The Role of Language in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

From international trade negotiations to emotional domestic spats, conflicts are a ubiquitous part of social life. This Chapter explores the role of language in shaping the way our conflicts unfold and resolve. The first section examines the functions of language in conflict and how different communicative acts relate to speakers' motivational goals and conflict outcome. The second section considers these acts as part of an unfolding interaction at two levels. At the micro-level it examines different forms of cue-response sequences and their role in managing information exchange and structuring relationships in conflict. At the macro-level it examines how episodes of language produce phases and cycles that escalate conflict or move it toward a resolution. The final section of this Chapter examines the link between thought and talk. It shows that basic language choices have a profound effect on the other party's perceptions and the cooperation that ensues, with changes in perceptions and goals going hand-in-hand with changes in language. The Chapter ends by posing some unanswered research questions that address both our theoretical understanding of the social psychology of language in conflict and our practical understanding of how to better use language to resolve conflicts.

The Role of Language in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

The US government recently adopted the term 'the good stranger' to refer to military personnel who are adept at gaining cooperation from civilians who might otherwise be antagonistic or distrustful (DARPA, 2011). The term reflects what has no doubt been observed through extended military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq (Goodwin, 2005): adopting a certain demeanor and communicative style is critical in conflicts where one must work with another whose priorities and beliefs are very different from one's own. Of course, the value of understanding what makes a 'good stranger' is not confined to military peacekeeping. It instantiates a question about the nature of what escalates and deescalates conflicts in contexts as diverse as marital conflict (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977), teacher-school board disputes (Putnam, Wilson, & Turner, 1990), and negotiations with hostage takers (Giebels & Taylor, 2009). This Chapter explores one aspect of what makes a good stranger, namely, what is known about the role of language in educing cooperation and resolving conflicts.

Language of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Competition and Cooperation

The basis of much of the social psychological research on language and conflict is a distinction between competitive and cooperative communication. Competitive language is characterized by behaviors such as justifications, irrelevant arguments, personal attacks, and excessive demands and threats (Giebels & Noelanders, 2004; Olekalns & Smith, 2003). By contrast, cooperative language is associated with behaviors such as proposals and counterproposals, agreements, expressions of confidence in the other's ability, and humor (Donohue & Roberto, 1996; Putnam & Jones, 1982). A person's use of these two forms of language is dependent on their orientation to the conflict. The use of competitive language is

associated with a focus on self and a motivation to maximize personal outcome even at the expense of the other party (often referred to as a distributive or pro-self orientation). The use of cooperative language is associated with a focus on fairness and a desire to find ways to satisfy the needs of all parties (often referred to as a integrative or pro-social orientation). The extent to which these orientations to communication are used during a conflict has been found to depend on a range of factors. These include person factors such as culture (e.g., Adair & Brett, 2005) and individual differences (e.g., Park, & Antonioni, 2007), and situational factors such as power differences (e.g., Giebels, De Dreu, & Van de Vliert, 2000) and emotions (e.g., van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004).

As one might expect, the use of competitive and cooperative language impacts the outcome of conflict. Cooperative language tends to promote conflict resolution and increases efforts to identify solutions that benefit both parties (Taylor, 2002a). By contrast, competitive language is associated with conflict spiraling and a failure to identify areas of common ground and 'win-win' solutions (Weingart, Prietula, Hyder, & Genovesse, 1999). However, the associations between language and outcome are not clear-cut. On some occasions the use of cooperative language has negative consequences, such as when a shrewd counterpart takes advantage of a cooperator's goodwill (Murnigham, Babcock, Thompson, & Pillutla, 1999) or when cooperative messages are overshadowed by the messages of a single 'hawk' (Steinel, De Dreu, Ouwehand, & Ramirez-Marin, 2009). Similarly, in certain low-stakes scenarios, use of competitive language, such as expressions of anger, may lead to preferential outcomes, at least for self (Van Kleef, van Dijk, Steinel, Harinck, & van Beest, 2008). Yet, in high-stakes scenarios the use of aggressive language often leads to reciprocal aggression and conflict spiraling (Donohue & Taylor, 2003; Giebels & Taylor, 2009). Thus, depending on context, the

use of cooperative and competitive language may play an important role for the 'good stranger'

who seeks to resolve a conflict. Identifying when and how both types of language work to

resolve conflict remains a dominant topic of research in the field.

