Framing in Intercultural Business Discourse: Differences Between German and Japanese Managers

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Abstract: This paper uses frame analysis of intercultural corporate business discourse taking place in Japan to explore differences between German and Japanese managers' linguistic activities and what contributes to these differences. It was found that the groups framed their utterances differently: the Japanese sequence of frame was prelude - story telling - short expression of key message, while that of Germans was heading/title - rationale - recapitulation. Furthermore, the Japanese initial frames tended to show backward orientation, consistently referring to previous speakers' remarks; and German initial frames demonstrated forward orientation, guiding the audience through the rest of the utterance. Analysis of shifting frames helped shed light on another difference: boundaries between frames and between speakers were blurry amongst Japanese while they were clearly delineated in German utterances, which made them sound independent and stand-alone. These differences suggested that rather contrastive cultural knowledge schemas and interactive frames were in operation. The Japanese strove to share their thinking process with each other in the form of a story, making sure that everyone was aligned in that context; the Germans tended to identify boundaries between their thoughts and made things clear for everyone. The findings suggest that these two groups have different perceptions and approaches to a meeting itself. The Japanese view of meeting was rather “people and process first,” while the Germans prioritized “getting ideas understood with clarity.”
Introduction

Globalization is said to be no longer an option but now a norm for businesses, and all business players need to compete with each other under multiple cultural influences of varying degrees. Increased practice of mergers and acquisitions both within and across borders, which brings multiple corporate cultures together into one corporate entity, is adding complexity to this picture.

This paper explores business discourse between German and Japanese managers in a Japanese company, which formed a strategic alliance with a German-based multinational company a few years earlier. The goal is to demonstrate the differences of communicative acts between these two groups of managers and to consider what is behind them when they interact together as a group.

Driven by a continuous surge of globalization in the business world, research on intercultural business discourse (IBD) has grown steadily during the past 20-25 years. Although the majority of research has focused on communication between members of two different cultures, one of which is often English-speaking (Poncini, 2004), recent development of this field includes more variety of cultures, languages, and regions (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2004)\(^1\).

The study of business discourse involving Japanese participants, however, is still limited. Although research on Japanese business discourse started to appear recently (e.g., Yamada, 1992; Kondo, 2002; Emmett, 2003; Yetsukura, 2003), few studies examined intercultural business discourse\(^2\); and most of them looked at culture-specific characteristics of discourse either in a monolingual setting or from a cross-cultural standpoint.

This article provides a frame analysis of intercultural discourse using authentic data from business meetings conducted in Japan. It is expected that context-specific differences could be identified by using data from intercultural interactions, rather than cross-cultural comparisons, as participants share a common physical context of time, space, and a business agenda in a meeting.

Methodology

Method of Data Collection

The discourse that provided the present study's data was audio-recorded from June to September 2003. The data consist of three meetings of two to three hours each, totaling about six hours. These were monthly senior management meetings of a Japanese manufacturer, which at the time of the research was partially owned by a multinational company; and many key management positions were occupied by Germans.

The meetings were a regular monthly meeting and the participants were the head of each department, including engineering, production, designing, marketing, IT, and so on. This meeting was also positioned as "a steering committee" of work on a time-limited project, where each manager representing his department was expected to make a specific
contribution to the decision-making of the group. With this expectation, “speak openly” was the commonly agreed norm, as advocated by the German Executive Vice President, to whom all meeting participants reported.

The participants included 11 Japanese, 7 Germans, and 1 each of Swedish and French managers when the maximum number of participants was present. The participants consented beforehand to my recording of all of the sessions. Simultaneous interpretation between English and Japanese was provided every time. All of non-Japanese managers spoke in English while Japanese managers had the language options of either Japanese or English.

The discourse of German and Japanese managers whose positions were comparable will be used for analysis. Thus the scope of analysis will be limited to two German managers and four Japanese managers out of a total of approximately 20 participants.

