: SIT 1: 2)

*Hi Alan. The party you had last night was really excited and we all had a good time. However, the dining room is extreme messy today. My friends will come to our flat and have dinner. I hope I can make a good impression for them. Thus could you please clear up the messy dining room with me?*

The speaker starts off with a form of greeting (*Hi, Alan*) and then the speaker uses compliment to prepare his or her next utterance as to how he or she had enjoyed the party (*…had a good time*). This, in turn, functions as a buffer or cushion to soften the impact of the next utterance that highlights the condition of the room that the party had caused *(…the dining room is extreme messy…*). The speaker then appeals to the hearer by informing him/her that she/he is expecting guests and that she/he might want to impress them too. This is done in hope that the hearer will somehow be sympathetic and play on his/her guilt in a way to solve the matter at hand. The speaker concludes his/her utterances with a final request for the hearer to clean the room with a suggestion that they would do it together *(...with me?)*

The manner as to how this request works relies very much on how the two interlocutors regard each other's social position. Blum-Kulka (cf. Van Dijk, 2011) identifies this form of request as a negative politeness strategy that requires the speaker to provide the hearer with a form of freedom from imposition by using linguistic markers of deference and appealing to the hearer's rationality through logical explanation. The speaker in the end concludes the request by asking for cooperation when she/he suggests that they accomplish the task (of which she/he did not contribute to) together. Releasing the hearer from carrying out the task alone hence lightens the burden and thus increases his willingness to cooperate.

This example also demonstrates the negotiation of momentary power where the speakers acknowledge that he/she was not at fault where the mess is concerned (by right she/he has the power to instruct) but she/he avoids using directives (i.e: *clean the mess you make!*) in order to maintain solidarity. It is also interesting to note that even though this situation is labelled as low social distance and both interlocutors are equal where none dominates the other, the speaker chose to observe power. In other words, even though, the speaker has every right to choose a direct strategy, he/she chose not to so as to maintain solidarity.

Cognitive dissonance is applied when the speaker prompted "*My friends will come to our flat and have dinner. I hope I can make a good impression for them.*" McLeod, S.A. (2008) posits that when there is an inconsistency between attitudes and behaviours (dissonance) something must change to eliminate the dissonance. Hence in this context, the speakers tried to instil guilt to change the hearer's attitude.

## EXTRACT 2

Annie, would you mind present[ing] your
work a week earlier? I think your work
would go well with my part this week. If you're not ready, it's
ok. However, I'd like you to work along with me

In situation 8, the speaker is seen to exude her status as a lecturer/academic in order to ensure that the hearer would comply to her request. This can be seen in the utterance; "*Annie, would you mind present[ing] your work a week earlier?*" The power distance dimension is used on the hearer and the utterance would result in the hearer being unable to negate the lecturer's request. This could be seen enforced in the next utterance; "*However, I'd like you to work along with me…*", even though the speaker initiated the utterance with "*If you're not ready, it's ok.*" It can be seen that the speaker is trying to play on the hearer's conscience and made it even harder for the hearer to refuse. This is in line with what Griffin (2009) and Hofstede (2001) have postulated that power distance would consider comfort with hierarchical versus egalitarian situations where it is very much reliance on the differences between blue collar and white collar positions. As mentioned in the above extract, this was what is practiced by the speaker and the hearer would not have much else to do but to conform.

Grice's Maxim of Quality and Quantity can be seen employed in this extract as the speaker uttered this; "*I think your work would go well with my part this week.*" This statement can be seen both to be true and informative and it was used to further emphasised on the request so as the hearer would not hesitate to go along with the speaker's request.

The third theory to the model can also be seen employed in this extract. The speaker insinuated the common traits of understanding between them of which that they belong to the same interests with regards to the subject the speaker was teaching and the hearer happened to be her student. This was evident in her utterance of "*I think your work would go well with my part this week.*" (Wendt, 1994)

The following extract also considers similar collective identity where both interlocutors shared the same course and were able to relate to each other's concerns.

## EXTRACT 2 (S3: SIT 3: 1)

*Do you perhaps mind if I would like to borrow your notes for couple of days? I will give it back to you as soon as possible.* (Table 4.10: Situation 3, no.1)

The speaker acknowledges the ownership of the "value good", as termed by Blum (cf. Van Dijk, 2011), which happens to be, in this context, the lecture notes. The use of a downtoner (…*perhaps*...) to soften the request made to the hearer, indicates that the speaker recognise the

hearer as the one in position of momentary power and realises that the hearer may deny his/her request. In order to further minimize the imposition, the speaker then offers a pledge to the hearer by promising to return the lecture notes back to the hearer "…*as soon as possible*."

In situation 12, power distance is observed in the request made by the speaker for the hearer to stop smoking in the train.