Motivational Goals

The distinction between competitive and cooperative language is a broad one that

captures a person's overall orientation to conflict. As such, it does not speak to the variety of

motives or goals that underlie a communicative act (Taylor, 2002b; Wilson & Putnam, 1990).

For example, consider a hostage siege where the police enquire about the hostages' welfare and

offer to deliver food, while the perpetrator complains about the police snipers and the fact his

threats are not taken seriously. These messages serve different purposes: the police are trying to

establish information and initiate a substantive exchange over food; the perpetrator is trying to

assert his 'identity' and relay his concerns about personal safety. Thus, communication may

address different aspects of a conflict, as determined by a person's strategic choice (De Dreu &

Carnevale, 2003), their perceptions of the other's intentions (Sillars et al., 1982), and the way in

which an individual 'frames' the interaction (Drake & Donohue, 1996).

Of the possible communicative frames, by far the most studied is how language allows

people to resolve substantive or 'instrumental' issues. This is understandable given the strong

grounding of early conflict resolution research in game theory and social exchange paradigms

(Roloff, 1981; Schelling, 1980). Instrumental goals are broadly concerned with material

'transactions,' which speakers resolve through positional arguments, offers and counter-offers,

rationale persuasion, and so on. This kind of behavior most easily aligns with a view that actors

are 'motivated information processors' (De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003) who seek to make sense of

the other person's communication in order to understand their goals and beliefs. The language of

the motivated information processor is thus a direct response to their inferences about how best to achieve a desired outcome, and, if he or she is orientated cooperatively, about how best to achieve the other person's desired outcome at the same time. When interactants fail to act in ways that maximize their material reward from the interaction, this is explained by a set of socio-cognitive barriers. As De Dreu, Beersma, Steinel, and van Kleef (2007) identify, three salient barriers are heuristics-led judgments, whereby the listener attends to only the salient features of the other's message, a naïve realism, whereby the listener interprets the other's actions as being motivated by an equivalent set of goals, and ego defensiveness, whereby conflict triggers a 'contend' reaction that leads to competitive behavior against the other. Support for the importance of these barriers comes from research showing that such biases can be reduced when individuals are motivated to process the other party's messages in detail (De Dreu & Van Kleef, 2004; Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001).

A second, quite different kind of language use concerns the 'relational' dynamic between the parties. These messages are less concerned with resolving the substantive disagreements of the conflict and more concerned with shaping the affiliation and interdependence between the parties (Donohue, 2001). Speakers manage relational goals by expressing affiliation and liking (e.g., humor), asserting rights and obligations (e.g., justifications and appeals), establishing trust and rapport (e.g., reassurances and promises), and so on. These behaviors are particularly important outside of the laboratory where interactants are mindful of their reputations, are keen to build long-term relationships, and are more likely to be under the spotlight of external perceptions (Donohue & Taylor, 2007). Thus, relational language is evident, for example, in messages promoting violent extremism, which tend to highlight in-group norms, out-group immorality, and peer acclimations over instrumental for-and-against arguments (Prentice, Taylor,

Rayson, Hoskins, & O'Loughlin, 2011). It becomes the prevalent focus of communication in contexts where the value of relationships is salient because of factors such as cultural norms (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002), 'power moves' by one party (Donohue & Hoobler, 2002) or a perception that the interaction has consequences beyond the current conflict (Greenhalgh & Gilkey, 1993). It is also linked to the success of conflict resolution, serving particularly to establish the interactional roles and trust necessary for information sharing and problem-solving at later stages (Wilson & Putnam, 1990).

