

The use of ALORS in French-Dutch negotiations : difference in the presentation of argument

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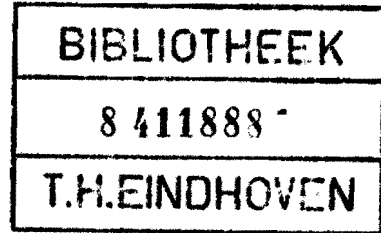
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LCN

Language and Culture in Technical Commercial Negotiations



The use of ALORS in French-Dutch negotiations; differences in the presentation of argument

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The use of "ALORS" in French-Dutch negotiation; differences in the presentation of argument.

Before I start the case-study of a French-Dutch negotiation I would like to mention some things about the research project I work on and I will then present the findings of a survey carried out among French and Dutch negotiators.

In the research project Language, Culture and Negotiation we try to describe and explain misunderstandings in international negotiations so far as these are caused by the contact of two different languages and cultures.

At the moment the research focusses upon French-Dutch commercial relations. We are collecting authentic recordings of French-French, Dutch-Dutch and French-Dutch negotiations.

The aim of the project is two-fold:

- the first goal is a purely linguistic one; we want to make a linguistic model of "negotiation".
(cf Ehlich/Rehbein, 1972)
- the second goal is more applied, namely to design post-academic courses to teach businessmen effective negotiation taking into account the linguistic and cultural component.

In order to get an overview of the language and culture problems that negotiators face in international meetings, we started the project with a questionnaire survey among Dutch negotiators in 200 industrial companies, followed by interviews among a selected group of French as well as Dutch negotiators.

The results can be summarized in the following way:

- = in general the negotiators had given little or no thought to this problem, although they immediately remembered all kind of problematic situations;
- = where they had, the misunderstandings were ascribed more to cultural differences than to linguistic ones.

The negotiators were more concerned with polite behaviour,

for example, how to act before and after the actual meeting;
= the negotiators had hardly paid any attention to the cultural background of their partners; although Eastern cultures (Japan and the Middle East) received more attention than Western countries;

Some of them felt that it might be useful to be provided with a booklet or a course giving the necessary cultural information;

= Most of them felt that the imperfect knowledge of a language is not always a disadvantage; In fact it can be used as a strategie in the negotiation;

= When, after deeper questioning, linguistic factors were mentioned, it was above all the comprehension side that gave rise to misunderstandings. This was noticed both by the Frenchmen and by the Dutchmen. As one interviewee stated:

"The problem with the Dutchmen is that they speak better French than they understand."

Other linguistic factors were the failure to understand nuances and to use them.

Further, the juridicial terms seemed to cause more problems than economic, technical and everyday vocabulary.

= It was also found that the countries which cause the most problems were France, Japan and the countries of the Middle East.

= Most of them felt that negotiating is more a person to person activity, than a culture to culture one.

What we learned from this survey is that it is not necessary to teach the negotiators to speak a languages perfectly but above all to make them aware of the differences in presentation, how, for example, to evaluate the strength of a rejection.

A practical example several negotiators mentioned was the fact that Japanese people never say NO. But they also have a way of expressing rejection.

This study is limited to the observation of intercultural negotiation. A further study, however will be made, which

analyze unicultural negotiation (French-French or Dutch-Dutch). And this is likely to provide insights into different ways of presenting arguments, rejections and so on.

The Case-Study

In manuels or handbooks of effective negotiation, negotiating or bargaining is often seen as the art of persuasion.

In the more theoretically oriented books the authors attempt to give a more sophisticated definition.

A negotiation is a process where two parties with different objectives, try to find consensus, knowing that they are dependant on each other.

It can then be described as a decision making process and/or a problem solving process, where at some instances the participants try by argument to influence the decision of the other party.

As an interviewee in the above mentioned survey emphasized negotiating is a personal, individual activity, where all kinds of situational factors interfere, but where the personal factors quite often determine the outcome of the meeting.

The most important activity is to achieve good personal relations with your partners.

Every act influences the negotiation and every act itself could be the topic of negotiation that is that it can be discussed by the other party, in order to come to a mutual agreement about the act itself.

Let me give an example. Some time ago I participated in a negotiation course for buyers. One simulated negotiation started with the following sequence:

- (1) A: hello Mister X
X: please to meet you, mister A
A: it is a long time ago we met each other
X: yes, too long ago, I should say
A: well, that depends on what you mean by a long time ago

A short dispute followed, introduced by this innocent, small talk sentence, uttered out of politeness.

The ambiance was directly competitive. At the end the parties did not come to an agreement.

What is done in a negotiation is not pure argumentation, that is: there is not always a statement which is defended or challenged.

What happens is that the buyer provides information about his needs and the seller uses this to boost his product.

Perhaps even demonstrates it.

The buyer asks questions; the seller provides information.

Perhaps both of them compare facts etc. etc.

We will, for the moment, use the term argument for these instances of talk. It is clear that we need a better label, we hope that a more suitable term will emerge as a result of this study.