**Peculiarity of This Discourse**

The monthly meetings used for this study had a few structural features that impacted participants’ production of utterances. As it was the norm for this meeting to provide simultaneous interpretation, a specially equipped conference room was used. The participants were seated at a U-shaped table and whenever any of the participants wished to speak, they had to turn on a microphone located in front of their seat, which was connected to the interpreter’s booth and to the recording device.

Along with this mandatory routine before making a comment, it was generally agreed for the ease of interpretation that only one speaker should speak at a time, discouraging any potential overlap of comments. The participants had been accustomed to this environment and become very disciplined in turn-taking, that is, they would often raise their hands when they wished to take the floor and the chairman would acknowledge the next speaker.

As a consequence of these constraints, there were very few overlaps between the utterances; and one utterance was often prolonged for a few sentences and occasionally for a few minutes, like a monologue. The large number of participants and this environmental constraint created a unique way of interaction, which was very different from what anyone would expect in a highly interactive group discussion. This is one of the reasons why this research focused on the structure and framing of the utterances, rather than on evaluating how the participants interacted with each other.

**Method of Data Analysis and Theoretical Background**

The managers’ discourse will be analyzed following the analytical model given by Tannen and Wallat (1993). They provide the following explanation as to the notion of frame:

The interactive notion of frame, then, refers to a sense of what activity is being engaged in, how speakers mean what they say. Since this sense is gleaned from the way participants behave in interaction, frames emerge in and are constituted by
verbal and nonverbal interaction (p. 60).

Their model is based on Goffman’s (1981) notion of frame, which could be uncovered by exploring the microanalytic world of cues and markers. Tannen, however, discusses this notion with another kind of frame, which she describes as *structures of expectation or underlying expectations*. “The model integrates these two senses of frames in a single analytic framework: *knowledge schemas and interactive frames*” (Tannen, 1993, p. 6).

Tannen and Wallat (1993) explain that the interactive notion of frame refers to a definition of what is going on in interaction, and knowledge schema refers to participants’ expectations about people, objects, events, and setting in the world. Using this model they demonstrate how frames and schemas together account for interaction and how linguistic cues or ways of talking evidence and signal the shifting frames and schemas.

The primary reason for employing this framework in this study lies with the assumption that each group of managers should have certain degrees of shared expectations about the way a meeting should be conducted. In a meeting of the company that was in a state of post-merger integration, it was expected that analyzing discourse using this framework would enable the researcher to identify knowledge schemas and interactive frames in operation in both groups.

In this study, drawing on the Tannen/Wallat (1993) model, the frames will be analyzed in the following three ways: 1) how managers structure their utterances and frame them, 2) how the frames shift and how clear the boundaries of frames are, and 3) interrelation of frames: what orientation the frames show.

According to Watanabe (1993), “the notion of frames, along with discourse analysis, enables us to link cultural knowledge at the macrolevel to individuals’ communicative behaviors at the microlevel” (p. 205). By analyzing these different aspects of framing practices, it is hoped that this study can reveal some evidence for their orientation and cognitive structures, in addition to their expectations regarding the meeting interaction.

**Findings**

It was found that speakers from both groups generally displayed the same structure of utterances that was made up of three different units, namely “initial unit,” “middle unit,” and “ending unit.” It is a structural, not a functional distinction between three different units of one utterance, which happened to be the same for both groups.

Another finding was that the shift of frames was synchronized with the shift of structural units, again in both of the parties. Noteworthy points included the way participants framed each of the units in the respective group and the way these frames related to each other. A brief summary of three points is given below along with illustrations in Table 1.

First, the German and Japanese managers framed each of these three structural units quite differently. Second, the boundary between these frames was given contrasting treatments by each group, in that the boundary was vague and blurry in the Japanese
managers' utterances while it was clearly delineated in the German ones. To illustrate the difference, dotted and bold lines are used to show the Japanese and German managers' frames respectively.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural units of utterance</th>
<th>Japanese managers' frame</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>German managers' frame</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial unit</td>
<td>Prelude frame</td>
<td></td>
<td>Title/subject presentation frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story-telling frame</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of reasons and rationale frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(To share a thought process)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle unit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frame of Summarizing key points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending unit</td>
<td>Express idea frame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, each of these frames interrelated with each other differently. Japanese initial frames show consistent backward orientation, with a visible tie to what has been said earlier, namely the previous speaker's frames. German initial frames are all oriented forward. These points will be further analyzed with representative examples.