A third motivational focus for language concerns the manipulation of interactants' identity or 'face.' Face may be conceived broadly as an "individual's claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction" (p. 398, Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000; see also Ting-Toomey, chapter X). A person's face can be undermined by competitive 'attacking' message that are direct, such as insults or criticisms, or indirect, such as negative emotions and commands. Alternatively, face may be addressed cooperatively by messages that 'give' or 'restore' face, such as compliments and apologies (Ting-Tooney, 1994). These messages can have a profound impact on the resolution of conflict because people respond to defend not only their material interests but also their self-image and social honor. Rogan and Hammer (1994) present clear evidence of this in their study of crisis negotiations in which the perpetrator was contemplating suicide. In these interactions, the language of the police negotiators focused on restoring the perpetrators' face whereas the language of the perpetrator focused on restoring self face and, critically for the incident that ended in suicide, attacking self face. However, it is important to realize that identity-focused messages also impact on conflicts not necessarily driven by issues related to personal crises. For example, disputes between eBay buyers and sellers are perceived as having a higher likelihood of settlement following interaction

in which sellers offer apologies and confessions, and a lower likelihood of settlement following

interactions dominated by commands or negative emotions (Brett et al., 2007). Similarly, in

cross-cultural conflicts, having one's honor harmed or insulted can provoke behavioral reactions

of retaliation against the transgressor (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Interactants with cultural

backgrounds in which face is important respond particularly poorly to implied threats and

attempts at intimidation (Adair & Brett, 2005; Giebels & Taylor, 2009).

Language Intensity

A final facet to consider when examining the nature of language in conflict is the role of

language intensity. This aspect of language is often overlooked in studies that examine utterance

content alone (e.g., from a transcript) rather than content alongside the form of delivery. High

intensity dialogue includes anger and threats, profanity, obscure metaphors, dramatic changes in

intonation, unqualified compliance, and so on (Bowers, 1963). It reflects "deviat[ion] from

neutrality" (Bowers, 1963) in terms of emotional stress and relational affect (Bradac, Bowers, &

Courtright, 1979; Donohue, 2001), as well as a rigidity of commitment on substantive factors

such as persuasion or threat conviction (Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). For example, relentlessly

threatening action if a demand is not met signifies a high degree of concern for a substantive

issue, since it does not allow communication to deviate to alternative possibilities (Taylor,

2002b). Similarly, Matsumoto, Hwang and Frank (2012) demonstrated that leaders of

ideologically motivated groups tend to increase their expressions of anger, contempt, and disgust

in public speeches immediately before acts of violence. Interestingly, while strategic use of

intensity can direct the other party's attention to an issue of personal concern and can enhance

message clarity (Hamilton, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1990), overuse of language intensifiers can

reduce the credibility of an argument, particularly when this use contravenes the receiver's

expectations (Burgoon & Stewart, 1974).

The Structure of Language in Conflict

Recently, the various facets of language use described above have been shown to be part of a single communication 'structure' in which the various distinctions relate to one another in distinct ways. Across a number of studies (Bilsky, Tebrugge, & Webel-Therhorn, 2010; Taylor, 2002b, Taylor & Donald, 2004, 2007), individual have been shown to adopt an avoidant, competitive or cooperative orientation to interaction and, at any one time, pursue either identity, instrumental or relational goals with varying degrees of intensity. As individual progress through a conflict, so they move through these different regions of discussion, ideally moving towards a cooperative interaction. This coming together of the different facets of language can be depicted graphically as a cylinder, as shown in Figure 1. Over time within a conflict, dialogue may be characterized as being focused on the different areas of the cylinder. On some occasions, for example, a couple may yell abuse and insults as they thrash out competitive-identity related issues. When they discuss their child, however, they may revert to more cooperative, instrumental behavior as they seek to do what's best for their child.

The cylinder structure highlights other important aspects of the nature of language in conflict. First, the model encompasses an 'avoidant' orientation. People in conflict often engage in withdrawal behaviors, remaining inactive and avoiding their counterparts as a result of either fear or strategic intention (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2012). When used strategically, avoidance allows an interactant to work around an issue that is likely to disrupt wider progress (Roloff & Ifert, 2000), or stonewall or devalue the other person and the relationship through a lack of engagement (Loving, Le, & Crockett, 2009). Second, the model's structure suggests that there is a linear relationship from avoidance to competitive to cooperative behavior, such that a move

from avoidance to cooperation requires a move through competition. This reasserts the

importance of competitive and cooperative language to successful conflict resolution, and it is

consistent with research showing that a 'differentiation' of issues (i.e., where parties mark their