What we need to know or study at this moment is whether argumentation theory offers a model within which we can describe what happens in negotiation. In any case, the participants in a negotiation are involved in argumentative-type activity, where they relate various kinds of statements to each other in a cause-effect relationship.

I shall now move on to describing the actual analysis. Our conclusions are naturally at this moment rather speculative. They function more as a starting point for further investigation.

What made me look for the ways of presenting an argument was the striking difference in the use of ALORS between the Dutchman and the Frenchman in the meeting under study. In 90 minutes of talk the Dutchman used ALORS 185 times, whilst the Frenchman only used it 9 times.

One of my colleagues suggested the explanation that the Dutchman has to think a lot to formulate his thoughts in French. To fill up this time he just utters a French sounding word. Is it really as simple as this? Is it only a question of filling up silence? Or is there a reason for his using ALORS in place of another particle. And even more important do these silence filling particles have their own repercussions in the conversation between the two participants?

Within the data referring to the Frenchman there are to few occurrences of ALORS to make a generalization. Therefore I also analyzed data from the Orléans-corpus which consists of interviews with the people of Orléans¹⁾.

I looked at the occurrence of ALORS within each individual turn: did it occur in the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the turn? The Dutchman placed it in all three positions, the Frenchman only at the beginning or in the middle of a turn. An ALORS in the beginning could be preceded, by other particles like, BON, BEN, AH, OUI. Minimal responses of the other participants were not considered as turns.

A sequence which was often found was the following:

- (2) S1: makes a statement / gives an explanation
- S2: gives a M.R. like: mm / oui / c'est ça
- S1: utters a conclusion or a recapitulation introduced by ALORS

The end-ALORS of the Dutchman could be followed by an e:h. I shall come back to this end-ALORS later.

Then I looked at the function performed by the sentence that followed the ALORS.

To do this I used the analysis presented by Zenone (1981). In her article she compares three particles which express consequence: donc, par conséquent and alors, where she studied the conditions under which one of these three occurred, with implicite or explicite premisses, if they introduced an objective or a more subjective statement.

She distinguishes two values in ALORS: a temporal and a consecutive one, and these values form a continuum. An ALORS can mark a temporal sequence (chronological listing), it can be purely consecutive (giving the outcome) and it can have both values at the same time.

Another function Zenone mentions is that ALORS is a structure marker: with the ALORS-sentence the speaker returns to the mainline of the conversation, or he makes a digression or he changes the subject.

Indeed all the ALORS in our data could be placed either on

the temporal - consecutive continuum and/or recognized as a boundary marker.

There are alternative ways of expressing consequence in French. Zenone and the Threshold Level of French (Ducrot, 1976) give a list of expressions, words and particles which can be used as markers of an act of consequence: *donc, par conséquent, c'est pourquoi, de ce fait, alors, dès lors, à ce moment-là, ainsi.*

But there exist differences in strength between these expressions. Some of them mark or introduce a strict relationship whilst others have a less firm relationship, compare (3) with (4)

(3) A: Quel courant d'air ici!

B: Tu veux donc que je ferme la fenêtre?

(4) A: J'ai envie de bouger

J'irai alors faire une brève promenade

Some of them have connotations that it is more a subjective conclusion, whilst others introduce objective conclusion. This means that there exist all kind of nuances to express a consequence. As the interviewees stated, they missed the possibility to make nuances.

Indeed we noticed the restricted performance possibilities of the Dutchman to present his conclusions. He only used the ALORS-construction, while the Frenchman used a variety of particles: donc, à ce moment-là.

I want to postulate an explanation for the use of ALORS, or rather for the choice of ALORS in the speech of the Dutchman; that is, he uses it overfrequently, and he uses it in all his conclusive remarks. The meaning of ALORS is devaluated.

ALORS comes from the latin expression "illa hora", at that hour. This is a deictic, temporal expression. In the course of time ALORS got a wide range of meanings, as Zenone (1982) stated.

Hence it is possible to use it in a lot of situations.

For the Dutchman it is a safe choice: he can do almost every consecutive act with ALORS.

- (9) N | oui d'accord il n il faut gagner de d'argent e:h comme ça hè alors eh/
F | hôpitaux c'est que c'est un des rares
N |
F | services dans dans l'hôpital qui: (0,3) qui soit bénéficiaire quoi (0,5) m, 'ya des
- (10) N | comment pensez-vous de de starter avec le: le la *
F | ah je dois dire je n'ai aucune
N | ha non non a normalement e:h il faut avoir un un idée
F | he [aucune idée, he he hu 'hh hu 'h en fait disons que
N | alors e:h/ de temps et e:h/
F | en fait disons que le:h e:h enfin disons problèmes techniques c'est

This led to my looking at the total negotiation, specifically to those parts where statements are made and conclusions given. I selected the chunks of argumentative talk of the Frenchman and the Dutchman, those bits where they presented a product, give reasons for their choice etc.

What I found was that the Frenchman presents his arguments and conclusion on his own.