Framing Differences

Framing differences are discussed in each group in two parts, that is, in regard to the initial unit and the middle/ending unit.

Japanese initial unit.

When Japanese managers took the floor, their initial unit was framed as a "prelude," which was expected to play the role of "paving the way" and "setting the stage," which worked as an ice-breaker or a warm-up. This pattern of taking the floor was seen very frequently as if they were unable to move on to the next unit unless they set the stage. The following excerpts of Examples 1 through 3 are the Japanese framing of initial units that
are shown with an underline. The words indicated in a box constitute a cue for each utterance, from which a shift of structural units becomes manifest. This reflects two different frames given to these two units.

Example 1
Ichikawa: Anoo, so iu mikata de erabu nodeshitara mata so iu kangaekatamo, varimasu. Tadashi, hitotsu anoo, itsumo kono gurupuu wo erabu tokini mondaito narimasunowanc...
(Translation) Ichikawa: Well, if you wanted to choose a person with that kind of perspective, then I could align my approach accordingly to that. Having said that, well, one thing that always becomes an issue with nominating members to this group is...

Example 2
Nakayama: Ima, maa, Kant-san ga itta koton, acchotto kanren suru kamo shiremasenkedomo, anoo, sorezore no bumonga jibunno tokorono maneejaa no resuponshi-birittii ga nanikato...
(Translation) Nakayama: My comment might be somewhat related to what Mr. Kant has just said, er, at each of the departments, responsibilities of their own managers...

Example 3
Kitajima: Feto desune, Ima ironna kangaede, ee, chotto matomete irun desu kedomo, maa anoo, sapuraiyaa san no kitaiga, maa, ima wagasha wa dokoni ikouto sihte irunoka, douiu shouhin de shourai...
(Translation) Kitajima: Well, you know, currently I'm working on it, bearing in mind a variety of different possible ideas, mhm, er, suppliers expect us to show where our company is going, and what products we have in mind for the future. ...

In these three examples, a shift of frame is marked with a discourse marker or an elongated “er,” after which, a different frame emerges. Initial frames generally were not very long.

Maynard (1989) and Yamada (1992) argue that Japanese participants in their study used sentence adverbial or metacommunicative remarks in topic openings in the meeting. Yamada (1992) suggests that it serves the purpose of “padding” topic openings for a gradual and eased entry as well as the Japanese strategy of non-confrontation, particularly when a new topic is to be introduced.

In this study, it was found that Japanese managers framed the initial unit as a prelude with almost no exceptions, some of which functioned as metacommunicative remarks to serve purposes discussed by Maynard (1989) and Yamada (1992). Others, particularly when they add comments to the existing topic, served the expectation of paving the way for their ensuing remark. More in-depth analysis of this unit will follow below, analyzing functions as well as what it stands for.
German introduction.

German managers' initial units are very different from those of their Japanese counterparts. Three German examples are shown below.

Example 4
Bruckner: At the moment I cannot see really a problem, because unfortunately for this issue, there was not...

Example 5
Kant: Just two comments. [pause] One small comment, I think, Oliver, what you said is quite right. When we discussed...

Example 6
Bruckner: Therefore, my recommendation is [if] we internally came to the, let me say, conclusion that we will...

As demonstrated above, German managers framed the initial unit as “presenting a title/headline of my talk.” Unlike Japanese managers’ initial unit, theirs visibly indicated the direction of the ensuing talk and key message, helping the hearers look forward.

German managers used both linguistic cues like conjunctive (example 4/6) as well as non-linguistic cues, such as a pause (example 5) to mark a shift of structural unit, showing a change in frame.