interests) typically precedes an 'integration' of possibilities (i.e., where parties find mutually

beneficial solutions; De Dreu et al., 2007; Olekalns, Brett, & Weingart, 2003). Third, the

identity, relational and instrumental goals that interactants may pursue are orthogonal to the

possible orientations that they may adopt while pursuing their goal. Interactants may take an

avoidance, competitive or cooperative approach to each of their different goals, demonstrating

the importance of not conflating a particular orientation to interaction (e.g., cooperation) with a

particular communicative goal. This is sometimes forgotten within the literature, with some

authors conceptualizing relational language as a friendly, cooperative act and instrumental

language as primarily competitive (Pinkley, 1990). Fourth, the model brings together the distinct

socio-cognitive systems cited as explanations of each of the various forms of language use. An

individual's overall orientation to the conflict will be governed in part by their social motivation

(Liu & Wilson, 2011), their instrumental behavior governed by motivated information

processing (De Dreu et al., 2007), their relational behavior by evaluations of emotion as social

information (van Kleef, 2009), and so on.

So how do 'good strangers' use the various forms of language mapped out in Figure 1?

An early answer to this question is provided in Ormerod, Barrett, and Taylor's (2008) analysis of

interactions during hostage negotiations. They showed that interactants match one another's

communicative goals and orientations for sustained periods, with this matching increasing over

time for conflicts that ended peacefully but decreasing over time for those that ended violently.

Part of this divergence in matching appeared to be due to the fact that, in successful incidents,

police negotiators were more likely to switch their language style to that of the perpetrator. The

behavior of these negotiators is consistent with 'active listening,' which is a communication

technique that involves the listener beginning their response with a reiteration of what he or she

has just heard, in order to confirm a common understanding of what has been said (Royce,

2005). In successful resolutions, police negotiators reduced the amount they spoke by over 40%

during transitional periods where the motivation behind a perpetrators' communication was

unclear, presumably in an attempt to reengage their sense of the perpetrator's concerns.

<div style="text-align:center">The Process of Conflict Resolution</div>

Building Blocks of Conflict Resolution

The different forms of language described in the last section are, of course, the result of

an unfolding exchange of cues and responses. Understanding how conflict occurs at this micro-

level is important to our understanding of how language builds into the larger patterns of

observed cooperation and conflict spiraling. This is illustrated in an early study by Gottman,

Markman, and Notarius (1977), which showed that marital discussion could be decomposed into

2-behavior loops and 3-behavior chains (e.g., probe feeling, mindreading). These sequences

served a variety of functions, such as 'ascertaining the other party's concerns,' 'forming a

"contract" regarding future behavior,' and 'summarizing self versus other's feelings.' The

relative use of these communicative 'building blocks' by couples was sufficient to differentiate

those in distressed and non-distressed relationships.

A body of research has examined the nature of this "lawfulness and inter-connectedness"

(Auld & White, 1959, p. 100) of utterances. The goal of this research is to derive generalizations

about how language organizes over time with a view to understanding the types of building

blocks that differentiate successful and unsuccessful interactions (Watzlawick, Beavin, &

Jackson, 1968). Kelley (1997), in particular, described the importance of a sequence of four behaviors comprising an initial cue, a response by the second speaker, a subsequent adjustment by the initial speaker, and a final closure message that moves the interaction in a particular direction (Cappella & Planalp, 1981; Taylor & Donald, 2003; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). This 'triple-interact' may be viewed as a local-context or 'move' in which interactants modify one another's understanding and transition to a new position. The importance of this triple-interact is borne out in studies of the interaction sequence. When modeling interactions using Markov chain analysis or similar techniques, researchers are typically only able to predict a person's behavior when two (Krain, 1973; Mark, 1971; Weick, 1969) or three (Cappella & Planalp, 1981; Mishler, 1975; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1968) previous behaviors are taken into account. Thus, a person's behavior in conflict is not a mere reaction to the previous cue of their counterpart, but a response depended on at least both parties' prior behaviors.

