

What Happen to Cross-Cultural Dyadic E-negotiation?

Hsiangchu Lai, Wan-Jung Lin, Juin-Yi Lin
National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan

Abstract

Ever since the boom in global e-business, and the resulting intensification of competition, cross-cultural e-negotiation has increased in popularity. Understanding how national cultures affect negotiation behaviour is becoming more and more critical for businesses. This research will explore how a negotiator's cultural background impacts its behaviour. There are four major findings: firstly, that Eastern and Western businesses have unique negotiation behaviours; secondly, that the negotiation behaviours of both Eastern and Western negotiators are impacted by their counterparts' cultural background; thirdly, that when Easterners negotiate with Westerners, there were more instances of task behaviour and persuasive behaviour, but fewer instances of procedural behaviour and private communication; and finally, that when Westerner negotiates with Easterner, there are more instances of task behaviour but fewer of private communication. In spite of the similarities, however, Western negotiators have more consistent negotiation behaviour than do their Eastern equivalents, regardless of cultural differences between the dyadic negotiators. The following research uses the content analysis method, which is more thorough than the questionnaire in terms of qualitative criteria. The total set of thought units can be analyzed from further viewpoints in the future.

1. Introduction

Rapid development in e-business has made the Internet an important and inevitable channel for trade, and for business communication and negotiation. Increasingly, companies use the Internet to conduct processes such as B2B purchasing, contracting, and outsourcing, with improved efficiency. Such business processes frequently involve negotiation activities. Furthermore, world-wide Internet access has resulted in the booming of global e-business, which has, in turn, increased the amount of international, cross-cultural negotiations conducted online. Understanding how

culture affects communication and decision-making—the two most important aspects of negotiation—is becoming increasingly important, both in business and in every day communication.

Indeed, the issue of culture's impact on business has received a great deal of attention recently, both in terms of academic research and entrepreneurial practice. However, the majority of studies on the subject have focused on traditional face-to-face negotiations. Research suggests that information technology will have an increasingly important impact on negotiation behaviour, as the technological medium becomes richer and more advanced [31]. This suggests that assumptions about the impact of culture on negotiation may not hold in the case of e-negotiation. Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted on the impact of culture on e-negotiation; the little research that does exist is based primarily on experimental questionnaires and surveys [26]. Obviously, questionnaires alone are not enough to understand the complicated nature of culture, which is comprised of both surface culture and deep culture [22]. Surface culture is what one can easily observe, while deep culture is what allows us to understand what we see. Content analysis allows us a better understanding of culture, which is essential in order to perform a detailed analysis of negotiation behaviour.

Fortunately, e-negotiation systems can not only facilitate communication and decision making, but can also collect detailed data both on the negotiation process itself, and on its final outcome. This would be impossible to achieve in traditional face-to-face negotiation unless the entire negotiation process were to be recorded [40]. If a researcher can collect and analyze all behaviour data obtained during and after the negotiation process, we will obtain a better understanding of negotiation behaviour in regards to cultural issues, and will therefore be better equipped to create an accurate theory of negotiation.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of culture on dyadic e-negotiations. Do negotiators behave differently in a cross-cultural negotiation? Do both Eastern and Western negotiators adjust their behaviour in such circumstances? If so, how do

Eastern and Western negotiators differ from each other in terms of their behavioural adjustments? *Inspire* has been an operational e-negotiation system since 1996, and has amassed thousands of records of negotiation activities. In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of culture on negotiation behaviour, we have applied content analysis methodology to the records obtained through the *Inspire* system.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Framework

Culture can be understood as the unique character of a social group, and is embodied by the values and norms shared by the members of its group. Culture is also the economic, social, political, and religious institutions that direct and monitor current group members, and that socialize new members [29]. Cultural identities can stem from nationality, and may also stem from race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and geographic location. Systems of communication and decision-making reflect a culture's particular philosophy. This, in turn, affects social interaction within a culture, as well as communication as it occurs between differing cultures. Culture thus provides a basis for interpreting social situations and the behaviours of others [12].