Hall and Hall (1986) compare the communication patterns of German and Japanese speakers and discuss them as below.

German speakers’ communication is direct. German speakers, when interacting with someone else, look into the eyes of the interactants and immediately move to the point. In contrast to Japanese speakers who try to avoid direct questions when they attempt to understand others, Germans do ask direct questions. Germans do not avoid getting to the point and do not “talk extensively about peripheral matters” (p. 77)8.

Middle to ending frames of Japanese managers.

As mentioned earlier, this meeting is a decision-making meeting for on-going business as well as for the specific time-limited project work. Each manager was expected to represent his own department at the same time to work together for the best interest of the group. Given this underlying expectation, frames from middle to ending units will be analyzed.

In Example 7 and 8 below, words in brackets are the cues for shift in structural unit and frame, and sentences shown between these words in brackets belong to the middle unit. The ending unit is indicated with an underline.
Example 7
Ichikawa: Anoo, soreni yoku nita hazashi nan desukedomo, konkai jitsuwa, BB to iu nowa furontoroodingu toiu kotoga hijco ni tanoshimi ni shitemashite, jitsuwa warewaremo imamade kata wo tsukutte wa mata yarinaoshita to iu noga iroiro arimashita. Ano, tsukuru hoo kara iimasuto...to iu sokono tokoro ga juurai yori monosugoku kaizen sareteiruto omotte irun desukedomo, sorega chotto koo, AA ni kurabete ototteiruto iundattara, nanika okashiinatte iu kiga surundesu kedomo...
(Translation) Ichikawa: Well, let me add a very similar story to that; this time, as a matter of fact, we were looking forward to practicing what’s called frontloading. Well, at our department, you know, we have gone through a series of trials and errors with a lot of re-works. Well, from a production standpoint... (a few sentences skipped) therefore that, should be, in theory, significantly improved from the past practice, now that, er; if you tell me that it could potentially be inferior to that of AA, and then it seems like something is going wrong.

Example 8
Kitajima: Eto desunne, ima ironna kanngaede, ee, chotto matometerun desukedomo, maa anoo, sapuraiyaa san no kitaiga, ma, ima wagashaha dokoni ikouto shiterunoka, dou iu shouhin de shourai sokyuuu wo shiteikunoka to iu gimon ga arunnde, sokonimo maa kotaenaito...no men mo haitte kozaruwo enai to. Dakedo yahari shutaia, aaru ando dii ga naniwo motometete...tteiu koto mc iwanaito ikenai toiukotode, iroiro ima, yokubatta kangae de orimasunde, nanaka matomarimasen.
(Translation) Kitajima: Well, let me see, now I am currently trying to compile it, bearing in mind all the possible ideas, mhm, er; we should acknowledge that suppliers are asking us where we are going and with what products we are communicating with the market in the future, therefore we should address these questions... (a few sentences skipped) we have no choice but to include this perspective as well. Having said that, our main message should be what the R&D department aspire to do... (skipped) and then, all of these should be included...so, I wanted to take into account a lot of elements and it is really hard to put this together.

These two examples show all three structural units in one utterance from which one characteristic stands out. Japanese participants start with the initial unit, and then move on to the middle unit, where they still keep setting the context. This means that even after a certain time has passed, they still have not conveyed their main message yet.

From a functional perspective, both of the initial and middle units may appear similar as they both are defined as setting the context, but there is a clear difference in content, that is, what they talk about.

In the initial unit, the speaker’s utterance often refers to what was said before, which functions as context setting. Examples 1 and 2 show a reference to the previous remarks explicitly, and example 3 addresses the previous remark implicitly. This is the way for
Japanese managers to position the first part of their remarks as a prelude, no matter what their main message would be.

On the other hand in the middle unit, the speaker sets the context by elaborating some of the background and peripheral matters of the main message. This is something we learn in hindsight, by analyzing what was said in the middle unit and what was eventually said in the ending unit. Also in the middle unit, Japanese participants fully describe, at times chronologically, the surrounding environment of what they believe the main message to be. From the hearers’ point of view, discussion of such a middle unit is open to multiple interpretations since nobody knows for sure where that discussion would lead.