The cue-response sequences that tend to dominate conflict interactions are those that reciprocate or 'match' the other party's actions (Smith, Pruitt, & Carnevale, 1982). Reciprocity allows interactants to confirm their common perspectives and understanding of the issues at hand, while preventing exploitation by parties who strategically compete to gain advantage (Putnam, 1990; Putnam & Jones, 1982). While reciprocation is usually associated with the positive impact it has when parties develop a common solution, the reciprocation of competitive language is equally difficult to break away from (O'Connor & Arnold, 2001). Even warning parties about the dangers of conflict spiraling from reciprocal competition does not reduce the tendency for it to occur (Weingart, Prietula, Hyder, & Genovese, 1999). Yet, breaking a chain of reciprocal competition is possible. Brett, Shapiro, and Lytle (1998) show how negotiators can do this by adopting a form of language that combines a competitive position with a more

cooperative possibility, and by changing their orientation to one of avoidance (e.g., by labeling

the process as ineffectual). These two acts move dialogue in opposing directions on the

orientation axes of the cylinder model in Figure 1, nicely reflecting the different ways in which

behavioral chains shape interaction.

As the Brett et al. study suggests, a 'good stranger' must ideally do more than reciprocate

cooperation and avoid competition if she or he is to resolve a conflict. Indeed, dyads that follow

a tight, predictable pattern of reciprocating the other sides' behavior are more likely to reach

impasse (Putnam & Jones, 1982). Examining how interactants achieve a more dynamic pattern

of behavior has led researchers to identify two other kinds of language sequence. One of these is

the complementary sequence, which is formed when speakers' match one another's language

orientation but not their strategic goal. For example, a complementary chain would be a speaker

who focuses on the partners' feelings in response to an utterance about a potential custodial

solution over the child. This kind of sequence is often associated with impasse, even when it

involves complementary cooperative behaviors (Olekalns & Smith, 2000). Oleklans and Smith

argue that the reason for this failure is that complementarity reflects speakers having different

interests at any one time and a failure to blend cooperative and competitive behavior to address

either party's issues. A second kind of nonreciprocal sequence is a mismatching of orientations.

Although mixing competitive and cooperative behavior often leads to a win-lose outcome, it is

not always a detrimental sequence. Mismatching in early phases of a conflict can be beneficial

because it allows one side to gain a better understanding of the partner's bargaining strengths and

limits (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Similarly, as a deadline looms near, it may be more beneficial

to mismatch in order to reach an agreement and avoid impasse (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

Consistent with the research on general language use, some evidence suggest that

interactants' preferences for different cue-response sequences is affected by individual difference

and context variables. For example, Donohue, Diez, and Hamilton (1984) found strong role

differences in the kinds of messages communicated during labor-management negotiations. In

general, the labor representatives were more likely to reciprocate the actions of the management

representatives, while management were more likely to respond in a complementary way to the

labor negotiators (Donohue et al., 1984). Donohue et al. also compared these interactions to a set

of simulated conflict interactions and, in doing so, demonstrated that conflict resolution in

natural settings involves more sequences of attacking behavior than found in simulated

interactions. This is a critical finding because it suggests that the composition of the language

building blocks that characterize 'real-world' conflicts is qualitatively different to that of

experimental interactions, even though both may yield successful and unsuccessful outcomes.

The influence of external variables also extends to sequences involving relational and

identity concerns (Beune, Giebels, & Taylor, 2010). This is particularly true of cross-cultural

research where these goals can take on particular importance because they shape how people

engage with strategic sequences. For example, Adair and Brett (2005) compared a group of

negotiators from high-context cultures (e.g., Japan, Russia), whose communication is often

implicit and reliant on social expectations, with a group of negotiators from low-context cultures

(e.g., Germany, United States), whose communication is explicit with meaning transmitted

through the message itself. They found that complementary sequences play a more central role

for high-context communicators because the increased diversity of communication provides the

flexibility needed to manage the indirect, relational nature of the expected interaction. Giebels

and Taylor (2009) also examined the differences across high-context and low-context

communicators but in the high-stakes context of hostage negotiation. Using a more flexible

measure of the interrelationships among behaviors known as proximity coefficients, they found that high-context hostage takers were less likely to engage in persuasive arguments or to respond to them positively, and that high-context perpetrators were more likely to reciprocate threats, particularly when they were made about self. This, they argue, is because high-context communicators expect strategic sequences to emphasize relational and identity issues over the exchange of rational arguments, such that they fail to engage in the persuasive sequences and respond negatively when the identity dynamic is challenged. This is consistent with subsequent findings of Beune, Giebels, and Taylor (2010) who showed that high-context rather than low-context suspects responded negatively to police efforts at being kind, but positively to intimidating behavior when it was directed toward the social group rather than toward self.