Culture can be studied from many perspectives. Hofstede [20, 21] and Hall [17] proposed several cultural dimensions. Context, time-orientation, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance have all been cited as reasons for cultural differences. Hall [17, 18] defined context as the "information that surrounds an event," and proposed the concept of high versus low context as a way of understanding different cultural orientations. In his view, a high-context (HC) culture is one in which people are deeply involved with one another. As a result of these intimate relationships between people a structure of social hierarchy exists; individuals keep their feelings largely in check; and interpersonal communication is understated and decorous, but also highly expressive to a keen observer.

A low-context (LC) culture is one in which people are highly individualized, alienated, and fragmented, and in which people have relatively little involvement with one other [17]. As a consequence, social hierarchy, as well as society in general, imposes less on individuals' lives, and communication between people is more explicit and impersonal. Furthermore, low-context cultures tend to emphasize logic and rationality, relying on the assumption that there is

always an objective truth that can be reached through linear exploration. This is in contrast to high-context cultures, which tend to believe truth will manifest itself through non-linear discovery processes, without any aid from rational inquiry. [8, 10, 25].

Researchers have found that Eastern culture is high-context and collectivist, with a polychronic time orientation and high power distance. Oppositely, Western culture is low-context and individualist, and has a monochronic time orientation, and low power distance [13, 28]. We can see, then, that a difference in context impacts other cultural dimensions as well. Over the past decade, dozens of studies have examined how negotiation varies across cultures [6, 30]. Many researchers have explored the relations between the six dimensions and conflict management. In general, the individualist (e.g. American, British, Dutch) negotiator is more concerned with individual rights, whereas the collectivist (e.g. Colombian, Pakistani, Taiwanese) negotiator is more concerned with relationships [30]. In addition, previous research provides evidence that an individual's national culture affects which approach he or she will take during a negotiation [15, 27].

In an intra-cultural environment, the negotiation process is more predictable because negotiators do not have to contend with linguistic or cultural differences. In fact, negotiation behaviour is tactical [32]. Negotiation behaviour is consistent with culture, and each culture has its own distinctive negotiation style [19, 34, 35]. Individuals who have the same cultural background tend to think, feel, and react similarly, in accordance with their shared cultural heritage [35].

Moreover, Buttery and Leung [6] have provided evidence of the following associations: firstly, that members of high-power-distance cultures (e.g. the Philippines, Venezuela, India, France, Belgium) have fewer conflicts with their superiors, and are more likely to seek a superior's intervention in settling conflicts than are the members of low-power-distance cultures (e.g. Denmark, Israel, Austria) [2, 16, 24]; secondly, that members of low-context cultures (e.g. United States, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland) have been found to communicate more directly than members of high-context cultures (e.g. Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam) [11]; and thirdly, that negotiators who hold monochronic conceptions of time (e.g. North American, Western Europe) are more likely to process issues sequentially and to negotiate in a highly organized fashion, whereas negotiators with polychronic conceptions of time (e.g. Asia, Africa, South America, Middle East) are more likely to process issues simultaneously, and to opt against conversational turn-taking, being instead frequently interruptive [13]. It is very clear, then, that culture

impacts negotiation behaviour. Therefore, H1 is proposed as follows:

H1: Negotiation behaviour will be influenced by the negotiator's own cultural background.

There are more challenges in a cross-cultural context than in an intra-cultural one. In a cross-cultural negotiation, the negotiating parties belong to different cultures, and therefore do not bear similar ways of thinking, feeling and behaving [7]. Such negotiation processes are generally more challenging because negotiators are unconsciously affected by their own cultural norms, thereby undermining effective communication [9]. In fact-to-face intercultural negotiations, negotiators adapt their behaviour and strategy according to their counterparts' culture [14]. A similar phenomenon may occur in e-negotiation. Therefore, H2 is proposed as follows:

H2: A negotiator's behaviour will be influenced by her counterpart's cultural background.