Lengthy elaboration of the middle unit seems rooted in a Japanese participants’ value orientation, that is, concern for others and non-confrontation. Example 7 is a good example of how this is reflected in the utterance.

The subject of “we” in the middle unit refers to his own department, the production engineering department. He discusses the perceptions of his own department at length. Elaborating the situation of his own department plays the role of context setting for his next utterance, his key message, which is rather negative. In other words, this elaboration is meant to be metacommunicative, guiding and influencing the hearers’ interpretive framework in a subtle way. By emphasizing the framework “this is simply our department’s own perspective, and there could be other perspectives, too,” it strategically functions as a mitigator for potential negative connotations that his ensuing remarks may carry.

The frame of the middle unit should be triggered by the Japanese managers’ knowledge schema of sharing the thought process as a way to get consensus, which is derived from their value of concern for others and non-confrontation. What is going on here in the middle unit should be understood as a frame of story-telling of the thought process.

On the other hand, the ending unit is very short and brief and marked very subtly by a hesitation marker or words functioning in the same way as so but with lower key. This so equivalent part in Japanese, *to iu koto de* was uttered as a par: of the previous phrase, *ikenai to iu koto de,* without giving any split-second pause between *ikenai* and *to iu koto de.* The way this phrase was uttered made this cue less conspicuous. If *to iu koto de* had been pronounced more distinctively, it could have made a clearer marker.

This is a tendency seen in most of the Japanese utterances. Although short, what seems like the opinion of the speaker is shown in this block only. As it is so short and the shift of frame is so softly marked from the middle to the concluding unit that this unit may not draw attention. The shift of frame from story-telling to expressing opinion could easily be overlooked with this structure.

*Middle to ending frames of German managers.*

Examples 10 and 11 show German utterances of their middle and concluding units, which display quite a contrast to what have been seen in those of their Japanese counterparts.
Example 10
Brukner:..., because unfortunately, for the ABC issue, there was not a common approach between Company A and our company...because they managed it very confidential, therefore when we make the decision not to continue with the ABC, for the product part X issue, [for my point of view, today], I think it might be NOT a big problem. That is my understanding, commercial-wise.

Example 11
Kant: (skipped)... I think that is very important. It was a sloppy process here, we are all running, but this mistake should not happen to us. I take it also for myself, but we must be very careful and very formal on that issue. So let's keep that in mind for the next time.

The middle unit, as shown above, is framed as discussion focusing on the rationale for the main point, illustrating some elements in support of their arguments. Sometimes the main point is repeated in the middle unit as well when the utterance gets long, as shown in example 11.

In the ending unit, main points are summarized (example 10) or remarks calling for specific action are expressed (example 11). The ending unit is marked very clearly using for my point of view and So, both of which distinguish the ending unit from the middle unit.

**Boundaries between Frames and People**
Differences between the framing of these two groups have been discussed. Now inter-frame boundaries will be analyzed.

In Japanese utterances, shifts of frame were not very explicit. They were often marked by discourse markers as well as elongated “er:” sounds, which could potentially be overlooked as a cue. They gave weak and even stress to each word and phrase all the way through, almost without using intonation as a resource to achieve frame shifts. Some managers spoke as if no punctuation marks were given, which also contributed to the inconspicuousness of the frame shift, particularly a shift from the middle to ending unit.

Boundaries between the previous speaker and the current speaker are not very distinctive either, as the initial unit tends to carry some of the topics discussed in earlier discussions. In other words, the boundaries between frames as well as speakers are not clearly delineated in Japanese managers’ utterances.

In contrast, German managers’ utterances display clear boundaries between frames and between speakers. Very straightforward and linear structure can be identified in German managers’ utterances in three units, each of which is marked distinctively with either a conjunctive, phrase, adverb or short but distinguishable pause.