Building Blocks Make Phases

Although studies of interaction sequences reveal how different kinds of utterances structure the local cue-response exchange, they tells us less about how such dialogue comes together to produce a complete conflict interaction. To address this question, other research has sought to understand how dialogue comprises episodes or phases of talk that serve distinct purposes. These efforts are well illustrated by case study research on historic conflicts. For example, in his analysis of negotiations between Spain and the United States over military base rights, Druckman (1986) showed the cyclical nature of behavior over time. This multi-stage negotiation moved through periods of negotiators using competitive tactics, such as retractions and threats, and cooperative tactics, such as initiations and promises. As the weaker party, the Spanish government typically defended their position by using three times more competitive tactics than the US team. However, there were occasions when the opposite was true; US negotiators 'ramped up' their competitive behavior with the result that the Spanish responded

with more cooperative behavior. This observed mirroring in behavior instantiates what is often

referred to as the 'negotiation dance,' with interactants engaging in a 'dynamic processes of

mutual accommodation' (Schelling, 1960, p. 102).

The idea that conflicts move through a series of stages is encapsulated in phase models of

interaction. A phase model presents either a descriptive or prescriptive account of how a set of

coherent stages of communication change as a conflict unfolds (Holmes, 1992). For example, in

her field observations of private disputes, Douglas (1957) found that interactions move through

three phases that cannot be skipped or ordered differently. These were establishing the conflict

parameters through a competitive exchange, a cooperative reconnoitering to identify possible

solutions, and a final period of competition to 'sort out the final details.' Others have since

refined Douglas' proposition by suggesting additional phases. For example, in his analysis of

conflict interactions across several contexts, Gulliver (1979) identifies eight phases: search for an

arena, agenda formation, exploration of the issue range, narrowing of the differences,

preliminaries, final bargaining, ritual confirmation and execution of the settlement. As the

Douglas and Gulliver examples illustrate, the number of phases identified by researchers

depends on the granularity of the analysis that is undertaken. Indeed, Gulliver's eight phases are

often paired to produce the four phases of establishing contact, relationship building, problem-

solving, and resolution (e.g., Donohue, Kaufmann, Smith, & Ramesh, 1991; Holmes, 1992).

The majority of studies of conflict utilize phase models in a prescriptive sense by

dividing the interaction under examination into the requisite number of periods. If a four phase

model is considered an appropriate framework for understanding the organization of the

interaction, then the dialogue itself is broken into four, equally-sized segments, and changes in

language examined across these segments. Although this approach ignores the possibility that

phases may take different amounts of time to complete (Taylor, 2002b), it nevertheless reveals

some important patterns in language use. For example, proposals increase in a linear fashion

over time, with the use of instrumental language peaking during the second and particularly third

quarter of the negotiation, in line with the idea of a problem-solving phase (Lytle, Brett, &

Shapiro, 1999). By contrast, use of affect during conflict tends to peak during the early

establishing contact stage of interaction only then to reemerge during the problem solving stage

as parties compete over position (Adair & Brett, 2005; Rogan & Hammer, 1995). This second

peak in language affect appears particularly prominent in high-stakes scenarios where impasse

and threats of withdrawal may dominate prior to the 'endgame' (Abbott, 1986).