The Dutchman does it in collaboration with the Frenchman that is to say, he presents the condition and premisses and the Frenchman provides the conclusive remarks.

The Frenchman's presentation

(11) N | pourquoi e:h * est
 F | (0,5)

N | vous pensez alors eh nécessaire pour cet labora pour pour ce laboratoire
 F | (0,5) t'h e:h

N |
 F | ben disons que ça fait d'jà un petit moment (0,4) eh bien sûr qu'o:n'hh qu'on pense [gh/

N |
 F | à investir dans cet appareillage (0,8) e:h [le/ problème en est [toujours/ le même hein
 N | (mm) mais

F | problème d'argent haha'hh hein e:h pourquoi e:h cet appareillage be:n (1,4) ben disons

N |
 F | que c'est ef (0,5) c'est avéré qu'on peut effectuer a:vec ce ce type/de * eh différentes

N |
 F | analyses particulièrement (0,3) eh des analyses toxicologiques (0,4) hein de contrôle

N | m

F | de: (0,9) [m/ de médicaments dosage de médicaments dans le sang 'hh hein qui pouvait

N | comme, e:h quelle sorte de

F | s'effectuer d'une manière rapide e:t (0,5) [m/ spécifique 'hhm e:h

N |

F | les antiépileptique:s présentent probablement la la: place la plus importante hein e:h,

N |

F | 'h à coté de ça i'y a les antiarythmiques (0,9) et puis il y a toute une série

N |

F | d'aut'médicaments e:h m: (1,5) m bv () de dosage mais un peu eh beaucoup par coup si

N | mm

→ F | on veut, donc si on avait de::s des technique:h (0,8) [a/ applicabl'à * ça serait beaucoup

N |

F | plus facile pour nous que des t/ techniques chimiques qui: sont certainement plus

N | o.k. et

F | longues plus fastidieuses et moins (0,5) moins précises et moins spécifiques quoi

(12) Dutch presentation

gerommel v.d. microfoon
 N | o.k. alors ehm 'h mais le: u la coopération avec * e:h on a calculé la la
 F | (0,3) (1,3)
 N | différence de de prix et e:h c'est fort alors le le:h il faut faire une investisjon
 F | mm mm
 * techniek
 N | dans une appareillage de, la * 'hh mais je pense tant que le le:h l'investisjon
 F | (0,4) mm
 N | est fait oui oui 'h mais après ça
 F | (0,8) (2,6) à partir de ce moment-là c'est, c'est rentable quoi

(13) Dutch presentation

N | pouvez acheter directement la la système gradient mais le grand avantage pour vous
 F | mm
 N | alors c'est e:h pour supposons qu'il y a une une problème électrolyte dans le le e:h
 F |
 Engelse uitspraak
 N | le contrôler alors vous pouvez vous pouvez mal vous pouvez opérer vous pouvez
 F | c'est ça vous passez automatiquement c'est ça oui
 N | passer automatiquement ehm vers le le pompe uniquement et laisser le :eh le
 F | (1,2) (mm)
 N | contrôler c'était pas possible dans le dans le passé et je pense que ça c'e: st
 F | d'accord c'est ça c'est ur
 N | c'es un c'est un gros avantage 'h: en plus et alors c'est pas e:h
 F | gros avantage bien sûr (0,7)
 N | c'est c'est seulement pour vous mettre au courant on a développé une système à quat'
 F |

What we see in both the end-ALORS and the presentation of arguments is that the Dutchman's talk in one way or another elicits reactions from the Frenchman. These reactions form an interruptive or overlapping sequence.

An explanation in terms of cultural differences could be given at this place.

Regarding to Frenchman and Italian people the interviewees in the above mentioned survey mentioned that they were more often interrupted. More overlapping talk and interruptions could mean less silence-tolerance within meditarrenean countries.

Although, other explanations need to be studied, that is:

Can the differences in presentation be attributed to:

- the difference in linguistic knowledge of French: the Frenchman helps the Dutchman in finding the right words
- the different roles they have in the situation: buyer versus seller
- the different negotiating style used by the participants: cooperative vs competitive.

The analysis of more data, especially of monocultural data will hopefully give an answer to these questions.

I will work on it in the next three and a half years.

Judith Stalpers
Eindhoven/Tilburg
November 1983

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Footnote

- 1) The Orléans-corpus has been put at our disposal by Prof. Dr. B.P.F. Al of the Free University, Amsterdam.

Verschenen in de LCN reeks:

- 1 Stalpers, Judith, Verslag Frankrijk; april-mei 1983
- 2 Gorter, Tjerk, et.al., Het taal- en cultuurprobleem van de technisch-commerciële onderhandelaar; een vooronderzoek onder Nederlandse bedrijven, 1983
- 3 Stalpers, Judith en Guust Meijers, The foreign client as an environmental factor in business negotiations, 1983
- 4 Stalpers, Judith, The use of ALORS in French-Dutch negotiations; differences in the presentation of argument, paper presented at the symposium on Intercultural Communication, Essen 1/2 december 1983