In particular, German managers' utterances make the initial and conclusion units standout, which plays the role of defining the territory and scope of one speaker. That eventually creates an impression of stand-alone and independent comments. This is because the German speakers immediately moved on to the main points as soon as they
took the floor and closed their statement with recapitulation of the message.

**Interrelation of Each Frame**

*Initial unit: Setting a stage for what?*

An interesting tendency was identified by comparing what was said in the middle and the ending unit with what was said in the initial unit of Japanese utterances. What Japanese managers say in the initial unit is not semantically relevant to any of the units that follow. All of the examples 1 through 3 have initial units that are no: directly linked to the ensuing utterances, that is, the utterance that follows could be understood in the same way even without these introductions. Therefore, these initial units are conveyed simply for the sake of opening their talk, a way of getting started.

In other words, the Japanese participants framed the first part of the utterance purely as a prelude or stage-setting, just to initiate their talk by superficially acknowledging/responding to earlier remarks. This may be one of Japanese floor-taking strategies in a group dialogue.

What is said in the Japanese initial unit is more literally linked to what previous speaker(s) had said. Goffman (1981) suggests that answerers are oriented to what has just been said and look backward, when there are questioners and answerers. Backward orientation of the Japanese speakers’ preludes was not limited to when the speaker was in a position of an answerer or direct addressee. It could be understood that the Japanese participants framed the initial unit with an answerer-like mind in relation to any preceding topics.

This suggests the presence of a knowledge schema amongst Japanese managers that a remark made earlier should be touched on in whatever way possible when you take the floor. It could be a representation of their cognitive structure that they perceive that the floor-taking speaker is receiving a baton from the previous runner, that is, speaker; and in recognition of this, they refer to the previous speaker’s frame.

A noteworthy point is that preludes and stage-setting should, by definition, be oriented to what lies ahead, while the Japanese participants’ preludes literally reflect a backward, not forward, orientation. Preludes with a literal backward orientation actually serve to drive the context forward in Japanese frames, which is an interesting paradox. From this standpoint, the finding suggests that the role of the Japanese initial unit is to set the stage for the “speaker,” not to set the stage for the “message.”

German managers’ frames have different interrelationship with each other. Their initial unit has forward orientation, as shown in examples 10 and 11, both of which guide the hearers’ expectation to the middle unit. The initial unit provides the title and theme so that hearers can make sense of the message when they hear the middle unit. The title helps hearers interpret the meaning of what is said in middle unit. In other words the German initial unit plays the role of setting the stage for the “message.”

**Ending Unit**

Japanese and German managers’ ending units relate themselves differently to the
middle unit. Japanese ending units tends to leave an impression that there is a leap and disconnection between the discussion in the middle unit and what is said in the ending unit. It sometimes sounds as if the conclusion appears out of nowhere, at least unless you can decode the context of the “story-telling” frame in the right way.

The German ending unit, on the other hand, is a summary and recapitulation of the main points that were shown already; therefore, it has a backward orientation. As Table 1 shows, German utterances start with a forward orientation and end with a backward orientation, which is a closed circle, making the inter-speaker boundary clear. It constitutes a part of the reasons why German utterances leave an impression of being independent and standing-alone.

**Discussion**

By analyzing the framing of individual units, how one frame is connected to other frames and preceding utterances, and how the shifts of frame are marked, the speaker’s underlying orientations and unconscious expectations become salient. When these utterances are reviewed as a flow of interaction, rather than as independent ones, the difference of their cognitive structure as reflected in respective framing practices emerges. Different knowledge schemas and interactive frames of respective groups of managers will be discussed below.

**Japanese Managers’ Framing**

A hidden agenda and goal of making a comment in the meeting, of which the Japanese managers might remain unaware, could be to gain understanding and support from other managers by telling their own stories. The Japanese managers’ framing practice implies that they seem to put more weight on gaining understanding from other managers on the process of developing their key message. The processes were represented by stories. Their key messages themselves are almost overshadowed structurally and buried by their lengthy discussion of their thought process and peripheral details.