Although a significant number of studies use phase models as frameworks for examining

interaction over time, only a few have tested whether or not moving through the prescribed

phases promotes successful conflict resolution. If prescribed phase models do not promote

conflict resolution, then there is little point in the 'good stranger' trying to adhere to the event

order that the models prescribe. In an early study, Hirokawa (1983) compared the phases of

discussion produced by groups who developed successful and unsuccessful solutions to a traffic-

flow problem. He found no clear distinction in the set of phases associated with success or

failure, but a clear difference in the timing with which successful and unsuccessful groups

engaged in problem-solving; successful groups began a problem solving phase of interaction far

sooner than their unsuccessful counterparts. In a more detailed study, Sambamurthy and Poole

(1992) examined the relationship of conflict management phases to the degree of consensus

change, perceptions of decision quality, and satisfaction with the resolution. Groups who

showed the most consensus change and the highest decision quality moved through phases of

interaction that map onto the prescribed phase sequences for negotiations. This is consistent

with research showing that negotiation supports systems, which guide users through prescribed phases of negotiation, increase the joint outcome from a conflict, and produced more balanced contracts (Foroughi, Perkins, & Jelassi, 1995).

One of the key questions for phase models of dialogue is what prompts changes in the focus of an interaction. In conflict research these points are often referred to as turning points, defined as the "events or processes that mark passage from one stage to the next, signaling progress from earlier to later phases" (Druckman, 1997, p. 92). Druckman (2001) identifies three causes of turning points: procedural (e.g., a change from public to private venue), substantive (e.g., new concepts introduced), or external (e.g., introduction of a third party). One precursor for turning points appears to be a crisis that jeopardizes the interactions (Druckman, 1986). For example, Harinck and De Dreu (2004) examined what occurred after a period of temporary impasses, where two parties deadlocked on a particular issue. They found early competitive language was related to impasses within a negotiation, but that such impasses were valuable in the long run because they prompted problem-solving dialogue later in the interaction. It appears that impasse allows negotiators to step back from the interaction in a way that facilitates a switch away from escalating conflict.

The Link between Thought and Talk

In examining the language of conflict resolution it is easy to focus on the content and outcome of communication while giving little consideration to how the message is being consumed (Olekalns & Smith, 2005). For many purposes it is quite reasonable to assume that speakers process the messages of the other party in a way consistent with their own orientations and goals. However, to derive a full account of how cooperation emerges, it is useful to model the factors that influence the way in which individuals makes sense of a counterpart's

communication. The importance of addressing the issue of interpretation is made clear in Sillars,

Roberts, Leonard, and Dun's (2000) analysis of partners' *in vivo* thoughts during marital conflict.

Sillars et al. videoed couples discussing a current issue on which they were in conflict and then

presented this recording to each partner, asking them to describe their thoughts and feelings as

experienced across the interaction. Overall, spouses viewed their own communication in more

favorable terms than their partner's communication. In particular, the extent to which speakers

believed that they were acting in a confrontational manner, and the extent to which their partners

believed that they were acting in a confrontational manner, was negatively correlated, suggesting

that partners in conflict build opposing interpretative frameworks of what is being discussed.

Husbands, in particular, perceived their messages as being far more cooperative than

independent judges who rated their language use.

So what is the relationship between goals, interpretations, and talk? According to

Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Coupland, 1991), individuals' use of language

is important to the creation and maintenance of the social dynamic between themselves and the

other party. The Interaction Alignment Model (Pickering, this volume) takes this one step

further by arguing that successful dialogue and shared understanding is achieved through a

mechanistic process of coordination across multiple levels of language, from lexical choice, to

syntactic and semantic preferences, to message framing. In this model, a speaker's lexical,

syntactic and semantic choices are part of their cognitive representation of the conflict. Their

utterance leads to the activation of a matching representation in the other speaker, which has the

behavioral consequence of shaping that person's response. This exchange reciprocates until

speakers come to view the world in a similar way. The key implication of this model is that

progress toward cooperation comes not only from high-level alignment of orientation and goal, as explored in the previous section, but also from a more basic coordination of language.

The notion that conflict is played out at the level of word use as well as at the level of strategic choice is supported by research. Indirect support comes from evidence showing that the persuasive effectiveness of a message is positively related to perceived communicator-recipient similarity in lexical diversity (Bradac, Bowers, & Courtright, 1979), language intensity (Aune & Kikuchi, 1993), and speech rate (Street, Brady, & Putnam, 1983). Since persuasion is an important facet of language use in conflict (Giebels & Taylor, 2009), these correlates suggest that language similarity may impact conflict outcome. More direct evidence comes from studies showing that the use of assents and positive emotional language has a positive impact on negotiation success, whereas the use of negative emotional language may promote competition (Curhan & Pentland, 2007; van Beest, van Kleef, & van Dijk, 2008). This pattern of language is also evidence in coalition formation in multi-party negotiations where group members show greater convergence in language use as they move toward agreement, and divergence when they move apart (Huffaker, Swaab, & Diermeier, 2011).