In-group vs. out-group consciousness relates closely to the individualism-collectivism dimension of national culture. Compared to members of an individualistic culture, members of a collectivistic culture tend to be more sensitive to in-group/out-group status of others during social interaction. With such an intense in-group consciousness, members of collectivistic cultures tend to apply different value standards to members of an in-group than to those of an out-group. Thus, compared to people in individualistic cultures, people in collectivistic cultures tend to be particularistic; namely, their behaviour is more likely to vary depending on whether the party with whom they are interacting is an in-group member or someone from an out-group [33, 37, 38]. For example, members of collectivistic cultures are, compared to their individualistic counterparts, more likely to behave differently with a friend than with a stranger during negotiation [27].

Adair et al. [1] compared the negotiation behaviours of Japanese and US managers in intra- and cross-cultural settings and found marked behavioural differences between in-group and out-group consciousness during the negotiation process. Japanese negotiators tend to have more adaptive behaviours when negotiating intra-culturally. By contrast, US negotiators present consistent behaviour across intra- and cross-cultural settings. Furthermore, most research found that Eastern negotiators change behaviour and strategy when facing people from different cultural backgrounds, while Westerners do

not [4]. Based on above discussions, we propose that Easterners and Westerners may have different reactions when negotiating intra-culturally and cross-culturally. Therefore, H2.1 and H2.2 are proposed as follows:

H2-1: The negotiation behaviour of Easterners in cross-cultural negotiations will be different from those in intra-cultural negotiations.

H2-2: Westerners will have consistent negotiation behaviour in both cross-cultural and intra-cultural negotiations.

Based on the stated research purpose and the above discussions, the research model is as shown in Figure 1.

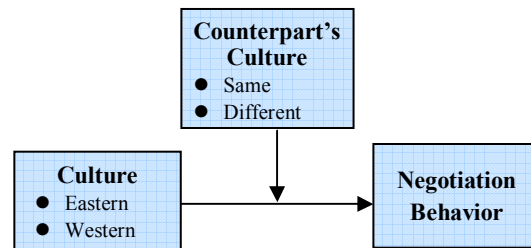


Figure 1. Research framework

One of the most widely used instruments in investigating these behaviours has been the “Bargaining Process Analysis (BPA),” developed by Hopmann with Walcott [39] and expanded into the BPA II. Hopmann [23] renamed BPA as Negotiation Process Analysis (NPA) in order to indicate that it is intended to be applied to negotiation situations that involve more than traditional bargaining. Later, Srnka and Köszegi [36] modified Hopmann’s seven categories into nine categories. We have adopted these nine categories for coding. The definitions are described in Table 1 [36].

Table 1. Definitions of main categories

1.	<i>Substantive behaviour</i> : messages that constitute fundamental negotiation behaviour.
2.	<i>Task behaviour</i> : messages that promote or facilitate problem solving.
3.	<i>Persuasive behaviour</i> : messages that support the claims a negotiator makes.
4.	<i>Salutation behaviour</i> : the beginning and end of a message.
5.	<i>Tactical behaviour</i> : messages designed to influence the expectations and actions of

- the opponent.
6. *Procedural behaviour*: messages that facilitate the negotiation process.
 7. *Affective behaviour*: messages linked to the expression of feelings about the content, the opponent, or the bargaining situation.
 8. *Private communication*: messages that are not directly related to the negotiation itself (process or content).
 9. *Text-specific units*: elements particularly linked to electronic (written) communication.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data has been collected by the *Inspire* system, which has been operational since 1996. From the countless samples, we selected 80 pairs of negotiations. The details of nationalities and roles of negotiators are described in Table 2. The data selection criteria are based on the completeness of the negotiation record and the cultural background of each negotiation dyad.