## EXTRACT 57

*Grandpa, it's a non-smoking coach. See the poster there and it's really a small room with many people. Cigarette is bad for you and other as well* (Table 4.10: Situation 12, no.2)

It is noted that the speaker (a grandson/granddaughter) uses the non-conventional indirect strategy as he/she phrases the request by highlighting the condition of the context they are in. That is, passengers are not allowed to smoke in the train (*…it's a non-smoking coach*). He/she then goes on to emphasise that the train coach is really crowded (*…small room with many people*). He/she continues with a plea for the hearer (who happens to be his/her grandfather) to consider putting the cigarette out by appealing to the condition of the hearers health as well as others (*…Cigarette is bad for you and other as well*). The speaker employs this strategy by giving strong hints (where the hearer would have to infer what the request is about) rather than a direct request of asking the hearer to stop smoking. The power distance in this context is recognised as what Hofstede (2001) discovered in his study to be a defence mechanism that protects the speaker from the hearer's displeasure.

It is noted that a number of participants from this study agreed that they found the situation a bit unnerving because they considered it difficult to express such request, especially if it is made to their own grandfather. Excerpts taken from the focus group discussion will present this condition.

From the data observed it can be inferred that most of the respondents agree that when making a request to an elderly member of the family, especially a grandfather, the speaker must be very careful as to how he/she should have it phrased as he/she would not want whatever that has been uttered to be misconstrued as being unpleasant and disrespectful. This is a demonstration of the use of cultural intelligence elements where the need to abide to the rules of transportation enforced and also the need to ensure that the respect towards the elderly was also observed (Network, 2015)

All these examples have demonstrated how requests are achieved in sequentially appropriate moves and in finely tuned negotiation between requester and the requestee. The final aim for these to take place is to maintain solidarity and to minimise the imposition. The speaker needs to understand that in all negotiations the

hearer's negative face must be protected and thus, ensure that the speaker's request is granted. This confirms that where power is concerned, as reiterated by both Blum-Kulka and Hofstede, in any interactions the speaker needs to identify and determine the relative power of the speaker and the hearer both have in order to accomplish communication goals.

It can be deduced from the responses taken from the DCT completed by the participants, when making requests, be it with friends, acquaintances, strangers and people of a higher level of status they choose to perform it indirectly.

The choice of requests chosen by the participants is similar to what has been reiterated by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Ogiermann (2009) that since requests threaten the hearer's negative face by restricting her or his freedom of action, in order to assure the hearer's compliance with a request, it is necessary to formulate it in a socially and culturally appropriate way.

Hence, relating back to Hofstede's dimension of power distance, be it in whatever language an individual speaks, if one understands how to synchronise terms, expressions, facial expressions, shared notion of human behaviour and the understanding of survival, individuals would be able to interact and communicate well with the society in whatever situation.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have established that when performing requests the participants are seen to employ all the elements; background knowledge, culture and identity. The model acts as a mental programme that is evident in the data collected. The respondents were seen to employ this model in every situation that is presented to them especially in a multicultural setting.

There are other aspects of this study that are worth researching. For instance, the notion of cultural intelligence may also be a factor that can influence the success of the requests performed. This could then be added to the present knowledge in the field of intercultural communication.

## REFERENCES

Breheny, R., Ferguson, H. J., & Katsos, N. (2013). Investigating the timecourse of accessing conversational implicatures during incremental sentence interpretation. *Language and Cognitive Processes*, *28*(4), 443-467.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press.

Buchanan, G. M., & Seligman, M. (2013). *Explanatory style*. Routledge.

Cerulo, K. A. (1997). Identity construction: New issues, new directions. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 385-409.

Festinger, L. (1962). *A theory of cognitive dissonance* (Vol.2). Stanford University Press.

Gawronski, B., & Strack, F. (2004). On the propositional nature of cognitive consistency: Dissonance changes explicit, but not implicit attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 40*(4), 535-542.

Griffin, E. A. (2009). *First look at communication theory.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Gudykunst, W. B. (2000). *Asian American ethnicity and communication*. Sage Publications.

Hofstede, G. H., & Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage.

Idrus, F. (2012). Shared identity construction. The third space exploration. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 21*(2), 111-119.

Klandermans, B., & Mayer, N. (2006). *Through the magnifying glass: The world of extreme right activists.* na.

McLeod, S. (2008). *Cognitive dissonance.* Simply psychology.

Network, N. (2015). Conceptualization of cultural intelligence. *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence,* 1.

Nor Mokhtar. (2016). *The use of request strategies by second language learners in a global community (a multicultural setting of a higher education institution).* Retrieved from http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/12426/

Ogiermann, E. (2015). In/directness in polish children's requests at the dinner table. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *82*, 67-82.

Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. M. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual review of Sociology,* 283-305.

Schöpflin, G. (2001). The construction of identity. *Österreichischer Wissenschaftstag,* 1-10.

Schutz, A. (1972). *Common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action*. Netherlands: Springer.

Spencer-Oatey, & Kotthoff. (2009). *Handbook of intercultural communication*. Berlin. Mouton de Gruyter.

Van Dijk, T. A. (Ed.). (2011). *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction*. Sage.

Wendt, A. (1994). Collective identity formation and the international state. *American Political Science Review, 88*(02), 384-396.

West, C. (1992). A Matter of life and death. October, 61, 20-23. In C. McCarthy & W.Crichlow (Eds.), *Race, identity and representation in education*. New York: Routledge.