Disproportionate time allocation to the process-sharing discussion, compared with the time given to voicing their message shows their implicit value orientation. Having their key message positioned with low visibility may imply a knowledge schema that they prioritize sharing the process, rather than strongly insisting on any one idea.

In other words, their knowledge schema dictates that sharing the process of thinking and peripheral details may naturally lead to a more or less similar conclusion; therefore, they should be less concerned about convincing and talking the hearers into supporting their ideas. Accordingly, they framed the middle unit as stories.

Another important knowledge schema that subtly emerged between their collective linguistic behaviors and framing practices was to maintain a good relationship and enhance solidarity. One of the reasons why their story-telling goes on so long and in such depth is because they bring other people’s perspectives into their discussion. Example 7
exemplifies how process discussion tended to get longer when people considered the other party’s perspective or at least tried to leave some room to accommodate other people’s interests. It is important for them to demonstrate that they also put themselves in the other people’s shoes and they give thought to their viewpoints.

Consistent backward orientation of the initial frame of Japanese managers signifies that they recognize that their first utterance should carry over from the context that had been set by earlier speakers. They have initial frames play the role of carrying over the preceding context and then transition it to a new context within their own utterance. What this implies is that the Japanese managers perceive a meeting as a collection of stories given by individual speakers and each speaker-runner needs to hand over the baton to the next. It is the next speaker’s duty to acknowledge the receipt of the baton.

**German Managers’ Frames**

German managers’ frames shift from title/theme presentation, rationale, and summary of key message and call for action in sequence. Because of this structure, the initial frames are oriented forward and the ending frames are oriented backward, which create a strong impression of an independent remark. In other words, their remarks can stand on their own.

This is a significant difference when compared with Japanese utterances. Japanese utterances are structured as open-ended; therefore, they can accommodate any possible add-ons, while those of Germans are highly governed by the theme given as if they were a closed loop.

It has been argued that the boundary between the German frames is very clear as well. Clear boundary orientation, be it between frames or between speakers and utterances may represent their value orientation. German managers often used expression such as “now that it is clear,” and “it is clear that...” in these meetings. Additionally, I have learned from one of the Japanese managers during research that one expression he had learned as he had heard it so often in communication in German was “Alles klar,” meaning “It is clear.” This orientation is in line with Koshio’s (1980) argument that Germans value a clear black and white separation just like texts written in black on stark white paper.

**Conclusion and Limitations**

It was revealed that Japanese managers have framed their utterances as “stage-setting for the speaker,” “process-sharing,” and “short discussion of key points.” German managers have framed theirs as “title/theme presentation,” “rationale,” and “repeat and summary of key message.”

Analysis of how each frame is oriented and what it does suggests an interesting contrast. Although both of their initial frames somehow play the role of setting the stage, Japanese frames set the stage for the speaker while German frames set the stage for the message. It symbolizes their contrastive approach to a concept of meeting, whether the meeting mainly
consists of ideas or consists of people. The answer, of course, cannot be predominantly either, but it is noteworthy that the respective communicative activities show a certain inclination.

There are a few limitations in this research. The first limitation is in regard to the treatment of culture. Although distinctions are given as Japanese and German in this paper, findings and discussions of their differences should not be attributed only to their national culture. In the IBD area, culture is discussed as two-fold. It includes both organizational and national culture (Bargiela-Chiappini, & Harris, 1995, p. 550) and several cultures should be recognized (Bargiela-Chiappini, & Harris, 1997, p. 2).

This point is particularly relevant in this research, because both Japanese and German managers had worked for the same respective companies for a very long time before starting to work together in this environment, which was created as a result of the strategic alliance of their companies. Both of their companies are recognized as one of the major companies in this industry worldwide, and people in both companies have a sense of pride and tradition.

It is assumed that their own company way of conducting a meeting and interacting with each other might have played a certain role in shaping this meeting discourse. Identifying which levels of culture, organizational or national, influenced their orientation and expectation in the discourse is beyond the scope of this research, and no direct attributions should be made to either.