Table 2. The nationalities and roles of negotiators

Cultural Background	Nationality/Role		Number of Dyad	
	Buyer	Seller		
Western vs. Western	Austria	Germany	10	20
	Germany	USA	10	
Eastern vs. Eastern	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	12	20
	Taiwan	Taiwan	8	
Western vs. Eastern	Austria	Taiwan	13	20
	Canada	Taiwan	7	
Eastern vs. Western	Taiwan	Canada	5	20
	Taiwan	USA	15	
Total	80			

The negotiations that are used deal with the purchasing of bicycle parts between a buyer and a seller. The case was designed in a mixed motive setting, including integrative and distributive elements. The subject represented either a buyer or a seller and

had full freedom to proceed with the negotiation through *Inspire* system for a two week period.

3.2 Content Analysis

To develop the basis for comparing cross-cultural negotiation behaviours to intra-cultural ones, we applied content analysis to the logged negotiation transcripts. Content analysis is a research method developed mainly for investigating problems in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inference. It is applied by a systematic investigation of specific characteristics of communication, even huge amounts of textual material. There were two coders who conducted the content analysis following the steps suggested by Srnka and Koeszegi [36]. Figure 2 presents the process.

Stage 1 and Stage 2: Data sourcing and transcription

When data is readily available or exists already in written form, these two stages are not necessary. In our research, these stages can be skipped because the full transcripts of messages exchanged in the negotiations were already available in electronic form. As such, there was no need for transcription.

Stage 3: Unitization

Correctly defining the unit of analysis is an important first-step decision that is vital for the systematic analysis of qualitative material. We chose thought units (one thought communicated by a negotiator) as analysis units.

Stage 4: Categorization

The main purpose of this stage is to develop a scheme of categories that are relevant to the research problem. Before starting the categorization procedure, coders must make fundamental decisions on the following issues: (1) How much of the unitized material should be used to develop the category scheme? (2) Should existing categories be used or should new ones be created? (3) How detailed should the category scheme be? (4) Should a hierarchical or a single-level category scheme be developed? In our research, we adopted the nine main categories proposed by Srnka and Köszezi [36].

Stage 5: Coding

This is the assignment of coding units to categories. Category definitions are rules for coders to ensure consistent coding.

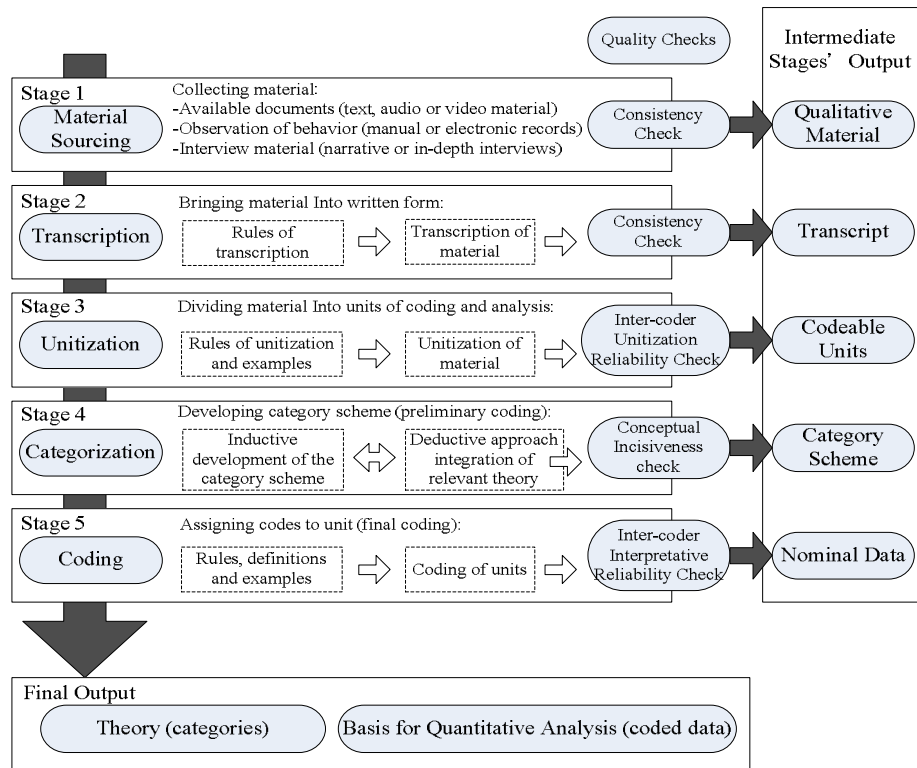


Figure 2. Guidelines for the qualitative analysis process (Srnka and Koeszegi 2007)