What is perhaps particularly interesting about the link between language use and conflict outcome is that cooperation appears to be associated with the coordination of language style. A person's language style is constructed by their choice of function words and reflects not the content of their message but the way in which it is being conveyed. These function words include articles, auxiliary verbs and pronouns, and are typically understood to be outside of conscious control (Ireland & Pennebaker, 2010). Using a specific measure of function word coordination known as language style matching (LSM; see Pennebaker, this volume), a number of studies have shown a positive relationship between LSM and interaction outcome. Gonzales,

Hancock, and Pennebaker (2010) found that cooperation in small group activities goes hand-in-hand with greater matching of categories of word use. Scissors, Gill, and Gergle (2008) linked increased language mimicry with less likelihood of defecting in a trader task. Taylor and Thomas (2008) showed that successful hostage negotiations were associated with higher aggregate levels of LSM than unsuccessful negotiations, due to dramatic fluctuations of LSM during unsuccessful negotiations, with negotiators unable to maintain the constant levels of rapport and coordination that occurred in successful negotiations. Moreover, by examining LSM at the local turn-by-turn level, Taylor and Thomas further revealed complex but organized variations in behavior across outcome. In comparison to unsuccessful negotiations, the dialogue of successful negotiations involved greater coordination of turn taking, a focus on the present rather than the past, reciprocation of positive affect, and a focus on alternatives rather than on competition.

The impact of language on thought can be quick, with people's opening words in a conflict impacting the subsequent outcome of their interaction. In their examination of the first five minutes of a simulated employment negotiation, Curhan and Pentland (2007) found that conversational engagement, prosodic emphasis, and vocal mirroring predicted 30% of the variance in individual outcomes. The conversational dynamics associated with success among high-status parties were different from those associated with success among low-status parties. Examining whether the timing of language mimicry matters to outcome, Swaab, Maddux, and Sinaceur (2011) found that high levels of language mimicry in the first 10 minutes of an interaction was conducive of better negotiation outcomes than high levels of language mimicry in the last 10 minutes of interaction. This was because early mimicry elicited more trust from the speaker's counterpart, which in turned allowed individuals to maximize their outcomes. By

contrast, late mimickers tended to mimic language that was more accommodating to the other

negotiator. Such mimicking of accommodating language in the final phase of interaction seemed

to impair individuals' ability to protect their own interests.

Being the Good Stranger

This Chapter has set out some of the major themes in research on the social psychology

of language in conflict resolution. In doing so it has shown how educing cooperation from those

who may have alternative motivations and goals requires a comprehensive understanding of

interaction processes. Conflict resolution cannot be distilled to an examination of positions or to

the use of particular influence tactics. It is a process in which different levels and different kinds

of language may shape progression, be that in the first 10 seconds or in the 10th hour of

negotiations. As a process, it is also not isolated to language. Critical to many conflict

resolution scenarios is also a set of nonverbal dynamics, contextual constraints such as

expectations from social groups, and preconceptions and emotional history that can radically

shape expectations and behavior. However, what is clear is that language is the vehicle for much

of what occurs across a conflict. Thus, learning how language structures an unfolding conflict

and its move toward resolution will play a key role in identifying the 'good stranger.'

Unanswered Research Questions

What role if any do interpersonal skills in impression management and interpersonal sensitivity

　　　　play in efforts to engender cooperation?

How do we reconcile the top down cognitive model of conflict behavior, as encapsulated by

　　　　theories such as motivated information processor, with bottom-up models of interaction

　　　　processes?

To what extent do findings from experimental studies of conflict resolution translate to real

     world conflicts?

How can third parities be effective?

How does language interact with non-verbal behavior to shape cooperation?

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Figure 1. Schematic representation of language use during conflict