The other limitation comes from the use of language. In the meeting, the Japanese managers mostly spoke in Japanese and occasionally in English, while the German managers spoke in English, their foreign language. From the standpoint of contrastive analysis, if German managers spoke in their native language, the data could have been more strictly comparable as parallel text, but this is the common reality for German and Japanese business discourse in Japan.

In the near future it is expected that intercultural in-house meetings will become more common and will be a daily reality for an increasing number of companies in Japan. Challenges associated with intercultural communication will become more diverse and complex.

Bargiela-Chiappini (2004) asserts, “If interest in intercultural communication in business and in the workplace continues to grow at the rate of the last few years, IBD will arguably become a field of study in its own right within the next two decades” (p. 30). This modest study is presented with the hope of contributing in one small way to the growing genre of IBD.

NOTES
1 Some examples include Turkish (Akar, 2002), Italian (Poncini, 2004), Spanish (Gimenez,
I draw a distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural aspects of communication. Cross-cultural involves comparisons of communication across cultures. Intercultural communication involves communication between people from different cultures (Gudykunst, 2002, p. 19).

Only the original utterances were recorded and used for transcription for this study.

The number of participants varied depending on the topic of the month, but there was a core group of people whose attendance was required every time. Most of the participants included in this study attended all meetings.

The seating arrangement was not pre-determined except for the Executive Vice President, acting as a moderator, who sat at the center of the U-shaped table.

Definitions of a situation are build up in accordance with the principle of organization which governs events—at—least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them (Goffman, 1986, pp. 10-11).

To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms are used for any individuals, products, codes, and so on in all examples. Original Japanese examples are shown in appendix.

Translation into English is mine.

Initial unit starts from the first part of the utterance to the words in brackets.

Middle unit is the sentences starting with the first bracket to the second bracket.

Watanabe (1993) shows that Japanese college students framed a small group discussion as “story talk,” and the U.S. college students framed it as “report talk.”

This block means underlined sentences of examples 7 and 8.

That is why no arrow is shown in the Japanese ending unit description in Table 1.

Watanabe (1993) called this way of arguing “multiple-account” arguments, which tend to examine many aspects of the issue at one time.

REFERENCES


Koshio, T. (1980). Doitsu teki hassho to nihon teki hassho [German ideas and Japanese ideas]. Tokyo:
Kodansha.


Appendix

Example 1
市川：あのう、そういう見方で選ぶのでしたらまたそういう考え方もあります。ただ、ひとつあのう、いつもこのグループを選ぶときに問題となりますのはね…

Example 2
中山：今、まあ、Kantさんが言ったことに、あっ、ちょっと関連するかもしれませんが、あのう、それぞれの部門が自分のところのマネージャーのレスポンシビリティが何かと…

Example 3
北島：ええとですね、今いろんな考えで、ええちょっとまとめてるんですがけど、まああのう、サプライヤーさんの期待が、まあ、今私が社はどこに行こうとしているのか、どういう商品で将来…

Example 7
市川：あのう、それによく似た話なんですねけども。【今回実は、BBというのはフロントローディングということが非常に楽しみにしてまして、実は我々も今まで型を作っては又やり直したというのがいろいろありました。あの、作るほうから言いますと…（中略）というこのところが従来よりもうごく改善されていると思っているんですけども、それがちょっとこう、AAに比べて劣っているというんだったら、何かおかしいなっていう気がするんですけども…

Example 8
北島：ええとですね、今いろんな考えで、ええ、ちょっとまとめてるんですけども、まああのう、サプライヤーさんの期待が、まあ、今私が社はどこに行こうとしているのか、どういう商品で将来訪問をしていくのかという疑問が楽しいんで、そこでにもまあ答えないと…（中略）の面も入って来るのが不得いない、だけどやはり主体は、R & Dが何かを求めても…（中略）っていうことも言わないといけないということで、いろいろ今、欲張った考え方でおりますんで、なかなかまといません。