4. Analysis Result

4.1 Thought Units and Coding Reliability Test

In this research, we decided to choose “thought” as a behaviour unit to unitize all exchanged messages. Two of the authors act as independent coders. After working to unitize the collected data for several weeks, the total number of thought units was 8707. We calculated Cohen’s Kappa to check the inter-coder reliability [5]. However, it was not good enough based on the criteria of 0.8 proposed by Brett et al [3]. After extensive revision, in which we checked the differences in units between the two coders, we added 8 subcategories and updated the number of coded units to 8843. The coding correspondence is $K = 0.88$, much higher than the criteria of 0.8.

Table 3. Numbers of thought units

Negotiator’s cultural background	Unit
Eastern to Eastern	1844
Eastern (B) to Western (S)	2636
Western (B) to Eastern (S)	2094
Western to Western	2269
Total	8843

In total, the main categories together with their subcategories amount to 60. The final thought unit is summarized in Table 3. General differences between Eastern and Western negotiators are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. General differences in negotiation behaviours

Variable	Culture	Total	Mean	SD
Communication Units	Eastern	4098	51.23	31.65
	Western	4745	59.31	31.09
Offers	Eastern	362	4.53	2.18
	Western	347	4.34	1.25
Messages	Eastern	469	5.86	2.81
	Western	430	5.38	2.08

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

We conducted the Chi-Square test, firstly, to the different behaviours of Eastern and Western negotiators in order to examine H1, and, secondly, to the cross-influence of a negotiator’s counterpart’s culture in order to examine H2.

(1) Culture and Negotiators' Behaviours

Table 5 represents the behaviours of Eastern and Western negotiators in terms of exchanged thought units. To test H1, the Chi-Square test was adopted to examine the interdependence of culture and type of negotiation behaviour. The result is $\chi^2=32.34$ at $df = 8$. It is significant with $P=0.00***$. Therefore, H1 is supported. Next, we examined the occurrence of negotiation behaviours in Eastern and Western negotiators. The results are summarized in Table 6. Of the nine types of negotiation behaviour, five occurred in markedly different frequency in Eastern and Western negotiators. These five types are substantive behaviour, task behaviour, salutation behaviour, procedural behaviour and private communication. All of them are highlighted in Table 5. We can see that Eastern negotiators employ more substantive, procedural, and salutation behaviour while Western negotiators employ more task behaviour and private communication.

Table 5. Distribution of negotiation Behaviours of Easterners and Westerners

Main category	Eastern	Western
Substantive Behaviour	735 (17.94%)	736 (15.51%)
Task Behaviour	823 (20.08%)	1056 (22.26%)
Persuasive Behaviour	390 (9.52%)	474 (9.99%)
Salutation Behaviour	934 (22.79%)	971 (20.46%)
Tactical Behaviour	124 (3.03%)	164 (3.46%)
Procedural Behaviour	197 (4.81%)	180 (3.79%)
Affective Behaviour	514 (12.54%)	656 (13.83%)
Private Communication	268 (6.54%)	360 (7.59%)
Text-Specific Units	113 (2.76%)	148 (3.12%)
Total	4098 (100%)	4745 (100%)

($\chi^2=32.34$; $P=0.00***$; $df = 8$)

(2) The Cross-influence from Counterpart's Culture

To exam H2— that a negotiator's behaviour will be influenced by her counterpart's cultural background—we cross-tabulated the cultural differences between dyadic negotiators with nine categories of negotiation behaviours, as shown in Table 8. This is based on the cultural backgrounds of dyadic negotiations shown in Table 7. The Chi-square test resulted in $\chi^2=109.03$; ($P=0.00***$; $df=8$), suggesting that cultural differences between dyadic negotiators and negotiation behaviours

are interdependent. In other words, H2 is supported. It is similar to the phenomenon in face-to-face negotiations observed by Graham [14]. Graham pointed out that negotiators may change their strategies and behaviours according to their counterparts' cultural background.

Table 6. Chi-square tests – difference in negotiation behaviours b/w different cultural negotiators

	χ^2	P
Substantive Behaviour	7.63	0.01**
Task Behaviour	4.78	0.03**
Persuasive Behaviour	0.46	0.50
Salutation Behaviour	5.42	0.02**
Tactical Behaviour	1.12	0.29
Procedural Behaviour	5.07	0.02**
Affective Behaviour	2.64	0.10
Private Communication	3.25	0.07*
Text-Specific Units	0.86	0.35

*Significant at $p<0.1$; ** Significant at $p<0.05$; *** Significant at $p<0.01$

Table 7. The Cultural backgrounds of dyadic negotiations

		Counterpart's culture	
		Eastern	Western
Self Culture	Eastern	(1) 20 dyads	(2) 20 dyads
	Western	(3) 20 dyads	(4) 20 dyads

Table 8. Distribution of negotiation behaviours of intra- and cross-cultural negotiations

Main category	Intra-culture	Cross-culture
Substantive Behaviour	708 (17.21%)	763 (16.13%)
Task Behaviour	795 (19.33%)	1084 (22.92%)
Persuasive Behaviour	369 (8.97%)	495 (10.47%)
Salutation Behaviour	869 (21.13%)	1036 (21.90%)
Tactical Behaviour	122 (2.97%)	166 (3.51%)
Procedural Behaviour	215 (5.23%)	162 (3.42%)
Affective Behaviour	526 (12.79%)	644 (13.62%)
Private Communication	395 (9.60%)	233 (4.93%)
Text-specific Units	114 (2.77%)	147 (3.11%)
Total	4113 (100%)	4730 (100%)

($\chi^2=109.03$; $P=0.00***$; $df=8$)

Again, we applied the Chi-square test to examine whether a particular negotiation behaviour is impacted by the cultural difference between dyadic negotiators. The results are summarized in Table 9. It shows that task behaviour, persuasive behaviour, procedural behaviour and private communication were impacted significantly by the cultural difference between dyadic negotiators. All of these behaviour types are highlighted in Table 8. When a negotiator's cultural background is different from her counterpart's cultural background, there were more instances of task behaviour and persuasive behaviour, but fewer instances of procedural behaviour and private communication.

Table 9. Chi-square test – difference in negotiation behaviours b/w intra- and cross-cultural negotiations

	χ^2	P
Substantive Behaviour	1.49	0.22
Task Behaviour	13.17	0.00***
Persuasive Behaviour	4.87	0.03**
Salutation Behaviour	0.58	0.45
Tactical Behaviour	1.83	0.18
Procedural Behaviour	16.34	0.00***
Affective Behaviour	1.07	0.30
Private Communication	67.13	0.00***
Text-Specific Units	0.73	0.39

*Significant at $p < 0.1$; ** Significant at $p < 0.05$; *** Significant at $p < 0.01$

Lastly, the Chi-square test was applied to H2.1 and H2.2. Table 10 summarizes the results. The upper part of Table 10 shows that for Eastern negotiators, negotiation behaviour and their counterparts' cultural backgrounds are interdependent ($\chi^2=51.77$; $P=0.00***$; $df=8$). Therefore, H2.1 is supported. However, when we examined each type of negotiator behaviour, only four types of behaviour occurred with significantly different frequency. When Easterners negotiate with Westerners, there were more instances of task behaviour and persuasive behaviour, but fewer instances of procedural behaviour and private communication. The result is similar to the results shown in Table 9.

On the other hand, the lower part of Table 10 shows that for Westerners, negotiation behaviours and their counterparts' cultural backgrounds are also interdependent ($\chi^2=96.43$; $P=0.00***$; $df=8$). That is to say, H2.2 is supported. However, when we examined each behaviour type, it became evident that Western behaviour is affected differently than Eastern behaviour. For Western negotiators, task behaviour

and private communication are the only behaviours impacted by their counterparts' cultural background. When Westerner negotiates with Easterner, there are more instances of task behaviour but fewer of private communication. In other words, the negotiation behaviour of Westerners is more consistent with their intra-cultural negotiation behaviour; their behaviour is less affected by their counterpart's cultural background than in the case of Eastern negotiators.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

E-negotiation has increased in popularity ever since the boom in e-business. Understanding how national culture affects negotiation behaviour is becoming more and more critical for businesses and negotiators. Existing research has explored whether a negotiator's behaviour and tactics are affected by their counterpart's cultural background. There are four major findings: firstly, that Eastern and Western negotiators have unique negotiation behaviours; secondly, that the negotiation behaviours of both Eastern and Western negotiators are impacted by their counterparts' cultural background; thirdly, that when Easterners negotiate with Westerners, there were more instances of task behaviour and persuasive behaviour, but fewer instances of procedural behaviour and private communication; and finally, that when Westerner negotiates with Easterner, there are more instances of task behaviour but fewer of private communication. Nonetheless, compared with their Eastern equivalents, a Western negotiator's cross-cultural negotiation behaviour is more consistent with their intra-cultural behaviour: they are less likely to significantly alter their tactical and behavioural approach. These findings are consistent with studies that suggest Eastern culture is a high-context one, in which people's behaviour is more adaptable to their environment [13, 28].

This research has adopted a content analysis method which is superior to the questionnaire in terms of qualitative criteria. The total set of thought units can be analyzed from multiple viewpoints, such as negotiation strategy and negotiation phases. In addition, the data collected from *Inspire* system includes questionnaires. There should be further chances to integrate content analysis and quantitative analysis in the future.

Table 10. Chi-Square Test – Interdependence Between Negotiation Behaviours and Cultural Difference between Dyadic Negotiators

			Counterpart's Culture				χ^2	P
			Eastern		Western			
Self Culture	Eastern ($\chi^2=51.77$; P=0.00***; df=8)	Substantive Behaviour	350	18.98%	385	17.08%	2.04	0.15
		Task Behaviour	340	18.44%	483	21.43%	4.52	0.03**
		Persuasive Behaviour	151	8.19%	239	10.60%	6.21	0.01**
		Salutation Behaviour	415	22.51%	519	23.03%	0.12	0.73
		Tactical Behaviour	54	2.93%	70	3.11%	0.11	0.75
		Procedural Behaviour	129	7.00%	68	3.02%	33.40	0.00***
		Affective Behaviour	220	11.93%	294	13.04%	1.00	0.32
		Private Communication	137	7.43%	131	5.81%	4.06	0.04**
		Text-Specific Units	48	2.60%	65	2.88%	0.29	0.59
	Total	1844	100%	2254	100%			
	Western ($\chi^2=96.43$; P=0.00***; df=8)	Substantive Behaviour	378	15.27%	358	15.78%	0.20	0.66
		Task Behaviour	601	24.27%	455	20.05%	9.47	0.00***
		Persuasive Behaviour	256	10.34%	218	9.61%	0.63	0.43
		Salutation Behaviour	517	20.88%	454	20.01%	0.44	0.51
		Tactical Behaviour	96	3.88%	68	3.00%	2.65	0.10
		Procedural Behaviour	94	3.80%	86	3.79%	0.00	0.99
		Affective Behaviour	350	14.14%	306	13.49%	0.36	0.55
		Private Communication	102	4.12%	258	11.37%	82.05	0.00***
Text-Specific Units		82	3.31%	66	2.91%	0.62	0.43	
Total	2476	100%	2269	100%				

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